

SPARK

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*Cover Photos provided by Zoe Batton,
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Marketplace Metamorphosis

By Isabel Georgieva

The minuscule room tucked in between the auditorium and the exit to the shell lot is a prime spot for Pine View students. In recent years, it has been shaped into what it is today by the very state-mandated rules which have enforced our weapons detectors and ID badges. How have the new rules impacted what the store is selling?

Long-time Pine View store committee chair lead Diane Thompson

explained the new changes due to the OpenGate weapon detection system.

"[We] have new binders and notebooks, and I've tested them out on the metal detectors, they do not set the metal detectors off..." Thompson said. "And we actually have the price less than what we've paid for them. [It's] more affordable than if you were to go on Amazon

or Target or Walmart and purchase the same thing."

As for the ID badge rule, the school store has plenty of acces-

sories for anyone's ID, Thompson adds, "With the ID badge requirement, I sell quite a bit of lanyards and waterproof badge protectors and also the retractable clips for your badges."

She also noted a rise in sales of accessories, "I try to keep a variety of stock of different designs, characters," she said. "And then the lanyard pins, those are really fun. The kids love to put those on their lanyard-necklace. So, yeah, I think that that has been a really big trend."

No matter what students get from the school store, it's important to remember that the purchase might never have been on the shelf in the first place without certain developments in school.



The photo depicts a lanyard case being sold at the school store for \$3.00. The store sells various trinkets for students. PHOTO BY ISABEL GEORGIEVA

School Store Student Voices

By Marina Wissa



Emma Belyavsky
Seventh Grade

"I like the stuff they sell, like the notebooks and the flashcards, (which) can be very useful."



Mathew Asaad
Eighth Grade

"I like that sometimes they have creative things...I like some of the fidget toys people like to play with, sometimes they bring back memories from when you were younger."



Julia Morkos
Sixth Grade

"My favorite part about the school store is probably the bracelets. (The best part of the school store) is that it's open to everybody."

The Future of the Ham Radio Club

Story by Rebeka Filko

The Ham Radio Club, a hands-on learning opportunity for students in grades six to ten, is preparing for an exciting future. What started as a project with NASA's Amateur Radio on the International Space Station (ARISS) program has grown into a chance for students to explore amateur radio and connect with people around the world. With the club advisor Ms. Rosander, they are working toward setting up a radio lab where students can build their own radios. Thanks to a grant from the Tami-ami Amateur Radio Club, the students will soon have the equipment needed to deepen their knowledge and hands-on skills in radio communication. Twenty students have

already gotten their license so they can make calls and contact people all over the world. The club now has its own call sign, W4PVS, which allows students to make real radio contact with people all over the world. Looking ahead, Rosander plans to change the club's schedule for next year to only seventh period, rather than both sixth and seventh. She also plans to attend a workshop at the Canadian Space

Center to learn more about everything and how to better support the students. A week-long summer workshop will also be offered for students who want to learn more about the technology behind the radios. Other than technical skills, the Ham Radio Club is about connecting with the world. Students have already made radio contacts with people in places like Malta, Mauritius, and Brazil, and they exchange QSL cards, which is a written confirmation for a two-way radio communication. This experience not only teaches students about radio but also about geography and culture as they learn about the countries they connect with.

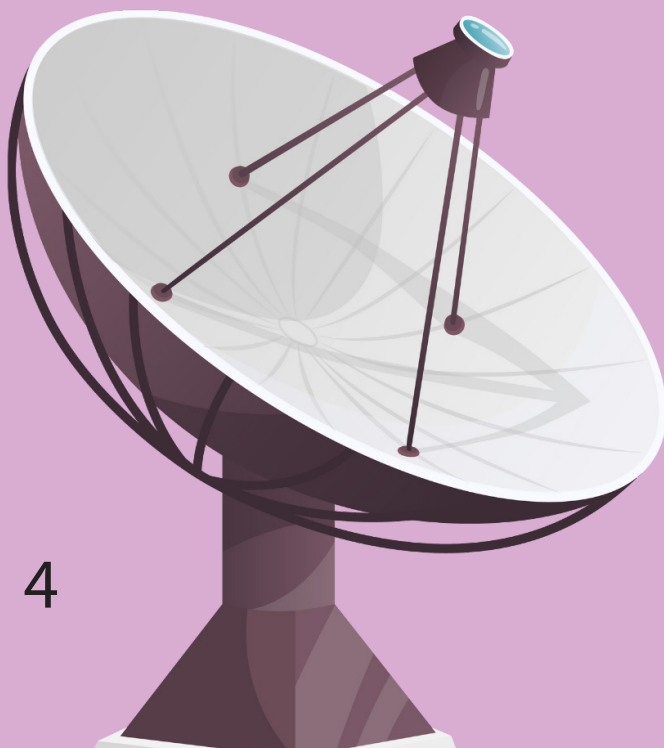
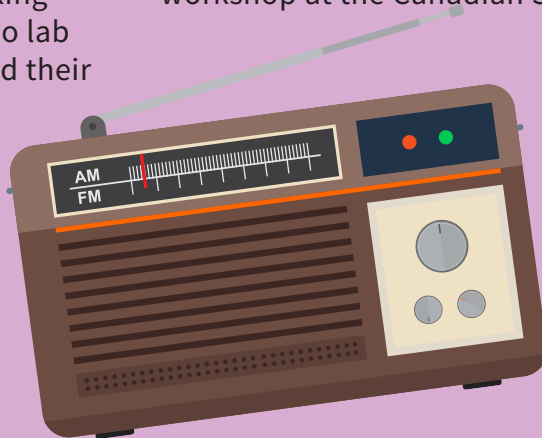


