



EAGLE ERA

FEBRUARY 2026 AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL 36300 FREMONT BLVD FREMONT, CA 94536 VOL. 53 ISSUE #5

AHS students walk out in protest of ICE

- POLITICS -

Concerns over recent ICE activity spur conversations on student activism

Iniya Prabahar | Staff Writer

On January 20th, many students participated in the nationwide Free America walkout, protesting the actions of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). These protests were spurred by concerns over unjustified use of force and deprivation of due process—specifically in response to the fatal shooting of Renée Good by an ICE agent on January 7th. The walkout at AHS began at 2:00 PM; most students returned to class by 2:30 PM while others left campus.

Students walking out gathered near the flagpole at Gateway, covering the pavement with chalked slogans and drawings protesting ICE. The walkout was not organized by AHS; rather, it was a part of a broader string of protests around the country happening that day. “It was a national walkout, so it was not something the school planned. I honestly didn’t know how many students, if any, would participate until around 2:00 PM that day,” said Principal Sharma.

While some participants described the walkout as a necessary call for reform and accountability, others criticized it as ineffective and inappropriate.

For many students, participation was driven by identity and political interests. Richa Mungara (12) said, “My parents are immigrants. To see what’s happening all over the country—it’s egregious. It’s terrifying.”



Aidan Encarnacion (12) and Mason Ledesma (12) displayed messages against ICE on their skateboards. “We are a school made up of an overwhelming majority of first- and second-generation immigrants, and we are a school full of extremely successful students. We are proof that immigrants are not only wanted, but also needed in our country,” said Mungara (Photo Credit: Aarnav Raamkumar (10)).

Eason Chang (10) helped publicize the walkout through social media. “If we didn’t do this, it would be like accepting the normalization of ICE coming to schools,” they said. “It would be like normalizing the oppression.”

Mungara described the protest as a response to what she believes are constitutional violations on the part of ICE. “There are no regulations on these things. There are no rules,” she said. “Everything happening is completely unconstitutional.”

ICE did not respond to the *Eagle Era*’s request for comment.

Mungara criticized teachers who did not permit students to participate. “To all the teachers who are not allowing their kids

to leave class, I think it’s disgusting. You are teaching your kids the wrong things for being future adults,” she said.

The walkout sparked debate concerning its impact on the school day and student learning. “Any disruption to the regular school day results in a loss of instructional time,” said Mrs. Sharma.

Hadi Souki (12), however, pushed back against claims that the walkout was disruptive. “What’s more disruptive: an ICE agent coming onto campus and trying to take you, or kids standing up for what’s right for one day? And it wasn’t even the full day—it was half a period,” said Souki.

Chang acknowledged that disciplinary consequences might be a concern, but they argued that the message of the protest outweighed the risks. “Sure, you may get punished. But a detention is better than seeing more people get detained,” they said.

However, not all students supported the walkout. Sricharan Sadagopan (12) said he supports ICE. “ICE is doing a good thing by doing what the voters asked for,” he said. “The point of ICE is to protect U.S. citizens from illegal aliens coming to this country. People are inside this country, and we don’t know anything about them. ICE has to deport these people back.”

(continued on pg. 3)

Chinook salmon return to Alameda Creek after 70 years

Years of dedicated work to bring Chinook salmon populations back to Alameda Creek have come to fruition

Sachi Ladole

Staff Writer

For the first time in over 70 years, Chinook salmon were spotted swimming in Alameda Creek in late 2025. Once blocked by a Pacific Gas & Electric Company (PG&E) pipeline, these salmon are now returning to the waters their ancestors once called home, bringing hope to the creek’s ecosystem and the surrounding community.

“The water storage dams were a direct barrier to salmon migration,” explained Mrs. Wheaton, an AP Environmental Science teacher who is familiar with the restoration efforts. “As California has so much habitat destroyed by fire, restoring ecosystems is even more important for reducing human and wildlife interactions.”

The comeback was the result of a multi-year project led by PG&E and California Trout (CalTrout). According to Claire Buchanan, lead project manager and CalTrout’s Central California Regional Director, the project was first identified as early as 2002, making the return of the salmon a long-awaited success.

The project involved removing and redesigning obstacles that blocked the fish’s natural migration routes and restoring portions of the creek channel. “[PG&E] buried a new pipeline really deep in the ground—around 20 feet—so there was no more need for erosion control and risk to the pipeline. They worked on this for 10 years,” said Buchanan.

The project targeted both Chinook salmon and steelhead. “Chinook are the first exciting spot, and now the next exciting



Chinook salmon finally returned home to their natural habitat (Photo Credit: Dan Sarka/Alameda Creek Alliance).

observation would be steelhead. They are threatened in the Alameda watershed and really do need recovery actions to help their populations,” she said.

The return of salmon will affect more than just one species. Mrs. Wheaton stressed the critical role salmon play in the ecosystem, supporting local wildlife. “Ecosystems are a giant web of interconnected relationships, where all parts are needed to survive. Potentially, a full salmon population will support our raccoon, coyote, bobcat, and mountain lion populations.”

For local students, residents, and nature enthusiasts, seeing the salmon return makes environmental work feel closer to home. “Having a change so close to our community is good for people to see because this is the kind of change we need more of,” said Ruhee Pauls (9), a frequent creek visitor. “These are issues that are going to affect our generation and we must continue to find solutions for.”

(continued on pg. 4)

More than a cup of coffee

Triple-C students prepare a coffee cart for teachers at AHS

Ananya Pangarkar

Staff Writer

Students in AHS's Triple-C special-education program are preparing to launch a coffee cart for teachers this February, combining practical career skills with community connection. The project, led by special-education teacher Ms. Miller, is designed to give students hands-on experience with real-world responsibilities.

"In this class, they are learning practical skills," Ms. Miller said. "The coffee cart came to fruition because I wanted to make sure that they had something tangible to work on so that they had a connection to the project."

Students have been responsible for nearly every step of the project from planning to publicizing. "The students have written every letter and survey, looked at data, and done all the financial work. Everything has been very student-based," said Ms. Miller.

Once the project launches, orders will be placed through a form. Students will prepare items such as coffee, tea, and hot chocolate in their classroom kitchen and deliver orders directly to teachers. Ms. Miller explained, "We're going to have a whole assembly line of napkins, bags, and coffee cups. Each student will have a specific hallway and specific teacher that they deliver to."

Throughout the preparation process, students have faced many challenges, particularly with funding and budgeting. Ms. Miller said, "Getting [the coffee cart] up off the ground actually took more money than we thought it would."

Students working on the coffee cart echoed this concern. "Money was difficult," said Harshit Nalluri (10). "It was too much money, and we couldn't get it right away."

Despite challenges, students have learned valuable skills through the stages of preparing the coffee cart. "I learned what steps you need to build a business," Nalluri explained.

Many students like Rishaan Anand (9) enjoyed the process. "The math was the hardest part, but I liked making the menu," he said.

Other students highlighted the teamwork skills they gained as a major part of the experience. "I like to work with other people," said Sanskriti Chinthekindi (11). "We have to do everything all together to learn new things."

The goal of the coffee cart is to help special-education students connect with the larger school community. "A lot of people don't think about us," Ms. Miller said. "What I'm hoping is to integrate these students into the larger narrative of AHS. Teachers throughout the school are going to be able to say, 'You're the one who delivered my coffee.'"

Ms. Miller had to invest a lot of time as the teacher in charge of the project. "Being a special-education teacher in general can be overwhelming with all the paperwork and the parents that we need to talk with—so putting more work on top of it can be hard," she explained.

