

Oct. 3rd, 2025

Issue 1

# Panther PRINTS

**RESHAPING PUBLIC  
EDUCATION: NEW  
STATE LAWS TRANS-  
FORM  
TEXAS CLASSROOMS  
PG 13**

# EDITORS

## *Adviser*

Mike Birnbaum

## *Editor-In-Chief*

Aisha Ali

## *Copy Editor*

Ava Canaday

## *Creative Director*

Aisha Hasan

## *Multimedia Manager*

Inara Pabani

## *Photo Editor*

Isabella Tolentino

# REPORTERS

Ardyn Murray

Katie Nguyen

Kristhel Soto Castro

Soha Syed

Aamna Umer

Sydney Rocio Wade

*Photos by Isabella Tolentino*

*Cover Model:*

*Junior Samuel Sekimoto*

*All polls were conducted through google forms and shared through social media.*

# LETTERS FROM THE EDITORS

This first issue has been a huge learning experience for both editors and reporters.

Although it's only been a few weeks, it's clear that the reporters have so much potential and I'm excited to see them grow as writers throughout the year. We encountered more than a few challenges as we scrambled to piece together this first issue, but it's reassuring to know that we can only improve from this point onward.



As a senior, working alongside the rest of Panther Prints for the first time has been an amazing experience and a valuable learning experience. To my fellow editors and reporters: I couldn't imagine being with a better group of people! To my readers: I am overjoyed to share our first issue with you! From all of us to you we hope you enjoy our first issue of the year! Go Panthers!



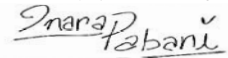
Just from working with all of my fellow reporters and staff members, my journalism knowledge has widely expanded and I'm proud to be working with such a dedicated and fun team. Each one of us worked hard in producing our first issue as a team, we kept each of our readers in mind. I hope you enjoy our first issue, thank you for your ongoing support Plano East Panthers!



Hi y'all I just wanted to say I hope you enjoy reading this issue. A lot of work went into it and I hope this bears fruit.



As a junior working on the first issue of the year and my first year on the newspaper staff, this experience has been an incredible learning opportunity for me. While there have been challenging moments, these hard times brought the staff closer together creating this issue both rewarding and memorable. I'm thrilled to share the first issue with you all! We hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as we enjoyed creating it and I wish you all a wonderful fall break!



## 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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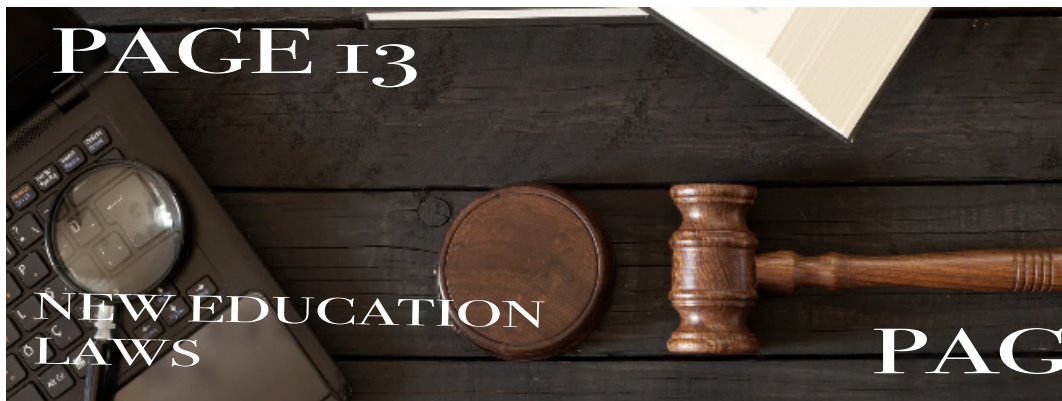
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MALE CHEER-  
LEADERS

*Photos from: Walmart, Amazon, Department of Criminal Justice, Outsports, 365 days of inspiring media*



# BANNED IN AMERICA: BEYOND THE COVER

By Aamna Umer and Ardyn Murray

*Photo from Pexels*

In compliance with House Bill 900, Texas schools began removing books from library shelves to meet the new rating system standards for their contents, with debates about whether the removals were over inappropriate material or not. Under the new legislation, school districts are required to review book titles and limit access to any that don't meet this standard. This bill, passed in 2023, reshaped library policies, impacting the availability of resources and how students engage with them.

PEN America is a nonprofit organization that is steadfast in its fight to protect students' right to freedom of speech and access to all available books. This organization has recorded over 10,000 book bans in public schools during the 2023–2024 school year, mostly seen in the states of Florida and Iowa.

"If I went to the school library and I found out that a certain book that I was looking for was gone, I would feel very disrespected," senior Safia Bilal said.

"I would wonder how this came to be in the first place, because if I feel disrespected from that, then there are probably many other people who feel outraged and disrespected from that too."

In Iowa, there is a pattern of removing books that depict sexual violence. Titles like "The Color Purple" by Alice Walker and "The Handmaid's Tale" by Margaret Atwood center around topics of women of color and violence against women.

Several groups, including the American Civil Liberties Union of Iowa, challenge this decision.

"Personally, I believe that every parent has the right to talk to their child about self-selection, but that overall it should be the responsibility of the family to decide rather than somebody else's decision placed upon you," Librarian Andrea Doerr said.

Restrictions on the content available to read affect the youth's ability to think for themselves and make appropriate decisions. Restrictions upon the content they consume should be in the control of their families, or even their own selves.

"It would contribute to prejudiced sentiment," Bilal said. "If you take away the ability of people to learn about other people who are different from them, that would negatively affect the growth of communities and the growth of society as a whole."

These bans are a warning, as they systematically and legally restrict access to essential knowledge and suppress critical thinking, which are vital for a healthy democracy and human development.

"I should be able to read whatever I want, wherever I want," Bilal said.

"I feel that all books regardless of the topic, should be able to be represented in the public school library because it's very important for people, for example, LGBTQ communities, to feel represented."

The 1982 Pico ruling declared that books can't be removed from school libraries due to ideas being controversial or not agreed upon by the school. According to Yale Law Professor Justin Driver, he sees the Pico decision as being the most overlooked regarding students' rights in American history, by referring to the misuse of the ruling

and the lack of knowledge citizens have regarding it.

"People our age, we're easily influenced," an anonymous student said. "It can change the way we think, since our brains are so malleable and impressionable. So, reading certain books that have harmful ideologies can lead to detrimental mindsets and perspectives on other people."

Banning certain books with content that reflects extreme violence and ill intent towards other minorities can breed and foster a set of beliefs that promote division, intolerance and even the normalization of harmful stereotypes.

"They should target specific types of content," Junior Charlie Mendez said. "Like 'Mein Kampf'. That's horrible."

Parents of students, school staff, and especially governmental officials such as Governor Greg Abbott have deemed certain novels as inappropriate and unsuitable for minors, leading to many of the books in Texas and all over the nation being taken off shelves. An example being 'Mein Kampf', written by Adolf Hitler, outlines his extremist ideology, including racism, antisemitism, and support for dictatorship.

"I feel that it's fundamentally wrong," Bilal said. "You're trying to cover up the wrongs of the past. And through the book bans, we're not making any progress in history; you have to know the patterns and stuff."

Book bans discourage questioning authority and threaten democratic principles of freedom of expression, making it imperative for people to resist and challenge these decisions to safeguard their future.

"We should be moving forward, not backwards," Bilal said. "We shouldn't be falling back into history."

**73.6%** of students believe that banning books **limits readers.**

# OWEN COOPER MAKES EMMY HISTORY: INSPIRES A NEW GENERATION

*By Ava Canaday and Katie Nguyen*



In a groundbreaking moment for television history, 15-year-old Owen Cooper made Emmy history as the youngest person to ever win the award for Outstanding Lead Actor in a Drama Series. His performance in Netflix's hit show "Adolescence" not only amazed audiences but also created a cultural moment. Cooper's win proved that age isn't an obstacle that can't be overcome, and that young voices are not only the future, but also the present.

"I think that's a very big representation that anybody can make it, that anybody can do it, and that anybody has the power to be as great as the actors that say that it took them a lifetime to get there," junior Guillermo Leiva said.

Cooper's success challenged long-standing expectations in the industry and showed that young performers can not only meet the standards but they can also set them. As his first acting role ever, Cooper delivered a performance powerful enough to affect young minds. "Adolescence" pushed boundaries not just with its acting but also through its production. The entire season was filmed in one single continuous take, which was a bold choice that demanded Cooper to have precision and emotional depth. His ability to complete such a challenge from start to finish left a lasting impression on both the industry and the audience.

"[Teens] will have more motivation to work to get where he is now," junior Melody Hoang said.

