A close-up portrait of a woman with dark, curly hair. A vibrant rainbow light effect is cast across her face, with the colors transitioning from red at the top to purple at the bottom. Her eyes are closed, and her expression is serene. The background is dark and out of focus.

FACING
UNIVERSAL
FEARS
PG. 10

PANTHER PRINTS

MAY 14, 2021

ISSUE 4

THE editors

Bree Johnson - Co-Editor-in Chief
Myh Seyoum - Co-Editor-in Chief
Mallika Chahal - Copy Editor
Samantha Heath - Copy Editor
Kashacla McGowan - Social Media Editor
Aiden Davis - Video Editor
Abby Cole - Advisor

THE staff

Abby Nguyen
Angela Tatsch
Claire Tweedie
Haris Kalam
Mohammed Modi
Risa Khawaja

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.

Letter from the...

Editor-in-Chief

This past year I've had the pleasure of leading the newspaper staff. Being the first time we've had an entire year with all editors attending school online as well as the majority of staff; I am more than pleased with how everything turned out. A big thank you to all of my editors this year, Myh, Mallika, Samantha, Kashacla and Aiden, this wouldn't have been possible without your assistance. A further thank you to the wonderful staff of this year's paper; Abby, Angela, Claire, Haris, Mo and Risa. They have taken every obstacle this year in stride, many being first-year reporters who were learning alongside producing amazing work. This last issue was an issue made in the home-stretch just as every last issue is. I am so proud to see the progress we've made over the last year; the skills of this entire staff have progressed immensely and this last issue is a testament of it. Our centerspread focuses on a heavy and important topic, and with our seniors heading off to college in a few months, issues like these are more prevalent than ever. The class of '21 can be the class to change issues like these in our future college environments. Next year's editors Abby and Claire handled the execution of this heavy topic wonderfully. I can't wait to see what they create next year. Finally, a thank you to the readers. Thank you for reading these four issues over this past year. I hope you've appreciated all the hard work that goes into creating the paper.

Bree Johnson

To submit letters to the editors of the Panther Prints:

Plano East Senior High School
Journalism Department
3000 Los Rios Blvd., Plano, TX 75074
Building 4, Room 201
(469) 752- 9000
<https://tinyurl.com/peshprintsletter>

**All student polls were conducted
through Google Forms and shared
through social media.**

**Cover Model:
Yasmin Palmer, 12**

**Cover Photo:
Bree Johnson**

Letters to The Editors

Dear Claire Tweedie,

Women's history month is coming to an end and I love to see women unify and stick together against misogyny, unjust pay, and discrimination in the work place. I can say that I am very happy with how the month went because many people on social media brought awareness to the cause. It is very refreshing to see change against something so unfair. Many women have fought to get their voices heard and I say that they are very courageous and brave because it's not easy. It feels really nice to go on social media and see my favorite influencers recognizing women's history month and standing up for women all around the world.

To me it does not make sense as to why women have to fight in the first place. Women are so beautiful and should be valued and deserve to feel free. I agree with the point you made in your article, because although we have such great women from the past who have paved the way for us, we should also be putting in effort to celebrate the women who have accomplished so much in these modern days. I agree because the fight is not over yet, we are still fighting for equality and many women have accomplished so much today. In English class we are learning about Manal al-Sharif, she is a Saudi Arabian who was alive to see the extremely conservative government take over her hometown. They had taught her that her face, her voice, even her name was sinful. They told her to cover her body from head-to-toe so that she may not seduce men, but why should we have to worry about that. Women should feel free to be who they are without worrying about being harmed or accused of something that just is not true.

I enjoyed your article and I am glad that awareness is still being brought to this topic. It is very relieving to know that women are standing up for, and supporting other women. And it is especially nice to see men and boys join the cause because it shows that we can unite and create a safe and happy place for women all over the world.

Best regards,

Valeria Garcia (11)

Dear Ms. Nguyen,

Your article about the environment made so much sense. I totally agree that having a greener America is helpful all around. It can help the environment while also improving citizens' lives.

One reason for this is protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, which is a very fragile ecosystem that can collapse under the slightest of stress. Preventing the authorization of drilling for oil there would protect the beautiful Arctic ecosystem. An important action is being part of the Paris Global Climate Agreement to have an obligation to transition to green energy. Green energy produces less pollution, and is a renewable resource energy companies don't have to worry about running out of. Another important action is to achieve net-zero emissions, which would also decrease pollution, which includes carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide is a major greenhouse gas that contributes to global warming, which is the cause of the ocean levels rising. Coastal towns should be protected from these rising sea levels by this reduction of emissions.

However, there are some important arguments to address. One is the tremendous amount of money spent on green energy, but the green energy business is going up in value, so it will be an important investment in the country's future. Another counter is the loss of the fossil fuel industry causing many to lose their jobs. These workers can move over to the rapidly increasing job market in green energy, entering a more sustainable career for their future. Some go as far as to say that global warming itself is a hoax, but this can easily be disproved by rising sea levels, global temperatures and even the snowstorm here in Texas back in February.

The important thing is, having policies in place to combat climate change and preserve the Earth is very important. This makes me, and I'm sure many others, glad to know that the current president hopes to help the environment too.

Best regards,

Chloe Boggs (11)

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Icons and Graphics sourced from Canva and Pixabay.

PUZZLED PANTHERS

By Mohammed Modi

HOW CAN I FIND OUT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT PROM?

This year's prom theme is the Mask-querade Ball. It will be held at Tom Kimbrough stadium on June 4 from 8 - 11 p.m. The cost per person will be \$35 when purchased ahead of time and \$40 at the door. Each student is allowed up to one guest who must be under the age of 20 and whose name is on the ticket when you purchase.

In order to buy a ticket for this year's prom, use this QR code.



WHAT ARE THE DETAILS FOR GRADUATION?

The class of 2021 will hold its commencement ceremony Saturday, June 5 at 8 p.m. at John Clark Stadium. With its limited capacity, each student will be issued six tickets for family and friends. Reserved seating will not be available so it is advised to come early. Students may not have purses or bags in their possession and no phones or cameras should be on during the ceremony. You should not attend if you are experiencing any COVID symptoms or have been in close contact with a person who tested positive for COVID-19.

Graduation Rehearsal is mandatory and will be held on the Plano East track field Thursday, June 3 from 8:30 - 9:30 a.m. for Alpha / Beta and 10:30 - 11:30 a.m. for Delta / Gamma students.

Graduation tickets will be given out June 1 and June 2 in the cafeteria.

WHEN AND HOW WILL THE DIPLOMAS BE DISTRIBUTED?