PHOTO PROVIDED BY MARIE ROSANDER



STEM FAIR SPOTLIGHT



Alakh Bhatt, Mantra Bhatt- Second Place (Plant Sciences)

Suzy Mata, Aurora Xia, Saniyah Sheikh- First Place (Plant Sciences)

Justin Chen, Yash Ganesh- First Place (Earth & Environmental Services)

Rithvik Raya- First Place (Behavioral and Social Sciences)

Francesca Madrid- Second Place (Biomedical and Health Services)

Teacher Voices: Scientific Breakthroughs

By Diya Panthulu and Truman Serine

Mr. Goebel, the middle school technology teacher, has been teaching for 22 years. He pursued a career in education and leadership for the mentorship opportunities, and says that “technology doubles every 4 years, but takes 8 for schools to catch up. It takes up to 8 years to implement [new technological advancements.]”

One of the first major technology initiatives that Goebel implemented at Pine View was the “1-1 laptop initiative with Pine View 9th graders in 2005.” He believes that “online testing and activities and content that give immediate feedback and results” revolutionized education.

Seventh grade physical science teacher Mr. Stumpf said that what he believes to be one of the greatest scientific advancements of all time

are things that “keep us healthy like how milk gets pasteurized.” He referenced Louis Pasteur, and said he changed how we think about health, because “there was a time when they didn’t know about germs, bacteria.”

Stumpf also said that in his lifetime, the microwave oven “changed how we reheat and cook food in the kitchen.” He added that in his teaching career, “advancements with computers and electronics have helped teach more effectively.”



Entertainment

Childhood Show Reboots

Story by ZOE BATTON

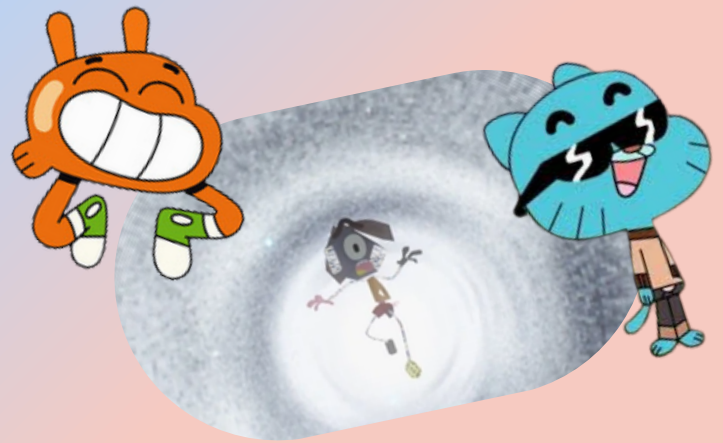
The Powerpuff Girls, a popular kids show that aired November 18, 1997, had a reboot made on April 14, 2016, featuring the same colorful trio of powerful sisters. The three main characters are named Buttercup, Blossom, and Bubbles, with each character having a personal color of green, pink, and blue, respectively.

Its peak popularity was in the late 1990's and 2000's, with its last episode before its reboot being aired on March 25, 2005. The reboot in 2016 of Powerpuff Girls featured new character development, a shift in the visual design, and a slight change to the three sisters' dynamic.

One person who has watched this show and has some thoughts to share on the reboot is sixth grader Elodie Lecoeuche, who began watching the show around 5 years old.

"The designs of the show are really interesting, especially the trails that come from [the sisters] when they are flying," Lecoeuche said.

She also touched on how the Powerpuff Girls had a similar structure to other popular kid's shows, which made it more exciting and entertaining. Lecoeuche compared it to another popular children's show My Little Pony, in which animated ponies fight against villains while learning about the value of friendship.



Another popular show among children is the Amazing World of Gumball. The amazing world of gumball, originally airing May 3, 2011, was a humorous animated sitcom that was produced by Cartoon Network. The show featured a blue cat named Gumball who is around 12 years old and a goldfish by the name of Darwin who is 10. The reboot for the show is planned somewhere between 2025-2026, although the window is planned to narrow over time.

Sawyer Haenel, a sixth grader, is one of the many who enjoy this television series. With an interesting introduction to the Amazing World of Gumball, he said that he would often see it when in hotels, and that is one of the main ways he got into the show.