Youth can better relate to someone their own age doing something as incredible as Cooper had done. That type of achievement doesn't just impress them; it energizes them. This motivation tells kids they don't have to wait to be older, richer or more experienced to start making a difference or following their passion. Youths bring fresh ideas to the table by seeing the world through a different lens. They carry raw emotion and bold energy to the table, and Cooper's win reminds them of that. His Emmy win delivers a message that change isn't limited by age. With courage, creativity and commitment, anyone can leave a lasting impression.

"I thought it was a really good show; his performance was amazing," junior Elizabeth Cazan said. "I recommend it if you want something short and has a plot."

What made Cooper's performance so unique is how he channeled his youth, not as a limitation, but as a strength, which added a deeper depth to his performance. This show explores the complexity of adolescence. It dives into the problems teens face as they try to find their identity. Cooper portrays the emotional, social and psychological emotions that younger generations go through. His performance connected deeply with younger audiences, many of whom saw their own reflection through the portrayal of bullying in the show. Many fans of "Adolescence" look forward to seeing Cooper in more films.

According to GQ India, Cooper is predicted to make his Hollywood debut in the upcoming movie, *Wuthering Heights*. He will be playing as a younger version of Heathcliff, along with Margot Robbie and Jacob Elordi.

"Most of the adult actors were very supportive of him, and they were all very excited, which was very heart-felt," Cazan said.

Many adult actors at the Emmys openly praised Cooper's win, celebrating his breakthrough with genuine excitement and heartfelt encouragement. Through their support, they fostered a sense of community and mentorship on set, demonstrating their genuine desire to see him succeed and thrive. For Cooper, this support did more than uplift his spirits; it reminded him that his work mattered and that his voice made a difference. Off camera, many actors continued to show their support for Cooper by posting about his performance on social media platforms. The established actors didn't just support him, but they stood with him, and in doing so, Cooper experienced something more valuable than a win.

"If you really put a lot of passion in it and pursue your talents, then you can do a lot of crazy stuff," Cazan said.

*Photo from ELLE*



## DEFUNDING OF PBS TARGETS PUBLIC EDUCATION

*By Kristhel Soto Castro*

**W**atch out, seniors! The start of your college applications begins! As this school year rolls in, students start their college applications, tirelessly working on their essays, reaching out for recommendation letters and maxing out their extracurriculars. Given all the work that has to be completed, students must afford to apply to their desired universities, which, over time, can pile up into large sums of money.

**T**o ease this year's college spending for students, the State of Texas dedicates a week in October, from the 13th to the 19th, to formally exempt students from application fees. In the 89th Texas Legislative Session, Governor Greg Abbott approved Senate Bill 2231, requiring all Texas Universities and Colleges to waive their fees on ApplyTexas. Although the usual application fees range from forty to ninety dollars, depending on the institution, Apply Texas provides an opportunity for high school graduates to apply for free.

**L**ike the Common App, Apply Texas helps students apply to universities throughout the state. These applications must be submitted through Apply Texas for free admissions; it is up to the institutions to decide whether to waive the fee on their admissions platform. The waiver applies to community colleges as well! The waiver fee is only eligible for Texas residents applying for an undergraduate degree, and it must be submitted by 11:59 pm CST on Oct. 19 for students to be eligible for free admissions.

**S**o, seniors, if you haven't submitted your application for admission, and the admission prices look daunting, take this opportunity to save a few bucks and apply during Free Admissions Week!

*By Sydney Rocio Wade*

**C**ongress passed the Recissions Act of 2025 on July 18, eliminating federal funding for public media, including the non-profit Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), directly affecting the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and National Public Radio (NPR), which rely on the funding to keep local stations running. While PBS lost funding, a conservative broadcasting service called PragerU aims to fill the said void that is being left due to the cuts being made.

"I think PBS is important because it's used as an educational tool throughout classrooms in America," junior Cody Trainer said. "I think it's insane that the budget for that is being slashed."

The Trump administration had a goal to defund public media due to the idea that it was outdated and an unnecessary expense. With the defunding, it will affect communities that rely on PBS, such as rural and low-income communities that have been utilizing it for the past 55 years as the only available option for a free early education source.

"I grew up in a household that did not have cable television, so I relied heavily on the 4 major stations that existed when I was a kid, which were ABC, NBC, CBS and then Fox sometimes," an Anonymous PESH Teacher said. "Growing up, PBS was one of the few options that I had available to me."

PBS is a widely accessible program for everyone, providing a diverse range of shows for free. In contrast, PragerU, which aims to serve as a replacement for PBS,

is also a free media network, but it believes that the education system is corrupted a free media network, but it believes that the education system is corrupted by by left-wing propaganda and that schools should teach the important and traditional values of America, pushing a distinct ideological bias onto their media.

"There's a clip that went viral recently where one of PragerU's videos shows Christopher Columbus saying slavery wasn't that bad, people would rather be slaves than be dead, which is insane," Trainer said. "There are stories of people jumping off of ships and dying in the middle of the ocean so they didn't have to grow up in slavery, so clearly it wasn't."

These videos PragerU produces sparked controversy due to the fact that they alter historical information and are being offered to educators and viewers. According to NPR's Lisa Hagen, educators have voiced a concern over videos that PragerU provides due to their inaccuracy. The video of Christopher Columbus is an example of one of the possible videos that can be shown to students in class, rather than PBS programs.

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"Back then, I just thought it was entertaining," Trainer said. "I liked watching it, but now I look back and I'm like, I think it was very nice, especially Wild-cratts. It was very educational as well, I learned a lot about biology, animals and ecosystems."

PBS Ready to Learn Grants, originally funded by the Department of Education, supported studies showing student growth subjects. Despite this, the funding was cut back in May.

"I think it's important for us to have a public, cost-free way to educate and entertain our kids," an anonymous teacher said. "It's much more than just education. It's also entertainment and mental stimulation that you get from PBS and those kinds of things."

PBS stations have provided a source for educators to learn and benefit from engaging shows, allowing viewers to better understand the world around them. Some parents, educators and students are opposed to PragerU becoming an alternative teaching source for their children because of the political and religious aspects of education.

"Politics has no place in schools," Trainer said. "I think that's part of basic education, just getting the facts. There shouldn't be any lens on it, whether it's left or right, conservative or liberal. I think that's kind of why PragerU being in classrooms is absurd."

According to Americans United CEO Rachel Laser, public schools should be a place for children to receive a high-quality education that is free from religious coercion and political ideology. Public schools are the building blocks for a democracy and the public education system is meant for all students, regardless of their ethnicity, gender, religion or even political beliefs.

"If we're going to say that we're representing all these people, then we need to represent these people and not represent our own specific groups of people that we align with," an anonymous teacher said. "Speaking as a public servant, I believe that it is not my responsibility to share and encourage my specific ideals, but instead for me to foster an environment where we all have our opinions and all can be present."



*Photo from PregerUkids.com*

**52.8%**

of students believe that defunding PBS will **negatively impact** children.

*Photo from Propsugar.com*

**27.2%** of students believe defunding PBS will **positively impact** student education.

**18.4%** of students chose **not to comment**.

# DENIM CONTROVERSY

*By Isabella Tolentino*

On July 23, American Eagle released an advertisement featuring actress Sydney Sweeney. In the various advertisements released, Sweeney was shown wearing a Canadian tuxedo, a natural makeup look and her blonde hair was made to look effortless. The lines Sweeney spoke during one advertisement in particular took the internet by storm, raising red flags and controversy about eugenics.

"I think [Sweeney] has a type when it comes to advertising," senior Aleeya Mohammed said. "She knows that she's attractive, she knows that men really like her, I feel like she [Sweeney] uses that to her advantage. She plays roles that fit into this and very much sexualizes herself."

The advertisement stated multiple times that Sweeney has "great jeans", a play on words after she mentioned genetics, which could also be interpreted as Sweeney having "great genes". This specific quote is one that changed how people would view her and American Eagle alike. The quote indirectly referenced the advertisement Calvin Klein did with Brooke Shields in 1980. The Calvin Klein advertisement "nothing comes between me and my jeans" sparked generations of debate, with many magazines removing the ad from their issues, worried about backlash and controversy. The fuel behind the backlash was the fact that Shields was only 14 at the time of the ad, not fully aware of the inappropriate undertone of the script. Shields herself stated in an interview many years later that she was "unaware" and "naive", not grasping the weight of the ad. Shields' ad began with almost the same quick review of genetics, just like Sweeney had done. The American Eagle ad, like Shields, has a sexual undertone as well. In another version of the ad, the camera pans to her chest.

"The jeans didn't even fit her well [Sweeney], the advertisement didn't even focus on the jeans themselves, it only sexualized her [Sweeney]," an anonymous student said. "The focus on her chest was definitely sexualization, there was just so much objectification. At that point, their target audience wasn't even women. This ad was focused toward men."

