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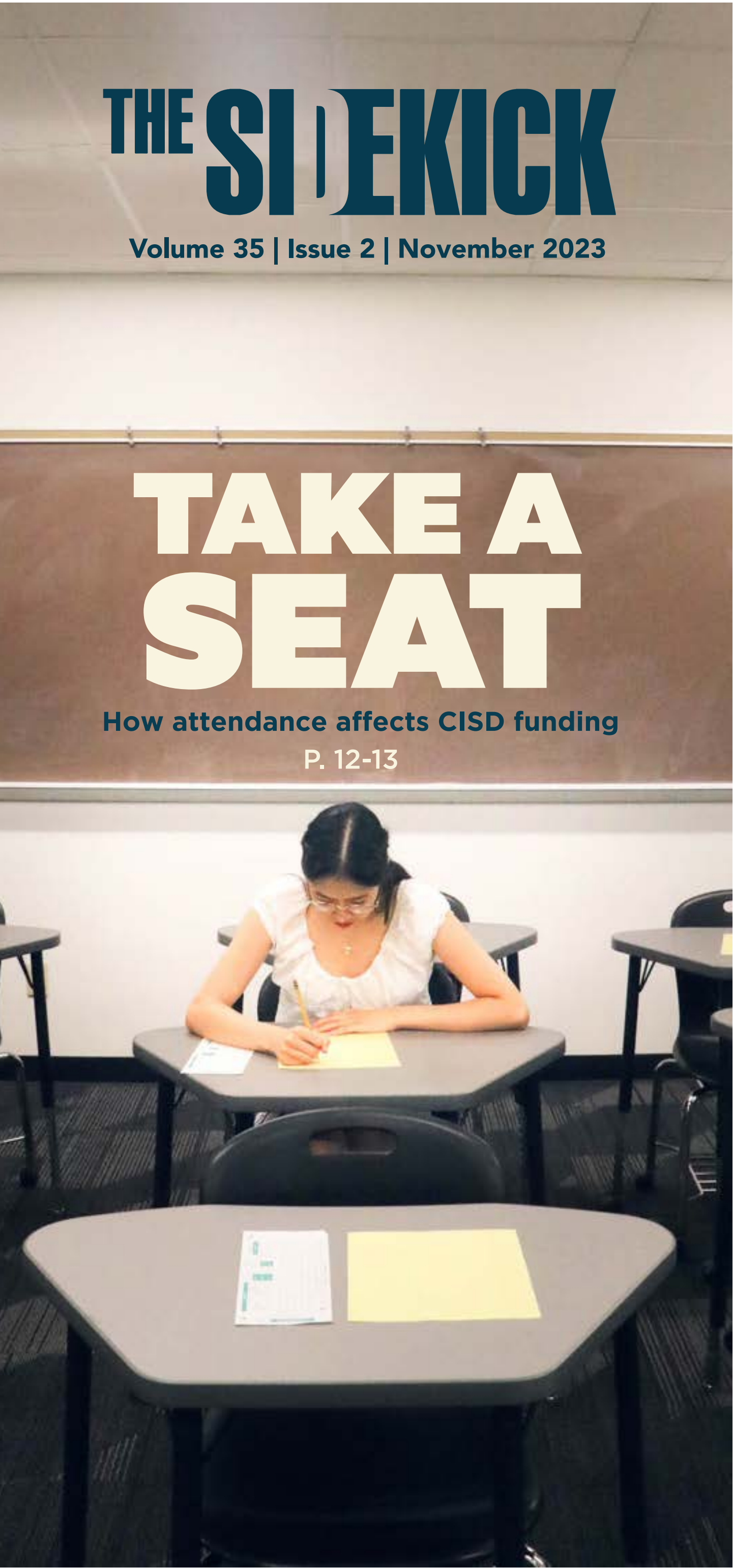
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THE SIDEKICK

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TAKE A SEAT

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letter from the editor



It's been four fishy years

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I was 13 when I became a self-proclaimed pescatarian.

But I swear I'm not a meat hater. I often think back to the good old days, when I would eat the classic McDonald's spicy McChicken on my way back home from swim practice or devour the cold-cut turkey sandwich from Subway. The taste of the meat itself was delightful, but at one point I couldn't escape the overwhelming feeling of the texture.

It was a rather typical day in eighth grade when I decided to tread the path of vegetarianism. I claimed that this was my way of advocating for animal rights, but in all honesty, I was just sick of eating chicken biryani. But there was this one culinary delight that continued to tug at my heart: sushi.

The delectable combination of a crunchy California roll adorned with fried shrimp was simply too irresistible to let go. So I settled for a compromise, pescatarianism.

I was told by many, especially my parents, that I wouldn't last. Determined to prove the world wrong, I set forth on this new trek. I remember walking into my local Wendy's later that year, but the soggy fish sandwiches that I forced down were a mediocre attempt at recreating the flavor of chicken that I started to yearn for once more.

It's been four years and I'm still a pescatarian, but I find myself inches away from reverting time and time again. It has gotten easier over the years, but I do have my moments. Every time I close the door to this seemingly inviting food, I feel empowered.

My ability to resist such temptations is only a testament to the resilience I've grown.

But my persistence hasn't stopped there. I've started to realize that my experiences are just my actions' ramifications - and if I'm not comfortable with the situation I'm in, only I myself can take myself out of it.

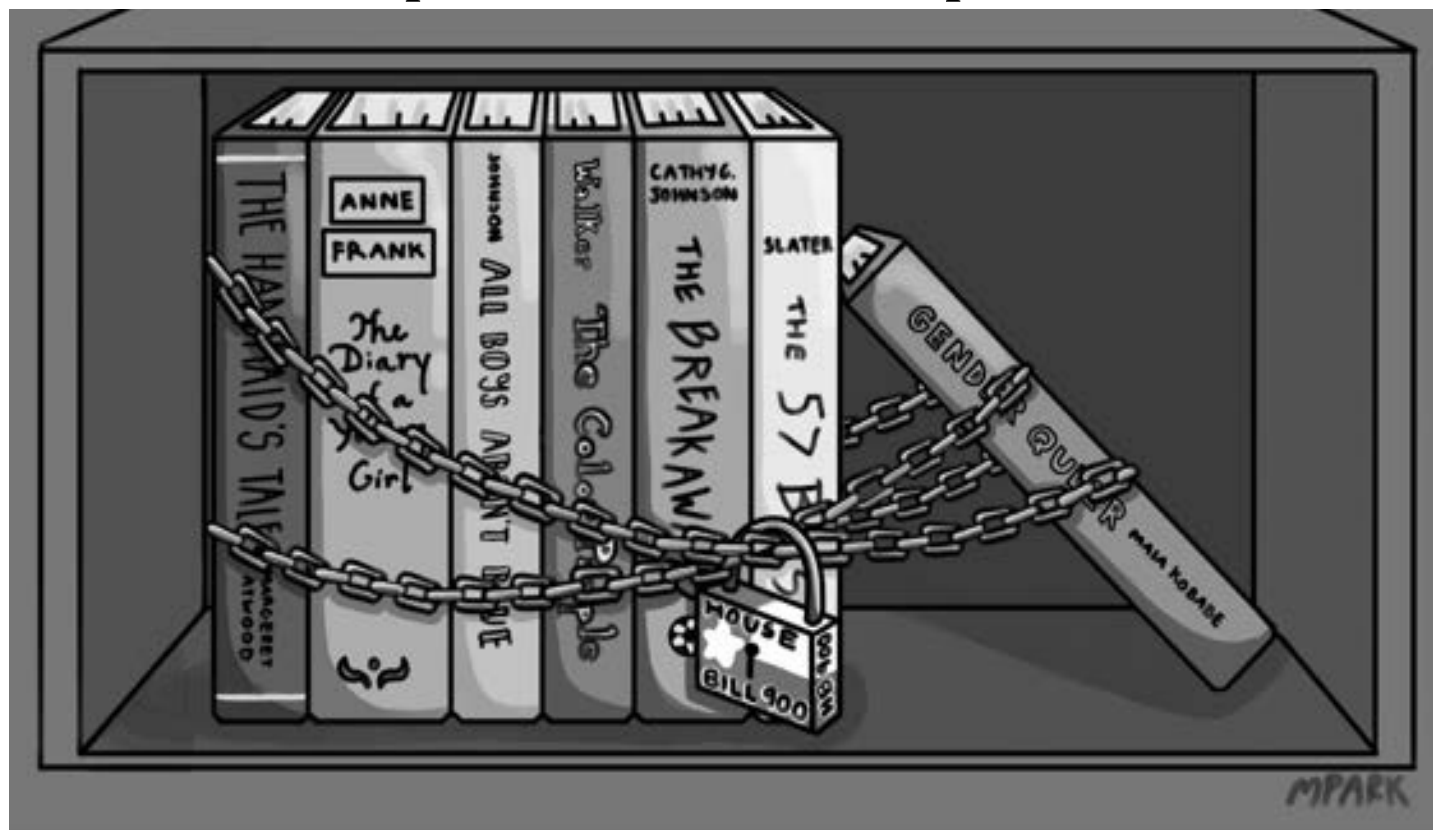
I am leaving for college soon, and I do see myself possibly going back to my meat-eating lifestyle.

But these four years have meant the world to me. I found true liberation in shaping my own destiny, guided by my personal values, even though there were deterrents each step of the way.



The Sidekick executive editor-in-chief Sri Achanta eats a Krispy Krab Roll from Sprouts on Oct. 18. Achanta explains how her journey as a pescatarian for the past four years has helped shape her personal destiny. **Aliza Abidi**

House Bill 900 to place limits on books in public school libraries



The Texas House of Representatives passed House Bill 900 on June 6, establishing a requirement for public schools to instill a rating system for books featuring sexually explicit content. The Sidekick staff photographer Sohana Singh discusses what this new bill could mean for school libraries going forward and the mixed opinions of teachers and librarians. **Maddy Park**

Sohana Singh
Staff Photographer
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Various iconic books - whether commonly read in school or popular to read personally - face a new threat of censorship, one that could affect the stories consumed by high school students drastically.

On June 6, the Texas House of Representatives passed House Bill 900 which establishes a rating system for sexually explicit content in books in public school libraries.

The bill, which went into effect on Sep. 1, requires book vendors to rate books with sexual content as "sexually explicit" if they contain sexual content, or as "sexually relevant" if the book contains that content, but is required for course curriculum.

Per the bill, book vendors can be barred from selling certain books at all in the future if their ratings are determined inadequate by the state. Books rated as "sexually relevant" can still be sold to school libraries, as long as parental consent is provided with checkout of the book, while books rated as "sexually explicit" cannot be sold to public school libraries under any circumstances.

The bill comes during a nationwide movement to regulate the content of books provided to students in school libraries and ban books with content deemed harmful for students or their well-being.

According to Texas House District 115 Representative Julie Johnson for District 115, which includes Coppell, this bill is a byproduct of earlier legislative decisions.

"House Bill 900 and many other bills were part of a larger attack on our institutions of learning and minority communities this last legislative session," Johnson said via email.

Johnson also thinks a precedent may be set by this bill for future legislative actions.

"This bill could potentially increase the number of bills in future legislative sessions that call for the overreach of the Texas Legislature into the personal lives of Texans and could erode long-held protections," Johnson said.

In terms of the Coppell High School Library specifically, librarian Alicia Grijalva thinks that the bill will not have much of an effect.

"We're always looking to have an

age appropriate library, so I don't think there's going to be a lot of change, as we're already very careful with making sure the content is age appropriate and something that should be in the library," Grijalva said.

Grijalva said a diverse selection of books is invaluable to high school students as they need to be exposed to different thought processes and worldviews to gain a nuanced understanding of their world.

"Any person is going to have experiences in life where they feel different or like they're the only one reading about those experiences," Grijalva said. "Connecting to a fictional character or a non-fiction story is cathartic and gratifying."

According to Grijalva, the opposite can also be true as when one reads about an unfamiliar experience, their world-view can be expanded.

"Students being able to read about different experiences and maybe see that there are similarities between their experiences and someone else's, such as a character that they thought they didn't have anything in common with, is a really important part of learning about not just yourself, but the world," Grijalva said.

Grijalva said the concern with the bill is that it may limit high school students from reading experiences that could be very important and valuable for them to read. One fear people may have regarding the bill is that the language of the bill is overly vague, and can therefore lead to the bill being misinterpreted or misused. Due to the ambiguous language, decisions made on what books or themes to limit could be arbitrary and disadvantageous for students.

"We want to be able to provide students with a lot of great books on different topics that represent all aspects of our school population, the community at large and the world at large," Grijalva said. "The concern is that we won't be able to out of concerns for liability or interpretations that are just really strict."

However, IB English teacher Lauren Rasca thinks that the bill's vagueness, although problematic, may be necessary for future adaptation and analysis of the bill.

"The vagueness of the bill is kind of concerning, but I think it also affords the opportunity for there to be some changes that maybe need to be made as we see this being pushed out and implemented,"

Rasca said.

Rasca views the bill as an extremely complicated issue, with many factors affecting its outcome and perception.

"It's so nuanced and there are so many different ways that this could go - some of them good, some of them not good," Rasca said. "I wish it was something that had an easy black-and-white, this-or-that answer, and it just doesn't."

Additionally, Rasca thinks parents should have a say in what their child reads in school.

"As a mother of a 4-year-old, a first grader, and a fourth grader, I don't want sexually explicit material to be at the elementary schools," Rasca said. "Parents should be involved in their children's education, they should be involved in their children's lives. I think this bill should not take away the responsibility of the parents to be involved."

Dinesh Somasundaram, a CHS student, anticipates that the bill may not hold too much merit in the current age of the internet, where many resources are easily accessible online.

"I feel in this day and age, parental consent isn't really as strong as it used to be," Somasundaram said.

Somasundaram thinks the bill won't affect high school students very much, as most students do not get their books from the school libraries. Additionally, he thinks that the bill may not be of much use in the future, as students are moving away from books and onto other forms of media and entertainment.

"As time goes on, people read less books and get more on video games and devices. I'm wondering, in the next four years or so, will this book ban thing even still be a big issue anymore?," Somasundaram said.

Even if the bill's impact is rendered less meaningful due to current circumstances, the ideas it presents and the precedents it sets still have a deeper meaning for schools and students, beyond books. According to Johnson, the bill could affect the First Amendment rights of students and book vendors.

"This right is violated when the government removes a library book simply because it dislikes the ideas contained in those books," Johnson said. "Additionally, the enforcement of HB 900 could violate the First Amendment rights of book vendors by compelling their speech on a matter of opinion."

AI use in schools becomes more prevalent

Teachers look for solutions to preserve academic integrity in students

Yug Talukdar

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A lengthy, multiple-choice assignment has just been handed out. Students immediately dash to their iPads in search for the answers on the Internet to finish with time to spare for their other assignments.

In recent years, fast-paced technological advancements have changed many aspects of life, especially those of students.

Schools transitioning to a more digitized way of learning have seen various improvements which are also accompanied by their own problems. The rise of artificial intelligence led to an alarming increase in usage with students seeking a way to escape the turmoil of pending assignments.

Cracks have started to form within the academic integrity of Coppell ISD.

In CISD, ChatGPT, a popular AI program, is restricted across district devices since the end of the 2022-23 school year. Its growing popularity among students led to concerns about academic integrity, resulting in the website's restriction. Usage of such AI programs are considered plagiarism and treated accordingly.

"I think it has just been used the wrong way," Coppell High School assistant principal Jeremy Jordan said. "We don't know how to use it properly."

Oftentimes, students can lean toward using AI because they are curious about its capabilities and how to apply it to make their lives as easy as possible. After school ends, students are faced with a finite amount of time to complete their coursework, making AI an appealing

option to finish assignments in a timely manner.

"Students have such a vast opportunity to utilize technology and to experiment with it and figure out, 'How can I best leverage this for my benefit?' and that is tempting," CHS English teacher Hannah Corley said.

The reality is AI responses are not a fix-it-all solution for students to save time and make good grades. It is often obvious that assignments written by programs do not show a deeper level of understanding on topics as they often echo points that others have already written about.

"That fluidity of thought, the originality of

thought is lost," Corley said. "We don't have those insights."

There are several layers to teachers' plans to reduce AI usage, starting with deterrence.

According to CISD's policy for academic dishonesty, first-time offenders face a grade of 0% with no chance for reassessment and are disqualified from honor societies or leadership positions. Repeat offenders receive the previous penalties along with three in-school suspension days for the second offense and five days of ISS for the third offense.

Teachers can combat AI in classrooms by observing the predictable formatting of an AI-generated answer, as well as running documents

through different softwares to catch AI.

