

# the INDEPENDENT

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## High school reflects on art teacher Caroline Epp after her passing

Faculty, students share memories of her generosity

By Riley McKinnon  
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

While processing long-time art teacher Caroline Epp's passing, students and faculty paid tribute by reflecting on some of their favorite memories of her.

Epp passed away on Jan. 6 from non-smoker EGFR lung cancer.

At the high school, Epp taught classes ranging from Digital Art to Advanced Placement (AP) Photography, Anthropology, and Graphic Design.

Senior Megan Graeter said she had Epp as a teacher during her freshman year for Photography 1 and half of her sophomore year for Photography 2.

"[Epp would] use her work as examples, which I really like because it shows that she cared and she wanted to be there and she liked teaching," she said.

Senior Anna O'Leary, who had Epp as a freshman in Photo Foundations, appreciated Epp's down-to-earth attitude and her dedication to her students.

"She would walk around and take interest in whatever you were doing because, obviously, people's photos are very subjective to themselves and often sometimes personal," she said.

Senior Maeve Coletti said she had Epp as a teacher when she took Introduction to Photography 1. She said she enjoyed her ability to find deeper meanings in art pieces that many would overlook.

"One time, I forgot to do the assignment, so I took a picture of my shoes and turned it in. She was like 'This is a masterpiece ... I really love the shadows and contrast,'" she said.

Coletti said she appreciated how helpful Epp was towards all the students with both her support and criticism.

English teacher Allison Krause said she remembers that Epp led the Manchester Essex Multimedia Online (MEMO), which was a digital magazine that covered current events in the school and published as they occurred.

"It was always such a cool resource and place where you could go to kind of just see what was going on in the school, and I think it got kids involved," she said.



COURTESY OF STEVE HUNT

Former art teacher Caroline Epp and her husband, maintenance supervisor Steve Hunt, pictured in Paris in 2016, enjoyed traveling to various places together.

Krause said one of her favorite memories was when she told Epp that her daughter was having difficulty falling asleep. The next day, Epp came in with a sketchbook for her daughter, suggesting that she could draw in it before she fell asleep to clear her head.

"She didn't just, like, listen to you and kind of move on with her life. She really cared about you as a friend and wanted to show that ... she was like that all the time," Krause said.

The two also shared a love for British culture. When Prince Harry and Megan Markle got married, Krause and Epp held a wedding shower for them. Krause reflected on trying to make a Bakewell tart for the event but having to call Epp for support.

"She was trying to be encouraging as I was showing her this thing that was just falling apart, but I think I ended up just stopping at the grocery store in the morning instead," she said.

English and journalism teacher Mary Buckley-Harmon said she was reminded of Epp's involvement in after-school activities like the Film Club, the Harry Potter Club, Yearbook, and National Arts Honor Society. Epp also served on a previous Scheduling Committee and School Council.

"I was going through past newspaper issues that she was in. I'm only up to 10 years ago, and I

was floored, remembering all the things she did," she said.

Social studies teacher Jessica Tran said she remembers Epp was an active member of the union.

"[She was] very committed to education and making Manchester-Essex the best possible place, I think, for students, but also for colleagues," she said.

Social studies teacher John Mullady said he remembered meeting with Epp, who was a former union official, to ask her questions and get support when he became a union official, as both had similar understandings when it came to certain topics.

"Ms. Epp very much understood that learning conditions for kids were working conditions for teachers," he said.

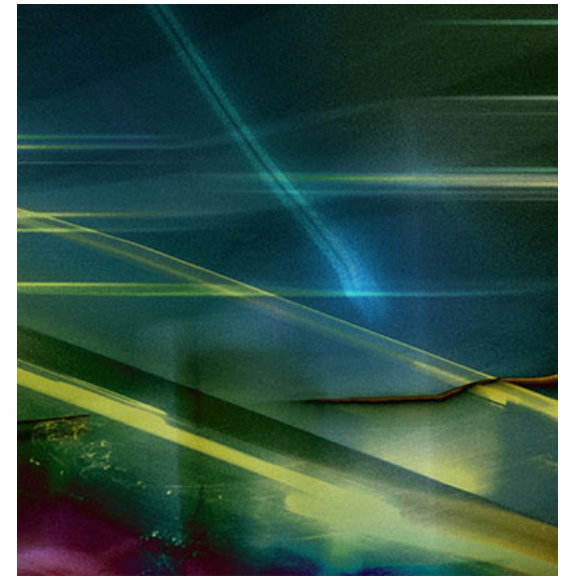
Tran said that Epp also heavily participated in faculty meetings and advocated for both the staff and the students.

Science teacher Kristin Umile said that Epp's ability to take a stance for the well-being of those in the building stood out.

"She was not afraid to speak her mind. I can totally relate to that. You always knew what Ms. Epp was thinking, and I can appreciate somebody that speaks what they're thinking ... It was always about kids. That was what she was always very passionate about: making sure good things were happening for kids," Umile said.

**'It was always about kids. That was what she was always very passionate about: making sure good things were happening for kids.'**

- KRISTIN UMILE



CAROLINEEPP.COM

After her diagnosis, Epp created a series of photos that turned her MRI scans into art.

The most common trait teachers and students associated with Epp was her ability to give to people.

English teacher Debra Isensee said she remembers when Epp created tutorial videos to help others in the building with online teaching during the pandemic.

"[She was] very generous ... with her time," she said.

Isensee said she remembers the kindness Epp showed to her when Isensee adopted her dog.

"One of her dogs had outgrown some of the clothing ... so my dog wears all the clothes that she gave me," she said.

Epp's generosity also extended to her work with people battling cancer once she was diagnosed.

Art teacher Tamera Burns said that she remembers how Epp raised awareness, reached out, and stayed well-read on the topic.

"She was exceedingly generous. Generous with her mind ... there were so many people in her shoes that she was trying to help and through that, you know, I think it helped her," she said.

Burns was on the hiring committee Epp went through when she first started working in the building.

"She took us by storm. She was clearly very knowledgeable," she said.

Burns said she remembered the artwork Epp made relating to her

diagnosis.

"She was making art about her X-rays ... they're very abstract, very colorful," Burns said.

Epp's work can be found on her website: carolineepp.com.

Epp also got involved with the Young Lung Cancer Initiative to help others going through the same experience find support during their journey.

Her constant efforts to be active in her community, even after getting diagnosed, was influential to the people around her, like Krause.

"She didn't just put her head under her pillow and hide and go away. I don't know what I would do if I were in her shoes, but I hope that I would be like her," she said.

Buckley-Harmon also noted Epp's strength and positive attitude when she continued to travel with her husband, district maintenance supervisor Steve Hunt, after her diagnosis.

Tran, who also underwent cancer treatment, found Epp's advocacy extremely meaningful.

"Once she was diagnosed, our relationship shifted to communicating and being in touch about what it's like to be a younger person going through cancer treatment. I always appreciated, probably because I'm the same way, her

EPP MEMORIAL, page 3

**'She was exceedingly generous. Generous with her mind ... there were so many people in her shoes that she was trying to help and through that, you know, I think it helped her.'**

- JESSICA TRAN

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# DECA students attend district competition in Danvers

## Growth in student qualifiers for state competition

By Bissy Mitrano  
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Members of Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA) attended the annual district competition at the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel in Danvers, where 63 students qualified for the state competition, which will be held at the Boston Convention & Exhibit Center in Seaport, to be held on March 12 - 14.

DECA adviser Barrett Alston said the district competition is the first level of DECA, which all participants attend.

"They take a business test in school, if their category has an exam; then at the event, they either do a role-play or they present their project presentation that

they prepared ahead of time," Alston said.

Role-plays are given scenarios where students have a certain amount of time to prepare a response before presenting it to a judge, he said, adding that Principles events are the first year DECA role-plays where students compete against others with no prior DECA experience.

Projects include a written paper and a slideshow presentation on a given business topic, which are then presented at the competition, Alston said.

He said the main change to the competition was its division into two different days, Jan. 7 and Jan. 8.

"This year was the first year that our district has done a two-day event. On the first day, it was projects and Principles events, and the second day was the other role-plays," he said.

According to an email from Alston, this is the greatest num-

**'This year was the first year that our district has done a two-day event.'**

- BARRETT ALSTON



BISSY MITRANO PHOTO

Seniors Kaylee Delaney, Lila Brady, and Kacey O'Connell worked on a group project in the Independent Business Plan category during the district competition, where they placed first.

ber of students to qualify in his time at the school.

"This is especially impressive since our district not only grew but had less spots available for state qualifiers due to overall MA DECA growth," the email said.

Senior Kacey O'Connell and her two partners, seniors Lila Brady and Kaylee Delaney, placed

first in their project category, Independent Business Plan.