"It definitely has a good animation... the character's mouths match up to what they say which isn't common to see," Haenel said.

With the new season coming out, it allows for the viewer to create predictions on how the plot will go, especially with the end of season 6. The end of season 6 titled "The Inquisition" showed the city of Elmore, where the Amazing World of Gumball takes place, beginning to be swallowed up by the Void. Season 6 was made in 2018-2019, making it over six years since there have been any releases regarding the show. This leaves many viewers interested on what the plot will shift to, since before the previous release the largest gap of a season releasing would be two years. This could hint at a new universe being formed, with new side characters and plot.

The Void is shown as an endless static-looking pit into which one of the characters ends up falling at the end of the episode. Even with this ending that makes it seem impossible to make a reboot, Haenel has some ideas as to what season 7 could hold.

The first episode of season 7 has been revealed to be titled "The Burger." Although episodes in the Amazing World of Gumball usually give a very light summary of the episode, this title leaves viewers curious as to how the plot will continue and what turns the show might take.



Stanley Pros

- It's big, can hold more water and ice
- keeps water cold longer than typical plastic water bottles
- various sizes and types that fit individual lifestyles and personalities
- durable and lasts longer than other water bottle models
- a vast palette of colors for all different tastes
- unobstructed space for decorations and stickers

Cons

- The straw model leaks consistently and considerably
- Spills quickly when knocked over
- Stanleys tend to be bulky and hard to carry
- Can be hard to fit in a backpack pocket

"It lasted a long time, and I am so protective of it, so no scratches... it's so preppy... there's a lot of lovely, lovely colors. And... It keeps your drinks cold."

Seventh Grader Cecelia Zhang for Stanley

Vs

By EJ BUCKLEY

Owala Pros



- does not leak very easily.
- keeps water cold for extended amounts of time
- can be put in a backpack pocket easily
- straw cover prevents germs from spreading and water from spilling
- FreeSip spout allows either small sips or larger swallows
- wide range of color combinations that are fun, subtle, or somewhere in between.

Cons

- The Owala water bottle is more expensive, even when compared to Stanleys
- Has a two-finger handle that may hurt to carry by hand

"It's very sleek and it's easy to carry around. It has a little handle and, also, I like it because there is something covering the straw, so people can't cough on it and then I drink the germs."

Eighth Grader Teagan Bower for Owala

The Future of Drama Club

By MILA SANDBURG

Keep your eye out because on April 26 this spring, drama club is presenting their spring showcase! Club members will dance, act, sing, and more! The club is also bringing back their summer performances this year. So, get excited for this year's summer performance, "She Kills Monsters"!

MEDITATION

BY ANDREA WANG

Meditation has been a useful way for people to calm down. One type of meditation that helps people connect to their inner selves is called kriya. Seventh grader Nidarshana Jayendran has been doing kriya meditation since she was five and claims that it really helps her control her stress. a type of meditation that controls one's Jayendran's dad teaches at an organization called Art of Living and instructs adults and others about kriya to allow them to have a chance to experience meditation and a unique way of life.

According to the Art of Living Foundation website, kriya's breathing exercises can reduce stress, anxiety, depression, increase one's energy levels, and improve sleep. There are various levels and courses. For example, the courses include Sky Kids and Sky Teens. Jayendran is currently in Sky Kids, which is for ages 8-12.

"In Sky Kids, we do many activities, such as roshambo, and we also learn the basics of kriya," Jayendran said.

The distinct levels start from the

basics of meditation and progress the kids learn more and grow.

To perform kriya, one must first sit down somewhere with your legs in crisscross position. After this step, you need to close your eyes and focus on your breathing.

"It's really tricky [to do], but you need to concentrate," Jayendran said.

Jayendran said it is essential to keep one's mind clear, though it may be hard, and to try and focus on one thought to make the process easier.

Jayendran's entire family is committed to meditating in kriya every day, usually around twenty minutes each time. Jayendran said that thinking about how useful and important this method is to her parents and her entire family keeps her motivated.

The fact that Jayendran's family carries out meditation daily, and her dad always makes this a priority motivates and encourages her to do the same. Staying on track requires patience and dedication, so Jayendran definitely has a strong commitment to kriya.

FULL SPEED AHEAD

By Eli Easter



Photo provided by Remy Rekus



Kevin Slinko (7) 1 mile
Photo by Diya Panthulu



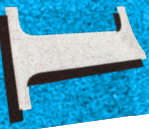
Kofi Addae (8)
Photo by Eli Easter



Eric Mattison (7)
Photo by Eli Easter



Makailyn Brown (7) long jump
Photo by Diya Panthulu



Many people see track as just a bunch of kids running around, but to seventh grader Eric Mattison and eighth grader Kofi Addae, it is a lot more than just that.

"Track is a fun sport, but it is scary to run when the people you are against are bigger and stronger than you, but it is also fun to run in meets and go to practice," Mattison said.

Mattison enjoys running in the 4x200m relay race, and likes to prepare by stretching, and always staying hydrated.