Objectification is something American women have been bringing into light over the past decade, across social media platforms and in society. Sweeney herself has stated previously that she would like people to stop objectifying her. Yet, she allowed this advertisement to happen and she continues to push feminism back, while also playing roles in various movies and shows that project a woman to be strong and independent, not focused on objectification.

In light of the American Eagle advertisement, people have been claiming that Sweeney's ad is a dog whistle for eugenics and white supremacy. With the current political climate in America, and her recent reveal that her family is Republican and pro-MAGA, people had mixed emotions on the ad. Many people, especially younger generations, associate being part of political parties as being extremists.

"I mainly think the reason behind eugenics being perceived is just the way she looks [Sweeney]," an anonymous student said. "In the current political climate, it's just not a good ad to be putting out at this time. Especially when there's an uproar in racism and hate."

One major issue the American Eagle advertisement faces is that it repeatedly claimed that Sweeney has "good genes". With no other genetic representation of people from different racial, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, this can be taken as a push to white supremacy by some individuals.

"I think even though she's [Sweeney] a woman, it was a very misogynistic ad," Mohammed said. "It was very much for males because of her revealing top. I think that it was perceived as a push to racism and eugenics because she's [Sweeney] a white woman, she's conservative, and the script she read was just not good. It was a bad mix and people took it many ways."

In light of these jean advertisements, global girl group, KATSEYE, has taken the internet and world by storm.



They released their own jeans advertisement with GAP jeans. In contrast to Sweeney's advertisement with American Eagle, those who have seen the ad are raving about KATSEYE, positive feedback has been given widely to their collaboration with GAP. In the ad, the KATSEYE members are all wearing outfits with denim aspects, from denim skirts to jeans, each member skillfully showing off a piece from the new collection and displaying how talented they are with their creative and well-executed dance moves.

"I think it was targeted more to teenagers and young adults," Mohammed said. "The clothes they were wearing were not revealing at all compared to the American Eagle ad, their outfits look like things teenagers wear today. I just like the KATSEYE ad better."

In the ad, they don't talk about genetics at all, only showing GAP denim. The song "Milkshake" by Kelis has become viral once more due to KATSEYE. The group has gained a stronger fanbase and more people know who they are. GAP's sales have gone significantly up, and people are more inclined to buy GAP jeans now more than ever.

"They're doing a fun dance, it's not about their bodies," an anonymous student said. "It's about celebrating their different their different backgrounds and how denim jeans can look good on anyone, no matter the body. Each member looks incredible, the choreography is just incredible to watch, displaying their differences makes people more inclined to want to buy GAP jeans."

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# REDISTRICTING: BATTLING FOR CONGRESS

By Soha Syed

While midterm elections are more than a year away, the Republican and Democratic parties have prompted the launch of what critics title a ‘Gerrymandering Civil War’ over redistricting rulings in Texas. Republicans currently control Congress, but their power is threatened as midterms tend to shift the House majority opposite of the elected President’s party. Gerrymandering is the practice of altering district lines to favor a party or group and thus inhibiting representation of other parties and groups, which is legal in partisan cases. Conversely, congressional districts are carefully mapped every ten years to fairly represent populations within a state. Following this pattern, the next redistricting shouldn’t occur till 2030, but the battle for Congress has arisen an unusual number of mid-decade redistricting proposals.

“Every state gerrymanders to some degree, whether the state is controlled by the Democrats or Republicans it will lean that way or the other,” an anonymous Government teacher said. “The timing is a little unusual, although it is not unprecedented. But in the end gerrymandering itself is political.”

Texan Republicans had first proposed a new map picking up five seats for the GOP. As the House majority is separated by a mere three seats, the plan would secure their dominance. According to NPR, President Donald Trump was incredibly supportive of the bill, viewing it as a fairer representation of a Republican Texas. Yet, Democrats, intimidated by the loss of seats, claim it violates the Voting Rights Act. The map may skew in favor of Republican seats, but it also dilutes voter representation of minority communities.

“This is the problem with gerrymandering,” senior Crystal Phung said. “We have ethnic enclaves, but at the same time it almost makes it super easy to dilute votes like [minorities].”

The controversy over the new map considers the impactful history behind one of the affected districts: District 35. According to the Texas Tribune, Latinos make up 40% of Texas’ population, outnumbering all remaining racial groups. The district was created to represent these voters of color, within the San Antonio & Austin metropolitan areas. However, the new map adds rural voters from white majority counties, making Latino voices diluted. Many fear the new elected representative will neglect Latino voters’ needs that were previously upheld by the district’s majority vote.

“It’s leaving a large population of people underrepresented,” senior Mariam Mubashir said. “In situations like these, one kind of inequality usually leads to another.” Despite Democrats’ beliefs over redistricting, Republicans claim their true intentions are for greater party representation. Todd Hunter, creator of the bill, argued the proposal was solely to improve Republican political performance, using the *Rucho v Common Cause* case to justify its partisan gerrymandering.

In addition, the Republican-led Statehouse negates the racial gerrymandering accusations with the plan’s increased number of minority-led districts. Though District 35’s Latino votes were diluted to promote Republican seats,

the new map adds two Black majority districts and one Hispanic majority district. Their plan targets districts without a clear racial majority, so the party can reshape them and pack more rural Republican voters.

“[The map] is not just making more Republican seats, but it’s making Republican seats more secure,” Phung said. “It’s packing votes into centers and making elections less competitive.”

With these justifications, the redistricting map was passed on August 29, 2025. Accordingly, voters nationwide are concerned, due to the dynamics within the House of Representatives likely shifting. To combat this, California proposes their own plan; the state adds five Democratic seats making the original proposal ineffective. But the President isn’t supportive of California’s redistricting plans compared to Texas’, attempting to file a lawsuit blocking the proposal. Despite the two states holding identical partisan intentions, the President’s responses to both allow the favorability aspect of gerrymandering solely applicable to Republicans. With this, many question the legality of the practice altogether as both parties have used the practice unjustly.

“[Gerrymandering] should be illegal in all scenarios,” Mubashir said. “Any sort of political bias or unevenness on either side, could cause a disruption in balance.”

# BUILDING COMMUNITIES: NHI INSPIRES STUDENT LEADERS

*Photo from NHI*

*By Inara Pabani*

After practicing their mock trials and traveling for hours to attend their events, with their tailored blazers along with pride and excitement, they are prepared to show their knowledge of the history of Latino culture.

The 501(c)(3) student-led non-profit organization “National Hispanic Institute” has been successful in building communities around the country for over 40 years. Over time, the Latino youth population began expanding rapidly. This opportunity was noticed by Ernesto Nieto and Gloria de Leon, founders of National Hispanic Institute (NHI), where they noticed this as an idea to bring the youth involved in their communities and develop leadership traits.

Through the years, hundreds of board, staff and volunteers have been serving their commitment over 20 years. The NHI alumni actively serve in multiple areas mainly being in the Dallas-Fort Worth region. NHI collaborates with more than 20 high schools nationwide to help recruit more members, especially involving undergraduates. Over 60 colleges and universities are current members of NHI College Registers.

“Any organization founded to empower the Hispanic community in my opinion, I hope would make students feel seen.” Junior Naima Ali said. “Especially with all that is going on in the world, we need organizations like NHI that sheds light on the latinos who are making a difference right now.”

High school freshmen, sophomores and juniors are allowed to participate in the organization where they are provided with networks of opportunities around colleges and universities, alumni,

training faculty and their own support system. Their opportunities involve leadership projects that revolve around their communication skills, building their knowledge of the organization’s concepts and teaching inquiry-based learning of personal and professional life planning.

“The people were really nice and I connected with them,” Junior Lorenzo Marquez said. “Now my family member’s sister, who is 13, will be doing the program. When I have kids, they will be doing the program too.”

The program offers a variety of opportunities for the youth to explore throughout their school year and help benefit their future. Every year, the National Hispanic Institute announces the “Great Debate” competition in their region for incoming freshmen to give them an opportunity to harness their voice and engage with prospective speaking-wise topics. The four categories were oratory, mock trials, cross examination and extemporaneous speaking. Furthermore, The oratory section aims for students to express their emotions through topics that impact their community.

“Last year, for the auditory selection we had to write a five minute speech,” Marquez said “I wrote mine about a baseball player, I talked about how he and I are doing sports that weren’t really meant for hispanics. I was the only person in the whole Dallas region to place up in the competition, and this year I worked with other people who did oratory last year, and one of our kids won the award.”

The National Hispanic Institute includes other programs such as “Lorenzo de Zavala

Legislative Session” and “Collegiate World Series”. The Lorenzo de Zavala Youth Legislative Session program focuses on organizational management, system development, and creating policy and legislation.

“Public speaking is one of the skills that is learned from various students that participated in the program,” Marquez said.