"We created an idea for an açai business located in Manchester," O'Connell said.

She said the division of districts was helpful because there were fewer people compared to the role-play day.

Senior Ava Linson, who scored

second place in her role-play category of human resource management, said she found the two-day division to be more efficient.

"I thought the change was good because, surprisingly, they were on time, and it also seemed less crowded ... it made it a lot better to handle, and the event went faster," Linson said.

## New courses offered for 2026

By Rosie Renehan  
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

New high school course options for next year have been approved by the School Committee.

The classes have been entered into the Program of Studies and will become available for student course selections in the upcoming school year.

Some of the new courses in the Program of Studies include marine science, marine biology, public speaking, and drama. One senior English elective is being altered.

"I'm really excited about marine science and marine biology. I think it's going to be a hit here," Principal Julie Sgroi said.

She said that there's a need for the new public speaking course.

"Offering a course to help students learn how to present themselves as their best self would be great for students," Sgroi said.

The English department's quarter-long "Hamlet" senior elective will be changed to study "Macbeth."

In addition to Public Speaking and Drama, a writing lab may be added for students who need support.

English teacher Daniel Koughan will be teaching the "Macbeth" elective.

Koughan said he enjoyed teaching "Hamlet," which he has taught for four years, but reading and analyzing the play took up most of the class's time, which is why he

**'Students don't have a lot of opportunities during the day ... to kind of express themselves in that way.'**

- DEBRA ISENSEE



ROSIE RENEHAN PHOTO

Science teacher Anjali Bhardwaj is set to teach STEM-related new courses such as Marine-Science-by-the-Sea and Marine Biology, which will be offered next year as a full-year and half-year elective.

decided to change to "Macbeth."

"It's a shorter play, so we'll be able to do more with it," Koughan said.

English department chair Debra Isensee is excited about the public speaking and drama elec-

tives.

"With AI, opportunities for students to show their knowledge in other ways is important. Students don't have a lot of opportunities during the day, students who are especially creative-mind-

ed, to kind of express themselves in that way," Isensee said.

She said these electives provide more exposure for students to learn and try new subjects.

The science department course: Marine-Science-by-the-Sea will be a full-year, honors course, and Marine Biology will be a half-year CP course.

Science teacher Anjali Bhardwaj will be teaching these classes.

Marine-Science-by-the-Sea will start "with the formation of our ocean, some biological oceanography, and then we move from oceanography to things like tides, currents, waves, all of that fun stuff before we actually get into the marine biology," Bhardwaj said.

A 2.5 credit arts or performing arts course graduate requirement is another addition.

"It's such an important part of high school students' education that when they leave here, they've had some valuable arts and design experience," art teacher Tamera Burns said.

## Tentative budget for FY27 looks moderate

By August Capotosto  
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

The district is anticipating fewer issues with the budget which will be assisted by new methods to reduce spending, Superintendent Pamela Beaudoin said.

Beaudoin said the tentative budget for next year is more controlled than last year's budget, which was characterized by cuts and contingency plans in case overrides didn't pass.

"We are, I would say, cautiously optimistic that it's going to be more of a normal budget year,"

SAVE THE DATES	
3 MARCH	MS/HS LEARNING COMMONS
17 MARCH	MS/HS LEARNING COMMONS
7 APRIL	MS/HS LEARNING COMMONS
27 APRIL	MEMORIAL ELEMENTARY (Early Start Pre-Town Meeting)
4 MAY	ESSEX ELEMENTARY (Early Start Pre-Town Meeting)
19 MAY	MS/HS LEARNING COMMONS
2 JUNE	MS/HS LEARNING COMMONS

COURTESY OF AMY LEJEUNE

### The School Committee plans to meet in the upcoming months.

she said.

Beaudoin said the main factor that has contributed to the district being unsure about the financial situation next year is ris-

ing health insurance costs.

"Until we know what that number is, for sure, we're not really positive what, if anything, we need to trim," she said.

Beaudoin said that if district personnel need to be trimmed, the district will focus on maximizing retirements or people moving on to other jobs.

She said the district is addressing how it covers potential long-term liability for retiree healthcare, which will be through focusing on adjusting the use of Other Post-Employment Benefit (OPEB) funding.

Beaudoin said the actuaries have identified for all municipalities that this will be a financial liability due to adding a plan for the person who is replaced instead of

losing a plan or breaking even.

She said that since this was anticipated as an issue a few years ago, the district began creative savings accounts so that when this liability threatened the everyday budget, the district could tap into these accounts to offset the growth of paying for retiree healthcare.

"So what we're talking about is, is there going to be a different strategy to still fund that account, but at a lower rate," Beaudoin said.

The School Committee meeting materials from their most recent meeting on Jan. 13 showed that this method will preserve the OPEB strategy while reducing annual expenditure to manage growth.

Beaudoin said the district plans

to reorganize and make smaller contributions to act as a reduction to the budget.

"The impact is slower growth in your savings account, but there's no immediate negative impact, which we think is going to be an important lever," she said.

She said that the district is pursuing additional reductions to the budget to hopefully stay away from affecting programs and staff, such as creating a general student activity fund to offset the cost of stipends and transportation after an access fee. This user fee directly affects parents and students but reduces tax to the towns.

"So there's good and bad in all of these solutions, and we think this will offset the budget a little, too," Beaudoin said.

# Speech and Debate members advances to state tournament

## Former Debate member returns to direct team

By Sophia Eagan  
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Students on the Speech and Debate Team have advanced to the state tournament this season while others placed in the top eight for speaker points at a recent tournament in Natick, Massachusetts.

Multiple members of Speech and Debate finished in high places or qualified for States, Debate director Sally Berkowitz said.

"I'm really proud of our

performance at the Holly Fest, which was the last tournament we attended in December, and we had among more than 100 competitors, three of our debaters finished in the top eight for speakers, which is really impressive," she said.

Debaters were either placed in the overall category, based on how many events they won, or speaker points, based on how well they presented their case and spoke, said Debate Team president sophomore Rosie Renehan.

Renehan and vice president freshman Annabelle Kerivan came in eighth place overall and qualified for States, which will be on March 27-29, Renehan said.

For speaker points, freshman Lily Berkowitz came in eighth place, Kerivan in third, and freshman Stella Langille in second, Renehan said.

Debate director Sally Berkowitz debated when she was a student at the high school. During that time, Debate was a class with tournaments across Massachusetts and other States on the weekends, she said.

"We traveled everywhere from New York State to Connecticut, all throughout Massachusetts, and beyond, and it was a really great way to get to meet kids from other communities and exercise my critical thinking skills," she said.

Competing in Debate helped Berkowitz in her professional life by preparing her to present in front of large audiences, she said. Her decision to become the Debate Director was influenced by her daughters who attend the school and her experience as a debater.

"I really wanted to make an opportunity for [my daughters]

**"I really wanted to make an opportunity for [my daughters] to engage in this extracurricular activity, and I wanted to provide that opportunity for other students as well."**

- SALLY BERKOWITZ



COURTESY OF SALLY BERKOWITZ

Three debaters finished in the top eight in speaker points at their last tournament. The Debate Team has grown from four members last year to 13 this year, marking a turnaround for the program.

to engage in this extracurricular activity, and I wanted to provide that opportunity for other students as well," she said.

Debate tournaments require significant preparation and thorough research ahead of time in order to confidently argue opinions, said Kerivan.

Kerivan explained how she and Renehan set themselves up for success in debates.

"We have to write cases on the topic, telling the judge our opinion and why using evidence and arguments, so Rosie usually writes con typically and I write pro, and she'll usually read the case, and I'll do the rebuttal responding to opponents," she said.

Writing cases can be very stressful, especially for newer members who are unfamiliar with the speech and debate style, said Renehan. To help with the tran-

sition, she assists new members with their cases.

Students compete in two to three tournaments per month from October to March, Berkowitz said. The tournaments are organized into five rounds with breaks built in between each round, Renehan said.

"At a debate tournament, what we have is five rounds, and they are kind of evenly spaced out with 30 minutes in between each round, but they are an hour long," she said.

For the first round, the pairing between teams is randomized, and skill level or experience is not considered, Kerivan said. After this, performance quality and overall skill level play a role in the pairing, she said.

"After your first Debate, you get power-matched with someone who's more on your level,

someone who has either won one or lost one like you did, and from there it continues to power-match," she said.

The team mainly consists of freshmen, with just one sophomore and one junior, Berkowitz said. The largest challenge with this roster is having no upperclassmen to assist the new students, she said.

In addition, the Debate Team has grown from just four active participants last year to 13 this year, Renehan said.

Berkowitz said members who return next year with the experience they have gained will help Debate prosper next season.