Contrary to its reputation, AI can also be used as a valuable learning tool.

"When people think of students and AI, they come to terms that students will use it to cheat," CHS sophomore Mohammed Shadab said. "But AI can be used in a way without cheating."

According to Corley, AI can also be useful in generating ideas and aiding students with chances to practice and improve.

"It can be bad if we misuse it, but it can also be a very great opportunity to learn and grow," Corley said.

AI can be used to hone skills including editing, structuring or simply brainstorming. Several staff members have plans to incorporate the regulated use of AI into their curriculum due to these abilities.

Jordan thinks students must be taught how to use AI responsibly rather than using it as an easy way out.

"It's definitely a tool," Jordan said. "The same way you use a calculator in math, it's going to be a tool in every other subject."

AI has grown to be a prominent part of students' lives. While it has taken on a reputation for fraudulence, some think that breaking the stigma can lead to more responsible usage.

"It can be used positively in a good manner in the workforce and in schools," Jordan said. "We just have to figure out the guidelines to direct us."

In recent years, AI has become a popular resource. However, negative usage has caused staff at CHS to consider combating the issue by arming students with the knowledge of how to use this new tool in a responsible manner.



As artificial intelligence use increases in classrooms, teachers have developed countermeasures against its usage. In Coppell ISD, ChatGPT is restricted across district devices. **Sri Achanta**

AP Precalculus added to course options

Pranavi Ramineni

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Starting this year, Coppell High School has introduced a new Advanced Placement Precalculus course. This marks a significant advancement in CHS's commitment to advanced math education.

As the course began, students encountered both familiar and new concepts. Sequences, regression models and remnants of Algebra II have been integrated into the lessons.

One distinctive feature of this AP Precalculus course is its emphasis on real-world applications of math. The course comprises more word problems and real-world appli-

cations, highlighting the practical side of math.

"I was surprised at the rigor and at how the honors class was more rigorous in terms of mathematics," CHS AP Precalculus teacher William Harrington said.

After three years of teaching, Harrington observed that while not as mathematically rigorous, AP Precalculus provides a strong foundation for college-level courses, aligning with Coppell's college-driven student body.

"Since more students are college driven this course allowed students to set them up for success in college," Harrington said.

It aligns with the content and skills commonly seen in college-level precalculus

courses, providing students with a strong academic base. Beyond academics, the course also equips students with skills, ensuring they are well-prepared for the challenges of higher education.

The decision to introduce AP Precalculus reflects the College Board's commitment to offering a curriculum preparing students for college-level mathematics. The course's framework outlines content essential for college-level precalculus, forming a strong foundation for careers in mathematics, physics, social science and data science. Beyond academics, the course imparts valuable life skills, contributing to comprehensive personal growth.

Harrington acknowledged the enthusiasm among administrators and teachers in implementing this new college-level course. He recognized potential challenges in aligning with AP regulations due to its novelty.

"Since there are so many different AP courses with success it was no strong feat to add another course," Harrington said. "Despite the little road bumps involved in aligning AP Precalculus with college board regulations to differ from Honors Precalculus."

Sophomore Ania Jalori thinks the first year of AP Precalculus brings uncertainty. While it's interesting to apply math to real-life situations, she finds some of the tougher problems to be a challenge.

"The hardest part is that it's the first year of AP Precalculus so we don't know what to expect," Jalori said. "Dealing with lots of word problems is a bit mixed. On one hand, it's like applying math to real-life situations, which is cool. But on the other hand, the extra challenging prob-

lems can be tough."

However, despite its complexities, students think the syllabus spaces out each lesson in a consumable manner.

"Although it is tough, the pace feels just right," Jalori said. "We get time to learn, practice and do our homework each day. The word problems are a bit tricky. It's like taking real-life situations and figuring out how to use the math we've learned. We have to plug numbers from the problems into the equations we've studied. It's like solving a puzzle."

Starting the new AP Precalculus course felt like a mix of familiar and new for sophomore Mahek Verma.

"We brushed up on some algebra, which made it feel like it was easier at first," Verma said. "Then, we tackled sequences and regression models, which was a bit like stepping into a new world. We're navigating through uncharted territory, not entirely sure what to expect which makes me worry a little."

Although Honors Precalculus was similar to AP Precalculus, there were some aspects it was missing.

"When AP Pre Calculus was created by the College Board, in order to better our competition and courses, it was added into the curriculum. Because precalculus is college math, this course was useful for learners," associate principal Zane Porter said.

The success of AP Precalculus at Coppell High School testified to the school's commitment to providing comprehensive and forward-thinking education.

"Although it is a tough new course I am excited to learn things that will actually involve real life," Jalori said.



AP Precalculus students collaborate on an assignment in third period on Oct. 24 at Coppell High School introduced AP Precalculus to their curriculum for the 2023-24 school year. **Anvita Bondada**

District joins accountability lawsuit against TEA

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On Sept. 12, Coppell ISD Board of Trustees held a special meeting to discuss the district's administration recommendation to join an accountability lawsuit. In a 7-0 vote, the Board approved the decision to join several school districts across the state in a lawsuit against the Texas Education Agency (TEA).

According to the Board's resolution, TEA Commissioner Mike Morath failed to provide school districts with a document detailing the "performance measures, methods and procedures" used to rate schools for both the 2022-23 and 2023-24 school years.

This began primarily with a redesign of the State of Texas Academic Assessment of Readiness (STAAR) test, which was brought to the attention of the Board in February, after over half of the 2022-23 school year had taken place. By this time, many of the STAAR tests were distributed to schools yet teachers were still unaware of the structure and content of the questions.

CISD chief communications officer Angela Brown turned to an analogy to illustrate the repercussions of this matter. She compared it to a football game, where the rules, scoring and criteria were determined after the game was over.

"Now scale that up to the size of an entire state progressing through the whole season before learning about the criteria for the game," Brown said. "That is what many school districts across the state have dealt with."

On March 6, CISD was one of 256 school districts to sign a letter to the commissioner stating that they did not know about the change in the STAAR test, with students scheduled to start testing in April. The letter requested the commissioner to essentially put the redesign "on pause," but the request of the school districts was not met.

Five years ago, when the STAAR test went through a previous redesign, schools were given a notice one year prior to the changes being enforced. Although this is not required by law, the commissioner stated that the A-F accountability system should be revised every five years.

The A-F accountability system rates schools and assigns a letter grade to districts and campuses. This system is organized into three domains and relies



Coppell ISD joined several school districts in a lawsuit against the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The TEA commissioner failed to detail the performance, methods and procedures, according to the A-F accountability system, that will be used to rate schools prior to the school year. **Safiya Azam**

heavily on schools' performances on the STAAR test as well as student achievement. This is separated into college, career and military readiness (CCMR), and graduation rate. According to Brown, the commissioner is yet to finalize the methodologies that will be used to rank schools for the 2022-23 and 2023-24 school years, which is against the law.

Although most schools are well into the 2023-24 school year, the non-finalized accountability measures are still to be implemented for the completed 2022-23 school year, which will take into account many seniors that have since graduated from high school.

"The lawsuit is about holding the entities who hold us accountable, accountable," trustee Leigh Walker said. "CISD is not afraid of accountability; we do not shirk away from that impact, we embrace it."

According to trustee Anthony Hill, this lawsuit is mainly a result of a lack of information and transparency, which is supposed to be the purpose of the A-F system.

"It is not about the letter grade, but about the effects," Hill said.

In order to approach the accountability system holistically, CISD has implemented a Community Based Accountability System (CBAS), which allows all stakeholders and the community to be informed of all areas of accountability

beyond the A-F system.

CBAS is based upon the core values of CISD (great teaching, redefining success, collective engagement and authentic relationships) and seeks to measure the growth and continuous improvement of learners beyond the STAAR test results and identify areas for improvement.

However, based on the changes to the accountability measures, some campuses could decline by one or more letter grades, regardless of success in student achievement.

"The reality is, we have been asking TEA to do the right thing for over one year now," trustee Nichole Bentley said. "We have stood up for what is right in public education even if it doesn't affect us negatively as much as it does others."

During the Sept. 12 meeting, trustee Manish Sethi referenced a rumor, though it has not been confirmed, that there is speculation that only districts participating in the lawsuit will receive benefits, if any.

According to a press release by CISD Board, the total cost for the lawsuit will be distributed evenly among all the school districts who choose to participate. The estimated \$10,000 will be absorbed by the current CISD budget.

"You have to stand up and say what is right and why it is right," Hill said. "This is not about whether you win or lose, it is about what is right or wrong."

NEWS FLASH

News Flash is a series in which readers receive updates on local news that has happened between the issues.

Two minutes added to each high school class period to comply with TEA



School board approves plans for bus improvements, campus renovations, maintenance



Your guide to the SAT: paper vs. digital



BUSINESS SPECTACLE Perkins finding happiness in the art of hairdressing

Rhea Chowdhary
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In the mood to try out a new hairstylist with a side of great conversation? Lily's Hair Studio owner Lily Perkins has got you covered. In The Sidekick's new video series Business Spectacle, video editor Rhea Chowdhary tells the stories of small business owners around Coppell, starting with Perkins. Watch Chowdhary's video to learn more about Perkins and her journey starting a business after moving from Thailand.



Scan this QR code to watch Rhea Chowdhary's video with Lily's Hair Studio owner Lily Perkins.



Lily's Hair Studio owner Lily Perkins does a root touch up for her client Edithann Ramey. Perkins has been running her hair studio since 2011 and finds artistic value in hairstyling. **Rhea Chowdhary**

Kumar takes stage at Carnegie Hall

Vibha Viswanath

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Sitting on the hallowed stage of Carnegie Hall on a momentous summer evening, CHS9 student Sahana Kumar enchants the audience, her melodic notes flowing on her violin.

Kumar played first violin for the Middle School Honors Performance Series at Carnegie Hall in New York this summer. The Honors Performance Series is a highly selective program, showcasing the most talented middle school musicians around the world.

"I was really impressed," Lone Star Youth Orchestra trumpeter Kendal Thiele said. "I knew she was good at the violin but I think it is really amazing for her to achieve that."

Hearing about the program from her cousin who had participated, Kumar auditioned as well being one of the 10,000 people aiming to grasp this opportunity. Students sent in a recording of a musical piece and answered questions to be selected by the Series' expert Board of Music Professionals.

"We are very proud of Sahana for her achievement," Lone Star Youth orchestra manager Robert Fishman said. "It's quite an honor."

The performance was June 17 at Carnegie Hall, home to the world's finest musicians. Kumar was joined by her parents and grandparents to watch her big moment.

"I was very happy for her," Kumar's mother Nithya Ayer said. "She had a great experience playing with so many passionate musicians in the great hall."

In the lead up to the long awaited performance, Kumar rigorously rehearsed under the guidance of master conductors along with a whole ensemble of performers. Embracing the opportunity to collaborate with like-minded musicians, she found joy in the challenge of playing on this prestigious stage. In between her intense rehearsals, Kumar experienced the heart of New York City by visiting the colorful and bustling Times Square and enjoying the magic of a Broadway show.

"It was pretty tiring because we had to



CHS9 student Sahana Kumar performed with the Middle School Honors Performance Series at Carnegie Hall in New York over the summer. Kumar excels in the fine arts, being a member of Lone Star Youth Orchestra, participating in Coppell High School Theater and singing Western and Indian classical music. **Vibha Viswanath**

rehearse the same four songs all day," Kumar said. "We would get to bed really late and have to wake up at like 6 am, but it was still fun."

Initially, Kumar felt more pressure being at Carnegie Hall than actually performing, however her nerves vanished as she made new friends, a few she continues to keep in contact with.

"It was really amazing to meet so many talented musicians who were my age," Kumar said. "The hall was really big and playing was unforgettable."

From Carnegie Hall's legendary history to its stunning acoustics and architec-

ture, performing left an indelible memory that Kumar will never forget.

"I can't believe that I got to play on the same stage that some of the world's greatest musicians have performed on," Kumar said.

Kumar's remarkable achievement is not just a stroke of luck. Being a violinist for five years, Kumar is also a third year member of the Lone Star Youth Orchestra. Practicing for almost two hours every day and competing in concert competitions, Kumar excels in orchestra. Aside from playing the violin, Kumar sings both Western Vocal and Indian Classical music.

Her musical talent shines through, being the CHS9 theater liaison and performing as a finalist for Irving's Got Talent this year.

"I would describe my daughter as hard working, focused and someone who knows exactly what she wants," Ayer said. "She is always happy to be playing music."

Kumar's musical journey doesn't end here. Next year, she plans to try out for the All State Orchestra and once again participate in the Honors Performance Series at the Sydney Opera House as a high schooler.

Freshman Forecast: Falling isn't failing



Many students struggle from the transition from middle school to high school. The Sidekick CHS9 editor Nyah Rama provides solutions to help the freshmen accommodate better to this change and let them know that they are not alone.

The moment is finally here. You sit at your desk waiting for the teacher to call out your name and hand back the test that will determine your grade.

Your name is finally called and you saun-

ter up to the front expecting a bright red 95 on the front. Instead you feel a lump in your throat as you gaze at the enormous 50 splashed across the paper in taunting red letters. As you glance around the

room you study the expressions on the faces of your peers, hoping that you are not the only one who has met the same fate.

This experience is commonplace for many CHS9 students but often is not talked about, leaving one feeling completely alone and something akin to a failure, especially when for most of their lives we have received high grades.

The following months are spent doubting yourself and working with fervor as you attempt to right your so-called wrongs. If only you knew how many others were experiencing this.

Though it may not seem like it, everyone goes through this and it is nothing to feel shame about. The jump from middle school to high school is not easy especially when being inundated with a heavy course load and homework that never seems to end. I still remember the first test I ever got back when I was a freshman. I was expecting at least an 80 and ended up with a 64 – the experience was a hard pill to swallow.

While this experience is jarring, it does not bind you to a life of F's. The biggest tips I can provide to you, dear reader, are to talk about this with your friends so that

you do not feel like you are going through it alone and to study more. That last one may sound a little simple but believe me, it is not an easy task.

Being a high school student requires you to become very familiar with yourself. You need to find out what works for you. For some, it is taking paper notes and for others it is being able to explain what you are learning. Whatever your process is, try a little bit of everything and see what works for you so that you are set up for success. As time goes on you will adjust to the pacing of the classes and by the time you graduate you will have become a master. I promise.

Most importantly, remember that nothing makes you a failure. Your grades do not define you, even though it may feel like it. Each test grade does not make or break your future. That red 50 does not determine your college acceptance, after all, it is only ink.



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The Sidekick is the official student newspaper for Coppell High School. Its purpose is to inform, entertain and provide an educational resource for its readers. This newspaper is a public forum for student expression with staff members (with assistance from their adviser) making content decisions. The editorials and columns in this paper reflect the view of their writers.

The Sidekick is a member of Interscholastic League Press Conference (ILPC), National Scholastic Press Association (NSPA), Columbia Scholastic Press Association (CSPA) and Southern Interscholastic Press Association (SIPA).

The Sidekick welcomes all letters to the editor, but letters must be signed before consideration for publication. Send letters to cwofford@coppellisd.com or bring them by D115.

Advertisements are sold as full, 1/2 page, 1/4 page, 1/8 page sizes in black and white or color.

Staff Editorial

We are tired of your performative activism



As you sit on your bed scrolling through Instagram, you see your friend posted something on their story. You click on the circle at the top of your screen, ready to see what they shared, a cute picture with friends or a scenic venue perhaps?

No, you are greeted by another post about the war between Israel-Hamas. But in place of empathy or grief, you feel nothing and continue scrolling, where you are met with the same post on the next story.

With the rise of social media, younger generations are beginning to display their opinions on political climates all over the world. For the first time, you can inspire change without being in a position of power and protest without risking your life.

However, what started as positive activism has unveiled its negative consequences.

#MeToo
#BlackLivesMatter
#FreeBritney

At some point or another, you have probably seen these hashtags when scrolling through the endless void of a social media feed. But what do they really mean? What is happening beyond the hashtag?

Unfortunately, this is becoming a question that many cannot answer.

With countless injustices in the world, it feels gratifying to do your part to spread awareness and advocate for change. However, our surface level awareness of the vast amounts of problems makes us understand them even less. The rapid flood of information we receive does not allow us time to fully understand the depths of each problem before a new one occurs. After a certain point this deters us from even trying and leads us to adopt an attitude of indifference. What is the big deal with another attack on Asian Americans that just adds to the insurmountable pile of crimes against people of color?

This is the problem. The mass publishing of informative media has led to widespread desensitization. Our

brains cannot process the sheer amount of information we read and the numbers of people who have been wronged. As a result, we have become indifferent to the scale of atrocities surrounding us.

