

# the Torch



Vol XXXVIII, Issue 2

PVTorch.com

Friday, December 12, 2025

## Pushing Back For Public Schools

The expansion of Schools of Hope raises local concerns



Sarasota locals protest the Schools of Hope program while waiting to enter the November 18 Sarasota County School Board meeting. Citizens, from high school-age to 92, took the stand during the meeting to voice their opinions on the School Board agenda. Supporters of the program believe it will make the district more efficient and create opportunities, while dissenters believe the for-profit charter schools are actively hurting public schools. PHOTO BY TIMOTHY NESANELIS

by Ava Lenerz and Skylar Bredlau  
Editor-in-Chief and Co Sports Editor

A controversial Florida education program is igniting debate in Sarasota County over who controls public school space — and who benefits from it. The Schools of Hope (SOH) program was first introduced in 2017 by the Florida Legislature as part of House Bill 7069.

In the beginning, the goal was simple: to give students in underperforming schools access to high-quality alternatives.

But as the law evolved, Sarasota educators say the program has expanded far beyond its original purpose and now can affect high-performing districts like Sarasota County.

A bill proposing the expansion of SOH initially died in committee; however, it was added to the budget bill that was passed during the summer.

The latest changes now allow charter networks, a charter school with three or more locations, to occupy underused public campuses free of charge.

Adding to the complexity

of the issue, the school district would also be responsible for transportation, food, health, security, utilities, and resources for these schools.

This situation gives SOH schools a leg up when it comes to funding.

“Compared to the other charters, (SOH) might have an extra \$60,000-70,000 a month right off the bat because they don’t have to pay those things,” Principal John Bailey of Sky Academy, a public charter school in Sarasota County since 2011, said.

This money can then be used to advance their programs and attract students away from traditional public/charter schools—hurting enrollment.

Not only are taxpayer dollars going to fund these for-profit charters, but none of the charter schools in Sarasota County qualify as an SOH, so the school would come from outside the district.

“I’m concerned if you’re coming in just to grab money because there’s availability, that you might not have the full focus of buying into what our school

district is all about,” Bailey said.

This is especially seen in the case of Oak Park. The approved Hope operator, Mater Academy, sent in a notice to occupy the available space at Oak Park. According to School Board member Liz Barker, while this school technically does have available space, many students require it for wheelchairs, walking devices, aids, or therapists.

“They don’t deserve to be crammed into half of the building in order to provide a place for a for-profit company to make an extra buck,” Barker said. “That’s just outrageous.”

The school board has been working hard to protect schools like Oak Park from this policy.

Superintendent Terry Conner said in an email that his first step was to “review the details, understand the intent of the law, and look at how it might apply to Sarasota County.”

“Every district is different, so the real question is how a program fits with our local schools, our students, and our long-term plans,” Conner said.

Because the rules about which schools can be target-

ed are vague, even schools like Pine View could be at risk.

“My understanding is that Pine View has available space,” Bailey said. “I don’t necessarily know that the idea was for another charter school to come in and take over part of Pine View. I don’t think that was the intent of this legislation because I don’t see that Pine View is struggling academically.”

To reduce Sarasota County’s risk of being targeted by SOH, district leaders are focusing on ensuring that school facilities are accurately classified.

“I know that the superintendent has worked very hard with the Florida Department of Education to recode some of our spaces to be more accurate, to more accurately describe what we’re doing with those spaces,” Barker said.

The board has also been trying to come up with ways to consolidate schools to increase enrollment.

The special school board meeting held Nov. 7 approved plans for new programs throughout the district, as well as phasing Alta Vista, Brentwood, Gulf Gate, and Wilkinson into K-8 schools, thus maintain-

ing enrollment in traditional public schools to combat SOH. This plan received mostly positive feedback and was passed with a 5-0 vote from the board.

Families and students are encouraged to share their feedback with the district as showcased when families at Suncoast Polytechnical High School (SPHS) spoke at the October school board meeting regarding moving locations. Nearly 75 students, parents, and faculty members from SPHS went to show their concerns over the proposed location change. This led to the development of a new plan leaving SPHS at its current campus.

As the next legislative session gears up, “this is our opportunity to make any change, and if we do not take this opportunity now, there will not be another one for another year,” Barker said. “So now is the time.”

The impact each voice makes cannot be underestimated, “...when you’re a collective group and you work together, then you can affect change,” school board member Tom Edwards said, “and that’s the beauty of democracy. It’s messy. It can be difficult, but it finds its way.”

## What’s The Difference?

### Private School

- Funded by tuition payments and private organizations
- Run by private individuals or organizations
- Curriculum may be focused on more specific values or benefits
- Can refuse students
- More flexibility in teaching

### Public School

- Funded by the government
- All students can attend tuition free
- Run by government agency (often a school board)
- Education/curriculum based on guidelines
- Magnet school: public school with a specialized focus

### Charter School

- Technically a public school, funded by the government
- Tuition free
- Run by independent organizations (some are for-profit companies)
- Can refuse students
- Accountable to government agency that approved the charter

### School of Hope

- For-profit charter school run by “Hope operator” (designated by the State Board of Education and must already run 3+ charter schools)
- Originally to serve “low-performing schools.” Now able to co-locate with any public school that has “underused, vacant, or surplus” space

According to... International School of Denver, GreatSchools, Florida Department of Education

GRAPHIC BY AVA LENERZ

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# A Turning Point for Pine View

by Shriya Ashok and Madelyn Bailey  
Assistant Entertainment Editor and Co-News Editor



**Club Campaigns.** Victor Redondo (second from the left), Justin Anderson (middle), and Wayne Robertson (right) pose with club members at the Club Fair. The Club Fair took place October 30, two weeks after the first club meeting October 14.  
PHOTO COURTESY OF JUSTIN ANDERSON

Chattering crowds swarm and two Sarasota Resource Officers (SROs) stand watch outside Room 121 in Building 17 for the first Club America meeting, held on the late Charlie Kirk's "first heavenly birthday."

Club America is a chapter of Turning Point USA, an organization founded in 2012 by Charlie Kirk. According to the Club America website, Turning Point's mission is to "identify, educate, train, and organize students to promote the principles of fiscal re-

sponsibility, free markets, and limited government."

Wayne Robertson, Algebra 2 teacher and the High School Athletic Director, decided to sponsor the Pine View's Club America chapter in an effort to give students a space to express their beliefs.

"It's just an opportunity for kids that are interested in politics or civic engagement to have an opportunity to get together, potentially discuss different topics, learn about different topics,

and have a place to do that" Robertson said.

Since its inception, Club America has caused a stir among members of the Pine View community.

Class of 2024 alumni Neela Ravindran and Devin Gulliver are two who have taken issue with the club. They found out about Club America from their Pine View friends.

"When Club America started, friends I had when I was still at Pine View who are still there reached out to me and told me about this thing. One said that they were scared," Gulliver said during a Zoom interview.

Soon after finding out about the club, Gulliver and Ravindran decided to draft a letter to Pine View administrators in an effort to support the Pine View community and call for the elimination of the club. The letter was written mainly by Ravindran and Gulliver with contributions from students, alumni, parents, and faculty of Pine View intending to "not advocate for any agenda and just call for the examination of the club and its views."

Accompanying the letter was a petition signed by over 600 people, even including alumni from the class of 1974. Gulliver has encouraged people thinking of signing the petition to do so, using the option to sign anonymously if necessary.

"It comes back to the student who reached out to me and told me that they were scared. I want that student to be



able to open up the letter, look at the 500 plus names on the letter, and realize that they're not alone, and that students and alums and parents have their back, and that Pine View is still, can still be, the place that it was when I was there," Gulliver said.

Sophomore Rebecca Jones is another student who has found comfort in the actions of Gulliver and Ravindran.

"it's nice to have a petition ... it makes you feel like you're actually doing something about it," Jones said.

Calls for removal manifested in many challenges during the club's first meeting.

"We had a bunch of trolls ... People showed up and they were just there for the food, and they were just being disrespectful to us as a club," freshman Victor Redondo, vice president of Club America, said.

The organization of the club changed for the second meeting, striving to create a more peaceful atmosphere for club members.

"It was more of a private meeting towards people that we knew were going to be in the club," freshman Jus-

tin Anderson, the president of Club America, said.

Still, those who disagree with the club's founding hope to speak out about the club.

Jones believes the ideas perpetuated by Turning Point USA are extreme and could cause harm to students' mental health.

"I don't care what you believe in, but think about what you're making other people feel," Jones said.

Jones and her friends created posters opposing Club America, which they hoped to use in protest of the second meeting. They were unable to do this due to the lack of information they had access to about

the club's meeting schedule.

Anderson and Redondo have said that despite the controversy, their intentions to start a club in an effort to increase political conversations at Pine View remain strong.

"We felt that people weren't speaking out as they should, as people are scared to speak out nowadays, and we wanted to have more people to debate," Anderson said.

Anderson and Redondo's motivation for starting a Club America chapter at Pine View led them to ask six teachers to sponsor the club, of which Robertson, Algebra 2 teacher and the High School Athletic Director, was the only to agree.

Robertson cites misconceptions about the mission of Turning Point USA and its founder as a reason for the controversy.

"Many people were putting memes out there with just very short snippets," Robertson said. "If you dig a little bit deeper and realize the bigger conversation that was happening in, you might change your opinion a little bit."



**Crumpled Club America permission slips found outside of Wayne Robertson's room. These slips were disposed of in protest after the first club meeting.**  
PHOTO BY AVA LENERZ

**“ I want that student to be able to open up the letter, look at the 500 plus names on the letter, and realize that they're not alone.”**  
Devin Gulliver  
Class of 2024 Alumnus

Robertson encourages critics of the club to consider the positive impact Club America has on its members.

"There's probably a lot of clubs on campus that certain students might not choose to be a part of, and that's fine," Robertson said. "It doesn't mean that that club is bad or that that club is going to do something disruptive. It just means that that club isn't for you"

Gulliver and Ravindran disagree, believing that the club's founding principles will create disruption on campus.

To Ravindran, the negative effects of Club America and its ideals hit close to home.

"For my AP Research project, I studied trans representation in South

Asian movies ... Now, it's a year and a half later and I could not have done that if I knew that there was a Turning Point chapter on campus. I would not have felt safe enough to stand up on that stage in front of teachers and students and large swathes of people and talk about the research I was doing that was so personal to me," Ravindran said.

Robertson argues that Club America members will only add to the local community in a positive way.

Robertson said, "They love the United States. They love Sarasota county. They love Florida. They love the city that they live in, and they want to contribute in a positive way to all of that."

GRAPHIC BY ALLIE CHUNG

## CLUB REQUIREMENTS

as outlined by Sarasota county school board policy 4.50

### PRINCIPAL AUTHORIZATION

- A charter and constitution setting forth the club's purpose, rules of conduct, qualification standards for members
- The sponsor must be submitted and approved by the principal

### RULES & REGULATIONS

- clubs may not act in violation of school board policies, school policy, and law
- discrimination and disrespect of any kind is prohibited
- membership must be available to all who qualify, i.e. secret societies are prohibited
- hazing, sororities, and fraternities are prohibited
- initiation ceremonies and meeting dues must be approved
- charter and constitution must be kept on file

GRAPHIC BY DIYA PANTHULU

# MID YEAR CLASS PRESIDENT CHECK-IN: Q&A EDITION!

## SHAWN AKABOGU (FRESHMAN CLASS PRESIDENT)

**Why did you want to run for class president?**

"I wanted to run for class president to help out this class... and gain more experience in a presidential role in leadership. I like being a leader... but I also want to contribute to the class and help everyone."

**How much money have you raised so far?**

"There was this big donation by someone, but they requested it back, so we had lots of our money taken, but I think like \$600... We started slow because we're all new to the job, but we're getting things rolling now, and I think it's going to look really good."

**What do you hope your class thinks of you?**

"I hope they think of me as responsible, fun, but still ready to handle things and get down to business."



## LUKE CALLEJA (SOPHOMORE CLASS PRESIDENT)

**What do you hope to improve and accomplish with your presidency?**

"I definitely want to improve the amount of turnout for events and create more fun volunteer opportunities for the class to mingle together."