Addae agrees with Mattison and also said that track and field is a fun and chill sport, but it can also be scary at times. Addae enjoys running in the 100m sprint and likes to prepare for his races by stretching.

The

2

Pine View track team managed to win the first meet of the season, winning in many events like the girls 100m, the boys 100m, 200m, and more, which was a delightful surprise to Mattison because he said that the team had not won in a meet for a while, and hopefully the team will be able to keep it up for the rest of the season.

WISDOM WARRIORS

WRITTEN BY ELORA JONES

CAPTAIN HELIOS



Mr. Lenerz was working with solar cookers when he accidentally got one melted on his head! Harnessing the power of the Sun he can cook omelettes and bad guys alike. So if crime is your middle name, welcome to the menu!

ROCKET ROSANDER



Her love for the aurora borealis led Ms. Rosander to discover a fascinating meteorite that was glowing blue! After being exposed to the meteorite she acquired the ability to teleport. Now she can surprise bad guys at any place!

DR. LENSING



When Dr. Bell was in a meeting, he saw a glowing green ball floating down the hallway. All of a sudden the ball floated through him and time suddenly stopped! He can now control time! He could save the world one second at a time.

PHANTOM PARKES



It was a warm autumn day, and Mrs. Parkes' was grading her students papers when a student randomly sneezed on her! Little did she know she now has the power to shapeshift! This enables her to find any bad guy!



★ UH OH! IT'S AN ALIEN!

BY
OLIVIA REISINGER



So far school has been going normally. The same routine everyday: Walking into school, checking for your ID's, then going to class. Truman Serine, a seventh grader at Pine View, is part of this "almost" perfect school ecosystem. Serine is known for being a little wild at times. There are even some crazy rumors of some, DISGUSTINGLY CRAZY, stuff in his backpack.

But one day this perfect routine was ruined... something new, and unique came to school. OpenGate has come to Pine View! Now students' "normal" schedule has been changed. But for Truman... Open Gate is the start of a new life.

Truman, not thrilled at all, finally agreed to clean out his backpack of doom. However, Truman has one problem, his major procrastination. Nevertheless, Truman has agreed to lock in, and clean out his backpack. As Serine got home, he decided to clean out his backpack outside. Standing outside with the cool breeze on his shoulders, he tried to just dump his backpack out.

Of course, his backpack was so full of the strangest things that, all his stuff wouldn't

budge! They were stuck in the backpack. Truman then decided to dig deeper into his backpack and pull out his things one by one.

First, he pulled out some of his binders. They were so dirty! Almost caked with dirt and dust (from being neglected), Truman was coughing up a storm. These binders might even have deadly diseases on them.

Serine shuddered, "How have I been wearing this on my back every day?"

As Serine cleaned out the rest of his backpack, he found various random things. He found erasers, pencils and pens, but also some old sandwiches, and toys that he got years ago.

Then out of nowhere he pulled out... AN ALIEN!

It had weird eyes and was bright green! Was this the beginning of an alien invasion? Or has Truman discovered a new species?

With wide eyes, Truman screamed, "EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEK!"



Plastic Binders

By Suzy Mata



photo from fivestarbuiltstrong.com

Almost every student has experienced being stopped by a staff member as they tried to walk through OpenGate, the new weapons detection system. They might have forgotten to take out their binder; or move their spiral notebooks into the correct order.

However, this problem does have a solution. Some students just walk right through, and they still have a bag full of colorful binders. How is that possible?



Bobby Nee, seventh grader
PHOTO BY SUZY MATA

Well, the students have plastic 3-ring binders (or Five Star's Flex Refillable Notebook).

Seventh grader Bobby Nee has a plastic binder for most of

his subjects. Nee enjoys how with a plastic binder, he doesn't have to take them out of his bag when entering school. He shared that the binders are pretty strong and that they are cheap.

Seventh grader Nicolai Petrov also shared his positive opinion on plastic binders. Petrov said that the binders are "portable and easy to get through metal detectors."

Petrov also said that these binders are very durable.

However, plastic binders do have their flaws. It takes time to get used to the way that a plastic binder functions. Seventh grader Andrea Wang said that the binders



Nicolai Petrov, seventh grader
PHOTO BY SUZY MATA



Andrea Wang, seventh grader
PHOTO BY SUZY MATA

are inconvenient.

"[You have to] open prongs one at a time," Wang said as she talked about the inefficiencies of plastic binders.

Wang said that the 3-ring metal binders are stronger and easier to organize than plastic binders.

So, back to the question: Should students use plastic binders to help get through the weapons detection system, or use the already strong 3-ring metal binders?

What are you willing to go through to pass through the weapons detection system without having to take anything out?

