

# the liberator

— Celebrating 50 years of publication —

Liberal Arts and Science Academy | 1012 Arthur Stiles Rd., Austin, TX 78721 | December 11, 2023 | Volume 50 | Edition 2 | lasaliberator.com

## opinion

# TX PRISONS OVERHEAT

ISABEL KRAMER | club contributor

Texas is a state infamous for its scalding summer temperatures. Texans try to stay inside AC or swim during those summer months. But what about those Texans who can't leave—those who have state-limited autonomy? According to PBS, 44 states in the U.S. do not have AC in any of their prisons, including 10 southern states. Being incarcerated means that you become the state's responsibility. These are people who are having their human rights violated by the state. All men in the United States are owed life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Why should the state have the power to take away the rights of criminals? If one is not sentenced to death, the prison system owes it to them to keep them alive.

The Lone Star State is no exception to not maintaining livable conditions for their inmates. The Journal of the American Medical Association shows that from 2001 to 2019, there has been an average of 14 deaths per year in Texas prisons due to the heat. When taking into consideration that those are only the cases reported as such, one can assume that many more have lost their lives due to the extreme heat.

see TX page 4

graphic by Kayla Le



## what's news



photo courtesy of LASA Tennis

LASA Tennis dominates state!

see LASA page 16



photo by Kayla Le

Photo editor tries out weightlifting after school

see RAPTOR page 16

# REDUCE REUSE RECYCLE

## AISD Recycling Practices

MARGOT MORGAN  
REBECA GONZALEZ | staff writers

Recycling containers can be found throughout LASA. However, there's no common knowledge of what the recycling practices at LASA are. The average student produces approximately 67 pounds of waste during a school year, according to EarthShare, which brings up the question of how waste reduction is practiced in school districts to combat this issue. To improve this problem, the Austin Independent School District (AISD) students, faculty, and committee members believe educating people correctly has to be the first step.

Students and staff have been concerned with the possibility that AISD, and LASA, don't recycle. However, after investigating the matter, it was confirmed that LASA does recycle diligently, dismissing false rumors and reassuring the concerned students and staff.

Ana Echeverria, the AISD energy conservation engagement foreman who focuses on energy and water conservation, provides zero waste training to educate people on how to transition into a zero waste and environmentally conservative lifestyle.

Echeverria said she was surprised when she heard that we thought that AISD doesn't recycle. While explaining that AISD does recycle, she also admitted that the way they do so isn't practical.

"Of course we do," Echeverria said. "But let me tell you, I realized that something was missing in how zero waste was set up. We need to create a culture of zero waste, a culture of sustainability. That is not something that

you can simply say, 'Oh, we're gonna set up, you know, the zero waste organization'. That is the beginning of creating a culture."

Echeverria stated her beliefs on the necessity of an environmentally sustainable culture that students are also echoing. Junior Rue Nava, a member of the AISD environmental stewardship advisory committee, expressed her concern about how zero waste is set up and how it could be fixed.

"The [recycling programs] aren't always strictly enforced or taught," Nava explained. "Transparency with the district is a common issue that the board faces... Recycling could be reinforced with more specialized fields like zero waste, conservation, transportation services, and outdoor learning."

Junior Nishtha Verma, who is also part of the AISD environmental stewardship advisory committee, agrees with Nava that there is a lack of education about recycling. She takes it upon herself to propose solutions for LASA by advocating for more education around recycling and waste reduction.

"I think that it would be beneficial to give an advisory lesson to everybody," Verma said, "because it needs to be brought to the attention of our students that it's important. I've never heard anybody saying, this goes in compost, or I suppose in trash. So people just put it [the trash] wherever."

see AISD page 11



graphic by Asha Rountree

# STRING FEST

## LASA Seniors Mentor Young Musicians

GEORGIA FINK | staff writer

High school seniors play a large role in the Austin Independent School District's (AISD) Fall Festival for Strings. They take on the responsibility of mentoring, teaching, and guiding the younger musicians, drawing from the culmination of knowledge they obtained during their musical journey. These seniors become the guiding notes for the next generation of orchestra students.

Established in 1973 by William Dick, the Fall Festival for Strings, otherwise known as the String Fest, is an annual event designed to benefit all of the sixth-grade orchestra students in AISD. LASA has been a part of this tradition ever since its establishment. Rachel Horvitz is the LASA orchestra director and has been teaching for over two decades. She attended the String Fest with the participating LASA seniors.

"This is an Austin ISD event that's been happening for a long time," Horvitz said. "All the beginner orchestra students learn a set of songs. And then they come together in early November to perform. They do like a mass rehearsal, and then have their lunch, and then give a performance, and parents and family are invited to come back. So for these students, it's their first performance."

Around 800 beginner orchestra students attend this event every year, along with seniors across the district, whose role is to assist the sixth-grade students in rehearsing for their performance. Parents will attend to watch their kids perform, making the String Fest the largest music event in the district with over 1,000 people in attendance.

According to Horvitz, when the seniors go to the festival, they don't have to prepare anything since they already know all the pieces. The seniors will just have to brush up on any details that they may have forgotten and show up ready to help the sixth graders. Akhila Jallepalli is one of the LASA orchestra seniors who attended the String Fest.

"We just played through them a few times before we rehearsed," Jallepalli said. "The sixth graders, though, learn their first pieces to play at this concert. Because this is their first time performing, there is a lot of preparation made."

Vedanth Ramanathan, another LASA orchestra senior and the orchestra president, shared his experience from the String Fest. He and the other seniors in orchestra assist the sixth-grade students with their technique and confidence in the pieces.

"It was our job to correct stuff we saw," Ramanathan said. "Giving them that confidence and that supportive environment I think was the most important part."

Throughout the festival, Ramanathan noted that the sixth graders learn the importance of confidence in their performance and how it all comes together in the ensemble. For the piece to work, every individual's contribution matters.

"Some of them think 'If I don't play, no one's going to notice because I'm one out of 800,'" Ramanathan said. "But we wanted everyone to play...and a lot of them were obviously shy at first to talk to high school seniors. But after getting to know them and giving them tips, most of them actually knew everything. But we gave them that motivation to do it, because in the long run that's gonna obviously help them."

see STRING page 13



IN HARMONY LASA Orchestra students lead middle school students through a musical piece. The event was held at the Delco Activity Center. photos courtesy of LASA Orchestra.

graphic by Kayla Le

*editorial* **U.S. Interference in Conflicts**  
*The Global Superpower Intervenes in Foreign Issues*

**Staff Stance:** Every grading period the Liberator staff present their opinion on an important current issue in the form of an editorial written by the Commentary editors. The opinions in the piece below represent those of the staff as a collective, not of each individual member.

In a matter of hours, Afghanistan’s capital city of Kabul fell, and control of the country was taken by the Taliban. This complete collapse of government so quickly after the U.S.’s withdrawal from an area is extremely concerning. While such rapid deterioration is rare, it is common for countries to fall into crisis due to American intervention. From overthrowing the sovereign Hawaiian government to helping install numerous dictators in Latin America, American interventions regularly lead to thousands of unnecessary deaths and the removal of democracy, which some nations still have not recovered from. It is clear that the vast majority of the time, U.S. international military interference leaves countries worse off than if they had just been left alone.

There are, however, a few situations in which the U.S.’s immense power should be used. When a country cannot help its citizens and reaches out to us for help, we have a duty to use our trillions of dollars of wealth for good. Disease, famine, poverty, and national disasters are all difficult to control and predict, and they hit poorer nations the hardest. If the U.S. has the ability to limit the deaths that these factors cause, it could allow nations to develop faster, and, rather than ending thousands of lives, could save them instead. Overall, federal projects in other countries would be far more effective if they were oriented towards peaceful solutions or towards solving issues of the health and safety of a country’s citizens.

The U.S. has been intervening in foreign nations for over 200 years, but these interventions rarely involved overthrowing sovereign nations. However, this changed when more than 160 U.S. Marines invaded Hawaii in 1893. Not yet a state or even a territory of the U.S., Hawaii had its own government, a queen, and a house of democratically elected representatives. Queen Lili’uokalani tried to restore her people’s rights after an all-white militia threatened her brother, the late King Kalākaua, into signing a new constitution that ceded power to them. The Missionary Party, who had sent this militia, convinced the second administration of Grover Cleveland (1893-1897) that Queen Lili’uokalani’s attempts to overturn this constitution were a threat to American lives. In reality, the only threat was to profits, as the Missionary Party owned the sugar plantations that exported to the U.S.. They didn’t like paying tariffs on their crops, and hatched a plan to turn Hawaii into an American state. Hawaii was declared a U.S. territory by President William McKinley in 1898, despite Lili’uokalani’s constant lobbying. She continued petitioning for Hawaiian independence until her death in 1917.

In addition to being illegal under international law, this

annexation had numerous negative effects for Hawaii. It lost much of its culture, to the point where many quintessentially Hawaiian

Hawaiians did not have a right to vote. Any interference that removes people’s basic rights and culture should be seen for what it is, a tragedy. No country should be allowed to get away with these actions, especially since the U.S. had no legitimate cause for taking over Hawaii. Sadly, this is a theme throughout American interventions.

During the Cold War, U.S. foreign interventions increased. Fear of communist expansion led to invasions of numerous countries, often overthrowing democratically-elected socialist leaders in the interest of installing capitalist dictators. In 1954, the administration of Dwight D. Eisenhower backed a Guatemalan coup against the democratically elected Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán and installed dictator Carlos Castillo Armas in his stead—all in the interest of protecting the profits of the United Fruit Company. The company owned immense amounts of land in Guatemala, which Arbenz wanted to redistribute. This coup was backed by another dictator, Anastasio Somoza García of Nicaragua, who was also the former leader of the U.S. National Guard. He was eventually overthrown by the socialist Sandinista party in 1979. Eager to keep control of the country’s leadership, the U.S. authorized covert operations in Nicaragua in 1981. These operations included funding, arming, and training groups dedicated to overthrowing the country’s government, known as the Contras. The successful coup led to a death toll of over 50,000 Nicaraguans, illustrating how U.S. intervention is often done with the intention of furthering their own goals and can lead to devastating after effects in the nations they meddle with, sometimes leading to massive scale deaths. The coup left Nicaragua with an unstable government, and it fell into a dictatorship in the 2000s, ruled by Sandinista Daniel Ortega.

All of these military interventions have a few things in common—they involved overthrowing a sovereign government, nearly all had an ulterior motive, and they all ended up harming the very nations they were supposed to help. Despite the U.S. having the strongest military in the world, according to Global Firepower, armed interventions are rarely effective. This is because they are simply the wrong approach to the majority of international issues. Many can be solved with simple diplomacy, and even more should never have involved the U.S. in the first place. What business do we have in meddling with the governments of foreign nations? Often the answer is simply profit, as can be seen with the intervention in Guatemala, or when a country dared to criticize capitalism, such as in Nicaragua.



items, like grass skirts and tiki torches, actually come from the mainland. Its population is now made up of more foreigners than Native Hawaiians, and before it became a state in 1959, these

**Raptor Chatter**

*Are there beneficial ways for the U.S. to intervene in foreign conflicts?*



photo courtesy of Aarya Sharma

**Aarya Sharma**  
Freshman

“I think that it is a wise decision for the U.S. to take a role in foreign affairs if they are making an effort to make a positive change. I think the U.S. has the resources to support other nations.”



photo courtesy of Niamh Catterall

**Niamh Catterall**  
Sophomore

“The U.S. can actually help conflicts if they fully assess them instead of going off of biases that they already have. I think if we had a better way of regulating the decisions we would not only do what’s best for the country but also what’s fair for everyone.”



photo by Norah Hussaini

**Emanuel Salazar-Rodriguez**  
Junior

“The U.S. should not align with either side of the conflict, but just stop the conflict entirely so there is minimal loss of lives, goods, and property for both sides.”



photo by Norah Hussaini

**Mateo Rives**  
Senior

“Sending in weapons shouldn’t be done because we’re not directly fighting or stopping the conflict, but rather assisting in the killing of lots of people.”

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**Editorial Policy**

Responsibilities of a free student press: Serving as the primary communication link within the Liberal Arts and Science Academy and between the school and the local community, this newspaper accepts the responsibilities inherent in being a free press. The Liberator staff strive to produce a professional-quality publication that follows the Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists. The objective is to print the news in a fair and objective manner with the utmost regard for integrity.

