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# PANTHER PRINTS

NOV. 10, 2020

ISSUE 1



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At Panther Prints, our mission is to serve as a connection between the Plano East student body and surrounding communities. Through inspiration and high-quality content, Panther Prints offers diverse coverage, passionate writing, relatable stories and a unique point of view. Our credible sources allow an in-depth experience that appeals to both the public and the individual. Our publication offers an informative and distinctive outlook on current interests.

### Digital Media Policy:

We at the Panther Prints commit to responsibly utilize all of our media platforms to unite and inform the student body. We strive to create original content and attribute credit to all sources. We require our staff to uphold these values and to accurately report the news to the student body and community.

# Letters from the...

## Editor-in-Chief

Being the first issue under Myh and my direction and also the first Panther Prints issue being released amid a pandemic- this issue has had its fair share of roadblocks. I'm happy to see it finally released and I hope those that read take light of what the staff and I have written. I'm sad to think that this issue will never get the release day it deserves. The staff has worked so hard and learned so much in these past few months. I hope you all can appreciate and enjoy our hard work.

## Bree Johnson

## Editor-in-Chief

The production of this issue came with its unique setbacks and challenges, but I couldn't be prouder of what we've accomplished. We were able to skillfully tackle issues such as social justice, the implications of the coronavirus pandemic, the presidential election and more. Despite our physical distance due to the pandemic, we have already formed deep, lasting friendships in the newsroom. This was also Bree and my first issue as co-editors in chief, and this process has taught us so much about the impact of our journalism, leadership and personal growth. I am genuinely so excited for you to see this issue and all the hard work that has been put into it. So what are you waiting for? Go read those articles!

## Myh Seyoum

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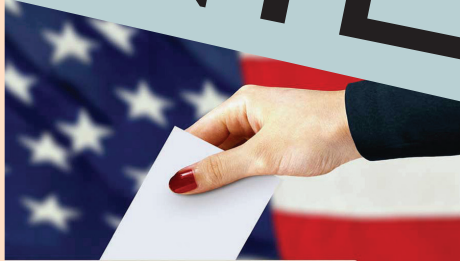
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**Cover Photo: Bree Johnson**

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# The 2020 Election

The 2020 presidential election between Democrat Joe Biden and Republican Donald Trump has proven to be an important election in U.S. history with record number of 100 million Americans opting for early voting.

“Biden is more sensitive to minorities and people of color, and he understands and supports the Black Lives Matter movement rather than shutting it down,” junior Vani Shah said. “I agree with his idea of building environmentally-friendly resources because it’s long-term thinking, which is something Trump hasn’t thought about because we are ‘now-thinkers.’”

“[Trump] does a great job keeping unwanted criminals and potential gang members out of our society, but I also feel that he does a good job of trying to let the good people in who are trying to help our economy, lives and well being,” junior Garrett Osborne said.

Having a low voter turnout in the 2016 election, the number of Texas votes surpassed 11 million this year, which raised questions whether or not Texas would stay a Republican state or become Democratic. Titled as a swing state, Texas was declared a win for Donald Trump with 52.2% of votes. Biden narrowly lost Texas’ 38 electoral votes having 46.6% of Texas votes. Joe Biden was declared the President-Elect on Nov. 8, 2020 with 290 electoral votes and also won the popular vote (75,462,478). Current President Donald Trump has not agreed to concede to Biden, stating claims of “voter fraud” and vowing to take the election results to the Supreme Court.

•As of Nov. 9

By Abby Nguyen

# NEW IB COUNSELORS

By Samantha Heath



As a result of the hybrid learning model, new IB counselors were hired to assist students in navigating their new environment. This means there are now a total of 10 counselors with only two of them being strictly for International Baccalaureate students.

The IB program is a two year-program education system taken over four years in which students are taught to think critically and independently while also inquiring with both care and logic. As confusion caused by the pandemic arises, the counselors were added to help ease the worries of students who might need help in their assignments or studies. Counselors spend most of their time in direct contact and service with their students, and IB counselors are no different. Temie Lehman and Emily Hoang are the two newly-selected staff members that will work alongside those in the program.

“IB World wanted to have two dedicated counselors for the IB students for a couple of years,” Lehman said. “When four openings happened in the counseling department, it was the perfect opportunity to hire two of us as IB counselors.”

Encompassing the changes inevitably brought upon the students as restrictions are put in place, the staff tries to take a flexible approach and modify some aspects of how the program will be conducted given the current health concerns and limited resources. A majority of questions have been about class schedules, following up on missing credits for graduation and making sure students are on the right path to meet requirements of the IB program. However, because of

the lack of in-person communication at the moment, they’ve tried to find other ways to communicate with their students.

“We all have Google forms set up so when a student scans a QR code, we get notified that they need to see us and why,” Hoang said. “We also have Google Classrooms set up when we need to have class meetings over counseling topics like Naviance or FAFSA, or a student can email and request a Zoom or in-person meeting.”

The counselors found themselves challenging a wide variety of problems such as weak communication between the people they were hired to assist and how they would progress in their actions as the unique approach was practiced throughout each week.

“I think the pandemic has made it hard to have connections with students,” Lehman said. “I see new 9th grade students struggling with their schoolwork or understanding exactly what they have to do because they aren’t in school every day to get hands-on support from their teachers or myself.”

This hindrance in connection with students translates well as easily accessible options from in-person learning are now unavailable in a home-learning environment.

“Before, we would be able to visit classrooms to make announcements or disseminate important information to students, which is now being done electronically,” Hoang said. “In a sense, this slows the progress because we can’t assume everyone sees the emails immediately, and sometimes, a sense of urgency doesn’t seem to exist when actions are required.”

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# USPS WORKS TO ALLOW MAIL-IN VOTING DURING PANDEMIC

By Mallika Chahal



President Trump and his administration publicized concern with the United States Postal Service's ability to properly manage copious amounts of mail-in voting ballots for this year's presidential election. However, the widespread coronavirus pandemic has interfered with the voting process primarily due to health concerns, especially pertaining to the safety of elderly voters who may choose mail-in voting.