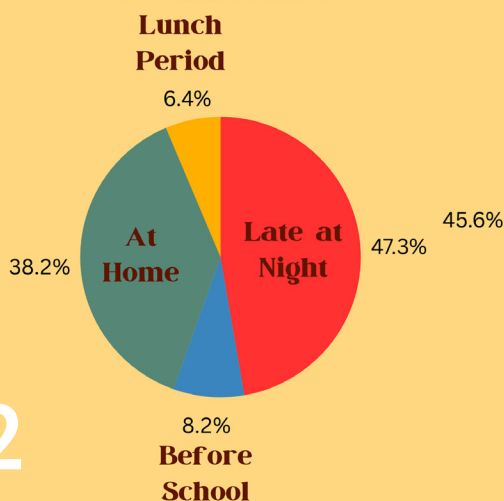


Students wait in line at the Bus Loop OpenGate system
PHOTO BY DIYA PANTHULU

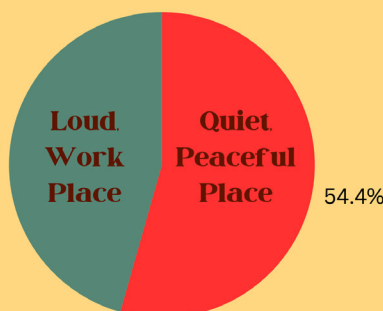
Learning Environments

By Alyson Fernandez

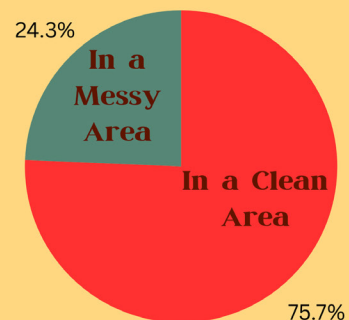
When?



Where?



How?



ETHICS OF KIDS ON SOCIAL MEDIA?

BY MARINA WISSA

Technology has practically taken over modern society, influencing the decisions we make in every aspect of life. However, when that technology is weaponized in ways that are detrimental to the proper progression of the society, questions arise about the ethics of using technology in ways that involve the participation of the young people.

Carol Vidal, a psychiatrist at John Hopkins Children's Center, said in an article that "Depression is complex and has many risk factors but research is showing that those who are more depressed tend to use social media more, and vice versa, confirming the correlation between poor mental health and high social media usage.

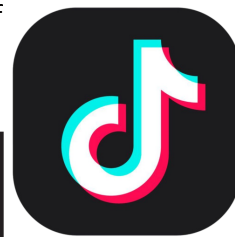
Due to this, the morality of having kids on social media is often questioned, as people—especially parents— are often concerned with whether their kids should have access to social media. Common arguments say that the constant consumption of content creates insecurity, dismantles the ability to focus, and encourages self-doubt due to comparison.

These reasons hold real weight - people only post the highlights of their life on social media, which may make others feel bad about their lives not quite matching up to those standards. Social media also has a great influence on people, especially young people, who are more impressionable - and this "herd" mentality may cause kids to do things they shouldn't due to peer pressure.

Despite the negatives of constantly scrolling in front of a screen, there are still benefits to social media. For one, it allows people to connect anytime, anywhere, and lets them share their favorite memories. In some way, making a simple Instagram post is just like scrapbooking in a journal or writing

in a diary - except this commemoration of your favorite memories can be shared with friends and family.

The relationships gained from social media are invaluable. But even still, is it worth the risk?



Eighth grader Alexa Villegas believes it is- "No, [I don't think a teen's access to social media should be regulated]. I think that social media is a strong part of a teen's life and engaging in each other's posts is a fun way to learn more about your friends," she said.

Villegas' stance certainly has merit to it, but when hundreds of children's psychiatrists and psychologists disagree, it becomes more important to consider implementing boundaries around teen's usage of social media. Social media, whilst an important and enjoyable aspect of many children's lives, should be regulated to prevent the damaging effects of overuse.

CONTACTS VS. GLASSES

BY NAIRIYAT TAKENOVA

Glasses and contact lenses are two tools used to correct one's vision. Glasses are eyewear that hold lenses in a frame, while contact lenses are thin lenses put directly on the eyes. They are both used for the same purpose but differ in numerous ways.

Diya Panthulu, an eighth grader, a user of both methods, prefers to use glasses.

"I don't like the feel of contacts in my eyes sometimes, but with glasses I can ignore them and get on with my day," she said.

However, Nattinee Catherine, an eighth grader, explains the benefits of both types of eyewear. "The advantages of using glasses is that you can protect your eyes by having transitions on them or maybe having blue light protection and with contacts you can do a lot more sports without worrying

about breaking them, and if they fall out, you can always get more contacts," Aaron said.

As both sides have their benefits, which is preferable by the majority? When people have the choice to decide which of the two they want to wear, it's really all based on preference and what one finds more comfortable.

There cannot be a singular decision on which one of these is better as they both have their advantages and disadvantages. It's largely based on what helps the person wearing them.



Unpacking



Open Gate

By Shriya Ashok and Ryan Lahey

We're all familiar with the so-called "metal detectors" that have awaited students at every entrance to the school since the end of January. But did you know that OpenGate is actually much more than a metal detector system? Middle School Assistant Principal Melissa Abela highlights the difference in technology.