Yet, the coffee cart remains as a sign of all

their progress throughout the year. "The project shows how much effort we put in. We worked on it for 3 months. I want [people] to know how hard we worked on it," Nalluri said.

As the rollout approaches, the Triple-C students continue to work hard on preparations for their coffee cart. With teachers engaging directly with students through the project, the coffee cart is set to become a meaningful part of mornings at AHS. "Something that's really important to me as a special-education teacher is that my students are not pushed to the back," Ms. Miller explained. "I want them to be in the center."



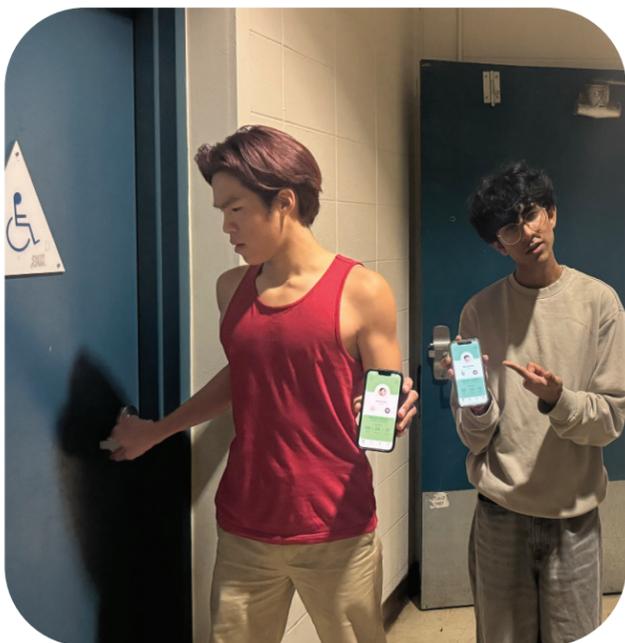
Triple-C student Samba Poludasu (11) worked on preparing the coffee cart in the classroom's kitchen. "To see the looks on their faces and how happy they are that they're being recognized for who they are has been the best," said Ms. Miller (Photo Credit: Ms. Miller).

Down to 6 minutes

AHS students and staff respond to recent changes in bathroom policy

Saanvi Deshini

News, Politics, and A&E Editor



Many students such as James Chan (12) and Abhi Soi (12) feel frustrated when the nearest bathroom is not the most convenient (Photo Credit: Saanvi Deshini (11)).

This semester, AHS introduced the 6-minute bathroom pass, a reduction from the previously established 7-minute pass. With bathroom breaks monitored by the 5-Star digital hall pass system rolled out just last year, students and staff have differing reactions to the change.

Assistant Principal Mr. Peterson explained the decision to implement a 6-minute bathroom break. "We looked at data, and students weren't exceeding a certain amount of time. There was a pattern of students who were out a lot or using the bathroom a lot. We wanted to see if changing the bathroom time

out would minimize wandering."

Many students feel frustrated as the nearest bathroom is not always the most convenient. Pranathi Kande (11) said, "I'm so irritated. One of my classes is in the portables, so the nearest bathroom is in the 300-wing because the bathroom by the portables is never open. The walk itself takes 2 minutes. You get to spend maybe a minute and a half in the bathroom."

She continued, "I shouldn't have to be punished just because someone else isn't spending their bathroom time wisely."

Others feel indifferent about the minute-shorter time limit, believing it will hardly impact their time out. Romir Swar (11) said, "I think I'm pretty neutral. I don't really care that they changed it. My teachers care more about the fact that I'm coming back at a reasonable time."

Mrs. Sharma emphasized that the goal of the shorter bathroom break is to prioritize students' academic time. "The primary academic impact is missed instruction. If a student repeatedly exceeds the time limit, there will also be follow-up from administration because it can indicate a pattern of avoiding class," she said. "Our goal is to correct behavior early so students don't lose learning time."

Still, students express frustrations with navigating the tight time limit. Shreeya Manga (11) shared, "7 minutes was a nice medium. It was never long—it's not enough

time to wander, and you could still get your business done. How are we supposed to go in 6 minutes?"

Malvika Balaji (10) said, "One time, I was in the bathroom in the new buildings. I got my period, but I didn't have a pad. Having to get the pad and then come back before my 6 minutes were up was stressful. And on top of that, I was stopped by administration because of it."

Mr. Peterson addressed the concerns of students who fear repercussions even when they use the system as intended. "We aren't sitting here monitoring if someone has signed out for 6 minutes and 3 seconds. It's more of a safety thing—and we want to keep students in class as much as possible," he said.

"Of course," he added, "if we're seeing very frequently that students are violating the time limit, they'll receive an administrative referral."

Though students and staff report varied feedback regarding the intentions and implementation of the bathroom policy, some believe that even the introduction of the policy can contribute to a more academically enriching school environment. Mr. Lucas, an AP Biology teacher, said, "I think that the announcement of the bathroom policy itself helps relay to students that someone actually does care about the time you spend out of class. I think the announcement of the policy itself is helpful."

AHS students walk out in protest of ICE (cont'd)

Rohan Gandhi (11) offered a more moderate perspective. “[At first] I thought that most people wanted ICE to be abolished, but I think most people did agree with me that we just need better regulations,” he said. “We always need to work towards making sure the right people are caught, sent to jail, or deported in a humane and legal way. But completely abolishing an institution is never a solution.”

Sadagopan also criticized the execution of the protest, saying it lacked meaningful engagement. “I feel like no one really cared, and everyone just wanted to skip school at the end of the day, so that’s why it was ineffective,” he said. “If people actually cared, they would make signs and have conversations about why the protest was just.”

Some participants also agreed the walkout could have been better organized. “We probably should have made [more] signs and stuff too, which would have been much more effective,” said Souki.

Despite differing opinions on the effectiveness and execution of the walk-

out, many students see it as a starting point for ongoing civic engagement. Chang reflected on the broader impact of the protest, saying, “It gets students to explore their own views. It introduces them to the real world. We can slowly develop our activism using this as a building base.”



AHS students gathered at Gateway after walking out of class to protest against ICE. “If I don’t scream for people who can’t scream [for] themselves, then no one will scream for me if something happens to me. You have to fight for what’s right. It only takes one person. And I might as well be that person,” said Souki (Photo Credit: Keithav Sivashanker (11)).

From lockdown to action

Students respond to lockdown procedure at school

Josiah Loftin | Staff Writer

While AHS follows the standard FUSD lockdown procedures during safety drills conducted throughout the school year, a recent lockdown drill in FLEX on January 14th has prompted discussions among students and staff about whether the current approach should remain unchanged or expand to include alternative safety procedures.

Lockdown drills at AHS typically require students to remain inside classrooms while teachers secure doors and wait for further instruction. For most students, the drills are familiar and routine rather than alarming.

Yet, some students think that the drills are not effective. Royce Magallanes (11) said, “I don’t really feel like these drills are doing anything. They’re not enforcing safety, and we’re just going through the motions.”

Many believe lockdown drills are important, but some feel that the current process focuses more on following directions than on preparing for different types of emergencies. “Every time there’s a drill, we’re expected to just stay inside

and be quiet. I think we should be running away from the danger and not staying inside,” said Chealsie Nguyen (11).

Some students would rather see AHS implement the full “run, hide, and fight” protocol rather than just instructing students to hide. “It’d be smart to do different types of drills, so we as a school are prepared for different types of situations,” said Ciara Yuhas (11).

