

ISSUE FOUR

MAY 9, 2025

PANTHER *Prints*



**BEHIND FOOD LABELS:
EVOLUTION OF FOOD INDUSTRY,
HISTORY, EFFECTS, MARKETING POWER
PG. 12**

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All polls were conducted through Google
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LETTERS FROM THE EDITORS

Being part of the Panther Prints for the past three years is one of the greatest experiences I've had. I'm eternally grateful to have had the opportunity to write, learn and design for the Panther Prints. Newspaper has taught me so much and I feel proud to have been part of it. I can't thank our advisor, Mr. Birnbaum, enough for the support he's given me over the past three years. To Camille, Celine and Megan: I love you guys so much and I can't wait to see what y'all do in the future. I also want to thank our wonderful staff: it has been such a pleasure working with you and seeing you grow. Lastly, thank you to those of you reading and supporting us: your support never goes unnoticed. Good luck to all the seniors embarking on new journeys and I hope everyone enjoys their summer!

As I finish my final issue with Panther Prints, I'm overcome with gratitude for this experience. Serving as Copy Editor, though challenging at times, has ultimately been a rewarding and fun experience. I'm proud of the meaningful work we've done and the creativity we've continued to bring. To the staff: thank you for making this quarter so special. We've truly bonded, and your growth has been incredible. To next year's team: keep the momentum going and trust yourselves. You're more than capable. To my fellow editors: it's been an honor to grow and lead alongside you. I'll cherish the memories forever. To Mr. Birnbaum: thank you for always supporting me; because of this class, I'm now pursuing journalism in college. To our readers: thank you for your continued support of our work throughout the year. I hope you enjoy this final issue of Panther Prints for the 2024-2025 school year. Saying goodbye is bittersweet, but I'll always be thankful.

As my time in high school and Newspaper comes to an end, I'd like to thank Varsha, Megan and Camille for their friendship and inspirational dedication to their passions — both inside and outside of journalism. You guys bring so much life to Newspaper! I have truly loved working with y'all as a team unit this year, and I am so glad this activity brought us together. To all of the staff, the immense amount of hard work you poured into this issue makes it shine. This last issue is definitely bittersweet, but I know I will always reminisce on these memories with fondness in the future. I hope everyone has a great summer!

This final issue—our last stretch—has been more than just rewarding; it's filled me with deep gratitude. These last two years will hold such a special place in my heart. Not only has this class taught me how to be an effective communicator and writer, but it has also taught me how to collaborate with others and find my voice in a world full of noise. I've been so lucky to watch everyone grow and discover their passion for journalism—each writer finding their spark and feeling motivated to share a story. Watching that growth unfold has been one of the greatest honors of my time here. Camille, Celine and Varsha are undoubtedly the easiest people to work with and my appreciation for them grows every day. I'm so proud of every single one of our reporters and editors—y'all continue to amaze me.

MISSION STATEMENT

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.

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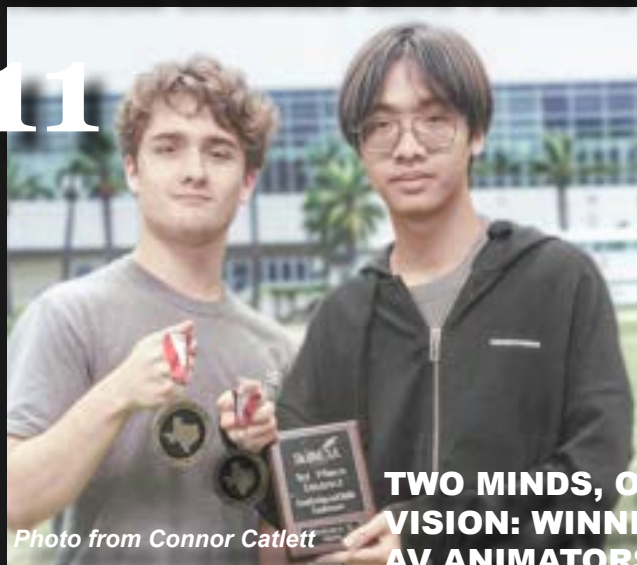
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Photo from Connor Catlett

**TWITTER
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@peshprints

Summer Prep

By Megan Glass

As a junior year comes to a close, it's a great time to start preparing for the college application process to ensure a smooth senior year. Begin by brainstorming potential essay topics early on, reflecting on meaningful experiences that can showcase individual growth. Review the Common App essay prompts for 2024 to get a sense of what colleges are looking for. On either ApplyTexas or CommonApp, the section to fill out personal information opens in June. It is wise to fill out this information and create a document listing all extracurricular activities, internships and leadership roles to keep track of personal achievements. It will also be helpful to plan summer activities thoughtfully, choosing experiences that align with personal goals. Don't forget to reach out to teachers and mentors for letters of recommendation well in advance, giving them time to write thoughtful, personalized letters. Starting early will help students stay organized and reduce stress during an active senior year.

For college-bound seniors preparing for life away from home, here's a handy guide on what to pack:

Side note: Many items listed are optional but would enhance a student's college housing experience. Please review your college's list of prohibited items.



Seniors, as the end of the school year approaches, be sure to transfer any important documents, slides, or files to keep from Google Drive. Visit takeout.google.com/transfer, enter a personal Gmail address, verify it, and select which data (Drive, Gmail or both) to transfer. The transfer process may take up to a week.

Social Impacts of Stock Market

By Melanie Pinkerton

Although the general population only participates in the buying and trading of stocks, their interaction within the economy also affects the state of the stock market. Boycotts and popularity trends impact supply and demand, and personal beliefs towards government actions may affect an individual's desire to participate in trades. Society's actions affect the rise and fall of the stock market. "You can't determine the way people will spend their hard earned money," IB economics teacher Richard Sklar said. "There's a lot of competition for your dollar." Companies constantly butt heads for customers and try to find creative ways to make a profit. The quality of their products, trends in the media, the customers' personal beliefs and government action all affect whether or not people choose to invest in certain products and even in the stock market itself. "There's speculative risk and market," senior Abdullah Kabeer said. "Verizon [does] better than AT&T, and the market crashes tomorrow, both of them are going down. It's a matter of which one does better than the other." Media and protests go hand in hand. People seek news and updates through social media platforms and broadcasting services. When they see that a brand doesn't support a cause or has a bad review on one of their products, they may decide to stop buying from that brand. People hope that their decisions not to buy products cause companies to change their opinions or their service. "[Boycotts] definitely [do] affect [the market]," Kabeer said. "Whether it's from a financial standpoint [or] not buying. It was evident when there was controversy with Target." Despite these boycotts, a lot of people don't exactly follow through with them for the rest of their lives, especially if they really enjoy the brand or its products. Still, these setbacks affect certain companies for an allotted period of time, even if the public's protests and boycotts end up being temporary. "People say now that people are apt not to buy products that don't agree with their political beliefs, but I think what they have found is that they won't

follow through," Sklar said. "They'll be driving down the road and tell their kids how terrible Walmart is because they put locally owned stores out of business. But then, they turn into a Walmart because they need a tax deposit." People may decide to buy more of a product as well. Popularity trends and specifically celebrity endorsements may encourage people to try and buy more of a product to fit with trends and support their idols. Individuals may even buy stock for the company that the celebrity endorses after they have a good personal experience with it. "If Taylor Swift endorses Outback Steakhouse, and people go there and have a really good experience, it's possible they go home and buy stock for it," Sklar said. "But to me, that's indirect. It's like 'That was a really good meal, maybe I should buy Outback stock.'" Another factor is the decisions that the government makes for the economy. People keep up with government actions and choose their next courses of action based on what the government decides to do. For example, if a president decides to increase taxes on items, people may choose to indulge less in the stock market and even withdraw their money from market interactions. "I think people, individuals and organizations do buy and sell stocks based on their expectations of the future," Sklar said. "If people feel that the country is moving in the right direction, they're more apt to buy stocks. If they feel we're on the wrong track, they're more apt to pull back on stocks." People's financial decisions, whether they're encouraged or discouraged through celebrity promotion, political causes or their own beliefs, have an effect on the stock market. From short controversial boycotts to media hits that skyrocket a company's profit for years, every person who participates in America's economy plays a role in the state of the stock market. "I think it's three things: the individual company has to perform well, the industry has to perform well, and the people have to feel good about the country," Sklar said. "Because people will buy and sell stocks based on those three things."