**Editorial Content:**

1. The students on The Liberator staff will print articles which have been researched to the best of their ability to obtain the most complete available information.
2. The information will be presented in a truthful and fair manner.
3. When personal commentary is given it will be in good taste on issues that have been researched, analyzed and where expert opinion has been sought.
4. All commentary will be clearly labeled as such.
5. No material which is obscene, libelous or that will cause an immaterial and substantial disruption of the school day, according to accepted legal definitions, will be printed.

**The Editorial Boards and its Functions:**

The Liberator staff will be governed by an editorial board composed of the following individuals: lead editors and commentary editors.

**The Editorial board will:**

1. Determine the content of the publication (with input from other staff members)
2. Stress the editorial policy
3. Ensure the accuracy of the publication
4. Address inappropriate behavior on the part of the staff
5. Dispense disciplinary action to staff members
6. Change or add policy as necessary

**Viewpoints:**

Printed material which contains the opinion of a staff member or a contributing writer will be labeled as such. These views are not intended to reflect the view of the administration of Liberal Arts and Science Academy nor the School Board of the Austin Independent School District. Viewpoints will be given in two areas in the newspaper.

**Editorials:** These will be determined by the staff consensus. The editorial will be unsigned and will represent the majority viewpoint of the staff.

**Commentary:** Commentary articles represent the viewpoint of one member of the staff, and are signed as such. These articles do not represent the opinions of the entire staff.

**Letters to the Editor:** Letters to the Editor are accepted for topics of general interest to the readership of the newspaper. Letters must be submitted typed or neatly printed in ink and must have the signature of the writer and the writer’s grade level. Editors reserve the right to determine which issue the letter will be published in, with every effort made to print the letter as soon as possible. The editors also reserve the right to edit the letter for grammar, length and repetition. No letters which are obscene or libelous will be published.

**Non-Staff Contributors:** Bylined contributions are welcome.

**Correction of Errors:** The staff makes every effort to print accurate information. In the case of substantial errors, a written correction will be made in the following issue of the newspaper.

**Sources:** In general, no anonymous sources will be used in reporting. Sources from within the school, as well as those not connected with the school, will be used. Under no circumstances will gifts, including coupons, etc., be accepted by the staff members from sources or advertisers.

**Note:** The Liberator will attempt to publish a range of opinions within reason.

**Push through to Winter break, Raptors!**



Have an opinion about a new school policy? Got an issue with this issue? Anything else on your mind? Email us at [lasaliberator@gmail.com](mailto:lasaliberator@gmail.com) or DM us @lasaliberator.

# Should Politicians Have an Expiration Date?

Younger Generation Doesn't Feel Represented by an Aging Congress

LEAH LASHUS | staff writer



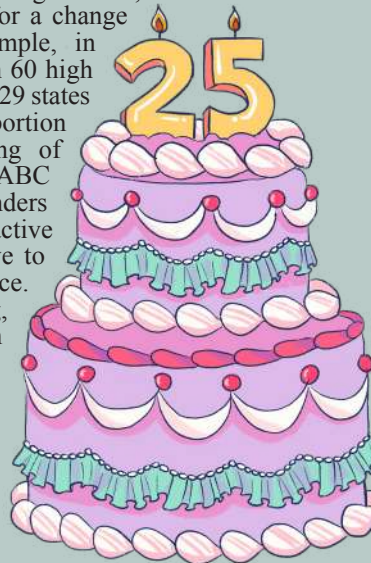
graphic by Amelia Coleman

If someone were to visualize an 80-year-old, many would think of retirement homes, dentures, and grandchildren. Not as many would recollect presidents' faces or leaders of Congress. However, in the 2020 election, the average age of the presidential candidates was 70.25 years old. To even consider running for president in the U.S., you must be at least 35 years old—almost half of the average lifespan. This means almost a quarter of eligible voters aren't seeing age representation. I am scared for the future we are currently heading towards, where senior citizens fill all our highest-ranked positions. Lowering the age limit to 25 for running for office could add more young and middle-aged people to our offices and lead to the creation of new ideas and opinions that can help America move forward.

The 2020 election was coined by Politico Magazine as "the Dementia Campaign," a nickname poking fun at the candidates' ages, but also a title reminding us of our government's demographics. Unlike the United States, Australia, Denmark, France, and many other countries' presidential age of candidacy starts at 18, which has enabled them to become powerful and prolific nations; the U.S. should consider doing the same. America's age of presidential candidacy was first set nearly

250 years ago and no longer reflects the lived realities of this country's citizens, especially the youth. 18 and 20-year-olds, on average, are no longer working on farms and helping run family stores, but are becoming college-educated and gaining experience in the workforce, according to Statista. It is easy to see the change in youth through today's age of digital and online news sources. News sites like TheCramm and credible social media accounts such as @genzforchange help provide informed and digestible news for teens, by teens, according to Teen Vogue, showing how the youth have become more involved in politics than in the past. Even during the pandemic, students were crowded around screens, watching the election over days of Zoom classes. These teens often have higher stakes in policies than their senior counterparts—being most affected by revised gun laws, climate policies, and pushes for a change in the voting age. For example, in 2022, students from more than 60 high schools and universities across 29 states held strikes against anti-abortion laws, such as the overturning of Roe v. Wade, according to ABC News. Teens are not just bystanders to their world: they are active participants and shouldn't have to wait two decades to run for office.

Anatomically speaking, our brains typically reach full development around the age of 25, according to the Postgrad Medical Journal. The argument that due to this fact, 25 is too young for candidates to be running for office, is commonly used by older adults to keep the candidacy age the same.



graphic by Asha Rountree

What they fail to point out, however, is that around age 30-40, the brain begins to shrink, with it quickening by age 60. This shrinkage directly impacts the frontal cortex, the part of the brain dedicated to learning, judgment, and complex mental activities, according to the Postgrad Medical Journal. These are all traits that are extremely important for running a government and a country. The hypocrisy is stark—older generations insist that younger ones don't have the mental capacity to run their country, whilst ignoring their own diminishing cognitive capabilities.

According to Business Insider, nearly one in four members of Congress are in their 70s or 80s, with key leaders born before or during World War II, which ended in 1945. Since then, massive strides have been made in civil, queer, women's, and environmental rights. Politicians who weren't born into this new era often do not understand the perspective and struggles faced by the youth. The age of our leaders directly impacts what legislation we pass, the voices and perspectives we choose to amplify, and America's appearance to the world. When you ask people from other countries what they think of America, most of the time it's a joke about past presidents or how we have to pay for healthcare. People from across every continent take to Twitter, TikTok, and other social media to make fun of our backward policies. I'm tired of these policies too, and the majority of them have been passed by older politicians.

In a rematch of the 2020 election, Biden led Trump 38% to 30% among young voters, but 22% of voters between ages 18 and 29 said that, given the choice between these two candidates, they simply would not vote, according to The New York Times. Young voters are not interested in candidates three times their age, and won't vote for them, showing that a system that doesn't support the candidacy of young politicians will not accurately reflect the concerns of our society's youth and future.

The majority of the people governing our Congress and supreme courts have outdated perspectives that misrepresent modern America, and that needs to change. Lowering the minimum age limit for politicians is a start.

# Prisons Overheat

from page 1



graphic by Amelia Coleman

In an interview with PBS News, Norma Bienrosto, the mother of a man convicted for 15 years, mentions that the prisons can get up to 120-130 degrees. "My heart aches when I see him... there's nothing I can do to help him," she said. To have a child taken away and put in inhumane conditions with no way to help must be heartbreaking. According to Architectural Digest, prisons are predominantly made out of highly insulating materials like concrete and steel. So when Texas residents are complaining about the 107-degree weather, the inmates could be subjected to heat up to 40 degrees higher. This could lead to complications such as heatstroke, heat rash, fainting, and much more. The prison system is currently willfully killing inmates by choosing not to install AC.

The director of communications for the Texas Criminal Justice Department released a statement about the situation, saying that in response to the deaths, the state is testing for heat sensitivity in their prisoners. Heat sensitivity means that someone reacts poorly to high temperatures that most can withstand. It is fair to say that all people become "heat-sensitive" when they are in a low-ventilation concrete box with 120+ degrees of heat. TIME magazine has reported that heat tolerance declines after many days of exposure—far less than the months inmates are subjected to during the summer.

Another effect of the heat in prisons is a

higher suicide rate according to PBS. Many antipsychotics are proven to negatively affect the body's heat sensitivity. Prisoners are choosing to go off their medications hoping that this will help them survive the heat, but without these medications, they are suffering mental health crises. Additionally, the National Alliance of Mental Illness (NAMI), has said that those who experience any mental health problems in prison are far more likely to be subjected to solitary confinement, which the United Nations (U.N.) has labeled as torture.

The state needs to take accountability for the State Sanctioned reckless manslaughter that has been taking place in our prisons and start protecting prisoners, namely, by installing AC. Our nation must honor our agreements and so-called dedication to human rights. In what will be 33 years ago as of December 19th, 2023, the General Assembly resolution 45/111 of the U.N. was adopted, stating that "all prisoners shall be treated with the respect due to their inherent dignity and value as human beings" and that "all prisoners shall retain the human rights and fundamental freedoms set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights." These fundamental freedoms include our Uncle Sam values of life, liberty, and happiness as previously mentioned, as well as Articles 4, 5, and 25 of the declaration, including freedom from slavery, freedom from torture, and a decent standard of living. Furthermore, Articles 29 and 30 states that we have a duty to others to protect their rights and that no one (including a state) can take these freedoms away.

Prison is not meant to be comfortable, but this situation is past the point of comfort. These are people's lives. We have a duty to these prisoners because they are people. Unless we make strides to protect the rights of those that many are willing to turn a blind eye to, the U.S. cannot call itself the Nation of Freedom. Ultimately, when the state deems that someone needs to be under their supervision, that person is owed protection.



WINTYR RICE | commentary editor



graphic by Amelia Coleman

My life is one of calculations, of overanalyzing jokes, and of mentally replaying conversations hours after they happened. But most importantly, it's one of learning how much of myself I have to hide in order to be seen as a person. Disability will often be automatically and subconsciously associated with helplessness. The infantilization of the disabled is a constant and persistent problem that severely impairs our ability to advocate for our rights. I'm lucky because my autism is typically invisible, but that's also because I actively try to keep it that way. Whenever I'm in public, I suppress any of my more obvious symptoms. I take care to monitor my facial expressions, my fidgeting, and my eye contact because I know what could happen if I don't: strangers will treat me like a toddler.

If a disabled person wants to talk about their struggles and the discrimination that they face, then there's a high chance that they won't be taken seriously. In my experience, it's rare that anyone puts in the minimal effort required to understand those who use alternative communication methods like text to speech, or those who have severely limited vocabularies. Even if someone is able to talk in a 'normal' way, that often doesn't change the way they're treated. Disabled people regularly share experiences where they've been talked to like toddlers, and taken about as seriously as one.

A Finnish YouTuber who goes by Oakwrym online analyzes media through the lens of disability. Some of his videos also talk about his own experiences as a disabled person.

In his video "The Infantilization of Disabled People", Oakwrym shared, "I was sitting on the curb waiting for a pickup and a complete stranger walked up to me and asked if I needed help while crouching down and getting uncomfortably into my personal space. I was a full-grown adult, but her mannerisms

when speaking to me took on all the aspects of talking to a preschooler—up to and including the 'are you sure' when I told her I was fine and waiting for someone."

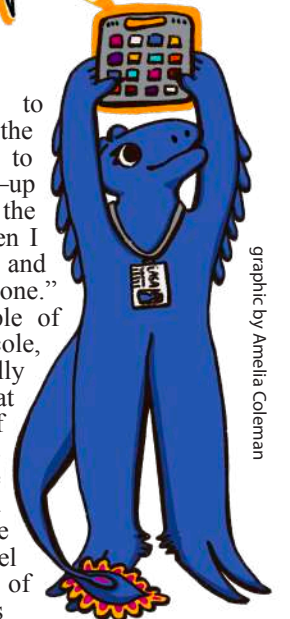
Another example of this case is with Nicole, an intellectually disabled student at the University of Delaware who was interviewed for the study "Disabled or Not, People Just Want to Feel Welcome: Stories of Microaggressions and Microaffirmations from College Students with Intellectual Disability". Nicole described one of her own experiences with infantilization. "[A group of undergraduates were] gossiping because I was wearing clothes that they were not wearing. They were, like, saying mean words to me ... And they said, 'Look at this kid.' And I said, 'I'm not a kid, I'm 21.' I was yelling at them, telling them, 'I'm 21, older than you guys.'"