Diplomas will not be handed out during the ceremony but will be available for pick up June 7 at your designated sub school at the following times:
8:00 - 9:30 a.m. Alpha Subschool (A-E)
Beta Subschool (F-L)
10:30 - 11:30 a.m. Gamma Subschool (M-Ri)
Delta Subschool (Ro-Z)

TEXAS VACCINATION RATES RISING

By Risa Khawaja and Samantha Heath

People 12-years-old and up are eligible for the Pfizer vaccine as of May 10. Texas received over one billion vaccines in the past three months and the rush to get the vaccines left many sites fully booked. When it comes to the effectiveness of a vaccine, Pfizer has a 95% protection rate, whereas Moderna has a 94.1% protection rate.

Senior Jacob Roy works at an oil and gas company that offered him a vaccine at the Allen Vaccination Center. He received his first dose of the Moderna vaccine in February and his second in April. He believes that Texas is handling vaccination distribution well, as appointments are opening up to anyone over 16 despite the fact that this wasn't predicted to happen until late April.

After showing his paperwork and ID, Roy's vaccinations took around five minutes, while others had to wait longer. Vaccinations earlier in the year were typically further distances with longer wait times. Driving up to three hours away to receive a vaccine was a common experience, with most local pharmacies not having any available spots.

Junior Omar Farid received his first Pfizer shot in February and his second in March at a CVS in Canton. He had to wait half an hour in line for his first vaccine, while when receiving his second dose, there were only two other people waiting.

"I don't know why that CVS was the closest one with a vaccine," Farid said. "It was very tedious to drive that far and I don't understand why Plano doesn't have any."

UT Southwestern has since opened up COVID-19 vaccinations to the general public. To sign up, go to the UTSW COVID-19 Vaccination website and click on the Vaccination Registration link. There are seven vaccination sites, with the closest site to campus being in the UT Dallas Davidson-Gundy Alumni Center.

Upon entering the building, there will be an appointment confirmation station where people check in before being directed to a big room with several smaller tarp enclosed spaces, where a healthcare

worker will administer the shot and sign patient vaccination cards. A common side effect shown after the shot is a sore arm, which can be avoided by "windmilling" the arm immediately after the shot.

Some vaccination sites have extra vaccines at the end of the day that you can walk in and receive, like junior Annabelle Dang did. After registering with both Dallas and Collin Counties, she hadn't heard back for a month, and instead went to John Clark Stadium where they had a few leftover vaccines.

With 12% of students planning to return to life as normal after they are fully vaccinated, there are rising concerns about another spike in COVID-19.

"The vaccine's really just to make sure if you do get [the coronavirus], you're not severely affected," junior Maha Wasiq said. "I'm not just going to start going out because I could still get COVID and then pass it on to my little siblings who aren't able to get vaccinated."

Even after receiving a vaccination, CDC guidelines recommend maintaining social distancing and mask wearing inside only or outside in large crowds if fully vaccinated, as it is still being researched whether or not people still have the ability to carry and pass on COVID-19. With two new vaccines, the Novavax and the Astra-Zeneca, expected to come out in the near future, production and distribution should increase.

After about three weeks, UTSW will send an email to schedule the second shot which can be any time after four to six weeks from the first dose.

Health experts such as Dr. Anthony Fauci predicted at least 80% of citizens must be fully vaccinated in order to reach herd immunity. With 29% of Texas residents over 16 being fully vaccinated, and the percentage of senior citizens who are fully vaccinated being higher than the national average at 61%, the state is further vaccinated than 30 others.

"With the two new vaccines coming out, I'm hoping we can be protected against future variants of the virus and avoid another failure of a lockdown," Dang said.

ANTI-ASIAN SENTIMENT INCREASES DURING PANDEMIC

By Abby Nguyen

As COVID-19 swept across the nation, it brought with it a rise of anti-Asian sentiment and an increase in hate crimes targeting the AAPI (Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders) community. Throughout the pandemic, reports of Asian hate crimes increased by 150% in the U.S. according to the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism.

As the state ranked number four in the most anti-Asian incidents according to nonprofit social organization Stop AAPI Hate, Texas serves as a hotspot for fear among Asian Americans. As a main contributor to racism and harmful stereotypes, the model minority myth has created an unsafe atmosphere for Asian Americans.

"The model minority myth boxes Asians into this standard that they have to be smart, good at math, submissive, non-confrontational and pushovers, and because of it, when an Asian doesn't act like the stereotype, they get criticized for it by non-Asians," junior Brianna Zhang said.

Junior Vibha Chemangunta said that the myth is a result of dangerous stereotyping and racism that serves as a cover-up for white guilt.

"There are higher acceptance rates of Asians into certain colleges and there are higher percentages of Asians in certain jobs like the medical field, law or business," Chemangunta said. "Because of that, [racism] is 'justified' because it's like 'Hey, we gave you opportunities that you were already guaranteed and we did the bare minimum, so we get to be racist toward you.'"

Throughout America's history, there have been ties to racism and with the pandemic, people are using the coronavirus as justification for their racist ideologies according to Zhang.

"I was not surprised [by the increase in Asian hate crimes] because people will always find a scapegoat for something negative that happens, and with the coronavirus, the Chinese are the scapegoats because that's where it originated," Zhang said.

Despite the common belief that racism only takes the form of physical attacks, verbal harassment still remains a major issue, especially in an environment where one wouldn't expect it to occur.

"Rather than being afraid for myself, I'm more afraid for my family to go out," junior Angel Tran-Nguyen said. "Whenever we're going somewhere populated, I'm always on guard."

"Because of that, [racism] is 'justified' because it's like 'Hey, we gave you opportunities that you were already guaranteed and we did the bare minimum, so we get to be racist toward you.'"

Throughout the pandemic, national officials referred to the coronavirus as the "China virus" or "kung flu," which people believe normalizes racism against Asian Americans. Chemangunta said those racist terms may seem small, but the more people that use terms like those, the more they perpetuate and normalize racist terminology.

"One day it's calling [the coronavirus] the 'China virus' or the 'kung flu' and then the next day it's killing six Asian women," Chemangunta said. "It's a pattern and cause-and-effect, and to just say that they're correlated instead of one being caused by the other diminishes the [impact of the] hate that's occurring and makes it seem like not such a big deal."

On March 16, Robert Aaron Long entered multiple Asian-owned spas in Atlanta, GA and murdered eight people, with six of those eight people being Asian women. However, Cherokee County Sheriff Frank Reynolds denied the brutal murders to be racially motivated.

"The suspect has been interviewed, which indicated he has some issues, potentially sexual addiction," Reynolds said

during a press conference.

Long claimed to want to eliminate his sexual temptation by getting rid of the outlets for his addiction: the massage parlors. Long further told the police that he had a "very bad day" and that he was "at the end of his rope."

"In Asian culture, you avoid confrontation, keep your eyes down and prove them wrong by working hard, but with the Atlanta shooting we're shown how working hard is not enough," Zhang said.

With 3.7% of Atlanta's racial makeup consisting of Asians according to the U.S. Census, racism against minority groups can be commonplace. However, in Plano, Texas, there are Asian Americans like Zhang who do not believe anti-Asian sentiment is a large-scale issue within the local community.