Students also argue that these drills have been around for a long time and are predictable. “It’s stupid because school shooters have been through the exact same drills before; they know our methods because they’ve been through them,” said Juan Pineda (10).

Another common complaint is that some students do not take these drills seriously. Yasmeen Nekrawesh (11) said, “I remember during the earthquake drill at the start of the year, people were talking, giggling, and just scrolling on their phones instead of actually practicing for the drill. That’s scary because what if it actually happens?”

“When I was in PE during a shelter-in-place drill, my teachers didn’t care. The teachers were just chatting and not actually going through the drills. I thought that was pretty crazy to be honest,” said Sebastian Montano (10).

Some students expressed that they are grateful to live in a mostly safe city with low crime. “I’m glad I live in Fremont because I hardly ever worry about super bad crimes happening. If I lived anywhere else with these drills I’d probably feel less safe,” said Shrina Shi (11).

The possibility of a new phone ban next year due to a new state law does nothing to ease student fears about campus safety. “The phone ban concerns me because what if there’s an emergency, and we can’t contact our parents? That seems dangerous to me,” said Dominic Sanchez (10).

While the current lockdown procedure provides consistency, many students believe adapting drills to a wider range of scenarios could help better prepare the school. Whether that means incorporating alternative safety strategies or reinforcing the seriousness of the drills, the conversation highlights a shared goal—ensuring that everyone on campus feels safe.

Lighting lanterns in the halls

How Lunar New Year fosters awareness and community

Anthony Liu | Staff Writer

Each winter, Lunar New Year is celebrated by communities around the world through family gatherings, traditional foods, and festivities that welcome renewal and prosperity. Lunar New Year, celebrated by Chinese, Taiwanese, Korean, and Vietnamese communities among others, is one of the most important holidays in much of East and Southeast Asia. On campus, however, recognition of the holiday remains limited despite its deep cultural significance for many students at AHS.

For Dongyu Yeh (12), Lunar New Year is more than a date on the calendar. It is central to Taiwanese culture and family identity, even if its presence feels diminished in the United States.

“Lunar New Year is a giant part of Taiwanese culture, and many of my relatives seriously celebrate it,” Yeh said. “Everyone in my family drives in from across the country, there are fireworks, and people get weeks off from work and school—kind of like Winter Break.”

Yeh explained that celebrations look different at home in America. While traditions are still observed, they are smaller in scale. “My family here celebrates with a New Year’s dinner and giving out hong bao,” Yeh said. “I also call my relatives back in Taiwan and watch their celebrations from here.”

On campus, however, Yeh has noted little to no recognition of the holiday. “To be honest, I haven’t really seen any Lunar New Year celebrations at school,” Yeh said. “I know the Taiwanese Students Association has an event

of some sort, but that’s pretty much it.”

Yeh added that this lack of visibility has remained consistent over the years, particularly in the United States, where Lunar New Year often receives less attention than Western holidays.

“In America, it’s more lackluster,” Yeh said. “Yet, in Taiwan, it has remained incredibly important.”

Archit Agarwal (12) does not personally celebrate Lunar New Year but believes its recognition on campus carries broader value. “Even though it’s not part of my culture, I think celebrating Lunar New Year at school helps people learn about traditions

they wouldn’t otherwise be exposed to,” he said. “It reminds students that our campus represents more than just one background.”

Agarwal also noted that cultural celebrations can help foster inclusivity when they are visible and intentional. “When schools acknowledge holidays like Lunar New Year, it shows respect for students’ identities,” Agarwal said. “It makes people feel seen, even if it’s something as simple as an announcement or a small event.”

Both students emphasized that recognition does not have to mean disruptive changes, but rather can mean impactful gestures that acknowledge the holiday’s importance.

“I don’t expect us to get the day off or anything,” Yeh said. “But mentioning it in announcements or doing a little more would be appreciated.”

As schools increasingly emphasize diversity and inclusion, Lunar New Year presents an opportunity to move beyond surface-level awareness. For students who celebrate it, recognition affirms cultural identity. For others, it offers a chance to learn and engage with traditions outside their own.

While Lunar New Year remains largely overlooked, student perspectives show how powerful acknowledging the holiday can be. Even brief recognition can make students feel proud, respected, and part of a community that genuinely values their culture and identity. As Agarwal said, “It really makes a difference just to be seen and included.”



A Lunar New Year decoration displayed the Year of the Horse, reflecting family traditions and cultural heritage (Photo Credit: Anthony Liu (12)).

Chinook salmon return after 70 years (cont'd)

The return of Chinook salmon to Alameda Creek is not just a sign of ecological recovery; it represents the result of years of collaboration, patience, and environmental planning. Buchanan highlighted the importance of environmental preservation, saying, "CalTrout's motto is 'Fish, Water, People.' You can't

have one without the others, and that's such an important thing for younger people to understand. If you want to live in a place where there's clean water and a beautiful creek to walk around, then it's really important that we work to keep our waterways clean and free-flowing."



Returning salmon added new life and drew community interest to Alameda Creek at Quarry Lakes. "These are issues that are going to affect our generation and that we must continue to find solutions for," said Pauls (Photo Credit: Trillink).

Essay situation at University of Oklahoma spurs debate about politics and censorship at AHS

- POLITICS -

AHS students and faculty on the incident with Samantha Fulnecky

Jonathan Wang | Staff Writer

In late 2025, Samantha Fulnecky, a junior at the University of Oklahoma (OU), received a 0 out of 25 from teaching assistant Mel Curth, who is transgender, on an essay she had written for a psychology course. Fulnecky's essay, grounded in her Christian faith, argued in favor of traditional, conservative gender roles and had numerous references to the Bible.

Because of her grade, Fulnecky filed a claim of religious discrimination and reached out to the OU chapter of Turning Point USA, a non-profit organization that advocates for conservative politics in schools—amplifying the conflict into a national controversy.

Victor Yeung (12), who is currently taking AP Psychology, said, "If I turned that in, I would expect a 0. The writing quality is poor; the argument is weak and anecdotal. Using the Bible as a pretext for scientific reasoning and logic is counterproductive and opens up the opportunity to use any biased and unreliable sources that support an equally biased opinion."

While some believed Fulnecky's essay warranted the grade, others felt it was a violation of her free speech rights. "The teacher's choice violated the establishment clause of freedom of religion in the First Amendment," said Thomas Lin (12), who is a Christian and the secretary of Youth Alive, the Christian club at AHS. "She chose to decide that the school was against such Christian beliefs on gender and the implications of the Creation through her grading."

On December 22, 2025, OU released a statement announcing the conclusion of their inves-

tigation into Fulnecky's claim. They ruled in her favor, deciding to remove the assignment from her grade and to dismiss Curth from instructional duties.

Mr. Noori, an AP US Government and Politics teacher, said, "I don't believe the grading was fair because [Curth] was imposing her viewpoint on gender on her students—but firing her was an overreach by the administration."

Though Mr. Noori often incorporates political discussion in his classroom, including debates between students and, at times, expressing his own political views, he still upholds the importance of neutrality. He said, "I try to stay objective. I try to point out things that both the Democrats and the current administration do wrong. I am very against censorship. It's dangerous for teachers to punish students because they have a different view."

However, Lin still cited instances where he felt his religious beliefs had been suppressed. "I have had a few circumstances where I hear classmates saying how they dislike people who hold Protestant Christian beliefs, or just

say that they don't like Christians at all. Often-times, my wanting to tell other people about Christianity results in many refusing to let me say anything to them," he explained.