**Since you were president last year, have you built upon anything you started?**

"We had an idea of class merch freshman year, but we... never really got through it until this year because we had other things going on... but yeah, this year we're supposed to accomplish merch. It'll be coming out soon."

**How are you staying in contact with the student body?**

"We send out some flyers sometimes and we have our semesterly class officer meeting [and] class meetings, so that's how we stay in contact."



## OMY PATEL (JUNIOR CLASS PRESIDENT)

**What have you accomplished with your presidency so far?**

"We raised roughly \$35,000 out of the required \$40,000 we need to raise... We had a bunch of fundraisers recently, with Open House, Kids Night Out, and the Hootie Harvest, which was a hit."

**How do you plan to raise the remaining \$5,000?**

"Hopefully, I'll try to create more fundraisers with my peers' support... and through Miss Pine View... and also, we have to calculate how much we made from the Pine View Fair. I actually want to raise \$10,000 for the second semester... because I want some of the money to go towards our Gradventure... and if we have more, I want us to get a Busch Gardens field trip at the end of the school year, and I'll pay for everyone's ticket!"



**Now that you're a senior, what have you accomplished?**

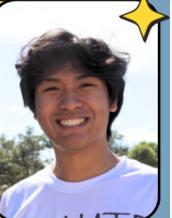
"We've made a lot of money, we've had a lot of very fun, successful events... a lot of these fun fundraisers where all of our classmates can get together, enjoy time, spend hours talking... and really connecting."

**How much money have you raised towards graduation?**

"We know it's roughly around \$30-35,000, ... So we reached the goal. A lot of our money was taken out due to the big, amazing Cobalt that we had. Shoutout Becky [Sipes] and Aashima [Goswami] for hosting and creating such a great party!"

**What do you hope your class thinks of you?**

"I've been president for four years, so I hope at least they think I did a good job. I hope they can see the amount of work... the entire class officer team has put in and the work that the sponsors have put in to make sure that we get amazing opportunities."



# The Good in Our Community

The Club SDC (Boys and Girls Club)



Members of The Club SDC stand in front of the capital building in Washington D.C. during the Summit for American Youth (SAY) program. The program allows for student leaders to gain experience advocating for change through leadership and community. Both junior Riya Doshi and senior Devdaan Lobo participated, alongside other Pine View students. PHOTOS COURTESY OF DEVDAAAN LOBO

by Robyn Schoenberg  
Assistant Editor-in-Chief

With over 3,200 service hours in 2024 alone, The Club SDC (formerly and commonly known as the Boys and Girls Clubs of Sarasota and Desoto Counties) has become known for their significant impact on the local community, but their influence goes far beyond what may be expected.

Through its mission to “enable all young people, especially those who need us most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens,” it provides resources for younger kids and teens alike.

“We have a lot of unique programs specifically for teens, ranging anywhere from leadership to workforce to advocacy to entrepreneurship,” senior Devdaan Lobo said. “I would say, for teens in Sarasota and DeSoto counties, the Boys and Girls Club is just a great hub of opportunities.”

Through these programs, students develop life-long skills, form meaningful connections, and discover how they can drive change in their community.

## Faulhaber Fab Lab

by Katerina Mazzo  
Web Editor-in-Chief

The Faulhaber Fab Lab is a familiar place with many in the Pine View community. The Student Planning and Education Committee (SPEC) is best known for building rockets, designing robots, and conducting colorful STEAM experiments. But for the volunteers who run the program, the most important thing they build is kindness.

At the Fab Lab, SPEC instructors work with younger students to conduct STEAM experiments during special sessions conducted every Saturday and during the summer involving various activities from Lego building to robotics.

For SPEC instructor and junior Yoojeong Lee, however, kindness is the foundation of every Saturday and summer camp session. The environment at Fab Lab is shaped with intention.

“Whenever we

get with the kids, we go over the expectations and one of them is always to be kind,” Lee said. “So we always try to enforce these kids to be open to each other’s opinions and ideas, and not have this toxic environment of learning.”

Kindness isn’t just something for the kids to practice, the volunteers grow into it as well. Fab Lab gives kindness back to them, offering opportunities to learn, lead, and develop new strengths.

“With the volunteers I’ve worked with, I’ve seen people become more patient,” Lee

receiving funding.

They were inspired to start their own non-profit called Riva, in which they combat period poverty and reduce the stigma around the menstrual cycle, after seeing the effects firsthand while traveling.

“We’ve gone to India a lot of times, and from there we’ve been able to see the impact that it [period poverty] has on just communities, and poverty, and even third world countries,” Doshi said.

With the funding they received Riva was brought to life. They fundraised and traveled to Senegal with buildOn Pine View, distributing reusable menstrual products and providing menstrual education to the local community.

“It meant so much to me to be able to be part of change ...” Doshi said in an over the phone interview. “It’s something that I’ve always thought about, you know, that’s all I’ve really done, thought about it. So, it was really cool to be able to do it myself.”

Through select Club programs, Lobo and Doshi, along with other teens, attended the Summit for America’s Youth (SAY) in Washington D.C., where they can present their projects, explore govern-

ment and public service careers, and connect with Club youth from around the country along with elected officials.

These programs display only a fraction of the opportunities available to Club teens. Ultimately, the staff at The Club is committed to empowering youth and facilitating their success in a wide range of ways.

“It’s just a great place to give teens the opportunity to use their voice... There is a mutual respect aspect between teens and adults that you don’t find in a lot of other places,” Lobo said. “We’re all working towards the same goal of making an impact and making a better future for everyone.”

Both Lobo and Doshi expressed that their mentors in the Club have become important people in their lives, guiding them in and out of the Club.

“If you’re passionate about something, and you show that to club staff, they will do whatever they can to find something for you,” Lobo said. “... Especially if you’re someone who doesn’t really know what they want to do or wants to find something that they’re passionate about for the rest of their life, the club’s a great place to start.”

With all that The Boys and Girls Club provides, it is an invaluable opportunity that is open to all teens.

“If you’re curious, just try to come to a meeting or talk to someone that you’ve seen wear a club shirt. We’re always looking for new members,” Lobo said. “... Especially if you’re someone who doesn’t really know what they want to do or wants to find something that they’re passionate about for the rest of their life, the club’s a great place to start.”

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DEVDAAAN LOBO

PHOTO AND GRAPHIC BY TIMOTHY NESANELIS



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PHOTOS COURTESY OF DEVDAAAN LOBO

PHOTO AND GRAPHIC BY TIMOTHY NESANELIS

# A New Voice for Student Journalism

by Nathan De Souza  
Director of Digital Media

As high-schoolers’ interests conflict with their county’s policies, the need for representation within the student body becomes increasingly relevant. The New Voices of Pine View club works to change the landscape for student journalism in Sarasota County, and all the work culminated in a great success for the club.

Starting in the summer of 2025, the president and senior Allie Chung sought to change policy regulating student journalism in Sarasota County to address important societal skills and encourage student journalism. Alongside other staff members of The Torch, Chung began to propose a change that was sparked by the student journalists’ experiences, particularly those concerning the role of school administration in publication.

“I really think that Torch and New Voices are like training grounds for how we’re going to approach life outside of school,” Chung said. “And if we’re trained to believe that it’s only okay to tell other people about what’s right in life and what’s going right with society, it’s going to cause a lot of issues later down the road.”

The revision to Sarasota County School Board Policy 4.51 clarifies the definition of an adviser as a teacher, emphasizes the role of the adviser in approving content, clarifies that publications are primarily student-run, provides clear limitations of publica-

tion content and provisions to ensure that content reflects student autonomy while maintaining appropriate standards, and creates an appeals process for potential disagreements with the school’s administration.

Proposing a policy change was not as simple as just asking to amend Policy 4.51. The club worked purposefully alongside Supervisor of Government Affairs Chris Parenteau to make this happen.

Additionally, members of the club had to miss school in order to attend school board meetings to defend their policy change, but according to Chung it still helps spread the word about the club’s policy.

“Creating the policy is definitely very difficult, because we don’t want to just pull it out of thin air. We had to do all that research, which took a long time,” Chung said.

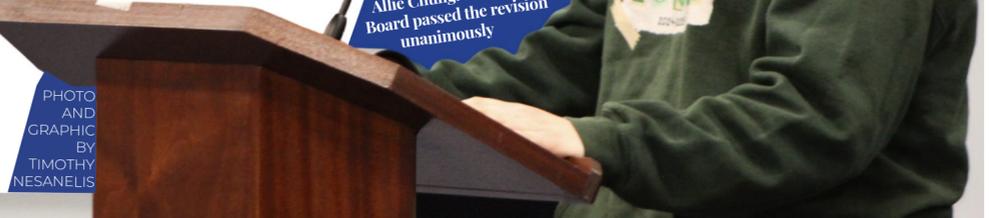
The club’s efforts were worth it in the end. On Nov. 18, Sarasota County Schools board members voted unanimously to accept their revision of Policy 4.51, marking a significant milestone in their push for student representation.

PHOTO AND GRAPHIC BY TIMOTHY NESANELIS

New Voices vice president Ava Lenerz was an attendee of the Sarasota School board meetings and spoke about her experiences in student journalism. Like Chung, Lenerz also emphasizes the importance of having the club to serve future student journalists, inspiring them to also initiate change and use their voices.

“I didn’t expect that we could actually get a policy change this year. I more considered it as a stepping stone to help future generations,” Lenerz said. “I’m really glad to see that it has a chance of actually having an effect this year, and it’s really inspiring getting to work with the other student journalists and seeing that change is possible.”

Senior and club vice president Ava Lenerz speaks on the revision of Policy 4.51 at the November 18 Sarasota County School Board Meeting. Lenerz attended the meeting along with Freshman Diya Panthulu, juniors Madelyn Bailey, Timothy Nesanelis, Jakob Roche, Andrew Ashby, Henry Yemofio, and senior Allie Chung. The School Board passed the revision unanimously.



# Blank Blocks to Natural Wonders

by Maya Ruffin  
Assistant Features Editor

After years of brainstorming ideas, sketching out plans, and setting up meetings, Pine View’s National Art Honor Society (NAHS) will finally begin painting its mural in January of 2026. The blank wall of the HVAC building, located near Building 16, will soon be filled with life and color.

The plan for the mural began a while ago when EllaRose Sherman, past NAHS president in the class of 2025, joined NAHS. The idea first arose when Sherman was a freshman and Layna Malave, who was the president of NAHS at

the time, wanted to do a mural. Malave originally proposed that the mural would have a starry night theme and wanted it to be located in Building 17. Unfortunately, they were unable to complete the project while Malave was still attending Pine View.

After numerous failed attempts to do the mural, the club decided to put the mural dreams to rest for the time being. That was until The Torch released a story in the October 2024 issue titled “Finding the Art Again.” This story included a quote from Middle School Assistant Principal Melissa Abela stating she was open to hearing ideas for creative projects around campus.

“We wanted to do a mural, but we thought that they [the administrators] wouldn’t want a mural and that we’d really have to push it. Here they are, saying that they want a mural,” Sherman said.

This led to a meeting with the administration, where Abela proposed an idea to center the mural around native Floridian plants and animals.