"Where we live, Asians make up a pretty large percentage of the ethnic makeup, so I don't think that I've actually ever been scared of racist remarks," Zhang said.

Even though one's race does not correlate to the spread of a virus, 43% of Americans say that they have seen Asians blamed for the coronavirus according to polls done by USA Today.

"I think a lot of people feel like racism is explicit, but in truth, it's embedded and institutionalized, and because of that, we don't even realize that it's happening," Chemangunta said. "I think the pandemic has brought out that explicit racism more than ever toward East Asians."

In response to the lack of action concerning the rapid increase in anti-Asian violence, Zhang said that conversation about the issue needs to occur.

"I think people should speak up more about Asian hate crimes, but in the society we live in, Asians are scared to speak up because it's a cultural thing to look the other way and keep it all in," Zhang said. "If we continue keeping it all in, then people will keep committing hate crimes because there are no consequences."



Photo by Plano ISD

DISTRICT FINALIZES PLANS FOR NEXT SCHOOL YEAR

By: Samantha Heath

The superintendent and district are positive that in-person learning will be a viable option by the time the new 2021-2022 school semester starts in the fall.

“Our district says that they have every intention of starting normal next year,” Principal George King said. “We’ll be doing everything [we] can to make decisions that will be safer for families and get us back to normal.”

The virtual learning option will be a stand-alone option with its own curriculum for students who still have health concerns or need the flexibility. Staff indicated this will require significant planning, and depends on the decisions not yet made by the state Legislature.

“We’re waiting for guidance,” superintendent Sara Bonser said. “But if we keep going in the direction we’re going, school’s going to look more like pre-COVID.”

The main issue surrounding the normalization of in-person schooling as it once was before the coronavirus is the susceptible environment in which a student can catch the virus.

“It’s been quite some time since I’ve notified teachers, ‘One of your students was identified as positive for COVID, please identify the kids that were in the classroom that were within six feet of them for 15 minutes or more because we need to identify them as close contacts and send them home,’” King said. “So right now it feels very safe and I think teachers feel that way. I think students feel that way [too].”

Students themselves are hoping to return to in-person schooling, as it not only will make it easier for them to

learn, but they will also be able to see their peers after a long year of little to no in-person interaction.

“All school activities and clubs will resume as it was pre-pandemic era, and it will be so relieving,” senior Cynthia Diep said. “The freshmen from the pandemic era are going to return as recognizable high school juniors, so that should be fun.”

Online schooling is still going to be an option in the fall, with in-person learning being face-to-face for the entirety of the week, however, it will not be the same as it was previously. There will be no co-seated classrooms and the district is exploring different options to recover the gaps lost because of virtual learning.

“I think that we would still probably be in a situation in which we try to mitigate COVID spreads, and so if a student were to become ill, we would still be imposing a quarantine,” King said. “The district doesn’t want to lose these kids, so the district may very well be providing an online option for families that choose that.”

For the incoming juniors and seniors who had been online for the entirety of the year, the staff plans to accommodate those who aren’t confident in the layout of the four buildings in the annual Camp Panther program.

“We realized that we’ve got to do more than just orient kids on how to get to classes, but we want to teach [them] how to navigate around Plano East traditions and culture,” King said. “[We] want to be able to take this opportunity to revitalize the culture of Plano East.”

Whether you are an at home or face-to-face learner this year, what is your preferred learning format?

Four days synch, one day a-synch

19%

Three days synch, two days a-synch

68%

Neither

6%

No Preference

7%

*Out of 300 students polled.

PANTHER PROFILE: PAST EXPLORATION, PURSUING ENDEAVOURS

By Angela Tatsch

Walking in front of the device and turning in a circle, the screening process spots a hidden weapon. The Thermal Weapons Detector was designed for use in tactical situations where hostages, enemies and dangerous subjects need to be detected. Unlike airport scanners that use harmful radiation, this technology was developed without it. The inventor: a 10th grader who won first place in the Science Fair engineering category. Two years later, senior Aryan Agarwal's passion for analytical understanding led him to accomplish personal and academic feats within his high school career that he hopes to pursue after graduation.

"I've always had a passion for small projects," Agarwal said. "Back when I was in middle school, my mom would get small kits that she would bring home from work."

Ever since, Agarwal has grown his engineering skills through other small projects that make his and his family's day-to-day life simpler. Not only does this bring enjoyment to Agarwal's life, but it even allows him to spend more time with his family.

"Another project I did very recently was renovating my pantry," Agarwal said. "I built shelves with my mom that we retrofitted into our pantry as well as little, mini-dividers for each of the previous shelves."

Agarwal acknowledges how his mentors inspired him to explore and develop his passion for engineering. One in particular, his middle school engineering teacher and robotics coach, sparked this invigorating endeavour.

"He was a big mentor of mine," Agarwal said. "He basically nurtured me through engineering and taught me a lot of the things that I use today in robotics and my small projects, so I have to credit him for a lot of what I do today."

Starting high school, Agarwal joined the robotics team as the co-captain, leading them to score well in their matches. Although acting as a teammate on the "building" sub-team and not a team captain this school year, each member's dedication to their assignments earned them second place in the Collins Aero-

space Innovate Award and third place in the Design Award. Additionally, a skill Agarwal believes he strengthened due to robotics is his communication. His peer, senior Mia Bazbaz, agrees, recalling his character during a specific group project.

"One of my thoughts when making that project was 'How can I benefit people in multiple ways?'" Agarwal said.

"I think in the future I would just love to benefit people and help them out no matter what."

"The way that he presented and wrote was all very concise and straightforward," Bazbaz said. "He expresses things really well."

Other qualities Agarwal possesses are reflected in further aspects of his life, such as his love for singing.

"He will do everything in his power to do [things] to [the best of] his ability and to make you proud of what he does," choir director Daniel Knight said. "That's what I love about him, he's an absolutely reliable kid."

For the concert choir's UIL this year, Agarwal volunteered himself for the tenor solo within one of the pieces. Knight knew Agarwal would have the repertoire prepared, and after auditioning in front of the choir, the solo was officially Agarwal's. However, this was not his only experience singing in a professional context. In sixth grade, Agarwal got an audition for the North Texas Youth Children's Choir (NTYCC), a specialized group of 10-15 students who sing various styles of music from around the world. During Agarwal's time with the choir, he traveled to Ireland in eighth grade and Australia in 10th grade to perform at the Sydney Opera House.

"It was a lot of fun, probably one of the best experiences of my life," Agarwal said. "Getting to go internationally, do[ing] something you love — which I think a lot of people strive to do and want to do — and I was lucky enough to get the opportunity to do it."

At first, juggling time for private choir, school choir and working toward an IB diploma was a bit of a struggle, but Agarwal had others guiding him to success, such as the NYTCC choir director.

"She helped me with a lot of things like expanding my love for choir as well as the arts and taught me a lot of different things about patience, being strong, being confident [and] singing," Agarwal said.