Mr. Noori continued to defend the importance of political discussion, particularly with students, saying, "It's important in helping keep the class connected to the real world and what's happening. But, even if a student disagrees with something I'm passionate about, I find their differing opinions interesting."

The belief that firing Curth sets a dangerous precedent for the future has sparked debate about censorship in schools. Many left-leaning people argued that firing the teacher decreases the university's credibility as an institute of higher education and promotes prejudice, while many on the right claimed the incident was an oppression of Fulnecky's religious beliefs. Yeung said, "I think censorship already exists in a few different forms in academics, but for those who do not support religious beliefs influencing scientific studies, this case opens the door for potentially allowing their ideas to be censored."

Though AHS has not had an incident as severe as this, it does not mean repression is nonexistent. Lin said, "Whenever our club hosts Evangelical outreach events, we have to tread more lightly as our school environment among both the staff and students is not that welcoming towards Youth Alive spreading the Gospel."

Curth has since submitted an appeal to OU's decision to the Institutional Equity Office, according to her attorney, Brittany Stewart.



The incident with Fulnecky's essay has sparked national debate on censorship in academic settings (Photo Credit: Chad Robertson).



FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

INSTAGRAM



@ahs_eagleera
@humansofamerican

SPOTIFY



The Beak Speaks

WEBSITE



eagleera.org

Fill out our guest article, tip, or feedback form

Funding the district

The causes, effects, and solutions to the FUSD budget deficit

Angella Li, Ananya Pangarkar, Lisa Shokoor | Staff Writers

From teachers who are unable to afford supplies to students missing out on opportunities that they're not even aware they have, funding has been one of FUSD's biggest challenges.

Over the past decade, FUSD's funding has been steadily decreasing compared to the state average. This has caused discrepancies in the funding between departments in AHS, with some struggling more than others. AHS is not alone in this issue; the district is projected to experience funding problems that may lead to reductions in certain resources. Potential solutions, like changing the funding formula to be more representative of different districts and their cost of living, have been proposed to help Californian schools.

The FUSD budget is derived from the California Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), which gives money to districts depending on attendance, otherwise known as Average Daily Attendance (ADA). This translates to roughly \$65 every day a student attends. As chronic absenteeism increases, the revenue generated by the school decreases.

Budgeting through AHS

The impact of FUSD's budget varies within AHS, with large discrepancies in the school budget's ability to meet the demands of certain classes. Ultimately, this results in a shortage of resources for teachers and a lack of opportunities for students.

While the Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) department currently receives Prop 28 funding designated specifically for arts and music, it still faces budgetary challenges. Ms. Mapelli, who teaches Sculptures and Ceramics, said, "I probably spent upwards of \$1000 of my own money. I have been reimbursed for most of it, but the school district does not reimburse teachers for anything purchased from Amazon."

Since staff are required to follow specific district guidelines for accepting donations from families, teachers are prohibited from sharing Amazon wishlists for extra supplies. Ms. Mapelli said, "I asked permission to send an Amazon wishlist for parents to donate supplies to the class. I was told no, but I feel like parents are more willing to donate when they know what it's going towards."

Despite struggles in the VAPA department, teachers in the science department find their budget to be sufficient. Mr. Benz, the science department chair,

said, "The science department, one of the largest departments in the school, has a sufficient budget. We always ask for parent donations; parents think science is important, so they're more inclined to donate to science."

"I would like to see the district recognize the arts and athletics more, because those are the [departments] I've noticed are the least funded, and you can learn from both disciplines," said Ms. Mapelli.

Budget constraints also have lasting effects on students. "We don't have access to a lot of resources that could be putting us at an advantage," said Anagha Sainath (12), a student who is working to tackle FUSD's budget issues through a policy paper on LCFF. "There's a portal called Naviance that many schools use that's really useful for seniors during college applications. Unfortunately, the district doesn't really have the excess funds to spend on that."

The school budget affects each department differently, and combined with fluctuations in parent donations given to each department, it sometimes restricts VAPA classes significantly more than others. "A lot of money is put towards the sciences, and we've seen that art is typically the first thing that gets cut when budget cuts happen," said Ms. Mapelli.

Belt-tightening in the district

As FUSD enters another budget cycle, district members and county officials warn that the issue is no longer short-term budget adjustment, but a structural problem with lasting consequences.

The concerns were acknowledged in January, when the Alameda County Office of Education (ACOE) reviewed FUSD's 2025-26 First Interim Budget Report. The district is expected to meet its financial obligations in the near term, but the county raised concerns about declining enrollment.

Enrollment projections included in the review show that ADA is expected to decrease from 31,410 students in the 2025-26 school year to 30,660 by the 2027-28 school year. As enrollment declines, district leaders warn that the funding model magnifies the impact; through LCFF, districts lose revenue when students are absent. Sainath said, "Excused and unexcused absences alike count against our funding. The school loses money with every person who's not in a seat."

Bobbi Parry, a member of FUSD's Facilities Advisory Committee (FAC) and Citizen Bond Oversight Committee said this approach fails to reflect the actual cost of

operating schools. "I think it should be based on enrollment rather than attendance," she said. "We know that teachers give homework packets and that school secretaries have to see why students were absent. There's follow-up that has to happen that we're not getting funded for."

Benjie Craig, a volunteer on the FAC, noted that FUSD's challenges are structural. "There's a lot of districts around us that have the same problem," he said. "Costs and salaries are going up, but there aren't as many families around here, so there's fewer students and less revenue."

According to the First Interim Review, FUSD is facing deficit spending of \$11 million in 2025-26, \$9.5 million in 2026-27, and \$8.9 million in 2027-28. If unaddressed, these deficits could reduce the district's ability to maintain required reserves.

Parry said that many reductions have already been made over the past decade, leaving few options remaining. Some services have already been shifted off the general fund, including busing and library media technicians.

This pressure to cut spending is further complicated by the district's approach to financial reserves. "Most school districts are supposed to keep a reserve fund of about 2-3% of their overall budget to help the school district weather a financial problem. Our school district likes to keep 10% of the budget," said Mr. Howard, an English 10 Honors and Mythology/Folklore teacher who is part of the executive board of Fremont Unified District Teachers Association (FUDTA). "If we're always planning for an emergency and not for the kids who are currently in the school system, then these kids might as well be the ones in the emergency because they're not getting that money."

Ultimately, county officials have made it clear that maintaining long-term financial soundness will require challenging decisions. There still lies a lot of uncertainty regarding spending reductions. "We run very lean," Parry said. "I don't know where it's going to come from."

The million-dollar question

While much of the conversation is focused on losses, officials are trying to reform staffing adjustments and new formulas that will distribute money more efficiently.

Since FUSD is a large district with 41 schools, implementing adjustments to the budget takes time, making responses to finan-

cial challenges more difficult. FUSD Budget Director James Arcala said every single year, the district is deficit spending by around 1 million dollars.

He said, "The majority of our expenditures in our budget—around 85%—goes towards people and then 15% pays for utilities such as electricity, gas, water, and school supplies."

While discussing solutions, Arcala emphasized that staffing reductions were necessary to maintain stability in the budget. He said the district had to reduce staff in order to stay solvent for the next 3 years.

One solution that Arcala mentioned was a reform in a classified staffing formula due to a drop in enrollment between pre-COVID and now. He emphasized that it was important that the district developed a formula where they collaborated with other districts to figure out a fair business practice plan.