Plano ISD Closes Four Schools in Emotional Farewell

By Camille Wright

In a unanimous vote on April 16, the Plano ISD Board of Trustees approved the closure of four schools: Davis Elementary, Forman Elementary, Armstrong Middle School, and Carpenter Middle School. The decision will take effect in the 2025-2026 school year to manage declining enrollment and increasing financial challenges within the district, which projects an operating deficit of \$60 million next year. The announcement sparked strong emotions from students, teachers and parents as the educational futures of many are in the balance for better or for worse. “I first heard about the Plano ISD school closings through a friend,” senior Rosaliny Avalos Gonzales said. “She called me up one night and she said, ‘Hey, did you see the news? And I [said] no, and she [said] Plano ISD just did a board meeting, and they just announced that they were going to close down some schools. [Two] of them are Armstrong and Forman.” Plano ISD met with the community for several months and conducted facility evaluations before moving forward with the recommendation to close campuses. The main reasons for the closures are the projected cost savings that the district will incur, as well as declining student enrollment across campuses. District officials estimate that the closures will save more than \$5 million annually in operational expenses and millions in maintenance and construction costs. According to facility assessments, each of the four schools would require extensive and expensive renovations if they remained open. “I felt like they were just giving up on the schools instead of helping them find a solution,” Gonzales said. “Did you at least try? Did you at least try to get more resources or help the students perform better?” The closures are expected to impact thousands of families, especially on Plano’s east side, where Forman and Armstrong are located. Students currently enrolled in those schools will be reassigned to neighboring campuses, with some schools absorbing students from up to five different zones. Families have raised concerns about longer commutes, overcrowding, and disruptions in student academic and social stability. “All of my friends

that I’m friends with till this day, I met at Armstrong,” Gonzales said. “We’ve been friends for so long, and we’re going to go back to where we all met.” Though district officials emphasized that no staff members would be laid off, the change means that many teachers will be transferred to different campuses. Staff have been told they will receive top priority in placement decisions, but losing familiar

ty Chamber, in an interview for WFAA. Community members expressed frustration at the school board meeting over what they felt was a rushed and unfair process. Several parents said the closures disproportionately affect immigrant and low-income families. Some speakers questioned whether all neighborhoods were considered equally in the decision-making process. “Our facilities have aged and enrollment in some areas has declined, which has left us with underutilized buildings,” Superintendent Dr. Theresa Williams said during the April 16 board meeting. District leaders say the closures were guided by recommendations from a Long Range Facility Planning Committee formed in 2023. The four schools selected for closure had some of the lowest facility scores, and renovating or rebuilding them would cost more than \$240 million in total. Plano ISD emphasized that by consolidating campuses, they can better manage class sizes, teacher workloads, and resources. “I hate this because I love my school,” Armstrong Middle School Principal John Tedford said in an interview for Community Impact. “But I know my kids deserve everything, and it’s becoming harder to provide that.” The four schools remained open during the 2024–2025 school year, which gave families time to prepare. The district is offering early transfer applications through June 18. While some families are beginning to look ahead, many are still grieving the loss of schools that have served their communities for generations. The district says it is committed to supporting students and families through the transition, but the road ahead is still uncertain for those affected. “The schools that we grow up in and that we attend, they influence a lot of who we become as people,” Gonzalez said. “Seeing an environment such as my middle school... it felt really sad. It was like, ‘Dang, that’s kind of crazy.’ I’m going back for the farewell walk because that place meant so much to me. It’s where I met all my closest friends, we basically grew up together there.”

19.1% of students fully agree with the school closures next year, believing it’s necessary to move and manage resources

43.5% of student somewhat agree with the school closures next year, wishing there were other options

18.7% of students disagree with the school closures next year, believing the closures hurt the students and communities

3.4% of students strongly disagree with the school closures next year, believing the district should reconsider

**15.3% of students chose not to comment
*out of 262 students polled**

hallways, students, and colleagues remains difficult for many educators. “She was really sad because she was leaving it behind,” Gonzalez said, recalling a substitute teacher who was the mother of an Armstrong counselor. “She said, ‘I loved Armstrong.’ She’s going to miss that community.” The decision also affects several specialized programs, including the Deaf Education program at Davis Elementary. This program serves students from 14 area districts and has earned recognition for its inclusive environment. While it will be moved to Harrington Elementary, advocates are worried the tight-knit culture at Davis may be hard to replicate. “Davis Elementary is a very important school to our students,” said Dylan Rafaty, a long-time disability advocate and founder of the North Texas Disabili-



Games

Does Playing Wordle, Connections Make You Smarter?

Photo from The Mirador

By Celine Tan

Wordle, the daily online word game by The New York Times, skyrocketed in popularity in late 2021 and currently has over three million players. With six tries to guess one five-letter word and a daily streak to keep up, Wordle primarily appeals to those who want a quick, mentally stimulating game. Similarly, Connections, which debuted a little over a year after Wordle, requires players to think outside of the box to create four groups by selecting four words at a time, which all have a common link. “It feels like a puzzle,” senior Evelyn Powell said. “You’re trying to solve this puzzle, and since you can only make it in a certain amount of tries, I guess that’s what makes it fun. You really have to think about what letters could fit in [a] certain spot.” According to Detroit News, any game that requires problem-solving, strategic thinking and quick decision-making can challenge various regions of the brain. However, there is limited scientific evidence that games, specifically, improve brain health. Dr. Andrew Newberg, a neuroscientist at Florida Atlantic University (FAU), stated that reading, learning new facts and simply engaging the brain in any activity can slow the cognitive decline that occurs due to aging. “I think [Connections] helped me start to rely on reasoning [that is different from] what I would usually think,” senior Loren Mediana said. “It definitely helps you think outside of the box more.” Connections is known for its often seemingly random or oddly specific categories. For example, Mediana recalled how once, a group of items in one category were linked together because they all appeared in the

television show “The Simpsons.” As much as Connections relies on examining the unconventional relations between varying objects, it is also a game of luck to receive familiar words. “Connections is really weird because it can give you shapes, it can give you words, it could be anything,” Powell said. “That’s what makes it cool.” When many people feel stumped while playing Connections or Wordle, they turn to their friends for advice. Interestingly, these games, which appear to be for solo players, open the door for socialization. “[The New York Times games] challenge my thinking, but it fluctuates over time,” Mediana said. “I’ll have one day where I get it and it’s stuff I know, but some days, it’s stuff I don’t know. So I would try to ask my friends ‘Hey, did you get the Wordle?’ or ‘Did this have double letters?’” According to Dr. Nicole L. Baganz, an assistant director of FAU’s Stiles-Nicholson Brain Institute, loneliness is “one of the worst things that can happen to the brain.” Social connections and positive emotions can improve mental health and cognitive reserve. In this sense, the rush of dopamine that comes from getting the Wordle in only two guesses or the friendships playing Connections promotes may help keep the brain sharp. “I actually think it was Ms. Barajas that showed me Wordle because she played a lot,” IB English teacher Bethany Yates said. “Then, I showed my sister, and she showed my dad. The three of us started a competition, so we play Wordle and Connections every day and see who wins. I really like that it’s a fun family bonding activity.” According to Penny Pexman, a psychology professor at the University of

Calgary, Wordle is like a “mental sketch pad” that players can manipulate by placing different letters in the empty spots. By doing this, people exercise the visual working memory area of the brain, which is located in the prefrontal cortex region above the forehead. “My opening word is ‘thurl’ because I like consonant blends,” Yates said. “I try to figure out where my consonant blends are, and then I try to figure out where my vowels lay in. If I can figure out where that happens, I can usually get pretty close to the word.” While strategies can sharpen gameplay, relying on them may take the load off of the brain’s attention and memory processes. When puzzles become too routine, the brain shifts into autopilot. So, even the daily word game comes with tradeoffs: should players prioritize their streaks or the occasional mental stretching? Though The New York Times games may not be a replacement for reading or studying with flashcards, they can still serve as fun supplements to learning. “I think, to some degree, that level of critical thinking is transferable [to other aspects] outside of word games,” Yates said. “I don’t know how, but if reading is such a transferable skill, I think word games would be too.”



American Economic Crisis

By Reece Yeamans

The future is bleak for younger generations. Housing prices and the cost of living are increasing at a rate that far outpaces wages. Homelessness is on the rise and social security is depleting. The vast majority of students reading this article will likely never own a home without a housing market crash. Since the year 2000, average home prices in America have increased by over 150% while wages have only

risen by 9-17%, depending on income bracket. The problem doesn't stop at housing prices, though; rent as well continuously increases over time, causing a nearly 140% increase since 2000. "I don't think the whole system is sustainable long term," American Studies teacher Joseph Russell said. "We've priced people out of the American dream, which traditionally centers around being able to own a home." These rising prices in shelters of all kinds correlate with the record-high homelessness numbers seen in the past

few years. For many, the choice is either having shelter or feeding themselves and their family. A study done by Acorns, a lending and savings app, revealed that one-third of Millennials and Gen Z fear they will be homeless, three times more likely than older generations. "I've seen a lot more people on the streets," senior Vy Nguyen said. "Part of it is higher housing rates, you used to be able to get a house in three years of saving, now it's ten." Many Americans demand action from the government to mitigate the homeless problem. While America claims to be a land of opportunity, there is still a large population of people who receive little to no help when they need it most.