This desensitization has led to a disregard for the message behind posts and has created a new trend, performative activism. Performative activism is when people repost serious issues simply because they want to fit in or create the appearance of someone who cares when in reality they don't. This is not only detrimental to their ability to have their own identities but detrimental to the greater issue at large, especially when it concerns the lives of others.

This looks like the black square trend on Blackout Tuesday during the Black Lives Matter movement where rather than raising awareness, a flood of black squares crowded out Black advocates from sharing resources that would actually come in use to provide support.

With every like, follow and repost, you are impacting the lives of the people who are actually living through these tragedies. When you continue to buy into the trend, you minimize their experience and their struggles, making it just another conflict that society will forget about once the newest tragedy occurs. In addition, you have no idea whether or not the information you just shared is actually true and more often than not, it isn't.

The lives of these victims are not a trend that should be tried on and tossed out as soon as a new person shares their struggles. Their darkest moments should not be used as an instrument to gain more social standing.

To make a bad situation even worse, sometimes issues deemed "less important" take precedence over more serious ones simply because it is easier to handle. Simpler issues are more talked about because they are less tragic. They simply do not require as much emotional stamina as others because they are not perceived as putting a large number of people in danger.

However, even with crooked versions of it forming through social media, activism is a powerful tool that has inspired mass political movements. People were called out for their behavior in the workplace, conversations about racism and discrimination in this country were addressed on a national level and Britney was freed.

So click that repost button for issues you think need to be seen, but make sure you do it because you care, not because you are following the masses. Never undervalue the importance of your political presence. We all have the ability to call attention to something that matters.

Let's not waste it.
#GoBeyondTheHashtag



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Giving Thanks:

Giving Thanks is a series where The Sidekick staff members discuss different aspects of their life that they are thankful for. To read more, visit coppellstudentmedia.com.

Get your sparkle on



Graphic by Jayden Chui

Walking through the dimly lit Family Video, a 5 year old me beelined to the front of the store, uninterested in the racks on racks of DVDs. As I reached the front of the store, I was welcomed by the newest selection of the Barbie movies.

The Barbie Cinematic Universe includes movies of Barbie as an actress, playing a role in a movie, like Barbie and the Three Musketeers, and Barbie: Princess Charm School, or of Barbie's real life, such as The Barbie Diaries, and Barbie: A Fashion Fairytale. In both movie variations, they all have the same themes of empowerment, friendship, and girl power.

In the endless selection of children's movies, my eyes would always gravitate back to the Barbie movies. The uplifting songs about friendship, the screen shrouded in different hues of pink and glitter, and the admittedly jarring animation quality entranced me in a way that stuck with me for the rest of my life.

Watching these movies as a child, I daydreamed of being a character in these movies. Even now, I joke to my friends about how I still wished that Coppell High School had the magical crystal lockers from Barbie: Princess Charm School.

I've always been entranced by the visuals in Barbie movies. Besides the subpar animation quality of the early 2000s, every outfit, background, and fantastical realm was made with keen attention to detail, with fantastical elements and vibrant colors throughout.

Often being written off as shallow and childish, Barbie movies get a bad reputation of being a harmful influence on young girls. Contrary to popular belief, barbie movies cover a wide span of topics such as class struggle, misogyny, and friendship struggles. They tackle such topics in a digestible way for children to understand, with a touch of magic throughout all of them.

Barbie movies stick out to me from other movies targeted towards young girls in terms of how they portray their female characters. In many movies, they either make their female characters' stories dependent on her love interest, or make her averse to love at all if her story isn't focused on romance.

Barbie movies had a good balance to where the main character fell in love, but it wasn't the main point of the story. In Barbie: Princess Charm School, the main character, Blair Willows danced with her love interest, Prince Nicholas, but he wasn't a main character at all. This type of narrative pushed me to see that I'm capable of anything I put my mind to, but it's also okay to fall in love, and that being successful and being in love aren't mutually exclusive.

Even now, 12 years later, I still reach for the bright pink "Barbie: Fairytopia" DVD on the shelf in my living room. When I'm drowning in the trenches of my classwork, I can always turn to the outrageous but comforting plot of a Barbie movie, whether the main character and her best friend are floating on a magical rainbow to the Diamond Castle, or if she and her friends are on a heist to steal an enchanted crown, a good Barbie movie can make me feel 5 years old without a care in the world again.



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4-row anklets carry my rhythm



The Sidekick business manager Sukirtha Muthiah thanks her Bharatanatyam anklets for providing her with a constant ringing of support. Dance has always been a significant part of Muthiah's life and has allowed her to find a safe space. **Sukirtha Muthiah**

I close my eyes as I sit down onto the cold dressing room floor, taking deep breaths to calm the pounding in my chest. The bright vanity lights penetrate through my eyelids, creating orb-like shapes in the darkness.

As my heart rate slows down to its regular rhythm, I open my eyes and reach forward.

There they are, waiting for me. The gold oxidized bells, sewn onto the dark brown leather in four rows,

create a staggered pattern, an organized chaos. The worn down straps are fraying at the edges, the result of years of rough handling. Thin white thread covers the inside in a zig-zag pattern, appending fallen bells back to their original positions. The silver buckles, still in their original condition, reflect even the smallest light.

I pick up the anklets, my most prized possessions, and hold them to my eyes as I say a quick prayer. I wrap them around each ankle, letting the cool leather mold against my leg. I loop the straps through the buckles, pulling fiercely until the prongs force themselves through the very last hole.

As I stand up to finish stretching, the bells make the faintest noise, like a soft but persistent rainfall, creating a quiet, consistent stream of jingling. I tiptoe through the dimly lit hallway, careful so as not to make loud noises. I crouch down to check my buckles one last time before I walk onto the stage, taking my pose in the dark, my heart racing once again.

As the music starts and the lights come on, all of my worries fade away. I strike my feet to the rhythm of the music, and my body takes over as I lose myself in the moment. I dance from one end of the stage to the next, feeling nothing but pure bliss.

My anklets.

My anklets that follow my every movement. My anklets that lift me above the music, drawing the attention to the intricate footwork of Bharatanatyam. My anklets that hug my ankles tightly, providing a sense of reassurance and stability. My anklets that have been my pride and joy ever since I earned them at the age of nine. My anklets that will continue to carry me through many years to come.

Dancing has always been my way of connecting with my culture and myself. I have found a safe space where I can allow myself to be free. As soon as I step into the studio, my stresses and worries fade away, leaving me with the opportunity to dance for myself.

And that is something that I will never take for granted.

So, I say thank you, to my four-row anklets.



Sukirtha Muthia
Business Manager
@suki_muthiah

The grumpiest friend I always needed

"Can we get a cat? Please?"

This was the question that eternally plagued my parents.

I remember the persistent, almost nagging tone in my voice, hoping to tug at my parents' hearts. The question was a consistent presence in our household, enforced by both me and my siblings.

Growing up, I was always surrounded by friends and family who spoke of the joy their pets brought into their lives. Memories of chirping birds, loyal dogs and playful hamsters filled my conversations. While I longed for a furry companion, the answer from my parents was always a resounding "no." They cited allergies, the responsibility of owning a pet and many other reasons to resist my campaign for an addition to the family.

Ten years

later, with that plea etched in my memory, I find myself giving thanks to the grumpiest friend I always wanted.

One evening, I arrived home from my new school, tired from a long day at Coppell Middle School West.

As I punched in my PIN and walked into the garage, a yellow dash of fur ran by my legs and crouched down under the car, followed by my siblings chasing after it.

Curiosity piqued, I crouched down to get a better look.

There under the car was a yellow loaf with blue beady eyes that captured my affection immediately. Upon looking at the plump outline of our newfound feline friend, my siblings decided on the appropriate name of Kofta, accordingly meaning "meatballs" in Urdu.

From that moment on, Kofta has been a consistent and positive influence in my life. His daily greetings when I return home from school and his playful attitude always gives me something to look forward to at the end of the day. Although putting up with his daily meowing at 6 a.m, constant demands for food and his frequent messes around the house does take a toll, his presence never fails to make every day just a little better.

Every holiday season, I fail to find a unique and creative answer to the inevitable question of what I am thankful for. This

Thanksgiving, however, as I reflect on the things I have to be thankful for, I find that one of the simple joys in my life is one that has been with me for years. So this year, I give my heartfelt thanks to Kofta, my grumpiest friend: the cat who made my childhood dreams a reality.



Kofta is a 4-year-old fluffy Persian cat who has been an unwavering source of positivity for The Sidekick staff writer Hamza Zakir. Zakir gives thanks to his cat Kofta and the impact he has had on his family. **Hamza Zakir**



Hamza Zakir
Staff Writer
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Evolution of body positivity: Shaping new model standards

In today's world of social media and ever-changing beauty ideals, it is important to understand how body positivity has evolved. This knowledge is key to feeling good about ourselves and maintaining a healthy state of mind.

Major fashion brands are now embracing inclusivity, featuring models of various body types and ethnic backgrounds in their campaigns. People want diversity because beauty isn't defined as just one mold anymore. It is not only about looks but also about representation. When brands embrace this, they connect with a wider audience and earn respect for their values.

Body positivity challenges the notion that there is a singular 'ideal' body type. It advocates for embracing diversity and recognizes beauty comes in many forms. In the face of meticulously edited online images and filtered photos, it is easy to feel inadequate. Understanding the roots of body positivity provides a counter-narrative, reminding us that our bodies are unique and should be celebrated as such.

Social media platforms are instrumental in this revolution, providing a stage for voices that have long been avoided. Influencers, armed with the power of authenticity and relatability, are reshaping the narrative, a transformation that brings light to the underrepresented minorities. It empowers individuals to embrace their identities and encourages a tolerance for different body types and ethnicities.

This shift towards diversity is reaching consumers who are increasingly seeking authentic representations of beauty. In a Vogue article, renowned fashion editor Hannah Jackson highlights the strides made in the industry towards inclusivity. She emphasizes how this change is not only reshaping the fashion world but

also impacting the way society perceives beauty.

These models not only challenge stereotypes but also inspire countless individuals to embrace their own unique bodies. Their presence on runways and in campaigns sends a powerful message: beauty knows no size. This shift towards diversity is not a passing trend, but a transformative movement that is redefining the very essence of what is considered beautiful.

"These days, in spite of the many obstacles, plus-size and curvy models are some of the most recognizable faces in fashion," Jackson said.

The evolution of body positivity has gained attention not only from fashion lovers but also from mental health experts. Embracing diverse beauty standards through body positivity contributes to improved self-esteem and mental health. Marriage and family therapist Dr. Emily Rodriguez, a psychologist specializing in body image issues, emphasized the relation between body positivity and mental well-being in an interview with Medium.

Dr. Rodriguez said when individuals embrace diverse beauty standards and practice body positivity, they embark on a journey of self-love and acceptance. This shift in perspective can have profound effects on their overall well-being. By letting go of unrealistic expectations and appreciating the uniqueness of their own bodies, people often experience a surge in confidence and self-esteem.

"Accepting and celebrating one's body, regardless of societal standards, is a cornerstone of mental wellness," Dr. Rodriguez said. "It fosters resilience and self-compassion."

It is important for individuals to familiarize



Body positivity, a transformative movement challenging beauty norms, is gaining momentum as the fashion industry embraces diversity, fostering self-worth and acceptance. The Sidekick staff designer Pranavi Ramineni thinks the evolution of body positivity stands for a more inclusive and understanding society. **Pranavi Ramineni**

themselves with the change in body positivity. By challenging societal norms, this movement offers a fresh perspective on the changing landscape of the fashion world.

However, it is important to acknowledge the wrongs of the past within the fashion industry. For decades, the industry displayed unrealistic beauty standards, often promoting unhealthy body images. This history of exclusion and unattainable ideals has left a lasting mark on society. As the dialogue surrounding body positivity continues to gain momentum, this movement is not merely a passing trend, but a much needed shift towards a more inclusive and accepting society.

Embracing one's unique identity is no longer an act of rebellion, but a celebration of the diverse beauty that exists in us all. The traditional ideals of beauty are being redefined, and it is great to witness a

surge in acceptance of all body types. This transformation is not just about aesthetics; it's about recognizing and valuing the inherent worth and beauty in every individual.

The journey of body positivity has been marked by various milestones. From the pioneering voices that emerged in the early 20th century to the influencers shaping conversations today, this movement has gradually gained momentum. Through campaigns, hashtags and candid discussions, individuals are redefining beauty on their own terms. It is a powerful reminder that beauty standards are ever-evolving.



Pranavi Ramineni
Staff Designer
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You are not too young to join political discussion

As elections near, a tension filled atmosphere envelopes people's lives. Murmurs start about what has, could and shouldn't happen.

I have always had an interest in history and politics and how social systems work and have developed. It is a fascinating trend to observe centuries worth of work from notable authors, historians and leading figures that track these patterns.

Learning and growing in politics, I realize it is necessary for a person to have a sense of awareness of the political atmosphere around them to drive a thriving democracy.

The impact of policy and the importance of voters are staples for a successful republic. However, the question of who should be informed about the ongoing discussions regarding a state is as old as governance itself.

The reason is to filter out the population so that only a select few, with qualities favorable to the

government, could have a say in its affairs.

Centuries ago, it was thought that only a select land-owning elite should be educated in the ways of a state, like the city-states of medieval Italy, or the nobilities in ancient civilizations like Persia and Macedonia. However, as time progressed, this trend has ceased to hold true, as now, any eligible citizen can vote in the United States.

While people as a whole are more informed, middle aged and elderly individuals make up most of the voters on election day. Most of the time, politics is not at the forefront of a young person's mind, but should that stop younger individuals from engaging with the world around them?

Many say that young people shouldn't involve themselves in politics. But why?

A lack of maturity or not having enough experience on the

issues related to finance or foreign affairs are commonly stated reasons. However, policy, even on a local level, affects everyone, so why should students be uneducated and unaware? A knowledgeable citizen holds more power.

Political parties often popularize this rhetoric to shift elections in their own favor. Because the majority of the voter base is older, their policies often reflect the concerns of the older population. Rather than adopting modern stances on new policy, it is much easier for parties to continue on appealing to their current voter base.

An educated and informed youth who is eager to start voting will shift the course of demographics and policies being discussed and implemented. Specifically, conservative parties are more reliant on their older voter base to vote in elections, since elderly people usually have built up a more financially stable life and more life experience, increasing the likelihood of them being interested in politics. Adding a large volume of young voters – most of whom will not vote conservative – will turn the tables against them.

This leads to policies that are more popular with younger people to be overlooked and issues fade out of the limelight. An average politician spends less time campaigning and garnering support from a younger demographic.

Politics influences many aspects of our daily life, whether one accepts it or not. Policies made decades ago could influence the place your food comes from, the taxes you pay or the amount of days you have to be in school during the year. To avoid being informed is being ignorant and unwise.

A knowledgeable voter base of diverse age groups is very important in keeping constant pressure on politicians to pass legislation on meaningful issues. You are never too young to attain knowledge. It

can be obtained at any age and time, so long as one is determined to grow.

Coppell High School allows students to take college level courses. If we are up to this challenge, why should taking time to learn about politics be any different?

Using resources available from accredited sources, such as well reputed professors and reliable news websites, new voters can already have an understanding about the people they are putting up to represent them.

We already see this happening all around us. The lack of information and understanding, which can be built up during the foundational years of the teens, has come back to affect our everyday lives. We should be worried about social matters but also pay just as much attention to what is being done with our taxpayer money, how we are handling foreign policy or the issues in our local communities.

Additionally, the youth today is very engaged in social reform and other activism, but don't actually vote or participate. In a way, the majority of these people are not actually interested in policy or their political environment, but caught up in a fad. It gives the impression of a growing interest, when in reality it doesn't really translate into much.

Being exposed to the vibrant political atmosphere around themselves from a young age gives a person valuable knowledge that will help them become a better citizen and voter. This in turn rewards society as a whole, allowing us to fix issues and put responsible people in charge.



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Stereotypes about youth in politics have always been common, closing off a large voter base. The Sidekick staff writer Yug Talukdar thinks instead of being closed off, citizens should instead follow politics from a young age so they are educated and can uphold a functioning democracy. **Safiya Azam**

Asian beauty standards causing more harm than good



Asian beauty standards are a great misconception in Asian society. The Sidekick staff writer Katie Park's column addresses the negative effects of stereotypical standards and explores the nature of beauty that can be found in everyone. **Katie Park**

Detrimental beauty standards in Korea have taken my time trying to live up to its unrealistic expectations.

Typically, when you imagine a "pretty Asian girl," you think of K-pop idols, actresses in a drama or perhaps that stranger that walked past you with perfect hair and makeup. These people create a sense of obligation in what girls think they should look like when in reality, there should not be a definition of what is "pretty."