In addition to budgeting strategies, the district is advocating for changes to the state's Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) which helps ensure public pensions and school funding reflect the expenses of an area. The COLA is the same statewide, regardless of the region or county, making it unrepresentative of each district's unique cost of living.

Arcala explained that the district has been doing some work with local politicians to emphasize the need to revamp COLA. "If you're in San Francisco, your calculated COLA should be based on your region and how inflation goes up, but [right now] it's the exact same in Eureka. We're arguing that the COLA should be region-based to account for inflationary factors that impact high cost areas."

As FUSD continues to navigate an ongoing financial crisis, many district officials are working to fix problems with budget constraints and long-term planning. Despite these difficulties, there are initiatives that could supplement local school funding moving forward. Until then, officials have to budget based on what they know and what the current law constitutes.



The ceramics class has faced many challenges as the result of insufficient budgeting, such as a lack of supplies, leading to creative solutions to work around the funding problem (Photo Credit: Ms. Mapelli).



My friend Jack chose
"Tanya Gupta (11)"

YEAR OF THE
FIRE
HORSE
WOMEN

In honor
of GRAD
Night!
Patriotic Week

My friend Jack chose
"Tanya Gupta (11)"



ANGELLA LI
JOWINA ZION PRADDEP

Phones belong in schools—just not during class

Why the smarter way to manage phones in class is implementing boundaries instead of bans

Anthony Liu | Staff Writer

As school districts across California debate whether to ban student phone use, many, including FUSD, have opted to leave the decision to individual schools. While some campuses are moving toward stricter policies, AHS has chosen not to implement a full ban this year. The discussion centers on whether phones are supporting student learning or undermining the classroom environment.

There is no denying that phones have become essential to modern student life. They are used for communication, navigation, and safety—and for many students, being separated from a phone feels unrealistic.

Yet, students themselves acknowledge that unrestricted phone use in class is a problem. Sophia Huang (12) recognizes the challenges of phone usage in class but still believes that a full ban isn't necessary. "I believe non-phone usage during class is beneficial,

but phones should not be completely taken away," Huang said. "Students should still have it on them for safety uses, just in case. Teachers should just reinforce phone policy rules during class."

Huang's perspective reflects a growing consensus among students. The issue isn't black and white—there's more to consider than simply allowing or banning phones. The real focus is on setting clear boundaries that help students stay engaged while still keeping phones accessible for safety and practical purposes.

While phones serve legitimate purposes, they are often disruptive during instruction. "Phones are distracting in class," Huang said. "In one class, my teacher banned phone usage. Everyone seems to be more alert and actually doing the work, working with neighbors and asking questions."

Allowing phones during class makes it unlikely for students to stay engaged. "Even if they start class focused, it's really easy to get distracted once you check your phone,"

said Aden Zhang (11).

Phones can end up disrupting the learning environment, making it less likely that students engage with academic material. "If phones weren't allowed during class, students would be more likely to ask questions and actually listen," said Zhang. "It would make classes feel more productive instead of everyone staring at their own screen."

Still, safety is a valid concern, as phones allow students to contact help during emergencies and stay connected throughout the day. Any restriction should therefore account for this reality. "If there's any danger, students need their devices to call for help," Huang said.

Learning to manage phone use can also prepare students for the future. "You can't be on your phone all the time when you graduate high school," said Huang.

Phones are not inherently harmful, but in classrooms, they can become distractions instead of learning tools. The ultimate goal should thus be to strike a balance that limits distractions while teaching responsibility. The solution is not an outright ban, nor ignoring the problem altogether. Schools should take a firm stance on limiting phone usage during instructional time, teaching students to disconnect when the time comes to do so.



In Ms. Yu's Accelerated Geometry/Algebra 2, AP Statistics, and Intro to Statistics classes, students' phones are temporarily confiscated in order to enhance focus (Photo Credit: Anthony Liu (12)).

Warner Brothers under Netflix

- A&E -

How consumers and industries will be affected in the wake of Warner Brothers' new patron

Natalie Tchao | Staff Writer

The Warner Brothers Studios, a prolific movie company producing franchises such as *Harry Potter*, the *DCU*, and *Looney Tunes*, was recently under bids by various production and streaming services. By December 5th, the new owner-to-be of Warner Brothers had been announced: Netflix.

This news signals major changes for media industries, including but not limited to movie theaters and streaming platforms. "The main change would be shorter theatrical windows like we've already seen with *Knives Out*, *Frankenstein*, etc," said Joshua Tsang (11), the president of Film Club. He also believed that buying

movies would become less common. "For physical media, I think there will be far less. Warner Brothers without Netflix has already been slowly pulling out of that market."

Some express concern about the potential of unconventional plotlines with the new ownership. Ryan Gerry, a worker at AMC, said, "Take *Stranger Things*, for example. I remember in the beginning, it was very small-town and horror-esque, but now it doesn't feel the same. It felt more like an action trying to be a modern comedy while still being in the 80s."

Comic franchises could also potentially be affected by Warner Brothers' change in ownership.

"It's like when Disney bought Marvel. The only change was that Disney was definitely censoring content in those books," said Alex Johnson, owner of Treasure Island Comics. "I don't think Warner Brothers has ever been interested in doing that, let alone for DC, so they probably won't try to censor them or anything like that. What you'll see is more Netflix TV shows built up around the characters. They're going to put lots of attention to make sure they can get a lot of money out of the movies."

Warner Brothers' transition to Netflix ownership will possibly make major waves in the entertainment industry, what people watch, and even how some favorite franchises will be used.

It's time to come out of your burrow

Why Groundhog Day is still significant in 2026

Jovina Zion Pradeep | Staff Writer

Every year in the United States on February 2nd, a groundhog (scientifically known as *Marmota monax*) pokes its head out of its burrow, squints at the sky, and either sees its shadow or doesn't. Tradition says that if a groundhog sees its shadow, it will retreat to its den, which is regarded as a prediction of 6 more weeks of winter.

Even in an age of weather apps and satellite forecasts, Groundhog Day still serves a meaningful purpose beyond its prediction.

Modern lifestyles and advanced technology have widened the gap between people and the natural world, leaving many students focused on their packed schedules, screens, and productivity rather than seasonal change. As a result, the gradual shift from winter to spring often goes unnoticed. Groundhog Day interrupts this pattern by encouraging people to pause and pay attention to the outdoors, even if only briefly.

At its core, the holiday emphasizes awareness of seasonal rhythms such as increasing daylight, warming temperatures, and the quiet signs of renewal in nature: an increase in birdsong and nest building, the emergence of flower buds, and the occasional appearance of a butterfly, all of which can brighten days around this time.

Recognizing these changes can help people reconnect with the environment. According to *Psychology Today*, spending time outdoors has tangible benefits; reconnecting with nature can reduce stress, improve focus, and support emotional regulation. These effects are especially noticeable during the winter months, when colder weather and shorter days can feel isolating for students.

"Spending time off your phone or laptop is really important," said Aathmika Dwarak (9). "Nature makes you calm, which can help you balance out



"Whenever I'm outdoors, I always feel extremely calm and relaxed. I love spending time with nature—looking at trees and the sunset," said Dwarak (Art Credit: Jovina Zion Pradeep (12)).

your life and stress." Groundhog Day reassures us that difficult times will eventually pass, and brighter days will return.

On a more lighthearted note, the silliness of teenagers and adults waiting for a groundhog to "predict" the weather can cut through social, cultural, and political divisions.

"Coming out of a burrow is basically us sitting on our phones the whole day and then getting up and moving around," Dwarak said.