The Collegiate World Series Program is targeted towards rising seniors who provide a capstone research experience focusing on preparing for college, by providing guidance on admissions, essay writing, interviews, financial aid and using inquiry-based learning to solve complex problems.

“Back then, I was really shy, I wasn’t really comfortable speaking in public,” Marquez said. “The National Hispanic Institute teaches you how to speak in public, how to speak to a large group of people. I ran for governor and I was in the finals where I gave a formal speech in front of 250 people.

The National Hispanic Institute continues being a victorious ongoing non-profit organization program accepting multiple volunteers and members yearly. Even with the programs involving multiple competition opportunities for students to compete, it’s also a team-based experience where each student can learn bonding with their peers and continue to strive with success.

“I believe that NHI would make a very positive impact on students.” Junior Mayah Kiama said. “It is extremely important for young people to see themselves reflected in leadership spaces and to have role models who understand their cultural background.”





# UNPLUGGING THE CLASSROOMS

By Aisha Hasan and Aamna Umer

As the bell goes off, observing eyes fall on the hands of every student. If a student is found with a device, in class or not, then they are immediately faced with consequences. Repeated offenders may even be sent to a disciplinary school. The phone ban being put into action, students and teachers alike share a mixed array of feelings and opinions about it. Beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, the law now requires school districts to implement policies that prohibit or secure any personal WiFi connected devices, with only certain exceptions.

"I think the phone ban itself is just too harsh for the students," Senior Nabeeha Ashfaq said. "I definitely understand where they're trying to come from and trying to better the school environment, and I do see the positive impacts that it could have, but I feel like it's too harsh to not be able to use it during the passing period or lunch. It's very inconvenient for students."

To Ashfaq, what makes the policy feel harsh is the loss of convenience. While Chromebooks are useful, they can not replace the convenience of a phone. If there is a change in your class or your schedule, checking that on your Chromebooks in the hallways is not easy and can disrupt the halls.

"Though if I ever get lazy, I wouldn't be motivated to learn it myself, but we can't really do that anymore," Ashfaq said. "During class, when I would be stuck, I would just go on my phone and ChatGPT it."

The purpose of the ban was to combat distractions and being able to achieve high academic standing. With cell phones, the curated algorithms and one's online feed are designed to be addictive. With the phone ban, theoretically, this problem is resolved.

"I think simply collecting phones or enforcing the policy within the classrooms should be fine," Ashfaq said. "You should be able to use it outside. The only instances I found it to be an issue were within the classroom."

This ban may endanger school safety as well, something which needs to be thoroughly looked into and prioritized over anything else.

"School safety is a big thing; the phone ban isn't really related to the topic of school safety, which is why I find it hard to understand why they did it when there are other things to be focusing on," Ashfaq said. Some teachers do not feel that school is less safe without phones, as there are measures in place to prevent harm from coming to the students.

"I can see why someone would have that concern," Pharmacology teacher Suzy Eisenberg said, "But when you're at school, if there's an emergency, there's landlines and there's ways for parents to contact the school."

Some teachers do not feel that school is less safe without phones, as there are measures in place to prevent harm from coming to the students.

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Despite the phone ban being for the students, the teachers are also affected by it since it changes how they manage their classrooms and how they deal with this shift in school culture. The ban also brings them opportunities to build stronger in-person relationships.

"I think we're doing fine without it," an anonymous teacher said. "Cellphones were not that common in the beginning for students, so it's not really that different from when I started in the beginning." The social lives of her students have been greatly impacted by COVID, where, during quarantine, they found comfort on their screens instead of real life. This ban maybe could be a small step towards reversing that effect.

"Students have been mingling more, more than they have in the past five years," the anonymous teacher said. "Especially since after COVID. Technology was a safe space for people, and it helped connect people, because we were not allowed to be with each other."

To build understanding and trust amongst students, some teachers hold themselves to the same standards, acknowledging that although this new shift is harder to adjust to, it is not impossible.

"I'm also doing the phone ban, I don't access it all day," an anonymous teacher said. "Because I know students might feel some type of way about that, but I feel like I'm connecting with my students more, I wanted to erase that tension, and be like I'm with you in this, we're in this together."

**58.9% of students disagree with the phone ban**

**35.5% of students disagree with the phone ban wishing to still use it during passing period**

**4.8% of students believe that phone usage is unnecessary during school**

**0.8% of students chose not to comment**





# SPOTLIGHT ON SIX

*By Isabella Tolentino*

In preparation for their newest production, theatre students are learning music and practicing for “Six: Teen Edition”. This musical is a retelling of the six wives of Henry VIII and the lives they led. Addisyn Barron is a Senior in the Plano East Theater company. She is one of the talented students who make up the advanced theatre class. In previous years, she had helped with their performances for the University Interscholastic League, which provides educational extra-curricular opportunities for students. Barron has helped in roles such as acting, make-up artist, and technical work for PESH’s theatre.

“Last year I did tech for our UIL show, I did costumes and makeup, but for the most part, I just acted, I love acting,” Barron said.

Barron wants to continue her passion for musical theatre and plans on becoming a professional Broadway actress. Her passion for theatre and acting is present in all that she does for advanced theatre.

“I love theatre, it’s my life,” Barron said. “I’ve been in theatre for almost 7 years. I want to be a professional Broadway actress.”

Her level of skill is not something many students can copy, from her bubbly personality, to her enthusiasm and excitement she has for theatre, Barron is a dedicated member of the advanced PESH theatre class. She strives to be the best and make a production memorable for not only the supporters who come to see them, but also her underclassmen, her fellow seniors, and her teachers.

“I really enjoy guiding the underclassmen,” Barron said. “I’m in the advanced class this year and I was in the advanced class last year. Some of our curriculum repeats itself but it’s cool to go into it with the perspective of already doing it before. and seeing them experience it for the first time, being able to watch and see ideas develop within them, seeing how I was last year and watching them perform is a really cool experience.”

It’s not just about guidance for Barron, she cherishes the friendships that come along with theatre. Being part of Plano East Theater company means being a friend to every student who is a part of the organization. Barron feels that being friends with the juniors and seniors just brings everyone closer together, making the hard times less stressful.

“When I was in this class last year, I didn’t know any seniors, but now, I know all the juniors and they’re all very talented, sweet kids,” Barron said. “I think already, the connections we have, our friendships, are really going to benefit us to get through the nitty-gritty hard work.”

So far, PESH theatre has made various preparations for the show, including the initial auditions, call-backs, learning songs and dances from “Six: Teen Edition”, and starting rehearsals. Despite the stress of theatre, Addison always makes sure to put forth her best effort.

“You have to remind yourself,”



Barron said. “You are who you are, all you can do is put in 100% effort and that’s just going to have to be enough.”

With this new production coming to PESH, much preparation needs to be done. Fundraising efforts for PESH’s theatre are run through the Booster club, a volunteer organization, one that Barron hopes can help raise money for an exciting school year. Establishing better social media coverage is another thing that Barron would like to have happen.

“I mean, it’s some hard music, it’s six girls, and everybody is pretty much singing their own part,” Barron said. “You don’t have anyone else in your ear to make sure you’re singing the right notes, but it’s going to be really exciting, it just increases the wow-factor a lot more.”



# RESHAPING PUBLIC EDUCATION: NEW STATE LAWS TRANSFORM TEXAS CLASSROOMS

*By Aisha Ali, Ardyn Murray, Kristhel Soto Castro*

**E**nacted during the 89th legislature, new laws are prompting significant changes in the K-12 education system; Texas Public Schools across the state adapt to new laws affecting student conduct, curriculum, religious displays and library content.

“Legislation and changes in school are good, but I can see how too many changes at once can be overwhelming,” senior Arabella Gonzales said. “[Students] are talking about legislation and laws a lot more than usual, but I think that it’s just a result of our [current] government.”

## TEXAS PHONE BAN: PROS VS. CONS

**A** new law, aimed at enhancing the school environment, prohibits the use of cellphones throughout all schools in Texas. On June 20, 2025, Texas Governor Greg Abbott signed House Bill 1481, which strictly enforces bans on the use of personal devices during school hours. This bill took effect on Sept. 1 and affects all grades, K-12, throughout Texas. This year, staff and students have adapted to using no electronic devices during classes, lunch, and in school hallways.

“The students have been great,” Vice Principal Mona Abdelfattah said. “They’ve been very respectful about [the ban], and putting [their phones] away. I know it’s hard to break the habit of having the phone all the time, but if they have it out, we address it and they put it away.”

House Bill 1481 bans the use of personal devices, including smartwatches, Bluetooth earbuds and headphones, tablets and student-owned laptops and Chromebooks. Students are only allowed to use school-issued Chromebooks during the school day for online work. Failure to meet the law’s standards comes with hefty consequences for students; as discussed in every classroom, all students receive a single warning before their phones are revoked and may only be retrieved by their parents. Consequently, students will receive In-School Suspension (ISS) on their second slip-up, which will remove their semester exam exemptions.