"I'm really excited to have some returning debaters who come in with some experience and who will be able to help turn my challenge into an opportunity," she said.

## Two English teachers to lead SCORE

By Riley McKinnon  
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

English teachers Angie Rice and Elizabeth Edgerton are in charge of overseeing the Senior Choice of Related Experience (SCORE) program for the Class of 2026.

"I think it's a really valid and important program ... it's basically building skills that maybe kids don't get in school so much," Rice said.

This is Rice's second year as a leader in SCORE and Edgerton's first.

"We work really well together in terms of how we organize ourselves, like, how we communicate. We have the same expectations for students, which I think is really good," Edgerton said.

Both teachers have collaborated outside of SCORE as they both teach freshmen, Rice said.

"We're constantly comparing notes and sharing stuff," she said.



RILEY MCKINNON PHOTOS

SCORE directors Angie Rice and Elizabeth Edgerton said that presentations will happen over one day instead of two this year.

Rice and Edgerton keep in contact with other faculty groups in relation to SCORE. The school counseling department works with them in cases where students may need extra help with their weekly activities, their presentations, or other opportunities.

"If [SCORE] is not going well, we're here to catch you and help you figure out how to make it better, and if it's going great, we're here to cheer you on the entire way," head of the school counseling department Samantha Pindara said.

open about it with her students ... [she was] just being a model for the rest of us about making the best of the time you have left because life is precious," she said.

Coletti said students valued Epp's transparency about what she was facing, and the bravery she displayed in front of her classes.

up more restrictions on what students can do for their project as the amount of freedom students have for the projects has been sometimes difficult for them to budget in the past.

"It can be difficult if you don't have a plan in place about having to be somewhere at a certain time or having goals," Rice said.

The grading for SCORE will also be different with more value focused on deadline submissions.

Regardless, both teachers are enthusiastic to see where students go with their projects.

"I really love seeing the variety of projects. I also really love when a project that a student didn't expect to work out really well works out really well ... I've seen projects change career paths for students or spark an

interest that they didn't know," Edgerton said.

SCORE was a requirement for Edgerton during her senior year when she attended high school. She did a research project on the Salem Witch Trials.

"I wish I had more hours when I was in high school, but even just partial hours help grow students," she said.

Rice did not have access to a project similar to SCORE in her high school.

"I think [SCORE] would have been great. I

think it would have been scary, but like in a really good way," she said.

Both teachers are preparing to help students make the best use of their time during quarter four.

"As a mom, I've kind of gone into this thinking that I wanted to help students find something that was going to be something just meaningful and something of value," Rice said.

**"If [SCORE] is not going well, we're here to catch you and make it better, and if it's not going great, we're here to cheer you on the entire way."**

- SAMANTHA PINDARA

## CONTINUATIONS

HIGH SCHOOL REFLECTS ON CAROLINE EPP  
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being open about that and being

"She was very strong. Like, when she told us she had cancer, she taught the rest of the class after. I think you just have to kind of push through some harder

times, you know. And she would always come back and visit even when she was going through treatment, and I always admired her for that," she said.

# Food drive, door decorating contests help community

## Winning U blocks get bagels, trophies

By Anna Garth  
INDEPENDENT STAFF

Both the food drive and the door decorating contests took place during the two weeks before December break. Math teacher Christopher Petrie's sophomore U block won the food drive contest, which social studies teacher John Mullady organized with the Culinary Club for Beverly Bootstraps.

Social studies teacher Jennifer Coleman ran the door decorating contest that English teacher Angie Rice's junior U block won.

Mullady said the food drive this year was more successful than the one last year, although he didn't know the exact amount of donations. "Beverly Bootstraps is very excited to see the number of cereal that our school donated," he said.

Beverly Bootstraps is an organization in Beverly that provides critical resources to people in need. However, if they do not need the donations, they will be allocated to other organizations on the North Shore.

Petrie said his U block brought in 16 boxes of cereal. He said he was happy they won, but it was not a surprise, given the amount of donations his U block had.

He said food drives are important for our school to do.

"There's not enough social safety nets in our society," he said. "It's important to help out people less fortunate than ourselves."



ANNA GARTH PHOTO

**English teacher Angie Rice's junior U block's Grinch-themed door won the door decorating contest this year.**

Mullady said they run a food drive at least once a year, and the one in December usually receives the most donations.

He said Beverly Bootstraps usually gets a big food donation before Thanksgiving, but then donations start to decrease. Having a food drive after Thanksgiving gives them a chance to replenish their stocks.

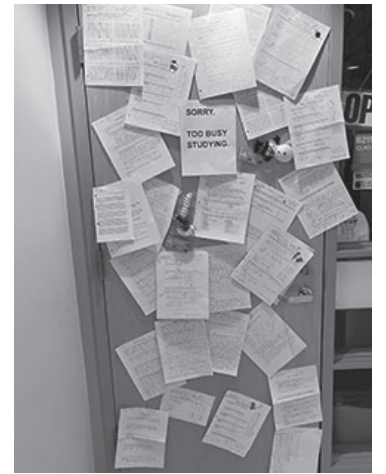
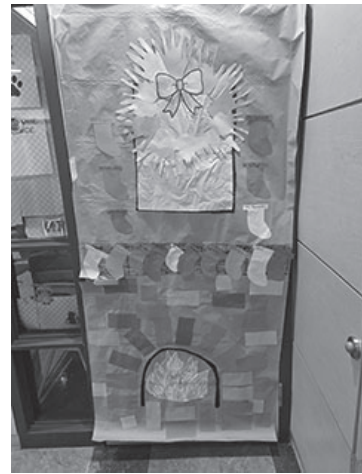
As their prize, Petrie's U block received a trophy vase called the Giving Cup and bagels from Bagel World. He said making the

food drive a contest incentivizes people to donate because people like receiving prizes.

For the door contest, Rice's U block's winning door was Grinch-themed, showing the Grinch stealing lights off a Christmas tree.

Rice's U block received bagels as a prize, along with a ceramic elephant trophy that winning students sign each year.

Rice said she was very excited to hear they won the contest. She said the contest gives students a



ELIZABETH MAUER, MARY BUCKLEY-HARMON PHOTOS

**The ACE classroom created a fireplace. English teacher Daniel Koughan's U block had quizzes with a "too busy studying" sign.**

break and an opportunity to have fun.

"It's creative. It gets people involved," she said about the contest.

Junior Graham Lewis, who dressed up as the Grinch in Rice's U block during the contest, agreed that it helps get people involved.

"We all connect, and we just work together. It's a lot of fun. We have a great time doing it," he said.

Lewis said that the class worked very hard on the door, and he thought it turned out well.

Other U blocks also participated in the contest.

English teacher Allison Krause's junior U block had a "Home Alone" themed door, which Lewis said was the second best next to theirs.

Across the hall, English teacher Daniel Koughan's junior U block covered their door with quizzes with a sign saying "Sorry, too busy studying."

The seniors in English teacher Mary Buckley-Harmon's U block, who won the contest last year, had a Charlie Brown-themed door with a live tree and lights.

Next door, English teacher Elizabeth Edgerton's sophomore U block had the lyrics to Band-Aid's 1984 song "Do They Know It's Christmas?" with the question "Worst Christmas Song Ever?" posted on the door.

Spanish teacher Robert Bilsbury's Spanish U block had an "Elf"-themed door with Bilsbury's face on the body of Buddy the Elf and the students' faces on the bodies of other elves.

Coleman's senior U block decorated their door with spirit animals.

The ACE classroom's door depicted a holiday-themed fireplace.

Lewis said the contest "definitely brings [his] class together," and they had a great time participating in the contest.

## Juniors, seniors to take 10-day trip to Spain

By Kiki Campbell  
INDEPENDENT STAFF

Students and chaperones prepare for the upcoming trip to Spain, which will take place over April vacation.

Led by EF Tours, students will travel to Barcelona, Madrid, Seville, Cordoba, Valencia, and Granada.

Spanish teacher Robert Bilsbury, leader of the 10-day trip, said he is pleased with the number of students interested in attending.

The group is made up of 39 students and seven chaperones. The chaperones include eighth-grade Spanish teacher Dorris Ann Vosseler and her husband, a Spanish teacher at Danvers High School, social studies teacher Lauren Dubois, music teacher Ben Icenogle, and English teacher Mary Buckley-Harmon.

The group will begin their trip with an overnight flight from Boston to Barcelona, where they will spend two nights.

Bilsbury said in Barcelona, the students will visit the cathedral La Sagrada Familia. Designed by

Antoni Gaudí, the basilica has been a work in progress for over 140 years.