Contributing to the problem for many Americans is the struggling social security system the government currently employs. As it stands now, the system is pay-as-you-go. This means that what is paid to the government isn't invested for that taxpayer's retirement; instead, it is given directly to those who are currently retired. It was pointed out by economists in 1979 that the social security system is inherently

Since the year 2000, average home prices in America have increased by over 150% while wages have only risen by 9-17%, depending on income bracket. Rent as well continuously increases over time, causing a nearly 140% increase since 2000.

flawed; however, no action was taken, and by 2041, social security will be significantly depleted, such that a quarter of benefits will not be paid out. "I can feel somewhat reliant on it, I'm not going to base my full retirement on it," Nguyen said. "There's so many people involved in the system, and only so much money to go around, so while I trust it, I don't trust it completely." If social security taxes were instead left to the taxpayers to invest themselves, each individual would see much larger, consistent returns on investment. Home prices are continuously increasing, so is rent, other cost of living trends follow the same pattern, and all the while the government takes money

out of the taxpayers' pocket, giving only an empty promise to pay it back later. While previous generations could rely on social security checks, millennials and onwards simply cannot. With declining populations, extreme government deficits and declining incomes relative to the standard of living, current and future generations should prepare to live and retire without social security. This, however, is likely impos-

sible for most Americans due to said relatively declining incomes. "You can easily tell that getting a house is a lot harder for Gen Z," Nguyen said. When you look at the rates, home prices have increased dramatically more than real wages, putting younger people at a major disadvantage."

The economy is declining as indicated by the decline in the Dow Jones Average, and it likely won't improve soon. The signs point towards doom and gloom for the American people, especially

those who are younger. The future may be brighter than it seems right now. The economy has experienced rough patches before, and the possibility of a rebound to new heights is not out of the question; however, if that is to come, something needs to change. "Every time in our nation's history there's been a massive wealth disparity there needs to be a course correction," Russell said. "Societies flourish when old men plant trees whose shade they'll never sit under, and I'm afraid that our society doesn't seem to have a lot of wise old men planting trees right now."

Longer Life, Longer Wait

By Aycen Koa Matsumoto Castro

Immortality is a concept that goes so far back that it almost becomes an ironic twist of itself. From ancient stories such as the Epic of Gilgamesh to real-world leaders like China's first emperor, Qin Shi Huang, the desire for eternal life is one that many have sought after throughout history. However, there is yet to be such a method or medicine that could help humans achieve such a feat. Current scientific and engineering breakthroughs seem to be evolving at a much faster pace than before, with no signs of slowing down. As these improvements continue, many speculate that this once-fictional idea may be achievable for humanity, with many already trying to attain it. Tech entrepreneur, Bryan Johnson, became popular by putting his wealth towards funding studies and scientific research that could find ways to help him live as long as he can. He calls this experiment "Project: Blueprint" and continues to find different methods to further research into the project. Another name that is often brought up is child prodigy Laurent Simons, who puts his attention towards helping humans achieve immortality. Simons theorizes immortality could be achievable by implementing machine parts into humans. "I believe science research is important," biology teacher Dusty Vincer said. "I think if we can learn information about other organisms and how they have different mechanisms to allow them to live for longer periods of time, then we should take advantage of that. I think

that trying to live forever is maybe something to strive towards, scientists can figure out what we can do to live longer." Immortality researchers like Johnson and Simons became subject to criticism from many for their research, with many claiming that their goals are immoral and unethical towards mankind. Most notably, Johnson's use of blood plasma transfusions with his own son and father faced criticism. These criticisms tie into many different discussions on whether morality should have a place in the scientific field, and if, in some cases, it may hold back many developments that could be made. Genetic engineer, He Jiankui, became noted for his controversial tweets relating to the subject, most notably where he tweeted about how ethics is holding back scientific innovation and progress. Although the argument between morality and science is debatable, many others who are knowledgeable in the scientific field do believe that ethics and morality have a place in the lab. "I do think that ethics has a place in the scientific field. To experiment on living organisms is unethical, which is why we have an Ethics Committee, and why science researchers have to go through the proper channels to do their research," Vincer said. "Without ethics, we probably could learn more, but I believe that we have an obligation to our race and other organisms to humanely perform treatments." Immortality research can't be viewed from just an ethical standpoint, but a realis-

tic one. Although many scientists and researchers continue to study the topic, others still question whether or not we are currently close to actually achieving it. Psychology Today recently concluded that although the improvements in anti-aging studies have exceeded expectations in recent years, true immortality still seems to be out of our reach, with plenty of work still needing to be done. "I don't believe that living longer is currently within our reach. There are cellular processes that happen, and I'm not sure that we could fully restore that," Vincer said. "At this point, I believe no. I think a better use of our research dollars would be maybe curing some diseases, that would be where I would focus my efforts." Whether or not humans are close to achieving immortality will forever remain a subject to focus on. Even if many scientists and engineers are still distant from discovering a method for altering the human lifespan, they will continue to research it until they do. With scientific innovation developing at a rapid pace, it could be sooner than predicted. It's all a matter of the very thing these researchers are trying to beat: time. "I think we have to weigh quality of life when you talk about a lifespan. Is the quality of life of somebody who's 100 years old worth elongating?" Vincer said. "As you age, diseases progress, so I'm not sure how we live longer, and have a good quality life."

49.2% of students would not take any procedure to become immortal

16% of students would take any procedure necessary to become immortal

11.5% of students were unsure

*out of 262 students polled

13% of students would take only medicinal procedures to become immortal

3.4% of students would only take surgical procedures to become immortal

6.9% of students decided not to comment

Fashion Changes With Politics

By Megan Glass

In times of uncertainty, people often turn to self-expression to gain a sense of identity and comfort. Whether through fashion, social media activism, or community engagement, individuals naturally seek connection with like-minded peers. The internet has transformed the fashion industry, replacing typical magazine spreads with diverse, niche-driven style bubbles. In the past five years, the fashion sphere has expanded dramatically, offering a space for every unique taste to flourish and thrive. “Nowadays, a lot of different styles are popular,” junior Chrissy Pelton said. “Pinterest aesthetics like cool girl aesthetic, clean girl, mob wife, cottage core and the downtown girl aesthetic,” “All these different styles are now seen as socially acceptable to wear. The online spaces really made it easier to dress however you want to dress.” Historically, fashion trends mirror political climates. In the 1960s, during John F. Kennedy’s presidency, progressive styles like bright colors and miniskirts aligned with his administration’s values. In contrast, under Richard Nixon’s presidency in 1968, there was an apparent shift to conservative styles. The shift was visible in fashion through structured silhouettes, muted colors and a rise in formal business wear all reflecting the era’s focus on traditional family values and a pushback against the counterculture. While the hippie aesthetic—characterized by long hair, tie-dye and bell-bottoms symbolized rebellion, Nixon-era styles embraced restraint and order. “In the past, people wore shorter skirts and more colorful pieces,” Pelton said. “In the 60s and

70s, women wore jeans to stand out against cultural norms and to be part of the feminist movement.” During Obama and Biden’s presidencies, the upsurge in maximalism, bold patterns and individuality centered on self-expression. Obama’s presidency saw a shift toward vibrant streetwear as the economy recovered from the Great Recession. Biden’s era, following the uncertainty of 2020, mixed expressive fashion with sustainability. Trends like dopamine dressing reflected optimism, while economic concerns fueled a rise in minimalism and quiet luxury. One perspective on the future of fashion predicts an increasing shift toward conservatism. “I’ve seen less boldness in outfits overall and more subtle changes in trends,” senior Janae Lam said. “With clothing so expensive, people might turn to thrifting. This ties into the growing popularity of sustainable fashion and rejecting overconsumption.” While both presidencies encouraged individuality, Biden’s term reflects a tension between self-expression and conservative restraint, highlighting fashion’s role in navigating the political and economic shift from 2019 to 2024. These characteristics align with the democratic administration of both terms. When considering voter demographics and style trends, individuals have found it easier to categorize others based on their fashion choices, often shaped by regional trends. For instance, a typical southern outfit compared to northeastern attire might polarize individuals. Voter demographics also play a huge role in social stereotyping during the

era of polarizing politics. This polarization took hold during the pandemic, as individuals watched social movements unfold on their screens. “This era marked a shift from the colorful, community-driven fashion of 2020, where VSCO and Indie styles thrived, to a culture of micro-trends and increased insecurity in self-expression,” Lam said. “Compared to 2020, people are more insecure about their outfits now and less likely to express themselves as they did during Covid.” Hidden behind a screen and in the comfort of one’s home, quarantine fashion allowed individuals to explore niche aesthetics driven by the media. Through the expansion of fast-fashion sites and creative opportunities like sewing and reusing old clothing, curated fashion trends boomed. In recent years, a shift toward more conservative and traditional aesthetics has emerged. Trends like cottagecore and the “tradwife” style have gained popularity, reflecting a cultural longing for stability and a return to traditional values. This movement contrasts with the rise of individualism and self-centered ideologies, largely driven by the demands of a fast-paced society. “I think the interest in conservative styles is because of the country’s conservative shift, especially with the rise of people like Nara Smith becoming more aesthetic,” Pelton said. “For instance, a popular brand recently rebranded from clubwear to conservative styles. People also use fashion to stand up against others, not necessarily to make a movement point, but to establish a social difference.”