These are just two stories of hundreds that can be found across the internet. It's easy to imagine how this would make activism hard. The combined forces of infantilization and centuries of discrimination make it incredibly difficult for disabled people to create change. This also leads to the rise of organizations that, despite claiming to help the disabled community, do far more harm than good. Organizations that actively cause harm to disabled people are now some of the largest voices within disability advocacy, while true disabled people are pushed down and spoken over.

For example, Autism Speaks is an organization that supports and actively works towards the stigmatization and eradication of autism. Their incredibly influential 2009 ad "I Am Autism" has millions of views over various reuploads, and claims that autism "works faster than pediatric AIDS, cancer and diabetes combined" in order to bring financial ruin upon your family, destroy your marriage, and rob you of your child. While the ad is nearly 15 years old, the organization's sentiments have not changed. Their 2019 pamphlet, the "100 Day Tool Kit for Parents of Newly Diagnosed Young Children", treats autism like a cancer that will sow discord within a family, and recommends pseudoscientific therapies to "treat" it.

Insidiously, the very people doing this will often say it's for our own benefit. I've heard countless arguments as to why autistic people, due to our apparently inherent gullibility, shouldn't be allowed bodily autonomy, especially in arguments of gender-affirming care. Rather than actually making an attempt to understand and help us, we are seen as props, and shields for bigots to hide behind, rather than as actual people.

Throughout our lives, disabled people are consistently ignored in conversations about disability advocacy because it is automatically assumed that we, much like how a 5-year-old doesn't realize why they can't eat candy every day, don't understand our own needs. In order to achieve a society in which disabled people are actually seen as people, this needs to stop.



graphic by Amelia Coleman



graphic by Asha Rountree



graphic by Amelia Coleman

# Migrants Bussed to Blue Cities

## Abbott's Operation Lonestar Moves Migrants Out of Texas

ELLINGTON TOUGH | staff writer

In March 2021, Governor Greg Abbott launched Operation Lone Star, designed to mitigate the large numbers of migrants crossing the border from Mexico to Texas. Part of this plan involved busing thousands of undocumented migrants to large blue cities, such as Los Angeles, Washington D.C., and New York City. Since then, 50,000 migrants from Latin America have been bused out of Texas.

Part of the reasoning behind this plan came from the physical location of blue states in the U.S., according to immigration lawyers. Juan DeKruyff runs the Juan DeKruyff Law Office, an immigration firm in Austin. According to DeKruyff, migrants have been sent to democratic leaning states that typically view immigration in a more positive light.

"[Abbott's] taking migrants and shipping them to other parts of the country, specifically to states that have liberal policies toward immigration," DeKruyff said. "He's not shipping them to North Dakota or South Dakota. He's shipping them to liberal-leaning states like Massachusetts, California, Illinois, places like that."

According to DeKruyff, Abbott is using the migrants to his political advantage to dissuade the rest of the country from imposing lax immigration policies. Abbott hopes that pro-immigration states will be negatively affected by an influx of immigrants, thus influencing future policies.

"He's doing it to try to punish those people for coming out in support of immigrants and their rights," DeKruyff said. "He's thinking, 'well, if [these states are] for immigration, then we'll just send all these people over there and they can figure out how to take care of them and help them.'"

Tiffany Burrow is the director of operations at Val Verde Border Humanitarian Coalition (VVBHC), which is a short-term respite center that gives traveling migrants a place to rest before they continue on their journey. VVBHC participated in the busing and is located in Del Rio, Texas, a couple of miles from the U.S.-Mexico border.

"When migrants go through border patrol, they must present a sponsor's address," Burrow said. "It could be a family, a friend, it could be whatever, and once they are released from border patrol, their final destination has already been determined by the migrants themselves."

Operation Lone Star has not been without controversy, sparking investigations from the Department of Justice over alleged civil rights violations. Additionally, states receiving migrants without any notice have been struggling to house them, as most of

them speak little English and come with no money or personal belongings. Although migrants were arriving through Mexico, the majority were not Mexican and instead were displaced from war-torn and economically struggling countries like Venezuela, El Salvador, and Colombia.

"It's definitely a strain on the public resources of those communities," DeKruyff said. "A lot of [migrants] are showing up but they don't have a place to stay, they don't have a lot of

[[ I feel like it's just a political stunt, honestly, by Greg Abbott to just try to become more popular. I don't think he's really taking into account the immigrants or the communities that he's sending them to.

- JUAN DEKRUYFF, IMMIGRATION ATTORNEY

stranded in the cold and snow.

"Buses are being dropped now at two in the morning, three in the morning, four in the morning, which is a challenge for families that might have children," Burrow said. "It's not a good idea to be dropping off families in the middle of the night in some of these major cities because there is nobody there to help them or meet them."

According to DeKruyff, most of the immigrants coming in are asylum seekers, meaning that they are coming into the United States as refugees and asking for asylum. U.S. law says they must be granted a hearing to determine their eligibility for asylum.

"If [the migrants] were not asking for political asylum, many of them were being sent back to their home countries right away," DeKruyff said.

Abbott's plan has elicited criticism from democratic leaders such as New York City Mayor Eric Adams. According to the Wall Street Journal, Adams has called on the federal government to make it easier for migrants to achieve work permits.

"I feel like it's just a political stunt, honestly, by Greg Abbott to just try to become more popular," DeKruyff said. "I don't think he's really taking into account the immigrants or the communities that he's sending them to."

Kate Lincoln-Goldfinch is an immigration lawyer in Austin. She runs the Kate Lincoln-Goldfinch Firm, and in her 15 years of practicing immigration law, has worked with thousands of asylum seekers.

"I've seen the way that they typically behave when they get processed into the country and what they do, where they go, who they live with, how they get work permits, and that has all drastically changed and been altered by Abbott's busing," Lincoln-Goldfinch said. "He's taken people out of the natural flow of migration."

According to DeKruyff, migrants who are bused to other states often get a job after they arrive. Their asylum will be granted or refused, however, either way, they usually overstay their permission and continue living and working in the U.S..

"I think [Abbott] wanted what he's gotten, which is a bunch of democratic cities around the country feeling the weight of immigrants and beginning to discuss immigration as if it is a problem," Lincoln-Goldfinch said. "People in the United States can travel freely between the states, [so] as long as these immigrants get on the buses, they can go anywhere they want. I don't think that, even though Abbott has spent 75 million dollars of Texan taxpayer money on this, he's getting enough negative blowback that he's going to stop or slow down."



graphic by Asha Rountree

### Archery

INANNA MURGOR  
staff writer

An arrow whizzes towards a bullseye in the small gym. On the archery team, students can practice archery to compete across the district and in national competitions hosted by the National Archery in Schools Program (NASP) before school, or gather during lunch to learn about archery.

Sophomore Amelia McRoberts is one of the club's officers. McRoberts likes that the archery club has options for people who are both interested in competing and playing recreationally. "If people are interested, they could come to the club so that way, they don't have to come in early in the morning," McRoberts said.

Sophomore Simon Windler, a club member, enjoys practicing archery on the school team with their friends. Windler has been in the club for two years and was happy to return this year.

"[Archery is] a high commitment, but it's not a super taxing commitment if that makes sense," Windler said. "So it's something I can do often without getting really annoyed." The club meets every Tuesday and Thursday before school in the small gym, and Wednesdays during lunch in room 11B.

### Horror

GORDON STREBER  
staff writer

Students in Horror Movie Club gather in room 709 each Thursday to catch up with a hand-picked movie, from "It" to "Insidious." Freshman Ari Duml-Harry is a new member of the club. He finds it a great place to get together with friends and watch movies with classmates.

"It's a nice experience because it's hard to meet up with friends outside of school," Duml-Harry said. "My family doesn't like horror movies, but I do, so it's great for that too."

Freshman Sadie Russell agrees. She usually finds horror movies daunting alone, but the club makes it fun.

"I like the experience of being around people while they're watching horror movies," Russell said. "It makes it much easier for me to indulge in horror."

The club started watching "American Psycho" on Nov. 9. To join the club, walk in at the beginning of the club and pick up a form for your parents to sign. You can reach the club at lasahorrorclub@gmail.com.

# CLUB CRAZY

### VT Seva

BISHOP BRITT  
staff writer

Volunteering for those in need alongside friends is what Volunteering Service Club (VT Seva) is all about. Since freshman year in 2021, junior Arihanth Nuka has run the VT Seva club, dedicating his time to helping the underprivileged. "We ... give back to all kinds of causes, such as for breast cancer, visually impaired students, and many other people with disabilities," Nuka said.

Junior Isaac Padilla-Rie joined the club earlier this year and has been enjoying volunteering. Among the events he's done, Beats for A Cause was his favorite.

"We helped set it up and watched the amazing performances they did and overall it was just a great experience," Padilla-Rie said. According to its members, being an outlet to give back to the community isn't the only reward given. One of the club's officers, junior Shaan Barman, is working to get the Presidential Award.

"Even if you have a one-liner resume, the Presidential Award looks really good on it," Barman said.

The club meets every Tuesday in Ms. Weems's room, T204.

graphic by Asha Rountree

# Homeless Prevention In Los Angeles Through AI

A program has been developed this October by the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) that utilizes Artificial Intelligence (AI) to find out who might lose their home and when. This was sent into effect in October by the Los Angeles County of Department of Health Services through the Homelessness Prevention.

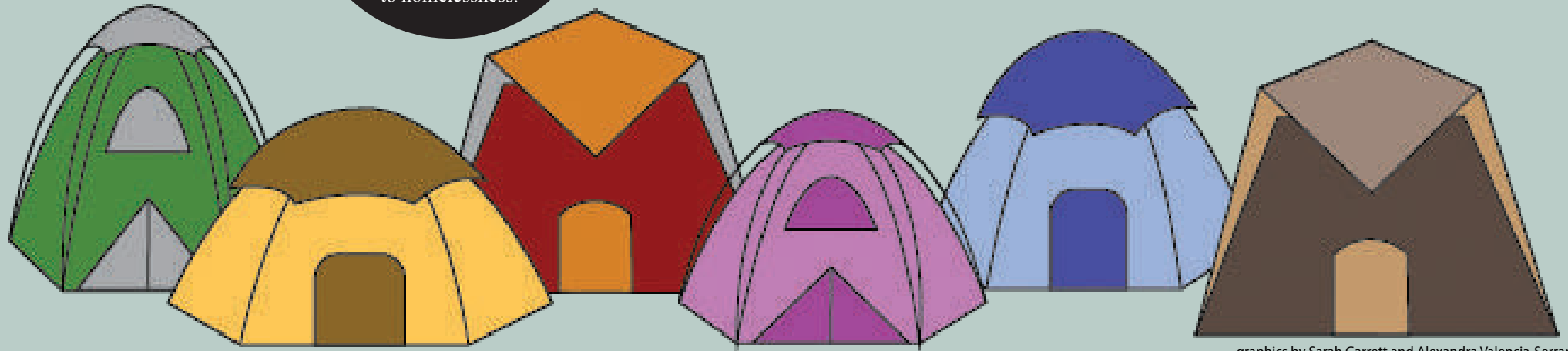
Factors AI has found that skyrocketing rent prices, inadequate incomes, constant hospital or emergency room visits, numerous arrests, lack of access to government aid, mental health issues, abusive relationships, and systemic racism eventually lead to homelessness.

The organization utilizes this information to create change. Each struggling person or family works with a case manager who provides guidance, and approximately \$4,000 will be supplied to a third-party donor to help cover expenses like groceries and utility bills.

As a result, 560 people have been helped in 2 years, and the majority of them have stayed housed. Clients were also able to receive help with car repairs, groceries, rent and utility bills, and finding temporary places to live.

Research by Sadie Sarraf, staff writer.

Sources: NPR, The Homeless Hub, and the Los Angeles Homeless Service Authority.



graphics by Sarah Garrett and Alexandra Valencia-Serrano

# Brodie Oaks Renovations Level It Up to New Heights

LILAH O'DAIR | staff writer

In 2019, local real-estate company Barshop and Oles partnered with finance firm Lionstone Investments to take on the task of redesigning the Brodie Oaks Shopping Center, located in South Austin.