As a NYTCC member through 11th grade, the choir director mentored Agarwal in his studies and perspective in his daily actions, which is now seen within his school choir.

"He's an amazing tenor [with] great work ethic [who's] very reliable [and] very dependable," Knight said. "He's very talented, and I'm sure he's going to do well when he leaves Plano East, not necessarily in music, but whatever he chooses in life."

Although not as a prospective career, Agarwal's sentiment toward music and choir shapes his plans toward his college path.

"I have a passion for singing and I really love doing it," Agarwal said. "Even if I don't get the chance to do [it] professionally or sing with a group, I would love to at least take a club in college or something where I could just sing with a small group."

For college, Agarwal decided on the University of Illinois at Chicago where he will study within the mechanical engineering department and choose courses oriented toward aerospace engineering. It not only allows him to explore beyond Texas, but also provides opportunities for internships and careers through aerospace industries like Boeing, Tesla and NASA. Additionally, Agarwal aspires to help others just as he did with his small projects and science fair.

"One of my thoughts when making that project was 'How can I benefit people in multiple ways?'" Agarwal said. "I think in the future I would just love to benefit people and help them out no matter what. Whether it be leading a non-profit or a movement of some sort, or a technology that revolutionizes life for certain people, it would just be amazing."



Photo courtesy of defense.gov

THREE SHOTS TO GET BACK TO NORMALCY

By Bree Johnson

As of May 10, the FDA has approved the Pfizer vaccine for children ages of 12 to 15. This means by next school year all high schoolers will have had the opportunity to get the Pfizer vaccine. Previously, the COVID vaccine eligibility had started at 16; high school students range from the ages of 14 to 18. This means that for the majority of this school year only half of the school was able to get vaccinated, while the other half had to wait. On March 29, Governor Greg Abbott announced that everyone 16-years-old and up was eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine. In a high school setting, this means the upperclassmen, including some sophomores, are able to get vaccines. Senior Klarke Pipkin was able to receive the vaccine earlier before the March 29 announcement, receiving her first dose of the Pfizer vaccine on March 20 alongside the rest of her family.

"I got the vaccine because [they] will undergo the most intensive safety monitoring in U.S history, and I trust that by doing this, we can eventually reach some sort of normalcy," Pipkin said.

Pipkin, who never contracted COVID-19 but had some family members who did, saw firsthand how serious COVID-19 can get.

"I got the vaccine equally for myself as I did for those around me," Pipkin

said. "I was eager to receive the vaccine because it enabled my ability to protect those at a high risk around me, such as my dad who has asthma."

Another factor for seniors receiving the vaccine is the requirement made by future colleges. As of March 30, 100 U.S. colleges and universities require the vaccine for enrollment in the fall, the largest of which being the California university school system. Universities such as Baylor University have not made it mandatory, but are incentivizing students to get vaccinated by not requiring mandatory testing for entering vaccinated freshmen.

"Some of the schools I'm considering have made the vaccine mandatory, such as San Diego State, but the majority of them haven't made their mind up yet," Pipkin said. "I got [the vaccine] regardless because I want my freshman year of college to be as normal as possible."

College freshmen anticipate traditions such as Greek life recruitment, athletic events or other social events celebrated. Incoming high school seniors look forward to traditions such as prom and graduation. Junior Cecelia Sloan eagerly awaits the vaccine.

"I'm excited to be able to go out and see my friends [after the vaccination], as well as doing normal theatre again and performing without masks," Sloan said.

Freshman Cassidy Harden, who is

also involved in fine arts, expressed her frustration surrounding not being able to get the vaccine. This annoyance is seen in a lot of high school freshmen and sophomore students.

"The only thing that frustrates me about the vaccine is that I'm not able to get it yet," Harden said. "I definitely think I will feel safer once I'm able to get it."

With clinical trials like that of Pfizer's in the works, it becomes a possibility that underclassmen like Harden will be able to get vaccinated before reaching 16.

"I think[getting vaccinated] is one of the best things a person can do for public health," freshman Isha Kurlekar said. "When it is available for my age group, I will be first in line."

As seniors like Pipkin are already vaccinated, juniors like Sloan are booking appointments to do so and underclassmen like Kurlekar and Harden await CDC approval. The dynamic between upper and underclassmen in high school is more apparent than ever. What keeps these diverse ages of teenagers from 13 to 18 united is looking forward to getting back to the high school traditions they love and miss.

"What makes me most excited about the future regarding the vaccine, is the feeling of hope that things are getting better and will get back to normal too," Harden said.



FACING UNIVERSAL FEARS

SEXUAL VIOLENCE ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

By: Abby Nguyen and Claire Tweedie

As the street lights flicker on and the sound of cicadas fill the empty street, a woman walking home continually looks over her shoulder, afraid of a danger that isn't there. From a young age, the threat of sexual violence loomed over her. While she learned to hold her keys in between her knuckles and how to aim pepper spray, the men around her are defended by the phrase "boys will be boys." For her, this is just another routine, but in reality, it speaks to a larger issue at hand.

"No matter where you go, [sexual violence] always seems to happen and sometimes it's not even physical," Kent State University freshman Alexa Dezelan said. "It's the little things that stick in your head."

Following the death of 33-year-old marketing executive Sarah Everard in early March from the South London area, her name became another call to action in the continual movement to protect women from the violence they face around the world. Everard's case became a global symbol, but it's a single instance among multitudes that go unheard. Homicide may be an extreme reaction in the commonplace threats against women, but the fear of sexual assault and harassment is equally prevalent. In the United States alone, there is an average of 433,648 victims of both rape and sexual assault each year among all genders, with 54% of these cases being people between the ages of 18 and 34. With this statistic in mind, the ages present a different environment and problem for sexual assault and harassment rates: college campuses and the students that inhabit them.

PRECEDENTS AND PRECAUTIONS

The United States higher education system has a history with sexual violence cases on their campuses, but few become publicized like those of Baylor University's scandal in 2012. Accusations from student Jasmin Hernandez, who alleged she was raped by

one of the university's football players, created a domino effect on campus for other women, including claims against other members of the football team of sexual assault in 2013 and rape allegations against president of Baylor's Phi Delta Theta fraternity house in 2016. While sexual violence is a problem, it stems from issues such as sexism and misogyny. In environments stereotypically meant to give young adults more freedom, these ideologies can run unchecked.

"I feel like the consequences are a lot more dire once you get out onto a college campus," University of Texas at Austin freshman Gracie Warhurst said. "It all depends on people's morals and values; if you already treat women like that, it's only going to get worse when you're not monitored as much."

Warhurst's college experience has been positive thus far but while she's enjoying the newfound independence, her safety is always prioritized. She carries pepper spray, her roommate owns a taser, and neither of them go anywhere alone. Baylor University freshman Bethel Tesfai was given tips by female students and told the history behind her university's sexual violence scandals.