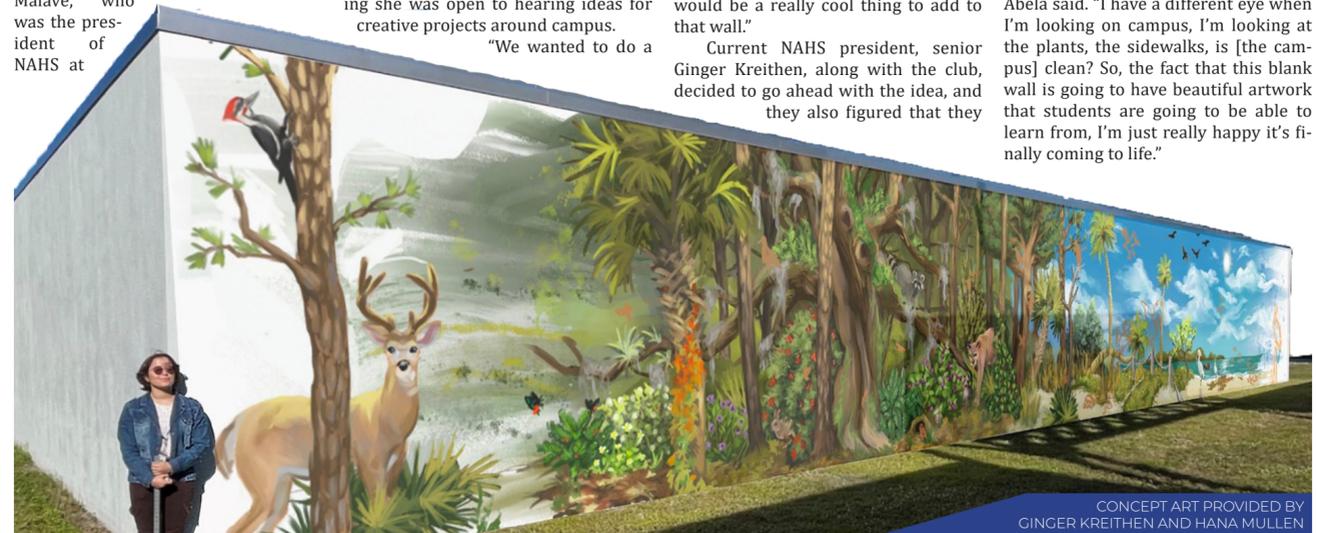
“I remember driving through downtown Venice, and when you get close to Harbor [street],” Abela said. “If you look to the right, there’s this building with beautiful murals of plants, it’s like a Bougainvillea, and I thought that would be a really cool thing to add to that wall.”

Current NAHS president, senior Ginger Kreithen, along with the club, decided to go ahead with the idea, and they also figured that they

could integrate it into the curriculum. “There’s Mr. Miller’s Marine [Science] class, the Life Science nature walk project, and the fourth grade nature project,” Kreithen said. “Having something that would unify all these subjects and something beautiful on the campus to bring attention to the degradation of our Florida ecosystem felt really important to us.”

The mural will include forest, marsh, and beach landscapes with over 30 native species of plants and animals. “I’m excited, I think that it’s going to be beneficial for the entire campus,” Abela said. “I have a different eye when I’m looking on campus, I’m looking at the plants, the sidewalks, is [the campus] clean? So, the fact that this blank wall is going to have beautiful artwork that students are going to be able to learn from, I’m just really happy it’s finally coming to life.”

PHOTO AND GRAPHIC BY TIMOTHY NESANELIS



CONCEPT ART PROVIDED BY GINGER KREITHEN AND HANA MULLEN

PHOTO BY KATERINA MAZZO

# If you snooze, you lose

Examining the effects of academic pressure on sleep

by Timothy Nesanelis  
Co News Editor



GRAPHIC BY HANA MULLEN



GRAPHIC BY ISABEL GEORGIEVA

It's an all too familiar feeling for Pine View students. Your eyes constrict, your brain slows down, and your body physically cannot hold itself up any longer as the rest of the period becomes an agonizing fight to stay awake.

For the vast majority here, sleep deprivation is a widespread issue, one teachers and students have normalized. But the dangers are more severe than one could imagine.

High school students need about eight to ten hours of sleep per night, but a 2021 sample of Floridian high school students by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) found that 78.4 percent of students are receiving insufficient sleep on an average school night.

AP Psychology teacher Robin Melton is one of the many teachers at Pine View who has observed this alarming statistic among her students.

"They are much more prone to spacing out and much more prone to being disorganized," Melton said.

Chronic sleep deprivation is more than just issues with memory or hormonal imbalances. Licensed clinical psychologist Keri Downs, PsyD, explains that sleep is a huge factor in both our physical health and mental health.

"In situations where teens might typically [be] able to regulate [emotions], they now are no longer able to and so they might not be able to function at that same capacity," Downs said.

The effect can be even more devastating for students with preexisting mental health conditions, as the symptoms of sleep deprivation can compound with

symptoms of other mental health disorders.

Why, though, are Pine View students so drawn to working in the hours of twilight? The answer may lie within the extra degree. As theorized by Downs, students at a magnet school for gifted children like Pine View could feel pressured to push themselves past the limits of their own body to excel, an idea Melton agreed with.

"As their schedules are getting busier, as the more rigorous classes are coming in, as they're trying to have a social life, the sleep is disappearing with it," Melton said.

To try and fix their sleep schedule students can avoid excessive caffeine intake, avoid screens for at least an hour before bed, track sleep, and meditate.

These can all increase the duration and quality of sleep.

"Ideally, I think if kids understand and can make those connections on your own, you're going to be more willing to make those changes and do them for yourselves," Downs said.

Melton sees the growing number of adolescents with mental health issues nationwide, and hopes that Pine View students struggling with sleep deprivation and poor mental health can find comfort in the people around them and recognize that they are not alone.

"They feel that they're going to have some stigma attached to them, and it's going to make them less of a person, and that should not be the case," Melton said. "Being able to admit something and seek advice or help definitely gives you the tools to be stronger."

## CAFFEINE

1 in 4 parents say that their teens consume caffeine every day or nearly every day.  
<https://mottpoll.org/reports/parents-asleep-teen-caffeine-consumption>

It is recommended that teens consume no more than 100 mg of caffeine per day (that's equivalent to 2 to 3 cans of soda or about 1 cup of coffee)  
<https://www.michiganmedicine.org/health-lab/does-your-teen-consume-too-much-caffeine#:~:text=The%20American%20Academy%20of%20Pediatrics,milligrams%20per%20day%20for%20teens.>

Caffeine-related emergency department visits have increased 1.8x for high schoolers (15-18 yo) from 2017-2023  
<https://www.epiresearch.org/articles/caffeine-related-od-visits-although-uncommon-doubled-for-middle-school-and-high-school-aged-children-since-2017>

Up to 11.6% of secondary schools sell energy drinks in vending machines, school stores, and snack bars.  
<https://www.cdc.gov/school-nutrition/energy-drinks/index.html>

CONTENT BY ATHENA ERBE  
DESIGN BY ISABEL GEORGIEVA

# BLUELIGHT

How blue light affects sleep and what you can do to combat it

- Blue light helps keep everyone alert during the day, but using devices at night confuses the human brain into believing that it's still daytime, so the human body slows down its release of melatonin, the hormone that signals the body when it's time to wake up
- Lack of melatonin release can make it harder to fall asleep, shorten the total sleep time, and lead to fatigue, deficiency in focus, and a lower mood throughout the day
- Limiting screen time to an hour or two before bed, wearing blue-light blocking glasses, and dimming bright lights in the evenings also helps
- Experts recommend turning on a setting of Night Shift or Night Light mode on screens to lower blue light exposure that gadgets give off



CONTENT BY NAIRIYAT TAKENOVA  
DESIGN BY ISABEL GEORGIEVA

# Scroll now, pay later

How brain rot could be affecting you financially

by Allie Chung

Asst. Editor-in-Chief

When Pine View senior Devdaan Lobo opened his screen time report, he laughed.

Seven hours daily on apps like TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, and ESPN.

He's not alone.

The American Psychological Association reports that teens now spend an average of seven hours and twenty two minutes a day on their phones, not counting homework. The number isn't just alarming; it's expensive.

"Unless I really need to focus when I'm doing an assignment, I won't put my phone on Do Not Disturb," Lobo said. "So if someone sends me something, I'll just watch it when it gets sent to me."

That pattern of breaking focus is where the financial fallout starts.

Researchers at the Univer-

sity of California, Irvine found that frequent digital interruptions can cut productivity by up to 40 percent. Every quick scroll forces the brain to take up to twenty minutes to fully

Focus used to be a skill; now it has become a form of wealth.

refocus. In the workplace, that's time and money lost.

Economists call it the distraction tax. In fact, Impact Economist estimates that constant phone checking costs the average worker around \$34,448 in annual productivity,

and costs companies billions overall. Multiplied across decades, that "harmless" nightly scrolling habit becomes a six figure financial loss.

"Brain rot," explained Pine View AP Psychology teacher Robin Melton, "is a decrease in cognitive function. The more you engage in an activity such as social media, the less active the other parts of your brain are being engaged."

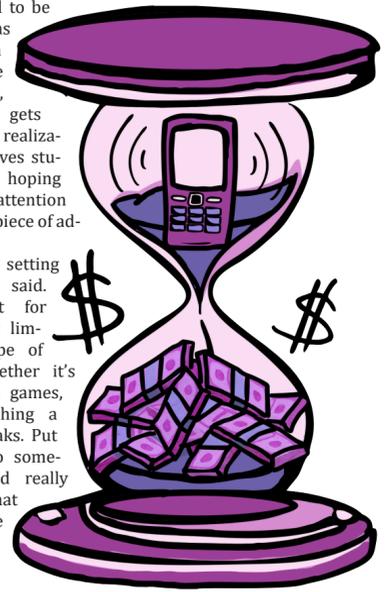
She compared the habit to a drug that carries real world costs.

"If you can't focus for long periods, you won't perform as well in the workplace" Melton said. "If we think about social media, it's constantly changing, and because of that, it greatly shortens our attention span when it comes to sitting in a classroom, being in an office, or even just having to work because you're constantly wanting things to change."

Focus used to be a skill; now, it has become a form of wealth. The more we scroll, the more time gets spent without realization. Melton leaves students who are hoping to protect their attention spans with one piece of advice: start small.

"Start by setting limits," Melton said. "It's important for anybody to set limits on any type of technology, whether it's a phone, video games, or binge watching a show. Take breaks. Put it down. Go do something else. And really think about what content you're looking at."

GRAPHIC BY MELISSA WHITE



# Discord in the Media

Roblox and Discord sued for child endangerment

by Andrew Ashby

Asst. Web Editor-in-Chief

Rather than "Powering Imagination," as Roblox's long-standing tagline would suggest, it actually empowers predators and other unsavory characters.

Every month, more than 70 million people play Roblox, with the majority being under the age of 16. This is partly because most parents think of it as just like any other colorful kids' game.

"As a parent, it's really easy to just stick your kid in front of a tablet," biology teacher Angela Wilson said.

"I think oftentimes we're busy, and most parents work and they're tired, or they have 10,000 things to do, and it's a lot harder to fight your kid."

Last year, Wilson appeared in a Torch Web series called "Teachers Play Roblox," where educators explored the popular childhood game. She enjoyed the experience; however, she had her doubts about child safety on the app. Upon looking into reports of grooming, explicit content, and predators, she became deeply concerned about younger children playing the game, banning her seven-year-old son from the game altogether.

"I think it's fine for older kids. It was fun, and

it seems like a good way to communicate. And I feel like if you're older," Wilson said, "then you can use judgment as to what's safe [and] what's not. I mean, even in ninth grade, I feel like I might be a little hesitant to let my child play that." Her fears aren't unfounded. In recent years, multiple lawsuits have accused Roblox Corporation of failing to protect children from predators who use the platform's social features to lure minors off the app. In one widely reported case, a man used Roblox and Discord to contact a 12-year-old boy, coercing him into sharing explicit photos and allegedly driving him to commit suicide last year.

Part of the issue may lie in the game's design. Roblox encourages players to socialize through public servers, voice chat, and private messages. Its moderation system, while extensive, may also struggle to keep up with millions of interactions every minute.

Discord, a communication platform, is also widely used by a younger demographic, with over 20% of its users below the age of 18. However, it also attracts a much older user base, with most of its users being over the age of 25.

The format of Discord's servers can often lead to contact between completely different age groups.

"My first friend group [was] older than me on Discord," senior Spencer Treadway said. "They were like 28, I was like 12, we were homies."

Communities on Discord have become gathering points for many children-- and in some cases, for predators as well. Crossovers between these platforms have deepened concerns, especially since both Roblox and Discord are now facing lawsuits for child endangerment.

For many parents, the damage is already done. Roblox and Discord have been hotspots for grooming and misconduct for years. Roblox itself reported over 24,522 incidents of child exploitation to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) in 2024, nearly doubling the number of incidents from the year prior.