"We may be one of the first groups that gets to see the final finished product of it... That's such a cool thing to have a cathedral that's been under construction for more than 100 years, and it's near completion, so that's really exciting to have a possibility to maybe see a final product of that," Bilsbury said.

Another highlight of the tour of Barcelona is an evening of flamenco dancing.

Senior Annie Pinkin, a dancer, is excited for this. "I hope that we go to a flamenco performance or class because I dance and have a lot of respect for flamenco dance, and I think it's super cool and awesome," she said.

From Barcelona, the group travels to Valencia, where they will see the city and arts complex. They will attend a papier-mâché giant sculpture-making class. Afterwards, they will set the sculptures on fire.

Bilsbury said this is the first time he is taking students to Barcelona and Valencia. He is very

excited to see what the tours are going to be like, he said.

After Valencia, the students will head to Granada, which is located in the southern part of Spain in Andalusia.

Granada is the last Arab stronghold. Bilsbury said the students are going to take a tour of the Alhambra, an Arab architecture-built palace, a major attraction in the Granada area.

Departing from Granada, the group will travel to the Costa del Sol, the southern coast of Spain. From there, they will climb the rock of Gibraltar. On top of the rock, they will be able to have a view across the Mediterranean Sea.

After their hike, they are to spend some time at the beach if the weather permits.

After a couple of days, the group will leave for Seville, where they will see more of the Arab culture.

"[Seville] is a really cool cultural experience. It has a big cathedral. It has a giant tower. It's an Arabic prayer tower that they turned into a big church bell, and you get to walk all the

**'It really can level up your Spanish so linguistically it's amazing for the kids.'**

- ROBERT BILSBURY



COURTESY OF ROBERT BILSBURY

**Foreign language teacher Robert Bilsbury took students to Spain in 2022. Thirty-nine students are going on the trip this year.**

way up that. There are lots of neighborhoods that we'll visit. We get a guided tour of the cathedral there," Bilsbury said.

The students will also visit a bull riding ring and Plaza de España, which was built for the world's fair.

After Seville, the group will travel to Cordoba to see the Mezquita-Cathedral de Cordoba.

Two days later, the students and chaperones will spend the last two days touring Madrid, including the Palacio Royal, where the royal family lives. Afterwards, they will visit the Prado Museum.

After these last few tours, the

group will depart for home.

Vosseler thinks the Spanish trip is fundamental for student linguistic growth.

"The students are asking questions in Spanish and understand, and so that's really exciting," she said.

Bilsbury said major benefits come from the trip, such as expansion of Spanish skills and newfound connections and bonds with other students.

"You don't get a break from [the Spanish], and if you kind of, like, open yourself up and take that in, it really can level up your Spanish so linguistically it's amazing for the kids," he said.

# Animals belong outside in their natural habitat instead of inside zoos

Zoos are an inhumane, selfish excuse to observe wildlife

By Kiki Campbell  
INDEPENDENT STAFF

Keeping animals in captivity, such as in zoos, is a selfish, inhumane, cruel practice for the sole benefit of public entertainment. Animals should be kept in their natural habitats unless it is necessary to relocate them for their benefit.

Displaying wild animals for public viewing has more harmful than beneficial effects. The negative consequences of keeping animals in captivity include mental afflictions, abuse, physical issues, and reduced quality of life/life span

Creatures are meant to be kept in their natural habitat. Zoo animals are removed from their environment and placed in small enclosed spaces. These spaces are vastly different from what they are used to, and in some cases, the habitats are also inaccurate.

Despite zoos' attempts to replicate habitats, some animals develop abnormal behavioral patterns, such as pacing, head bobbing, and rocking.

According to an article from World Animal Protection US written by Hannah Goldstein, "A captive animal's memory and emotions are irregular, and some animals have been shown to become emotionally unpredictable. Prolonged stress also disrupts the balance of serotonin and dopamine in an animal's brain, which can lead to repetitive and often damaging behavior."

In addition, animals in captivity can acquire depression and



Animals are taken from their natural habitats and placed into artificial enclosures for human entertainment. Captivity disrupts animals' mental and physical well-being, leading to depression and abnormal behaviors. Zoos cannot recreate a natural environment for these animals. Consequently, animals cannot act naturally, causing long-term harm that cannot be justified by public amusement.

become overstimulated.

In an article from Science Direct, Benjamin Lecorps wrote, "Imagine going from wide-open spaces to being stuck in a small, barren cage for the rest of your life. Captive animals can't roam, explore, or even interact with others as they should. ."

Too many people surround and observe animals in their enclosures. Little children reach their

hands in and try to touch them, which makes the animals uncomfortable.

According to an article by The Dodo, written by Nanna Pâskesen, "175 million people visit zoos every year." Despite this attention, zoo animals in some environments can become depressed if they not receiving sufficient attention. Some zoos neglect their wildlife by not check-

ing on them or analyzing what they may need.

In some cases, the animals are only kept in captivity for a certain period of time to "protect them" and then are released back into the wild. Contrary to popular belief, this does more harm than good.

"They have to rely on humans for their every need," Pâskesen said.

The animals can grow accustomed to not having to fight for their food or work hard to obtain it. They can also get used to having no predators or competition.

When they are released, some

can experience difficulty relearning their instincts, which can cost them their life if they don't learn fast enough to compete with the other animals naturally born in the wild.

Some endangered species are rescued for study, analysis, and education; however, enclosing wild creatures simply for the enjoyment of humans is inhumane.

Unless crucial, wild animals should be kept in their natural habitats, where they can live their normal lives. Human can observe animals without interfering with their lifestyle in other ways, such as visiting local sanctuaries or their natural habitats.

**'Imagine going from wide-open spaces to being stuck in a small barren cage for the rest of your life.'**

- BENJAMIN LECORPS

## Gratitude supports stronger mental health

By Rosie Renhan  
INDEPENDENT STAFF

Practicing gratitude can have many different forms and helps with general mental health or specific mental conditions.

Gratitude can help people affected by anxiety and depression. This is because they both have underlying negative thoughts. In not only the short term but also in the long run, thankfulness can help to reverse these thoughts.

The Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA) says in a 2023 article that rumination, meaning dwelling on the past or worrying about the future, can worsen feelings of depression or anxiety.

Gratitude is a mental habit that can compete with practices such as rumination or negative thinking, pushing them out of the way to think positively.

The ADAA calls this habit reversal training, where one does

completely incompatible actions with the habit they are trying to break.

The habit of thankfulness has a correlation to not only alleviating the effects of mental disorders but also general well-being.

According to a 2024 article from Harvard Health Publishing by Maureen Salamon, new data from the Nurses' Health Study shows an association between gratitude and mortality.

This long-term study surveyed women with an average age of 79, who completed a gratitude questionnaire. Women who participated in the Nurses' Health Study who were in the top third of having more feelings of gratitude had a 9% reduction in mortality risk.

Additionally, a study conducted by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing in 2022 found that a single act of thoughtful gratitude produces an immediate 10% increase in happiness and



MARY BUCKLEY-HARMON PHOTO

High school English teacher Mary Buckley-Harmon keeps a gratitude jar to help maintain positivity and support her well-being. The jar serves as a reminder to be mindful.

a 35% reduction in depressive symptoms.

These results accumulate over time, continuing to support mental health. According to a 2022 article from Mental Health First Aid, practicing gratitude is a great protective factor. A protective factor is "something that decreases the chances of a person being adversely affected by a circumstance or disorder."

An important factor to note is that behavior changes biology, Amanda Logan of Mayo Clinic Health System wrote in a 2022 article. Positive and thankful gestures benefit people by releasing oxytocin, a hormone that helps connect people.

In this way, the person showing their gratitude feels more positive, and the people around them are also positively im-

pacted.

Some ways that individuals can practice gratitude are by journaling, celebrating small victories, and using habit reversal training.

There is so much to be grateful for, even just living in coastal New England, spending time with friends and family, and having free time to pursue what you love.

# Student Speak: What is your dream date and why?

**Charlotte Lockerbie, junior**



"Probably somewhere at the cinema or the Topsfield Fair."

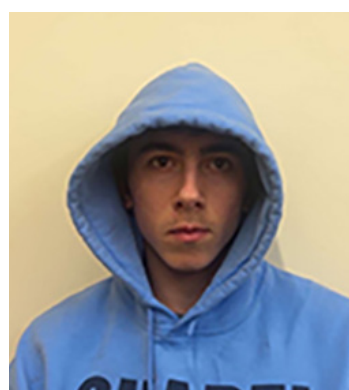


**Aliyah Doyon, sophomore**



"My dream date is probably being on the beach with a picnic and watching the sunset together."

**James Donohoe, sophomore**



"I would sit in the band room and play drums for her."

**Peter Langendorf, junior**



"My dream date would be playing tennis."