Shaping Tomorrow's Chefs, One Plate at a Time

By Aisha Zahrah Ali

The scent of fresh spices and herbs fills the school air and lures students into the bistro, a kitchen where aspiring culinary prodigies attend meetings hosted by the Chef's Association for more than just eating food. One dish at a time, the kitchen comes to life as students dedicate their time after school to building meaningful connections with people who have similar interests in the art of cooking. "[Chef's Association] just wants everybody to come [to the bistro] and have a good time," sophomore Social Media Manager Naima Ali said. "Finding a love for cooking [is important] too, if you can't find it at school, find it at home. I think when you're cooking with somebody that you love, it is a very special experience." Regardless of whether or not people like cooking alone or with other people, the Chef's Association urges students to learn how to cook. Cooking is a basic life skill, so rather than seeing it as a chore, the Association encourages students to learn how to love the art of cooking. "I think cooking is a really important skill to have," Ali said. "If you aren't really art oriented, this is one way to get in touch with your artistic side so you're balanced in all aspects of life." While cooking is considered a good life skill, it makes an even better hobby. According to a study conducted by Ask Your Target Market, 63% of American adults who participated in the survey wished that their schedules accommodated more time for hobbies. It is rare to find a hobby where someone gets invested and cares about spending time

on that hobby. When students like Isis Smith, secretary of the Chef's Association, develop a passion for cooking or any other generic hobby, it is essential to treasure and nurture that interest. Smith's love for cooking comes from an Oscar-winning animated feature film; most commonly known for its romanticization of food, the world-renowned film *Ratatouille* is truly an inspiration. "Seeing it, that one [quote], 'anyone can cook,' that line really hit me," Smith said. "So you're saying I could do something that's related to food and be good at it. I want to be a head chef and an executive chef, which I've heard is really difficult." Both jobs require a senior culinary professional, so obtaining either job is known to be a taxing task. Cooking for the first time is difficult, but making an effort is the first step to overcoming those challenges. "Not knowing how to manage the heat, like accidentally burning the food, I feel that is a very important factor with cooking," Smith said. "You could always adjust the sugar level, it's something you could water it down or even change how it tastes. Once it's burnt, you can't do anything to fix it; I feel like once you overcome that one layer [of] cooking, it gets a lot easier." It takes effort and dedication to get even just the basics down, but gaining experience helps immensely. Even if that setting isn't at a Chef's Association meeting, it starts from understanding and learning how to love cooking. "When my mom and I were in China, we had this Chinese restaurant, and she would cook really good food,"

junior Shiru Zhang said. "I think I got [my love for cooking] from her. I know a lot of people don't like it [because of the] bitterness, but [my favorite dish is] bittermelon with beef; it's really refreshing." Chef's Association focuses on more than just Western dishes, they provide opportunities for club members to learn about different cultures through cuisine. The association recognizes that food is unity; they encourage all students to share their feedback and pitches for future meetings via Google Forms. "We have focused a lot on more than just American cuisine," Ali said. "We wanted to spread more cultural diversity throughout the school, and one way that we did that was to teach people different types of cultures. [For example, the] food that they use, the ingredients, and how even if it's different, it doesn't mean that it's not good." Considering multiple perspectives helps the club explore different cuisines and foster a welcoming environment. Sharing both their culture and culinary values, students are able to embrace the opportunity to learn about different cultures and be active in the community. "Bonding over the food, [is] one of the best ways to bond with our community," Ali said. "A lot of [students at Plano East] are big backs [who] love eating food, sweets, and all that good stuff. [Chef's Association] is a good way to just bring our community [and] student body closer together, and that's what I'm really proud about."



Photo from Chef's Association

Two Minds, One Vision: Winning AV Animators

By Kristhel Soto Castro

For months, two students prepared for their annual AV competition, eager to impress the judges with their creative talent. As the lights dimmed in the cold, dark stage, their animation played for hundreds of people to see and for the judges to deduce their scores. Hands clenched, gripping to what they hope is a decent score, the judges announce the film as the gold-medal winner of the district. Holding their first-place awards and shiny medals, both contestants stood for a picture, proud to succeed and move on to the next round. “We did 3D animation [and] it specifically had to do with a portrayal of different scenes [by] kind of piecing them together [and] making a composition,” senior Connor Catlett said. “You’re given a prompt and you have to make a thirty-second 3D animation within that time and you need a lot of techniques and stuff to do it.” Each year, audiovisual competitions are held for emerging artists who thrive under a creative spotlight. This year, senior AV students Connor Catlett and Steven Ho participated in the district and state competitions, receiving silver and gold for their 3D animation projects. Contestants are given anecdotes to animate and are judged by their creative take on their project, their skills and their accuracy on the story given. Within the thirty seconds of both students’ animation, their artistry, performance and general knowledge of animation impressed the judges and won medals. “The competition is more career-oriented,” Ho said. “So, they base you off of how well you do, the time you spend and the techniques you use.” In their district competition, both students took on the task to animate ‘a gamer going outside and seeing something surprising,’ and divided the work based on their areas of expertise. Although Ho first began animating six months prior to the competition, his dedication and hours of work showed in the animation’s storytelling and rigging. He focused on the Twelve

Principles of Animation and centered his work around anticipation, exaggeration, key poses, and more. Connor took on the responsibility of creating the models for the animations, considering how the shapes and textures affect the lighting and rendering of their projects. Connor and Steven combined their abilities in 3D rendering, rigging, modeling and backdrop photography to enhance their first project’s eye-catching detail and immersive storytelling. “Those are the techniques and overall knowledge you really need to compete in this competition,” Ho said. Although their first prompt allowed them to stretch their imaginations and add their own spin to the story, their second prompt limited their creative expression. For the state competition, the prompt detailed the story from start to finish, leaving little room for both animators to experiment with different ways to tell the story. “We normally get one sentence [for the prompt], but this one was like an essay,” Catlett said. “The grading was kind of more specific, and it inhibited our creativity. Like, we would have done a lot more for different scenes, but they gave a shot-by-shot rundown of how [the judges] wanted it.” Despite the creative challenge the state competition imposed on both animators, they focused on the pinpoint accuracy of their story, further basics of animation, modeling and creative designs to further push their abilities. Their story centered around two characters placed in a

skirmish situation that struggle against each other in a battle of erasers, pencils and school essays. With their interaction concluding in a stalemate, both students explored different ways to make their animation exciting and more engaging. Although they struggled with narrative freedom, their use of animation styles allowed their mini-film to stand out through their meticulous work in character design and flashier use of wireframes for a crucially detailed visual design and intricate animation, adding their own unique ‘pop’ to the film’s essence. “Our teacher would give us practice rounds before the actual competition,” Ho said. “They were like really helpful with piecing [the story] and techniques together, and we were able to learn from our mistakes.” Due to these trials and errors, both artists grew tremendously throughout the year and produced a silver medal-winning animation in their state competition. They’ve observed their earliest animations and compared them to their newest, proudly noting the growth of their animation and modeling skills. “We tried our best, and we’ve actually got pretty good,” Catlett said. “We pushed ourselves as much as we could for those [competitions] and you can really see a difference.”



Photo from Connor Catlett

Behind Food Labels: Evolution of Food Industry, History, Effects, Marketing Power

Photo from Wikipedia

By Carter Fleming, Jewel Jeffery and Kristhel Soto Castro

Widespread obesity in America has continued to increase since the 1980s, with the obesity rate growing by 10% each year. Although the rapid industrial production of food is convenient, the growing food production introduces harmful chemicals, addictive ingredients, environmental harm, and nationwide health issues that worsen every passing year. Its history explains the transition to these radical changes in the way food is made and its striking advertisements to hook on consumers. “As a whole, we’ve been developing so we’re trying to make food easier and on a wider scale,” junior, Kelly Harr said. “But in doing that companies are marketing some types of food as healthier than they are because it’s easier and more convenient to make.”

From Hand Tools to High-Tech: How Food Production Evolved Through the Ages

Since ancient civilizations, the distribution and availability of food depended on a system to properly catalog their crops in case of scarcity and poor harvest. But it wasn’t till the 1900s that the food industry innovations quickly produced large amounts of food in a shorter period. Before the Green Revolution, food production was considered traditional and based on community knowledge. “Before modern advances in the food industry, early food processing techniques can be traced back to the 1700s,” food science teacher Rachel Nabors said. “Preservation methods such as sun drying, smoking, salting, fermentation and can-

ning emerged largely through experimentation and accidental discoveries.” The ways in the past were built on intensive labor, natural fertilizers and simple tools. Farmers used only hand tools; they had no synthetic sprays to keep bugs away, and they did not own flashy machines or tractors. Around the 1960s, things started to turn around in the food production world. Scientists like Norman Borlaug introduced these high-yielding seed varieties. Suddenly, crops were stronger, faster-growing, and were immune to many diseases that used to ruin them. Farmers were harvesting massive yields. During the Green Revolution era, it caused some positive changes, yet it also caused some challenges. The land was over-used, the soil was rich and fertile but needed a large amount of chemicals just to function,

and everyone was planting the same few crops. “Before advanced techniques for food processing, I think a lot of things had more natural ingredients, but at the same time, I think it was more unsanitary,” senior Zoe Butts said. Along with the food production changing over time, food factories have too. How things operated back then during food production are very similar to how things work in food factories. A lot of manual labor was seen, with little to no regulation, and most food was local. During the time of the industrialization boom, things started to change, such as the mechanization. More machines were seen rather than labor and replaced many manual tasks. Also during this time, preservation and processed food were introduced, and government regulations started to roll in, such as the Federal Drug Administration (FDA). “The FDA had lots of positive effects on the food industry because more people became more knowledgeable about what they were consuming,” Butts said. The Green Revolution changed everything from before, after, and now. Now, most food is grown on large farms



using modern machines, there

is a balance of how much fertilizers are used, sprinklers and other similar concepts are in more use than rain, and a lot of technology is used. Just like back then, challenges still exist. Problems such as climate change, rising costs and food waste are major issues. Food production is changing and improving over time. “Your health is your wealth,” Butts said.