The USPS mandates all mail-in voting, which appoints specific criteria for eligibility, includes age and possible disabilities or illnesses. Given the pandemic restrictions, where millions of absentee ballots are expected, President Trump has stressed his lack of faith in the USPS's ability to oversee mail-in votes as they can be found "fraudulent". In addition to mail-in voting, the USPS offers additional services such as general delivery.

The USPS is a federal agency, however its funding has no dependence on taxpayer dollars. The USPS insisted they are well-prepared and have the resources to oversee the mail-in voting process as the pandemic persists. Despite this, their request for \$25 billion in funding and the agency's efficiency in its entirety is being questioned.

Despite the majority of voters conducting the process in-person, President Trump has heavily scrutinized the USPS and Democrats

believe it is due to their own party being more likely to vote through absentee ballots. Senior Layla Bensellam voted

why mail-in voting could be a valuable option for millions of Americans.

"People are scared to go to places

that are very congested and in this case, the old people," Singh said. "They are more vulnerable to COVID-19, so this [mail-in voting] goes in [their] favor."

Despite Trump's opposition to the USPS's mail-in voting service, he said he would not veto a coronavirus relief bill that includes financial support for the Postal Service during a White House briefing in August as he simply wants an "accurate vote." When presented with the information of Trump's criticism of the USPS, Singh suggested it could be due to "the postal service not doing well" as they are "under huge loss."

In September, senate failed to pass the bill that would have provided \$10 billion to the postal service. The failure to pass this bill created another roadblock for the USPS nationwide. Complications surrounding mail-in voting have occurred statewide too.

Gov. Greb Abbott limited Texas counties to a one mail-ballot drop off site. As a Texan voter, Bensellam voiced her thoughts on Abbott's ruling.

"Limiting anyone's right to vote is definitely considered voter suppression in my opinion," Bensellam said.



***Texan voter Ranjit Singh opens his mailbox and looks for his absentee ballot, that he later used to vote. The United States Postal Service provides mail-in ballots for citizens who are eligible, such as Ranjit who qualifies because he is over 65. The mailed document contains the ballot as well as additional legal information that is filled out then returned to a drop-off location within the county.***

in-person and spoke on USPS's role in accounting for ballots.

"As American citizens, it's our right to vote," Bensellam said. "Military, elderly, disabled, sick and other people that can't make it in person should be able to have the access to vote by mail."

Due to not meeting the criteria to vote by mail, Bensellam voted in-person at her nearest voting location in Collin County. Those who did meet mail-in voting criteria, did vote through mail, with over 65 million mail in ballots.

U.S. Census employee and active Texan mail-in voter Ranjit Singh holds similar views to Bensellam and suggests

Photo By Mallika Chahal

# SCHOLARSHIP SEMIFINALISTS, SURPRISING SUCCESS

by Angela Tatsch



“Ding!” Two senior students unlock their phones and see messages from their peers. “Congratulations!” Confused, they look closer at the texts and see their names bolded among a list of their peers. It’s a list of the National Merit Scholarship Semifinalists.

“When I was going into the PSAT, I really had no expectations of being a National Merit Semifinalist,” senior Priya Bapna said.

It was her first college board test—besides AP exams—making the news a shock. However, her pathway to its success was not; Bapna attended numerous classes at KD College Prep since ninth grade.

“Practicing tests is the best way to prepare because you learn how to manipulate it and get it within the time limit,” Bapna said.

After tenth grade, she took practice tests, leading her to only missing two out of 108 questions on the PSAT.

Another individual out of the 103 students in Plano I.S.D. to make it into the semifinals took a different approach.

“The PSAT was more of an afterthought really,” senior Patrick Premilan said. “I was focusing on the SAT for college admissions.”

Premilan practiced SAT tests, doing 20-25 the summer before his exam in October 2019. As a prospective investment banker, Premilan excelled in the math section (scoring 760/760) but didn’t do as well in the reading portion (later scoring 730/760).

“It’s not simply recalling information and applying it like math,” Premilan said. “It’s not like some kind of formula. You’re supposed to actually think and it takes time.”

Premilan also attended KD. His mother drove him three times a week since he did not have his license and the drive was 45 minutes away.

“I’m really thankful for being able to have a family that can afford and have the time to send me to KD and allow me to have all of these opportunities,” Premilan said.

Premilan’s family and counselor assisted him in the qualifying compo-

nent for becoming a finalist: an essay. Bapna had a clever strategy for this.

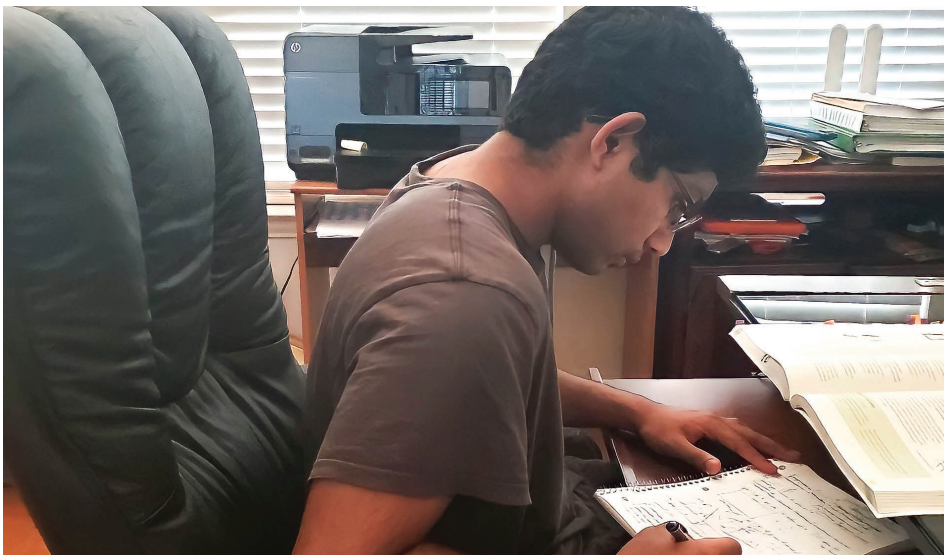
“It’s an essay based on one of my college essays,” Bapna said. “I used a similar topic.”