Brodie Oaks's spread-out style retail has remained largely unchanged since its opening in the early 1980s, but the new project plans to completely transform the area from sprawling retail to a self-sustaining community with a focus on affordable housing, walkability, and ecological revitalization, according to the project's website. The production team plans to finish designing and permitting by 2025 when they will begin construction.

Abby Gillfillan is a planner for Lionheart, an urban planning company, and a contributing designer to the Brodie Oaks project. She hopes Brodie Oaks will become an integral part of the surrounding community.

"One of the things we wanted to do is to take single-use one-story retail and create one of those places that people in neighborhoods or schools close by really feel welcomed by and want to come and experience," Gillfillan said.

The Brodie Oaks project plan includes approximately 70 units of affordable housing scattered across the development. Orla Tower, a freshman at LASA, lives in South Austin and supports the idea.

"I think that the affordable housing will be good for the community because the housing prices in my neighborhood are just going up and up as more mega-rich people move in," Tower said. "I mean, people who have lived here in Zilker for a while are being priced out of their own homes because it's so expensive."

One of Brodie Oaks's main goals is to be a more ecologically sound development project, especially considering its vicinity to the Barton Creek Greenbelt. Gillfillan feels that this concern was a vital part of their planning process and was important to

creating a development more respectful to the local ecosystems.

"One of the things that we always knew going in was that this was a really environmentally sensitive site," Gillfillan said. "Something that we were always really thinking about is how we can make sure that when this site redevelops, it's a really good steward to the Barton Creek Greenbelt there."

The project is committed to a 54% reduction of impervious cover, which is any surface that water cannot pass through. Matt Bartos, a professor of civil engineering at the University of Texas at Austin (UT) who focuses on water resources, sees how this reduction could help the local environment.

"Impervious areas like parking lots, roads, and sidewalks accumulate a lot of gunk and contaminants," Bartos said. "Those contaminants wash off into the waterways and cause problems for the aquatic wildlife."

This awareness also applies to how Brodie Oaks proposes to use the water that lands on their site. Gillfillan recognizes the innovative methods that the planning team is using surrounding water usage.

"The innovation behind it was really around how we treated water on the site because it's an environmentally sensitive site," Gillfillan said. "There's the Barton Springs zone and there's this SOS (Save Our Springs) ordinance that regulates that area. What this means is that every drop of water that lands on the site has to be fully treated before it runs off of the site. One of the innovations we did was develop a new way to meet that SOS standard, which is instead of capturing the water, treating it and then just spraying it out on the ground. We're capturing the water, treating it, and then reusing it in the buildings."

Bartos also sees the importance of Brodie Oaks's innovative ideas surrounding water usage. He believes that the redistribution of water can help the process of quality control.

"Rainwater harvesting benefits just by reducing hydraulic load, which can cause all the water quality problems," Bartos

said. "You're basically just storing some of that water so it doesn't flow downstream and pick up contaminants causing flooding and stuff like that."

The Brodie Oaks project is still in the planning stages of development. Gillfillan noted the next steps in the project after planning, from permitting to eventually beginning the actual construction.

"It usually takes about a year to get all the construction documents together, and then, after that, it would be moving into getting permits through the city, and then starting to build construction," Gillfillan said. "So it's probably a good two years away from any dirt moving out there on the site."

The Brodie Oaks project is currently in phase four, with two more stages and another three years before it opens up for operation. Tower sees this as a negative to the new reconstruction.

"My only complaint about the rebuild of Brodie Oaks is how long it's going to take, so I won't really get to use it for a while," Tower said. "Also there's going to be a lot of construction which is never really fun. But I think the positive effects still outweigh the negative."

Despite the grievances, Brodie Oaks is still considered "the most environmentally sensitive project of its scale currently planned in the city" according to TOWERS Reality, a real estate brokerage in Austin. Gillfillan recognizes how vital it was that the development team aimed to meet their objectives and create something unique.

"Meeting the highest environmental standards was really important," Gillfillan said. "And also really starting to think, 'how can this large new development really be forward thinking when it comes to things like zero carbon, zero water, in this development of the future?'"

Brodie Oaks plans to be open for operation by the year 2027. For more information regarding the project, visit their website at [brodieoaksredevelopment.com](http://brodieoaksredevelopment.com).

# Climate Change Threatens Austin Gardeners

TITA GONZALES  
LEAH LASHUS | staff writers

Many Texans enjoy the pastime of gardening: beautifying their lawn, growing their own produce, and giving back to the community. While Texas has always had a hot climate, temperatures have recently reached all-time highs, leaving plants—and their owners—hoping to find ways of adapting to climate change, according to KXAN.

Neighborhoods in Texas are bonding together to help combat the heat and become more sustainable, and often use social media to communicate. Yogesh Sharma is the CEO of Britehoods, an app that allows neighbors to help communities practice eco-consciousness. Sharma lives sustainably by maintaining a large personal garden that produces a wide variety of seasonal fruits and vegetables, and through this, he has learned a great deal about growing practices to work around climate change in Austin.

"As temperatures have gotten more extreme, with greater fluctuations, it has become harder to grow with seeds," Sharma said. "Seedlings are more fragile and sudden changes in weather can stunt their growth."

Seeds have been genetically modified for a plethora of reasons, including having a high-temperature tolerance, according to the National Health Institute. And while genetic modification can be helpful, it also carries some risks.

"Non-GMO seeds have become harder to grow as well," Sharma said. "The warm season is getting longer, shortening the potential for winter crops."

Some people fear that genetically modified seeds can host allergies, destroy biodiversity, and be potentially toxic, according to the Center for Food Safety and the Canadian Biotechnology Action Network. Sharma discussed the many techniques to help plants thrive during the heat without resorting to GMOs which can be just as effective.

"Plant at the right time at the beginning

of the season," Sharma said. "Till and enrich soil before planting. Water once a day at least. Plant earlier than usual, [and] grow seedlings indoors first to give them a better chance to survive the heat."

The summer of 2023 was the hottest in Austin's history, dating back to 1942, according to KXAN. Austin's summer temperature has risen 2.4 degrees in the last century, making it difficult to grow produce.

"[I plant] tomatoes, peppers, watermelons, melons and herbs," Sharma said. "This summer was so hot that despite all that, a lot of plants did not survive."

Plants are not the only organisms affected by the rising temperatures during Texas summers. According to Monica Cong, the Planet Earth teacher and environmental surveyor, habitat loss due to climate change is a concern for many species.

"For the specific species that I surveyed, birds are very affected by climate change, some with their range or natural habitat, but it's again, dependent on species," Cong said. "For others that I've surveyed, a primary factor was habitat loss."

Since 2006, American commercial beekeepers have reported honey bee colony loss rates averaging 30% each winter, according to Ohio State University. These unprecedented rates are not only visible with honey bees, but also with other native animals.

"One survey I can think of was surveying for Kit Foxes in an orchard," Cong said. "We would go out and look for a habitat in or around the orchard used by endangered species, and if we saw a Kit Fox den for example, it's something that we would notify the farmer about so they could make sure to avoid that area within a safe distance so they're not impacting the animals."

Texas ranks first in the U.S. for total number of farms with just over 248,000 according to the USDA. In total, about 74% of land in Texas is agricultural land. This amount of land reduces the habitats of native plant and animal species. Land fragmentation, where

one farmer operates one or multiple divided plots of land, and habitat loss are some of the greatest risks to wildlife in Texas; they put approximately 800 fish species, 639 bird species, and 5,000 native plant species under threat, according to the Texas Agricultural Land Trust.

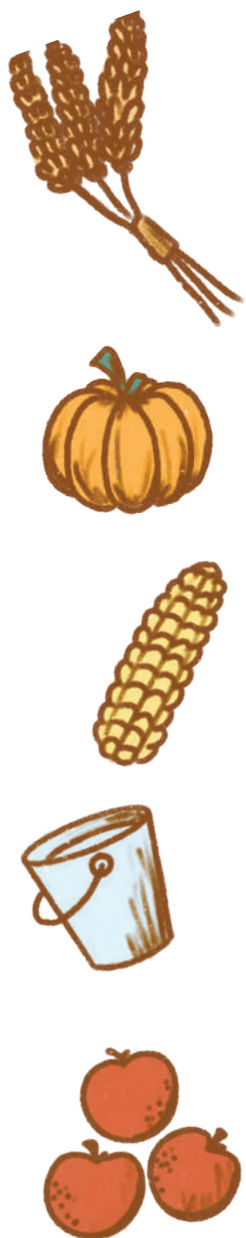
"I think the future of [agriculture] will have to take endangered species into account," Cong said. "There are regulations on the impact on endangered species, so landowners will have to take that into account when planning their activities and make adjustments to mitigate the impact to endangered species, which they have to do. I think that will continue, and working with landowners is critical for protecting endangered species, especially with those threatened by habitat loss and climate change."

Though farmers are faced with diminished biodiversity, they are finding ways to protect local ecosystems. Land surveyors are key to learning how human intervention affects the environment, according to Cong.

"[Surveys can be used to] see how they could mitigate any impacts on endangered species," Cong said. "If [surveyors] were using it for farming, or for horticulture, how they could continue to do that while avoiding the endangered species so that it didn't impact them."

Strategies like crop rotation, food forests, and cover-cropping have proven to be effective in reducing carbon emissions by organizations like the National Resources Defense Council. Despite the conditions Texas gardeners face daily, many remain passionate about protecting their hobbies, according to Sharma.

"It gives me personal joy to watch the plants grow," Sharma said. "We get fresh produce, which tastes better and is nutritionally richer. We save money. We can share with neighbors. We help the environment."



graphics by Amelia Coleman

## Collegeboard Sets a New Standard

PRATIK GURIJALA | staff writer

In September 2023, College Board made some changes to Advanced Placement (AP) classes to go into effect this year. The new AP rubrics affect the Document-Based Question (DBQ) and the Long-Essay Question (LEQ) sections of the AP World History, AP U.S. History, and AP European History exams. College Board also added Pre-calculus to its AP course offerings.

Maricruz Aguayo is an AP European History, AP World History, and AP Psychology teacher at LASA. According to Aguayo, these changes could mean higher scores for LASA students, but less of an understanding of their skills.

"The expectations remain the same, but the quantity of times an expectation must be demonstrated was altered," Aguayo said. "For example, on the DBQ, the College Board used to require that a student support their thesis with evidence from six of the seven documents provided; now, students must support their thesis with evidence from four of the seven documents."

Aguayo is unsure of how these new changes will affect students' ability to demonstrate their understanding of concepts. However, she predicts that it will be easier for LASA students to score better on the exam as a whole.

"It may become easier for LASA students to score better on the DBQ, which is 25% of the total test score, and LEQ, which is 15% of the total test score," Aguayo said.

Junior Dedeepya Rudraraju thinks that students with certain skill sets will do better than others. People who are better at writing will do better on the exams with the new rubric changes, according to Rudraraju.

"For people who normally do worse on the multiple choice section compared to the writing, they are now disadvantaged," Rudraraju said. "On the flip side, people who struggle with the writing portion will now get higher scores because the most difficult parts of the test were altered. [The AP test] is still not too easy because the entire test won't change, but it'll definitely lead to way more 4s and 5s on the test since people struggle with the DBQ and LEQ the most."

Rudraraju also expects students to spend more time studying for the multiple choice questions instead of the written portions. The multiple choice parts of the exam test general knowledge content whereas the DBQ and LEQ questions are more specialized.

"Students will now probably be less stressed about these parts and focus more on general knowledge for the multiple-choice," Rudraraju said.

Aguayo believes that the AP test will still be challenging. She thinks that the changes to the rubric aren't big enough to drastically change people's perception of the test.

"The test will remain challenging," Aguayo said. "Remember, two parts of the test, multiple choice and short-answer questions, remain entirely unchanged. While the scoring is altered, the rigor of the assessment is the same: students still will not know what any of the specific topics/prompts of the short answer questions, DBQ or LEQ, are. In addition, they will still have a set amount of time in which to complete written responses for all of these prompts."

Junior Kirithi Korattur agrees that the changes to the AP rubrics aren't big enough to change the way colleges perceive the AP exam. She believes that the AP exam is still difficult for students.

"I think on a larger scale, the changes to the rubric won't make too large of a difference on how the AP exam is perceived," Korattur said. "History APs are still difficult in that they require students to be able to remember and analyze historical events through different lenses, and even with the changes to the rubric, the DBQ still tests for these skills."

Both students and teachers are not exactly sure why the College



It may become easier for LASA students to score better on the DBQ, which is 25% of the total test score, and LEQ, which is 15% of the total test score.