Fast Food, Slow Harm: Impact of Processed Food

Food processing occurs in many different ways: processed and ultra-processed. According to the US Department of Agriculture, anything that alters the fundamental nature of a food is processed food. This could range from heating, dicing, juicing or purely freezing food. These foods aren’t necessarily bad for you; they’re simply the frozen vegetables often found in the freezer or the canned chickpeas of your local grocery store. But, the issue arises when it comes to ultra-processed foods; these are the typical, ‘ready-to-eat’ foods such as microwaved dinners, chips, sodas, baked treats and candy. “I believe it is essential to understand what we are fueling our bodies with, as knowing the nutritional content of our food helps us meet our body’s needs

for energy and sustenance,” Nabors said. Unfortunately,



these unhealthy foods are more convenient for people in a hurry and cheaper for those on a budget, making it easier for people to choose fast-and-cheap foods over a nutritious meal. Ultra-processed foods contain lots of sugar and refined carbs and are heavily packed with unsaturated and trans fats. The lack of fiber keeps consumers hungry, while the tons of sugar they contain push consumers to become sluggish and addicted to these sweet treats. This sugary addiction can affect blood pressure, weight, productivity and overall health. “While I don’t believe fast food is the healthiest option, I do indulge in it from time to time,” Nabors said. “When I do, I make a conscious effort to choose meals that are well-balanced, incorporating a variety of nutrients.” Further stressing the harm of super-processed foods, the FDA isn’t as strict with additives and chemicals allowed in food as one might think. Foods that are ‘generally recognized as safe’ don’t go through the official FDA, creating a loophole for food companies to allow these chemicals into your morning cereal. A few of these, such as aspartame, titanium dioxide

and potassium bromate, which are found in your typical junk food, are carcinogens and can cause a higher risk of genetic complications in your body. However, Europe follows a stricter regime of food additives and has completely banned any of these chemicals from its products. “It’s just like the consumer market is just hurting us, how are we supposed to make decisions when we don’t even know what’s good for us because they market it to us as good,” Harr said. “As a consumer society ourselves, we should work toward asking producers to [replace] these harmful additives [instead].” As more of these ultra-processed foods become readily available to people, the child obesity rate increases. According to NIH, one in six children is either obese or overweight. Since the 1980s, children’s exposure to chemically produced food has contributed



to a triple increase in child obesity in the United States. CDC

explains that fifty years ago, only 5% of children suffered from weight problems, instead of 17% during 2009-2010. These results further suggest that the growth in child obesity continues in our society. “By comprehending not only the nutrients our food provides but also the processing steps it undergoes, we can make informed choices that promote safety, health, and environmental sustainability. This awareness empowers us to select foods that support our well-being and align with our values,” said Nabor. Adopting a healthier lifestyle that minimizes the intake of super-processed foods and prioritizes whole and nutritious foods can deeply define the line between a malnourished body and a replenished one as you age. As told by NIH, over the last five decades, the health of Americans has continued to worsen. Now, 71% of Americans are overweight or obese. That concludes in an estimated 100 million people in America who struggle with obesity. To deeply understand its true harm, today, eating processed foods and fast foods kills more people prematurely

than cigarette smoking. Drinking enough water and eating enough vegetables every day can go a long way to further improve your organ systems and overall health. “In all honesty, it is better for you, and I feel like after eating healthy, you’re able to feel healthier and go about your day better,” Harr said. “It’s like this whole cycle of feeling better and healthier after eating.”

Business and Advertisement Side of the Food Industry

Ever wonder why suddenly that bag of chips is a need or that healthy snack seen on TikTok? It’s not just craving; food companies are really good at getting into consumers’ heads. They’re not just selling food, they’re selling a whole vibe. A lot of the time, people don’t even realize it’s happening. Food brands know teenagers are online constantly, so they meet them on social media like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. Often, influencers are casually munching on snacks

43.1% of students eat junk food a few times a week

29.8% of students eat junk food everyday in small quantities

9.5% of students eat junk food a few times a month

6.9% of students eat junk food even less frequently

or posting ‘what I eat in a day videos,’ making viewers think the videos are authentic. But most of the time, those are paid promotions. Since it doesn’t look like a regular ad, it feels more trustworthy, even if it’s just smart marketing. Through the power of social media, when food becomes popular, everyone wants it. “We have flyers to advertise the bistro and it’s on morning announcements too, and I know they put it on the Instagram sometimes,” senior Landon Ihms said. A big trick companies use is promoting the health angle. Lots of brands brag about their products being organic, low sugar or made with real fruit. But this doesn’t always mean it’s truly healthy. Healthwashing is when brands make food seem healthier than it is. A candy that says no artificial colors might still have a ton of sugar, but the label distracts from the actual product. “No, vegan food isn’t always healthy,” Harr said. “You need protein and unless you can regulate your veganism well, you need a substitute.” Bright colors, bold fonts and

clean designs all help a product stand out. Often, consumers of a product will buy that product purely based on aesthetics. This is a common practice. Brands spend tons of money making sure their packaging is made for social media. If it looks good on paper and in the media, it’s way more likely to grab it. Convenience is another major selling point. Brands know teens are busy and want quick options, so they hype up things like ready in two minutes or grab-and-go. It’s all about making life easier, especially when students have school, sports, or just want something fast after class. Easy food equals good food in the eyes of marketing. “The U.S is generally this consumer society. As cheap as possible,” Harr said. “Get that supply to meet that demand.” Food advertisements don’t just show what the product is; they show how it feels. Families laughing over breakfast, friends sharing snacks, or someone relaxing with their favorite treat it all creates this cozy, happy vibe. When food is linked to good feelings, people are more likely to remember

it and repurchase. It’s not just about taste anymore, it’s about the experience. Finally, brands love to tell stories. Whether it’s made by a small family farm or saving the planet with eco-friendly packaging, these messages make the consumer feel better about what they might be buying. Even if it’s a stretch, the story helps build trust and gives a reason to choose that product over another. At the end of the day, food marketing is everywhere and it’s smart. “The biggest thing I found out about marketing and advertising is just the food,” Ihms said. “There is nothing you can do in advertising do in marketing if you’re not giving good food.”



**% of student
t junk food
very day in
e quantities**

**4.2% of
students
rarely ever eat
junk food**

**1.9% of
students never
eat junk food**

**4.6% of students
chose not to
comment**

***out of 262
students polled**



Track: Sprinting to Success

Photo from @awuhani

By Varsha Jhanak

The track team is establishing itself this season with exceptional achievements in all events. As the team prepares for championship competition, athletes continue to set personal bests, with freshman Liana Wright winning an area title in the 100m and senior and Texas State recruit Phillip Reed qualifying for state in the 110m hurdles. The team keeps working hard with the same objective in mind: continuous progress and group success, even when meets get underway and individuals compete in 17 different events. “There are 17 events in track & field,” Coach Robert Reed said. “We rely on not only track-only kids, but we need athletes from other sports to build our team so we can be successful.” Distance runners begin training in the summer, while sprinters and field competitors intensify their preparations in August. The team prioritizes synchronization, quickness, and explosiveness. “Our training focuses on getting athletes stronger, faster, more explosive and coordinated in order to prepare them for the demands of their events,” Coach Reed said. Phillip, who moved from Nor-

way to join the team his sophomore year, didn’t expect track to play such a significant role in his life. After suffering an injury, he opted for track. Despite his unsure start, Phillip quickly connected with the technical side of hurdling and the way track rewards individual effort. “With track, the amount you put in really shows,” Phillip said. “It’s up to you. People who work the hardest usually get the best results.” Track athletes spend practices fine-tuning their specific events. For hurdlers like Phillip, this includes drills, simulated races, and form work focused on both strength and rhythm. “On meet days, I do my warm-ups and hurdle drills to work,” Phillip said. “Then I’m ready to go. It’s like a love-hate relationship: the workout can be very gruesome. But, at the end of the day, the results are like no other. Especially with hurdles, it’s so technical [and] that’s kind of the aspect I really like about it. There’s always something you can work on and change to get better. With most track meets featuring multitudes of athletes, the competition atmosphere is fast-paced and exciting.