Creating mind maps, bullet points and drafts, Bapna restructured her essay and got it within the word limit. Although this took a week, Bapna had struggles with the process, too: this year, the pandemic struck and she was assigned a new counselor. At first it was intimidating to work with someone new, but she was able to adapt.

“The counselors are reaching out to their students as much as they can,” Bapna said. “So I am really grateful.”

Just like Premilan, Bapna had many reasons for success in the scholarship.

“I was motivated by a lot of the people around me and my parents urged me to do my best, but at the end of the day, I wanted to do well for myself,” Bapna said. “And I think that is what caused me to earn it.”



**12th grade student, Patrick Premilan studies for his PSAT. The PSAT is a practice SAT taken nationally by juniors. Students are quizzed over evidence-based reading and writing, as well as math.**

Photo by Patrick Premilan

How much do you know about the National Merit Scholarship process?

23%

Of students say they know nothing.

34%

Of students say they know little.

33%

Of students say they know a decent amount.

10%

Of students say they know a lot.

\*out of 304 students polled





## ONLINE OPPORTUNITIES NHS transitions in new, virtual world

by Claire Tweedie

As the 4:15 dismissal bell rang, students piled into the cafeteria, awaiting the start of the National Honor Society meeting. The bang of a gavel from the chapter president took members' attention away from their Google form sign in and to the officers with a Powerpoint at the front of the room. The meeting started and as students settled in for roughly 30 minutes of reminders and new information, the officers were able to ask questions of one of the largest NHS chapters in the country. That's a thing of the past for this year's NHS president, senior Sridatta Teerdhala and NHS co-vice president senior Samanvitha Nukala in a new virtual world.

"I think our team has done a really good job of transitioning everything online with the portal and everything," NHS assistant coordinator of service junior Tanaz Muhamed said. "It looks amazing from the member's side and I'm really excited to see what we do."

All clubs have gone virtual this year, causing officers to find a new approach to traditional in-person extracurriculars and NHS is no exception. New changes include the creation of a credit system that gives members more leniency by only requiring eight credits instead of the 15-hour requirement from previous years. Members can gain credits through service hours, donations of \$10 or more, or by attending NHS events and programs. Another new change is the online portal. Rather than using paper logs to keep track of service credits and attendance, the

newly established portal is a completely virtual method of tracking anything and everything members may need.

"I think all the work the officers put in, the results come as expected," Nukala said.

Along with these implementations, the officers strive to make sure NHS is still accessible and fun by experimenting with Padlet service projects and creating new programs, such as guest speaker events. According to Muhamed, these events are meant to focus on "the value of education, how to complete important resumes, and make college applications a little bit easier for some of the members to tackle" along with other important topics. The NHS service committee also created a database of service opportunities consisting of everything from DIY crafts to transcribing documents for museums.

"It has been more difficult than anticipated, definitely, to switch to virtual because there was a lot we had to change with service projects and meetings," Nukala said. "Making all of that virtual was a lot of work but we had to make sure it was as easy as it could be for members so that way they have the same opportunities to get their service hours and meet other requirements."

An early struggle was ensuring open communication between officers and members. Even if they planned their virtual events successfully, if members weren't informed or weren't interested, the officers knew their efforts would be wasted. The chal-

lenge they faced was finding a balance between requirements and projects so members would want to come to the service opportunities presented to them, even without the appeal of in-person interaction.

"Now that we've kind of started off and we've had that first presentation, I feel that everything is going to go very smoothly this year," Nukala said. "I feel we all kind of have that same feeling of comfort that we're good to go."

They have yet to notice any unforeseen problems in the virtual format and their optimism continues to grow when looking at meeting attendance numbers, which are comparable to previous years that had a little over 1,000 members. Low Google Classroom participation numbers of around 300 people led to some doubts for the new NHS format, but the optional introductory meeting proved to be a success and numbers have grown to over 800 members. The pandemic also allowed for the use of new speaker events and service projects, which the officers hope to continue once the pandemic is over by merging virtual and face-to-face aspects.

"I think in the future when this COVID situation does settle down and we go back to school, we're going to have a really good balance of in person and virtual," Nukala said.

Photo by Sridatta Teerdhala



# Wying Voices

## Addressing racial injustice, path toward equality

By Angela Tatsch, Claire Tweedie and Myh Seyoum

The crowd took in the sun on a breezy June day as they marched through Haggard Park. They passed an apartment complex, where residents hung banners and flags in support of their struggle. Chants erupted from the mass of bodies, screaming “No justice, no peace! Defund the police!” They cried out, “What do we want? Equality!” Junior TJ May joined with his own voice, overwhelmed with inspiration and empowerment at the sight of the diverse group around him, all of them fighting for the same cause: to make it loud and clear that Black Lives Matter.

Both main candidates for the presidential election, President Donald Trump and President-elect Joe Biden, have made efforts to address issues of racial inequality in their campaigns for the recent November vote. Trump cites his administration’s passing of criminal justice reform measures in the form of the First Step Act in 2018 and opportunity cities, claiming he has “done more for black Americans than anybody with the possible exception of Abraham Lincoln.”

Biden made his support for the Black Lives Matter movement a significant feature of his campaign, highlighting black activism during the Democratic National Convention in August. He also proposed “The Biden Plan for Black America,” which claims his administration would enact investment in black-owned businesses, expansion of accessible health care for African American and low-income families, reform of the policing system, and more.

The issue of racial equality is significant in the election across political lines, with 52% of voters agreeing that “race and ethnic inequality” is “very important” to their vote, according to Pew Research Center. Regardless of the election’s results and resulting national policies, all American communities are subject to the historical and current implications of racial inequality.