"OpenGate is a weapons detection system. Metal could be like your zipper; it could be anything metal. That's not what this is for," Abela said.

OpenGate, a county-wide initiative, identifies anything that has the potential to cause danger or harm, which is why it is specifically a weapons detection system.

"It has AI, so it actually looks at the items in [the bags] and sees the density of the metal. That's why when you have things that are grouped together in your backpack, like your headphones, your charger, all that, it'll go off," she said.

Speaking of grouped items, Abela noted that recently students have adapted to the OpenGate system, but there is still progress to be made.

"We had a student go through with three umbrellas. Three. Didn't even know they were in there. We've seen a huge two-inch binder with one piece of paper in it," Abela said.

While it makes for some hilarious stories, if students make sure they're unloading any items they don't need, it will keep Pine View's new routine flowing smoothly!

Abela also recommended that students arrive earlier to school to minimize tardiness.

When OpenGate was first initiated on Pine View's campus, some students noticed dramatic changes in their school life.

An example of one such student is eighth grader Dakota Koval, who recently had changes in her routine due to the new systems. One of the biggest problems Koval faces is her rolling backpack.

"I have a rolling backpack; every day I have to take everything out and let [the aides] search it," Koval said.

In addition to the typical long lines found behind every weapons detector on campus, Koval's rolling backpack increases her existing lateness to school, which was due to a late bus.

"I have been noticeably later to my third period class because of [OpenGate]," she said.

Despite her tardiness to class, her third period teacher, Judit Pauling, like many teachers at Pine View, has been very understanding. Abela noted that students already arriving late to school due to late buses continue to be excused.

However, in the weeks since then, students and families have grown accustomed to the routine, just as they did when River-view piloted the program last year.

Despite the big change, students are adjusting and realize that these changes are making our campus even safer!



FROM *Rink* TO REALITY

Stepping out onto the ice, blinding lights overhead and a smile on his face, eighth grader Samuel Meng Li can't help but feel a rush of adrenaline. Li's journey to a figure skating competition in Hershey, Pennsylvania was filled with excitement.

He began skating at four years old and, although he was initially hesitant, he developed a passion

for the sport. Eventually, Li started synchronized skating, leading him to participate in major events like the sectionals in Hershey.

Though familiar with the rink from previous competitions, Li still faced challenges. His teammate, Woodland Middle School student Eva Christenson, despite her nervousness, executed her routine well. Christenson said that the preparation involves more than practice.

"The hair, makeup, and buildup are stressful, but it's worth it," said Christenson.

Before the competition, the team stuck to a routine of warming up, playing fun music, and mentally preparing themselves. Though Li found controlling his nerves difficult, he soothed them by emphasizing the importance of focus and

By Alakh Bhatt
remembering his love for skating.

Despite the stress, both skaters found the competition rewarding. For Li, qualifying with his team was a significant achievement.

"We might not be the best, but qualifying was a victory," said Li.

He hopes to improve and be ready for future events, while Christenson dreams of competing in New York.

Balancing schoolwork and skating present challenges, but Li and Christenson are determined to succeed. Li mentioned that missing school requires catching up at a more intense pace.

With dedication, hard work, and support from teammates and coaches, they remain committed to their skating journey.



A FRUITFUL FESTIVAL



By Dina Altshul

The first thing I noticed when I hopped out of my car? The overwhelming stench of gasoline.

I walk with the flow of traffic towards the kingly gates that welcome the 2025 Florida Strawberry Festival, which ran from February 28 to March 9.

The smell of gasoline is quickly smothered by the sweet scent of strawberries floating from outside the gates. Boy Scout Troop 5 waves friendly greetings towards passers-by. Upbeat country music floats through the air and sets the mood. A whirlwind of 'hello dears' and metal detectors later, the gates are behind me.

The first eyecatcher is the enor-

mous, 155 foot rainbow Ferris wheel. The second is the biggest (and first) cowboy hat stall I have ever seen in my life. Black, white, pink, striped, sparkly, you name it-- cowboy hats everywhere. The third is a lady walking around in a strawberry mask. As adorable as she is, I hope she isn't deteriorating in the sweltering heat.

I walk up to the mansion-sized orange-white tent that take up half the park. Inside the first thing I notice is a German man juggling three bowling balls... OUCH! One lands on his head! Concern bubbles up in my stomach as I think I've just witnessed a show go very wrong, when I hear "Ha! That was the fake one!" I casually walk through the tent as if I didn't

just have a heart attack.

Outside the tent, the sun's rays burn my eyes as they land on a happy couple enjoying some sodas.

"I'm twenty-seven, so I've been to the festival twenty-seven times," the young man on the left, Tucker Massey, shares his story.

Another couple sits at a bench nearby. Nancy Easterbrooke says "I came to Florida in 2007, and I've been coming [to the festival] every year since then... I come back for the entertainment."

The countless shows, fun stands and good food keep people coming back to have a good time.