"[They told me] don't walk in certain places because they're not lit at night, don't take shortcuts, don't walk past these houses, don't go into these areas and don't drink the punch at parties," Tesfai said.

Men have similar practices to ensure their own safety. Texas A&M freshman Ethan Johnson makes a conscious effort to pick public places when meeting up with people for the first time. While he knows the police department and the safety measures his college provides, such as the safety escort from members of the army corps, are always there, he still feels the need to raise his awareness.

"I think while it can happen to anybody, a man or woman by a man or woman, it's everyone's job to make sure everyone feels safe on a college campus regardless of gender," Ethan Johnson said.

STORIES AND SITUATIONS

Each of the students has a story regarding sexual harassment as a victim or a bystander with many starting from a young age or occurring in educational settings. When Warhurst was 12-years-old, she was walking around the mall with her mom. A man drove by and rolled down his window and started talking to her in a crude, sexual manner. Her mom's reaction was to walk away and ignore it, but Gracie heard the message that it would only be one instance of harassment in many more.

"I think that was one of the first times I realized this happens and is out there," Warhurst said. "It's scary because you don't know if they're going to follow through with their words or if you're in any serious danger."

Kent State sophomore Elliott Johnson was at a college party when he saw his female acquaintance visibly uncomfortable while another male student flirted with her. Rather than ignore it, Elliott Johnson put his arm around the girl's shoulders to physically steer her away from the other student.

"You realize how much of an impact you have even though it's something small," Elliott Johnson said.

Tesfai remembers one of her classmates during high school who looked down her shirt when she bent down to grab a clipboard. Hearing him make inappropriate comments about her body made her uncomfortable, but her peers told her she was being too dramatic and emotional.

"That was the first thing that made me realize [harassment] is real and to never put people down based on what they experience because to other people it might be dramatic, but to me I felt violated," Tesfai said. "That was my privacy and it wasn't okay."

STIGMATIZATION AND STATISTICS

While women are more likely to have direct

experiences with these issues, men are also affected. Thirteen percent of all college students become victims of sexual assault by means of physical force, violence or incapacitation, but male college students aged 18 to 24, are 78% more likely than non-students of the same age to experience rape or sexual assault.

"That 8% of men [who are sexually assaulted on college campuses] is one of the least likely demographics of survivors to get adequate support," University Survivors Movement organizer Carter Woodruff said. "Even though it's a lower number, male survivors face a stigmatization that is quite different from women."

As a marginalized group in terms of sexual violence, male survivors face unique experiences of embarrassment, shame and a stripping of their masculinity because of the stereotypes connoted with their gender. Woodruff argues that male survivors deserve the same kind of empathy and compassion that other survivors receive but are often the most silent.

"It just opens up a lot of avenues for harm to happen with no one knowing about it," Woodruff said.

Sexual violence is not an issue that just affects cisgendered men and women. Approximately 23% of transgender, genderqueer and nonconforming college students have been sexually assaulted according to the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network. Due to the fetishization and sexualization of non-binary and transgender people, they are more at risk for sexual violence because of the discrimination they already face.

"The sexual violence that non-binary individuals face is a tool of their oppression," Woodruff said. "It's a tool for those who don't believe their existence is valid or legitimate."

The LGBTQ+ community faces similar issues of sexualization and fetishization because of their sexuality rather than their gender. Woodruff believes their experiences with sexual violence are often overlooked because of the lack of representation among survivors, further creating a harmful stigmatization.

"As long as there is one instance of sexual violence occurring within a community, there are ramifications for the community in its entirety," Woodruff said.

ALLYSHIP AND AID

As young adults enter college, their pre-existing beliefs are further cemented by the people and experiences they surround themselves

with. For those who practice misogyny, misandry and sexism, further unrestricted boundaries places the safety of those around them onto other students. For many, this means being an ally in the struggle against sexual violence.

"I think being an ally is simply doing your part," Ethan Johnson said. "It's making sure that if you are participating in sexism and sexual harassment, you stop, and if you see anybody regardless of gender engaging in that behavior, then you tell them to stop."

Being an ally presents itself in different forms. For University of Texas at Austin sophomore Manav Arora, that means speaking up when witnessing sexual violence, even if it's someone you're close to. Dezelan prefers to support the victim, opting to share her experiences and listen so they don't feel alone. Elliott Johnson shares similar beliefs that to be an ally, people should act as a shoulder to lean on to better understand what the other is going through.

"We're all humans and we all think of ourselves highly, but we all have bad ideas in our head that may seem right in the moment," Arora said. "It's about educating yourself and becoming a better person."

Many of the students believe sexually violent habits stem from nurture rather than nature. A student's upbringing and ideologies from childhood can shape their perspectives toward people of different genders and sexuality as a whole. Dezelan believes the phrase "boys will be boys" sends the message that men's actions are excusable because of their gender and the first step toward change is understanding how detrimental that can be.

"[Sexism and misogyny] has made me more aware of the inequality that women face and I've tried to become more conscious of that, making sure I take that extra step if someone's feeling uncomfortable to prevent it," Ethan Johnson said.

Sexual violence continues to jeopardize the safety of students on college campuses, and while Woodruff knows the issue will not disappear overnight, she hopes that amplifying the voices of victims will bring more light to the problem.

"We need to sway public discourse and make sure that sexual violence persists as a central theme in discussion," Woodruff said. "It's an issue that we as a society as a whole need to tackle."

How big of an issue do you think sexual violence is on college campuses?

65%

Of students said it is a major issue.

23%

Of students said it's a moderate issue.

4%

Of students said it's a minor issue.

1%

Of students said it's not an issue.

7%

Of students said no comment.

*Out of 300 students polled

NEGATIVE EFFECTS ON STUDENTS OF FOUR DAYS SYNCHRONOUS VIRTUAL SCHOOL



By Mallika Chahal

Staff Editorial

Deciding on the best learning format during a pandemic has proven to be a continual challenge among educational institutions across the globe. Various methods of education, and the social, academic and psychological effects this would have on students, have been locally debated. As the district determines the best model for school next year, PISD should offer the virtual school option model of three days asynchronous learning and two days synchronous learning, along with in-person school for all institutions.

The coronavirus has proven to be detrimental to the public, with more than 570,000 deaths occurring in the U.S. alone, and according to the CDC, these numbers are gravely alarming for those at risk or with loved ones at risk. Staying put and doing school from home is a cautious decision students make to reduce the risk of obtaining and spreading the virus for the safety of their families and friends. The virtual school model provides students with relief, allows them to not worry about any possible lack of enforcement of CDC guidelines and reduces the risk of contracting the virus. PISD tries to meet the needs of students and teachers during the ongoing pandemic, as education formats can be replaced, while lives cannot.