“There are some districts that take [the phone] right away,” Abdelfattah said. “I think we made it fair that we gave out warnings the first week, and then we started a stair step process; the first time’s a warning, the next day is ISS, then three days of ISS. At the end of the day, having a phone out is breaking the law.”

Districts such as Plano, Allen, Fort Worth, Mesquite, and Garland chose to implement an ‘out of sight’ policy, requiring students to have their phones completely turned off and kept in their bags throughout the entire day. The bill aims to enhance student participation in class and improve social interactions among peers. It’s also intended to limit cyberbullying and eliminate online harassment among students.

“When kids use [their phones] in the halls and during lunch, they don’t put it away in the classrooms,” Abdelfattah said. “It’s so we can keep it consistent. If not, it’ll bleed into the classrooms. And I think it’s just because they got too used to [their phones].”

Although the bill aims to improve schools, students express concerns about their safety while on campus grounds. Despite phones being commonly known as a distraction to students, they are also used as a means of communication between kids and their parents. Students are concerned that, in a matter of minutes, they may become victims of any serious situation that requires phoning their parents or 911 for help.

“When I saw the [Catholic Church school shooting] news, I wasn’t surprised; I was more devastated because school season is coming up,” senior Haneen Gaben said. “I’m really sad that they are elementary schoolers; they’re younger than me. It makes me think that it might happen to me; it shows that no one is spared.”

The bill also states that phones are banned during lunch periods and school hallways in addition to classrooms, but students argue that phones should be allowed during their assigned lunch periods and on their way to other classes. A few more argue that the law should only apply during lectures.

“In my opinion phones should only be banned during lectures,” Gaben said. “During passing period, phones [should] be okay, and during lunch, it should be okay as well. Everything but class lecturing should allow students to use their phones.”

## NEW DEI LAWS: EVALUATING CLASS- ROOM LIMITATIONS

But the school staff aims to improve school morale and participation by using the phone ban to their advantage. Although some students have difficulties adjusting to the new law, while others find it easy to keep their phones in their bags, House Bill 1481 will remain a significant change in Texas schools.

"It's hard, but it's good to not rely on your phone," Abdelfattah said. "I'll tell you, like, just seeing kids' interactions at lunchtime, it's nice to see them talking to each other, laughing, playing games at the same table on their phone, texting the person next to them. Now, there are actual conversations."

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As a result of Texas' new laws, recent debates have drawn sharp criticisms and growing controversy over public education in the state. One law mandates the display of the Ten Commandments in every classroom, while another targets the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) in schools to prohibit from considering race, gender identity or sexual orientation within the classroom. The attempt to restore fairness and limit political agendas raises concerns that the new law disturbs vital support structures for marginalized students, potentially limiting freedom of expression.

"Honestly I'm disappointed to hear about the bill because I feel like it violates so many of the laws that we say this country is built on," Gonzales said. "Obviously I'm aware, it's not a perfect country, but I would at least hope that we would have some truth to our words."

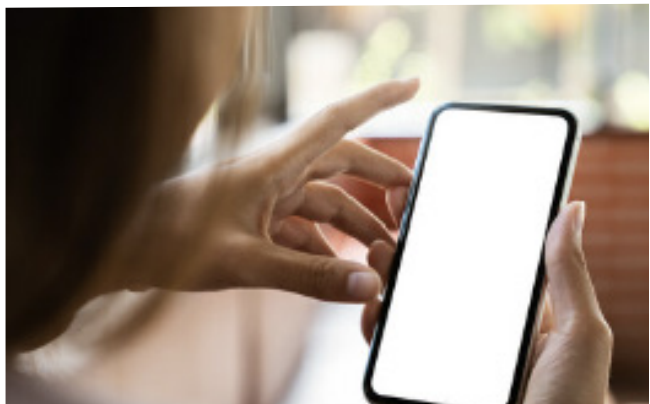
This new DEI law is represented by Senate Bill 12, which censors classrooms from offering instructions, programs and guidance that focus on sexual orientation or gender identity. The legislation proves to provide parents more control and understanding over their children's education.



According to the Texas Tribune, U.S. District Judge Fred Biery ruled on Aug. 20 to temporarily block certain districts in Austin, Houston and Plano from enforcing the bill. Although the changes across Texas classrooms may not be immediate, school districts are gradually adjusting to the new laws. While some consider the bill to be constitutional, others believe it limits education.

"I think [it's] stupid, honestly," Gonzales said. "That's the most blunt word because they know what they're doing is wrong. That's why they're censoring it. They want to keep it from us, and that's why it's so important. It goes more into bias and everyone's belief."

**44.8%** of students said that the phone ban has made life more inconvenient but not more difficult. **4%** said that it has not been inconvenient but has made school harder



*Photo from Adobe Image Stock*



## FUNDING CUTS IN- CREASING UNDER TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Senate Bill 10 requires a visual display, or poster, of the ten commandments in every public classroom for K–12. Laws relating to senate bill 10 have also been challenged in many states including Texas.

“I’m kind of in between, because it doesn’t bother me either way,” senior Brooklynn Lamb said. “If [schools] are going to have the 10 commandments out they should have something similar for [other religions] too. Having the ten commandments in a class over [religion] makes sense, because it is related to the class structure, but there’s no point in having it in a math classroom. I think they had good intentions, but forcing anything on anyone, that’s not how it works.”

Supporters of Senate Bill 10 believe that Christian values play an essential role for children in understanding American history. Critics argue that implementing this law is a violation of the separation of church and state.

“It’s forcing religion on people and it goes against the first amendment, we are a product of our environment,” Gonzales said. “Not like the ideals are necessarily bad, It’s the idea and the fact that this is a religious text and [children] are reading it.”

For students who don’t share the same belief, the experience can potentially be alienating. Children reading the posters might experience self-doubt or inferiority, especially since they are at a critical stage of psychological and emotional growth.

“To put that on display, it’s like you don’t understand how much influence you have on that child,” Gonzales said. “That child’s mind is still being built, it’s very moldable and if they are built around the idea, [that they are] lesser because [they] believed [something different], that is going to be engrained into them for the rest of their life.”

There is currently an education crisis in America, which has been ongoing for decades and has advanced in recent years by the Trump Administration. One of the largest changes that’s affected the nation has been Trump’s executive order in March to shut down the department of Education. This department, which has historically promoted and protected equality, civil rights, religious freedom, LGBTQ+ students and students with disabilities along with multilingual speakers, has been slowly dwindling in budget and staff. The staff and budget cuts from this department, which is over 50% so far, results in less students being able to protect themselves from discrimination. Hollowing out this department of its staff and resources puts other programs at risk, including Title 1 funding, which funds over half the nation’s low income students. Already in the 2025–2026 school year, the government has withheld more than 4 billion dollars for public education while offering tax cuts for donations to private with the Educational Choice for Children Act (ECCA).



This, being uncapped, could potentially cost the government up to 52 billion dollars. Sadly causing further cuts to public education and other government programs. These private school voucher programs have already led to less public school funding, causing K–12 schools closing nationwide including 4 here in Plano just this past year.

“Public education needs to be focused on more, I think private schools should be funded by those who want their child to attend,” Collin College professor Autumn Giunta said. “Private school students already have resources, funding should be better spent.”

**37.6% of**  
**students said that the phone**  
**ban has made life more incove-**  
**nient and makes school harder**

**7.2% of students chose not to**  
**comment**

With Trump's continued support of Private schools, it is expected that Choice programs will continue at the cost of public schools nationwide. Even though Trump's administration has severely impacted K-12 education, it's also impacted Higher Education by cutting research funding for universities and challenging requirements for financial aid along with freezing students grants or rescinding them entirely. There has also been a higher tax on endowments, which are much needed to help fund programs for Universities nationwide, impacting even the wealthiest institutions.

"We're cooked," junior Alicia Sheehi said. "Nobody's gonna [be able to pay] for college"

The budget cuts in all schools have caused program cuts mainly in extracurriculars, University research in medical and scientific fields, art programs, teaching English to migrants, and children with disabilities along with some programs being eliminated entirely.

"Kids like my little brother aren't getting the help they need with Special Education," senior Ash McAllister said. "The government needs to be funding education, not taking funds away."

Many schools in Texas have lost the funding to have any extracurricular activities at all, particularly

in smaller counties. These funding cuts are planned to continue throughout the 2025-2026 school year, but the abolishment can't be finalized until it is approved by Congress. All there is to do is wait for a decision to be made for the future of Education here in Texas and all across the United States. If not, teachers and students will both have to suffer the consequences of permanent funding loss.

"Budget cuts to education in general are a terrible idea," Gunita said. "You're going to see a decline in student success due to lack of under-funded resources and under-paid faculty staff."