### A Brief History of BLM

The Black Lives Matter organization was founded by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi in response to the Trayvon Martin case in 2013. The trial followed the fatal shooting of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, who had walked home from a convenience store when George Zimmerman — a man of white and Hispanic descent who was working as a neighborhood watch volunteer — claimed Martin looked suspicious. Zimmerman was acquitted of second-degree murder, leading to nationwide protests on Martin’s behalf. These protests led to the creation of the Black Lives Matter organization with the mission to “eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes.” The organization is now member-led with over 40 chapters that continue to use their platform to advocate for racial equality in the face of police brutality.

“[Black Lives Matter] is a wonderful movement,” said Star Carter, co-founder of Kanarys, Inc. — an online platform that compiles employee data and helps companies promote racial equality in workplaces — “It’s a rainbow of people chanting, recognizing that black people are suffering more injustices than others. Unfortunately, in the past, it’s been a moment. I really hope that this truly sticks around as a movement.”

Black Lives Matter has since peaked in activity following the 2014 killing of Eric Garner in New York, N.Y., bringing attention to the deaths by police brutality of Michael Brown, Walter Scott, Freddie Gray, Eric Harris and many more. Protests and petitioning more recently came to a head following the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minn. in an incident where officer Derek Chauvin asphyxiated Floyd by kneeling on his neck. Floyd’s death, alongside that of Breonna

Taylor, created racial unrest in the U.S. unprecedented since the late 1960s. Protests in Dallas lasted for consecutive days in early June, with crowds amassing thousands of protestors, and again in late September following the grand jury decision regarding Breonna Taylor’s case.

“Really, my reason [for attending a protest] is [that] I don’t want to see so much more pain and grief throughout the United States,” May said. “I just want to help people any way that I can. [The protest] was something that needed to be done, and said, and heard.”

### Perspectives in School

Delta Sub School Principal Roland Rios says many incidents regarding racism he encountered in the past three years working here end up being misunderstandings, although in his experience these concerns aren’t reported very often.

“You know, one of the things about Plano East that I find to be extremely uplifting is how diverse we are,” Rios said. “I’m hoping that Plano East can serve as a light to what it looks like to be able to be diverse and to get along. It’s pretty amazing— it’s really, really amazing to see you guys hang out with each other.”

Students like IB senior Nikolai Rura agree that racism at the school isn’t a big issue since in his experience “everybody gets along and everybody respects each other.” While he did see more instances of racist division or name calling during middle school, he believes East does a good job of uniting “a melting pot” of people.

“One of the things that sets East apart, or at least IB kids, is that we chose to come here,” Rura said. “We all chose, together, to embark on this. It was about getting through it together rather than being separated.”

Rura’s knowledge as a child of immigrant parents who fled from the collapsing Soviet Union



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changed his perspectives on what he constitutes as racial discrimination. Even with his own instances of being called a communist because of his Russian heritage, he describes name calling as “playground level stuff.”

“It’s not the same level as what my parents experienced where they had to flee the country, or what a lot of people experienced, that I know their families experienced in IB, so I think it’s just a different perspective,” Rura said.

However, Rura’s views aren’t shared by all students. Although people like senior Yemisi Badmus agree that the school is one of the most diverse in the area, she argues that a lot of anti-blackness and cultural divides are often ignored.

“There’s a lot of diversity going there, but we don’t reconcile our differences, or we don’t learn to appreciate our differences,” Badmus said.

Carter, who graduated from Plano East in 2000, recalls being called the n-word by a friend while attending elementary school during 5th grade camp. Badmus was also called names in elementary school like “Medusa” or “mophead” because of her dreadlocks, only to run home and beg her parents to let her change her hairstyle.

“I got so sick of being made fun of and being ridiculed,” Badmus said. “At some point, when you’re faced with that a lot, you just realize you start to make yourself smaller.”

Even in high school she has faced similar issues. Badmus can think of instances when she was disrespected, talked over, and when unfair assumptions were made about her because of her race. May also cites multiple instances of racism outside of school when people have driven up to him, alone or with friends, calling him racist slurs.

“It annoyed me very, very much,” May said. “It was, to me, very idiotic how you could be so judgemental or hateful toward someone for no reason at all.”

Badmus emphasizes the role education has in shaping future health care providers, judges, prosecutors, etc. For that reason, she says the failure of schools to educate students on racial issues facilitates long-lasting negative effects on black communities.

“I’ve always said that if education is where we create the leaders of tomorrow, then why are we not confronting racism?” Badmus said. “Why are we not teaching racial sensitivity? When we are not speaking up about those issues, when we are not saying anything, we are letting the future leaders of tomorrow know that behavior is okay. And so, [when] we don’t say anything, we perpetuate the same system.”

During the 2019-20, PISD’s Diversity Board Advisory Committee — active for its 19th year — served specifically to aid in the development of additional programs for teaching employees cultural sensitivity. Teacher Richard Roehrig agrees that all people could benefit from racial sensitivity training, and he confirms the district has already made efforts to ensure teachers are aware of racial issues, and how to address them in the classroom.

“I’m from New York, originally, so essentially I didn’t really see much difference [between people of different races] growing up because we had people of everything everywhere,” Roehrig said. “Moving to Texas, I found out that a lot more people were anti- one [race] or the other. And I’ve had it from both sides, so that’s what is really strange.”

### Moving Forward

In early June following the death of George Floyd, superintendent Sara Bonser and the board of trustees sent out a statement to PISD employees clarifying that any racism or discrimination toward African Americans had no place in the district.

“Our call to action must be grounded on the beliefs held in our strategic plan that in Plano ISD all students, staff and families feel safe, welcome, valued and respected,” Bonser said in the email. “We must be role models to our students and one another as we demonstrate our commitment to equality with understanding and compassion for one another.”

Administrators stress the importance of communication between students and staff — or any trusted adults — in ensuring all students feel valued in their identities. Rios calls communication “the greatest equalizer” because students must be able to convey their problems properly in order

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to achieve the best possible resolution. He also encourages students who see the mistreatment of others to report their concerns.

“The aim is not for somebody to get in trouble and to be suspended,” Rios said. “The aim for something like that is so that way we can teach.”