With four back-to-back days of virtual learning, the only time to study is when free time is given to a student after their school day. A majority of students hold jobs and have familial responsibilities. A weekend and one asynchronous day may not be enough

to catch up on all that was instructed each day. Students can refresh their concepts and coursework by studying or catching up during the asynchronous days, especially when they may need additional resources to understand the learning material. The two-day-three-day model provides students with more time in between live lectures to compensate for what they're learning that week and to prepare for various assessments.

Another significant effect of the two day-three-day-model is the difference in mental health of students and teachers. It's arguable that anxiety arises for both those attending in-person and online classes. However, in general, those who partake in Zoom conferences and Google Meets experience more technological and workload stress rather than the typical social anxiety that comes with being at school in-person. This unease is worsened with the amount of screen time. In October 2019, Common Sense Media found that 13 to 18-year-olds in the U.S. use screens for about seven hours a day on average, excluding use for virtual learning. That number has likely increased due to more electronic use during the pandemic, and the four days of synchronous learning only adds to the average hours spent on screens. Therefore, the more asynchronous days provided in between synchronous days will give most students and teachers a break from being glued to their screens.

Online school is not preferred by many individuals due to a number of

concerns, one being the prolonged amount of screen-time for students and teachers. Though this is a legitimate grievance, it can be amended if PISD regresses to the former two-day-three-day model instead of the current four day-one-day schedule. It goes without saying the use of screens cannot be completely eliminated, but it is possible to cut back on the number of hours spent in front of a screen if four days of live instruction are reduced back to two days instead. The U.S. National Library of Medicine found too much screen time causes strain on eyes, headaches and pain in the neck and back. Two live instructional days will bring virtual learners less of these ailments and decrease physical stress.

The current number of Texans who are COVID-vaccinated is 19 million according to the CDC U.S. Census Bureau, showing great progress toward limiting the spread of the coronavirus. Regardless of vaccination numbers growing, the pandemic should not be treated as something concluded. Students may not feel comfortable to return to in-person school for the sake of themselves and their loved ones. The most convenient and effective method of virtual schooling for them is to have two days of synchronous classes and three days of asynchronous learning, as demonstrated at the start of this school year. For the better enrichment of students and teachers, returning to this format will put more individuals at ease amidst struggles of the pandemic and provide better absorption of course material, convenience and less physical and emotional stress.

JUST PEOPLE, REPRESENTATION IN MEDIA

By Risa Khawaja

Navigating the world as a minority is difficult. It is a constant limbo of fitting in while figuring out how to express yourself, whether that be race, religion, sexuality or gender. How we display every facet of ourselves, and whether or not we embrace them, is based on the media we consume.

The concept of wanting to be white is one many children of color share, ranging from a desire to look more like those around you, to an eventual self hatred. Living in a predominantly Caucasian-centered country is hard enough, however, the lack of people of color representation does not make it easier. For example, Disney princesses with pale, European features are normalized as the beauty standard, with princesses such as Jasmine and Mulan still being relatively light skinned. These instances solidify the idea that pale equals beautiful, and brings about a case of internalized colorism.

Additionally, “Aladdin” is a lazy attempt at representation. Not only is the Arabic name “Ala’ Al-Din” mispronounced, but the movie lazily combines Middle Eastern and South Asian cultures. While this allows people across these regions to see themselves on an impactful platform, the movie robs them of correct representation and displays them as interchangeable, blended together in the western eye. This is also the case in “Raya and the Last Dragon” where Disney picks and chooses parts of Southeast Asian culture that they only deem “story worthy.” Rather than getting to genuinely identify with a character, children end up desperately latching on to the first characters that look like them.

Other characters of color are susceptible to tokenization. They become static characters whose purpose is to support the main character while never getting any development themselves. While having them be secondary characters is fine, it becomes a problem when they are reduced to nothing but those roles. It makes them seem like tools to aid the “more interesting” white leads, and they tend to end up caricatures made through racial stereotypes. Mr. Yunioshi, a Japanese man in “Breakfast at Tiffany’s,”

was played by a white man with taped eyelids, buck teeth and a hissing accent. Baljeet in “Phineas and Ferb” is a typical grades-obsessed Indian boy whose central struggle is meeting his parents’ academic expectations.

“Living in a predominantly Caucasian-centered country is hard enough, however, the lack of people of color representation does not make it easier.”

Caricaturization is especially prevalent with black female characters. There are three common types of caricatures for black women: the “The Mammy,” “The Jezebel” and “The Sapphire.” The Mammy is the motherly figure who takes care of the white child, like Ama in “Beautiful Creatures.” She has no life of her own and is only there to serve the equally-as-white family. The Jezebel is the seductress who is reduced to her body and the power she wields over men with it. The Sapphire is the most common. She is aggressive and characterized through dramatic finger wagging and head bobbing, like Leshawna in “Total Drama Island.” The Sapphire reinforces the stereotype that black women are angry and hard to deal with.

Representation for gay characters also tend to be caricatures, with just as much rarity. While in recent years there has been a stronger push for accurate representation, most queer characters we get usually fall victim to the “bury your gays” trope, where LGBTQ characters are shown as expendable and not capable of happy endings. This is seen in the show “The Umbrella Academy,” where both Klaus and Anya lose their lovers to war and time travel. Gay characters are killed either immediately after coming out, or even before they get to. Even in movies that are specifically queer stories

like “Portrait of a Lady on Fire,” the lovers do not end up together, often because one married a man. Transgender characters are becoming more common, but representation stays unsatisfactory as the characters are often played by cis people, such as Eddy Redmayne in “The Danish Girl.” Despite all this disappointment, there are some gems that show accurate representation, our favorite being “The Handmaiden” where we get a happy ending for the lesbian protagonists. While getting to see queer characters on screen can help avoid confusion, internalized homophobia and compulsory heterosexuality for queer youths, if they’re not lesbian or gay, they most likely won’t see themselves represented well.

Among all the feelings of being “othered” by race and sexuality, religion also takes a slice of the cake. Most popular channels make special Christmas shorts and ads every year trying to get everyone into a jolly mood. This, sadly, does not include children of other religions. Constantly seeing Christmas-related specials that exclude other religions makes you feel like you are missing out on something, and that your own traditions are invalid.

Lately children’s cartoons have been better at introducing other religions. Isabelle Garcia Shapiro from “Phineas and Ferb” is Jewish, and a whole episode focuses on a Mexican-Jewish cultural festival. Ibtiyah Muhammad’s picturebook “The Proudest Blue” is about a young hijabi who grew to be a New York Times Best Seller. Being able to see characters who share your religion behave outside of what is expected of them is validating. It proves that we are all multi-faceted human beings with more in common than in difference. The religions that set us apart do not determine how we carry ourselves.

Whether it be in religion, race, sexuality or gender, it can be overwhelming to grow up different than what the norm is. Seeing people like yourself in the media helps you feel more sure of yourself and embrace your identity. The current state of representation is harmful and lazy. It is important to show minorities as they are: just people.