Women and girls in Korea have indulged in Korea's extensive skincare and makeup industry, striving to achieve clear, glass skin. Facial products are known to be cheaper and more affordable in Korea, thus increasing resources for girls and women.

However, some take it a step further. South Korea has the world's greatest rate of plastic surgeries, dominating the cosmetic industry. A common type of plastic surgery is double eyelid surgery, also called a blepharoplasty. The logic behind the double eyelid surgery is to succeed in making your eyes look bigger and wider, also called "doe eyes." This is to enhance the look of innocence and youth.

As an East Asian with mono-eyelids, I feel at times my life would be looked upon much higher if I were to have double eyelids. Family members would gush over my younger sister as she possesses the favored double eyelids, while I was not a part of the admiration.

The love people around the world have for K-pop singers and Korean actresses sometimes makes me feel like I also have to match their features to be deemed "pretty."

In sixth grade, I had become very tan from my church's summer camp and

was told by my family members that I was too dark. I started to wear sunblock with high SPF coverage to try and change the color of my skin.

East Asian beauty standards can also coincide with beauty standards present in other countries such as India where society favors fair skin. These are extremely detrimental to one's well being and are often exclusively targeted towards girls. The standards create extreme self consciousness in young women and normalizes going out of their way to change your appearance to fit in with society's standards.

Plastic surgeries and similar procedures intensify Korea's beauty standards which puts K-pop idols at the spotlight to be the visual representation of their definition of beauty.

The requirements of having features like a small, V-shaped face, bright pale skin, plump lips and a slim figure indirectly convey women and girls who do not possess these features to be unworthy and unattractive. This societal pressure of having to look exactly perfect causes Koreans and other East Asians to reconsider their self esteem, later causing mental health issues.

Asian beauty standards have been a prevailing topic in Asian societies and convey how women should look to be "pretty," but are not accurate as beauty comes in all shapes and forms and is different for everyone.



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Don't let becoming more practical replace your happiness

When we are born, every door we enter is a new one, every face we see is a fresh one and every arm we hold is attached to an undiscovered heart.

As babies, we lack true consciousness; our minds are a blank canvas to paint upon. Our fresh brains contain no memories of bitterness, bliss or boredom. Experiences that come our way are new beginnings to grasp.

However, as we grow older, we become more practical, or even cynical. Doors we see are a mere construction of blank wood; Faces we see are ones we've known our entire life and arms we touch are connected to individuals whom we know the flaws.

Developing from adolescence into adulthood makes people rely on their logic-based thinking, making them forget about the pleasures of youth. People learn to stop romanticizing their lives and instead focus on trying to overcome the harsh realities of life.

The first day of school changes when you grow up. As a little girl, the first day of school for me used to be one filled with curiosity and excitement. I would skip into a vibrantly decorated classroom and stare at the alphabet poster placed above the "Counting to 100" chart. Eagerly, I would look for my cubby to hang my bright blue backpack, then sit down next to equally eager strangers, soon to become my friends.

The first day of school now holds feelings of tiredness and dread. I stay up the night before thinking about how I can make the right amount of small talk to develop fulfilling friendships, but not too much to where I might drain myself. I show up to school, participate in class icebreakers and then go home to immediately

lie down on my bed.

Absent-mindedly making decisions, interacting with my peers and handling everyday occurrences has prevented me from feeling cheerful, and from being able to remain hopeful.

A high school student gets her math test handed back to her, only to see a large "58" written in red. Rather than acquiring an attitude of acceptance and reassurance by studying for the retest, she begins to cry, resentfully complain to her friends and give up on math.

When I embody this mindset, it tends to make me hostile and judgmental towards new people, changing the way I form relationships.

The adoption of this behavior, over the long-term, weakens one's mental health. It becomes our nature to take on a state of antagonism and distrust. Remaining in this constant state takes away from our ability to find contentment in our lives or feel exhilarated from the joys that come our way.

"If you are less willing to express yourself in imaginative ways by holding yourself to some unrealistic expectation, you're not able to do a lot of the things that you may enjoy like drawing or painting," Coppell High School psychology teacher Abigail Atchison said. "It could definitely affect your mental health if you are manipulating your true desires or personality in order to be more logical."

The frontal lobes in our brain develop through the primary years of our life. The frontal lobes are responsible for rational decision making processes. This development in our brains is one of the reasons why we turn to practicality as we age.



As we face more challenges growing up, we become more practical and focus more on our problems such as work, school, and mental issues. The Sidekick staff writer Neha Nathwani explores the naive mentality we lose as we grow older. **Omega Tamang**

As kids, people would harshly be told to "act more mature" in order to become more manageable. Social standards oftentimes encourage youth to act more adult-like, telling them to utilize their logic-based thinking skills, and to abandon their spontaneous, spirited traits. This conditioning makes older individuals conform to a more sophisticated persona.

However, we don't have to accept hopelessness from the sorrows of life. We can learn to rekindle the curiosity, energy and emotion we forgot how to feel.

Paint your walls the same color as your childhood bedroom, compliment the beauty of those faces you've seen today and appreciate the stability provided by the shoulders of the arms we lean on. Perhaps it will make you feel like a naive child, but let that be a good thing.



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From campers to counselors:

Chinese Youth Camp calls alumni back to culture

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A sea of pink.

That's the first thing you would see as you enter the venue, and meet a crowd of 200 students clustered into the UT Arlington Texas Hall. From July 1-8, Chinese-American students ages 9 through 14 performed a course of activities to embrace their cultural heritage at the DFW Chinese Youth Camp at UT Arlington.

Campers attended classes such as Chinese etiquette classes, folk dancing, painting fans, spinning diabolos (Chinese yo-yos) and practicing calligraphy that engaged them in Chinese traditions. At the end of camp, students poured into Vandergriff Hall at UT Arlington, and the culmination of the counselors' hard work finally came to fruition with performances done by the students.

Among the pink campers were camp counselors, denoted with bright blue shirts. Coppell High School sophomore Emma Zhao, junior Larry Liu and junior Amanda Zhu wore these blue shirts with pride. The journey wasn't easy, as it took five years of camp to get to this point.

As young campers, Zhao, Liu and Zhu always admired the vibrant environment of the Chinese Youth Camp. The camp immersed them in Chinese culture, allowing them to deeply connect with their cultural roots around other Chinese kids their age.

This year, Jessica Chu, the associate camp director of the DFW Chinese Youth Camp chose Zhao, Liu and Zhu as counselors for the camp.

"All of them have an ability to learn, I think that's always important as a leader," Chu said. "Our leadership program is a big part of it and I'm so glad I got to work with all three of them. They all grew from this experience."

For Liu, being a counselor at CYC was an experience teaching him to be less reserved by forcing him out of his shell. Liu's self confidence grew and now he finds himself being a much more sociable person.

"I remember last year, I didn't speak to anyone," Liu said. "When I went to CYC, I became the loudest person, to make my campers laugh. Now, I'm more outgoing and willing to put myself out there."

Liu's experience at the camp also helped him embrace his identity, connecting him to his culture more than ever. Prior to CYC, Liu felt distant from other Chinese teenagers. Being able to guide traditional Chinese activities devoted to Chinese-American youth made him feel like he truly belonged in his community as a Chinese person in America.

"CYC is basically the only time I have to talk to people of my community," Liu said. "At school, there's not really that many Chinese people, but at CYC there's hundreds of Chinese people. Interacting with all these different types of people makes you feel more at home."



Coppell High School juniors Amanda Zhu, Larry Liu and sophomore Emma Zhao spent their summer as counselors for the Chinese Youth Camp at UT Arlington. The camp from July 1-8 allowed the students to connect with their culture and hone their leadership skills. **Nrithya Mahesh**

Zhu started attending the camp when she was in fifth grade. She was inspired to be a counselor when she heard her friends' conversations and stories about how much fun they were having being counselors at the camp.

"I knew I wanted to do volunteering during the summer so when I got the opportunity I was like this is perfect," Zhu said. "I feel like I was able to grow as a person."

"I went to CYC and became the loudest person."

- Larry Liu
Coppell junior

Teaching Chinese culture to kids isn't an easy task and requires a lot of patience. Through CYC, Zhu learned to persevere through tough situations to be an effective leader.

"I learned how to just roll with the punches," Zhu said. "To persist even when it wasn't the easiest situation to be in."

Chu views Zhu as a compassionate leader who's always willing to lend a helping hand.

"There's a lot of potential with Amanda since she is a good listener, knows how to connect with people and finds ways to help people when they need it," Chu said.

Zhao has been attending CYC since she was in sixth grade. Her goal as a counselor was to make camp a positive place for her group.

Zhao faced initial difficulties getting her group to cooperate. The age group that she was assigned was 13 to 14-year-olds who were distant. Zhao encouraged the group to bond and worked diligently to come up with strategies to unite her campers together.

"One of the big things in my group in the beginning was that the boys and girls were very separated in the beginning," Zhao said. "Every night, the counselors would get together and have meetings about how we could make the group dynamic better."

As the CHS Chinese Club historian, Zhao looks forward to using the skills she learned in camp to bring more camaraderie to the club this year. CHS Chinese teacher and Chinese club sponsor Andrea Voelker recognizes Zhao's leadership qualities.

"She's very caring and very responsible. She wants to help others," Voelker said. "I can rely on her, she's very trustful. With her there, I know things will get done."

At the end of the camp as students were saying their goodbyes, Liu, Zhu and Zhao felt prideful in the change they were able to invoke in these student's lives. CYC was a unique experience that helped all three counselors mature as people, their time at the camp is something that they will never forget.

"It's a good chance to connect with people from similar cultural backgrounds. It's definitely something that I wouldn't take for granted," Zhu said. "I'm grateful that I got the opportunity to participate."



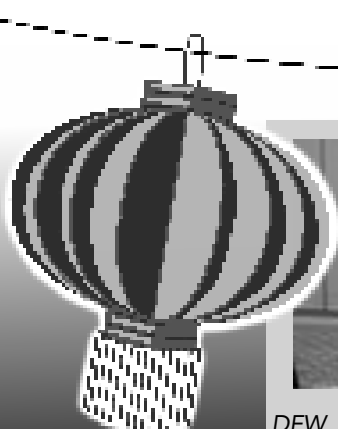
Campers at the DFW Chinese Youth Camp practice tricks with spinning diabolos (Chinese yo-yos). Chinese yo-yos originated in China around 1000 B.C. as toys. CYC took place this summer from July 1-8. **Photo Courtesy CYC Facebook**



Amanda Zhu teaches Chinese calligraphy to campers at the DFW Chinese Youth Camp. The DFW Chinese Youth Camp (CYC) teaches Chinese youth in the area about traditional Chinese culture for a week. The camp took place from July 1-8. **Photo Courtesy CYC Facebook**



Campers learn kung fu at the DFW Chinese Youth Camp (CYC). Kung fu is one of the most well-known martial arts in China today. **Photo Courtesy CYC Facebook**



DFW Chinese Youth Camp (CYC) campers participate in a lion dance class at camp. **Photo Courtesy CYC Facebook**



Emma Zhao and Larry Liu along with other counselors take a group photo at the end of camp banquet at the DFW Chinese Youth Camp (CYC). **Photo Courtesy CYC Facebook**



TEACHER OF THE ISSUE

Poskey finding parallels in teaching, life

Anushree De
Features Editor
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In rural Tyler in East Texas, a young boy found pleasure in the simplicities of life. The scant population of the town meant that entertainment was found through hobbies like reading, the catalyst to the boy's future passions.

This was the childhood of Coppell High School English II teacher David Poskey, one filled with a wealth of knowledge in embracing the modesty of the everyday.

"I grew up in the country with no one to play with but my brother and sister," Poskey said. "My dad would take me to the used bookstore every couple of weeks. We had every National Geographic magazine from 1888-1980."

Even in his early years, Poskey's experience as a teacher to his younger brother was an indication of his aptitude for teaching.

"My mother was a custodian at the high school, so she would be working after school," Poskey said. "I'm six years older than my younger brother, so I would always teach him algebra that I barely understood."

Among his childhood memories are cars. It was when Poskey drove with his father, David Poskey, that he felt bliss. Poskey's drive to continue to work with cars convinced him to attend the Universal Technical Institute in Irving. After spending four years at the vocational school, Poskey moved back to Tyler and worked at Tyler Ford, the local Ford Dealership.

"I decided that I liked working on my own car, but not the cars of other people," Poskey said. "The money was good, but I didn't care for it."

Poskey transitioned to another job that still utilized his technical knowledge of transportation vehicles. After scoring well on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), Poskey joined the Air Force as a reservist to work on technical support for planes. When Poskey became crew chief of an A-10C Thunderbolt, he had to perform extensive checks on his aircraft before every departure and after every landing, including checking tires, refueling fuel tanks and checking for leaks. The job came with a significant amount of responsibility.

"These people are depending on me for their lives," Poskey said. "I may be the only crew chief working on the aircraft. When I was based in Shreveport, La. a fuel leak killed a crew chief because he did not know it was leaking."

After six years of being a crew chief, Poskey left the Air Force. He entered Tyler Junior College, open to whatever passion would find him.

Poskey took a theater appreciation class for his fine arts credit. As he watched his first play, "Amadeus" by Peter Shaffer, he became transfixed by the magic of theater and its ability to take him to new worlds.

"Amadeus" was about Mozart, and I happened to listen to classical music," Poskey said. "When I was five in the bookstore, my dad and I found a collection of old Beethoven records. The costumes and set design made me feel like I was a part of that time period."

"Amadeus" brought Poskey back to those memories of his father, and he decided to be an extra on the show. Although acting was not his calling, Poskey's love for the technical made him find his place in technical theater by building sets. After attending the University of Texas at Tyler, Poskey continued to specialize in his technical theater knowledge.

"The University of Texas at Tyler has a very big theater program," Poskey said. "A lot of Broadway

shows came through there. Through college, I would work on some of these big shows. I almost finished my degree, and then I met my wife."

For many, love is found in partners with similar personalities. For Poskey, who has a quiet persona and solemn stature, his wife, Leia Poskey, is the absolute opposite.

"My wife has been all around the school," Poskey said, chuckling. "She is a super teacher. She is very outgoing, and I am very much an introvert. My wife was on her way to London to study art. I ended up in London before I graduated. I decided at that point that I wanted to teach."

After moving back from London, Poskey received his teaching certification and began to teach technical theater at John Tyler High School in Tyler at the tail end of Hurricane Katrina. The hurricane brought an influx of students from Louisiana.

"It was a lot," Poskey said. "I had to teach classes and be there for all the shows. It was like being a coach. I would stay from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. I did love it, but it was too much and burned me out. But, they needed an English teacher."

Poskey took the job because of the inter-secularity between theater and English.

"A lot of theater is deep analysis of the script," Poskey said. "You have to know the character motivations, which uses the same analysis in English II."

In his 17 year career of teaching, Poskey worked at four schools, before finally finding his calling at Coppell after his wife's conversation with the principal of CHS.

"My wife started at Coppell in 2015," Poskey said. "She ran into Principal Laura Springer one day, and they were scrambling to find a teacher. But, I already got a job offer from Richardson ISD. Principal Springer said not to sign the contract before I met her."

After a conversation with Springer, Poskey took the job. As a car mechanic, veteran, technical theater designer and teacher, Poskey has lived many lives. But now that he has found his place, he does not plan on leaving.

"I have no desire to go anywhere else," Poskey said. "I could retire in three years, but I don't see that happening. Some people don't realize how special Coppell is. I don't have to break fights. I don't worry about my phone being stolen if I leave it on my desk. I always knew I wanted to do something to make the world a better place,

and this job helps me shape young minds."

As a teacher, Poskey inserts his past lives into all aspects of his pedagogical structure. Poskey's philosophy in teaching, one crafted by his experience in the Air Force, is letting students learn through independent study. Upon a glance at Poskey's classroom, a bulky Merriam-Webster's dictionary can be seen at every desk. The purpose of the dictionary is to make students investigate questions by themselves.

"I don't teach people what to think; I teach them to think," Poskey said. "In today's world of misinformation, education is the way to reduce that. You learn to sort and analyze information in my classroom. I don't give students answers. I make them work for it."

That teaching philosophy is recognized by Poskey's students.

"'Let the boys play' is his phrase," senior Addison Terry said. "He really cares more about effort, sometimes more than the material. He pushed us, but he pushed us to the place where we had to push ourselves, and I think that's more important than a teacher nagging you."

Voices have power. The trademark Southern drawl, an indication of his upbringing, in Poskey's voice is precise. Each word is chosen carefully and his pacing is slow. Every question asked is not just an answer to Poskey; it's a conversation.