Many students have taken to posting resources on social media to spread awareness and encourage students to educate themselves on disparities within and mistreatment of Black communities. Former senior Ava McLeod posted short videos on her Snapchat story educating her classmates on Black history at the end of the spring semester last year.

“I think the most important thing that you can do is to reach out to somebody who might have a different perspective and just hear them out, talk to them,” Rura said. “That’s true for both sides of pretty much any argument.”

Badmus agrees with this plan of action, but claims vocalizing student incidents is difficult. In the past, she noticed these occurrences become so normalized that she doesn’t realize the error in others’ actions. She also supports racial sensitivity training for students and staff and suggests partnering with organizations like the Center for Racial Justice in Education located in Dallas. The Center offers “trainings, consultations and in-depth partnership” as well as additional resources for addressing racial disparities in schools.

“When you’re faced with [discrimination] continuously, you sort of give up and accept it because it’s easier,” Badmus said. “But I think the point is you can’t accept it.”

Carter emphasizes how widely racial inequities affect the experiences of Black Americans, in education, the workplace, police encounters, etc. She says that the mistreatment of Black individuals is “in the fabric of our society,” and that efforts like the Black Lives Matter movement are attempting to address and resolve these issues.

“[Racial equality in schools] is complicated,” Carter said. “It’s not going to be an overnight fix. It’s going to take time. But I think if there are plans and if there is intentionality to do so, any of the school districts could start really laying the foundation to build more inclusive school district and classroom dynamics.”

Photos by Bree Johnson.





# ADJUSTING TO ONLINE LEARNING DURING A PANDEMIC

by Abby Nguyen

As students and teachers settle into the new hybrid environment, with 1211 in-person students and 1922 online students, some believe virtual learning either takes away the social aspect of learning or gives students more freedom. Online student and junior Aamina Choudhry said that virtual learning limits students' learning abilities, especially since they have to work all day without real face-to-face interaction.

"I just don't feel as motivated at home because I'm the only one who's pushing myself to work, whereas if I'm around everyone else, we're all working," Choudhry said.

While Choudhry enjoys the experience of going to in-person school because of the ability to build relationships with teachers and peers, she recognizes that the risk of contracting COVID-19 still remains.

"It's a thing of want and what you have to accept," Choudhry said. "In an ideal world, I would want to do in person, but considering the circumstances, I would prefer online school just to be safe."

Although virtual learning largely impacts students, the teachers behind the computer screens have to adapt to the new changes as well, especially in hands-on classes like science. Since science is a collaborative and interactive class, staring at black screens all day makes learning lose the personal connection it normally provides between students and teachers.

"Usually by the end of the first nine weeks, we have our relationships built and have a feel to each individual classroom, but being online makes that a lot more difficult," environmental science teacher Emily Baker said.



However, virtual learning also provides freedom, especially since online students gain the ability to make their own decisions.

"It allows me to create my own schedule because during school, it was more of a strict schedule," online student and junior Iman Nasir said. "You had to be at school and you couldn't do anything in between classes."

With more time at home, Nasir said that she has been able to take better care of herself and improve her mental health.

"[In the past], as soon as I came home from school, I would do my homework and wouldn't get as much time to myself or time to do anything else," Nasir said.

Virtual learning has also changed the concept of being absent because students may have transporta-

tion issues or obligations at home, which would hinder them from being able to attend in-person school.

"We figured out a way that [students] can still be engaged and involved in the class without having to be physically present," American studies teacher Kristy Alexander said.

"With school being more centered around technology," Alexander said that the new classroom allows teachers to grade, work and assign tasks without putting everything on paper.

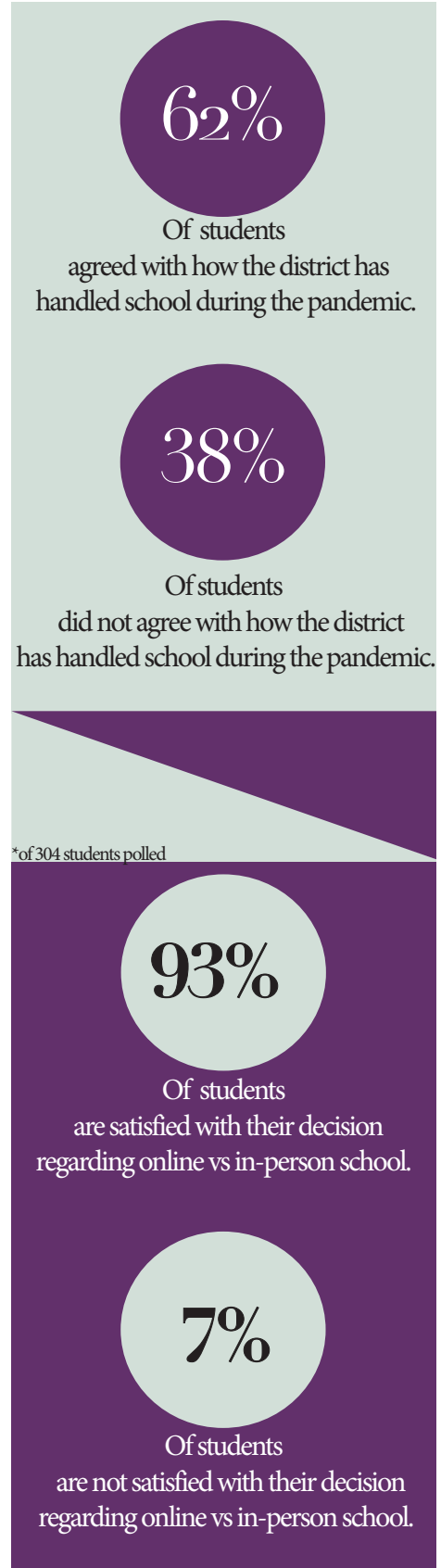
"Environmentally-speaking, we have reduced the amount of paper we use on this campus," Alexander said.

Despite the challenges, Alexander encourages students to try their best.

"This is the best process we have available to us at this particular time," Alexander said. "I know that [online learning] has faults, but I think that if you try, then you can find a way to make virtual learning work."