SLAMMING THROUGH DISTRICT

Wrestling team caps off season in fourth place

By Haris Kalam

The boys wrestling team took fourth place and scored 111 points in the district tournament April 10, improving by four places and 51 points from last year. The wrestling team is 22-7 in the season and 6-2 in the district. Coach Bryan Kenney and his team now sit within the top five in the entire district.

"To be honest, this has been a tough year with getting our season pushed back twice, but our program has responded amazingly," Kenney said.

In efforts to keep wrestlers safe, restrictions have been put in place. During matches, they get into groups of four and do not practice wrestling outside of them. It is also mandatory for the team to wear masks on the bus and during meets they're not wrestling. According to Kenney, no one on

the team has contracted COVID-19 or has had to quarantine during the season.

"I have felt completely safe, my biggest fear is the team getting quarantined and not being able to compete," Kenney said. "I was close contacted one time, but I was not sick; however I had to coach practice via Google Meets."

The wrestlers are optimistic and don't let the obstacles with the pandemic get in the way of their season.

"This year has been difficult for many people but all the wrestlers still try their best," varsity wrestler Bailer Turner said. "They aren't allowing COVID get the best of them in taking away our season."

This year, the UIL shortened the wrestling season to five weeks. The

season consisted of a hefty first three weeks compiled of around nine matches per week. They then went down to two matches per week, and then only one match in the final week. A 10-day break prior to district tournaments was put in place in order to prevent close contact and maintain safety for district tournaments. Regarding practices, the wrestling team practices every week-day for one-and-a-half hours, just like every other year in the past. Even with these new drawbacks Turner believes that the team has a positive outlook on the season.

"This pandemic is making things unique and challenging," Turner said. "However, we all believe that with an optimistic mindset we can get through any obstacle."

DETERMINATION AT DISTRICT TOURNAMENT

Tennis team finishes spring season

By Angela Tatsch

Stepping up to the court, she keeps her mind focused on the game. The opponent serves the ball, and she strategically hits it back. Continuing the rally, she stands on one side of the court and hits a shallow angle shot. She approaches the net and then strikes the ball in mid-air with a backswing, hitting a swinging volley cross court shot. Girls varsity team captain and junior Elsa Syed earns the point as her teammates' applause surrounds her.

The district tournament for the varsity tennis team took place April 13 and 14, and the junior varsity team played April 16 at Marcus High School in Flower Mound.

Although the whole team competed, only one member advanced; Syed competed in the girls' singles event and received second place in the final round leading her to compete in the regionals tournament on April 27.

"I think overall my game was a lot better in terms of trying more things like going [to] the net and following patterns," Syed said.

Although having lost the regional tournament with a score of 2-6, 3-6 in the first match due to missing some opportunities

and struggle with finishing points, Syed looks forward to improving for the next season with help from the coaches. Before regionals, on the first day of the district tournament, she won 6-0, 6-0 in the preliminary round, 6-2, 6-0 in the quarterfinals and 6-0, 6-1 in the semi-finals. On the final day, she earned second place with a score of 0-6, 1-6 in the finals.

"I was kind of nervous," Syed said. "But [the first match] was a match that I knew I could win, so I just tried to not over do it and try to ease my way into it."

However, come her third match, Syed faced an opponent she had lost to before which made it difficult to stay attentive.

"The power we were putting to our shots wasn't really affecting [the point], it was just who could stand the point longer," Syed said.

Junior varsity member and sophomore Anika Mukherjee agrees, stating that her opponents were more consistent with their returns.

"She also had a lot of cool things in her toolbox like slices and stuff like that to mix it up every now and then," Syed said. "She was a very consistent player and those are

the hardest players to play, in my opinion."

Regardless, Syed stayed enthusiastic about the tournament and took the loss as something to learn from.

"It was good for her game and it was really good for me to experience something like that," Syed said.

Syed was originally planning to compete in the mixed doubles event, but when her partner had to drop out the day before, she switched to girls' singles.

"They [were] just excited about the opportunity," varsity coach John Lara said. "They've done really well, and they've shown they can compete at the high level."

Even amidst the pandemic, Lara said the tennis team put up a fight in their spring season, taking about 75% of awards at tournaments.

"The environment in tennis is super fun," Mukherjee said. "We all get along pretty well, but we all always keep each other on our toes in the sense that we are competitive; so when we play points, we're always trying our best. It's a really good dynamic we have."



Photo by Brooke Shaw

STUDENTS PREPARE FOR COLLEGE SPORTS

By Mohammed Modi

As the final semester of the school year comes to an end, student-athletes prepare to take their talents to college. With athletes already committing to various universities, preparation for the upcoming sports season has begun. Scouting for sports has been a huge obstacle for universities due to the pandemic because of the limited opportunities to view prospects and restrictions on how much they could offer.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association gave every athlete an extra year of eligibility, causing limited scholarships for athletic programs.

"It was hard on the student-athletes because so many of us worked so hard and knowing that our chances of getting into our dream schools decreased is unfortunate," Midwestern State University commit senior Mark Folorunso said.

Normally, 25 or more full-to-partial scholarships would've been handed out to students from D1 colleges, but due to COVID-19, that number went down drastically. Athletes who held division one offers, including Folorunso, didn't get a scholarship offer due to this new rule change.

In preparation for college, athletes increase the intensity of practices while also focusing on how they take care of themselves off the field by being aware of what they put in their body.

"Off the field, I train hard and make

sure I am reaching my goals while taking care of my body," Stack said.

Many athletes follow strict diet plans to increase the amount of energy they have throughout the day. While some must increase their calorie intake for high cardio sports such as cross country and basketball due to the amount burned, others must eat more moderately for sports with comparatively less cardio. They follow strict calorie intakes to achieve a certain physique for their given sport.

"I'm just eating at a deficit," Folorunso said. "I'm eating from 2100-2500 calories of anything that's high in protein in order to drop a couple of pounds."

Along with taking care of their physical health, they prioritize their mental health, too. College athletics improves the players mental strength because it pushes new limits never experienced before. Mental readiness is vital in high-contact sports such as football, where emotions could take control of performance. Due to this, it's very important for student-athletes to control their emotions and get in the right mentality.

"I've been practicing the mental side and recovery side of football," Folorunso said.

Going into college, the skill and age gap becomes much greater compared to high school. College athletes are stronger, bigger and faster than the

average high school athlete because their bodies are more developed. Only 7% of student athletes get to play in college, making it is a very prestigious group to be a part of, but with the limited spots comes high competition.

"I believe it will be pretty difficult," Stack said. "I set big goals so I'm preparing for a rough summer of training to ready myself."

One of the biggest changes is the physicality they will face mostly due to the higher age gap.

"Since it's college, I will be competing with grown men and seasoned veterans week in, week out," Folorunso said. "To that I think the level of competition can vary but will be very hard for me."

Another challenge to overcome is adjusting to new coaching styles. As a high school athlete, one gets used to having the same coach for four years or more, building a connection that is hard to replicate.