- MARICRUZ AGUAYO,  
TEACHER



Board decided to change the rubric. Aguayo believes that it could be because of the previous level of difficulty of the test.

"The College Board must have felt that some of the expectations for the DBQ especially were too rigorous given the time restrictions of the timed essays," Aguayo said. "The LEQ changes aren't too much of a surprise; they simply standardize and publicize what was often expressed as expectations during the annual reading, which is when all AP essays are scored."

Similar to Aguayo, Rudraraju is unsure of why changes were made to the AP exam rubrics. She suspects it may be to increase passing rates.

"I honestly have no clue. It was very sudden and surprised a lot of teachers," Rudraraju said. "I'm guessing it's primarily because the old requirements were hard to meet within the allocated time for the exam and they want to increase AP passing rates."

Aguayo believes that even with the changes to the AP rubric, teachers won't have to change too much of what they are teaching. This is because the content required for the AP exams hasn't been altered.

"The rubric changes do not really change how teachers will approach teaching the content at all; it will change how we score student essays," Aguayo said. "For example, the AP World History teachers have developed a 20-point DBQ rubric to help students better understand the various expectations. The first few times students write a timed DBQ for us, they'll be scored on the 20-point rubric, which of course corresponds to the College Board 7-point rubric."

Rudraraju agrees with Aguayo on this topic. Rudraraju also believes that teachers are frustrated with the changes made to the rubric because they may deprive students of crucial writing skills.

"The actual content isn't changed so they aren't forced to leave anything out, but teachers are frustrated because the exam is primarily a writing and analysis test and they're making it significantly easier," Rudraraju said. "This means students probably won't develop the crucial writing skills they would have benefited from."

The effects of these adjustments to AP classes will be seen in May 2024 as LASA students take their official AP exams.

## Austin Organizations Against Algae

### Lady Bird Lake Pollution Continues, Unsafe to Swim

MARGOT MORGAN | staff writer

On a hot summer day, Lady Bird Lake can be seen full of paddle boarders, kayakers, and rowers, but no swimmers. Lady Bird Lake is a reservoir of the Colorado River, which passes through downtown Austin and acts as an important source of water for recreational purposes and drinking. However, some regions of the river, such as Lady Bird Lake, are home to pollution and toxic algae. Many organizations, such as Austin Water, Keep Austin Beautiful, and the Water Environment Association of Texas (WEAT) have been taking steps to save the river.

Jay Porter is an Environmental Conservation Division Manager at Austin Water Special Services, and he handles the industrial wastes that get treated to go out into the Colorado River. According to Porter, swimming is prohibited in the river when the algae, specifically cyanobacteria, which produces toxins, blooms.

"That particular kind of [algae] has a toxicity to it," Porter said. "So it can make a dog or a cat sick or ill or even die. It makes a human ill also, but we're bigger animals, so the toxicity isn't going to be an immediate problem to a person like with a small dog."

Matias Pasch is the Operations Coordinator of WEAT, a nonprofit organization with the mission to educate and raise awareness on the importance of clean water. One threat to clean water is the toxic algae, which Pasch explained feeds off of the nutrients brought into the water.

"The factor that has the main influence on how hospitable the water is is the available nutrients," Pasch said. "Because if you have high nutrient content in there, it's just fertilizing the ground, and there's going to be some kind of growth that happens. Some organisms are going to take advantage of the nitrogen and phosphorus present in the water and use that as fuel essentially."

Brent Bellinger is a clinic ecologist with the Austin Watershed Protection Department. Bellinger explained that most of the nutrients that go into the Colorado River are from fertilizers and septic systems, which are wastewater treatment systems.

"There's a lot of sediment that's being washed into the Colorado River," Bellinger said. "And those sediments generally contain nutrients. It could be because of fertilizers, it could be because of some septic. It could be because of animal waste, human waste, and other things. So when all those sediments come in, those nutrients then can become available to fuel the algae growth."

Austin Water has been trying to treat its water to make sure it's safe to be released back into the Colorado River. This is to ensure the river's ecological balance and maintain the water quality for users downstream.

"The nutrients from house water isn't an issue with the way we treat



Treating wastewater and sewage, and making sure that the discharge downstream is clean, has saved more human lives than any other public health intervention like medicine or medical innovation. None of that has had as profound an impact on the rates of disease and avoidable deaths than treating wastewater has.

- MATIAS PASCH, OPERATIONS  
COORDINATOR AT THE WATER  
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSOCIATION  
OF TEXAS (WEAT)



it," Porter said. "We treat the water to a higher standard to discharge it back to the Colorado River."

Treating wastewater and sewage is an important aspect of public health and infrastructure. It has played a crucial role in reducing waterborne diseases and improving community well-being.

"Treating wastewater and sewage, and making sure that the discharge downstream is clean, has saved more human lives than any other public health intervention like medicine or medical innovation," Pasch said. "None of that has had as profound an impact on the rates of disease and avoidable deaths than treating wastewater has."

Pasch clarifies that changing established habits and attitudes often requires time, education, and community engagement. In the case of waterways, the challenge is harder because these areas are often used for purposes other than serving as a source of water.

"Social engineering and behavioral change are hard," Pasch said. "And as long as waterways are our amenities and people take their dogs to the parks, [and] by the creeks, there is a certain amount of danger inherent to that."

Bellinger had a more optimistic perspective on the matter. He believes that if the community can work together to help our waterways, we could reverse our past mistakes.

"So we're looking at different criteria that we could put in place," Bellinger said. "We can't have nutrients over these thresholds, otherwise, things go downhill. Things could get worse or things could get better. More people could become aware, more people could become conscientious. More people could do their part. We can slow [damage] down, maybe reverse it. It's up to the community at large."

According to Porter, Austin Water is creating a plan to figure out how to supply clean, fresh water. Porter said that keeping the water clean during the distribution is very important to Austin Water.

"You're always watching what's going on," Porter said. "We also do water quality testing. We have a water quality lab that goes out and tests both our distribution system and surface water issues."

Bellinger sums up what should be in the mindset of many people when trying to save the environment. He emphasizes the importance of individual actions and collective efforts to combat environmental challenges.

"It's just a matter of scale," Bellinger said. "The mantra that a lot of scientists have is to think globally, and act locally so that what we do here will scale up and have big impacts down the road."

## THE SKINNY

### Global News

November

Flooding in Somalia has killed at least 100 people and displaced more than half a million people, according to ABC. Heavy rain has been hitting Somalia and other countries in East Africa since October, but the weather phenomenon El Nino, which occurs every two to seven years, has recently exacerbated the flooding. Affected cities include Beledweyne, where 90% of residents have been displaced. According to the BBC, the United Nations has released a \$25 million humanitarian aid package to Somalia in order to help alleviate the impacts of the flooding.

November

One of the five men convicted of murdering Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya in 2006 has received a pardon from the Russian government. Politkovskaya's coverage of the Russian war in Chechnya was highly critical of President Vladimir Putin, which likely led to her murder. In 2014, Sergei Khadzhikurbanov was sentenced to 20 years in prison for the attack, but has now been pardoned after serving out a six-month military contract. The Russian defense ministry has been recruiting prisoners in the country to fight in the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

### National News

November

After striking for four months, Sag-Aftra members have reached a deal with the Alliance of Motion Picture and TV Producers. During the strike, the 160,000 members of Sag-Aftra were unable to work, stopping work on films worldwide. Members were fighting for better working conditions and pay as well as artificial intelligence regulations.

November

A newly released climate report from scientists across U.S. government agencies says the effects of climate change are becoming increasingly worrisome. The Fifth National Climate Assessment is released every five years and is compiled by 14 different national agencies, including the EPA and NASA. The newest edition of the report, issued in mid-November, tracks the effects of climate change across the country from wildfires to droughts and heatwaves.

Nov. 14

The U.S. House of Representatives passed a temporary spending bill on November 14 to stop the threat of a government shutdown. The bill replenishes funds, which were set to expire three days later, for federal organizations. New House Speaker Mike Johnson was able to garner bipartisan support for the bill, but still faced some opposition from those on the far right. The bill now moves to the U.S. Senate for approval before it can be signed into law by President Biden.

Nov. 24

In a surprise announcement on November 24, the board of artificial intelligence company OpenAI, fired their CEO, Sam Altman. The company made a name for itself last year with the launch of its advanced artificial intelligence chatbot, ChatGPT. Investors and other employees at the company were caught off guard by the announcement, after which 800 OpenAI employees signed a petition to say they would leave the company as well. Ultimately, Altman was rehired on Tuesday and several changes to the board of the company were made.

### State News

Nov. 7

In the Texas state constitutional election, voters passed 13 of the 14 proposed amendments, rejecting only Proposition 13 which would have raised the mandatory retirement age of state judges and justices from 75 to 79. Of the 13 propositions passed, voters were most in support of Prop 9, with 84% of voters approving of a raise for retired teachers. Another highly supported proposition was Prop 4, with 83% of voters approving of the state spending \$18 billion to cut tax rates for school districts and lower property tax rates for homeowners and businesses, according to the Texas Tribune.

Nov. 20

Texas State University officials announced that the university will host the first presidential debate on Sept. 16, 2024. Texas State University, located in San Marcos, will be the first school in Texas to host a presidential debate. Later debates will be held on Sept. 25 at Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania, Oct. 1 at Virginia State University in Petersburg, Virginia, and the final debate on Oct. 9 at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City.

### Local News

Nov. 15

Following a strike in Houston, employees at a Pavement thrift store in Austin went on strike to advocate for higher wages, health insurance, sick leave, and more. Strikers gathered in front of the Guadalupe St. location chanting "Pavement don't pay rent." This is in response to Pavement's hourly wage being \$14 per hour, according to Spectrum News. According to the City of Austin, the living wage as of October is \$20.80. The workers advocated for a base pay of \$16 per hour.

# the LIBERATOR

LBJ High School • Austin, Texas • Volume 7 • Issue 5

LASYA SANGANA | student life editor

Founded in 1973, the Liberator has been on a mission to provide fresh, reliable news brought by students, and is now celebrating their 50th anniversary as a publication. In the past 50 years, the Liberator has evolved in the visual formatting and the content it covers.

Former editor-in-chief Eli Durst, who was on the Liberator staff from 2004 to 2007, mentions that during his time on the Liberator, there were only five sections: News, Sports, Features, Commentary, and Entertainment. Now, the Liberator has seven sections. According to Durst, designing the Liberator was much harder during his time because the team used early versions of iMacs to work, but it was still very fulfilling.

"I mean, it was amazing," Durst said. "It was definitely a central part of my high school experience. I'm sure you know it's like a part of your identity. It was a ton of work, especially when we were on deadline, and it was definitely a huge commitment, but one that meant a lot and provided a lot in return."

Additionally, Durst mentioned that during his time on the Liberator, he and other editors would stay up until 2 a.m. in the newspaper classroom for late nights, days dedicated to editors staying after school to finalize stories and designs to get the newspaper ready for printing. Aside from the dedication Durst said was involved in the Liberator, he also reminisced that a key part of the growth of the Liberator and the experiences it provided was from the past Liberator advisor Janet Elbom who held the newspaper to high standards.

"We were one of the top papers in the country," Elbom said. "It's just very motivating, you know, after all the time you spend on it, that somebody really appreciates that. I taught the team how to understand cooperation, because in everything in life you're not going to be successful if you don't have cooperation. But also I taught the team how to communicate in writing, how in order to get your information you have to be able to come up with good questions. And interviewing a person isn't just getting answers to your questions. It's learning about that person. You have to be a good listener, and just develop, you know, self-confidence and empathy. When [journalists] take those communication skills with them, they can use them for the rest of their lives in whatever they do."

Elbom pointed out that teaching students to be journalists went far beyond just teaching them to write, and also included educating

students on how to deal with hard issues, topics, and experiences. She recounted that she saw students take away this core idea throughout their own years on the Liberator with hard interviews or issues, one even being an interview with former U.S. President Lyndon Baines Johnson's (LBJ) wife, Lady Bird Johnson, after he passed away.

"When the school had its dedication, LBJ had died not too long before that," Elbom said. "We interviewed Lady Bird Johnson and

“I learned a lot about the history of LASA... when I was there, we were still in the LBJ building. We were on the top floor, and they were on the bottom floor. So I really went through that issue surrounding that. I wouldn't have paid attention to those types of things without journalism.”