**"I just don't feel as motivated at home because I'm the only one who's pushing myself to work, whereas if I'm around everyone else, we're all working,"**

**Choudhry said.**





# CONSIDERATE CHOICES

## District decision to let students choose their learning environment was right choice

Staff Editorial

With the first nine weeks of the pandemic-driven school year now wrapped up, students have once again decided between an asynchronous or synchronous learning style for the next grading period. During the first quarter, the majority of students chose online with 46% of students on campus and 54% of students online. The district's appeal to students the first nine weeks has been that this school year is all about choice. PISD expressed multiple times that the decision to stay online versus in-person is a decision made solely by the student and families with no pressure from the district. While their statement is mostly accurate; the choice for schooling this year does have clauses.

For the second nine weeks, approximately 61% of students chose to do online, making this the majority decision by a slim percentage. Students choosing this option chose to learn remotely— having virtual meetings two days a week and asynchronous assignments the other three. Like any decision, there are pros and cons to online school which affect students' grades, morale and learning environment. The major pro for online school is obvious: safety. Students attending school online cut down their interactions with other students/staff by 100%, meaning that they are at less risk to catch COVID-19 than those who do attend school. Another positive for both of the schooling options this year is the freedom associated with online school. Having three asynchronous days gives students the freedom to work, study and socialize while still completing their work before 11:59 p.m. This level of freedom is a great trial run for college as well as a great way to learn time management. Without the usual strict schedule and supervision from teachers, some stu-

dents find it easy to fall behind in class, thus becoming stressed, unmotivated and having their grades suffer. It's very easy to get confused in online school considering at times you are teaching yourself the material. Confusion is normal, it's natural and it happens to all students. However, before you could simply raise your hand to ask a question. Students now need to write an email and wait for a response, which is a time-consuming process for asking a simple question. Often classmates have similar questions and can help one another out, this element of socialization is taken away through Zoom. As expected, online school creates a safe environment for learning, but acts as a buffer for communication.

Students also chose to go in-person with around 46% of the population attending school twice a week and having asynchronous assignments three times a week. Being in-person gives students the structure they need to keep grades high, morale high and understanding in check. Having school as normal as possible is an easy choice for students who don't adapt to change well. In-person school provides students with easier communication with their teachers, socialization and a strict schedule forcing them to keep on top of their learning and assignments. Many students trust the district and their safety protocol citing that school is safer than expected and the pros outweigh the possible cons. COVID-19 is an obvious fear for most students, but with the district keeping things as safe as possible (such as enforcing mask-wearing, constant sanitization, keeping six feet distance from each other when possible), the choice to have normal school twice a week is the choice that makes the most sense to these learners. Many students and parents crave normal school so much that

they question why the district made the choices as they are. Why not all five days of in-person for the students that chose?

Suppose the 46% that chose in-person were allowed to go to school all five days. Calculating using rough numbers that's around 1500 students on campus every day versus the 750 students who are on campus now Tuesday-Friday depending on their cohorts. Not only would having in-person school five days a week double the amount of students, it exponentially increases the number of interactions between each student's "bubble" (friends, family, coworkers, classmates, etc.). This enables the spread of COVID-19 more likely. With a campus this size, students getting Covid-19 could mirror an outbreak of a midsize college and once an outbreak happens, COVID-19 would spread through everyone's "bubbles," affecting the entire community. By cutting down the number of students on campus as much as possible, the district can more easily prevent the spread of COVID-19, providing a more successful year for all students.

Ultimately, the district provided options to the best of their ability. There are no perfect choices in life, but there are better ones. Allowing for students to make the better choice for them was the right move by the district. Their flexibility with students' decisions to change each nine weeks is a major positive. This is why, numbers of online students for the second nine weeks went up by 7% with 61% of students choosing virtual learning. The numbers will presumably change again for the third nine weeks, but due to the districts' considerate planning, no matter which learning option students choose, it is safe to say that each student's education and safety will be prioritized.

If you go to in-person school, do you feel safe there?

24%

Of students said YES

9%

Of students said NO

67%

Of students don't attend in-person school

\*of 304 students polled

# SUFFERING SOCIAL SKILLS

by Samantha Heath

If the state of our generation's social ability wasn't already hindered by our own inability to communicate, then the pandemic certainly isn't doing us any favors. In isolation, the social skills we've gained from interacting with our peers are slowly declining as time goes on and will eventually leave us unprepared for when we return back to a normal environment.

Besides the physical and mental aspects of students' and teachers' well being that will be heavily affected as we become more comfortable in our lonely surroundings, the concept of social skills gained by communicating with friends and staff will show the biggest sign of diminishment. As we rely more on our current technology as a means to keep in contact with those close to us, both the social cues and speech patterns used prominently in everyday language will not be translated through a simple screen. Usually this would not affect us substantially since calling or texting is just a temporary replacement, but when even introverts- who

usually choose to isolate themselves to avoid interaction with others- start to question their morals, then it's more of a problem than we thought.

This applies to online learning environments as well. Through applications such as Zoom and Google Meets there's a striking disconnect between teachers and their audience. Although students might consider online learning either a blessing in disguise or the epitome of torture, there's no doubt that there's a layer of uncertainty when it comes to communicating with one another. When students are physically in a classroom with a teacher hovering over their students' shoulders, although maybe making them feel a little uncomfortable, it makes students feel more motivated to reach out and ask questions when they're having trouble with the material. This not only develops the habit of seeking out a teacher when needing help, or at least having the option for people with social anxiety who refuse to even look their teacher in the eye, but also creates

a sense of comfort and trust with the teachers. This, and the fact students would now prefer to stay silent instead of answering any questions given to them, hinders any sort of developing teacher-student relationship. If someone happens to have poor internet connection, then they're basically at a huge disadvantage for the rest of the year. Getting cut out of call, not being able to do school work properly, and overall feeling less motivation because of it are the struggles that people face on a daily basis. This coupled with the fact that students can easily find a loophole to class participation and not pay attention all together shows the declining socialization between each other.