In 2023, Discord reported approximately 36.2 million incidents. Both platforms have a clear track record of dangerous activity; therefore, any child using these apps should exercise proper caution.

Stay vigilant. Stay safe.



GRAPHIC BY MELISSA WHITE

## ROBLOX DISCORD

FACTS AND INFORMATION  
GRAPHIC BY MELISSA WHITE

ROBLOX

ROBLOX IS A FREE ONLINE GAMING AND CREATION PLATFORM RELEASED IN 2006.

ROBLOX CURRENTLY HAS OVER 300 MILLION MONTHLY ACTIVE USERS.

DISCORD

DISCORD IS A FREE VOICE AND TEXT COMMUNICATION APPLICATION RELEASED ON MAY 13, 2015.

DISCORD CURRENTLY HAS OVER 250 MILLION MONTHLY ACTIVE USERS.

### SecondhandStyles Sell

**Melissa White**  
Co Entertainment Editor

More than just a way to save, thrifting has become an affordable fashion trend allowing shoppers to curate their wardrobe for less. Rising inflation and high living costs have forced many shoppers to get creative by saving money without sacrificing style.

The origin of thrift stores dates back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when organizations such as The Salvation Army and Goodwill began opening resale shops to raise funds for their missions and provide affordable items to low-income families. During the post-World

War II era, a time of economic recovery, thrift stores became more popular as families sought out affordable options. The 1960s and 1970s particularly saw a rise in popularity for vintage items, further fueling the secondhand market.

Once seen as something done out of necessity, thrifting has become one of fashion's biggest movements. With the rise of the internet, shopping for vintage brands has become more accessible than ever. Online marketplaces such as Depop and Poshmark allow users to both buy and sell the grails they find at Goodwill and local thrift shops. Shopping at thrift stores is not only an enjoyable hobby for consumers, but also a lucrative source of income. Resellers can be seen anxiously skimming through racks of clothes, anticipating their next profit.

Influencers on social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram have further fueled this resale economy, showcasing their thrift finds and promoting their online stores. They teach followers how to "upcycle" — reusing old items to create something new and fashionable.

A pair of old jeans might become cute shorts, or a leather bag might be transformed into a unique jacket. These influencers attempt to "de-influence" their audience, discouraging

overconsumption that is commonly seen online, by promoting mindful spending.

Shopping at local thrift stores can not only be inexpensive, but also an environmental statement. With the rise of "fast-fashion" — mass produced and cheaply made clothing — that can be harmful for the environment, many consumers are opting for a more sustainable method of purchasing their outfits.

Fast-fashion giants such as SHEIN and Aliexpress are slowly losing their appeal as shoppers turn toward secondhand pieces that feel more authentic, high quality, and don't harm the

environment.

Searching through an assortment of different items also allows shoppers to be creative. Looking for the clothes that fit a distinctive personal style turns shopping from something otherwise straightforward into a treasure hunt. The unique pieces that can often be found at thrift stores allow for selection and individuality that traditional retailers may not offer.

Many thrifters are drawn to thrift stores for the sense of nostalgia it can offer. Sifting through bins of low-rise jeans and baby tees can take older shoppers back to simpler times. The resurgence of Y2K fashion has primarily pushed resale stores' popularity, since they often carry the vintage goods many shoppers now seek. In an era when minimalism dominates fashion, the colorful, maximalist styles that thrift stores offer may help people reconnect with more expressive aesthetics.

The most appealing part of purchasing secondhand commodities, however, is the sentimental value that comes with pre-loved items. The shirt you bought, like many items in the shop, carries the stories of previous owners along with it. Now, just like those before you, it will stay with you until you decide to pass it on — or not. The choice is yours, and with it, the power to keep the thrifting

Once seen as something done out of necessity, thrifting has become one of fashion's biggest movements.

### Thrift Tips!

CONTENT BY ANA EASTER

**1 Go in With a Plan**  
Before going to the thrift store, decide what you're looking for. Having a plan can keep you from getting overwhelmed.

**2 Research Brands**  
Familiarize yourself with clothing brands before you shop. It helps to know a few brands you like and recognize.

**3 Dress for Easy Try-Ons**  
Wear comfortable, fitted clothing so you can try on items quickly when fitting rooms may be busy.

**4 Try Everything on**  
Sizing varies between brands and eras, so don't rely solely on the tag. Make sure to try items on to see how they actually fit.

**5 Inspect Items Carefully**  
Take a moment to look over each item. Check for stains, holes, or missing buttons to avoid buying a damaged item.

**6 Think creatively**  
Think beyond how an item looks at first. Thrifting is all about experimenting and making pieces your own.

DESIGN BY ROBYN SCHOENBERG  
PHOTOS PROVIDED BY WIKIMEDIA COMMONS AND CANVA

**IT'S THE HOLIDAY SEASON**

"[I look forward to] getting to see some of my family members that I don't usually see the rest of the year ... They'll come down to Florida for a week, and I get seven days that I don't get the rest of the year to do whatever I want with them." — Sophomore Anand Carpenter

"Usually, every December, we go on some athletic road trip kind of thing ... Last year, we did scuba-diving ..." — Senior Justin Hixon

"All of my siblings have gone to college, and I'm going to be going to college soon, so I want to spend time with my family ... Each Christmas, my family and I watch a movie called 'White Christmas.' And it's really old—it's from, like, the '50s—but we watch it each year, and it's really nice." — Senior Barrett Covert

"I still love spending time with my family and the fact that everyone gets to be together in one place. It's just a really special time." — Junior Olivia Pettinato

"I have two big Christmas traditions. One of them is that every year we give my mom a tomtie, which is a little Swedish gnome, and she gets a new one every year. And then also, every year me and my sister have a Christmas sleepover." — Sophomore Jane Callahan

"During Christmas, I'm excited to see Santa again." — Junior Lucas Yee

"It's a jolly time." — Sophomore Dylan Gonnelli

"I feel like it's kind of overshadowed, the fact that people get to come together for Christmas, or even for 'friends-Christmas'—because I know a lot of people do Friendsgiving for Thanksgiving ... Just coming together, exchanging gifts with your friends and your family, that's really nice ..." — Senior Derrick Wu

"I like traveling, [and] also see[ing] my family. It's fun to go to new places, or also [to] ski ..." — Senior Mia Quijano

"I go upstate to visit my family every winter break ... It's a nice opportunity for our family to be together." — Sophomore Samantha Goldberg

"I like the decorations, really. I used to live in New York, and obviously everything gets really decorated up there. I like ... the weather, too." — Junior Julia Filosa

# Elf on the Shelf of Childhood

by Alex Lieberman  
Opinion Editor

Around Christmas, toy elves were not an uncommon sight at the Tucak family home. As one of many families who partook in “The Elf on the Shelf” tradition, they frequently lifted spirits during the holiday season.

“The Elf on the Shelf” is a doll that, according to legend, monitors children and reports back to



the North Pole, and moves around throughout the house by night to garner excitement and holiday cheer from children. The Tucaks had two elves, named Peppermint and Pearl, for current juniors Tristan and Trinity Tucak. The elves were around for 25 days until Christmas, doing “something completely different” every morning, according to Tristan.

Tristan’s mother and second grade teacher Misty Tucak helped the elves, creating elaborate designs like a potato bag race or a game of Quidditch with Harry Potter. The twins’ grandma also participated

The elves are set up to resemble a Harry Potter Quidditch game. Tucak said that this was taken “during a very difficult time in our family and we had very little, so it brought the joy we needed during a tough time in our lives.” PHOTO COURTESY OF MISTY TUCAK

by sending little presents for the elves’ adventures. Misty Tucak said that the elves often raised their spirits during tough times.

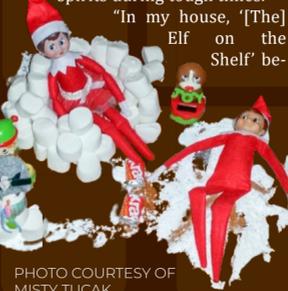


PHOTO COURTESY OF MISTY TUCAK

came a huge tradition, partly because I wanted to continue with the magic of Christmas...” Misty Tucak said. “I’m a really firm believer that everybody should have the heart and soul to give at Christmas and be giving and have gratitude for all things.”

Misty Tucak participated in a very similar tradition as a kid at

her grandmother’s house.

“Her plan to keep such a large family of children happy was to use [the elves]...as messengers to Santa in efforts to better control children’s behaviors,” she said.

For Tristan, the tradition began when he was about five years old and stopped around the time he started high school.

“I miss it... [the elf was] definitely a big piece of my childhood. It was always something for me to look forward to every time Christmas season came around,” he said.

Even though the Tucak twins do not have their own elves anymore, Misty Tucak’s grandkids are continuing with the tradition. She’s glad that her twins got to experience this custom, and the tradition has truly been passed through generations with her grandkids participating.

“The whole thing is about believing and giving to others and the kindness of the world...” she said.

# Dear Scarlett...

by Isabel Georgieva  
Co Sci & Tech Editor

Scraps of paper drifted down onto the tables of my math class like snow, covering the memories of my middle school life as if they were never there. I watched the photos of birthday parties and class trips sink to the bottom of the pile and snapped back into focus. It was my first time saying goodbye and I knew that I had to do it right.

In a few days, I would be parting with one of the best gift-givers I’ve ever known, now-freshman Scarlett Byrne. Time after time, she presented me with painstakingly handcrafted jewelry, a talent she cultivated throughout the years that I had known her for. In contrast, I have always struggled to express my emotions coherently by word or even in a neatly packaged gift (and I have my poor wrapping skills to thank for that).

Consequently, I was buried by the burden of perfection. What could I give Byrne that New York

couldn’t offer her? How could I bundle up my appreciation for her calm attention to my passionate rants or her laughter in response to my worst jokes?

Thankfully, to accompany Byrne to New York in our stead, freshman Alexis DeMassa initiated the construction of a collective present: a scrapbook with all of our memories and handwritten notes from each of her friends.

“I chose to make a scrapbook because I wanted to make something meaningful and [show] my friend group’s great appreciation towards Scarlett,” said DeMassa, “...The specific type of scrapbook I made and got for her though has lots of room for more memories so she can still remember us and continue to make more ... This way she can have this forever...”

When I look back at the days before her departure, I regret that I spent more time worrying about the future than enjoying our time in the present. Nonetheless, our fleeting time escaped from my grasp.

Byrne was also shocked by the brisk passage of time.



Scarlett (far right) smiles for a photo with friends Maya Ruffin, Delilah Karayel, Nairiyat Takenova, Minhkhue Tran, and Alexis DeMassa (left to right). The group had just graduated eighth grade. PHOTO BY MAYA RUFFIN

“I think the last few weeks of school, I was somewhat in denial that it was all ending, both middle school and my time in Florida,” Byrne said. “It didn’t really click for me until I was home after the last day of school looking through the scrapbook. It was then that I realized this chapter in our lives had come to an end.”

In reflection of our time together, I realized that the most memorable gift that she had given me wasn’t bunched in tissue paper—it was her encouragement. It was the memory of her reassuring presence by my side after a bad test and the moments of her quiet comfort when she reminded me that I am only human.

After hours of rummaging through camera rolls and perfecting fancy calligraphy, there was only one element left: a handwritten letter.

If there is one thing that I have learned after watching the clock tick down to an unavoidable fate, it’s that I couldn’t lose out on any more chances to be happy at the mercy of my perfectionist tendencies. I had to understand that fate only intended for us to spend a short amount of time together and I became grateful for the few years that we spent growing as people.

And so, after plucking all our memories from the snow of time, I started writing: “Dear Scarlett...”



Seen above: Images of the cover of the scrapbook given to Byrne, and two pages inside the book. PHOTO BY ISABEL GEORGIEVA

## MEANINGFUL GIFTS AND TRADITIONS

### Secret Santa

by Ana Easter  
Match Editor-In-Chief

Every December, freshmen Shriya Ashok, Olivia Johanning, Aidan Christo, Samuel Li, and Shreya Reddy carry on a long-standing holiday tradition: their annual Secret Santa exchange.

The tradition began in fifth grade when three of the students decided to start their own gift exchange.

“I am a very festive person and my family stopped doing White Elephant,” Johanning said. “I still wanted to get people gifts, so we started Secret Santa.”