**Steel McDonald, senior**



"A movie night."



**Chris Glass, senior**



"I would probably buy my date some flowers, drive over to her house, have a little picnic arrangement, go to the beach and watch the sunset, and then watch a movie after."



**Ellen Gilson, freshman**



"At the beach, of course."



**Olivia Hickey, sophomore**



"My dream date is probably going out on a boat and watching the sunset and then going out to dinner."

# Flirting Advice from the Journalism Staff



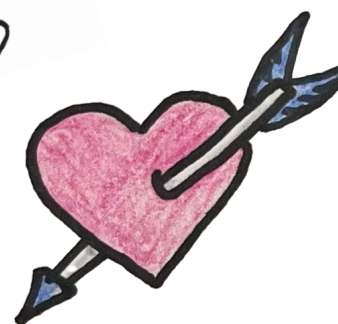
**Maya Chaghouri, sophomore:**  
"Send a lot of photos of your cat to your crush."



**Claire Masters, sophomore:**  
"Build her a white house with blue shutters."



**Kiki Campbell, sophomore:**  
"Write her 365 letters."



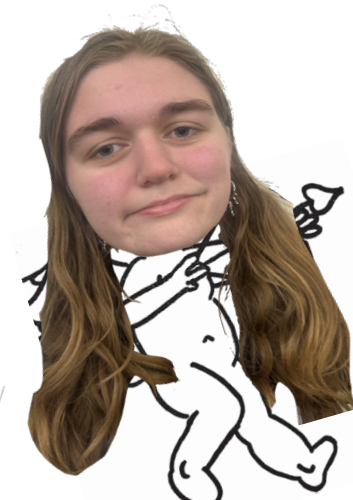
**August Capotosto, senior:**  
"Airtag their car so they can never leave you."



**Riley McKinnon, senior:**  
"Bend and snap and then ghost them."



**Bissy Mitrano, senior:**  
"Spend all of his money."



**Maddy Holsomback, sophomore:**  
"Find someone who matches your crazy."



**Maya Frangioso, sophomore:**  
"Buy her flowers."



**Rosie Renehan, sophomore:**  
"Be a good listener."

MAYA CHAGHOURI PHOTOS

BISSY MITRANO PHOTOS

**Alicen Shaw, Math**



"My celebrity crush from when I was a kid was Adam Brody, because I was a big fan of 'Gilmore Girls,' and 'The OC.' And then he still is, with 'Nobody Wants This.' Still the crush, honestly, from middle school to now."

**Daniel Koughan, English**



"I could probably make a list of a thousand celebrities I had crushes on, in addition to just real average humans every day ... This is too cliché, but, you know, as an '80s teenage boy, Molly Ringwald and Winona Ryder. They were in all of the good movies."

## Teacher Speak: Who Is Your Celebrity Crush and Why?

**Gianna Baglioni Learning Commons**



"So my crushes are Ethan Hawke for his insanely vast music and literature education, and Megan Thee Stallion for obvious reasons."

**Keith Hartan, Science**



"Marion Cotillard... She speaks French."

# STAFF EDITORIAL

## Social media, exposure to rapid content shrink attention spans

Exposure to short-form social media content significantly weakens people's ability to focus on longer, more demanding tasks.

Social media has become a part of everyday life, especially for the younger generation. Students use platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat every day to communicate with others and be entertained. While social media can be fun and helpful, growing evidence shows that it negatively impacts human attention spans.

The design of social media apps causes attention spans to shrink. Apps like TikTok and Instagram show quick videos and posts that only take a few seconds to watch.

In the article "Impact of Social Media Usage on Attention Spans," published June 25, 2025, in *Psychology*, Alina Poles writes, "Frequent exposure to

rapid, fragmented content on platforms like TikTok and Snapchat overstimulates cognitive processes, leading to decreased working memory capacity, impaired cognitive control, and challenges in maintaining focus."

Social media not only distracts individuals but also makes it more difficult to concentrate on tasks like studying, reading, and getting work done.

**Social media not only distracts individuals but also makes it more difficult to concentrate on tasks ...**

In the article "Speaking of Psychology: Why our attention spans are shrinking," by Gloria Mark, PhD, from the American Psychological

Association, Mark explains that attention spans have dropped significantly from two and a half minutes in 2004 to about 47 seconds today, with many people's attention even shorter. The drop in attention span shows how much digital devices and social media can affect the brain. When people are used to constantly switching between apps, it



MAYA FRANGIOSO PHOTO

**Students sometimes do not do their work in class or socialize with each other because they are distracted by scrolling on social media. Students can limit their social media by setting time limits.**

becomes difficult to focus on one thing for a long period of time.

High school students feel the struggle of staying focused or studying because social media constantly interrupts their attention.

In her article "Social media causes attention spans to drop," published Dec 14, 2023, in *The*

Standard, Tessa Nussenbaum writes, "I am sitting at my desk, trying to finish an assignment due tomorrow. When my phone buzzes, I force myself to look away, fighting the urge to pick it up. It always fails. I tell myself it's just a quick minute and that I'll finish later. However, next thing I know, it's been an hour,

and I've just wasted my time switching from app to app." This experience shows how easily social media distractions interrupt focus and can lead to lost productivity, especially for students. To improve attention, students can try limiting their social media by setting daily time limits on the apps.

## Valentine's Day should focus on appreciation for friends, family

By Bissy Mitrano  
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Valentine's Day is problematic in that it has become too focused on romantic love and should focus more on love and appreciation for family and friends.

By broadening the holiday, more people will be able to feel included. According to the 2025 *Psychology Today* article by Sam Goldstein Ph.D., "Many people feel lonely or isolated on Valentine's Day, especially those who are single or have lost loved ones. Expanding the holiday's focus to include everyone can help mitigate feelings of exclusion."

The narrow focus on romantic love may make single people feel unhappy. Validating the love of friends, family, or even pets is important.

"Anthropologists believe that the evolutionary basis of love lies in the need for sur-



BISSY MITRANO PHOTO

**The Mitrano family centers Valentine's Day on appreciating each other's company as opposed to focusing solely on romantic love.**

vival. Love fosters connections between parents and children, ensuring the survival of their offspring," Goldstein said.

Attachments are formed between couples, but the core attachments are from family and friends.

According to the Harvard

Medicine 2011 article, "The Look of Love" by David Cameron, "Empathy and attachment are at the core of human relatedness, and a small section of our prefrontal cortex drives us to find it one way or another. Without it, we're lost."

Friendships and families support healthy future relationships, by helping feel loved and cultivating empathy.

Valentine's Day places pressure on people to focus their attention on expensive gifts or "perfect dates" rather than simply appreciating each other.

According to the 2024 *Psychology Today* article, "Dreading Valentine's Day", by Cortney S. Warren, Ph.D., "For couples, pressures come from the expectations to express love in a romantic, overly positive way through gifts, cards, and loving gestures. When these expectations aren't met, people often report dissatisfaction."

Valentine's Day has shifted to a day about who can receive the most lavish gift, rather than spending time with loved ones.

Warren, Lange and Colleagues (2022) led a study of over 2,000 participants that revealed that people who did not receive a Valentine's Day gift reported more

symptoms of depression than recipients of gifts.

Social media has made Valentine's Day more showy, causing people to conflate attention with affection. The day is treated as a couples competition, leaving the whole point of celebrating love lost.

If the holiday emphasized all loved ones, not just significant others, then the social media pressure would be alleviated for couples.

Some people may want to keep the focus on romantic love, as it is the only holiday that focuses on it. However, couples also have private days like anniversaries or birthdays to spend together.

Romantic love can continue to hold space on Valentine's Day, but it should not dominate the holiday.

When recognition expands to include family and friends, the day becomes more inclusive and less driven by pressure.

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**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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# Boys' basketball team shares chemistry, strong bond

## Reaches state playoffs

By Maya Chaghouri  
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

With a record of 9-7, the boys' basketball team has made it to the Division IV state playoffs.

Captains of this team are seniors Jake Zschau and Zach Hurd, along with juniors Graham Lewis and Alex Ste. Marie.

Hurd was recruited to play football for Bates College.

Other seniors are Jack McCavanagh, Joe Glass, Chris Glass, and Parker Woodman.

Zschau has played basketball since he was 5 years old, and Lewis has played since he was three years old.

"I had this fuzzy little basketball that I used to dribble around my house when I was three," Lewis said.

Coach Tim St. Laurent said that one of this team's biggest strengths is their athleticism.

Practice is broken up between conditioning, individual and team skill on both offense and defense, St. Laurent said.

Additionally, the team's overall goal is to go far in the state tournament, Lewis said.

They hope to "finish off the season strong and head into the playoffs hot," Zschau said.