Our societal skills are completely being destroyed by the lack of in-person communication. All we can do is hope that others around us are faring well in keeping their communication skills intact so that they can teach us how to come out of our shell once again.

## SOLIDIFYING A SENIOR SEASON

By Haris Kalam

As COVID-19 cases surpass 15,000 in Collin County and are projected to continually rise, schools continue to evaluate the safety of student athletes and sporting events. Managing safety in contact sports is only more complex as teams navigate new protocols to ensure the best safety measurements are followed. The district looks to new policies, such as social distancing, in efforts to maintain a healthy fall sports season.

Seniors specifically believe they deserve a season in order to secure sports scholarships and due to the fact that it's their last year. "I think that [seniors] should definitely be allowed to [play]," senior varsity football defensive end Bryton Forte said. "I don't think that because of this pandemic we shouldn't be able to have our senior season. Seniors in the past have been able to play and I think that if all the safety precautions are met, then we should definitely be allowed

to play as well." Although sports play a big factor in students' lives, at the end of the day their safety along with the people involved in sport is the greatest priority.



Senior varsity volleyball player Sidney McClain focuses on setting up a serve.

Therefore, precautions such as social distancing and crowd capacity regulations are being taken into account during games. For players in volleyball for example, they are not allowed to touch hands with the other team and

the ball has to be thoroughly cleaned every time the ball hits the floor.

"I think the [district] is doing a good job because not a lot of people in our district have gotten COVID-19," senior varsity volleyball player Sidney McClain said.

According to the official PISD website as of Nov. 6, there are currently 98 total active COVID-19 student cases and 183 students have successfully recovered during the 2020-2021 school year. Even though players understand the risk they face every time they step on the court or even on the field, they are thankful for the opportunity of a season.

"It definitely was a bummer not to be able to have the same liberties that the seniors have had in the past," Forte said. "But I think once everybody got it through their head that this is how it's going to be, then definitely we were optimistic about this whole thing."



Photo by Brooke Humphrey



# SLIDING INTO A NEW CHAPTER

Senior pitcher Colton Shaw commits to Yale University



By Mohammed Modi

After committing to one of the most prestigious schools in the nation, senior Colton Shaw felt a sense of achievement. His hard work had finally paid off and Shaw was filled with a range of emotions from shock to delight. Shocked that his journey had led him to commit to a D1 baseball program and delighted to announce that his commitment was to Yale University.

Starting baseball at the age of 9 and realizing that he had a future in it at 13 because of the increase in competition, Shaw was in no shock when he got offered athletic scholarships from several division one schools due to his hard work and determination. With many prestigious universities on his mind, the pitcher decided to choose Yale University and announced his decision in early August.

Shaw started his journey at Coach Pitts, a junior league baseball organization. During his early teens, he started taking the sport more seriously as the game's pace got faster.

"I was around 13 or 14 when I started to put in the work rather than just playing for fun and I started to see results, so I thought I could maybe go somewhere with it," Shaw said.

Senior Jake Jennings, one of Shaw's teammates and closest friends who has been playing alongside him for eight years, was a big supporter and one of the first people to learn about Shaw's offer.

"He's a great player but more importantly than that, he's a great teammate. He's always positive on the field [and] never has his head down," Jennings said. "Without him, it would be a whole different program at East."

Varsity Baseball Assistant Coach

Shawn Redd recognizes the strenuous work that got Shaw to achieve this milestone.

"Colton is a fantastic young man with a work ethic second to none," Redd said. "What he has done in the classroom and on the field is to be admired and replicated by anyone looking for a great opportunity at any school of higher education."

In January, Shaw received his offer from Yale. Once dialogue began between him and the coaches, the decision to choose where he was going became a lot easier.

"They just cared about our relationship a lot which I found pretty awesome because they would take the time to reach out to me all the time," Shaw said.

As the offers kept coming in, Shaw wanted to make sure that the school he would attend had a good baseball program, but the athletic program wasn't the only thing Shaw was looking at.

"Another important factor was the education," Shaw said. "it was a really big opportunity I couldn't pass up, and having the mix of education and athletics was a really big deal for me."

The relationship between the coaches and Shaw was one of the driving forces that put Yale on the top of his list.

"They were constantly checking up on me and asking about my family," Shaw said. "They tried to build a very strong connection which I kind of value."

The pandemic has resulted in concerns over athletic scholarship opportunities as sports seasons face uncertainty. With many athletes relying on scholarships for the funding of their education, Shaw believes that this

will play a big role in how many other student-athletes receive scholarships and is thankful that he didn't have to go through the circumstances many others are dealing with.

"It would have affected my chances because, before COVID, it was a lot easier to talk to coaches," Shaw said.

Student-athletes are caught in a peculiar state with the current circumstances and their direct effects on their futures. With many athletes looking for motivation, Shaw encourages them to keep pushing forward.

"There's no reason to stop now," Shaw said. "If you put all this work in, try to envision the goal and have that in the back of your mind all the time."

Many people who have been along the ride with Shaw are excited to see him start another chapter in his life.

"This does not mean the journey is over. If anything it is just beginning for Colton and I know he is more than capable of achieving his goals," Redd said. "Yale is extremely lucky to have him."



Photo by Brooke Shaw

# ALBUMS YOU' LL BE FALLING FOR THIS FALL



By Kashaela McGowan

New music is welcoming us into fall with albums from major artists coming out left and right. Three of these albums all came out on October 30th, proving that artists' are eager to release music and competition is hot- even when the weather is not. Here are some of the albums that are worth spending your time listening to- from four different genres. Be thankful this fall and have fun jamming out to this

## ARIANA GRANDE "POSITIONS"

Making this her sixth studio album, "Positions" by Ariana Grande is a very catchy, bouncy album as expected. The album has 14 songs. "Positions" has three feature artists out of 14 songs which include Doja Cat on the song "Motive", The Weeknd is featured on the song "Off the Table" and the third featured artist is Ty Dolla \$ign on the song "Safety Net". "Positions" is a culmination of her past and being very thankful for what's to come. Different from her other albums like "Thank You Next," "Positions" is a mix of pop, hip-hop and R&B all together. Overall, the album is very inspiring because Ariana talks about becoming empowered and stays optimistic. I would recommend this album to anyone who already likes Ariana Grande and for those who might be new to her music because she puts her vocals on display in this album. I would give "Positions" a 5 out of 5 rating.