"The Plano East coaches do a great job of seeing past a ballplayer and focusing on preparation for the future, and I couldn't ask for more," Stack said.

The end of student-athletes' high-school careers is right around the corner as they prepare for the next level of competitive sports.

"I am very eager to make the transition towards college," Stack said.



Teacher Ross Craig reaches into a car engine during auto tech class, May 7.

Photo by Zachary McHale

UNIQUE COURSE OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS

By Haris Kalam

Aside from the typical core classes, students are required to select two to three other courses to take per year. To make this easier for students, there is a vast selection of over 200 possible extra classes students can take in order to find the perfect fit. For example, imagine a class where you deal with machinery and tool work in order to repair an automotive; this is just one of the many eye-catching, unique classes being offered. Classes such as fashion design, interior design, automotive technology and earth space sciences are just a few that offer students the opportunity to explore career interests and gain valuable life skills.

Fashion design and interior design is a hands-on class that helps the student learn craftsmanship, layout and organizational skills. The two classes help both students who are interested in pursuing a career within visual arts and those who are not.

“For students that are wanting a career in fashion or interior design, my classes give them a jump start before furthering education,” teacher Gayla Vaughan said. “For those that aren’t interested in a career, the skills I teach can be used by everyone in everyday life such as decorating your home, maximizing space, mending clothing, spending wisely, and current trends in home and fashion.”

Both classes are project-based and hands-on, meaning there are various materials for students to use in the class to work on; examples of a project would be sewing or painting.

“I think [interior design] is very unique compared to other [classes] because you’re constantly doing something new; you are

always getting to express your creativity in assignments,” senior Austin Craven said. “I love classes that stimulate my creativity and encourage me to think outside the box. If you are a creative person who loves making your own choices, I would highly recommend this class.”

On the other hand, auto tech is a class targeted toward students interested in the automotive repair industry. The class provides an in-depth entry level understanding of automotive services and systems through hands-on learning.

“Students typically engage in vehicle maintenance and light repair, but with some students we go a little more in depth,” teacher Ross Craig said.

According to Craig, the subject gets recognition from the school counselors with regard to the program’s relevance along with acknowledgement from people within and outside the district. However, even with this recognition, class size seems to be dropping over the years; if you are someone with interest in this industry, make sure to take a look into the class.

“In the past I have had large numbers of students engaged in multiple projects concurrently, now we have low numbers of students and projects,” Craig said.

Earth space sciences is a year-long conceptual science course that introduces students to a wide range of topics designed to increase interest into how cosmological objects and the physical features of Earth are formed. This class is not like your typical science class, instead, it’s more interactive and collaborative lessons rely heavily on current events regarding the environment.

“The content is highly dynamic with new and exciting discoveries almost every day,” teacher Don Walker said. “The course is filled with interactive hands-on activities and labs with a strong collaborative presence, and the course sets itself apart from other science courses in that the concepts and theories are constantly evolving with new discoveries on almost a daily basis.”

On top of the class’s theoretical aspect, the earth space science is also fun and engaging.

“We do numerous activities during class such as playing interesting games and performing creative labs,” senior Ashraf Rahman said. “There are also fascinating videos we watch to better help understand the class and how we can benefit from using the information we attain in our daily life.”

Earth space sciences looks at different aspects of the environment and looks at the connection between them rather than taking a broad approach.

“This class allows students to connect with everything around them from the earth’s core to the top of the atmosphere and everything in between,” Rahman said. “This class portrays the interest of students who are passionate about the scientific perspective of the interconnections between the land, ocean, atmosphere and life of our planet.”

At the end of the day it is the uniqueness and the impact of the course on students’ futures that gives it value and sets it aside from other classes.

“These courses are for students who love a challenge and are eager to expand their horizons beyond the classroom,” Walker said.

SENIOR SAYONARAS

By Kashaela McGowan

This school year will go down in history as the first year public school offered hybrid classes as a response to a global pandemic. While all students overcame challenges, seniors specifically stand out as having their final year of high school without any of the normal school year traditions. With these obstacles in mind, the class of 2021 has been flexible and found positivity in an otherwise atypical school year.

DEUCE HARDISON- The most challenging task about being a senior this year for me was adapting to how different learning was online and figuring out how to still have fun while being safe. I did online and in person school and it was very different to say the least. Sometimes it was boring not having my friends in class with me since they did online learning. The highlight of my year was being the varsity basketball captain and playing basketball with my teammates. I'm going to miss Friday night lights, basketball and all of my friends that I've made over the years.



Photo by Deuce Hardison

KATELYN BOYD- Senior year is already a weird year, you naturally just have one foot out the door getting ready for college stuff. I think the best part of my senior year was how much online school opened up my schedule. Online school hasn't been my favorite, but I will say that I do appreciate that it's helped free my day up. I know I'll never be in high school again, so I'm glad that I've had some extra time to soak it all in before I leave. I've made some really good friends in high school and they're all going across the country for school. I'll miss getting to hangout all the time and living so close together.



Photo by Kate Boyd

ADEENA QURESHI- The hardest thing about being a senior is keeping up with school work. It was hard getting up in the mornings for 8 a.m. class. The highlight of my senior year was being able to have my own schedule. I was able to do what I wanted as long as I completed my assignments by the due date. I am going to miss being able to see my friends after class, and seeing the people I grew up with since kindergarten. I am also gonna miss having small classes where everyone knows each other, and it isn't awkward to speak out loud.

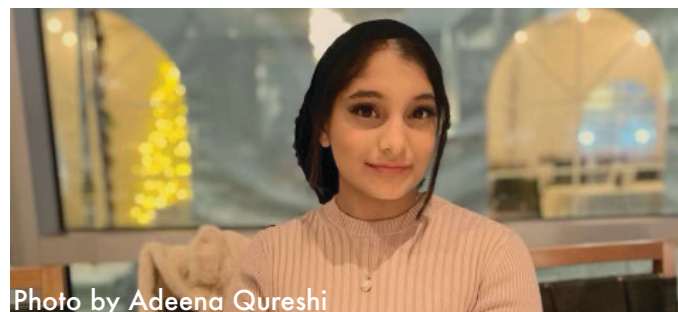


Photo by Adeena Qureshi

JAYDON NAVA- The most challenging task of being a senior is having to lead by example and the pressure of figuring out where you want to go and what you want to achieve or major in later on in life. Thinking back on all my senior year memories, the highlight of my senior year was the amazing memories and time I spent with my friends and the football season. Now that graduation is around the corner, something I'm going to miss about high school is my friends and all the fun memories I made at Plano East.



Photo by Jaydon Nava

Although this year wasn't the most ideal situation for seniors, this year has taught students to persevere through hard and unprepared situations, which will help seniors transition to the next chapter of their lives and the beginning of their journey into the real world. Even without the traditional senior year festivities, this year's senior class will have memories of how different senior year was opposed to previous years and all the hard work put forward to still make the most of senior year.