A major struggle this season has been that many play-

ers have gotten hit with the flu, he said.

His favorite memory was seeing his players come back healthy after being sick, he said.

Although illness has been a challenge for the team, St. Laurent said that it has been an opportunity to work with the players through adversities in life.

**'We hope to finish off the season strong and head into the playoffs hot.'**

- JAKE ZSCHAU



COURTESY OF O'CONNOR STUDIOS

Captains seniors Zach Hurd and Jake Zschau, and juniors Graham Lewis, and Alex Ste. Marie, and seniors Parker Woodman, Chris Glass, Jack McCavanagh, and junior Jacob Zachareas play varsity.

This team's chemistry is great because of their strong bond, Lewis said.

Zschau said Chris Glass exemplifies team spirit and inspires the team.

"He brings the energy every single night, and no matter what happens, no matter how the game is going, he keeps his head high, and really lights up everybody," he said.

Lewis said that Joe Glass, along with his brother, is the MVP when it comes to team spirit and lifting everybody's mood.

"He's the best," Lewis said.

# Girls' basketball starts season strong, faces difficult competition

## Key players impact team

By August Capotosto  
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

With an overall record of 9-7, the girls' basketball team is working hard to qualify for the state tournament and win the Cape Ann League Baker Championship, head coach Lauren DuBois said.

"We started off the season really strong with some big wins over a couple of opponents in our league," she said.

In their first league game against Amesbury, a rival in the Cape Ann League, the team won 62-52.

"It was a big game for us, and kind of showed us what we were

capable of doing, and we were able to put a lot of points on the board," DuBois said.

In their following matches, the team faced more difficult teams such as North Reading.

"While we were able to play a really great defense on them

and hold some of their top scorers to low point totals, we ourselves struggle to put the ball in the net. So we've had some ups and downs, but what I'm really happy about is

that we, in every game, regardless of the score, have been fighting and giving our best effort," she said.

DuBois said the team's captains have been instrumental in the team's cohesion and success.

Senior captain Harper Brooks has started the season as the

**'We started off the season really strong with some big wins.'**

- LAUREN DUBOIS



COURTESY OF VICKI DONNELLAN

The varsity girls' basketball team and their swings pose for a photo in the gym hallway with head coach, Lauren DuBois.

team's leading scorer and rebounder after returning from an ACL injury that kept her from playing her junior year, she said.

"She is just a little Energizer Bunny out there, nonstop, relentless, and such a tremendous rebounder," DuBois said.

She said that offensively, senior captains Lily Oliver and

Penelope Riggs handle pressure effectively and are key players in matches.

"Lily is our point guard; she can get to the basket really effectively and score for us ... Penelope's a forward, so we often put her on some really tough defensive assignments," DuBois said.

She said this year's roster is composed of individually strong and talented players, such as senior Anna Gardner.

"She has been so impactful on the defensive end. I always put her on the toughest opponent, and she just works so hard all game" DuBois said.

Oliver said this well-rounded team is exemplified by not only full-time players, but swing players as well, such as freshman Hadley Johnson.

"She has been playing a lot on Varsity and is doing really well. She was a little nervous at first, but now she's coming out of her shell and scoring a lot," she said.

Riggs said that after defeating league rival Georgetown 68-47, the team is hoping to compete for the CAL Baker title.

"It's been, I think, three or four years since the last time we did, and I think that we have the best team and lineup this year to be able to do that," she said.

# Indoor track prepares for Division V State meet

## Team growth enhances success

By Claire Masters  
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Having finished all of its regular-season meets, the indoor track team is now preparing for the Division V State meet on Feb. 14.

The team had its Cape Ann League championship meet on Feb. 3 at the New Balance Track in Boston.

The boys' team came in tenth place, and the girls' team came in third place, said senior captain Cia Donohoe.

"We had a lot of metal and team placements so we did really



COURTESY OF O'CONNOR STUDIOS

Sophomore Isaiah Nicastro, running at the New Balance Track, is an impact member on the team, Coach Brian Davis said.

well" she said.

Head coach Brian Davis, who coaches the team with distance coach Kim Lations, said the team has had an "amazing season."

The girls' team is 3-1 for the first time in 10 years, and the

boys' team is 1-3, with their first win in two years.

Davis attributes this success to the team's growth, which has made them more competitive and helped them score more points.

Senior captain Charlie Thur-

low said the team's growth has had a big impact.

"Having a bigger team definitely enhances your chances of winning," he said.

Thurlow was recruited to play lacrosse for Roger Williams University.

"I'm very excited to play next year; it should be fun," he said.

Additionally, senior captain Abby Kent was recruited to play field hockey for the College of the Holy Cross.

On Jan. 16, the team competed in the Massachusetts State Track Coaches Association Relay Invitational meet at the Reggie Lewis Center in Boston, Davis said.

"An invitational is a special meet where people are invited from all over the state to compete," he said.

The girls' 4x200 relay, consisting of eighth-grader Melina Binieris, sophomore captain Tess Taylor, Donohoe, and Kent, placed fourth overall at the meet.

"It's a real honor for them," Davis said.

The team had a last-chance meet on Feb. 7 at the Reggie Lewis Center. It was an opportunity for athletes to get personal bests and attempt to qualify for the Division V State meet, Davis said.

Both the boys' and girls' teams have practices at the high school, Donohoe said.

"We practice in the hallways and in the parking lot, which is the best that we can do, just because we don't have a facility, but it turns out really well," she said.

# Swim team thrives in second season co-op with Hamilton Wenham

## Girls' and boys' team send nine swimmers to Sectionals, States

By Anna Garth  
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Head coach Angela Ceriello said the swim team, a co-op program with Hamilton-Wenham Regional High School, had a successful season.

The girls' team placed second at the Cape Ann League Championships, and the boys' team placed fifth. At Sectionals, the girls' team placed 15th and the boys' team placed 27th. The top nine swimmers on each team go to the State Championship meet on February 15.

The girls' team ended second with a record of 4-1. The boys' team is in last place with a record of 0-4 in the league.

Ceriello said the team has a strong group of new swimmers, returning swimmers, and a few divers this year.

Three girls' relay teams have qualified for Sectionals: the 200 medley relay team, the 200 freestyle relay team, and the 400 freestyle relay team. Several individual swimmers also qualified for state and sectional meets, including senior captain Sydney Hemme.

**'We've just increased our team unity as a whole, which is great.'**

- SYDNEY HEMME

Hemme said she saw the team improve this season, including how they made it to Sectionals for certain events. "We've had practices almost every day, with a lot of practices over break," she said.

Both the girls' and boys' teams did well, but the boys' team had a harder time winning meets due to their size, Hemme said. The boys' team has seven swimmers, while the girls' team has 19.

Athletic director Cameron Molinare said the swim program's small size is what led to



COURTESY OF CAMERON MOLINARE

Seniors Sydney Hemme, Maddie Novak, and Mollie Mosher and the swim team celebrate senior night with posters and flowers during a home meet against Lynnfield at Gordon College on Jan. 7.

the co-op program. Nine students from Manchester-Essex are in the program.

"I'd love to see that number continue to grow," Molinare said. "I think competitively, they're doing better than they have been in the past."

Hemme said it's nice sharing a team and connecting with Hamilton-Wenham.

"I probably wouldn't have known any of them if we didn't," she said. "It's nice to make more friends."

She said she noticed the team

bonding. "We've just increased our team unity as a whole, which is great," she said.

The team has been welcoming to new swimmers, Ceriello said. "They've done a really good job of incorporating the new people," she said.

## Co-op alpine ski teams increase participation

By Maya Frangioso  
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

The ski team, competing as a co-op with Essex North Shore Agricultural and Technical School (ENSATS), is seeing growth and progress this season despite mixed results in races on the girls' and boys' teams, junior captain Kiernan Day said.

Although the girls' team's current record is 0-6, Day explained that the team has been positively impacted by the increase in participation numbers from this year to last.

"The biggest highlight so far is how our team has grown in comparison to past seasons. Our team has really grown in terms of numbers and experience. Last year, the participation numbers felt like half of what they are this

year," she said.

Head coach Jerry Murphy explained how there are "not so many participation problems this year. We have 15 boys and nine girls."

Sophomore captain Stella Lage said the team's record is not a direct reflection of the effort and hard work each and every member of the team puts in.

"Just because we haven't won a race yet does not mean we aren't putting in a lot of hard work and dedication," she said.

Day discussed how the team's overall skills have greatly de-

veloped over the course of this season.

"We have been getting closer and closer to our opponents that we've been racing against," she said.

On Jan. 13, the girls' team lost their race 78-57 against Hamilton-Wenham, and on Jan. 14, they lost 73-62 against Haverhill.