"His persona is very serious," Terry said. "He never laughed. The first day I met him, I didn't know how this class would be. I was a little worried. Throughout the year, we saw a different side of him as a person."

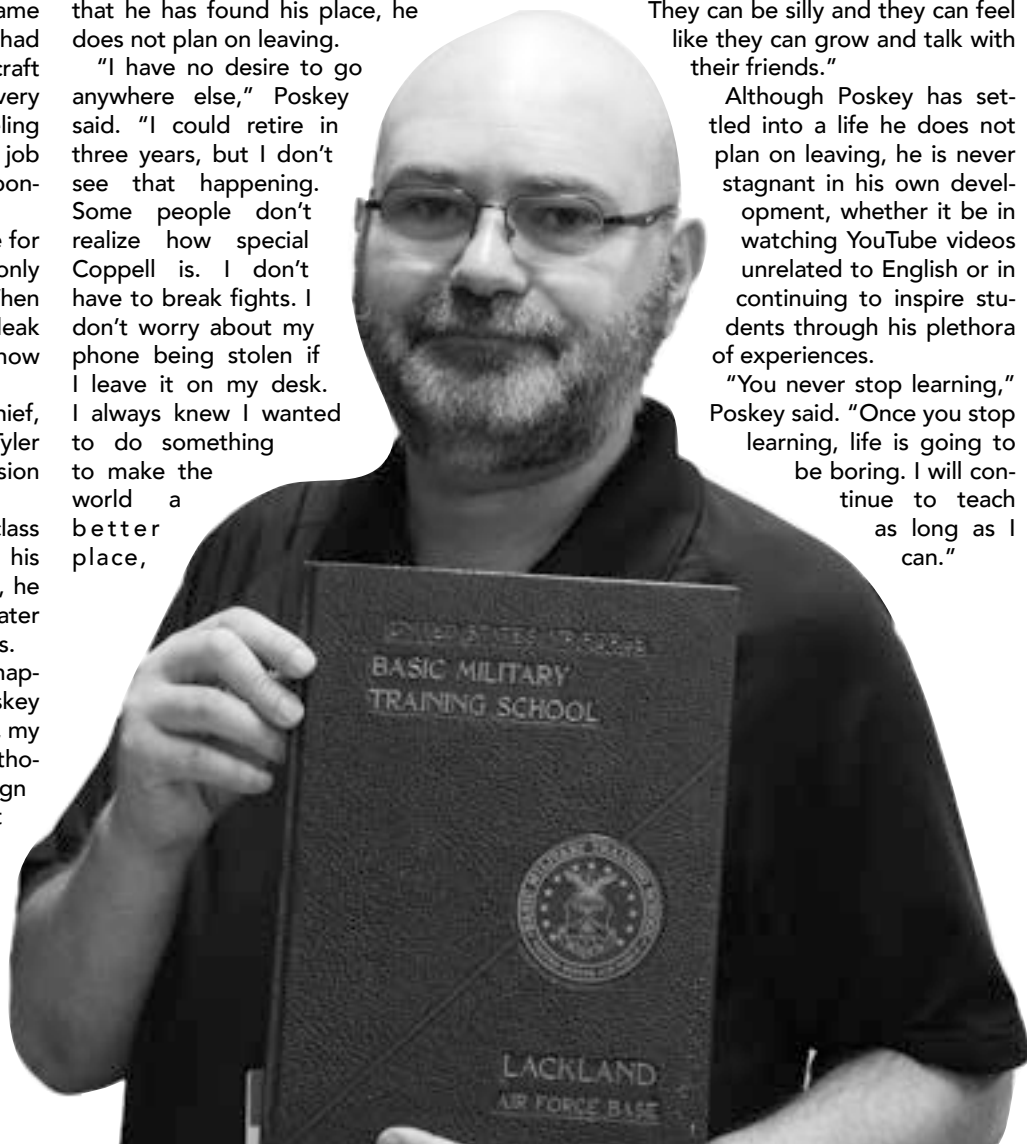
Poskey is a person of few words, but it is that trademark characteristic that teachers in his fellow English department have grown to revere.

"He's very kind and observant," English teacher Hannah Corley said. "He's not the loudest in the room. He thinks before he speaks, which allows people to be heard. Kids feel safe in their English classroom and they feel like they can ask questions.

They can be silly and they can feel like they can grow and talk with their friends."

Although Poskey has settled into a life he does not plan on leaving, he is never stagnant in his own development, whether it be in watching YouTube videos unrelated to English or in continuing to inspire students through his plethora of experiences.

"You never stop learning," Poskey said. "Once you stop learning, life is going to be boring. I will continue to teach as long as I can."



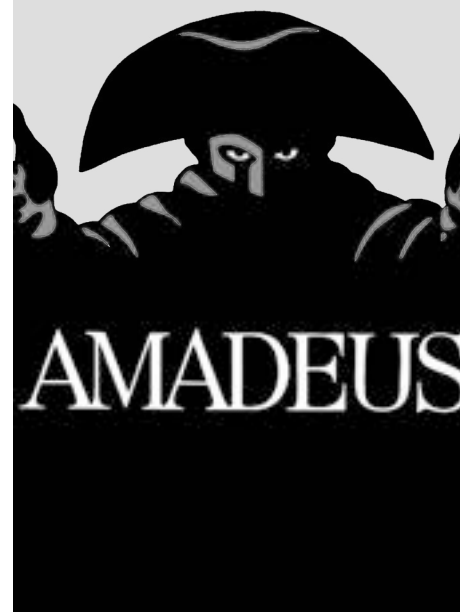
Coppell English II teacher David Poskey holds the yearbook of the United States Air Force Basic Military Training School as a reflection of his life that has led him to where he is now. Poskey has been selected as The Sidekick's Volume 35 No. 2 Teacher of the Issue. **Ainsley Dwyer**

Poskey's Picks

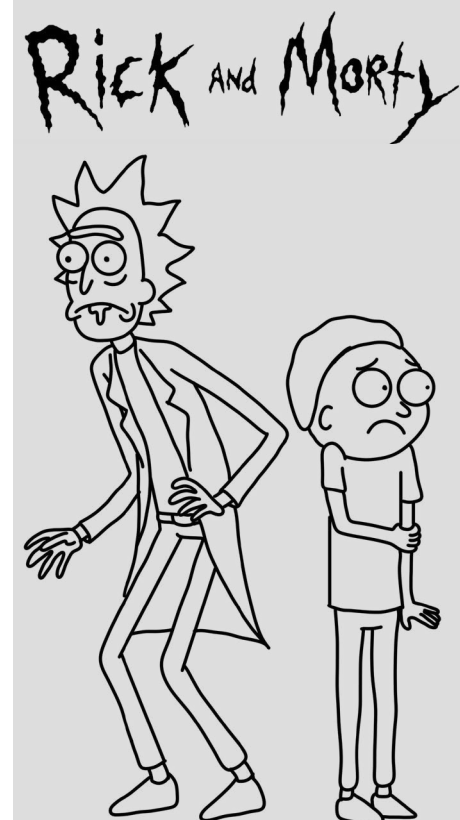
Favorite Book:



Favorite Play:



Favorite Show:



Graphics by Sri Achanta

STORY BY
Aliza Abidi and Sahasra Chakilam

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IMPORTANT

USE A NO.2 PENCIL ONLY

• EXAMPLE: ☐A☐B☒C☐D☐E

• ERASE COMPLETELY TO CHANGE

\$50 in compensation to the district for every student per day in attendance

ATTENDANCE RATES IN CISD

2017-18	96.7%
2018-19	96.7%
2019-20	96.7%
2020-21	remote
2021-22	95.4%
2022-23	95.6%

ATTENDANCE RATES BEFORE BREAKS IN CISD (2022-2023)

Week before Thanksgiving	92.36%
Week before Winter Break	93.76%
Week before Spring Break	95.34%

EACH PERCENT DECREASE IN DAILY ATTENDANCE LEADS TO AN ESTIMATED LOSS OF

\$900,000

SOURCE: COPPELL ISD

1 ☐A☐B☒C☐D☐E
2 ☐A☒B☐C☐D☐E
3 ☐A☐B☐C☒D☐E
4 ☒A☐B☐C☐D☐E
5 ☐A☐B☒C☐D☐E

More than a headcount

Attendance influencing funding, education

It's a typical Wednesday morning at Coppell High School and the day of an AP English Literature unit test.

CHS English teacher Benjamin Stroud holds 29 test copies. Little more than half his students sit waiting with a pencil and scantron sheet.

"It's just so frustrating," Stroud said. "There is a pattern of the same students who miss class on test day and get away with it."

Under the Texas Education Code, school districts receive funding from the state based on the district's average daily attendance (ADA). ADA measures the average number of students attending school on a day to day basis, calculated by dividing the total number of students in attendance each day of the school year by the total number of instructional days within the year.

Administering the policies of the Texas Education Code, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) receives all data regarding districts' ADA rates from school in six-week reporting periods through the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS).

At the end of the school year, the TEA determines the annual ADA and defines the state funding allocation the district receives. According to the Coppell ISD 2022-23 budget book, state funds account for approximately 10% of the total district revenue funds.

The other 90% of financing comes from local civilian taxes, such as the Robin Hood Tax and interest earnings (89%) and federal sources from School Health and Related Services (SHARS) (1%).

Through the calculated ADA, a per pupil allotment is calculated by dividing the total amount of funding available by the number of students attending school. The per-pupil amounts vary for students amongst different school levels. Per the Coppell ISD 2022-23 budget book, the per-pupil amount was \$94.61 per elementary student, \$123.23 per middle school student and \$157.54 per high school student.

According to CISD director of student systems Kathy Creek, the district is compensated about \$50 for each student that is present each day.

Every absence is a loss of funding the state provides to the district. CISD director of communication Amanda Simpson said each percent decrease in daily attendance leads to an estimated loss of \$900,000.

"If you think about it, it is 13,000-plus students times \$50 a day, times 170 instructional days which is the amount of days we had last year," Creek said. "If attendance drops by even 1%, it is pretty significant."

A rate of 97% or higher indicates that the district is in good standing for attendance rates and for funding. CISD had been maintaining its attendance in this percentile until the rise of COVID-19, chief financial officer Diana Sircar said.

In 2019, the ADA in CISD was 96.7%. In 2022, after the COVID-19 lockdown and CISD virtual learning, the ADA fell to 95.4%. As of 2023, the percentage has dropped to 95.6%, a loss of approximately \$1,000,000 of funding.

"Since we were remote during the pandemic, our attendance rate has not been an apples to apples comparison" Sircar said. "It was higher during the pandemic, because people were remote."

With less than 2% annual change in enrollment since 2017, the flattening of enrollment

rates in CISD affects the district's ADA, further lowering funds received from the state.

"When you're a growing district, it doesn't seem as concerning, because your population is growing," Creek said. "Our population is flattening right now and that means that every day of attendance matters."

With inflation, the cost of resources has risen to a rate of 9.1%, the highest since November 1981, according to the CISD 2022-23 budget. TEA funding has not reflected any inflationary adjustments changes to ADA since 2009.

"Our allotment per student has not changed in many years and we need to keep a base with inflation," CISD Board of Trustees president David Caviness said. "Our needs for our teachers and supplies are costing us more, it takes money out of our classrooms."

Whether a student brings a note or not to excuse themselves, their absence affects the compensation the district receives.

"You could afford to give me one absence,

"When the student returns, it's a group effort to get them up to speed, and it takes time for the teacher and classmates," Olmstead said.

In the broader picture, a decrease in attendance rate affects the development of students on the day they miss. The time teachers and classmates spend making up for the absent child pushes back the curriculum and incentivizes future absences and setbacks.

"We require students to go to school because it's a net benefit for all of society," CHS IB Psychology and Economics teacher Jared Stansel said. "It hurts our student body's financial capital that could otherwise afford them learning resources that would have enhanced their learning."

TEA measures school funding through the academic expanse. Student absences imply that the services that were provided were not accounted for and that the student did not experience any academic growth.

"Your attendance notes are like our receipts

on other educational experiences, social experiences and to avoid the stress and anxiety of the feelings of falling behind," Stansel said.

However, many students think mental health and personal comfort should be accounted for when taking assignments that critically measure performance.

"It is really valid to just take a day off and designate time to focus on your mental health," CHS junior Anushka Joshi said. "School can be something that is draining and stressful, and it is understandable to take a day off and just recharge. Your health should come first, including mental health."

However, some students avoid missing tests as it sets them behind with coursework. "I hate when I miss tests, I just want to get it over with," CHS senior Su Dikilitas said. "However, you can't really control what's going on in your life and it can really affect your performance on tests."

Students working on tight schedules and deadlines may warrant a reflective day off to catch up on schoolwork.

"I have taken absences before, because school is often overwhelming," CHS junior Larry Liu said. "School is so fast paced and sometimes after a long week, you get burned out. Sometimes you have to find your own pace instead of the pace your teacher forces you to follow."

Until 2019, CISD had mandatory final exams at the end of each semester. The policy stated that if a student has less than a set amount of absences in a class they could be exempt from that exam. Now that the system is no longer in place, students at CHS lack motivation to maintain minimum attendance, taking advantage of the ten absences allowed until truancy.

"Is there a medical happening standing in the way of you coming to school?" Springer asked. "Are your parents divorcing? Those are types of things we figure out to help students beat truancy charges, if none of those hardships are there, you're just not coming to school."

To mitigate absences and raise the attendance rate to a goal of 97%, CISD is in the midst of a 12-week attendance campaign. Posting attendance incentive graphics every Thursday and Sunday on the CISD website, newsletters and social media accounts, the district aims to raise awareness among community members of the importance of maintaining attendance.

"We felt that it was important to inform our community about how important attendance is," Simpson said. "We are not saying that you should go to school if you are sick, we also realize there are mental health reasons that can cause an absence, and we want the community to know that there is support for that. Attendance is important in particular to learning and if you miss a couple of days a month, you can miss a lot."

FREE RESPONSE

"We can't afford for students not to be in school because it kills us financially."

CHS Principal Laura Springer

but when I end up having 250 kids out on a given day, then I have just lost funding for 250 of our kids for that day," CHS Principal Laura Springer said.

CISD posts its full-length calendars two years in advance for every school year to ensure families are aware of the set dates for any holiday breaks or special days.

"While your family takes you on a road trip, every day you're going on that trip counts against us for attendance," Springer said. "We give you plenty of notice on when we have district holidays."

Beyond its impact on school funding, unnecessary absences result in the waste of resources, educational opportunities and state funds. When students are absent and fail to utilize these resources, it hinders class productivity and efficiency.

"Absences affect everyone in the classroom, not just the students or the teacher," said Coppell Middle School West registrar Shannon Olmstead, who is also a district parent. "If a student is absent, the teacher is still present and the services are still paid from CISD. But CISD is not receiving funding from Texas for that student."

This affects the overall learning environment of the classroom. Each absence is a loss in social and academic benefit for both the students and their classmates.

for the state to prove that they should pay us," CHS attendance office aide Amy Praytor said. "The state says you have to be in class 90 percent of the time, if not, you were not there enough times to get the information you should have gotten."

With COVID-19 introducing online learning, students now take days off more often with the intention of keeping up through online resources.

"Our attendance was phenomenal until COVID," Springer said. "After COVID, we got used to laying in the bed."

However, learning online while the class is in person can lead to a lower grasp of academic topics and limitation of social interactions.

"We can't afford for students not to be in school because it kills us financially for students not to be here," Springer said. "Plus, I want students to get a good education, students can't get a good education when they're not sitting in the classroom and learning."

Often, students rationalize their absences by taking days off for mental health. Students also might take it further, taking absences when they have a test that they do not feel prepared for.

"It would have been better to just go ahead and fail the assessment so as to not miss out



Bhatia exemplifying the model in Model U.N.



New Tech Model U.N. president Tejas Bhatia provides feedback to Model U.N. members on Oct. 16 at New Tech High @ Coppell on their pro-con speeches. Bhatia is a member of the Model U.N., winning 13 regional, state and international awards in the span of three years as well as qualifying for the Model U.N. international conference. **Ishana Sharma**

Nrithya Mahesh

Staff Designer
@CHSCampusNews

Fa-M.U.N-ly.

It is the word that can't seem to escape the minds of New Tech Model United Nations delegates ever since New Tech Model U.N. president and Texas YMCA vice president Tejas Bhatia came up with it as a pun to refer to them, his found family.

Bhatia said everyone groans when they hear him say it, but this word made its way into every conversation I had with Model U.N. delegates over the past week. It is clear that four years into the program, Bhatia has had a bigger impression on his peers than he realizes.