Throughout the years the group has changed and expanded, but the tradition has continued.

“When it started it was just our fifth grade friend group, but we’ve gotten more people and some have left so its changed over time,” Johanning said.

Even with this change, the tradition itself has stayed the same. The students pull names out of a hat and stay within a \$5.00 spending limit to get their person a thoughtful and personalized gift.

“We set the price limit because we wanted to encourage handmade gifts,” Johanning said.

Christo, who

joined the group last year, finds that the price limit allows for the creation of something meaningful.

“It’s great because we don’t need to spend a lot of money on the presents,” he said. “They end up being just little thoughtful things.”

Over the years, Johanning has created a variety of personalized gifts like bracelets and necklaces customized for her friends’ interests. One year, she spent hours making a bag of paper cranes, each with its own heartfelt message.

The closeness of the friend group is reflected in the gifts they give each other. For his first Secret Santa, Christo gifted Johanning a crochet stuffed animal of her favorite Call of Duty character.

“I knew she liked Call of Duty, so I got her a crochet plush of one of the characters,” he said.

As the group gets older and moves into high school, this small tradition continues, and it’s not something they plan on stopping.

“I’m really glad we started it, I think it brings us together,” Johanning said. “I definitely think we’ll continue doing it when we get older.”

### Feasting Under the Moon



The festive table with traditional Chinese foods is set and ready for the family to gather around. PHOTO COURTESY OF SAMUEL LI

To the right: Family members Qing Yao Li, Moe Li, Tian Yuan Wang, Zhe Bian Zhang, Kelly Hou, Samuel Li, and Meng Meng Li (left to right) gathered around the dinner table to celebrate the Lunar New Year. PHOTO COURTESY OF SAMUEL LI

by Alakh Bhatt

Asst. Opinion Editor

For freshman Sam Li, Lunar New Year has never been just another holiday on the calendar. It’s a gathering, a shared round table, and one of the few times each year when his entire family comes together in one room.

“Usually me and my family would be up in Boston with my dad’s side relatives ... We would all go to my older aunt’s house and have a big feast the day before we all left,” Li said. “It’s like a really nice reunion...I haven’t been with them for a while.”

Before the feast begins, the day is filled with preparation. Li’s family divides the cooking based on who grew up mastering certain dishes, turning the kitchen into a team effort shaped by tradition and memory.

Li’s aunt, for example, is in charge of the meat dish, and his grandmother prepares dumplings, scalion pancakes, and fried veggie balls made with carrots and corn flour — foods Li describes as “really good” and comforting in a way nothing else is.

These traditions, however, have shifted over time. While Li’s family still gathers around homemade dishes, the celebrations look very different from the ones his mother, Meng

Meng Li, experienced growing up in Beijing. Her childhood Lunar New Year was full of noise, color, and energy — a version of the holiday that doesn’t fully exist anymore.

“When it hit 12 a.m., it was so loud outside. Everybody was burning fireworks...you can’t even hear anybody speak,” Meng Meng Li said. “People in China believe the goddess of money likes noisy, exciting places. That’s why people made it so loud, hoping she would come to their house.”

Some of these practices faded because of policy changes in China — fireworks became restricted due to safety risks and pollution — while others faded when the Li family moved to the US, where the atmosphere of the holiday is quieter and less communal.

“We only have food left,” Meng Meng Li said.

Food, however, continues to carry deep meaning. Families from different regions make different dishes, and several

symbolize wishes for the new year.

“Fish sounds like ‘more than enough’ in Chinese,” Meng Meng Li said. “It means the family will have abundance.”

Other customs faded naturally over generations. For example, the first five days of the lunar month once served as a mandatory rest period; a time when families paused everything, even major responsibilities. The tradition emphasized the holiday’s purpose: slowing down, reuniting, and beginning the year with intention.

Moving to America changed the celebration in practical ways — fewer relatives nearby, fewer decorations, and fewer community events — but one thing has stayed the same: the closeness it brings.

For Li, Lunar New Year gives “a sense of closure” before returning home and a rare chance to be surrounded by the family he loves. No matter the country or the traditions that evolve, the heart of the celebration remains in the same place: the round table, the dishes passed from hand to hand — and the people who gather around it.



### A Hop to New York

by Athena Erbe  
Humor Editor

This is a story about how a forgotten wish became an unforgettable gift...

It all began last summer, when junior Eliza Fritz-Bryant went to New York City with her mom. Together with her sister and her mom, Fritz-Bryant visited a big toy store, FAO Schwarz. While wandering through the many aisles, her eyes caught a cute bunny in the Jelly Cat section of the shop. Due to the already pricey trip to the city, Fritz-Bryant decided not to buy it.

“When we were leaving New York, I was like, I regret that a lot. And I kept talking about it because I was like, ugh, I should have gotten this,” Fritz-Bryant said.

Months rolled by, and Christmas soon arrived bringing the most surprising gift that Fritz-Bryant would have ever expected. Turns out, Fritz-Bryant’s mom had remembered her talking about really wanting the bunny. So, for her Christmas gift, she had the same bunny she viewed at New York City shipped from the shop for her.

Fritz-Bryant felt like it was

the best gift she had ever received, and it was a very meaningful Christmas day to her.

“I cried. I actually cried when I received it. I was really happy, very grateful. And it was very meaningful that she remembered it, especially because it was so long ago. Even I forgot about it for a while, but it’s really cool,” Fritz-Bryant said.

Now, Fritz-Bryant adores this bunny and even keeps its photo as her Instagram profile picture. The fleeting moment that summer at the toy store became a cherished memory for many years to come.



Fritz-Bryant smiles with her sister, showing off her gifted bunny. PHOTO PROVIDED BY ELIZA FITZ-BRYANT

# ACTIVITIES FOR THIS WINTER BREAK ❄️

## HOLIDAY BOAT PARADE OF LIGHTS



**When:** Dec. 13  
**Where:** Sarasota Bay  
**Cost:** Free admission, reservation required to be in the parade

**What:** A festive parade of boats decorated with lights and holiday themes cruising through the bay. Guests are encouraged to bring a wrapped toy and book to be distributed by Suncoast charities for children. Starting from City Island, cruising across Sarasota Bay south under the Ringling Bridge and across Sarasota's Bayfront park and will parade in front of Marina Jack and Bayfront Park in downtown Sarasota, FL.

## EVENTS AT UTC



**When:** Nov. 8, 2025 to Jan. 4, 2026  
**Where:** University Town Center (UTC), Sarasota  
**Cost:** Depends on the event

**What:** A series of Holiday events that take place at the UTC mall. Some popular ones are photos with Santa, Santa Paws Pet photos (your pets get photos with Santa!), The Rink at UTC, Holiday movies under the stars, Nightly Light shows, and Horse-Drawn carriage rides around UTC. Check out malluttc.com for more information specific for the event you want to go to!

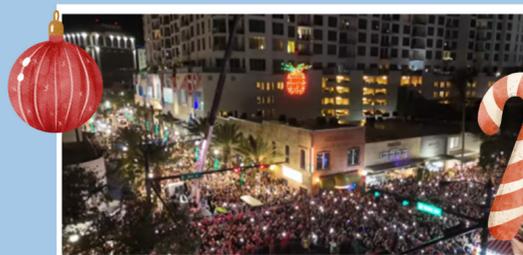
## LIGHTS IN BLOOM



**When:** Select nights between Dec. 5, 2025 and Jan. 6, 2026  
**Where:** Marie Selby Botanical Gardens  
**Cost:** General admission is \$30 for adults and \$15 for kids ages 5-17

**What:** Lights in Bloom features more than two million lights illuminating the gardens and walkways, providing the perfect place for brilliant photos.

## SARASOTA PINEAPPLE DROP



**When:** New Year's Eve  
**Where:** Downtown Sarasota  
**Cost:** Depends on number of rides. Prices range from \$1.50-\$37

**What:** Sarasota New Year's Eve Pineapple Drop kicks off Friday, Dec. 31 at 1 p.m. with amusement rides and games at Five Points Park, live music at Main St. and Lemon Avenue, drinks and food available on the street and at local bars and restaurants. The Pineapple will drop at midnight followed by fireworks.

## VAN WEZEL HOLIDAY SHOWS



**When:** Dec. 15 to Dec. 27  
**Where:** Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall  
**Cost:** Prices vary by show

**What:** A lineup of festive holiday performances, including classics like "The Nutcracker" (Dec. 27), "A very Broadway Christmas" (Dec. 22), "A Christmas Carol" (Dec. 23), and so much more. You can access the calendar for all the upcoming shows at vanwezel.org, so be sure to check that out!

## SANTA RUN 5K



**When:** Dec. 14  
**Where:** Downtown Sarasota  
**Cost:** Around \$40

**What:** This exciting event features both a 5K and 1 mile run and is perfect for runners of all skill levels. There are many local vendor booths along the way, perfect for if you need a little snack! The race kicks off at 7:30 a.m., but there is a group stretch session 30 minutes before the event.

FROM TOP LEFT: PHOTOS TAKEN FROM HOMESOP SARASOTA.COM, MYSUNGOAST.COM, SELBY.ORG, SARASOTAFI.GOV, VANWEZEL.COM, AND LETSDOTHIS.COM RESPECTIVELY. GRAPHIC BY MAGGIE WANG

# A White Christmas: Hallmark's Falls Short

by **Hana Mullen**  
 Graphics Editor

Red, green, and full of cheer, the Hallmark Channel has been bringing joy to the Christmas season since the airing of "Countdown to Christmas" in 2009. Hallmark's cliché scripts repeat girl meets boy plots, big-city small-town dynamics — and casts that lack diversity.

From interracial families, individuals with disabilities, to LGBTQ+ members, Hallmark lacks inclusivity. The first five images under "Hallmark Christmas Movies" on Google show 44 leads, of those only 3 are minority leads.

Of the 232 films created in the past five years, seven films included minority leads. Six of the seven casted were Black leads, and one included a Chinese-American lead in "Christmas at the Golden Dragon".

With 80 million viewers worldwide, Hallmark's iconic productions represent the Christmas norm. The exclusion of minorities from their casts removes them from the representation of "normal." Hallmark continues to use a narrow focus of casting to appeal to their audience, but their portrayal reinforces the inaccurate notion of a "normal" family.

It's not shameful to watch Hallmark movies. The nostalgic clichés are relaxed, jolly, and always have a happy ending — besides, there's 80 million other viewers just like you. However, if Hallmark's underrepresentation isn't giving you the heartwarming feeling you crave, here are a few inclusive movies to try:

*'Jingle Jangle: A Christmas Journey'*



When Jeronimus loses his creative spark, his toy-inventing shop Jangles and Things is out-competed by Gustafon, who steals Jeronimus' inventions. Journey, Jeronimus' niece comes down to stay at Jangles and Things to bring back the shop's wonder and toys, telling a heartwarming story about family and compassion along the way with an African American cast.

*'Godmothered'*



*'Happiest Season'*

Abby plans to propose to Harper at her family's Christmas party until Harper reveals that she hasn't come out to her parents yet. When they arrive at Harper's home, Abby is forced back into the closet and tensions rise between family members as secrets inevitably leak. "Happiest Season" is a heartwarming tale about fitting in and the unconditional love of family.

*'A Naija Christmas'*

Set in Lagos, Nigeria, "A Naija Christmas" is about Madam Agatha Agu, a single mother distraught over her sons' lack of marriage. With the prize of their mother's luxury apartment, Ugo, Obi, and Chike compete with each other to see who gets married first. "A Naija Christmas" is all about family, love, and humorous competition.

On a journey to save her fellow Fairy Godmothers' careers, the clumsy and young Eleanor Bloomingbottom enters the human world to grant a wish to Mackenzie Walsh, who turns out to be an exhausted single mother. Through Eleanor and Mackenzie's journey, "Godmothered" tells a magical story about joy, wonder, and the value of happy endings—even if they aren't made perfect.

## What Candle are You?

GRAPHIC BY MINH KHUE TRAN

IF YOU GOT MOSTLY...