For some students, making time to step outside can feel difficult due to academic pressure and expectations to remain productive. Ariel Tao (12) said this mindset often keeps students indoors, even when taking a break could improve their well-being.

"I want to get good grades for college, but at the same time I'm happy to meet and talk with my friends instead of focusing on things that make me feel stressed all the time," Tao said. She added that Groundhog Day encourages people to think about seasonal change and the arrival of spring.

This February 2nd, Groundhog Day can serve as a reminder to look up from screens, step outside, and recognize the natural cycles continuing around us. Even small moments spent outdoors can offer relief from stress and reassurance that winter, like all difficult seasons, will eventually pass.

The final season of *Stranger Things* trips over its own plot

After nearly a decade since its pilot, *Stranger Things* finally concluded its story with a fifth season that delivers with spectacle and nostalgia—but it is so full of plot holes that it is difficult to call the ending fully satisfying.

Part 1—or the first 4 episodes—was paced carefully and re-established the stakes of the show by introducing new mysteries. However, once Part 2 began, that momentum stalled. Storylines that had been set up meticulously were rushed or abandoned entirely.

One of the biggest issues lies with Vecna, the show's central villain. Earlier seasons developed him as a calculated force in Hawkins, yet his defeat in the final season feels inappropriately quick and oddly incomplete. As Ashni Mathamsetty (12) said, "I would have appreciated it if they spent more time on defeating Vecna. I felt like it was a little rushed."

Apart from Vecna, fans were promised a climactic reckoning with a face-off between the protagonists and the biggest villain of the *Upside Down*—season 3's Mind Flayer. In earlier seasons, the Mind Flayer was a terrifying force—a genuine life-or-death threat to Hawkins. Yet, in the finale, its defeat feels underwhelming and anticlimactic. There were no demogorgons, no killer bats, and no threat to the core group other than the monster itself. A 700-foot monster that haunted the narrative for 5 seasons was defeated in under 10 minutes. To put this into perspective, the Battle of Starcourt with a miniature version of the Mind Flayer was an entire 50 minutes long.

Will Byers' storyline also raises questions. In the first half of the season, Will developed psychic powers, tying him directly to Vecna

A review of *Stranger Things* season 5

Iniya Prabahaar | Staff Writer



Eleven faces off against the 700-foot hive mind of the Upside Down and Dimension X, the Mind Flayer—a shot taken just 6 minutes before the monster is defeated (Photo Credit: Netflix).

and the hive mind. However, when Vecna dies, Will survives without explanation. Earlier scenes made it clear that Will's connection to Vecna causes him physical pain and can nearly kill him, yet the show never clearly explains why this later disappears, leaving one of its most important arcs unresolved.

Another major disappointment is the complete lack of meaningful character deaths. Prior to the release, Season 5 was heavily marketed as devastating, with creators hinting at multiple deaths. Yet, by the end, nearly every single core character survives, significantly undermining the sense of danger that the show spent 5 seasons building.

This choice is even more glaring when juxtaposed with how *Stranger Things* gained traction in the first place—as a show unafraid to put its characters in mortal peril. Bob's death in Season 2 upset audiences because he was a kind and innocent character. When Alexei, a fan favorite, was killed, fans were devastated.

These moments mattered because they carried permanent consequences. Without that balance of victory and loss, the finale's win feels less earned and more like plot armor.

The only core character that "dies" is Eleven, and even that ending is ambiguous, seemingly preserving a flexible narrative for the possibility of future spin-offs.

While many viewers were disappointed by this choice, others appreciated it. "I was hoping to see no one die, so I'm glad no one did," said Adrianna Camarena (11).

Still, the season has some strong moments. One of the most effective scenes occurs when Hopper accidentally shoots Eleven and genuinely believes he has killed her. This moment is intimate and grounded, and Hopper's horror restores the shock value *Stranger Things* was built on. But isolated moments cannot compensate for the broader flaws of the season.

The finale was so heavily criticized that some fans proposed a theory called "Conformity Gate"—a theory that the finale's seemingly happy ending is actually a manufactured illusion by Vecna, and the real finale would come the following week. While most people dismiss Conformity Gate, the theory's existence underscores how dissatisfied parts of the fandom are with Season 5's conclusion.

These issues don't necessarily make *Stranger Things* Season 5 terrible. It still delivers moments of nostalgia and action, but it's a finale that too often sacrifices internal logic and tension for spectacle and comfort. In trying to stick the landing, the show lets main plot points slip away, leaving viewers with more questions than closure.

Why pop can't let go of the past

How Zara Larsson's new rebrand blends nostalgia with modern pop—proving that the old can feel new again

Sachi Ladole | Staff Writer

For the past few years, pop music has been looking backwards. From vinyl filters on TikTok to constant remakes and throwbacks, nostalgia has become one of the most dominant forces in modern media. Pop star Zara Larsson's recent rebrand taps directly into that trend—and it's working.

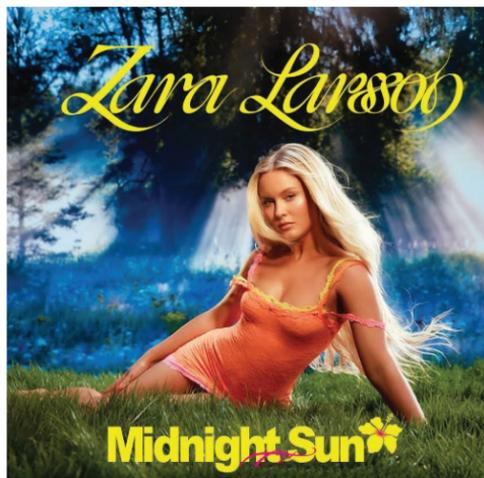
Larsson, once known for a more polished and mature pop image, has recently shifted toward a brighter, more playful aesthetic inspired by early-2000s imagery. The aesthetic was first associated with her after a viral Lisa-Frank-style dolphin meme surfaced online in 2024. Larsson has since taken the style on—using it through the rollout of her latest album, *Midnight Sun*. For many listeners, the appeal isn't just the music—it's the feeling that comes with it.

Ms. Leo, a chemistry teacher at AHS, noted that nostalgia often centers around comfort. "For most people, your younger years are the better years that you reminisce about," she said. While referencing the past can be risky, she argued that it works best when artists honor the original inspiration without copying it outright. "If you do the reference, you have to do it justice," she explained.

Connie Lu (10), a student musician, explained what makes people look to the past. "People are unsatisfied with their lives as is," she said. "And I think

that makes us romanticize the past." With academic and social pressures, teenagers are at a point in life where things are constantly changing. Nostalgia offers an escape.

This discomfort with the present helps explain why Larsson's aesthetic resonates even with audiences who never lived through the era she references. Teenagers today may not be able to recall early-2000s aesthetics, but they continue to resonate with the simplicity, color, and playfulness of an older era. "I know it's logical to move forward



Zara Larsson's Midnight Sun cover captured the fun, bright energy that her fans have been loving (Photo Credit: Charlie Chops).

because growth is most important and sustainable, but it's also very uncomfortable," said Lu.

Beyond basic visuals, Larsson's success also reflects a shift in how audiences connect with artists. Music is about more than sound. "It has always been in two parts—the music and the people who make the music," said Ms. Leo. In an era dominated by social media, fans are drawn to artists who feel human, not just talented ones.

Sana Arora (12), president of the Songwriting Club, pointed out that there are many factors other than talent that affect the recognition of artists. "Some people just stand out because they have better financial means to get better marketing. Still, she noted that Larsson stands out as an exception to this. "I don't think that for Zara Larsson," she said, explaining that her rebrand feels genuine rather than manufactured.