Despite their losses early in the season, the team was able to improve and tighten the scores against their opponents, Lage said.

The boys' team has a record of 5-5 in the regular season.

Sophomore Tucker Gibbs said the boys' team has seen drastic improvement in the skills of its members as the season has gone on.

"It has been really cool to see everyone progress," he said.

**'Our team has really grown in terms of numbers and experience.'**

- KIERNAN DAY



MAYA FRANGIOSO PHOTO

Girls' ski team participants gather after a 77.5-57.5 loss against Andover at Ski Bradford in Haverhill on Jan. 21.

Lage said both the girls' and boys' teams aim to make States. At the rate in which the team members' skills are progressing, "We can do it," Lage said.

Coach Murphy also talks about his goals for the younger generation of skiers and the future of the ski team.

"I want the freshmen and the

eighth-graders to continue skiing and gaining experience so we can compete with Haverhill and North Andover," Murphy said.

On February 11, both teams will compete in the North Shore Ski League Championship.

Due to the snow days on January 26 and 27, the postseason dates are still to be determined.

## Girls', boys' hockey hope to reach playoffs

By Charlie Baker  
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

The boys' and girls' hockey teams look to make the playoffs as their regular seasons come to the final stretch.

The boys' team is currently 4-12, and the girls' team is 7-10. Both teams are likely but not guaranteed to make the playoffs, senior captains Matthew DeOreo and Teyah Fleming said.

The boys play in a co-op with Rockport, Hamilton-Wenham,

and Ipswich, with Manchester-Essex having the most players, DeOreo said.

He said that going into the season, he thought the team would be much better, but they were hit by injuries.

"We gotta pick it back up before the playoffs start. We thought this would be our year, but we haven't been playing to the best of our abilities," he said.

An injury to senior Aaron Crompton, the starting goalie, was a big challenge for the team, DeOreo said.

He said the team's impact players are senior Daniel Brophy and sophomores Hayden Wood, Christian Cooper, Cameron Barber and Michael Bruce, who DeOreo said has stepped up in

goal after Crompton's injury.

The boys' team sits in 27th place in their division, with the top 32 teams making the playoffs

"Our goal is to make it to the playoffs, and then we'll figure it out from there. Winning a playoff game would be huge," DeOreo said.

The girls' team plays in a co-op with Rockport and Gloucester. Fleming said the team is mostly made up of players from Gloucester.

Fleming said that there are 34 teams in the division and 32

make it to the playoffs, meaning that the team is very likely to compete in the postseason despite their losing record.

She said that the team was expecting to do better than they have, but played a very tough first-half schedule.

"Now, since we've played with each other for a long time and our lines know how to work with each other, I think if we were to play those teams now, it would be a different game," Fleming said.

She also said the team is very

**'Our goal is to make it to the playoffs, and then we'll figure it out from there.'**

- MATTHEW DEOREO

young, with a few seniors and no juniors. Impact players include sophomores Melanie Earl and Joslin Twombly, and freshman Lexi Francis.

Fleming said the team's goal for the rest of the year is to win out to reach a .500 record, helping their chances in the playoffs.

The team's proudest moment is their win against Arlington, she said.

"We played them earlier in the season, and we lost in overtime, and then we played them later on in the season at home, and we won in overtime," Fleming said.

The girls' next game is at Newburyport on Feb 11, and the boys' next game is at home against Pentucket on the same day.

## Film 'How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days' highlights unexpected love

### Shows strong lead chemistry

By Claire Masters  
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

"How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days," a 2003 romantic comedy directed by Donald Petrie, effectively showcases the clash between career ambition and romance while highlighting how love can come in the most unexpected ways.

Andie Anderson (Kate Hudson) is a journalist for the women's magazine Composure in New York City.

She decides to write an article on "How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days," where she will start dat-

ing a guy and try to drive him away using the classic mistakes that most women make. If she succeeds, her boss will allow her to write whatever she wants.

Benjamin Barry (Matthew McConaughey) is a marketing executive, hoping to expand his clientele by working on an ad campaign for a well-known jewelry brand.

To prove that he is capable of selling to women, Ben makes a deal with his boss that if he can make any woman fall in love with him in 10 days, he will get the job.

Andie and Ben meet at a bar, and both secretly pick each other for their bets.

As they start dating, Andie tries to drive Ben away through a series of comedic acts. For example, she creates a scrapbook of what their future children would look like by photoshopping their

faces together.

This makes Ben annoyed but he has to stay with her to win the bet.

The soundtrack of this movie features notable pop songs such as "You're So Vain" by Carly Simon and "Kiss Me" by Sixpence None The Richer.

Notable side characters include Andie's friends, Michelle Rueben (Kathryn Hahn), Jeannie (Annie Parisse), and her boss, Lana Jong (Bebe Neuwirth), as well as Ben's co-workers, Judy Green (Shalom Harlow), Judy Spears (Michael Michele), Tony (Adam Goldberg), and Thayer (Thomas Lennon).

Written by Kristen Buckley, Brian Regan, and Burr Steers and produced by Paramount Pictures, "How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days" is a timeless rom-com, renowned for its strong chemistry between Hudson and McConaughey.

This film shows how love



NETFLIX.COM

Kate Hudson and Matthew McConaughey star in this 2003 romantic comedy about a journalist and marketing executive.

can grow in the most unexpected situations. Andie and Ben never meant to fall in love with each other; they used each other as pawns in their career, but love can flourish, no matter the cir-

cumstances.

This movie is rated PG-13 for some sexual-related material and has a running time of 116 minutes with an overall gross of \$177.5 million.

## Monthly NAHS themes for artwork maintain engaging, creative environment

By Maya Chaghouri  
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Students enrolled in the National Art Honors Society (NAHS) are working towards building foundational art skills while also hosting fundraisers to support their chapter.

NAHS has both flexible and non-flexible bylaws for joining, said art teacher and NAHS adviser Tamera Burns.

Part of this program includes an induction, similar to that of the National Honor Society. Before joining NAHS, students usually need to be enrolled in an art course, but this is a more flexible bylaw, Burns said.

Burns said she and photography teacher Andrew Lucas look over the class rosters together and take note of students who may be interested.

The student board members of NAHS are responsible for choosing monthly prompts that students base their art on, senior and NAHS president Megan Graeter said.

Other board members of NAHS include junior Riley Corrigan as vice president, senior Augie Capotosto as secretary, and junior Simone Argento as treasurer.

The prompt for the NAHS January meeting was "Light." There is no prompt for the February meeting, which will allow for students to create anything of their choice. Graeter said students can make a piece of art, take a photo, draw, or do anything that fits the theme.

Artistic freedom is a major part of the program, sophomore Ava Dick-

erson said.

"Each prompt gives you a lot of leeway to do whatever you want, artistically," she said.

Graeter said prompts are meant to be vague to allow artists to create whatever they would like.

In addition to fostering creativity, NAHS has continued to bring many different communities together.

"Part of our mission is to accentuate the arts in a school to our communities, so it's giving support," Burns said. Graeter said that NAHS is an important program because it helps represent student artwork.

"Everyone's art was on display in the hallway. We had a really good diversity of people who do

**'Each prompt gives you a lot of leeway to do whatever you want, artistically.'**

- AVA DICKERSON



COURTESY OF JULIE SGROI/INSTAGRAM

New National Art Honor Society members hold their certificates of membership at the NAHS induction.

photo, who paint, who do all different kinds of work, which is really interesting to see," she said.

Additionally, NAHS hosts many different kinds of fundraisers. For example, they ran the concession stand for the Night of Stars talent show, making almost

\$300, Graeter and Burns said.

In the future, NAHS plans to host a fundraiser with the Music Honors Society (MHS) where they will be showcasing a film created by the video class during a movie screening night, Graeter and Burns said.

## Not enough original movies are being produced

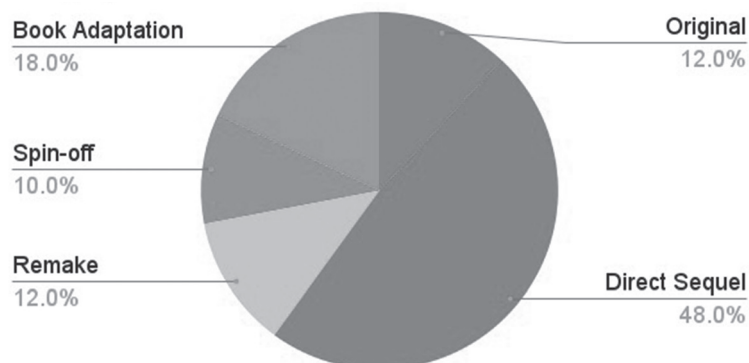
By Charlie Baker  
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Studios should release more films based on original screenplays.