1. What's your favorite type of cookie?  
 A. chocolate chip  
 B. oatmeal raisin  
 C. sugar cookie  
 D. peppermint



2. Pick a holiday spirit animal  
 A. owl  
 B. arctic fox  
 C. reindeer  
 D. snow hare



3. What's your favorite holiday activity?  
 A. watching movies  
 B. seeing light displays  
 C. baking  
 D. ice skating



4. Pick a cozy drink to sip  
 A. hot cocoa  
 B. spiced apple cider  
 C. coffee  
 D. eggnog



5. Which place for winter vacation?  
 A. home  
 B. cabin in the mountains  
 C. countryside cottage  
 D. city full of lights



6. How do you stay warm?  
 A. extra layers  
 B. cozy blankets  
 C. light a candle  
 D. hot drink



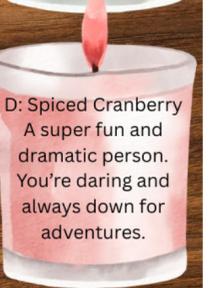
**A: Vanilla**  
 A chill person who can bring peace to any room. You're dependable and approachable.



**B: Forest Pine**  
 A grounded person who gives great advice. Not the most talkative, but never afraid to speak your mind.



**C: Pumpkin Spice**  
 A comforting friend whose smile can light up any room and cheer everyone up.



**D: Spiced Cranberry**  
 A super fun and dramatic person. You're daring and always down for adventures.

## More Than Muscle

The teenage fitness boom

by Marina Wissa  
Match Layout Artist

In recent years, teenagers worldwide have flooded the category of “gym bro,” a term used to describe men who have an affinity for hitting the gym.

Everyone knows a teenage gym bro, whether it be the muscular guy in the hallway or the kid who takes mirror selfies flexing his biceps.

Going to the gym can have positive effects on teenage boys, helping build discipline and community.

Lucas Chen, a sophomore, has been going to the gym for over a year and feels motivated by his prog-

ress and peers every day.

“Find someone who’s consistently going to the gym like you, and find a way for them to convince you that you should do this for the better,” Chen said. “It’s about setting a rhythm ... I feel like there’s only benefits from working out, even if you don’t go full on ‘gym bro,’ like me.”

Recently, Chen has posted content documenting his process on social media.

“In a couple years, I think I’ll look back and be pretty happy that I started young,” Chen said. “There’s really no downsides to it ... I think the gym is depicted as a

pretty negative space, but people are really nice, especially if you’re a beginner.”

However, social media can still push unrealistic body standards onto people, no matter how critically they may consume content. When it comes to fitness-related content, comparison can cause feelings of insufficiency rather than motivation.

Senior Robert Guttridge has been going to the gym since his sophomore year, and he has felt the negative effects of unachievable standards firsthand.

“You get body dysmorphia, and then you spend a lot of time and effort chasing unrealistic goals,” Guttridge said. “I just had to realize where I was at and how far I’ve come ... I’ve come a long way, but there’s just some things that you cannot do.”

“According to the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, insecurities caused by gym culture can lead to overusing supplements such as protein and creatine. While these supplements are not inherently bad, they can contribute to feelings of in-

sufficiency and, ironically, lead to declining health.

“At first it was just for fun, but it became something more mental to me and something I need as part of my routine,” Guttridge said, although he still maintains a healthy life balance.

Chen, who has also observed similar effects, said “To the extreme, if you take information the wrong way, I feel like that can cause stress. Gym is a big part of my life, but it’s not my only thing.”

While teenagers should be careful embracing the life of a gym bro and finding a balance that works for them, fitness tends to be a healthy habit. The gym might not be for everyone, but you cannot deny the power of building a routine and community through a solid workout.

“It’s about consistency, not motivation,” Chen said, “and the only person you should compare yourself to is the person you were the other day.”



Mid-rep on the squat rack at EOS Fitness. Chen trains with the focus he credits to routine over motivation. PHOTO COURTESY OF LUCAS CHEN



Chen poses after an upper body session at the ESO Fitness gym. PHOTO COURTESY OF LUCAS CHEN

## Racing on the Rink

by Alex Lieberman  
Opinion Editor



Mid-shot at Amalie Arena. Sam Roy skates in a team scrimmage on the same rink used for local matchups against the Tampa Bay Lightning. PHOTO COURTESY OF SAM ROY

Though Florida isn’t known for its winter sports, junior Sam Roy is no stranger to ice hockey. For six years, Roy has spent his nights racing across the rink at Ellenton Ice and Sports Complex. Roy is in his second year on the varsity team for Sarasota County and often plays other teams around Tampa.

He is the only varsity hockey player at Pine View, which makes it hard for him

to relate to his teammates.

“I also didn’t know any of them previously from school so I had to get to know everyone when I joined the team,” he said.

Roy said that hockey is a fast game, which is part of what attracts him to it.

“I also like the physicality — the hitting. It’s really fun to play.”

Roy does not want to be recruited for hockey because

he plans to take on a pre-med track and focus on hospital experience and academics, though he is interested in playing recreationally in college. Currently, he does more than just play: he is a professional hockey referee as well.

“Practice is just one day a week... but he referees most weeks as well,” said Robin Roy,

At home, Roy has a full-sized hockey goal in his driveway where he frequently practices shooting.

Sam’s dad, Robin Roy also added that Roy sometimes has three of his own games in a weekend. Roy often referees an eight and under league and a 14 and under league.

“Generally, they are fourteen and under [players], but there are some kids that he has played with before [that he referees],” Robin Roy said.

“We’re a big hockey family,” Robin Roy said. Given his weekly practices, games, and refereeing, Roy has come a long way since he began playing and stepped on the ice for the first time.

“He has improved so much [in] his hockey over the years,” Robin Roy said. “He’s very dedicated.”



Roy poses for his Ice Rays portrait as he enters his second year playing varsity hockey in Sarasota County. PHOTO COURTESY OF SAM ROY

## THE FUNDING BEHIND THE TEAM

by Jakob Roche  
Managing Editor



The Pine View boys varsity golf team lifts the district championship trophy after securing first place. PHOTO COURTESY OF CHARLES WILLIAMS

Throughout the inaugural run of Pine View’s golf team, there have been quite a few victories. Both the boys and the girls teams qualified for Districts and Regionals, with the boys falling just short of States.

But perhaps the largest victory came before the season even started. Before they could compete, the infrastructure to support the teams first had to be built.

In the beginning, it wasn’t clear whether Pine View would be a full member of the Florida High School Athletic Association. In June, notice was received that they would be permitted to enter the organization, allowing participation in District and Regional tournaments.

By the time this membership was finally secured, though, it was already mid-summer. This was much too late to start a fundraising campaign, but the teams still required a startup fund to pay for their expenses. So, Athletic Director Wayne Robertson went to the Pine View Association (PVA) to try to procure the funds.

“PVA was very gracious and allotted an amount of money for us, and it was sufficient to get both the golf and tennis programs going,” Robertson said.

These funds were used throughout the season to cover tournament fees, practice rounds, and transportation. Robertson’s work wasn’t over yet, though — coaches needed to be arranged for as well.

Robertson said that it’s practically impossible for one person to coach both the girls and boys teams due to the time commitments involved.

“I basically had the mindset of, I’ll coach one of the

teams. I don’t care which one, let’s just find a qualified coach for one or the other and I will give them their preference,” he said.

Part of the solution came rather quickly. The father of a boys team member had been Assistant Coach for the boys golf team at another school and volunteered to step into that role at Pine View. With this parent volunteer’s help, Robertson was able to find a head coach as well.

That left Robertson to coach the girls team. “I feel good about coaching. I don’t feel like the girls had any kind of a worse situation,” Robertson said. “We actually practiced together [with the boys] at least once a week, and oftentimes more than that, so the girls were able to get feedback from me and

“PVA was very gracious and allotted an amount of money for us, and it was sufficient to get both the golf and tennis programs going.”

Wayne Robertson  
High School Athletic Director and Algebra 2 Teacher

from the other two coaches.” Sophomore Alesya Redko of the girls team said that although the majority of the girls were beginners this year, the coaching they received allowed them to quickly improve.

“I wouldn’t say that our coach is beginner. For myself, it didn’t feel really that way. I think that the coach was really nice the whole season. He was always cheering us up,” she said.

After the coaching situation was settled, the final uncertainty surrounded the

## Future Pine View Sports

Q&A WITH WAYNE ROBERTSON

by Isabel Georgieva  
Sci & Tech Co Editor



After finishing their rounds, the Pine View girls varsity golf team celebrates their first 18-hole tournament. PHOTO COURTESY OF ALLIE IVANOV

courses themselves.

The Oaks Club, a well-known course close to Pine View, offered up a time slot for the golf program to use. However, they specified that only one team would be able to play once a week.

Due to the players on the boys team playing the sport for an extended period of time and all ranking well, they were given this slot over the girls.

Overall, however, members of the girls team said that these differences in courses and coaching don’t run too deep.

“The difference between the girls and boys team is just the courses we play at. We all had the same things when we were at the Regional tournament,” freshman Allie Ivanov said.

Adding on to Ivanov’s statement, freshman Brooke Cohen said, “The course you play at doesn’t really determine how you play.”

Going forward, Robertson said that he’s still searching for a dedicated girls coach. He also remains hopeful that The Oaks will open up more time slots for both teams to occupy.

For now, though, Robertson is happy with what the golf teams have achieved.

“All of the players, boys and girls, have been tremendous, our coaches have been great,” he said. “I’m just proud of both teams for doing what they did.”

Has Pine View discussed including more team sports other than our tennis and golf teams?

“...we are not in a rush to add more sports and we will always be selective in what sports we add. I think it would be safe to say that

Pine View is never going to have a comprehensive sports program like you would find at other high schools.”

From your perspective, which team sports would most greatly benefit our school’s athletic program and why?

“I think anything that we add is going to be beneficial. We’ve had a great season with golf. I think that’s going to grow even more with tennis, because we’ll have more kids involved in the tennis programs. The more stuff that your school is involved in, it gives more options for people to be involved and be supportive of it.”

What specific teams has Pine View considered implementing?

“So, [to me] one of the ones that comes to mind right away is cross country. [You] could also potentially talk about swimming, maybe beach volleyball. The reason being, right now we started with golf and tennis, which are individual sports. And historically, quite a few Pine View students have been involved in those specific sports. When you start to talk about bigger team sports like baseball, or even basketball, some people look at it as just finding a team, but there’s really more than that... You have to have some very committed coaches to run a program like that and it just requires a lot of resources.”

## Metal Mayhem

by Alakh Bhatt

Asst. Opinion Editor

It's 7:00 a.m. The sky's still dark, everyone's half-asleep, and the weapon detector gates outside Pine View are glowing like little portals to pain. People are dragging their feet, holding coffees like emotional support pets, completely unprepared for what's about to go down.

The line moves at the speed of a broken Chromebook. Every few seconds: BEEP! Another student forgets to take something metal out of their bag. Apparently, after months of doing this, some of us still think that part is optional. Bags are being unzipped, flipped, and opened like treasure chests of pure chaos.

Pencils fly. Papers explode like confetti. Someone's

umbrella pops open mid-air and nearly smacks the person in front. Someone else drops their laptop and just stares at it like, "Yeah, that's fair." Meanwhile, the rest of us are standing there like NPCs, whispering, "How hard is it to remember?"

One kid's backpack literally sounds like a toolbox. The beeps keep coming louder, faster, more chaotic until we're all numb to it. Just beep, sigh, repeat.

After what feels like a lifetime, the chaos dies down. Backpacks are lighter (mostly because half the stuff got dumped on the table), dignity is gone, and everyone's trudging to class like survivors. Someone's binder is missing. Someone's ego is, too.

Moral of the story? Forget weapon detectors remember your brain. Because at Pine View, one thing's guaranteed:

Beep. Happens.



PHOTO ART BY ATHENA ERBE



GRAPHIC BY ATHENA ERBE

## WHAT DO YOUR CLASSES SAY ABOUT YOU?



### IF YOU TAKE AP LIT AS A JUNIOR...

...you need to stop. Unless you are planning to skip a year they don't want you in that class; it's a senior class through and through. You are not better than the rest of your grade for whatever crazy maneuver you pulled to accomplish this.