- NIA ORAKWUE, FORMER EDITOR IN CHIEF (2020)

We took her to the journalism room at LBJ [High School]. My editor was there, my assistant yearbook editor, and then a photographer. And then the Secret Service was there. It is a story I tell when I teach interviewing because my students made her cry. They were pulling up his speeches, and she got so full of emotion. And they kind of looked at me like, 'oh, shit, what did we do?'"

Another former editor-in-chief, Nia Orakwue, who was on the Liberator from 2017 to 2021, carries a similar message saying

she believes her time on the Liberator and being a journalist had a big impact on her. She still carries this time with her at college and stated that the community awareness journalism gave her is a valuable skill.

"I think I really loved and I still really love journalism and how much community awareness it forced me to have," Orakwue said. "It made me pay more attention, and I learned a lot about the history of LASA and about how when I was there, we were still in the LBJ building. We were on the top floor, and they were on the bottom floor. So I really went through that issue surrounding that. I wouldn't have paid attention to those types of things without journalism."

Ence Morse, who was on the Liberator from 2015 to 2019 and a former editor-in-chief, also felt that the Liberator gave her a greater interest and context for surrounding issues. For example, she mentions that she felt she was able to address the LBJ and LASA split with more context and statistics because she was on the Liberator.

"There was this big issue about the social divide between LBJ and LASA," Morse said. "The survey found that I think some really disproportionate number of LASA students didn't have any friends at LBJ. I got 250 responses just like that, which was pretty good."

I mean, there was this whole big double talk about it, and I loved working on that. It was very exciting to sort of be able to put words and figures and analysis to the situation that we were experiencing, and students are able to report on that wall."

Her experience covering the LASA and LBJ split taught Morse how to be more engaged in her community. She believes that student journalists and publications like the Liberator can be an important driving force for future change.

"It's very important to have student journalists," Morse said. "It's important to have a student voice in places and have them show up to things like CAC (Community Advisory Committee) meetings and taking notes at school board meetings and just being a presence in the community. It makes us engaged. We hold people to account. We're not just going to leave this all to the adults."

Along with the LBJ split, Orakwue also spoke on how the Liberator was affected during COVID-19. According to her, all the meetings were on Zoom, the newspapers were shipped directly to people's houses, and she and her co-editor-in-chief Malena Heineman also had to shoulder more responsibilities when it came to managing the Liberator.

## Where They Are Now...

LASA Liberator Editors/Advisor


**PRESS PASS**



**Eli Durst**  
currently: Assistant Photography Professor @ UT Austin

photo courtesy of Eli Durst


**PRESS PASS**



**Nia Orakwue**  
currently: Writer for the Harvard Crimson

photo courtesy of Nia Orakwue

**PRESS PASS**



**Janet Elbom**  
currently: Retired

photo courtesy of Janet Elbom

**PRESS PASS**



**Micah Hauser**  
currently: Story Editor @ The New Yorker

photo courtesy of Micah Hauser

**PRESS PASS**



**Ence Morse**  
currently: Data Journalist @ Washington Post

photo courtesy of Ence Morse

# THROUGH THE YEARS

“All of our meetings were on Zoom, which was not the most fun,” Orakwue said. “It kind of made it difficult to like, get people to keep people engaged and to keep tabs on people’s work. In those meetings, especially at the beginning, it also meant that Malena and I did basically all of the design which also increased our workload, but because we were at home I feel like it was okay, it was manageable...the types of things we reported on were different because obviously the world is changing and this really radical way. We definitely made it work and I’m proud of that time.”

According to former news editor Micah Hauser, who graduated from LASA in 2007, the split from LBJ also affected the Liberator’s policies and what it covered. One of Hauser’s favorite aspects of covering news was the feeling of excitement he felt to conduct interviews and have a degree of rights to the school’s information.

“We felt very kind of in control of what we were doing,” Hauser said. “It was just cool to preside over documents that then got distributed to everyone in the school. I remember that it was fun to be able to go to a class to go do interviews, and be professionally obligated when you’re wearing your Liberator hat to be nosy and relentless about getting information, and also creative in how you are going to tell those stories and lay them out on a page. And I remember just sort of the feeling of having fun being able to ask a bunch of, like, administrators questions about things that you otherwise would not be able to ask them.”

Combining his experience on the Liberator with his experience being an editor on The New Yorker, Hauser’s main advice to journalists is to remember that when interviewing a source, it’s not a violation to ask for information. If a journalist doesn’t have confidence when asking for information, the source will pick up on that and will make the interview more challenging.

“You should sort of approach your reporting like you’re kind of building the stories with a sense of exuberance and entitlement to information that the public deserves to know about,” Hauser said. “End that feeling of ‘oh, I don’t want to bother people’, or ‘I’m like a nuisance to them’ or something. I think sources often will pick up on that reticence in a reporter. And so if you just kind of come in with a huge smile on your face, and act as though you’re entitled to this information, which means you often are, I think that that goes a long way in kind of setting the tone of a challenging interview.”

For Hauser, his experience on the Liberator came down to the community the Liberator provided and the experience of creating something together. Similar to Hauser, Elbom mentioned that being on the Liberator was about the community they were able to impact through their news.

“It’s just knowing those kids whose lives you touched,” Elbom said. “Even though it might be a very brief time in the scheme of things that you have touched their lives in, in some way they take that with them. And that’s the true reward. I think it’s kind of the long-term effect because I’m sitting here 11 years after retiring, I did this for 40 years. And I can kind of see the big picture. Not to say things weren’t stressful and all of that, but it was great fun. That’s what I would say, it was great fun, and I enjoyed pretty much every minute of it.”



## LATE NIGHT CRAVINGS

Every issue before publication, editors spend time after school anytime from 4-8 making final edits to the paper. Here are the snacks that Liberator editors have enjoyed through the years.



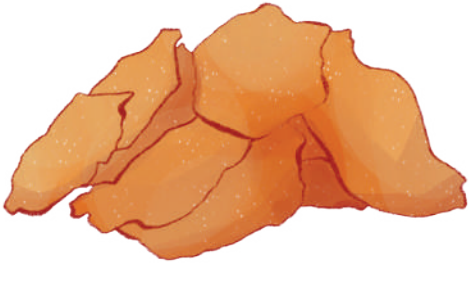
pizza bagels



sour patch kids



popsicles



bbq chips

graphics by Kayla Le

graphics by Kayla Le

## TEA Monitorship Threatens AISD

ETHAN STERN | staff writer

Last March, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) announced a conservatorship in Houston Independent School District (HISD) after the district consistently had low performance in student test scores. This stripped HISD's elected board members of their power, and TEA's new governing team became responsible for setting budgets and district-wide policies—a fate the Austin Independent School District (AISD) is at risk of facing.

As a last-ditch effort to avoid a conservatorship, on Sep. 25, 2023, AISD accepted a monitorship that will allow for TEA to monitor the district's special education department to ensure AISD is meeting all the requirements. This will allow the TEA to monitor AISD's progress and prevent AISD from falling under a conservatorship that grants the TEA the ability to direct staff and resources. The monitorship placed two monitors over the AISD special education department to oversee the completion of the special education evaluations, which allow students to have personalized education programs accustomed to their needs and ensure the staff members undergo extensive training.

This monitorship stems from the Individual Discipline with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) which has been in effect since 1975 and requires public schools to provide a free and appropriate public education to students with disabilities, according to the TEA. Under this act, a procedure is set for how the district is required to evaluate a student in order to create an Individualized Education Program (IEP), which outlines the student's needs and develops a personalized program accordingly. Parents and educators have a right to request an evaluation under Child Find, a federal requirement that asks schools to identify students with special needs, and file a report within 45 days.

According to Jacob Reach, the AISD Chief of Governmental Relations and Board Services, an IEP is key to providing the help needed for the students. The first step to developing an IEP is identifying the student and evaluating the student's needs.

"Evaluating [a student] tells us that they have these needs, and we believe that doing these other things will help address those needs," Reach said. "We recognize that they may need extra support, and then we have a timeline to have that complete."

This monitorship was offered as an alternative to the conservatorship, which AISD was

concerned would have similar outcomes to the HISD's conservatorship. According to an anonymous Central Texas teacher who has been teaching for around 10 years, though a monitorship still places a TEA-chosen monitor over the district, a conservatorship would be vastly different.

"The monitorship allows the school board to still have control," the teacher said. "So the monitorship is way less restrictive than the conservatorship that was on the table."

The TEA and monitors require that teachers, counselors, administrators, and AISD staff partake in special education training that will strengthen all the special education required information. Cristina Torres, a counselor at LASA, found this training to be a good opportunity to refresh these topics for everyone.

"I think for a lot of people it might have been a while since they've done [training], and it's helpful to review it," Torres said. "So while it's not necessarily new information for me right now, it's a good reminder of things to make sure that we're doing."

Although the training is not challenging, according to Torres, there are still obstacles the staff has to overcome, the main one being the time required to finish this training. Even though there are professional development days to cover training modules, the staff members participating may also have to juggle answering emails or grading assignments lest they fall behind.

"One challenge sometimes is just making sure to make the time for it because I do want to do it with integrity," Torres said. "And I want to do it right for the district. So [it is] finding the time to do that."

If all of the required AISD staff complete their modules, this could avert a conservatorship, which would take more control away from the district. As a former employee of the TEA, Reach can understand the importance the TEA is placing in the monitorship and having special education modules.

"[The] TEA is responsible for delivering and ensuring free and appropriate education for all Texas kids," Reach said. "No matter where they're at, they have that responsibility. I recognize that part of that responsibility is built into the Texas Constitution that requires the system to develop education."

With the monitors having recently started and AISD staff working towards completing training modules, the estimation of this monitorship is at least two years, according to Reach.

## Student-Led Service Projects

GORDON STREBER | staff writer

There are service projects done by student-led organizations at LASA that give students an opportunity to volunteer and improve their communities. Newer clubs, such as Helping Hands and Bake a Difference, and older organizations such as the National Honor Society (NHS) have all started to provide more chances for service hours in the LASA community. Many members of such clubs enjoy the new opportunities for service projects.

Freshman Kate Wright, a new member of Bake a Difference, enjoys the club because of the welcoming environment. She originally joined the club for baking and additionally got an opportunity to give back to the community, which she feels enriched her experience.

"It makes me happy to help other people, and I also love baking, so it was a good compromise," Wright said. "More people should be helping out by donating and giving anything that helps. I think that donating time, patience, and peace of mind is the most valuable in terms of volunteering versus donating. Volunteering is less about money and goods, and rather more time."

Wright participates in weekly projects by either baking or organizing donation events at the club's meetings. The donations go towards whatever charity the club chooses each week, like Austin Pets Alive and Keep Austin Beautiful.

"We do take a couple of weeks to figure out what kind of project we want to do, and then as soon as we figure out where we wanna donate, we decide on who wants to bake and who wants to volunteer to sell," Wright said. "We bake, select charities that we are passionate about, and we also volunteer at the tables to run the whole thing."

Freshman Jack Lovelace, a member of Bake a Difference, is always willing to volunteer and believes that finding time to donate in any way possible is something that everyone should take the time to do. He believes this is something that is lacking at LASA, and with this belief, he takes initiative and volunteers with multiple service clubs each week.

"I don't think we have enough volunteers here at LASA," Lovelace said. "People should help in any way they can, like if you're good at a certain subject, tutoring peers is an option. Organizing student groups here to go

outside of LASA to help out around town is always helpful. There isn't anything specific that matters the most in volunteering, so anything anyone can do to contribute is more than enough."

Lovelace was adamant about the fact that Bake a Difference finds volunteer work crucial to building a strong community. He thinks communities built by service projects are greater than ones without them, particularly schools, and that these new developments in the community are strengthening LASA.