**2025-2026 SCHOOL YEAR**  
**NO**  
**PERSONAL COMMUNICATION DEVICES**

**HB 1481:**  
New Texas Law Restricting Student Device Use During the School Day

**PRE-K TO 12TH GRADE**

- Cell phones and all electronic devices including smart watches
- Keep devices turned off
- Must be stored in backpacks or lockers
- Use of device will result in confiscation and disciplinary consequences
- Classrooms, libraries, cafeterias, hallways, restrooms, locker rooms, common spaces

Info@LamarCISD.org

# CONRAD, ALWAYS

By Sydney Rocio Wade

Through various summers filled with love and heartbreak, *The Summer I Turned Pretty* follows Isabel Conklin, or Belly, as she is tangled in a love triangle with two brothers she has known since she was a child. The show is on its third and final season, captivating the internet with the rising question: Team Conrad or Team Jeremiah? It's simple, really, and it's quite obvious which Fisher brother Belly should end up with.

Out of the two brothers, Conrad is the clear option for our main girl. Despite her engagement with Jeremiah, Conrad remains loyal, mature, and continues to prioritize Belly's happiness.

Throughout the show, Conrad's actions reveal his hopelessly devoted nature to Belly. However, loyalty is not the word that would be used to describe Jeremiah and his actions. In season three, it is revealed that during spring break, he cheated on Belly not once, but twice. Jeremiah's excuse for cheating was that he thought they were on a "break" or "broken up" after a fight that he initiated. Belly broke up with Conrad four years ago, but he hasn't been in a relationship with anyone since. According to *Cosmopolitan's* Annabel Iwegbue, Conrad is considered a green flag due to his loyalty and respect for just maintaining a friendly relationship with her. But he also purposely avoids any opportunity to see her because he knows that the moment he does, all the memories will just come flooding back. And he was right, those memories flooded his head and his heart when he saw her again, confirming for him that he would never be able to love someone else or just be friends with Belly. Additionally, Conrad is also more mature than Jeremiah. Throughout season two, Jenny Han, the author of the original books, writes that Conrad is facing depression and panic attacks after his mother's passing, which ultimately resulted in his and Belly's breakup.

According to *Entertainment Weekly's* Sydney Bucksbaum, this is a vital part of his character that the actor deemed as an important representation for men's mental health. And Conrad, being aware of his personal issues as well as past actions, acknowledges that he needs to go to therapy to improve himself. But with Jeremiah, he acts like a man-child when it comes to facing his emotions or conflict. For example, in season three, when he was supposed to be with Belly shopping for their wedding, he was actually at work trying to get respect from his dad who he looks up to and craves so deeply to please, so when it came to the discussion of picking a cake he wanted one that cost \$750, and he wouldn't take no for an answer because it was his "one" thing. So he just hung up on Belly like a child who didn't get their way with their parents. Furthermore, Belly is always first to Conrad. He always prioritizes her happiness. For example, when she was really upset that her mother would not be attending her now-called-off wedding, he went out of his way to speak to Laurel. Out of the love he has for her, he convinced Laurel to come because he wanted her to be happy. According to Annabel Iwegbue, Conrad pushes his pride and feelings for Belly to make her happy despite them just being "friends". But Conrad ultimately decides to confess his love for Belly, even though he knows that he is risking his relationship with his brother and her. Conrad is rejected, but his confession leads to an argument between Jeremiah and Belly, which results in them breaking off their wedding and relationship.



Photo from *Entertainment Weekly*: Emma Louise Swanson

Despite him still not getting Belly, his love confession allows her to realize her true feelings. She realizes that she doesn't know what it is like to not be codependent, as well as be happy on her own.

Although it is understandable why Belly originally chose Jeremiah, he is her best friend and is always by her side. Belly clearly values a strong bond in a relationship, and she loves him so much because he has always been there for her. After her breakup with Conrad and the loss of her godmother, Susannah, the mother of the Fisher brothers, Jeremiah was a support system for Belly. They remained in touch with one another, and he never made her feel abandoned. Whether it was hyping her up or comforting her after a long day, he was always by her side. However, their relationship was very codependent to the point where Belly couldn't even think about herself outside of it, creating a toxic bond between the two, which made it difficult for them to separate, even after the fact that he cheated on her.

Therefore, between the two brothers, Conrad has always been the reasonable option because of his loyalty, his maturity, and his devotion to prioritizing Belly. Jeremiah is just not any of those and thinks of her as if she were something to claim. Belly is her own person who deserves someone, like Conrad, who considers his actions and allows room for her to discover herself in and outside of her relationship. So, looking back at the question circulating on the internet: Team Conrad or Team Jeremiah?

***Photo from Entertainment Weekly***



# DEATH PENALTY: ACCOUNTABILITY, CLOSURE, JUSTICE

Staff Editorial

Since the death penalty was reinstated in 1976, Texas has executed more people than any other state in America. Texas' continuous commitment to capital punishment throughout the years highlights how the justice system values accountability; despite attempts to abolish the law nationwide, Texas continues to uphold the belief that certain crimes are beyond redemption.

Although it can be considered extreme, or barbaric, the death penalty remains a necessary action in Texas to deal with the most heinous crimes.

The death penalty is a necessary evil for Texas to continue the pursuit of justice. According to the Death Penalty Information Center, the five methods of execution include lethal injection, electrocution, lethal gas, hanging and firing squad. While the five primary methods may seem extreme, they are only meant to be used on crimes that are considered the most brutal and inhumane. For example, when an individual intentionally takes away another person's life through murder, the punishment should reflect whatever level of severity the offense is. Imprisonment isn't always considered fair compensation for the damage caused by the perpetrator. Sentencing an individual to the death penalty isn't an easy decision, but any successful society requires a good justice system. A system that deals with unspeakable crimes like sexual assault, rape, murder and other harmful actions is what ensures that society understands how serious crimes require serious punishment.

Enforcing the death penalty on a criminal is irreversible, but according to Britannica, the penalty proves to be a strong deterrent for those who might consider committing the crime. Additionally, if a criminal is sentenced to death, they are permanently prevented from committing more gruesome crimes.

While both the crime and the consequence have long-lasting and likely permanent effects, it is essential to consider the greater good of humanity.

According to the Death Penalty Information Center, Anthony Ray Hinton is one of many people falsely accused and condemned to die by a state's racist criminal justice system. He suffered 28 years on death row serving time for a crime that he didn't commit.

**58.1% of students believe that death penalty laws should be stricter**  
**20.2% of students think that the laws should not be stricter**  
**21.8% of students chose not to comment**

It's true that the death penalty is considered morally corrupt when placed in the hands of a racist system, which inevitably leads to wrongful convictions. Regardless, the death penalty is uncommon. In a world where crime is the norm, the death penalty is reserved for only the most extreme crimes. Since it is essential to prevent future crimes and provide closure for the victims' families, the system provides leniency.

In a world where crime is the norm, the death penalty is reserved for only the most extreme crimes. Since it is essential to prevent future crimes and provide closure for the victims' families, the system provides leniency. If the perpetrator or convict demonstrates moral decency or accountability, the court is more likely to help.

Although the death penalty may seem extreme compared to the crime, society's normalization of brutality through constant media exposure should not diminish the severity of the offense. Victims and their families suffer irrevocable losses and endure traumatizing experiences that are difficult for the average citizen to empathize with, especially since their pain and experiences are personal. For many families, knowing that the perpetrator can never commit the same crime that was forced on their loved one provides a sense of peace. That is not a privilege, that is a right that the victims deserve.

The death penalty should not be considered outdated because it continues to uphold the values that Texans hold dear. It is an essential tool that protects citizens by upholding the standards of justice. No system is perfect, but the death penalty is morally justified by ensuring that criminals are kept accountable for their actions.



# BEHIND THE DAZZLE

By Inara Pabani

Every year during school, the fall semester marks the start of football season. Students pack the stands, full of excitement and pride for their school. Dazzling the crowd with precise routines, sparkling uniforms and energy fueled by their talent and school spirit, the Golden Girls drill team takes center stage. Many high schools have many traditions, but nothing shines brighter than the Golden Girls.

The Golden Girls are the school's drill team, performing at various events including the yearly round football games, UIL Competitions, pep rallies and other school shows such as their annual "Spring Show," which is held during the spring semester, showcasing their most popular routines played throughout the year.

"For Golden Girls, it's a full year-round sport," junior Micah King said. "For two weeks during the summer, we learn pretty much all of our dances for football season. We have the whole summer off, but we have the camp, so we can come back to practice knowing what's going on."

Behind the scenes, the Golden Girls dedicate countless hours to perfecting their dances, balancing intense practice schedules with academics and other extracurricular activities. Their commitment teaches time management, discipline and teamwork, shaping not only their routines but also brightening their overall high school experiences.