### IF YOU TAKE AP MUSIC THEORY JUST FOR YOUR FINE ARTS CREDIT...

...why do you hate yourself? In what world was AP Music Theory the path of least resistance. If you need your fine arts credit that bad, there were other solutions.



### IF YOU HAVEN'T TAKEN HOPE AS A SENIOR...

...you're a secret slacker. People probably don't know you haven't finished it, but why'd you wait so long? You could've started 4.5 years ago — insane procrastination skills.



### IF YOU TAKE AP CHEM AND AP BIO IN THE SAME YEAR...

...you REALLY like science to the point you've given up on your sanity. If you're not going into the STEM field, what are you doing? Or maybe you're setting yourself up for an EZ (Orgo reference) senior year schedule.



GRAPHIC BY AVA LENERZ

## HONORABLE MENTIONS

IF YOU TAKE AP CALC BC OR AP STAT AS A FRESHMAN...

...there is no need for this. What math do you expect to do the other three years of high school?!

IF YOU TAKE TORCH...

...You probably think you're really cool or something, but really you're just a nerd (we see you geeking out over fonts).

FRQ 1

ON THE TWELFTH DAY OF MIDTERMS, MY TEACHERS GAVE TO ME...

TWELVE TEST GRADES COMING

ELEVEN NIGHTS WITH COFFEE

TEN DAYS OF NOT SLEEPING

NINE SADLIER QUIZZES

EIGHT BOOKS FOR READING

SEVEN HOURS OF LOATHING

FRQ 1

GRAPHIC BY NATHAN DESOUZA

SIX SLIDES FOR MAKING

FIVE CLUB MEETINGS

FOUR TARDY SLIPS

THREE MATH TESTS

TWO THINGS THAT AREN'T DONE

AND A WHOLE LOT OF STRESS FOR ME!

## The Night Before the Psych Exam

by Madelyn Bailey

Co News Editor

It was the eve of her AP Psychology test when Sarah Belle-Um found herself wondering why she ever decided to take the class.

"This class is so boring! I won't even study for the test tomorrow and I'll probably ace it. Bah Humbug!" Belle-Um shouted to no one in particular.

Suddenly, her window curtain rustled.

She heard an almost familiar voice speak out to her.

"Oooh aaaaah beware of what you speak!" the voice proclaimed in a ghost-like manner.

The voice came towards Belle-Um and revealed itself to be her long graduated brother, Suree Burr-Um.

Belle-Um was quite shocked. As Burr-Um came closer to her, she saw a long chain of unfinished study guides attached to him.

"I was once just like you," he said, "I refused to study for my AP Psych tests out of pure annoyance and my undying belief that the class would be an easy A anyway. But then my grades started to slip; I began to resent the class and ended up failing the AP exam!"

Belle-Um smirked, confident that her grand intelligence would keep her away from such a fate.

"Sarah! Take this seriously. If you don't study up you will

undoubtedly face the same fate as me," he proclaimed, "that is why I have made the decision to send three spirits to educate you in my wake. I hope they can remind you of the beauty of AP Psych and maybe even help you study for your test tomorrow."

Before Belle-Um could get in a word, he vanished and she fell into a deep slumber.

The clock struck 2:12 a.m. and Belle-Um woke to a monstrous sight: the ghost of AP Psych past, Lance Bergman.

"Behold! It is I, the ghost of AP Psych past," Bergman exclaimed.

Belle-Um trembled in fear, Bergman's presence reminded her of the long disappearances of her senior friends. Every time they mentioned having a meeting with him, they weren't seen for hours on end.

Bergman took Belle-Um to her second-grade classroom, where she first learned about psychology.

They observed the most typical happenings of an elementary classroom.

"Teacher! Brian called me a little brain!" young Belle-Um exclaimed.

"That was the worst day of my life," Belle-Um recalled, "It was then that I

decided to learn psychology so I could defeat Brian with the power of REM sleep."

"So you do recall!" Bergman was joyous, this could make for an excellent personal statement one day.

Tears began to fill Belle-Um's eyes.

"Wow. I can't believe I've procrastinated my psych homework for so long when I should have been feuding with Brian," Belle-Um said.

"Not exactly," Bergman said, "but alas, my time is done, hopefully the next spirit can fix you up."

Belle-Um was thrown back into a deep sleep.

Suddenly, Belle-Um was awakened to see a new, familiar spirit: the ghost of AP Psych Present, Robin Melton.

"Ms. Melton?! Are you another spirit?"

"Oh I see!" Belle-Um said, "you set this up to teach me about experimental ethics!"

Melton nodded. "It seems like you've figured it out! How about you go back to bed and await the final spirit," Melton said.

In just a second, Belle-Um awoke to see her final spirit.

"Hey Sarah. I'm your final spirit," said Mikayla Foss, the ghost of

Belle-Um asked.

"Yes, now follow me, I have something to show you," Melton said.

Belle-Um was taken to her AP Psych classroom, but this time it was different. From the floor to the ceiling, she counted nearly 70 psychology textbooks, each open to a different, horrifying page.

"These textbooks have been in my classroom for ages," Melton said, "they have been observing each and every student as they face the challenges, it's kind of like my own experiment"

"That sounds cool! But didn't you say something once about experimental ethics?" Belle-Um asked.

Melton smiled, glad that Belle-Um had learned something in her class, even if it meant halting her experiments.

"Oh I see!" Belle-Um said, "you set this up to teach me about experimental ethics!"

Melton nodded. "It seems like you've figured it out! How about you go back to bed and await the final spirit," Melton said.

In just a second, Belle-Um awoke to see her final spirit.

"Hey Sarah. I'm your final spirit," said Mikayla Foss, the ghost of

AP Psych future, "I'm here to show you what will happen if every Psych student decides to disregard the class as you do."

Belle-Um took her outstretched hand, and they flew together to a futuristic Pine View.

"What you see before you is Pine View in ten years. Ms. Melton retired due to declining grades and failed social experiments. They then forced me out of my job as a professional psychologist and had me teach this class," Foss said.

"Students don't take anything seriously. All they do is talk about their other classes while not paying attention to my lectures," Foss said, "Everyone is failing."

Belle-Um realized in that moment that the only way to avoid a disastrous future for Pine View students was to study for her test.

On her way back to her quarters, she ran into an old, ginger, physically challenged, friend: Tiny Tim. She noticed him studying diligently and asked for help. He cheerfully obliged and helped her build on her knowledge!

Belle-Um woke up bright and early the next day. Lucky for her, she received help from Tiny Tim and could now actively recall all of the information.

From then on, she acec her test and maintained nearly perfect AP Psych grades.

GRAPHIC BY HANA MULLEN

## Should Club America be allowed on campus?



Senior Mira Carpenter (center) debates other Club America members after leading a presentation on respectful debate. PHOTO BY ALEX LIEBERMAN

Voices Not Sides

**by Skylar Bredlau**  
Asst. Sports Editor and Club America Member

In the age when political conversations are more diverse than ever, it is easy to want to silence those we disagree with. But school is supposed to be where we learn how to think, not what to think.

Right now, our generation is growing up in a world that tells us to pick a side before we even know who we are. Every conversation feels like a competition; every opinion comes with the risk of being hated for it. This needs to change.

Genuine listening is becoming harder to find. Many students feel pressure to stay silent, worried that one honest or unpopular opinion could spark tension or turn classmates against them.

Real learning happens when we listen and understand other opinions and views, not just to react with rude words or comments to win an argument.

That is what Club America is trying to do. And that is exactly why it deserves to be on our campus.

Club America is funded by the organization Turning Point USA

(TPUSA), a nonprofit founded in 2012 by Charlie Kirk. It focuses on promoting free markets, limited government, and individual liberty, especially among high school and college students. The group is known for hosting political events, campus chapters of TPUSA, and social media campaigns to encourage friendly debate among peers.

However, "We [Club America] are our own branch of Turning Point, so we have no relation to them [Turning Point USA], only as they fund us," said freshman Justin Anderson, Club America's president. "They give us ideas, like when we want to volunteer, they help out with that, but other than that, it's mostly student-lead."

This student-made and driven atmosphere is what makes the club meaningful. The conversations and friendly debates reflect the voices, questions, and experiences of the students who participate.

Club America isn't forcing opinions or dividing people; it teaches students to have conversations and consider all sides. It's about talking to someone who disagrees with you and realizing they are still a person with

feelings and beliefs just like you.

Anderson explained that their mission is "to promote civic engagement among our peers here throughout high school and to make sure people debate and speak their opinions."

That simple goal is exactly what schools should stand for — open dialogue, empathy, and courage. "We're trying to get speech back in mainstream — without violence," said freshman Victor Redondo, vice president of Club America.

Without violence. Without hate. Without fear.

Club America stands for something bigger than politics: the belief that students can disagree and still respect one another. It creates a safe space where we can speak the truth without being attacked for it.

The club is nonpartisan and invites all students to join in civic discussion.

"Anyone who wants to come and debate peacefully or just have a view [is welcome]; we want everyone to be there," Anderson said.

Freedom of speech entitles

everyone to their own opinions, and we respect those with differing views and their right to speak as well.

"There's always going to be people that disagree with you — and that's okay," Redondo said.

Regarding the petition to have Club America banned from campus, they are happy that students, faculty, and parents are using their right to freedom of speech.

"Use your voice. Get out there. If you don't like our views, then challenge them, and that's what they're doing," Redondo said.

This club is not about punishing one belief; it's about teaching our generation how to think critically, communicate kindly, and to be flexible with our opinions.

Too often, we have been taught that disagreement means division. Too often, we resort to name-calling when our views are challenged.

In a world where shouting and fighting has replaced listening and debating, Club America is trying to give all students a chance to speak their thoughts. And remind us that the loudest voice in the room isn't always the right one.

### No: Students Over Politics

**by Andrew Ashby**  
Asst. Web Editor-in-Chief

In 2012, Turning Point USA (TPUSA) was founded by the late Charlie Kirk with the intention "to identify, educate, train, and organize students to promote the principles of freedom, free markets, and limited government," according to their website. However, rather than promote dialogue, it has sewn divisiveness by pushing conservative views, influenced student government elections, and opposed progressive movements like Black Lives Matter and the LGBTQIA+ rights.

Given TPUSA's history, it should be no surprise that Club America, Pine View's chapter of the nonprofit, was met with much backlash. Kirk himself is no stranger to inciting controversy.

In December of 2023, at TPUSA's annual conference AmericaFest, Kirk said "We made a huge mistake when we passed the Civil Rights Act in the 1960s."

That same year, on the Charlie

Kirk Show, he also said that "Happening all the time in urban America, prowling Blacks go around for fun to go target white people, that's a fact."

At a Trump campaign rally in 2024, Kirk remarked "This is a Christian state. I'd like to see it stay that way," and, on a similar note in a 2023 speech, "... Western civilization is the best that humanity has produced."

These quotes weren't exceptions to his usual vitriol — Kirk saw no end to his hatred, whether it was directed at gay people, feminism, Muslims, and so many other marginalized groups.

Pine View's Club America asserts that they have minimal association with its backer, TPUSA. However, it's hard to believe that promise when they held their first meeting as a commemoration of Charlie Kirk, celebrating his birthday with pizza and cupcakes.

Apart from that obvious link to

TPUSA, there is also Civic Engagement Club already at Pine View, one without political ties. And, if the founders of Pine View's Club America wanted a right-wing club, they could have started a Young Republicans Club to avoid the backlash associated with Kirk and his legacy. This type of club wouldn't be new, either: Pine View previously had a Young Democrats Club.

Aside from that, Club America is a plant. Seeded by political authority, this club not only has its roots in a far-right organization, but also runs the risk of growing out of control.

Since Kirk's assassination in September, former Sarasota County Commissioner Christian Ziegler and his wife, school board member Bridget Ziegler, have been pushing for the club to come to high school campuses.

In a September 22 Facebook post, Christian wrote "Last week, there were

ZERO (0) Turning Point School Campus Chapters in Sarasota County. TODAY we have SEVEN (7) Schools with Student Leaders & Teacher Sponsors identified!"