Part of what makes Larsson's resurgence different is the sense of community she has created. During concerts, Larsson often brings audience members onto stage to perform with her during the song "Lush Life." Through memorable dances and these shared moments, her nostalgic imagery doesn't just reference the past but creates a collective experience. Arora stressed, "The reason why that stands out right now is because she is making it a community event. People are drawn to that sense of community. With everything going on in the world, we have less and less of a sense of community, so people are turning towards the arts for it."

Teaching while pregnant

The challenges and highlights of Mrs. Fronda's experience

Jonathan Wang

Staff Writer

Teaching is a hard job. It entails being in charge of a classroom full of rowdy students all day, creating and delivering engaging lessons, serving as a mentor, and committing to many other overwhelming responsibilities. For Mrs. Fronda, an AP US History and English 12 teacher who is currently teaching while pregnant, her job is especially difficult.

In their day-to-day life, pregnant women often face struggles ranging from physical complications like fatigue and morning sickness to mental struggles like mood swings and anxiety. Mrs. Fronda said, “Obviously, I’m a lot more tired. Also when you’re pregnant, you have to use the bathroom all the time, so during lunchtime, I have to push students away or rush them out, which I feel bad for.”

Though the paperwork and slow-moving HR have been less than ideal, Mrs. Fronda felt supported by management at AHS. “When I had my daughter, I was in a different district, and the process is always really different. But my department head, Mrs. Smith, and the admin here have all been really helpful,” she said.

However, Mrs. Fronda is still disappointed by some of the district policies surrounding maternity leave. “I am allowed to take 6 weeks after birth

and 12 weeks of child-bonding leave. But if I take all the leave this school year, I won’t move up in pay for next year, which is really sucky, cause it shouldn’t affect my pay next year.”

Mrs. Fronda’s time off also poses difficulties for her teaching plans and her students. “It is a little bit harder to plan accordingly. I have to keep in mind that I don’t know who my substitute may be and what credentials they may have. So going into semester 2, we had to get a lot of the important stuff out of the way early,” she said.

But for her students, the change is not necessarily a bad thing. Wesley Guo (12), a student in her English class, said, “I feel like we have had



A mother cradles her newborn in a digital illustration (Photo Credit: Setyan Law).

fewer lectures than the first semester and have had more in-class assignments, which I tend to like more as it lets me work at my own pace.”

Even while her English students must now do their senior projects months in advance—with presentations scheduled in February—Guo was optimistic. He said, “This means we will have to figure out how to do this relatively quickly, but we can also get it out of the way early and won’t have to worry about it later on.”

Through all this, Mrs. Fronda has found support from her students. She said, “My students have been really chill. When I was pregnant the first time, I was teaching predominantly freshmen, so they were super high energy and really kept me on my toes—which was rough. This time around with seniors is probably the best class I’ve ever had in terms of discipline.”

She was especially surprised by the attentiveness of her students and the bonding experience her pregnancy offered. “My students have been really caring, asking me a lot of questions about how I’m doing and being really empathetic about how I’m more low-energy,” she said. “I feel like they’re super excited for me, and I’ve learned how much of a connection I can have with them even though this is something they probably can’t really relate to.”

The hidden crisis of junioritis

With work and pressure comes less motivation for juniors

Marjan Nabizada

Staff Writer

When students hear the suffix “itis,” senioritis—the senior-year experience of counting down the days until graduation and slowly checking out of school—is usually the first thing that comes to mind. While senioritis is widely acknowledged and even joked about, another form of burnout often goes unnoticed: junioritis. Unlike seniors, juniors are expected to push through exhaustion while being told that junior year is the most important of their high school career.

Junior year carries a unique weight. Students are expected to take on some of the most challenging coursework of their academic career while balancing extracurriculars, leadership roles, and the pressure of college preparation. For many juniors, there is little room for mistakes; they are constantly reminded that this year determines their future. This pressure and expectation leads to burnout that is rarely addressed.

For many students, junioritis begins halfway through the school year, once the initial spark fades and workloads increase. “Midway through the year taking those really hard classes, you start to feel a lot of burnout, and it drives down your motivation,” said Ikjot Bali (11).

She explained that the academic rigor of junior year plays a major role in this burnout. “Focusing on APs feels the most mentally draining because a lot of them require constant studying compared to previous classes,” Bali said.

As motivation declines, students’ study habits and daily routines often change. Bali shared that she began the year feeling confident and hopeful, but that her motivation has since started to dete-

riorate. On days when junioritis feels overwhelming, she turns to coping strategies to manage her workload. “I’ll write out all the work I have to do, and I’ll take an insane amount of breaks,” Bali said. She noted that while some teachers acknowledge the pressure juniors face, others underestimate how mentally draining the year can be.

However, junioritis does not affect every student in the same way. Vraj Shah (11) explained that prioritizing personal well-being has helped him manage the stress of junior year. “Junioritis has not affected my sleep schedule or mental health,” said Shah. “I prioritize these things before schoolwork, so I am able to get enough sleep and focus on myself—even if it sometimes comes at the expense of a bad grade.”

Shah believes that college expectations significantly contribute to junioritis. “High GPAs and



Overwhelmed by assignments and deadlines, Elea Yangorin (11) experienced the mental fatigue that defines junioritis (Photo Credit: Marjan Nabizada (11)).

AP classes being normal to colleges does increase junioritis,” he said. “So many students bite off more than they can chew and compromise parts of their life that are more important, such as their diet, sleep, and family.”

Shah also pointed out that peer pressure can make burnout worse. “No matter how much you do, someone will always be doing more,” Shah said. He added that this mindset causes burnout to set in faster.

Despite the pressure, both students emphasized the importance of self-awareness and balance. Bali shared that organization helps her manage stress. “I have a calendar and I lock it. Priorities are really important to me, so my schoolwork comes first and then my extracurriculars,” Bali said.

Maintaining his own personal boundaries and having reasonable standards has helped Shah stay grounded. “I know my limits, and I try not to compare myself to other students—which makes my capabilities shine,” Shah said.

While senioritis continues to dominate conversations about burnout in high school, junioritis quietly affects many students long before senior year arrives. Recognizing junioritis not only validates the experiences of juniors but also opens the door for more supportive academic environments. As schools, colleges, and families continue to emphasize high achievement and as students place increasing pressure on themselves, acknowledging the mental and emotional toll of junior year may help students find healthier ways to succeed without sacrificing their well-being.

Stepping onto the podium

An overview of winter drum major and the experiences of new drum majors

Suhani Thakkar | Staff Writer



Chen conducted as a winter drum major last season. “Conducting is truly something special to me. I love putting my all into it with my expressions and my movements” (Photo Credit: Benjamin Chen (12)).

The field is empty, the stands are silent, and music blares from the field as a baton slices through the cold winter air. As the new semester begins, many excited band kids put on their uniforms once again—ready for the start of a new winter drum major season: a sport where students compete against others in conducting or baton routines. For many students in AHS’s Marching Band, however, this time marks the rise of a new chapter filled with unique experiences as they lift their batons for the first time.

Before becoming a winter drum major, students have to go through an audition process. For many new members, including Olivia Chen (10), this

process can be somewhat intimidating. “I was incredibly nervous throughout the audition process,” said Chen. “I didn’t allow myself to imagine the thought of making it since I was just so focused on getting through the auditions.”