"The main thing I learned is how to grow as a leader," King said. "You can't focus on just yourself; you have to put the team in front of you. I really had to put myself second to my team and focus on them to make sure [that] they [were] good before I could be good too."

At the heart of every dazzling performance are the responsibilities of the drill team's officers, whose leadership shapes the Golden Girls' success. Their main job is to lead the team with leadership and pride, along with organizing practices, mentoring new members and keeping the team motivated, ensuring every performance is polished and that each dancer feels supported. The senior officers help guide the team and send out reminders for upcoming events, while the junior officers learn from their senior officers and watch how they lead the team to become more prepared for next year.

"I'm the manager for the team," junior Reyna Chole said. "This is my first year being associated with the Golden Girls and drill team in general. Golden Girls is positively affecting my social life because it has pushed me to interact with so many new people."

While the Golden Girls make appearances at school-related events, they also attend competitions in the University Interscholastic League (UIL), which is a comprehensive program of academic, athletic and music contests where students compete with other schools.

"We usually have competitions held on Saturdays where we usually have competitions held on Saturdays where we spend the whole day, 8A.M. to 8P.M. and we compete among other Plano schools for awards," junior Sophie Schleef said. "We spend the whole day, 8A.M. to 8P.M. and we compete among other Plano schools for awards," junior Sophie Schleef said.

UIL competitions are held in the spring semester, where all of Texas' high school drill teams attend. Being a part of a team-based sport involves competition where each member in the drill team showcases their talented abilities and is rewarded for their hard work throughout the year. In 2024, the Plano East Golden Girls performed at Timber Creek High School in their competition, they won 2nd runner up overall XL classic team and many other various awards such as solo winners, officers and team-based. While the Golden Girls are a supportive and close-knit community that values teamwork and achievements, the overall constant practices, competitions and school work can sometimes create stressful moments for members.

"It's really hard for me because I'm in a lot of hard classes," Schleef said. "Just having Golden Girls [takes] up two hours a day. It's physically draining too, with a lot of girls getting hurt very often."

Even with these girls experiencing overwhelming times, whether it's physically or mentally, they continue to strive in keeping the school spirit alive by sharing their passion and encouragement with their team members. Despite the occasional stress, the Golden Girls also share fun and memorable moments.

"It's [been] really fun to bond with my team," Schleef said. "We overall make the school more fun and interesting. Be confident and try your best on all the things you do, because you never know what's going to happen."



# JV2 REMOVAL

By Ava Canaday

Plano ISD decided to remove JV2 to formally unify their basketball and volleyball programs. Many sports haven't been affected by the switch from three teams to only two. Many athletes involved within these two sports have taken a step away from Plano ISD sports in search of something amusing.

"I feel as though they took away more spots than probably necessary," senior Emma Martinez said. "So even though you might be taking spots away from people that are on the team, you are taking away spots that those kids aren't getting the chance to play."

Plano ISD's goal was to make sure that student engagement and participation were key within all of their athletic programs at the High School Level. Additionally, finding coaches who would want to be separated from the rest of the program caused many coaching positions to slowly be less appreciated. Many coaches want to be involved with both their players and the staff in the athletic department.

"It might be bringing us closer together; however, it's only bringing certain people closer together," Martinez said. "Those younger kids aren't able to play with the older kids because of spots being taken away."

Many sports, including football, had not been as impacted by the removal of JV2 as athletes in both basketball and volleyball had not been altered. Even though many sports still include JV2 athletes, they have found other reasons to move away from Plano East sports programs.

"I'm in the HSA program and one of the classes gets double-blocked in senior year and I didn't have any space in my schedule to fit football," senior Colin Coakley said.

According to Community Impact, Plano ISD decided to vertically realign all Plano High Schools. This includes things like taking away JV2 from both basketball and volleyball for more involvement from coaches, students and a new look on how Plano schools represent themselves. Plano is one of the only school districts that separates their High Schools in half, which makes the ideas of athletics even more challenging. Athletics at East is separated by sports: softball, football and soccer. However, for some sports JV2 has been a part of their program for many years.

"I definitely think that the coaching staff makes the best of what they are given," Martinez said. "There's definitely a lot more pressure on them to try and make their team successful. I do feel as though sometimes there is a lot more stress that they get for only having two teams."

Plano's goal to unify its schools had more of an impact on the athletic programs and the athletes that run underneath them. Community Impact said that the coaches had more of a connection to their players with this new unification that the school district is providing. Players had gone over the fight for the spot over the summer months, with fewer than 27 rough spots to make in both basketball and volleyball on Plano ISD campuses.

"Taking away that entire team made it to where most IB students don't even try out for volleyball,"

27



rough spots to make in both basketball and volleyball on Plano ISD campuses.

"Taking away that entire team made it to where most IB students don't even try out for volleyball," Martinez said. "They just stay with the other sport they were involved with, or just don't compete at all."

Students in the IB programs originally had to make JV2 and higher to make the team. This information gave the IB students closure, knowing that JV2 was mainly a team for them. IB stands for International Baccalaureate, which is a non-profit educational program that puts students with higher educational credits. Many Plano schools have a JV2 team just for IB students, as the amount of pressure it takes to just be involved in IB programs is challenging enough. With the removal of JV2, IB athletes are taken away from the opportunities they had in the past.

"It took away multiple spots, which allowed for fewer people who wanted to try out, because they assumed that they wouldn't have a spot," Martinez said.

Throughout all of sports history at East, JV2 had played an important role in gearing up future teammates and talent for the generations to come. Though many sports still hold a JV2 on their roster, many players from basketball and volleyball will feel the loss of the beloved JV2.

"[Its] place where the kids who might not be going on the next level or anything, [they are able] to have fun and be able to play football without getting cut from the team and having to find a different team," Coakley said. "JV2 is an opportunity to play and show the coaches that you can keep up."





# STUNT STEREOTYPES

By Aisha Hasan



Populated by teenagers and young adults in short skirts and flashy pom poms, cheerleading as a sport has stereotypically been seen as feminine. The players perform physical feats of strength disguised in flips and synchronized choreography. So when the Minnesota Vikings decided to add two male cheerleaders to this year's roster it caused quite a stir. People were taken aback by having male cheerleaders performing alongside their female counterparts.

"I think they're needed since their bodies are more muscular and so they're needed in stunts and stuff," an anonymous Golden Girl said. "Because cheer's a very demanding sport, strengthwise, so I feel like having a man on the team could make the stunts and tricks better."

Despite the predominately female sport, people forget that the first cheerleader was actually a man, according to USA Cheer. Johnny Campbell led the first modern cheer group in America which eventually led to cheer as a sport today. So, with this history, people must wonder if it really is so outlandish that the Minnesota Vikings have hired two male cheerleaders onto their team. Male cheerleaders are a part of the sport since the beginning of the sport's history. The apparent newness of this development in cheerleading is not really new at all.

"Guys have great jumps, they're very strong dancers," an anonymous Golden Girl said. "I think they can bring good things to the team."

*Photo from Getty Images*

But, the people critiquing this choice are primarily people that do not participate in the sport of cheerleading. So, what do people who do actual athletic performances feel about this new addition to the NFL Vikings' roster.

"I hope there's no favoritism," an anonymous Golden Girl said. "A guy shouldn't be put in the center just because they're a guy."

On the political podcast Hot Mic Senator Tuberville even ranted about the NFL's decision to keep the two new cheerleaders. The manner of backlash that the Vikings' new cheerleaders face range from inquiries about why men are in a woman's sport to homophobic slurs online. Antonio Brown posted insults on X (formerly Twitter) in response to the Vikings' new roster. This backlash is mainly due to a more conservative view on gender roles and stereotypes. This rhetoric creates a lot of controversy amongst fans of the NFL and even sports commentators. Popular right-wing commentator Ben Shapiro spoke about the new developments on "The Ben Shapiro Show", where he criticized the male cheerleaders. Shapiro ridiculed the cheerleaders for their sexuality and accused them of doing an impression of Dylan Mulvaney. The majority of the public criticism regarding the new roster including men stems from people who believe that the cheerleading industry should stay as a woman's sport.

"If they're put in the front just because they're a guy it could cause competition between the two," an anonymous Golden Girl said.

Throughout history men have overshadowed women in a predominantly patriarchal society so having men join a sport with women could potentially be seen as risky and even endangering women's job security.

"For some people it might be like 'why is there a guy on a girl's cheer team' but for some people they might be glad it's inclusive," an anonymous Golden Girl said.

Even though there is strength in inclusivity, some feel it could infringe on safe spaces for women to perform and may present worries for the female cheerleaders that have already earned their place.

"But because guys have a lot of things where they have more of an advantage, like football and different things, so I think it's nice that girls get their own thing that they get to do," another anonymous Golden Girl said.