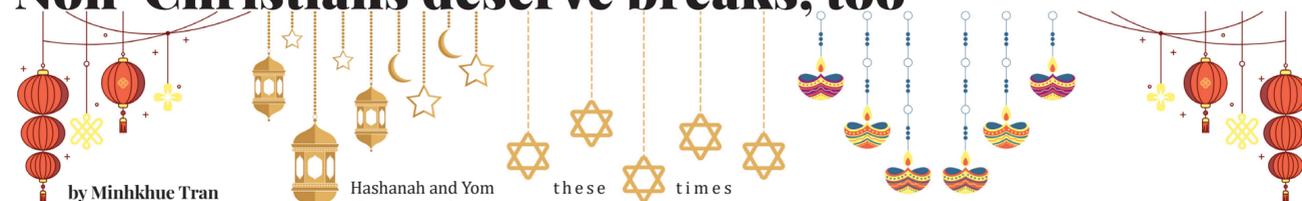
As the anti-Club America petition called "Letter to PV" puts it, "Mr. Ziegler and these [Republican] allies, who have no connection to nor investment in Pine View, are eroding the educational standards of our school, shamelessly using children as pawns to further their own careers and their petty political crusade."

Without outside influence from political figures who care only about self-advancement, Pine View's Club America would not have formed the way it did. We must maintain the precedent of clubs being made by and for students.

For so many reasons, Club America isn't suited for the Pine View campus. Or any high school campus.

email the editor at alex.lieberman@pineviewtorch.com

## Non-Christians deserve breaks, too



**by Minhkhue Tran**  
Match Layout Artist

Running into the living room in excitement, many students of all ages wake up on Christmas morning without worrying about school. Winter break is conveniently scheduled around Christmas so students can take time off to enjoy the holidays, and our Spring "mini-break" always falls on Good Friday. But the school calendar doesn't account for other holidays celebrated throughout the school year. Many religions like Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism have celebrations that occur during school.

For example, Oct. 20 was Diwali, which is usually a five day festival of lights. Primarily, it is celebrated in India and across South Asia by mostly Hindus. Students typically get a five to seven day break because of Diwali in these areas.

One of the most important festivals in India was disregarded by Sarasota County Schools. Students who would normally celebrate it did not have a scheduled break like Christmas. Teachers still assigned homework and tests still had to be taken.

Lunar New Year will be Feb. 17, 2026. It is celebrated by many East and Southeast Asian cultures, and students of these cultures usually participate in traditions like going to parades or just spending time with family.

It isn't fair that the western New Year is included in winter break while Lunar New Year is just another regular day at school. Some other examples of overlooked holidays are Rosh

Hashanah and Yom Kippur for Judaism, Navratri and Maha Shivaratri for Hinduism, Ramadan for Islam, Nowruz (the Persian New Year), and others.

Specifically for Yom Kippur, Navratri, Maha Shivaratri, and Ramadan, part of the traditions is fasting.

Students participating in this are expected to be more tired because of the lack of nutrients during

these times teachers should take this into consideration and be more lenient with their work loads. Unfortunately,

nately, this isn't usually the case for most classes.

To advocate for students who celebrate non-Christian holidays, parents have to send angry emails or students have to talk to the teachers themselves, though these desperate actions are often still ignored. This is unjust and instead, Christian holiday or not, schools should acknowledge them all more equally.

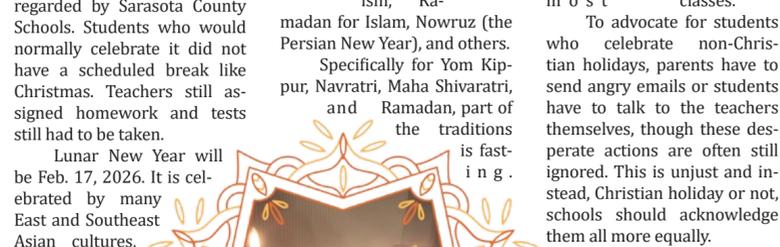
This problem is not just in Sarasota County, however; many public schools all over the nation have this flaw. Most public schools across the US have a winter break that includes Christmas but not one for non-Christian holidays.

Some exceptions are public schools in New York City which all have scheduled breaks for different religious events. On the official New York City Public Schools website, students get Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Diwali, and Eid al-Fitr off from school.

Other schools should see this as a positive example and take action to create a more inclusive calendar.

According to Effective School Solutions, some ways to be more inclusive include modifying the calendar to provide scheduled breaks for different holidays, organizing events to showcase a variety of religions, and training staff members to be more culturally aware.

It is important for students to feel acknowledged when it comes to celebrating different traditions. Schools should prioritize changes that embrace unique cultures.



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### The Verdict

**Schools of Hope:**  
We are unhappy that for-profit charters are trying to occupy space in public schools.

**Gym Culture:**  
We are glad that students are motivated to work out.

**Gym Culture:**  
We are sad that fitness trends can have a negative impact on body image.

**Thrifting:**  
We are happy about the resurgence of thrifting.

## the Torch

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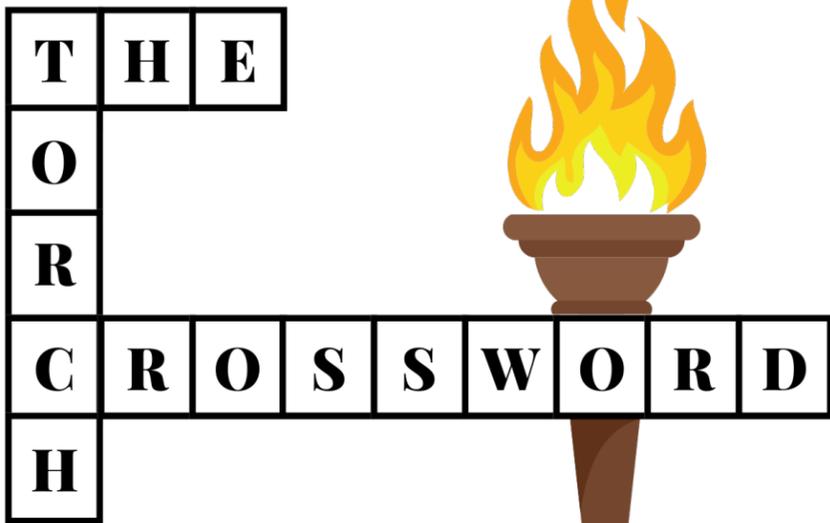
The Torch covers topics, issues, events and opinions of relevance to students grades nine through twelve. The Torch is published four times a year by Pine View School and maintains membership in the Florida Scholastic

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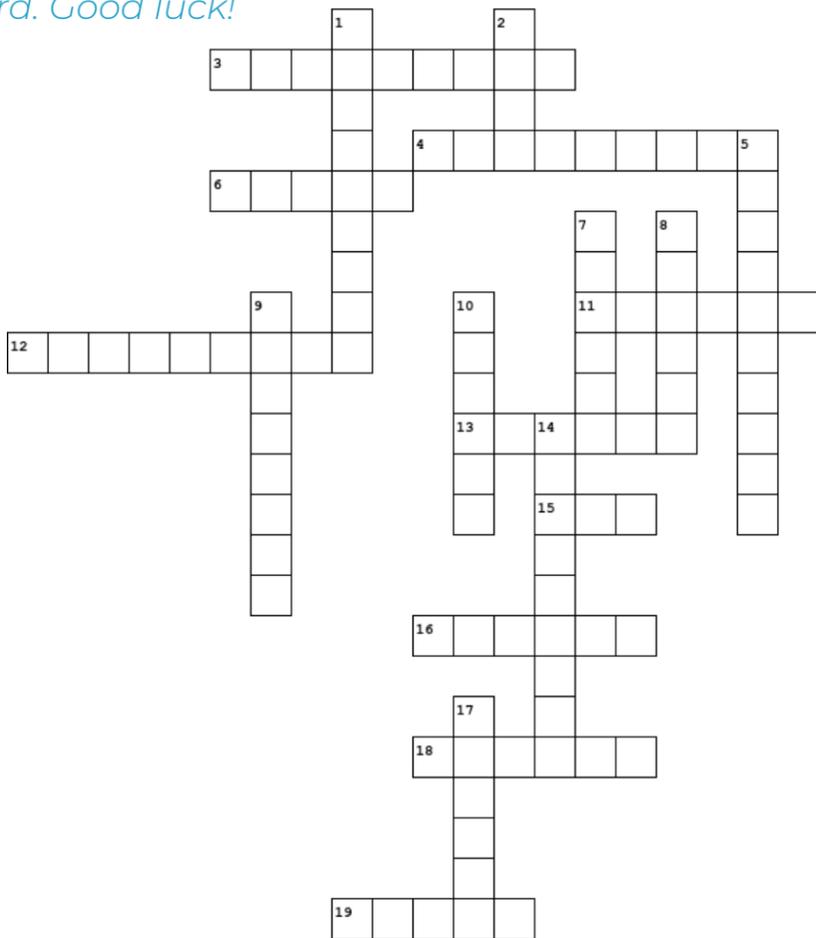
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Hints correspond to information shared in the stories throughout this issue, including through QR codes. The first person to bring their completed version in Room 117 in Building 17 will win a \$5 gift card. Good luck!



### Across

3. Who coaches the girls golf team?
4. On Nov. 7 the school board voted Alta Vista, \_\_\_\_\_, Gulf Gate, and Wilkinson to be phased into K-8 schools.
6. In what grade did Ashok, Johanning, Christo, Li, and Reddy's secret Santa tradition begin?
11. Which teacher banned their son from Roblox?
12. Who studied trans representation in South Asian movies?
13. STAR program stands for Students Taking \_\_\_\_\_ Roles
15. Who is the only varsity hockey player at Pine View?
16. Who is the ghost of AP Psych Present?
18. "Christmas at the Golden \_\_\_\_" is one Hallmark movie that included a Chinese-American lead.
19. Who is the president of New Voices of Pine View?

### Down

1. Blue light can slow down the body's release of what hormone?
2. Not taking what class by senior year makes you a secret slacker?
5. Unrealistic fitness standards can lead to body \_\_\_\_.
7. What holiday was October 20?
8. Who was the president of National Art Honor Society when the idea of a campus mural was originally formed.
9. Who had an older friend group on Discord?
10. A lot of class of 2026 money was "taken" from the "big, amazing \_\_\_\_\_"
14. What has become one of fashion's biggest moments?
17. The metal detector line moves at the speed of a \_\_\_\_ Chromebook.

## Hear me out...

### Mental health matters

The purpose of advisory classes is to dispel the stigma around mental health and spread awareness on the danger of substance abuse. However, it can feel like these sessions do the opposite, almost normalizing mental health disorders.

As someone who has suffered from chronic mental health conditions since sixth grade, I have experienced firsthand how important this subject is, yet even I find myself joking about these videos.

I think it comes down to the circumstances and the medium of consumption students receive the information in.

Classes with teachers not versed in the subject, playing videos that robotically repeat content, can turn a topic as serious as death, into something laughable.

Our Pine View teachers are amazing and we should feel comfortable talking to them if we are ever in need of help. However, randomly assigning us to these classes and making them "teach" an additional subject may not be an appropriate use of their time.

These bimonthly meetings are also very disruptive to instruction.

Unfortunately, the reason for the setup and frequency of these classes is state law. This means if we want to see any real change, we have to lobby to our state representatives.

In my opinion, it would be more meaningful to have an assembly once or twice a year — possibly in the auditorium — with the school counselors or a licensed psychiatrist.

Instructors with greater qualifi-



**Ava Lenerz**  
Editor-in-Chief

cations along with a more serious atmosphere would be beneficial in enhancing the class, allowing students to understand the gravity of these topics.

That is not to say mental health should be ignored the rest of the year, but I feel a different format would make it more memorable for the time between.

I cannot state enough how essential raising awareness for mental health is. Many students are affected by these conditions daily. No one should have to suffer feeling that their problems are insignificant.

There is no problem too small to reach out for help, in fact, Forbes references the "8-minute rule" in psychology: if someone is struggling, just talking to a friend for eight minutes can help improve your mood.

So, hear me out, let's start giving mental health the respect it deserves.

Help is available, Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: 988

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