EDUCATION

Around the World

By Lila Morsy

"Everything is different back home" eighth grader Rebeka Filko said.

School is very different in the USA compared to Europe, and Filko has experienced both.

Filko lived in Slovakia for almost 10 years before moving to Florida. Recently, she went back to Slovakia for two weeks to attend school. She is still enrolled in her old school, Wonderland School, because of the mandatory attendance requirement of 10 years in Slovakia.

"The school system is so complicated I barely understand it," Filko said.

The way her school organizes grades follows a similar hierarchical

tion, ninth grade will only exist if more than three students sign up.

First through fourth grade is the first level of elementary school, while fifth through ninth is the second level. Students can choose to go to a middle school or "Gymnasium" before fifth grade, or after eighth or ninth grade.

What grade you enter school in determines how long you stay in school. After middle school comes high school, the equivalent of college in America.

She must take finals every year for the subjects that she doesn't take in Florida, for example, Slovak and Slovak History, and provide proof that she attends school here. Whenever she visits Slovakia, she also must attend school there.

Including Filko, there are seven students in the entire eighth grade at Wonderland. Other schools in Slovakia have A, B, C etc. classes, each with about 30 students, but her school is a very small private school.

Schools in Florida have even more students, with Pine View having over 150 students in eighth grade alone.

Unlike Pine View, which has the same schedule every day, Wonderland has a different schedule every day, even ending school at different times every day; depending on if there's 6 or 7 classes that day (1:40 PM if 6 classes, 2:35 if 7 classes). Classes are 45 minutes long, with 10-minute breaks in between each class other than one 15-minute snack break and a 20-minute lunch break.

Almost everyone takes the city

bus because the school does not provide buses. Instead of the students going to different classes, teachers come into one classroom dedicated to the students. The grading system is also different; the grades are numbers instead of letters. 1 = 90%-100%, 2 = 75% - 89%, 3 = 50% - 74%, 4 = 30% - 49%, 5 - anything below 30%.

"It was really challenging but I had so much fun reconnecting with my old classmates that I haven't seen since sixth grade," Filko said.

After her visit, Filko felt more connected to both her past and present, embracing the unique aspects of each school system.



system to that found in America.

First through ninth grade is considered elementary school in Slovakia. However, unlike most schools in Slovakia, due to Filko's school having a very small popula-



Eighth grader Rebeka Filko (right) and her friend (left) get ready to step out into the cold winter day. During her time studying in Slovakia, she would go out and play in the snow with her family and classmates for fun! **PHOTO PROVIDED BY REBEKA FILKO**

Features

Behind the Scenes:

SPEECH AND DEBATE

*By Justin Anderson
and Rithvik Raya*

The Speech and Debate club here at Pine View is more than just speaking and debating, its learning how to speak confidently, think critically, and compete at the highest levels. From middle schoolers to high schoolers, everyone plays a major role in the club's success.

For eighth grader Luke Zhang, the best part of Speech and Debate is simple: "The talking part where I get to speak my mind and say what I want to say," Zhang said.

He enjoys debating about foreign affairs and works closely with his partner to prepare for competitions. He believes the skills he's learned in debate will help him in both academics and future career opportunities.

Seventh grader Mantra Bhatt joined the club this year and already sees the benefits of the club.

"I like going to tournaments and competing against other people," Bhatt said. "If you have a career where you have to make a lot of speeches, I think it would be very useful."

To prepare, he memorizes paragraphs by repeating them over and over. Leading the high school team is senior Shalini Nair, who started Speech and Debate as a freshman.

"I was inspired to join after hearing about it from friends and family and seeing them earn awards," Nair said.

Now, as president, she helps run meetings, organizes tournaments, and mentors younger students. One of the biggest challenges is balancing the needs of over 100 members across grades 7-12, but she enjoys seeing students grow over time. For Nair, one of the most memorable experiences was competing at Florida Blue Key, a prestigious tournament hosted at the University of Florida.

"It's the biggest tournament in the southeast, and students from all over the country enter," Nair said. "Last year's Florida Blue Key was special because our team had so many successes."

She encourages new members to focus on learning rather than just winning.

"Every competition is a chance to perfect your craft," Nair said. "Being ready to fail and accept defeat is the first step towards success."

Speech and Debate at Pine View isn't just about competition, it's about teamwork, growth, and success.



MATHCOUNTS

behind the numbers

BY JUSTIN ANDERSON

MATHCOUNTS isn't just about numbers, it's about teamwork, problem-solving, and competition. Led by math teacher Kelly Vest, MATHCOUNTS is a club that gives middle schoolers a chance to sharpen their math skills and compete against other students. The club focuses on preparing students for competitions by practicing different types of math problems.

"We just practice a ton," Vest said. "There are two individual competitions and a team competition. The math covers everything from middle school topics to Algebra I and even some Algebra II concepts."

Luckily, this year, the team has some extra help. "We have a high school student, Ben Jiang, who was the national winner last year," Vest said. "He's been running lessons on different skills he knows the students will see in competition."