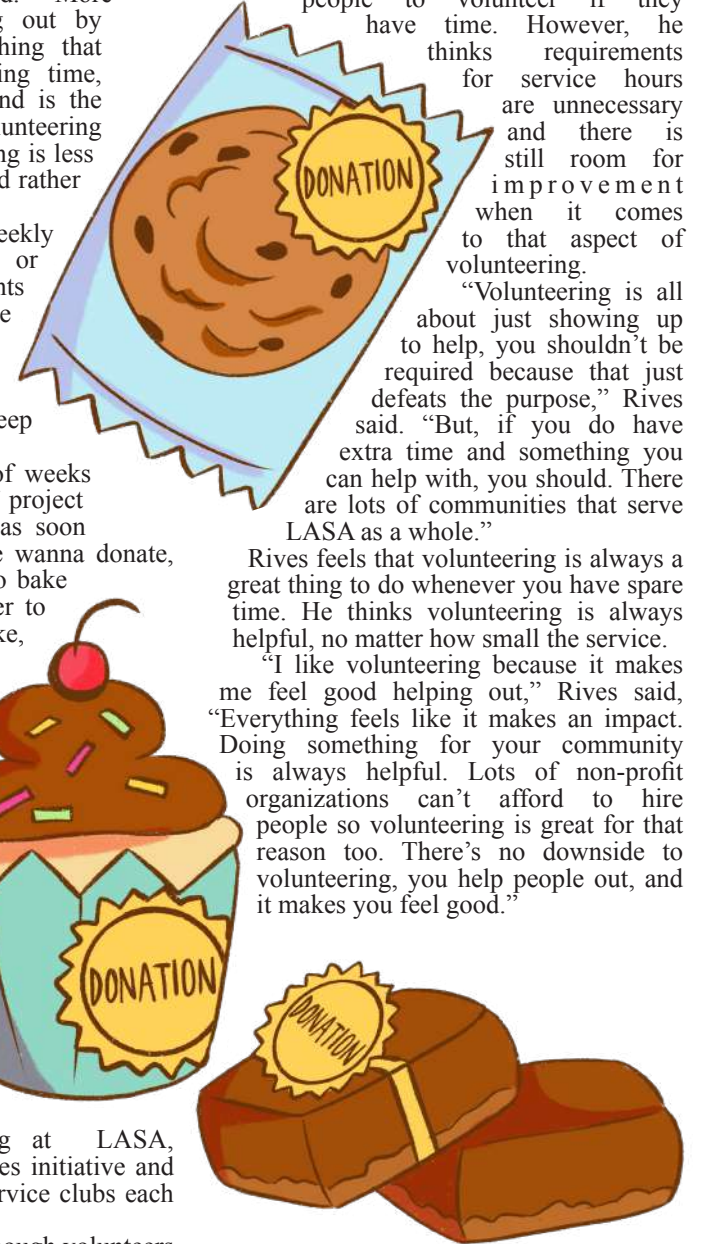
"I feel like it's important that LASA has a great community, and that we need to put our effort into making a stronger one here," Lovelace said. "It's a big school, and some people can get lost in it without a community to be there for them. The more we help each other, the better the school will be."

Senior Mateo Rives, an Environmental Club member, avidly encourages people to volunteer if they have time. However, he thinks requirements for service hours are unnecessary and there is still room for improvement when it comes to that aspect of volunteering.

"Volunteering is all about just showing up to help, you shouldn't be required because that just defeats the purpose," Rives said. "But, if you do have extra time and something you can help with, you should. There are lots of communities that serve LASA as a whole."

Rives feels that volunteering is always a great thing to do whenever you have spare time. He thinks volunteering is always helpful, no matter how small the service.

"I like volunteering because it makes me feel good helping out," Rives said. "Everything feels like it makes an impact. Doing something for your community is always helpful. Lots of non-profit organizations can't afford to hire people so volunteering is great for that reason too. There's no downside to volunteering, you help people out, and it makes you feel good."



graphics by Asha Rountree

## SAT Trades Out No. 2 Pencils

### College Board Moves Standardized Test Online

HARRISON CHAMBERS | staff writer

The College Board announced in early 2022 that the SAT testing format will change from a physical test to an online one starting in 2024. The current paper and pencil multiple-choice test will no longer be offered, giving way to a modern-day digital format that aims to be more efficient by removing intermediate steps in the process. With this change comes many questions from students such as what aspects of the test have changed, how it will affect the students, and what this change will mean for future testing.

The new digital format will enable the College Board to use an adaptive testing approach, allowing for a more personalized assessment. The new format is intended to achieve a more accurate evaluation of the student's knowledge and skills. According to junior Helena Donovan, the new SAT format will be very similar to the new PSAT format.

"The SAT is using the same format as the PSAT," Donovan said. "For instance, on a math-based section if you do really well on the first part, it recalibrates and gives you harder questions. So to get the highest score possible you would have to do really well on all the previous parts."

Donovan also expressed a unique drawback of the change that will impact each student's test-taking style or ability. She points out how some students may need to alter or improve their test-taking strategies.

"It is going to make certain parts of the test easier and maybe certain parts more difficult," Donovan said. "Some students are not really good test takers, even if they are really good academically. This might come into play with other types of students taking the tests. Some just really need to be able to underline things when reading through passages, and not being able to do that by hand might make it more difficult for some students to comprehend."

Junior Frogby Sachs commented on how the online format allows for many benefits while also creating new problems. They shared similar concerns about the technical impact and fairness improvement of the new format.

"I'm very worried about tech glitches, especially because many of us saw that in the first-ever digital PSAT," Sachs said. "But I think the test will be more fair digitally since a literal computer is

administering the test for you. There's no way to go back and change your answers from previous sections."

This new change is substantial and is causing a variety of thoughts among other students as well. As expressed by Donovan, many students were initially opposed to the idea of transitioning to an online format.

"I was initially a little upset because there are a lot of perks about doing something on paper," Donovan said. "You can underline things, and sometimes, it's just a better feeling to write something or just read something when it's actually physical. So that kicked me a little bit."

Junior Janani Easwar believes that though there are drawbacks to the new format like its adaptable nature, it will make standardized testing more efficient and accurate online. She considers it a sign that the future of standardized testing is and will continue to vastly change.

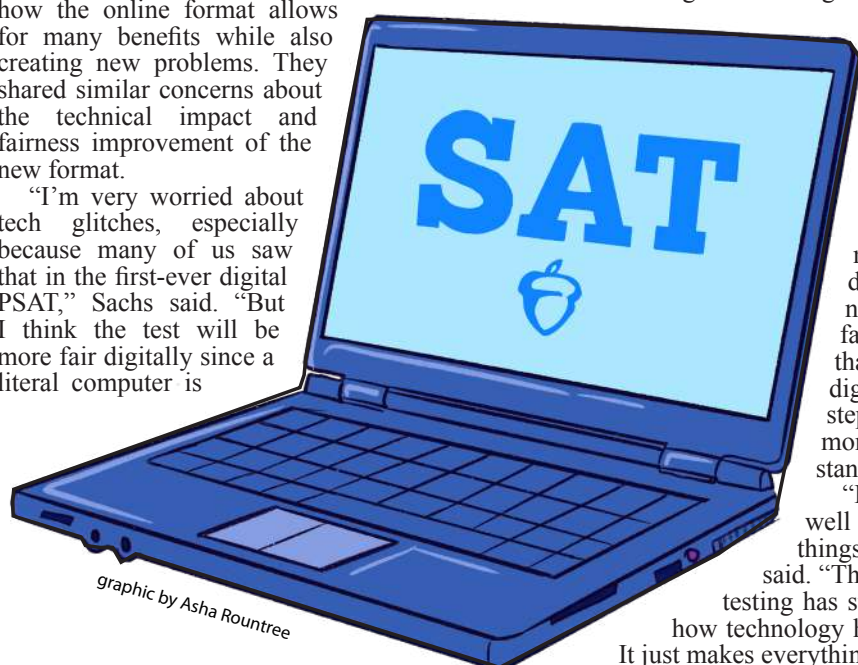
"The technology aspect is a huge change, as test administrators will have to get used to administering tests in a different format entirely," Easwar said. "Even more important, however, is that if online tests continue to be adaptive, standardized testing may begin to reflect more accurate scores and may be taken more seriously, refuting the popular idea that standardized tests don't accurately reflect the performance of people who take them."

Sachs concluded their thoughts on the digitized SAT format by elaborating on a positive outlook and the benefits included in it. These benefits consist of things like the importance of environmental adaptations and logistical improvements.

"A digital test format is a great leap forward in terms of environmental concerns—as the non-digital SAT uses lots of paper—and in terms of accessibility," Sachs said. "With a digital test, the test takers don't have to go to a testing site, and the test itself is more easily adaptable to specific needs such as large print or extended breaks."

In many industries such as healthcare and finance, much of the work has been transferred to a digital platform, and more digitization is expected moving forward, so the digitization of the SAT is not new. Considering all these factors, Donovan believes that shifting the SAT to a digital format is only a first step, and there are likely to be more changes in the future of standardized testing.

"I think if it seems to go really well in the next few years, most things will go online," Donovan said. "That is kinda how standardized testing has started to move forward, and how technology has started to move forward. It just makes everything a lot more efficient."



graphic by Asha Rountree

## StuCo: An Inside Look

LIVIA HALE | staff writer

Student council serves as a platform for students to voice their opinions, make positive changes, and contribute to the overall well-being of our school. According to members of student council, it encourages teamwork, helps students learn leadership skills, and takes charge of school activities and events.

Senior student council President Sofia Francis believes that student council is an activity that appeals to specific types of people due to the planning and organization skills it requires. Additionally, Francis finds that confidence is crucial when leading as president, but it's also important to recognize herself as a normal person while being assertive.

"I try hard to walk the line between assertive and understanding," Francis said. "People will respond to me the way I address them. Besides that, I find that having thick skin is pretty helpful as Student Council President. People often criticize our projects as if there weren't real students behind them, or blame us for things far out of our control. It's tempting to just be rude in response, but it helps nothing, so I just have to suck it up."

Similarly to how Francis believes the ability to stay organized and be confident in her decisions is an important skill, Isabel Liu, the sophomore student council president, also feels that her organization skills are what make her a good president. Liu believes that student council is a group effort and is about learning how to lead and make decisions together.

"LASA student council positions all kind of do the same thing," Liu said. "It's all a group effort. It just differentiates between the different grade

levels. The seniors typically do more than the freshmen...high school is the time to build up your resume and learn new skills and student council is the perfect chance to do those."

Among other responsibilities like communicating with the administration and organizing fundraisers, student council is in charge of running school activities and events like homecoming and prom. According to Francis, for these events to succeed, task designation and flexibility is a crucial skill for the students to learn, especially for group tasks such as elections and meeting plans that transcend their specific roles.

"For the most part, in student council, the role titles don't matter too much," Francis said. "Except for the treasurer, who will always be in charge of sales analysis in senior year, the president is in charge of quite literally everything. Like running our weekly meetings, having an agenda drawn up, and assigning our multiple tasks to different members."

The freshman vice-president, Camille Schuppe, believes in the importance of LASA student council and its role in decision-making, organizing events, and speaking for the entire student body. What drew Schuppe to the role in the first place was the chance to improve her leadership abilities. She has learned to appreciate the challenges that come with her role.

"I thought that it would be fun and a good way to meet new people and learn leadership skills," Schuppe said. "I think it's a great way to connect with other people and it's challenging in a very fun way... I've really gotten closer to other people and I love being able to plan events. It's stressful but all worth it in the end."



## AISD

## Recycling

## Practices



from page 1

graphics by Amelia Coleman

Junior Nishtha Verma, who is also part of the AISD environmental stewardship advisory committee, agrees with Nava that there is a lack of education about recycling. She takes it upon herself to propose solutions for LASA by advocating for more education around recycling and waste reduction.

"I think that it would be beneficial to give an advisory lesson to everybody," Verma said, "because it needs to be brought to the attention of our students that it's important. I've never heard anybody saying, this goes in compost, or I suppose in trash. So people just put it [the trash] wherever."

Nava believes that the lack of education about recycling is a problem that goes beyond people's time at LASA and is an issue in their daily lives as well. Similarly to Echeverria, she feels that the lack of recycling is a result of the poor environmental management of AISD.

"AISD needs to take accountability for its lack of effort in making its sustainable practices accessible," Nava said. "We still don't see enough initiative to see any fast-paced change. This is also because caring about the environment isn't prioritized as much as other issuers, and when it is, it's not done well."

An idea that Echeverria has found useful when encouraging students to recycle is green teams, where students will have the opportunity to band together and think of innovative solutions to implement in schools. She explained that green teams can encourage students to be more involved in the environmental challenges in their school.

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**NISHTHA VERMA, MEMBER OF AISD ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP ADVISORY COMMITTEE**



"Green teams are very helpful because they give opportunities to many students," Echeverria said, "and they have leadership roles to develop their skills. So they will practice and create ideas in what they consider to be the best way to lead the way in their school."