Bhatia's journey into the world of policy started in the tumultuous year of 2020, right before the presidential election.

"I kept thinking about the presidential election and making predictions because I really wanted to know what was going on in the world," Bhatia said. "I wanted to focus on Biden's and other liberal policies while also looking at conservative ones. I got very much into the world of politics."

Bhatia's interest was noticed by his sister, Coppell High School 2016 graduate Dia Bhatia. A member of Model U.N. at Barnard College herself, she encouraged him to join Model U.N. as a platform to combine politics and global affairs.

"It was very overwhelming at first," Tejas said. "There were so many procedures I had to memorize, policy position papers to write, speeches and public speaking."

Bhatia's initial struggles didn't stop there. He grew up with a speech impediment and stutter, putting him at a disadvantage in a competition like Model U.N. where public speaking is a prerequisite.

"It was extra difficult for me to be confident with public speaking," Bhatia said. "To make up for this, the night before my first competition, I made flashcards of my speech to practice. Somehow, within that first speech, I was surprisingly confident and didn't stumble at all."

Finding his footing, Bhatia traversed through more competitions and immersed himself into the complexities of the program. At every step, he looked up to leaders in the program like 2021 New Tech Model U.N. vice president Mahum Rana.

"She was not only an amazing delegate and leader but an amazing person who I could talk to about anything," Bhatia said. "She always encouraged me to be calm and take in every second of the conferences, learning from and enjoying the experience. She also taught me to listen to other people and their perspectives and incorporate them into your own."

Bhatia was not the only one inspired by his peers in the program. Rana herself was floored by his initiative and true passion for Model U.N.

"He was really passionate about getting to know the world and wanting to find the details people would miss about countries," Rana said. "He wanted to know everything not to be a know-it-all but just to know everything. He was that curious about the world. On top of that, he always wanted to make sure that the people around him were doing just as good if not better than him."

It is no surprise that Bhatia became proficient at competing and voicing himself after all the hours he put into preparing and improving his skills. Spending so much time looking up at the different stars in his life, he became a star for others.

"Tejas crushes almost every Model U.N. competition, so he has a lot of skill sets that he knows how to pass onto others and teach them to do as well," junior New Tech Model U.N. conference officer Khushie Vora said. "Because he's so passionate about the subject, it's so easy for him to interact and help others. He shows us that we are better than we think we are."

Previously serving as parliamentarian and vice president, Bhatia was awarded the position of Model U.N. president as a senior. It seems this was the inevitable next step for the delegate in his journey after all of his previous efforts.

"I could tell when he was a freshman that this is where he would end up as a senior," Model U.N. advisor Danae Boyd said. "You can see that drive in a person, that it's not just something to do for extra time, but truly a passion of his."

Bhatia takes his role seriously, always seeing how he can aid delegates better so they can find their stride like he did a few years ago.

"If anyone needs assistance, he works

with them hand-in-hand to make sure he's leading by example and not just being a figurehead," Boyd said. "It's one thing to have on your resume that you were president of Model U.N. It's another thing to be a good and effective president."

Though growth in skills is crucial, Bhatia knows the importance of connecting with his club members and makes sure to cultivate a family atmosphere similar to the one he was enveloped in when he first entered the club.

"He has two sides when it comes to being a leader," junior New Tech Model U.N. vice president Sanya Pillai said. "One side is very firm in what he needs from students, while the other is focused on interpersonal relations and checking up on others. I've seen leaders fall on one side or another, but Tejas finds a way to balance the two and I think that's amazing."

Learning from his leadership roles, Bhatia qualified for the Model U.N. International Conference last May at Vancouver, where he took on the role of Democratic Party Leader Chuck Schumer in the U.S. Senate.

The only problem?

This was his first time competing in a domestic body committee.

"Being at internationals and a first-timer of the conference type was immensely stressful and scary," Bhatia said. "I was competing with people from all over the continent and globe who had experience competing as part of the U.S. Senate. On top of that, being a party leader meant I had more responsibilities, which added to a great deal of stress when combined with everything else."

Even in the wake of a new situation, Bhatia spent time researching and reflecting on how he could better his performance as soon as he got back to his hotel room. And just like always, the hard work he put into improving showed in his results, earning himself an honorable mention as third place in a room of over 30 delegates.

"Once I became more confident and started to understand what was going on, I started to get into the groove," Bhatia said. "In Model U.N., you will be pushed into situations you are not familiar with that cause you to reflect. It was really formative in my development as a delegate and a leader."

Bhatia, with all his accolades and experience, decided to try his hand at being a state officer for the Texas YMCA Model U.N. secretariat. After screenings and interviews, Bhatia found himself as the vice president of the state's program.

"For me, it meant a lot to me to represent my school, considering that we often don't get the recognition we deserve as a school," Bhatia said. "It was also a testament to all the hours upon hours of work and effort I put into each competition. It feels great to be recognized for something that you love so much and put in a lot of work for."

Model U.N. has done more for Bhatia than just being a platform to compete in conferences. It's opened up doors to a new future and career possibilities in the form of human rights law.

"Through all my experiences thus far, I've realized human rights is a topic that is not discussed enough," Bhatia said. "I want to utilize my experience in Model UN to continue to learn about issues that are happening and become an advocate and upstander against injustice."

The world of Model U.N. is complicated. Delegates have to represent their country's stance while also appeasing others and finding resolutions. It is easy to get overwhelmed by the sheer amount of points each delegate needs to hit in the few hours they are competing during.

But, somehow, Bhatia reigns in all the components to find power in a world of words.

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Kumar compelled by global curiosity

Noor Fatima
Staff Designer
@CHSCampusNews

If you sit down with Coppell High School sophomore Harshvadhan Vinoth Kumar, the first thing that you will notice is his unique accent. With a rich concoction of Indian, English and various other European intonations, it is the first clue to his international upbringing that started from age 7 when his father asked him one simple question:

Are you fine with us traveling?

Kumar's answer to the question would shift the course of his life as he spent his childhood living throughout Europe, traveling through Africa, Asia, even going on an expedition to Antarctica from ages 7 to 13. Kumar's experience has allowed him to develop a rich, multi sided view of the world. Though pivotal to his identity, Kumar's frequent trips have left him a literal and metaphorical traveler, both in physically traveling but also in his attempts to connect with others. For Kumar, who believes geography serves as the bedrock to social connection, his abundance puts him in a more isolated position.

"Many people say they admire me," Kumar said. "They wish they could travel like me, but personally speaking, I haven't enjoyed it as much as people make it out to be. Friends hang out on weekends or go out, but I've never been able to do that because I move around too much. Just when I start getting close to people, I move around again."

Born in Charlotte, North Carolina, Kumar returned in eighth grade, first living in Virginia where he was alarmed at the biases behind how certain subjects were taught in history. He witnessed the use of language to imply communism as a system of governance rather than an economic system and the oversimplification of Hinduism as a religion.

Noting the bias inserted into pedagogy, Kumar felt impassioned about the discrepancies and sent letters to the school board, requesting a change in approach to these subjects. It certainly was not the first time Kumar noticed bias in his history curriculum.

"History will always favor the winners, there's no question about that," Kumar said. "It'll always favor the more techno-



Coppell High School sophomore Harshvadhan Kumar attended the Dallas Model U.N. Conference hosted by North Hills Preparatory on, Oct. 21. Kumar has traveled to six continents and speaks eight languages which offers him a global perspective on the world. **Anushree De**

logically advanced, the fighters. In Europe, they colonized people, won many wars, and put it down in history books as the most important parts of history. This is not just in Europe. It happens in India. It happens in any country you take."

Moving from Virginia to Texas his sophomore year, he found a place for his love and knowledge of history within his AP European History class, getting wildly into character during debates, sometimes even a little too much he says, recounting how he told someone to go burn at the stake while role playing as King James I.

"History has always been one of my favorite subjects, it just comes up naturally," Kumar said. "I have seen a great deal and have general knowledge so oftentimes it's hard for me to understand that some people might not know certain topics. I tend to get very passionate when I talk about history."

CHS AP European History teacher Dan Gillette recognizes Kumar's international perspective and ability to see a larger picture. Gillette feels assured in Kumar's ability, even admitting that he shows a deeper knowledge of the history of and after King Henry VIII rule than himself. This last fact may be a little less shocking by the fact that pre-Elizabethan and Elizabethan are Kumar's favorite eras of history to study.

"He came a few weeks late," Gillette said. "It's always a concern for a teacher when a student comes a few weeks late to a class in the beginning of the school year, especially in an AP class. I was keeping an eye on him just to see how he was catching up. The first time I checked on him I knew he was going to be fine."

“
He commands a lot of attention in a room because he has that confidence and that helps him stand out.”

- Ishaan Kashyap
senior AcDec captain

Kumar showed so much promise in class that Gillette recommended him for the state University Interscholastic League Social Studies competition within his first week of attending class. Kumar accepted the offer. The different curriculum has given him the opportunity to see history from multiple sides, leaving him with a desire to find the truth between opposing perspectives and a willingness to challenge the biases he encounters. Kumar's intellectual vitality for a global perspective is apparent on his every venture whether it be in school, Model U.N. or on Academic Decathlon.

"One thing I notice is that he's always trying to learn more than what's in our material," senior Academic Decathlon captain Ishaan Kashyap said. "He'll ask us about questions that we don't really need to know but he wants to know about anyway. He commands a lot of attention in a room because he has that confidence and that helps him stand out."

For Kumar, there is always more to learn about history: more perspectives, more problems, more progress.

"History is important so that we learn from it and not commit the same mistakes again," Kumar said.

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Concert etiquette striking a sour note

Fluorescent lights flick on, illuminating the venue as the audience roars with excitement. The singer begins her song, her powerful voice resonating through the crowd.

But this powerful moment ends in an instant as a phone thrown from the audience hits her face.

This was the case of Bebe Rexha's concert on June 19 in New York City. Rexha's incident isn't the only recent occurrence of this issue. More and more videos are circulating online of performers targeted during live shows by fans. This not only

makes concerts a dangerous environment for performers, it also ruins the experience for fans.

Coppell High School junior Anna Rodriguez is a frequent concert-goer. For her, concerts are a fun way to get out with friends.

"It's all about the experience, right?" Rodriguez said. "Concerts are a great place to listen to artists you enjoy in the moment. There's nothing quite like a concert experience."

But social media can play a huge factor in the way people behave. Rude behavior during concerts ruins the experience for everybody. Rodriguez thinks the rise of violent concert videos can encourage rowdy fans with likes and views.

"In those TikToks and videos and things, and even at concerts, when people throw stuff on stage it kind of distracts the singer or artist from performing," Rodriguez said. "It's not appropriate for the time."

It can be especially disruptive when rude behavior ruins other fans' times at a concert they paid a lot of money for. For sophomore Priti Bhandari, this issue is especially prevalent at K-pop concerts.

"Some people from specific fandoms are

meaner than others," Bhandari said. "They felt they had a dominance over people because their ticket was higher, like a VIP ticket."

For performers, the atmosphere of their shows is really important for them. A positive concert experience can definitely be determined by the mood of the audience. Local singer Aaron Burton enjoys when people are upbeat at his shows.

"When people are positive and they have a positive response, they're dancing, that always makes it more fun," Burton said. "It's not nice to be rude and if you do enjoy something, then let the performer know because that's something that they'll want to know."

Generally, good concert etiquette is pretty obvious. Respect the artist and don't be afraid to show your appreciation for them.

"If it's a big show, then just cheer and clap, even if it's a smaller show and you're embarrassed to clap because nobody's clapping, that's fine," Burton said. "If you have the chance, say hi and tell them you enjoyed it, maybe drop a tip in the tip jar. Anything to show love is a great rule that should be followed."

It is easy to get swept up in reckless behavior at concerts when you are enjoying yourself. Cheering and having a good time is what you're expected to do at a concert, but when that behavior turns to violence, it can ruin everyone's experience.

Sometimes, it's better to just sit back and enjoy the show.



Lately, concert etiquette has been getting worse and worse; some attendees go as far as physically hurting the performers. The Sidekick staff writer Elizabeth De Santiago finds that this trend of behavior is problematic for fellow attendees and entertainers alike. **Manasa Borra**

Elizabeth De Santiago
Staff Writer
@CHSCampusNews

Drake barks about toxic relationships on *For All The Dogs*

Canadian singer and rapper Aubrey Drake Graham, also known as Drake, is a leading artist in today's music scene and has been popular among the younger generation since his debut mixtape, *Room for Improvement*, in 2006.

His new album, *For All The Dogs*, released Oct. 6, takes listeners on a musical journey showcasing his singing and a mix of hip-hop, R&B and pop.

Drake's eighth studio album consists of 23 songs and 10 featured artists, including Bad Bunny, 21 Savage and Yeat. The cover, a white dog with red eyes, was drawn by his son, Adonis Graham. *For All The Dogs* was originally to be released on Sept. 22, but was postponed to 6 a.m. on Oct. 6. However, fans may find this album worth the wait.

From the get-go, Drake creates a feeling of nostalgia through his first track, "Virginia Beach," which reminds listeners of his music style from the late 2010s. Throughout the album, melodies and rhythms resembling his older songs, such as "One Dance" and "In My Feelings," are woven into each track. This can be seen as Drake's tribute to his past self and works as a long-time artist.

Arguably, the similarity between *For All The Dogs* and his previous tunes can be viewed as unoriginal and repetitive. As the album progresses, the beats start to sound redundant, calling Drake's talent and originality as an artist into question.

Though *For All The Dogs* seems to lack inspiration and uniqueness, the featured artists on this album certainly make up for its shortcomings. Drake and his collaborators sing about the rough parts of relationships, including trust issues and

emotional manipulation. Various rappers and singers help to enhance the tracks during their parts, such as SZA on "Rich Baby Daddy" and J. Cole on "First Person Shooter."

In "Slime You Out", the ninth song and lead single featuring SZA, Drake conveys the confusion and frustration of being used by someone else. He expresses, "Next time, I swear on my grandmother grave / I'm slimin' you for them kid choices you made", while SZA choruses, "Slimin' you out, I'm slimin' you out, I'm slimin' you out," revealing that the artists recognize how toxic their exes were and are careful not to let them in again.

For All The Dogs has more of an R&B vibe than the rap-style music listeners have received from Drake lately. A series of chill beats and sounds accompany the mesmerizing lyrics of each track, creating a summery feel.

Some tracks, such as "Bahamas Promises" and "8AM in Charlotte," successfully blend soulful music with Drake's melodies. On the other hand, many elements in this album struggle to mix together, sounding randomly and carelessly thrown into the songs.

Drake concludes the album with "Polar Opposites," where he expresses the feeling of being disappointed by his lover after trying to trust her again. In the second verse of the track, he sings, "Had plans to understand ya / Mariana, you broke my faith / Why you gotta listen to the propaganda? / We just broke the ice, and now you're both leaving," indicating he was willing to give his ex another chance, but she once again proved to be unreliable.

For All The Dogs is a rollercoaster of nostalgia and moodiness, leaving listeners feeling wistful. While Drake manages to release a portion of magnificent songs on this album, a majority of these tracks sound unoriginal and tedious. It could be suggested that

Drake prioritizes quality over quantity, taking the time to enrich his music instead of focusing on releasing as many songs as he can.

Nevertheless, *For All The Dogs* is certainly a chill album and a good listen.

Taylor Pham
Staff Writer
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Popular artist and rapper Drake released his highly-anticipated album *For All the Dogs* on Oct. 6. In reviewing this latest musical offering, The Sidekick staff writer Taylor Pham delves into how the album applauds the inclusion of impressive features, including SZA on "Rich Baby Daddy," which add depth and diversity to the tracks, while critiquing the album's length, writing that 23 tracks is excessive. **Pranavi Ramineni**

Ratliff rocks her fringe all the way to the top

Rhea Choudhary
Staff Photographer
@rhea_choud

Coppell High School junior Lariettes lieutenant Emme Ratliff has had dance be a vital part of her identity as she has been doing it her whole life, along with dancing competitively for the past nine years. Being a part of the PACT dance company, Ratliff is also a student at Dana's Studio of Dance in Coppell.

What does the position of being a Lariettes junior lieutenant consist of?

My role involves assisting our coaches in directing the team to ensure we're all performing at our absolute best. I work closely with our captain, Elise Kniff, and the other officers to coordinate practices, routines and performances. While it is a leadership role with a responsibility, I love the opportunity to help every Lariette shine.

How long have you been dancing?

I've been dancing my whole life, but I have been dancing competitively for nine years. I began my journey at Dana's Studio of Dance, and it's been an incredible experience dancing at the PACT dance company ever since. Dance has always been a part of my life, and I can't imagine ever giving it up.