All athletes compete simultaneously, making the events both hectic and energizing. “Track & Field meets are unique,” Coach Reed said. “Most 6A teams have over 100 athletes, and it makes for a unique and exciting environment.” While track may seem like a solo sport, the team possesses a strong sense of community. Athletes support each other in practice and at meets, recognizing that individual success helps the team overall. “At practice, everyone wants to grind it out and everyone respects it,” Phillip said. “People going hard, it kind of motivates everyone else. Meet day, everyone’s very supportive of each other [and] wants to do the best [because] if more people do good in different events, the team gets more points.” This bond is what Coach Reed believes sets his team apart. Athletes of all skill levels are welcome, and no one is cut based on ability alone. “We strive to have a family environment that people want to be a part of,” Coach Reed said. “We try to make it fun, so athletes want to participate throughout their high school career.”

Sweat, Sun, Sports: Students Find Summer Fun

By Camille Wright

The sun hangs high in the sky, classrooms are empty and summer freedom is in full swing. For students looking to break the rut of staying indoors and get active instead, summer is the perfect season to pick up a new sport or rediscover an old favorite. From spikeball matches on front lawns to pickup basketball at local parks, hobby sports are becoming a top way for teens to stay active over the break. “Pickleball is perfect for summer because it’s easy to learn, low-cost, and super social,” senior Plano East Pickleball Club Co-Founder Ade Agho said. “You can play it almost anywhere: parks, driveways, community centers. It’s also a great way to stay active without needing a huge team or lots of equipment.” As one of the fastest-growing sports in the United States, pickleball has moved from retirement communities to high school clubs and become much more than a TikTok trend. According to the Sports & Fitness Industry Association, pickleball participation has increased by nearly 160% over the last three years, making it one of the most accessible and inclusive sports on the rise. “We’re still deciding if we shall continue to hold events over the summer,”

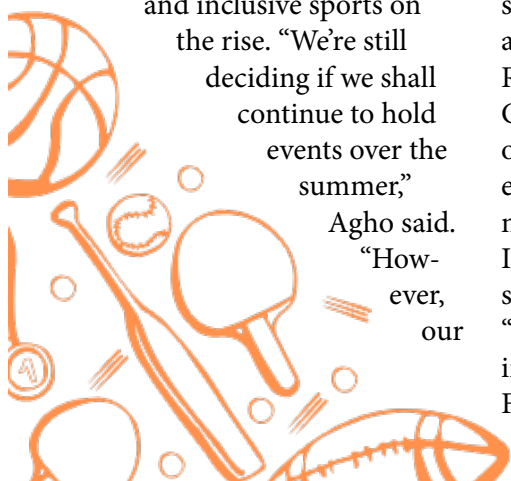
Agho said.

“However, our

leadership hopes to get together and play sometime in the summer one last time before we move on to college.” Staying active over summer break isn’t just about fun; it’s also important for maintaining physical and mental wellness. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends teens get at least 60 minutes of physical activity daily. Regular movement improves sleep, boosts energy, reduces anxiety and enhances mood, especially when the activity is done outdoors. “You got to keep up with the sport so you can get back to it when the summer’s over,” freshman Skylar Garriss said. Summer hobby sports offer a low-pressure way for students who aren’t part of organized school teams to stay both active and social. Activities like biking, rollerblading, skateboarding, ultimate frisbee and recreational soccer require minimal equipment and are easy to play with friends. Others may join local leagues or participate in sessions at recreation centers. In Plano, the Parks and Recreation Department offers summer leagues and open play opportunities for youth in sports such as volleyball, pickleball and basketball at the Carpenter Park Recreation Center, Liberty Recreation Center and other locations. Many of these programs are low-cost and easily accessible for residents of Plano. “It’s kind of positive ‘cause, like, I mean, you had something to do,” sophomore Gabrielle Titoyan said. “You weren’t just at home doing nothing and you’re able to stay in shape.” For some, these activities are just for fun. For others, they’re a stepping

stone to something more serious.

“Looking forward into the future, as pickleball grows in awareness and in members, we hope that Plano East will have its own official Pickleball Team,” senior Plano East Pickleball Club Co-Founder Victoria Johnson said. “For our most talented members, it’s not just fun, it’s a real sport and very competitive.” While Plano East doesn’t offer pickleball as an official sport, Agho and other club leaders hope to change that. The student-run club meets weekly to practice, compete, and introduce new members to the game; no experience is necessary. “We hope that through the blueprint we set this year, the Plano East Pickleball Club will develop into a full sports team, just like tennis or basketball,” Johnson said. With more daylight, fewer academic pressures and many community options, summer is the perfect time to get out and move. Whether it’s a casual game at the park or a new hobby picked up at a rec center, students don’t have to be varsity athletes to enjoy the benefits of summer sports. And for many, that mix of fun and fitness is exactly what they’re looking for. “Even if we don’t plan any events in the summer, we hope all our members keep playing and spread the word about how awesome pickleball is,” Agho said. “It’s a sport anyone can love, and that’s what makes it so great.”



Rising Up While Sitting Down: Influence, Popularity of ESports

By Aycen Koa Matsumoto Castro

Video game media is by far one of the largest forms of entertainment in the world. Ever since starting out in the late 1950s, it continues to evolve and make its brand known throughout generations. But here in the 21st century, there is no doubt that its market is nearly at its peak, with no signs of slowing down. One of the biggest names in this market is its very own sports brand, esports. Electronic sports (esports) is a competitive sports brand that specializes in forming and organizing video game competitions. Initially starting off small in the early 70s, the brand continued to attract many fans over the years as gaming culture became more and more popular, which has now led to the well-known industry it is today. And as esports continues to harbor more fans of the gaming industry, it also continues to gain more notability within the entertainment industry. The brand held its first competition in 1972 for the game “Spacewar!” which was held at Stanford University, but experienced its turning point in popularity in the early-to-late 2000s. With the rise of the internet and online multiplayer games, esports was able to switch from small local tournaments to a much broader style of competition. Popular games such as “Call of Duty”, “Counter-Strike”, and “Starcraft” were extremely popular worldwide, and when many players were offered the opportunity to compete in competitions for such games, it garnered attention from audiences worldwide, which helped the brand immensely. “I think because of how popular video games are in general, there is a large audience, people are going to watch,” avid gamer, Jaywone Yi said, “I guess it can exist just because of just how many people have such a passion and love for that.” However, in the 2010s, gaming media would become one of the most popular subjects on the internet, which would lead to this being one of the biggest eras for the competitive gaming industry. Competitive multiplayer games like “League of Legends” and “Overwatch” attracted a massive

online following, and since the concept of Esports was now a much more well-known term in the community, it led to many fans wanting to both watch and compete in competitions of their favorite games. This would help lead to the creation of official tournaments such as the “League of Legends World Championship” and the “Overwatch League” (which would later be replaced by the Overwatch Championship Series). The introduction of major esports tournaments such as these not only introduced a more competitive side for fans, but also interested fans who didn’t have any knowledge of esports before. This also opened up the opportunity for many other less-popular games to be included in Esports events that showcased a variety of many different games. This action would help esports gain attention from gaming fans outside of the more popular gaming genre, offering them the chance to watch and compete in more niche-based tournaments, one example can be “CEO” (Community Effort Orlando), an esports event that focuses on fighting games, old and new. As esports’ fan base grew, so did its brand. Public tournaments began to bring in more and more spectators, which would help support many tournaments in increasing their rewards, with many modern tournaments even now providing prize pools of over \$1,000,000. It’s not just the large prizes that became a benefit to competitors, but with the introduction to professional esports teams and leagues, becoming a professional gamer soon became an actual career option for many. However,

as esports gained more notability within the entertainment industry, there came criticism as to whether or not it should gain notability within the sports industry. Despite its name, many have argued that esports has no actual place in the world of sports. The Oxford Dictionary defines a “sport” as an activity that involves physical exertion and skill used to compete against others for the purpose of entertainment. And although Esports may fit the bill for the second half of that meaning, it’s hard to say that it does the same for the first half. In 2023, a court case concerning the lack of equity in the sports culture of the Florida Institute of Technology was filed by six student-athletes. In this case, the subject of the university’s esports team was brought up, to which the courts judge, Carlos Mendoza, would state that esports doesn’t meet the requirement for a sport, as it lacks athletic ability, nor is it recognized by the National Collegiate Athletic Association. Even so, there are still plenty of dedicated followers who defend its status. Claiming that although it may lack the physical aspect connected to many traditional sports, it still provides a highly competitive atmosphere, with certain skills still necessary to compete in it. With such support from fans, Esports continues to push itself to prove that it can exist on the same field as other traditional sports. “Some might say sports are sports because they involve physical movement and activity, while in esports it’s all purely on game.” Yi said, “I’d still consider it a sport, it pretty much is that since the competitiveness in it. It’s non-traditional, but I think it still can consider one.” There is no doubt that despite its history, many still view Esports as something relatively new, but its influence continues to spread globally, with many colleges offering esports scholarships, to even now being implemented into the Olympics for 2027, this competitive platform will continue to rise and entertain audiences worldwide.