Of the 50 highest-grossing films of 2025 at the domestic box office, only six are not based on any existing intellectual property-- "Elio," "F1: The Movie," "One Battle After Another," "One of Them Days," "Sinners," and "Weapons."

The other 44 include 24 direct sequels, nine adaptations of books or video games, six remakes, and five spin-offs or reboots.

In 1985, 40 years prior, the 50 highest-grossing films featured 28 original stories, nine direct sequels, 11 direct adaptations of a book, two spin-offs, and zero remakes.



CHARLIE BAKER GRAPHIC

2025's highest-grossing movies were mainly made up of sequels.

Hollywood's originality problem is now at its breaking point, with 88% of films being attached to existing big-name franchises or characters.

Lack of originality is not what audiences want and is part of the reason people are going to the movies less often.

The causes for this trend are

numerous, with the proliferation of streaming chiefly among them.

One would think the streaming era would be a golden age for independent film -- it has never been easier to put out a film that anyone, anywhere in the world can watch.

Instead, streaming has had

the opposite effect. When a user opens a streaming app, they are presented with thousands of options. An unfamiliar title can't stand out among the sea of sequels, remakes, spin-offs, and adaptations of best-selling books.

When original films were consistently in theaters, good movies had the chance to stand out. When moviegoers only have a handful of choices, every film gets seen by enough people that good movies can build hype and become hits by word of mouth.

The closing of theaters for COVID-19 in 2020 also greatly hurt the industry, leading to studios being tighter on money and less willing to take a risk on original scripts. As a result of this unoriginality, ticket sales never rebounded and are at about half of their pre-COVID levels, per thenumbers.com

The problem is not a sudden lack of creative people. It's a

lack of studios willing to take a risk on those creative people until they are proven commodities. Studios are only willing to let a small group of established directors make original movies. But the only way for an aspiring writer or director to become an established one is for someone to take a chance on them.

A notable exception to Hollywood's slew of unoriginal films is independent studio A24. They still consistently put original films in theaters, including Best Picture winners "Moonlight" and "Everything Everywhere All at Once."

Hollywood is caught in a cycle of losing money, causing it to take fewer risks and produce generic films that lose money, repeating the cycle.

If the industry is to be saved, Hollywood needs to take a risk and produce more original movies.

# 'Wicked' returns to theaters in thrilling, essential sequel

Faithful adaptation includes minor additions to plot

By Riley McKinnon  
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Jon M. Chu's movie-musical "Wicked: For Good" proves itself to be a detailed sequel that adds a faithful conclusion to the beloved Broadway adaptation.

Starring Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande, "Wicked: For Good" continues the origin

story of the Wicked Witch of the West, whose narrative now overlaps with the events that transpire during "The Wizard of Oz."

The film was released on Nov. 21, 2025, almost a year since the release of the first one.

The plot picks up "12 turnings of the tide" after the previous movie, or at the start of Act

II, which ends with Elphaba's pivotal escape from the Emerald City.

While this sequel is much darker than the previous film, the whimsical cinematography, exceptional acting, and well-choreographed musical numbers are presented with the same vibrancy.

The film's crew took time to create an adaptation that honored both the Broadway musical and the original story.

In the film, Dorothy wears silver shoes, like in the book, as the

production team did not have the rights to the trademarked ruby heels, but in one scene they are shown to be lit with red lightning as a nod to this. The choice to only show Dorothy as

a silhouette was also intentional in order to preserve the iconic image of Judy Garland.

Even the final shot of the film, an image of Glinda whispering something into Elphaba's ear,

**"Wicked: For Good" is an essential addition to the previous film, as it develops on a classic, reimagined story.**



UNIVERSAL PICTURES CANADA

"Wicked: For Good" stars Ariana Grande as Glinda and Cynthia Erivo as Elphaba. The action of the film takes place in the Land of Oz during the events of "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz."

is meant to mimic the original playbill illustration.

While the movie makes several references to its source material, it also provides some newer additions, which include two new songs written by Stephen Schwartz, the original composer and lyricist for the musical.

"No Place Like Home" is sung by Erivo to emphasize Elphaba's

determination to save her homeland, which has turned against her, and plays an homage to the famous phrase coined by "The Wizard of Oz."

The other number, "Girl in the Bubble," comes prior to the finale and title song, "For Good." Grande sings it to finalize Glinda's escape from the authoritarian regime in the Emerald City.

"Wicked: For Good" is an essential addition to the previous film, as it develops on a classic, reimagined story that offers insight into the reality of scapegoating and the importance of friendship in a way that should be captivating to all ages.

The film is rated PG for its suggestive material, violence, and other thematic elements.

## 'Good Will Hunting' depicts growth by confronting trauma

By Sophia Eagan  
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Set in South Boston and at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), "Good Will Hunting" explores emotional growth and the power in confronting childhood trauma.

The importance of facing trauma and vulnerability to achieve true fulfillment is manifested through Matt Damon and Ben Affleck's writing and Gus Van Sant's directing.

The film depicts the journey of Will Hunting (Matt Damon), a troubled, brash young man from South Boston working as a janitor at MIT. Behind his rough exterior hides a highly intelligent mind shaped by early trauma and self-sabotage.

Damon delivers a poignant

performance as Will by capturing both sides of his character. Hunting is cynical and aggressive while being terrified and avoidant.

Robin Williams gives a compelling performance as Sean Maguire, the therapist who breaks through Will's defenses using empathy and shared experiences.

Will's upbringing leaves him with the belief that closeness leads to abandonment. As a defense mechanism, he distances himself through sarcasm and rejection, which becomes present in his relationships.

In his romance with Skylar (Minnie Driver), he pushes her away when the relationship gets serious. To him, ending the relationship is better than the risk of being hurt.

In therapy, Will resists Sean's

attempts at confronting his past and removing his emotional armor.

Skylar's care and Sean's patience later tear down his emotional barriers. He learns to change his life for the better, choosing love and growth over fear and isolation.

The cinematography and writing play a critical role in developing the story.

Close-ups during therapy sessions or arguments highlight the emotional intensity of the story. Boston locations and the MIT setting contrast Will's working-class status with academic opportunity, further emphasizing his internal conflict.

Will's sarcastic and vulgar language gives insight into his character's defense and ingrained fear of emotional exposure.

Conversely, Sean's calm and reflective responses slowly chip away at Will's defenses.



WIKIPEDIA.COM

In "Good Will Hunting," set in South Boston, Matt Damon stars as Will Hunting, and Robin Williams plays his therapist, Sean Maguire.

This film is an emotional story on human potential and the power of healing, showing that overcoming trauma is essential to building deep connections and

living to the fullest.

The film is rated R primarily because of its strong language, brief violence, and sexually suggestive dialogue and scenes.

## Sophomore releases first EP

By Kiki Campbell  
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Sophomore Gavin Bolduc released his first Spotify EP, "By the Fire," on Dec. 19, marking his debut as a singer and songwriter.

Bolduc has been a part of the arts community since he was eight years old, when he began singing and producing music.

He said he not only participates in theater productions, but he also plays guitar and used to play the violin.

"I think music has always just been a part of me my whole life," Bolduc said.



COURTESY OF GAVIN BOLDUC

Sophomore Gavin Bolduc has over 20 monthly listeners on Spotify. He also has acted in shows throughout his musical career.

His favorite shows he's been a part of include "Twelfth Night" at Waldorf in Beverly and the high school production of Chicago.

Bolduc creates his music at

home with his guitar teacher through a database called "Logic." He said the program is similar to the application GarageBand.

Bolduc said he would like to

have a band accompaniment if given the opportunity.

He finds his inspiration for his song lyrics through his emotions.

In his song "I hate but love them," he sings, "I love the look of her eyes, it opens up all of my skies."

On "By The Fire," some songs include 'Song 4 someone', 'perfect picture', and 'Moonlight.'

The EP includes a set of all six songs he has produced.

On July 14, 2025, Bolduc released a single titled 'Lost Track Of Time.'

This was the second single he released.

Bolduc received praise for his confidence in sharing his music.

Sophomore Kit Carpenter said Bolduc is secure in who he is.

"He's so confident and doesn't really care what other people think, and he has this confidence to put out his music, which is really cool," she said.

English teacher and Gavin's U block teacher, Elizabeth Edgerton, said, "I love his style, and I love how he is just authentically himself."

Bolduc's dream is to become a professional singer-songwriter.

"I find it inspiring that he has a dream, and he is actively working towards it, and I think that's really good," Carpenter said.

Bolduc shared important advice for anyone who aspires to be a singer-songwriter:

"Start just writing. Just writing words. Whatever comes to your mind, just put it on the page," he said.