Why did you decide to continue dancing in high school?

While I knew that high school is an important time for growth and the grades you acquire are especially crucial, dance has always been a vital part of my identity. Dance is not just about the movements; it's about the bonds I've formed with my dance family and the lessons I've learned. Dance has given me some of my favorite memories, along with teaching me discipline and teamwork, which is how I knew I wanted to continue this journey in high school.

What lessons have you learned from dancing competitively and within the school team?

Dancing competitively and as part of a school team has taught me many valuable life lessons. First, I've learned the importance of time management. Balancing dance, schoolwork, and other commitments can be challenging, but it has taught me how to prioritize and make the most of my time. I've also learned how important perseverance is. Dance isn't always the easiest, and there are times when you have to push through physical and mental barriers. That determination and resilience are skills that extend far beyond the dance floor and have been helping me face various challenges.

Finally, I've learned how much teamwork matters. Because being part of a dance team, especially the Lariettes, has shown me the strength of unity and how much more we can achieve when we all work together. The bonds I've formed with the other Lariette members are irreplaceable and being a part of this group has given me experiences I'll carry with me throughout my life.

What is a piece of advice for people deciding whether or not they want to try out for Lariettes?

Follow your heart and passion. If you have a genuine love for dance and the desire to be a part of an amazing team, don't hesitate to take that chance. It's about the personal growth and the unforgettable experiences you'll gain. The Lariettes are a family, and if you're passionate about dance, you'll find a second home. With us. So, go for it with all your heart, give it your best, and you might discover your incredible journey, just as I did.



Coppell junior Lariettes lieutenant Emme Ratliff performs the kick line dance during halftime at the Cowboys' game against the Hawks at Hawk Stadium. Ratliff is one of six CHS Lariette officers and has been an avid dancer for the past 14 years. **Ainsley Dwyer**

Rahi using art as medium to advocate for social change

Sri Achanta
Executive Editor-In-Chief
@sriachanta_

"We were at a yield sign and my mother couldn't see," Rahi recalled. "She pulled up a bit forward, but the car behind us just saw that the car was moving, so it didn't stop. My head snapped forward and then it snapped back into the seat belt receiver."

What Coppell High School senior Isha Rahi thought was mild whiplash quickly turned chronic. The arch in her neck straightened out post-accident, but physical therapy was just a band-aid solution.

Rahi moved to Coppell from Jacksonville, Fla. prior to her eighth grade year. She attended Coppell Middle School North with her only goal being to fit in. Taking advice from a family

friend, she joined athletics hoping it wash-er ticket to friendships.

"Gym at my old school was just talking," Rahi said. "People were lifting my body weight and I was struggling to lift the bar. My neck and my shoulders were in so much pain. But I wasn't going to tell anyone. I can't be weak, people already think I look stupid. I kept doing it, I kept trying, I did get better."

But soon, she couldn't take it anymore. "I was really tired of putting myself through all this pain because there was a time where I could not hold my head up - It hurt that bad," Rahi said. "It made me realize that it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks."



Coppell High School senior Isha Rahi holds her piece titled "A Daughter's Burden." Rahi is president of National Arts Honors Society and uses art as a medium to advocate for South Asian women. **Sameeha Syed**

If I don't care about myself, then who's going to care about me?"

When COVID-19 peaked during the second semester of her eighth grade year, Rahi set forth on an introspective journey, understanding that only she could find ways to heal her pain.

Consistency with meditation and journaling put her one step forward, but Rahi found true solace in simply doodling in her sketchbook.

"When I was younger, art had always been a safe space for me," Rahi said. "It's always been something that takes me away, but especially COVID, I really got into it. I was sketching all the time, it was my stress reliever."

Simultaneously, she used this time to delve into her love for social entrepreneurship, working with nonprofits to advocate for women's rights within the South Asian community.

Diving into the nonprofit sector, Rahi worked herself to the bone in her junior year, losing herself to her chronic pain.

"A lot of it, I was jumping head first," Rahi said. "I had this idea where I just wanted to make a difference. And a lot of what I learned is you have to take that first step back. You have to listen to the community first. You don't talk, you listen. Don't rush them."

And Rahi did just that. She not only listened to the people she worked with, she opened her ears to the things that her body was telling her to do: to regain her sleep and prioritize the right things. She took a step back and revisited her time journaling, meditating and especially connecting with nature.

"Once you have that connection with nature and you just look around and actu-

ally pay attention to it, and it reminds you that there's something greater here," Rahi said. "And it reminded me of those days when I actually prioritized myself. I started giving myself ample sleep and time."

Pulling from her experiences in social work, learning to prioritize herself and her own anecdotes as a person of color, Rahi curated an AP Art portfolio that scored a 5, the highest score. She highlighted the struggles that Asian women face in today's society and her perspective on breaking that barrier.

"Art has helped Isha learn to live through what she's been through, it's almost therapeutic for her," Burns said. "She's able to visually represent the things that she thinks and believes and it's even furthered her passion for entrepreneurship and wanting to help women. [When I saw her portfolio] I was in awe."

Using this portfolio as her prime example, Isha ran for president of National Arts Honor Society on a platform of using art as a safe space to advocate for change.

"She definitely had a huge impact last year," junior NAHS vice president Amanda Zhu said. "Having the president role has launched her more into the spotlight and she has taken to it so well."

Rahi plans on creating a haven for all types of people, introducing art as just one way to slip away from the bustling world.

"Sometimes you just need a break and art is that break," Rahi said. "I don't want people to look at National Arts Honors Society as just another club or something you do for a chord; when people participate, they realize what the meaning is behind the club. It's important for people to understand that you're heard, you're valued and we want you here."

For the record: A look at 4 of DFW’s music stores

As soon as I got into the car with *The Sidekick* entertainment editor Ainsley Dwyer, I could already feel the music I was about to hold in my hands. We were on our way to explore some of the most popular record stores across Dallas-Fort Worth, an assignment that felt like anything but work as a vinyl lover. As we headed excitedly toward our first destination with Fleetwood Mac’s 1977 *Rumours* blaring through the speakers of Ainsley’s Mini Cooper, I knew this experience would practically write itself. All I had to do was listen.



Doc's Records and Vintage in Fort Worth

Our first stop was **Doc’s Records and Vintage** in Fort Worth. While it’s the farthest store from Coppell on this list, it makes up for it by being a haven of vintage and music alike. The records themselves are very well organized and had a great variety of both new and used vinyls with a range of prices. The staff was extremely knowledgeable and helpful, happily answering my questions about specific records I was looking for.

However, I will say what makes this store one of my absolute favorites on this list is the parts of the store not dedicated to vinyls, but vintage and memorabilia. Taking up half of the store’s large space was an assortment of vendors selling mainly vintage clothing. I had so much fun looking through the racks and found some truly incredible pieces, such as several vintage leather jackets I fell madly in love with and dozens of vintage slip dresses.

They also had vendors selling vintage toys and collectibles, sure to be responsible for a wave of nostalgia for many generations, my favorite being a “Buffy the Vampire Slayer” action figure from the early 2000s. The store got a lot of its character from the hundreds of pieces of film and television memorabilia lining the walls, such as cardboard cutouts and a replica prop of Slimer from *Ghostbusters*.



Doc's Records and Vintage in Fort Worth



Doc's Records and Vintage in Fort Worth.



Forever Young Records in Grand Prairie



Forever Young Records in Grand Prairie

Ask any record collector across DFW, if you’re looking for a rare record, chances are you’ll find it at **Forever Young Records** in Grand Prairie.

Forever Young has the largest selection of records, CDs and cassettes out of any of the stores on this list. From original pressings of Elvis Presley records to a vinyl solely dedicated to the forgotten songs coming out of Seattle in the 1990s, to even the *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* soundtrack with the beloved alien on the record itself, Forever Young has it all. Being the first record store I ever visited, I know my way around the place and the nostalgia of beginning my record collection here hits me as I sift through the stacks.

One of my favorite aspects of the store that makes it unique to others on this list is that Forever Young doesn’t just sort by genre, but by decade. It has a separate section for soundtracks, scores and singles, making it super easy to navigate, aside from the insane amount of media itself.

Store manager Gary Austin has worked at Forever Young for a little over a year. A lifetime collector himself, Austin has thousands of vinyls at home, and is always looking for more. We talked about the beauty of vinyl in an increasingly digital age.

“To me it’s like a way of educating people on the world of music,” Austin said.



Forever Young Records in Grand Prairie



Josey Records in Farmers Branch



Josey Records in Farmers Branch

Josey Records in Farmers Branch was probably my most anticipated stop on this list. Being the favorite of many Coppell High School students I know, including Ainsley, I was excited to see what all the talk was about, and I have to say, I was not disappointed (for the most part).

15 minutes from Coppell, Josey is the second closest option on this list, and is definitely worth a visit. While it is now a chain store with several locations across Texas, Oklahoma and Missouri, Josey’s roots lie here in DFW, evident in the fact that its largest locations are all within the Metroplex. The Dallas location alone is more than 15,000 square feet, with both used and new records and other music related goods.

While I love many aspects of the store, the only thing I didn’t quite groove with was the level of organization I saw while visiting their store. Josey has their vinyls separated similarly to many shops on this list, by genre then alphabet.

However, for a store with thousands of records, the way the music is organized is too broad, and makes the searching process quite overwhelming. The most frustrating aspect is the store has records sorted alphabetically, and within these alphabetized sections, the albums are mixed up. You might find a Lou Reed album (Re) right next to The Rolling Stones (Ro), and when just a single letter section contains hundreds of vinyls, this can make the process of finding one album difficult and very time consuming.

While this may work for smaller stores, for one as large as Josey, the system may need a revamp. However, I don’t consider this to be a fatal flaw for the store, just one I think people should be aware of before visiting, and I don’t think I would go again if I was looking for multiple albums unless I had a few hours to spare.

But nonetheless, I highly recommend Josey for its proximity to Coppell, fair pricing, great selection and dedicated staff.



Josey Records in Farmers Branch



Josey Records in Farmers Branch

Dead Wax Records in downtown Carrollton was our last stop on this trip, it’s the perfect place to visit when hanging out with friends or on a date, given the fact it is the closest store on this list to Coppell, and is surrounded by various other amazing small businesses, including antique shops and various places to eat.

The store is on the smaller side with vinyl memorabilia and posters plastered on every wall. I found the store for the amount of stock it had to be well organized, and liked the fact that soundtracks had their own section, as did film scores. They also had an impressively large sale section, and an incredible selection of used records at discounted prices, such as Jefferson Airplane’s *Surrealistic Pillow*, Weezer’s *Green Album* and Deftones’ *Covers*.

However, I love this vinyl destination because of the staff during our visit. Danny and J.T. of Dead Wax Records were the most hospitable and friendly of any of the staff members we talked to at the various stores, spending time to tell us some other places to visit, the history of Dead Wax and their own experiences as vinyl collectors.

Danny and J.T. have a passion for what they do and are truly the burning flame of the Dead Wax candle. I would go back just to hear another one of their stories.

I had a wonderful time walking through each of these stores, and they all have aspects that make them worth a visit. Whether you’re just starting your vinyl collection or an experienced buyer, I encourage you to step out of your comfort zone, go out into our local community, and find the music for yourself. I assure you, it’s out there.

Photos by Ainsley Dwyer



Marli Field
Staff Writer
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Dead Wax Records in Carrollton



Dead Wax Records in Carrollton



Dead Wax Records in Carrollton



Dead Wax Records in Carrollton

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- AUTUMN

BONES

COBWEB

EERIE

FRIGHTENED

GHOSTLY

HALLOWEEN

HAUNTED

JACK-O'-LANTERN
- MAGIC

MONSTER

PARANORMAL

SCARECROW

SCARY STORY

THANKFUL

TOMBSTONE

TURKEY

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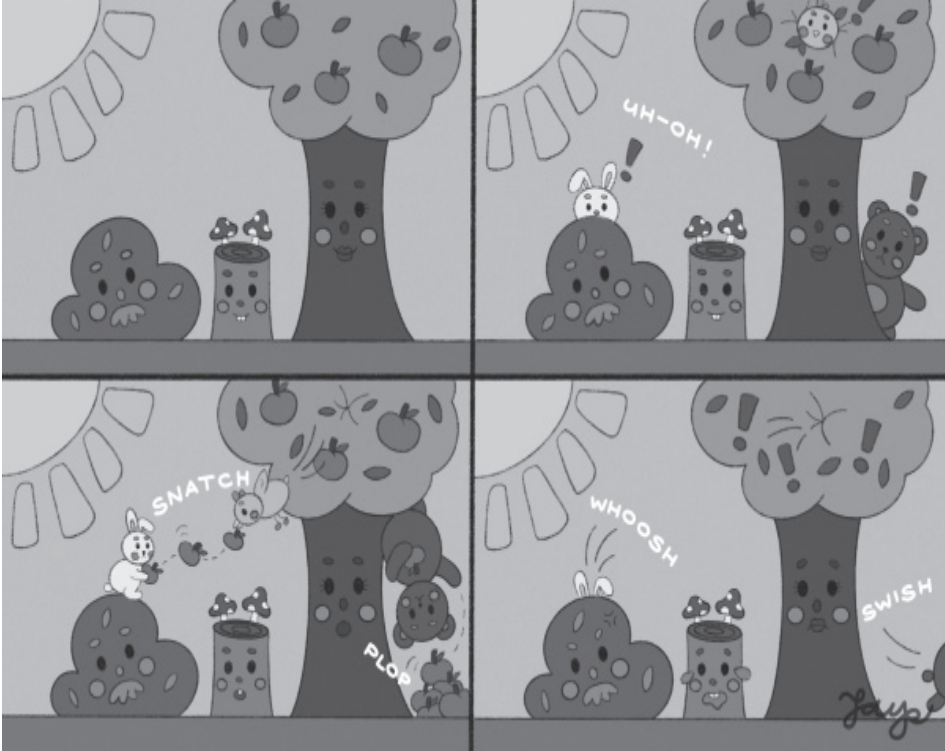
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COMICS



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Mice snacks

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Patton setting high standard for Coppell tennis

Sabah Uddin
Staff Writer
@CHSCampusNews

In the Coppell High School hallways, sophomore tennis captain Lexie Patton can seem unassuming and shy. However, upon walking onto the tennis court, she becomes the fiercest competitor.

With her relentless hits and unending stamina, her hits and name both demand attention and ward off opposing players.

Before officially being named head coach of Coppell tennis, Alyssa Noonan observed Patton play doubles with sister Lindsay Patton at the spring Class 6A State Tournament.

"They had a really good dynamic, both very skilled players, very confident and worked well together," Noonan said. "I've gotten to know Lexie this year, it's been great to see off-court Lexie. She's kind, genuine and hilarious. But that first impression, she was so serious on the court and intense."

In freshman year, Lexie felt overshadowed by her sister's experience and seniority. However, after her sister's injury and the start of Lexie playing line one, Lexie feels she took off that blanket and started showing her own potential.

"There is another Patton sister, and it's not just the little sister," Lexie said.

After being inspired to play tennis by Lindsay, Lexie has dedicated the last 10 years to hone her technique and mental fortitude. A unique pairing of siblings, Lexie and Lindsay placed third overall in doubles at the state tournament.

Part of Lexie's talent comes from her experience playing at Las Colinas Country Club. Jakob Paulsen, Lexie's academy and private coach since 2015, has observed the years of consistency and sheer dedication that shaped Lexie into the athlete she is today.

"When she was 6 to 9 years old, she truly believed she could beat anybody," Paulsen said. "It didn't matter if I paired her with her sister or a coach, she believed she could beat them regardless of level or age. If she lost, that would make her extremely upset. That shows the mindset she had was different than most others, which helped her a lot in improving."

Once she got older, she became more calm and now carries herself well on the court."

Because tennis is an individual sport, mental fortitude and calmness on the court is essential. Paulsen also attributes Lexie's success to her athletic capabilities, in which she has fortified over time through not just tennis, but other school sports, such as track and field – even achieving district champion in middle school with a 5:47 mile time.

"She has a very rare combination of athleticism, which is explosiveness and durability," Paulsen said. "Usually, you have one or the other, but something genetic is unusual with her because she can run extremely fast and never gets tired. Her physical aspect is unheard of, and it's not something you can just train for."

Despite being younger than many opponents and sometimes carrying less impressive statistics on paper, Lexie fights



Coppell sophomore Lexie Patton hits a forehand during practice on Sept. 18 at the Coppell Tennis Center. Patton is captain of the tennis team and has been playing tennis for more than 10 years. Rhea Choudhary

relentlessly during matches.