For many students, the competition is what makes MATHCOUNTS exciting.

"Just doing math competitively and going against other people is fun," eighth grader Jerry Liu said.

The competitions start at the local level before advancing to bigger events.

"The chapter one is held in Brandon, and the state competition is on the west coast of Florida," Liu said.

Justin Kim, another eighth grader and MATHCOUNTS member, enjoys the challenge, especially the countdown round.

Kim is currently taking honors pre-calculus and also taken geometry over the summer. When it comes to the math in MATHCOUNTS, Kim believes one

topic stands out.

"Definitely algebra," Kim said, "Just algebra in general."

Despite his high-level math skills, he admits MATHCOUNTS is harder than his regular math class.

"Pre-calculus, in my perspective, is a lot easier than MATHCOUNTS," Kim said.

Beyond competitions, MATHCOUNTS is also a great place to make friends.

"The math community is very accepting of everyone," Kim said.

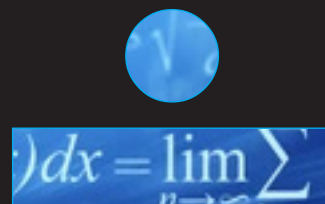
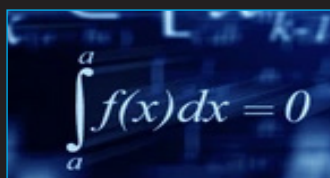
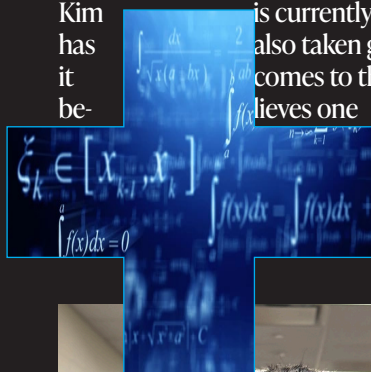
He encourages students interested in joining to focus on self-study since meetings are limited.

"You can just go to Mrs. Vest, but we've already picked teams for this year," Kim said. "If you're in sixth or seventh grade, you can ask to join next year."

For those continuing in high school, MATHCOUNTS has alternatives.

"What we [have] here at Pine View is Mu Alpha Theta. It's not exactly like MATHCOUNTS, but it's a competition," Kim said.

MATHCOUNTS is open to sixth through eighth graders who love a challenge. Whether it's solving tricky equations or competing head-to-head, the club is a great place to grow and have fun with math.



Eighth Grader Jerry Liu



Club Sponsor and Coach Kelly Vest



Eighth Grader Justin Kim

ODYSSEY OF THE MIND

behind the scenes of

BY VARSHINI GANESH

Creativity, teamwork, and problem-solving—these are the pillars of Odyssey of the Mind (OM), a club where students push the boundaries of their imagination. OM isn't just about the competitions; it's a space where students come together to think outside the box, build innovative solutions, and form lasting friendships.

At its core, OM challenges students with problems that blend engineering, art, and storytelling. Teams spend months constructing elaborate props and practicing their skits. But beyond the technical aspects, OM fosters a unique sense of camaraderie and collaboration.

Pine View teacher and OM sponsor, Pamela Novak said, "It really is about the team creating their own response to a pretty complex problem ... but they have to do this really on their own ... as they get older, it's really a student-run opportunity. So, I as their coach, as they get older, I'm just sort of facilitating contexts where they can work on that."

Izzy Lopez, an eighth grader and Novak's daughter, loves how the club brings people together.

"This is my fifth year doing Odyssey of the Mind," Lopez said, "I keep coming back because it's such a fun way to be creative and be around a community of other creative and kind people, who all have a passion for the club."

For Lopez and her teammates, the most rewarding part of OM is the experience of working together—brainstorming solutions, building props, and solving challenges as a group.

In OM, teams face two types of challenges: long-term and spontaneous problems. Long-term problems are complex projects that teams work on for months, creating original performances and solving creative engineering or artistic challenges. In contrast, spontaneous problems are surprise verbal prompts, given only on competition day. Teams only have a few minutes to respond with solutions. Both types of challenges test creativity and teamwork but in different ways: long-term requires careful planning, while spontaneous demands quick thinking under pressure.

For many students, the skills they gain from OM extend beyond competitions.

"Odyssey of the Mind has helped me grow outside the club by making me a more creative person and a better writer," Lopez said.

And Novak believes OM prepares students for life far beyond school years.

"It's just a fantastic program for creative thinking, creative output, teamwork, and where they can go with it is so significant," she said.

Novak feels that OM's impact goes beyond competitions, helping students grow into creative thinkers and collaborative problem solvers.

"I just think it's one of the best programs out there," she added, emphasizing how the skills students develop in OM—like teamwork, adaptability, and innovation, can stay with them for life.



Junior, Camille Wright, practicing for long-term.



Eighth grader, Adalee Heath, practicing for spontaneous.



Adalee Heath practicing for long-term.

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