Baseball Sets Sights on Striking Success

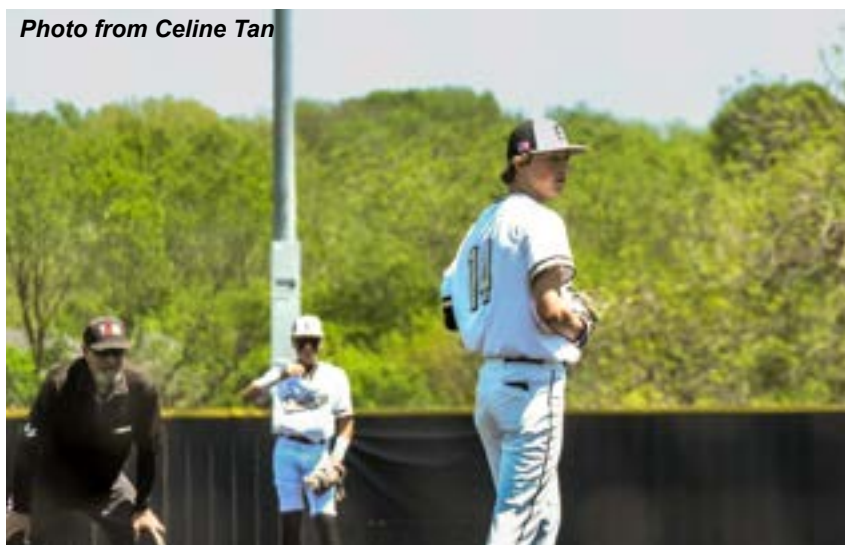
By Celine Tan

The baseball team faces a major transformation. With head coach Tommy Sparks, who joined the Panthers last year, the team is in an uphill battle. After winning just one district game total in the last two years, they remarkably won seven this year. Overall, the trend continues: the baseball team won five games in 2023. They tripled that score last year with 15 and won 14 this year. The secret to their improvement is all mental. “Having the confidence of going out there and getting the job done and rolling with the punches, I feel like that’s become a strength,” Sparks said. “We’re still trying to get out some of the demons that have plagued the program in the past and just focus on the next pitch or the next game. We’re better, but we’re not [yet] where we want to be.” Sparks and the assistant coaches allocate the first 10 minutes of practice every day to mental strategies, where they utilize visualization and breathing techniques to enhance the players’ focus and block out the surrounding noise on the field.

“Other than that, which is a big part of what we do, we incorporate the breathing [techniques] into different facets of the actual game, whether they’re hitting or pitching,” Sparks said. “That’s something that has had a big impact on what they’re doing.” Every day of practice focuses on a different aspect of baseball. During the season, the team lifts weights two times every week to build up their strength. Games typically occur on Tuesdays, Fridays and Saturdays, so Mondays and Thursdays emphasize hitting while Wednesdays focus on defense. The goal is for this season to be another season of growth. “I’m excited to just play my last year [in high school],” senior Cole McClendon said. “The opportunity to play, it just makes me happy. Yes, there [are] times when [I] have a bad game and think, ‘Why am I doing this?’ But baseball is a game of failure. I realized that I just have to keep on showing up every day to get better.” However, baseball is more than a game. When players get beat or when they don’t make the team they

Sparks said. “It’s a fight, and you’ve got to fight for what you want. Just because you work hard, that doesn’t necessarily mean that it’s going to happen. But, if you have that approach every single time, eventually it’s going to work out.” For many of the players, baseball may not be a sport they play seriously for the rest of their lives. This is why Sparks believes in the value of diverse experiences. The opportunity for these student-athletes to grow up on a team with people of different races and socioeconomic statuses prepares them for life after school. “It’s extremely diverse here, and I really like that,” Sparks said. “That’s exactly what you’re gonna get out in the world when you’re going through life, so that’s awesome for the kids to grow up like that because we want good people, not just good baseball players.” For seniors like McClendon, this year is all about savoring the last moments of being on a team with players he knew starting from elementary school. Before he continues his baseball career at Henderson State University in Arkansas, he wants to focus on “the memories [he’ll] never get back.” Not only does he treasure the time he spends with teammates together on bus rides, at team dinners and in between games, but he also wants to leave a lasting legacy. “To whoever wears number 23 next, I want them to know who wore it before them,” McClendon said. “If you look at LeBron James or Michael Jordan, they’re known for their numbers. To me, it just means you’re carrying a higher standard.”

Photo from Celine Tan



hoped for, they learn valuable life lessons that apply to areas outside of the sport. “Life is hard,”

Weekly Work: Four or Five Day Weeks

STAFF EDITORIAL

By Carter Fleming

The five-day work and school week is the standard for scheduling. A usual seven to ten hour day with 40 to 60 hour weeks, the weekend and repeat. Having worked for years, there shouldn't be a debate on why the work week should be different. Yet recently, many companies and schools are pushing for a four-day work week, giving three days off. On paper, a shorter week sounds amazing. Having time off is an experience to enjoy and may sound good on paper. However, this change can completely alter how the work week is structured. Every week, people go to work and school five days a week consistently. A switch to a four-day week takes another day out of the business week, where people need to work. Keeping companies around would be more difficult with shorter work weeks, as work wouldn't get done with cut-down hours. For schools, that is a loss of time in a week for students trying to get their education. It takes time out of the work week where productivity could be made. The alternative to ensure productivity works in a four-day week is to increase the work hours in each day. These days would be longer, forcing the working class to have less time to recover after a day of work, while cramming during the week because of earlier deadlines. For students, longer days would mean that those with extracurricular activities have less time to participate in sports and UIL if students are in them. Another argument for students is those in high school who work jobs. Not having time after school to work anymore, they can't work during the week,

their weekends are spent working and they burn out. Five-day weeks are crucial for students. When the world currently runs on a five-day week, students need to be able to be accustomed to that. Students from a young age go to school five days a week, starting at the age of five or six. Many students might lose that skill to work five days a week if they aren't accustomed to it. Some school districts are switching to four-day weeks and it makes people wonder if they will be able to come into the real world and work five-day weeks, never actually doing that a day in their lives. These five-day weeks, which are consistent, relatively short work days, easy communication, and stability, would be lost with these four-day weeks. Students and the working class would have a harder time with a four-day week. Though there is an argument for the four-day week. Depending on the scenario, a four-day week can lead to a better work-life balance. Having more time for yourself can help mental health and reduce work from being an overwhelming everyday factor that people think about. Fewer work days can also lead to productivity and less burnout. With the increased mental health and mindset, many will be able to come into work with more motivation to do the work they need, leading to new strides in efficiency. A

four-day week might also improve company costs. With fewer people working during a week, companies can spend less money needed for an office, saving resources and being cost-efficient. Overall, a four-day week can lead to cost efficiency and more productivity with employees who are more willing to work. In the grand scheme of things, the four-day work week seems plausible, but it just isn't for everyone. Multiple jobs require people to be available five days a week or more. Examples like nurses and doctors who are already overworked now would be working even more than others without any pay increase. Teachers would have to work five days a week, as well as working more than a lot of others, while still not getting paid much. These teachers would have to work a five-day week because a four-day week for students of education is just not possible. The five-day work week is a more plausible scenario for students and those who were compared to the counterpart of a four-day week, which may lead to inconsistency and stability issues.



The Panther Prints staff voted 9-3 believing that a five-day week is more beneficial

Artistic Scourge

By Reece Yeamans

It's an experience fundamental to school that many hate. Sitting in English, or history, maybe science, the teacher assigns a project, and it's an art project. Several times a year, students find themselves faced with art projects in classes that have nothing to do with the visual arts. When in these non-art classes, the last thing many people want to do is an art project. When there are classes specifically dedicated to art, and classes that are not, the question arises: should non-art classes be allowed to assign an art-only project? The clear answer is no. Art projects in non-art classes are detrimental to students who lack artistic ability. If teachers desire creativity in the classroom, there must be options besides drawing arts. Many students avoid taking art classes because they either do not like the subject or are simply incapable of drawing more than basic stick figures. So, when projects arise in which teachers expect them to engage in creative artistic endeavors, they naturally struggle. Normally, struggling would be natural and accepted for a difficult project, but when the project is arbitrarily difficult in a way irrelevant to the class' subject, undue stress is put upon students. This stress turns what should be an easier project into an insurmountable task. In non-art projects, there is clear scaling in grading; for instance, if mod-

est effort is given, a

modest grade is received; however, in art projects, what is modest and what is not varies from

student to student. According to the rubric from an AP psych art-based project, in which no technology could be used for aid, the metric for the art is as such: 70-scribbled together, 85-clearly lacking effort, 100-great with clear time taken. Besides the fact that there is practically no difference between the qualifications for getting a 70 and an 85, the jump from 85 to 100 is enormous, with no potential grades in between. For this reason, art projects can get in the way of students who want to earn the highest possible grades in their classes. When grades ride on how much a teacher likes a subjective piece of art, there is a risk of having a non-art class art project negatively impact GPA and rank. The difference between being valedictorian and salutatorian should be due to academic endeavors and not artistic ones. The biggest concern concerning GPA and art projects is the issue of subjectivity. When there is no clearly defined rubric to go off of, there is no protection against a teacher's personal opinions on a student from bleeding into the grade they receive. Nobody should have to fear failure simply because a teacher dislikes them or sets unrealistic standards based on other students' artistic ability. Teachers, though, feel that the art projects are beneficial to classes that don't teach or focus on art. Art projects help students be creative and see a subject in a new light. By reframing a subject through an artistic lens, students may be able to deepen their understanding of a subject and make connections that they otherwise could not. While this argument sounds like it makes sense, the issue lies in the fact that there are many more ways to

broaden understanding of a subject besides art. Activities such as storytelling, real-world application, and in-class discussions are all effective ways of deepening understanding. Some classes, such as Humanities and American Studies (AMSTUD), already integrate a unique approach to art-based projects that allow students to be creative without necessarily doing art. These classes allow for open-ended creativity-based projects; while some students may still choose to paint and draw, others may write a story or even prepare a representative dish, for example. This form of the creativity project takes away from the stress-inducing nature of art that can hinder academic success. Studies prove that creative projects lead to improved grades in classes of all types, and there is no reason to completely abandon this benefit simply because purely art projects are problematic. While creativity is certainly important in the classroom to develop minds, it is also important that the default does not just become art projects. Letting students express themselves in their own familiar way allows for not only deeper learning but also stronger engagement in creativity-based projects. Non-art-based classes should not have art-only projects; instead, if they want to incorporate creativity into their teaching, it should come in an open-ended form that minimizes stress and potential for failure while still encouraging growth.