The projected future of cheerleading shows that it will become a more inclusive and open space for people to do what they love regardless of whether they are man or woman. The new additions of Shiek and Conn to the Vikings' cheerleading team will set the new social standard for men and women in stereotypically one-gender sports. Ellen Staurowsky, a professor on sports media at Ithaca College, commented that this new addition to the Vikings' team might lead to a change in gender relations and how it impacts the sports world.

"I don't think there's anything wrong with guys doing dance," another anonymous Golden Girl said.

Blaze Shiek and Louie Conn, the two male cheerleaders on the Minnesota Vikings team, are personally responding to the attacks and criticism they are facing regarding their new positions. Shiek and Conn continue to work for the Vikings in cheer, posting photos of themselves on Instagram during practice. Other cheerleaders and even sports fans take to the internet to defend the Vikings' decision and the cheerleaders' positions. Dalton Wash, a cheerleader for the Philadelphia Eagles, shared his support on Good Morning America. Wash encouraged Conn and Shiek to keep their position in the team despite the backlash.

"I feel like the hate's unnecessary, especially in this generation because everything's more inclusive and people do things where genders be glad it's inclusive," an anonymous Golden Girl said. "I feel like the hate doesn't really get anywhere. It's just kind of like 'what's the point.'"

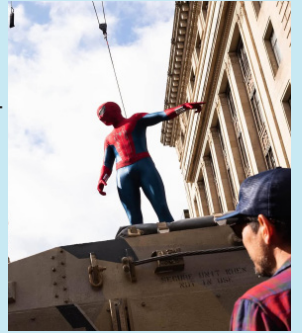
**83.9% of students believe that gender should not affect career choice**

# SUPERHEROES IN CINEMA

By Katie Nguyen

Superheroes are back, and fans are filled with anticipation for what's next. As Marvel and DC roll out their latest films, many movie fans are looking forward to what lies ahead for the superhero genre. With the upcoming release of "Spider-Man: Brand New Day" and the recent premieres of "Superman" and "Fantastic Four", audiences are expecting these films to live up to their expectations.

"I'm excited to see how Peter Parker overcomes everyone forgetting about him," junior Sarah Huq said. Following the emotional ending of "No Way Home", where Peter Parker is forgotten by everyone he loves, "Spider-Man: Brand New Day" promises to explore not only his personal problems but also introduce a new challenge in the form of a neighborhood villain. According to The Direct, Sadie Sink is rumored to play an iconic character, Gwen Stacy, which adds a lot of excitement and a familiar feeling that fans have waited for. It has been confirmed that Sadie Sink will be in the movie, but her role is unclear. Whether Gwen is introduced as a romantic interest or a friend, both of these offer a new story and a nostalgic plot. This rumor suggests that in "Spider-Man: Brand New Day," it won't just be about Peter saving the day, but it may also be about him trying to save himself.



"I absolutely loved Superman, and I thought it was really good, and I liked the message; it was just put together very well, and it was coordinated. Everything about it was beautiful," junior Samrah Ali said.



DC is rebooting Superman in a way that fans haven't seen before, not just as a powerful alien, but as a symbol of humanity and compassion in a world that is challenging. Previous portrayals of Superman have emphasized power and traditional strength, while the newest interpretation of Superman introduces a more balanced, emotionally grounded superhero that movie fans have come to love. Superman reflects the modern-day individual, with some dealing with loss, identity and moral responsibility in a complex society. His struggles also highlight how he deals with everyday issues, making him seem more human than an alien superhero to Superman fans. His journey throughout this movie isn't just about saving the world, but also about understanding it and learning how to live in it.

"It was very slow-paced, and it felt like I was watching an ad, but then the second half, after they met Galactus and came back to Earth, that was when I started getting excited, so I really liked it," Huq

said.

Fantastic Four initially had mixed reactions from movie fans, with some feeling that the film's pace was slow and a bit drawn out. Early scenes seemed to focus more on introducing the characters and establishing their dynamics, which left movie fans feeling disconnected. However, as they watched the second half of the movie, fans started to enjoy the excitement of a new adventure after meeting the villain, Galactus. While the beginning of the movie had a slow pace, Sue Storm's pregnancy added an emotional depth to the movie. Throughout the movie, Sue Storm struggles with balancing her powers and her pregnancy. The film gave each character their own journey that felt vulnerable and authentic to viewers.

Filmmakers are adding new depth to superhero characters by mixing action with powerful personal journeys. From Spider-Man's struggle, to Superman's embrace of humanity, to the Fantastic Four's challenges of family and responsibility, these movies have highlighted character growth and vulnerability. These films aren't just about saving the world anymore, but they are also about saving themselves, healing, and learning how to live with the weight of the choices they make. Modern superhero films are showing more relatable and more powerful storytelling than before.

"I love watching the newest movies with my family because I feel like it brings us closer together," Huq said.



Photo from @tomholland2013

Photo from Reddit

Photo from @Velikan\_XS



# TAKE A SIP: A LOOK INTO PLANO'S BEST COFFEE

By Soha Syed

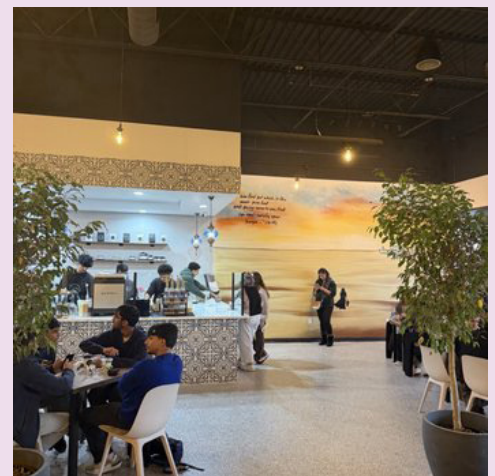
Today, coffee lovers look for an experience beyond the cup. The rise of third-wave coffee culture creates a shift from large coffee chains to smaller, more local shops. According to the Perfectly Daily Grind, the shops focus on the customer's experience, making it sustainable and unique by developing quality flavors that have special, cultural and historical backgrounds. Now, cafes around the area are competing to serve customers with a dynamic and impactful coffee shop experience.

Located in Historic Downtown Plano, 1418 Coffee is a vintage-style cafe that represents the original small town feel of Plano's past. The shop possesses an indie rustic atmosphere, complemented by its warm, dim lighting and exposed brick accent walls. The cozy antique couches and toasty aroma floats throughout the shop, leaving the scent of the cafe with its customers. The Plano-based coffee spot started out serving simple but meticulously crafted coffee options. Its menu spans from warm, rich cappuccinos to their sweet caramel macchiatos. Though small, the shop's menu is exemplified by their baristas, which the company refers to as artists. The artists take a great amount of care in producing quality drinks that taste like a cup of home. They also offer unique lattes that are always a fun choice to try on visit, but still don't stray too far away from their rustic local aesthetics. A customer favorite to try is the Purple Haze, a sweet, smooth vanilla latte accompanied by delicate hints of lavender. Another option to go for is the Bananas Foster Latte, a limited edition fall drink that includes a warm cinnamon taste with a slight caramelized banana flavour. The heart of the cafe is in its simplicity, so sit down and enjoy a quiet, tranquil cup away from the busy world!



MOTW opened in Plano this year, serving a fusion of Eastern and Western coffee selections. The cafe's size is notable, measuring over 4000 square feet. Its large space is accompanied by comfy couches and minimalist furniture functioning as both a place for a long study session or a late night spot to sip a cup with friends. It also features two large accent walls that bring you in, displaying beautiful, vivid paintings of landscapes alongside Islamic quotes. The cafe's roots derive from an Instagram page called "Muslims of the World". Now, the shop serves as a flagship for their large online network and invites new people to its lustrous space. The menu references its diverse community, offering specialty lattes, matchas, Yemeni Chai and other flavorful drinks. Their specialty lattes are exquisite with a stronger coffee taste that's rich and has a line of unique cultural flavors to try. Most notably includes the Carmel Avalanche, a not-too-sweet thin latte packed with a toasty caramely flavor, like the name suggests. Customers

Recently gaining popularity on TikTok as one of the best matcha spots in DFW, Preston's Cafe won't disappoint with its amazing flavors and marvelous space. The small coffee shop has a leafy, lush atmosphere, surrounded by radiant, blooming plants providing a fresh aroma in the air. It's the perfect place for an early morning coffee run, as the sun dazzles through the shop's many windows. The cafe offers a variety of drinks suitable for all occasions. Their matchas, popular for good reason, are a delight! Its menu contains matchas with unique, interesting flavors, like ube and raspberry. The Ube Matcha is a great drink to try, possessing a strong matcha taste topped with a creamy ube cold foam that delightfully pairs the two ingredients together. If matcha's not your style, order the Biscoff Cookie Latte, a great fall-style beverage accompanied by a caramelized gingerbread taste.



*Photo from 1418 Coffee*

*Photo from YELP*





# SIX

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