Photo from Republic

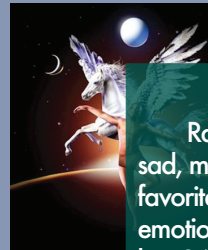
## SAM SMITH "LOVE GOES"

British soul singer Sam Smith released their new album "Love Goes" on Oct.30 with 17 songs. If slow songs with lots of riffs excite you then this album will for sure be on your playlist. Sam Smith's last album describes a bad breakup, but "Love Goes" is about coming to agreement and accepting. "Diamonds" is the most upbeat song on the album and is also the first official single from the album. This album reflects greatly in Smith's personal growth which is apparent while listening and comparing this album to their previous albums and songs. "Love Goes" is a great album for displaying character development and personal growth, but is still very sorrowful. I would give the album a 3 out of 5 rating because I think this album is one you can sing to and pour your heart out while doing so. I wouldn't give this album 5 stars because only 11 of the songs are new and six are previously released singles.



Photo from Capitol Records

Photo from Caroline Records



## TRIPPIE REDD "PEGASUS"

Rapper Trippie Redd has always leaned to the sad, moody type of music which is most of his fans' favorite. His third album "Pegasus" goes back to the emotional Trippie that many fans adore. "Pegasus" has 26 songs with numerous feature artists such as Young Thug, Future, Quavo, Lil Wayne and more. If upbeat songs are more appealing to you, then this album is probably not for you. The most upbeat song on this album is "Sleepy Hollow". "Pegasus" definitely fits into the category of the emo mood that Trippie is known for. If you like sad love songs that will have you crying, this album will probably be playing on repeat. I would rate this album 3.5 out 5 stars for the variety of different features, 26-song tracklist, following a general theme of sadness, which he is known for. The reason it does not get 5 stars is because the songs can be repetitive.



Photo from Sony Music Nashville



## LUKE COMBS "WHAT YOU SEE AIN'T ALWAYS WHAT YOU GET"

Fans have been waiting patiently for Luke Combs new deluxe album featuring five new songs: "Cold As You," "Without You," "The Other Guy," "Forever After All" and lastly "My Kinda Folk." The first new song on Combs' album is "Cold As You" which was originally recorded acoustically, but this new deluxe album features a studio version. This song will definitely be a fan favorite as it is already number four on the iTunes chart. Out of all five new songs, my personal favorite is "Forever After All" which is written for Combs' wife. It's a very beautiful song talking about his marriage to Nicole Combs and how it will live on forever. Fans certainly love this song as it has debuted at number one for iTunes charts. Overall, "What You See Ain't Always What You Get" is a great album because many of the songs are meaningful and are produced very well. I would give this album a 5 out of 5 rating because it was well written and well worth the wait.





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NOV 10, 2020 •

# TREAT FRO-YOU



by Risa Khawaja

Even though it's November, Texas weather stays hot, making frozen yogurt the perfect treat to cool down. Treat Yo Self is a froyo place that opened late summer of 2020 and is conveniently placed down the road from campus.

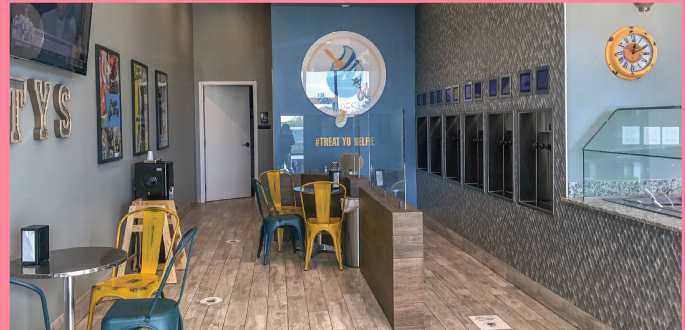
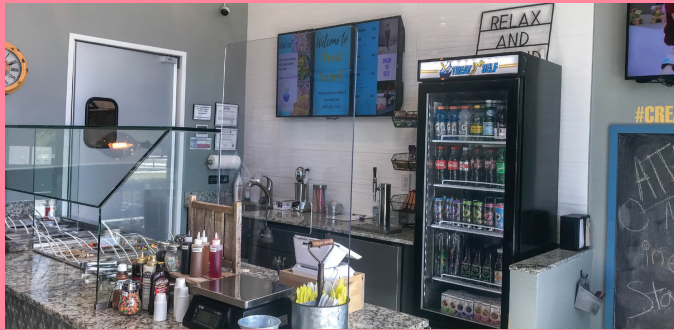
## Selection: 4/5 stars

Twelve flavors make up the menu, a nice variety considering it's a small, new business. Their selection includes the basics such as strawberry, chocolate and vanilla, but branch out into more exciting flavors such as blueberry acai and mango. As for toppings, I would like to see more fruit options but they have a good amount of candies and popping boba as well as coffees to pair with your desert.

## Prices: 2/5 stars

Treat Yo Self charges 50¢ per oz making it on the more pricey side. They are however offering 10% off to students who show their ID.

Photos by Risa Khawaja



## Taste: 3/5 stars

The frozen yogurt itself is a bit watery and the mango sunrise is pretty bland. More than anything you can smell the mango. The blueberry acai on the other hand was very good. The perfect combination of tart and sweet. It was thoroughly refreshing. The cheesecake tastes strange and unpleasant, as does their mini cheesecake topping.

## Ambiance: 3/5 stars

While the colors are a bit nauseating and the lighting is dim, it's a pretty open space with a nice sunlit bar table to the right of the entrance. The acoustics are terrible with sounds constantly echoing and inducing a headache. Regardless, the corner benches and shelf full of games make it a welcoming place.



Overall, it isn't worth it for how subpar the taste is and the aesthetics can't carry it. It all boils down to the convenience of having it a five-minute walk from campus.