Zodiac Signs

By Jade Chu

Do personalities have anything to do with zodiac signs? Some believe they do and that it could have something to do with the stars. There are 12 zodiac signs, and although many people might not take it seriously, others find meaning in how their personalities intertwine with the day they were born. Knowing someone's zodiac signs can be a unique way to better understand their behaviors and traits.

Those born between December 22 and January 19 fall under the sign of capricorn—the boss of the zodiac—known for ambition and a generous heart. Although they have a strong exterior personality, they are known to be sensitive once getting to know them better. Success is a big part of their life as being driven is important to them. Some people look at zodiac signs to put their beliefs into and have a different perspective on who they truly are.



“I have to be better than I was the day before, I really do like taking care of other people in a pragmatic way which relates to my zodiac sign,” senior Cyreana Foulk said. She realized that a way of stability is gained through reading about her sign and giving a second opinion on her emotions. Celebrities that are Capricorns include Michelle Obama, Timothee Chalamet and Ryan Seacrest.



Being loyal and a comfort seeker falls under being a Taurus to be born on April 20 and May 20. Given their trustworthiness, they are reliable when it comes to friendships and making sure that there is always a warm, welcoming environment everywhere they go. Although they come off as stubborn, it is their drive for ambition.

“I feel like I reflect being more grounded, down to earth, very chill and hungry for some reason, but it's not the entirety of myself,” Senior Ryliegh Peterson said. Taurus's favorite foods are fresh vegetables, fruits, chicken and turkey being able to balance healthy and comfort foods.

Virgos, born from August 23 to September 22, are often seen as detail-oriented and deeply analytical—always thinking three steps ahead before they even speak. As an earth sign, they are grounded, understanding, and think deeply about everything before speaking their mind.



“Everytime I talk to someone, I learn about their zodiac signs and I feel like zodiac signs tell the type of person they are. I also feel that Virgos are very detail-oriented and it relates to me,” Senior Ariana Aguliara said. Although Zodiac signs don't seem that interesting, it's a star sign that is unique to everyone based on birthdays. Being judgmental, overthinking and being easily annoyed are some flaws that Virgos have.



Cancers, born between June 21 and July 22, wear their hearts on their sleeves, offering unwavering loyalty and emotional depth that makes them incredibly empathetic companions. They are naturally empathetic and have a big heart although they have extremely strong emotions.

Fandom Fever

By Jewel Jeffery

Fandom culture is a collective of people who are fans of a specific work. The thing that someone is a massive fan of can be a person, a show, movies, cars, or a book. This phenomenon is very widespread, and the culture of fandom could be seen with almost anything that people engage with and celebrate their shared interests. It involves talented expression and social interaction. Fandom culture fosters passion, connection, and creativity. Fandom culture goes back decades. According to ImageText, fandom culture rose with the rise of science fiction and comic book communities. Popular comic strips in the 1900s included 'The Yellow Kid' and 'Little Nemo in Slumberland.' Soldiers in World War II were reading comics for their entertainment. The concept of comic books influenced a wide variety of movies and TV shows. In the 1930s, Sci-Fi and comic conventions started appearing. During these conventions, fans were able to meet characters and discuss stories. To search further into it, after these comics and characters started gaining popularity, along came fandoms. Fan communities eventually emerged for all sorts of things, and there is a culture and knowledge about them now. "I think back in 2017 is when I first watched *Divergent*," senior Ade Agho said. "I honestly think I have watched *Divergent* like one hundred times, and I see a lot of satire from the film, mainly on TikTok and Instagram. My favorite part about the film is the cinematography and the montages." Another way to look at a fandom would be like-minded individuals gathered together to 'fan' over a specific person or thing. Fandoms have a lot of components, especially when involving a musical artist. Perfect examples of this would be Taylor Swift, Beyonce, Michael Jackson, or Drake. Fandom culture involving artists sometimes

goes by a specific name that is naturally from the fan community. As time goes on, the artist will eventually start to embrace the name. For example, Taylor Swift, her fan base calls themselves the "Swifties". Some of these artist fans can also be considered groupies. A groupie is someone who is a passionate fan who follows a particular musician, band, or celebrity. They heavily support the artist, and some have high hopes of meeting them in real life. People also form fan bases over other celebrities with other occupations. These people could be actors, influencers, or athletes. People specifically love to fan over the American NBA player, LeBron James. When people fawn over athletes, a lot of these individuals have an emotional connection to them. They feel they have a personal bond with the athlete. Along with this, they celebrate their losses and their wins. "Around the 2018- 2019 playoffs is when I first started seeing [LeBron James] play very well," Ahuja said. "It was very inspiring to watch just how fast he attacked the other teams, and so it was cool to see that." Ahuja said. "If it is something special, like if he goes back to his hometown, I feel that's very special, or if his team wins a final, I feel extremely happy about it and emotional. And of course, they collect things associated with the athlete like jerseys, posters, signed items, or sometimes digital collectibles. I used to have some clothes related to LeBron, but I

Photo from Popsugar



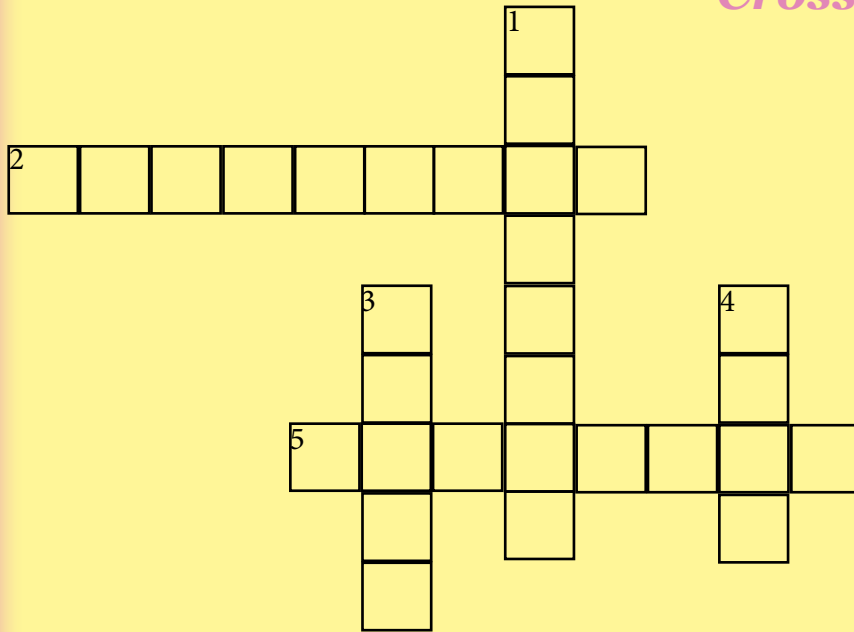
grew out of them, and sometimes my friend gives me LeBron action figures and stuff." Fandom culture is highly prominent on social media. A key element of fandom culture is creativity and storytelling. This influences the people online to make edits, fan pages, and draws attention to the subject for those who have never heard of it. For influencers, their fans may use clips from their content and repost them, and for people like athletes, fans use their favorite or best highlights from a game to show off their talent. "I love the comparisons and criticisms because that is their opinion," Ahuja said. "I like to hear other people's perspectives, and it is fun being able to debate them and bounce ideas off of each other." All these elements and points describe what the culture surrounding fandoms is. These are elite parts of fandom culture because they foster a sense of community within the fan base. They can joke and connect with the content. People who come together so passionately about a topic or person are, all in all, very inspiring and shape modern entertainment.

SUMMER THEMED GAMES

Enjoy your summer and these games!

- From the Newspaper Staff

Crossword



Across

- 2. Protection from the summer heat
- 5. A break from school and work

Down

- 1. Common summer treat
- 3. Summer destination
- 4. A place to cool off in the summer heat

Maze



Coloring Sheet