"When the opposing girl knows Lexie, nobody wants to play her, because you know you're in for a long match if you try and beat her," Paulsen said. "Most do not want to sacrifice two hours of pain because they aren't mentally as strong as Lexie."

Currently, Patton plays doubles with fellow sophomore Gabby Rice. Their middle school rivalry was heated, but as they bonded, their friendship and chemistry became essential to their current playing dynamic.

"It was like we had to beat each other, rivals, rivals, rivals," Rice said. "It was like that going into ninth grade too, but after I hurt my shoulder, I was no longer playing and got to cheer her on, and she would cheer me on through my recovery. That bonded us so when I came back this year we were really close."

According to Rice, one of Lexie's biggest strengths is her unending dependability.

"Lexie has the consistency down," Rice said. "She's always able to put the ball back in play whenever I mess up, and she's always able to bring me up and my confidence. Our game styles are like polar opposites, but they attract so well."

As a tennis captain, Lexie not only supports herself but her teammates too, such as using her water breaks to cheer teammates on from another court or building relationships with her partners.

"I feel like I have a strong connection to both my doubles partners," Lexie said. "Obviously, Lindsay is my sister, and Gabby is my best friend. It's been good having doubles partners that I can trust. I want to be my best for them, and I feel like that pushed me to another level because I want them to be able to rely on me and know that I will put my best foot forward to help us win."

In the near future, Patton hopes to go to regionals as a team and compete at state in the spring, either in singles or doubles. In the long term, she aims to play for a Division I school and be top of the lineup.

"Athletes of her caliber are made purely of their own drive," Noonan said. "She is one million percent responsible for the player she is today and I'm so proud of who she is."



Coppell sophomore Lexie Patton prepares to return a serve during her doubles match against McKinney Boyd on Oct. 10 at the Coppell Tennis Center. Patton is captain of the tennis team and has been playing tennis for more than 10 years. Avani Munji

Lexie's fun facts

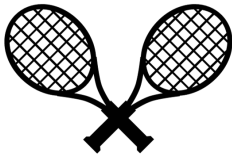
STARTED PLAYING TENNIS 10 YEARS AGO



LOVES TO SHOP AT STONEBRIAR AND NORTH PARK MALL



TRAINS AT LAS COLINAS COUNTRY CLUB



Cusano's heart for others shines through as team manager

Namir Awan
Staff Photographer
@namir_awan

There are merely 10 minutes standing between the Coppell football team and kickoff. On the sideline is senior manager Jackson Cusano.

While he jumps hyping up his teammates, his heart is palpitating. Are the screws tightened correctly? Are all the players padded up?

Being a manager in any sport, especially as a student, may seem easy with its fair share of perks. But it is not like that. When Cusano had the honor of taking up the position of team manager for the Cowboys, he grasped it and never looked back.

"It is definitely tough work," Cusano said. "I have so much responsibility. If someone's helmet pops off it's my fault because I didn't tighten it enough. But, I'm blessed to have the team and the coaches I have, helping me and allowing me to work with them."

Cusano's football story, however, started long before this position.

Back in third grade, Cusano started playing football for his dad, Mark Cusano. Mr. Cusano was a starting linebacker at USC and football meant the world to him. Jackson, however, kept his true feelings secret, never enjoying the sport. His only motivation to keep playing football was to use it as a way to connect with his dad.

"My personality isn't the hard-hitting strong guy," Jackson said. "I was more there for the boys, the experience and behind the scenes jobs than the actual gameplay."

Jackson always had a colorful and caring personality. CHS Principal Laura Springer met Jackson when she was principal at Coppell Middle School East.

"He is just so kind to everyone, hard working, loyal, dependable and conscientious," Springer said. "I am so blessed to have him around. He's been in my life so long that he's a shadow of me."



Coppell High School senior Jackson Cusano rushes to get back to Buddy Echols Field for halftime at the Coppell football game against Plano East on Oct. 13. Cusano fills the role of team manager with kindness and attention to support the team. **Wendy Le**

Throughout middle school and his first two years of high school, Cusano pushed through his dislike for the game and continued to play football.

As the 2021-22 school year came to an end, Jackson finally found the strength to disclose to his father his choice to part ways with playing football.

"I was really worried that this would break our bond," Jackson said. "Although I knew he was disheartened, he was very accepting of the fact and let me know that

as long as I'm happy he's happy."

At this point in time, Jackson still didn't know what was going to happen regarding his years of being a part of a football team.

"When he told me he was quitting football, I was definitely very disappointed," Mr. Cusano said. "At the time I didn't know what was going to happen to him regarding football."

While everyone thought that he wouldn't be a part of the football program

anymore, Coppell coach Antonio Wiley had other plans.

"I saw that his care for football was not as much as his care for the students on this team," Wiley said. "He sees his teammates as more than just athletes, he sees them as brothers. He sees the human side of them."

Wiley also saw that he had a passion for education and service.

"He's willing to go out of his way to help others despite any difficulty it may cause him," Wiley said. "Being an educator is tough work. There will be scenarios when you have to make hard decisions and being the manager of a football team is the best thing that I believe could happen for Jackson."

Wiley had the perfect roster spot for Jackson.

"He came to me one afternoon and told me that he loved what he saw leadership wise," Jackson said. "He then offered me a spot on the team as a manager."

Jackson was ecstatic to find out that he would be able to give back to the team and the field in a different aspect: helping his brothers and teammates.

"He helps us as much as he can," junior quarterback Edward Griffin said. "He builds the locker room and brings energy when we are tired or when we need it."

Utilizing his skills and versatility as team manager, Jackson sees himself pursuing a future in education with Springer as his role model. Joining Texas Association of Future Educators (TAFE) his first year of high school, Jackson decided that being an educator was definitely the path for him.

"Looking back to when I was young, I always loved to help people out," Jackson said. "I would go out of my way to ensure that everyone was getting the help they needed. This is what led me to my further aspiration to become an educator."

Jackson realized that his connection to people and his strive for education is his true calling, something he will pursue indefinitely.

"Always follow your dreams and your passion," Jackson said. "Don't let anything or anyone decide who you are or your future ahead of you."



Coppell High School senior Jackson Cusano rushes to get back to Buddy Echols Field for halftime at the Coppell football game against Plano East on Oct. 13. Cusano fills the role of team manager with kindness and attention to support the team. **Wendy Le**

Courts to cross country

Sherrer races through the finish line



Coppell junior cross country runner Mallory Sherrer is a standout runner on the cross country team, helping lead her team to a successful district season. Sherrer holds the title of being one of the fastest girls' cross country runners for the 2023 season at Coppell High School, along with having several other high stats recorded. **Maddy Park**

MALLORY'S

MAD

MINUTES

5K

18:51.07

1600m

5:14

3200m

11:31

800m

2:19

Rhea Choudhary

Staff Writer

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The rhythmic sound of running shoes hitting the ground, the cool breeze in the early morning, and the competitive spirit in the air—these are the elements that make up the world of high school cross country.

In the heart of this athletic universe, you'll find CHS junior Mallory Sherrer, not just competing but soaring past her competition.

Prior to finding her calling in cross country, Sherrer explored various sports including volleyball, basketball, and track. Her passion for running began in the sixth grade at Coppell Middle School North, and five years later, she became one of the fastest girls cross-country runners at CHS.

Sherrer's achievements include an 800-meter run in just 2 minutes and 19 seconds, a 1,600-meter run in 5 minutes and 14 seconds, a 3,200m run in 11 minutes and 31 seconds, and a 5K run in 18 minutes and 51 seconds. These times translate to an average of about five minutes per mile, leaving her competitors in the dust.

Sherrer's journey is not just about talent or being naturally gifted as a fast runner; it is about the unwavering amount of hard work she puts into the sport.

"I've been coaching Mallory for the past three years now, but the commitment and

passion I'm able to see in her specifically this year has been unmatched," cross country coach Landon Wren said. "The most remarkable quality I've seen in Mallory is that she completes each workout with the purpose of getting better. It takes a great deal of passion for teenagers to want to get up early and run what seems like an endless number of miles everyday."

Cross country at CHS is a year-round pursuit with training that never stops, even on holidays. The preparation for district meets intensifies in May, with practice sessions six days a week, starting at 7 a.m. However, Sherrer's commitment goes beyond the track as she puts her all into balancing her academic responsibilities.

"What you learn in cross country easily carries over into the classroom, and vice versa," Wren said. "Grades are never an issue with Mallory because she always takes care of business in the classroom. She is what we consider an unofficial cap-

tain on the girls' team because she cares about everyone's racing strategies, steps up and asks everyone about their nutrition, and helps out a lot with warm-ups and cooling down stretches."

Sherrer's commitment recently paid off when she earned a spot in the top 10 runners among a fierce competition of 50 girls at the District 6-6A Meet at North Lake Park in Denton on Friday, October 13.

"The fact that Mallory is one of the team's best runners never gets in the way of her encouraging and optimistic attitude, because she never lets her high times and awards boost her ego," freshman runner Maya Easterwood said. "Mallory is someone who will hold everyone accountable for completing their workouts, but she will also push herself to her maximum potential in the workout room. She is someone who will remain calm and handle friendly com-

petition very positively."

Sherrer is not just spending her time running daily; she's sprinting toward a bright future. With Sherrer having high hopes of being on the track and cross country team at her future college, her goals include becoming a student-athlete at the University of Colorado, in Colorado Springs, or Wake Forest University.

"While I'm always nervous about competing with other highly qualified runners in such tough courses, I hope that all of my practice ends up paying off, and I know that if I do my best, my times will reflect that," Sherrer said. "The good part about cross country is that you are fully in control of your results, because your times are a testament to how much hard work you put in. I've learned that if you push yourself to your highest potential, when competing, your efforts will pay off."

Coppell High School junior Mallory Sherrer holds her running shoes, a pair of Hoka sneakers, after morning practice on Oct 20. Sherrer holds the title of being one of the fastest girls' cross country runners for the 2023-2024 school year at CHS, along with having several other high stats recorded. **Maddy Park**

“

Mallory is someone who will hold everyone accountable for completing their workouts, but she will also push herself to her maximum potential in the workout room.”

- Maya Easterwood

Coppell freshman cross country runner

The Final Serve

Klem leaves lasting legacy on court

Riya Prasad
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“Give yourself the same grace you give to your teammates.”

That is the advice senior co-captain Mira Klem of the Coppell volleyball team has made her personal mantra after years of diligence.

Encouraged by her parents and motivated by her siblings, Klem signed up for almost every sport in the book.

“My mom played tennis and my dad played baseball in high school, and as kids they tried out a bunch of different sports, like soccer, baseball and more,” Klem said. “This influenced me because I was raised in a really competitive household with two older brothers, and we all took on multiple sports.”

After being exposed to a variety of sports ranging from gymnastics to middle school basketball, Klem honed in on her passion for volleyball. Playing for a diverse array of club volleyball teams including Texas Advantage Volleyball, Excel, Drive Nation and Tejas Volleyball, Klem was able to find a sisterhood within every single one— accentuating her love for the sport.

“No matter how rough the season was going or if we didn’t like the coach, my teams have always been tight knit, and I have gotten to know some of my best friends from volleyball,” Klem said.

Since holding the position of setter from her YMCA volleyball days, a role that tends to be regarded with a leadership title on youth volleyball leagues, Klem often saw herself developing into a reliable figure for her high school’s team someday.

However, as she advanced in her volleyball career, Klem noticed how a player’s position on the team had little correlation to why they were chosen as leaders.

“One of our captains last year, Skye Lamendola, influenced me because she was an extremely versatile player,” Klem said. “She played in the position I currently play, and I idolized her because even though she held such a huge role on the team she still managed to connect with all the players on the team.”

To reach her full potential, Klem decided to strive for a spot on the varsity team.

Taking it to heart every year she missed the mark, Klem decided to push herself to improve upon any weakness. Her dedication and work ethic opened a spot for Klem on varsity her junior year.

“Up until my sophomore year I had never played serve receive because I had mostly been setting,” Klem said. “I



Coppell senior opposite hitter co-captain Mira Klem prepares to receive a serve on Oct. 17 against Hebron. Klem stepped into a leadership role this season and implemented the same positive influence on her teammates as her predecessors. Eirene Park

had to serve-serve in rotation when I began hitting, and at first I really struggled with it. However, after practicing non stop in the gym I can now serve-serve every game.”

From her initial experiences of confronting aspects of volleyball that challenged her, Klem has progressed a long way. Through the course of her high school volleyball career, Klem has embraced the challenges thrown her way in order to become a more versatile player. Not only has Klem’s ambition given her the assets to become a force of nature on game day, it intensifies her team’s abilities.

“I’m proud of my versatility on court because I am able to take initiative whenever and wherever my team needs assistance,” Klem said.

Stepping up to the role of co-captain for her senior season, Klem was left to emerge into this leadership role. By executing her acquired knowledge from past

leadership into her own, Klem continues to be a source of inspiration to the other girls.

“It can be really difficult to step into that role after being under so many strong leaders last year,” Coppell volleyball coach Robyn Ross said. “Mira continues to perfect how to deliver expectations to her teammates without discouraging them, and how to keep the program standards high.”

Using self observation for dictating how to guide the younger girls on the team towards a more fulfilling group experience, Klem promotes positivity on the court by celebrating the “small wins” in losses. This is more effective in making improvements on court rather than lowering morale.

“Mira is a hard worker and leads by example which is what I look for in the girls who will lead within this program,” Ross said. “She is dedicated to this program and her teammates.”

Teammates appreciate the high standards Klem sets.

“Mira always gives 100% at practices and this has been reflected over the years,” senior co-captain Kate Macdonald said. “And she is a player we can rely on to push us to be our best during a game.”

Leadership is holding yourself to higher standards than you hold your team to, and in Klem’s case it is also giving them a target to aim for.

Klem played her last home game on Oct. 24, with her season coming to a bittersweet ending.

“Even though it didn’t end the way we wanted to, this was a game we played the most as a team and we really put as much effort and everything we had on the court and never once did we give up or start shutting down,” Klem said. “We were always there for each other and did everything in our power to do as best as we could.”



Coppell senior opposite hitter co-captain Mira Klem stepped into a leadership role this season. Klem implemented the same positive influence on her teammates as her predecessors. Wendy Le, Sahasra Chakilam and Vibha Viswanath

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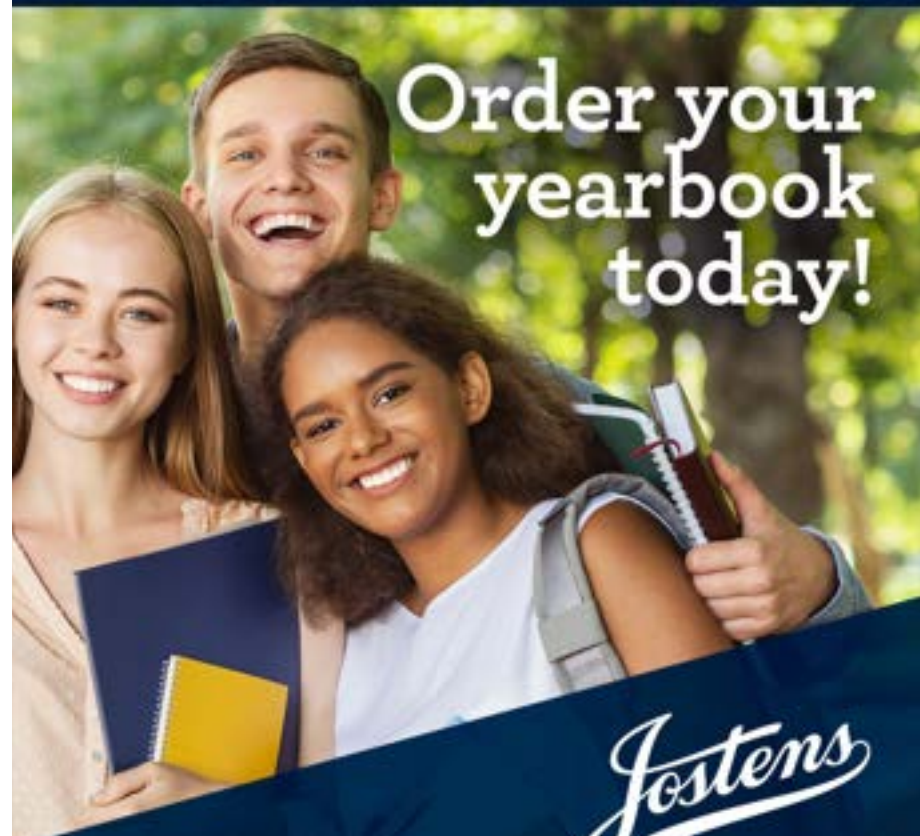


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