Others trying out for winter drum major, including Atsu Iyer (12), found the audition process more enjoyable. “Although I definitely was a little nervous, everyone there was really helpful. I was also doing it with many of my friends, which made it more fun and gave me the courage I needed to keep going.”

While the process of becoming a drum major was stressful for many new members, their previous experience in the band greatly helped them prepare. As Chen explained, “I think that doing winter guard in the past has definitely helped me, since I know the basics of how to toss, and I have much better hand-eye coordination.”

However, for many new drum majors, the shift toward an independent sport can be quite rattling at first. Chen said, “Winter drum major was a bigger change from the band than I thought it would be. Since you have to come up with your routine on your own, there is less of a connection between people, and it’s harder to make friends.”

While most people in winter drum major participate in the baton section, those who hope to become a drum major in the fall do conducting as well. During the marching band season, which happens in the fall, students conduct the entire band. Last season’s head drum major Benjamin Chen (12) was also a winter drum major, and he explained how it prepares students for the role in the fall. “For anyone wanting to become drum major in the fall, joining winter drum major is the best thing to do to get on that path, as it helps build core fundamentals that can be expanded on in the future.”

Sidelines to comebacks

The battles athletes face while recovering from injuries

Tiffany Notice | Staff Writer

For many athletes, injuries can happen in a flash, turning a single moment into a season-altering event. Being sidelined due to such an injury can challenge both their confidence and sense of self.

Huibo Yang (9) is a first year wrestler who dislocated her elbow during a match and cannot compete for the rest of the season. While Yang’s physical recovery has been steady, the mental toll has been an obstacle. “I experienced anxiety about my recovery when I got injured. I feel more alone, and the fear that I may not be able to wrestle the same after recovery scares me.”

Despite Yang’s mental setback, she is determined to stay committed to her recovery. “Rehab is not easy; I go from tiny exercises that bore me to

stretches that hurt,” she said.

Yang also needs to stay active to be ready for the next season. She said, “I go to the weight room, do biking for cardio, and work legs and core.”

Kristin Calhoun, AHS’s new athletic trainer, said, “I see an increase in injuries as the season goes on due to fatigue and repetitive stress buildup.”

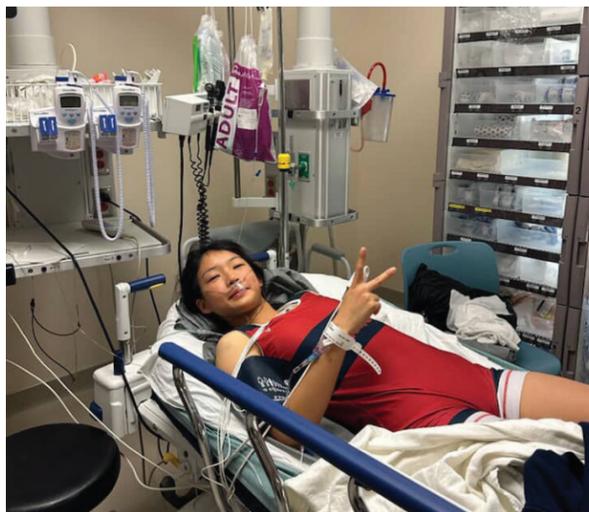
“Sports that involve constant cutting [a misdirection maneuver] and contact tend to have longer recoveries,” Calhoun said. “If an athlete were to return too quickly, it can lead to long-term problems or a chance at re-injuring.”

Through her job, Calhoun has noticed patterns in how students respond to the recovery process. “Athletes who are struggling mentally may become withdrawn or rush their recovery out of fear of falling behind,” she said. “Helping athletes trust their body again is a key part of the healing process.”

Elisha Escueta (12), has been playing volleyball for 6 years and has suffered multiple injuries. “I have had multiple concussions, sprained ankles, and more,” she said. “I had to watch others play the sport I love while sitting on the sidelines. That took a toll on my confidence in my sport.”

Escueta felt like she was getting left out from her team. “I was stuck at home thinking of what I could’ve done to prevent my injury,” she said. “I kept getting into my head because I put so much effort into being better.”

The road to recovery becomes a defining part of students’ athletic journeys. “It’s a test to see if an athlete can bounce back or just sulk in misery,” Escueta said.



Huibo Yang (9), still in her singlet, posed for her mom after she dislocated her elbow mid-match (Photo Credit: Shuqin Zhao)

Mental toughness in sports

The impact of mental strength on individual and group sports

Kaitlyn Liu | Staff Writer

While on the outside, stamina, technique, and physical strength are highly important factors that differentiate between players of varying skill levels, one overlooked aspect of school sports is mental strength. Athletes’ responses to pressure and expectations are critical to developing their games, aiding themselves, and potentially helping out other teammates.

For team sports such as cheer and soccer, athletes are required to hold themselves accountable for their own performances in order to benefit their teammates. Wanzhi Li (11) is in her second year on the cheer team, where she is currently the backspot. Being in a group sport, Li believes that confidence and focus play a large role in performance. “There’s always this fear that you might mess up, especially in cheer because we do a lot of stunting,” she said. “It’s important for us to constantly be in the right mindset to guarantee the safety of everyone.”

Similar to cheer, soccer also relies heavily on team chemistry. Ishanvi Putta (11), who plays on AHS’s soccer team and runs for cross country and track, is not a stranger to the pressure to perform well in sports. “In soccer, it’s really important to be mentally strong on the field,” said Putta. “You may be one goal down with less than 10 minutes left. You could have a referee who doesn’t make calls in your favor. Players from the other team could be acting aggressively or trash-talking you. You cannot let any of that affect your focus on the game.”

Li’s coaches stress the importance of attitude through constant reminders. “They encourage us to appreciate the little moments, to just try our best, and to work hard,” she said.

Putta said that the soccer coaches also greatly emphasize mental strength. “Before games, our coach encourages us to get into the ‘black mamba mentality,’ as he puts it, and to put in our best every single day—whether we’re practicing or playing against other teams.”

Li acknowledged a time when she completed a stunt she was struggling with by changing her mindset. “I was really anxious about competing since I thought I would mess up this one stunt which I kept messing up. After staying positive, practicing, and doing whatever I could, it ended up helping me because I felt more reassured in my abilities.”

Even on days when she feels she is underperforming, Li reminds herself to stay positive by repeating uplifting phrases. “I just mainly tell myself that practice is good for me, and it’s beneficial for my performance. Besides, what’s the point of performing if you don’t practice?”

Aaliyah Wolfe (10), who has competed in track, cross country, and wrestling for the last 2 years, emphasized the importance of getting into the right mindset. “If you give up before you start, you have sealed your fate,” she said.

Wolfe believes that mental strength, similar to physical strength, can be conditioned. “Mindset is definitely something you can train by putting yourself in uncomfortable positions and learning to push through.”

As the winter season draws to a close, mindset plays a large role, marking the difference between potential league titles and crushing losses. As Wolfe said, “Mental strength is a huge factor in determining whether or not you win.”



Art Club x Eagle Era Competition Winners

Description: The contrast between the rough texture of the branches and the movement of the water, makes the scene feel like a hidden discovery, something magical you only notice if you pause and take a closer look.

2nd Place:
Hala Amer (10)

1st Place: Sophia Jimenez (11)

Description: I was just really inspired by the large imagination I used to have as a child—something I feel like I've lost over the years. This work is my visual representation of those feelings and regrets, as well as a tribute to my childhood self.

Description: Cool witch go boom

3rd Place: Jodi Alena Quitlong (10)