Along with making green teams, Echeverria believes that it is important to create a sense of belonging in the school community. According to her, the school belongs to the students and staff, and if they truly felt that, they would want to protect their school.

"As long as people don't feel that it belongs to them, they are not going to care the same for the school," Echeverria said. "That is sometimes the big barrier and why people litter here. Why? Because they think someone is paid to pick that up, but they are not here to pick up things like a waiter from the table of a restaurant."

Nava explained that a major reason students don't recycle is that students don't understand how to recycle and the consequences of not recycling. She hopes that in the future, AISD takes steps to raise the awareness needed for students to recycle.

"I only ever remember being taught about recycling in elementary school, even now, we're expected to know what to recycle when the process is a lot more intricate than people realize," Nava said. "Not everybody has the right education for that."

## Students Affected by Bus Driver Shortage

ELLINGTON TOUGH | staff writer

For the past year, mostly due to the effects of COVID-19, low pay and benefits, and lack of appreciation, Austin Independent School District (AISD) has been dealing with a school bus driver shortage. For over a year now, this has been something that has had a big impact on the LASA community, especially during student arrival and dismissal. This problem has been uniquely showcased at LASA due to its students coming every day from all across Austin.

Kris Hafezizadeh, the head of transportation for AISD, has felt the stress from the shortages due to the lasting effects of COVID-19, and managing them has become a large part of his job. This school year, the district raised salaries for the bus drivers, but that has not completely alleviated the problem.

"It was bad [the] last couple of years, especially after COVID," Hafezizadeh said. "You have a driver shortage, then you don't have a permanent driver on the same bus every day. And when you put a sub driver on a bus, they will not know the students, they will not know the area, they will not know other logistics and that will cause delays, late arrivals, and so on."



file graphic by Kayla Le

Sophomore Bouna Sakho explained how he was affected by the bus driver shortage when his bus started coming later this year and experiencing delays. It prevented him from doing as much homework as he would have been able to do otherwise.

"Usually the bus would come around 6:30, and it comes [at] 6:50 now," Sakho said. "And so I get to school around 7:40, 7:50ish...I didn't get much homework done because the bus came late...The past three days it's been like this. It's just been an issue."

Due to LASA being a magnet school, it uses a different bus system as its students come from all over Austin instead of just one area. Buses pick up both Kealing Middle School and LASA students early in the morning, first stopping at Kealing between 7 and 7:15 a.m. to drop students off, then continuing to LASA. As a result, LASA students must be picked up earlier and spend more time on the bus to account for the Kealing students.

"It was just a longer time on the bus ride, and I wanted to get homework done," Sakho said. "Last year, it was fine. I would come early and it would be just on time when I came, and it was a very peaceful ride. It was fast, it was quick. So, I got a lot of homework done last year."

The Texas government recaptured most of the money collected for AISD schools through taxes. Hafezizadeh mentions that the recapture of money from schools, in general, has been a controversial topic recently. Many people advocate against recapture being sent to the state, arguing that public schools need and deserve it more.

"We are the district in Texas that pays the highest recapture back to the state," Hafezizadeh said. "We get funding from the state every year, based on that, we are counted as a property-rich district, so the state takes part of that back to them so they can assist the districts that are not property-rich."

Last year, AISD paid back \$960 million to the state in recapture. According to Hafezizadeh, this number is disproportionately large because the formula being used to calculate recapture rates is outdated. This is part of the reason why bus drivers, and AISD staff in general, have low salaries compared to the cost of living in Austin, which is among the highest in the country.

"Austin now is the most expensive city in Texas,"

Hafezizadeh said. "The cost of living here is outrageous. Our teachers, all our other employees, they deserve more. When you buy new groceries, six, seven years ago it was 100 bucks on average, but now it costs about 200 bucks. So everything has almost doubled, but when you remain at the same wages, then you have stressed, unhappy employees."

This school year, however, AISD reacted to the shortage with a wage increase of 7% for all teachers and drivers. The raise helped ease the shortage as more people sent in applications giving AISD the capability to hire more bus drivers and allocate them around the district.

"This year is much, much better than previous years," Hafezizadeh said. "The reason for that is our district approved a nice increase of \$4 an hour for all employees. Also, our starting wage from \$21 starting this year went to \$25 an hour, plus the other benefits that the district provides for our employees. So we have been able to hire more, to receive more applications and things like that versus previous years."

Rae Hudson, a bus driver for AISD, often heard her coworkers talking about how bus driver shortages were a pre-existing problem. According to her, there was always somewhat of a shortage until the wage increases happened.

"The bus driver shortage was really big last year for our district," Hudson said. "This year it seems to be a bit alleviated, and I'm almost certain it's because of the wage increase. I would say that there's probably always been a shortage."

Texas has a public school system notorious for its low pay to staff, among other issues such as mental health and even school shootings. According to Hudson, part of the reason people don't want to be bus drivers is that they get little respect, though the job is very demanding.

"This is a job where it's very underappreciated," Hudson said. "Not a lot of people respect us. Even though we do hold a CDL [Commercial Driver's License], even though we go in for random drug testing and alcohol testing, even though every year we have to have a yearly physical, it's a thankless job."

## AISD Troubles with Funding Allocation and Budgeting

ETHAN STERN | staff writer

With impending budget reductions and jobs being cut, the Austin Independent School District's (AISD) budget may turn out to be unsustainable. Moreover, with the continuation of a budgeting system that draws money from high-valued property area districts to low ones, a sign of change with the current system may not be likely.

In Texas, school districts containing high-valued property usually depend on residents and property taxes to fund their schools. The state of Texas then distributes some of the money those districts put in to fund many other school districts with lower property values, which is called the Robin Hood system. This system, established in 1993, seeks to give equitable educational opportunities for all students by restricting the amount of money that higher-valued property area school districts spend on public education and earn through property taxes.

Although this money assists many underfunded school districts, district employees such as LASA principal Stacia Crescenzi, feel that the funding is not always used best for the purpose it was allocated towards.

"The state of Texas says it distributes that [money] to these other districts," Crescenzi said. "And yeah, we know some districts that get that money, but what goes in doesn't equal what goes out. And so then those tax dollars that were put there for education, the governor can use for anything, road projects, salary, like anything."

According to Ed Ramos, AISD's Chief Financial Officer, the amount being spent on this system has changed the district's budget over the years. With the district sending 56% of local tax collections back to the state, a 250% increase from 2016, this averages to over \$900 million. This, he claims, is "enough to fund another AISD." Although some districts need the funding distributed from the Robin Hood system, Ramos feels a change is needed in the formulas that determine the amount of money districts send. This amount is formulated by evaluating a

district's revenue from local property taxes, and if it surpasses what the state deems necessary for the school's programs and student categories for the district to function, it goes back to the state.

"In the formulas, [they should] reduce the amount that wealthy recapture districts send back to the state," Ramos said. "Because, right now, we're sending too much, and [they should] just reduce the overall burden on property-rich school districts."

In addition to not changing the formulas, the state has neglected to have a system to even review the formulas. This may result in an inadequate estimation of districts, according to Crescenzi.

"Not having a structure or a system in place to look at that algorithm every, say 10 years, doesn't make sense," Crescenzi said. "Round Rock doesn't look the same as it looked in the 1990s, Austin doesn't look the way it looked, the economy doesn't look the same, house prices don't look the same. To not have a system in place that is reflective on that doesn't make sense to me."

Although AISD and the Austin area are generally considered to be property-wealthy, more than 50% of AISD students have free and reduced lunch plans, approximately 56% are considered economically disadvantaged, and some schools even have populations where 97% of students are considered economically disadvantaged according to AISD.

While the Robin Hood system does not directly correlate with AISD's budget reductions, a large change in the AISD budget stems from the amount of funds that they have been recapturing and returning to Texas. Budget reductions are mainly aimed at reducing budgets for vacant positions, as the payroll accounts for 87% of AISD's budget.

"We try to prioritize and really concentrate on positions outside of campuses," Ramos said. "So that means we look at our operational positions, central office positions, and as those become vacant, that's where we look at reducing those positions from the budget. So we try to have as least of an impact on campuses as we can."

Although the district aims to have the least impact on campuses when deciding where to cut spending, there are times when that falls through. Jessica Fisher, the LASA Art and Fashion Design teacher, recently had her fabric budget cut by the career and technology education department (CTE).

"What happened is [CTE] wants us to have pathways [multiple levels of one subject] now, where there are three classes back-to-back," Fisher said. "What happens is, if you do not fall under [those classes], then they need to cut budgets from someplace."

Budget cuts for school spending can affect both students and staff in a multitude of ways such as vacant positions and less of a budget for supplies, which is why the district tends to distance itself from this. Not only does it affect the school by reducing expenses, but it can personally affect teachers and students educationally.

"For students, it may just take longer to get the materials that we need, for me, it is paying out of my own pocket for materials," Fisher said. "It makes our job a little harder to kind of figure out how we can best serve the students as we get you the materials you need for projects."

In November 2022, voters passed a \$2.44 billion AISD Bond, which funds the modernization of older campuses and increases pay for teachers. The bond, outlined by Adriana Cedillo, an Executive Director of Financial Budget and Planning at AISD, does not directly help with expenses at risk budget cuts.

"Having a bond gives the opportunity to lessen the burden that the General Fund has covered in the past year, like repairs or maintenance on old equipment and lesser utility costs," Cedillo said. "But because a bond is typically a multi-year program, it takes time for these savings to come to fruition."

According to Cedillo, to keep the AISD budget sustainable, the district will continue to analyze its funds to determine what will happen in future years. If there is no increase, the financial department will look at budget reductions and go through with it as a viable option.

## Austin's Nutcracker is En Pointe

### Ballet Dancers Perform Holiday Classic

**DEVEN SHARMA** | staff writer  
**KATIE BUSBY** | entertainment editor

From the Summer nesting of bats under the Congress Avenue bridge to the city's multiple Spring marathons, Austin has many seasonal traditions every year. As winter approaches, Ballet Austin's annual Nutcracker performance is on the horizon. Numerous LASA students who train at Ballet Austin are taking part in the production.

Ballet Austin dedicates months of preparation and work in tandem with the Austin Symphony Orchestra to perform musical compositions for The Nutcracker. All of the classical music written for The Nutcracker was created by the Russian composer Pyotr Tchaikovsky.

Preparation started in late September and continues up until the first performance on Saturday, Dec. 2. For Ballet Austin students, rehearsals take place every Saturday and are on top of a recommended 3-hour class.

LASA junior Amber Wang plays the role of Clara, a girl who is led into a magical world by her newly-gifted Nutcracker who comes to life on Christmas Eve, and has been training in ballet since she was in sixth grade and has been enrolled the past few years at Ballet Austin Academy.

"This is my third year doing The Nutcracker with Ballet Austin," Wang said. "I never did a big production before I joined Ballet Austin, and it's been really special being a part of such a big Austin holiday tradition."

Rehearsals for the production take place every Saturday and are on top of a recommended 3-hour class. Wang said that while the rehearsals can get very stressful, the work they do makes it worth it.

"It's a lot of material that we have to know, physically and mentally," Wang said. "Rehearsals are a very professional setting, and we're all working really hard to make sure we can live up to the standards. It's difficult, but very inspiring and constructive. The environment we have at Ballet Austin is always so supportive, which makes rehearsals really enjoyable."

Sophomore Valentina Bernal plays the role of a girl who attends the Christmas Eve party. Bernal has been dancing since she was 5 years old and has been a member of Ballet Austin since 5th grade. She says that while many people in the production are accustomed to the added load of rehearsals.

"Being in The Nutcracker definitely takes a toll on everything else in your life," Bernal said. "We have rehearsal every weekend, and specifically [for the role of] party girls, we're usually at ballet Austin almost all day and then have to pick between studying or seeing friends

because we really don't have time to do both. The [dancers given the] roles of party girls, Clara, and soldiers have to dance every day after school anyways so we're used to managing all of that, but it's always hard."

Phoebe Herbert, a sophomore who has been dancing for 11 years, is also taking part in the production. While Herbert agrees that rehearsals can make scheduling challenging, she said she gets to see her friends at dance and they make the experience special.

"My favorite part of The Nutcracker is show days," Herbert said. "I get to the theater and go to the dressing room where my friends are. We do makeup and hair, and everyone is so excited. The nerves hit me when I go to the stage and I'm waiting in the wings. But then we do the dance, and it goes fine, and we hurry back to the dressing room with huge smiles on our faces. It's a blast."

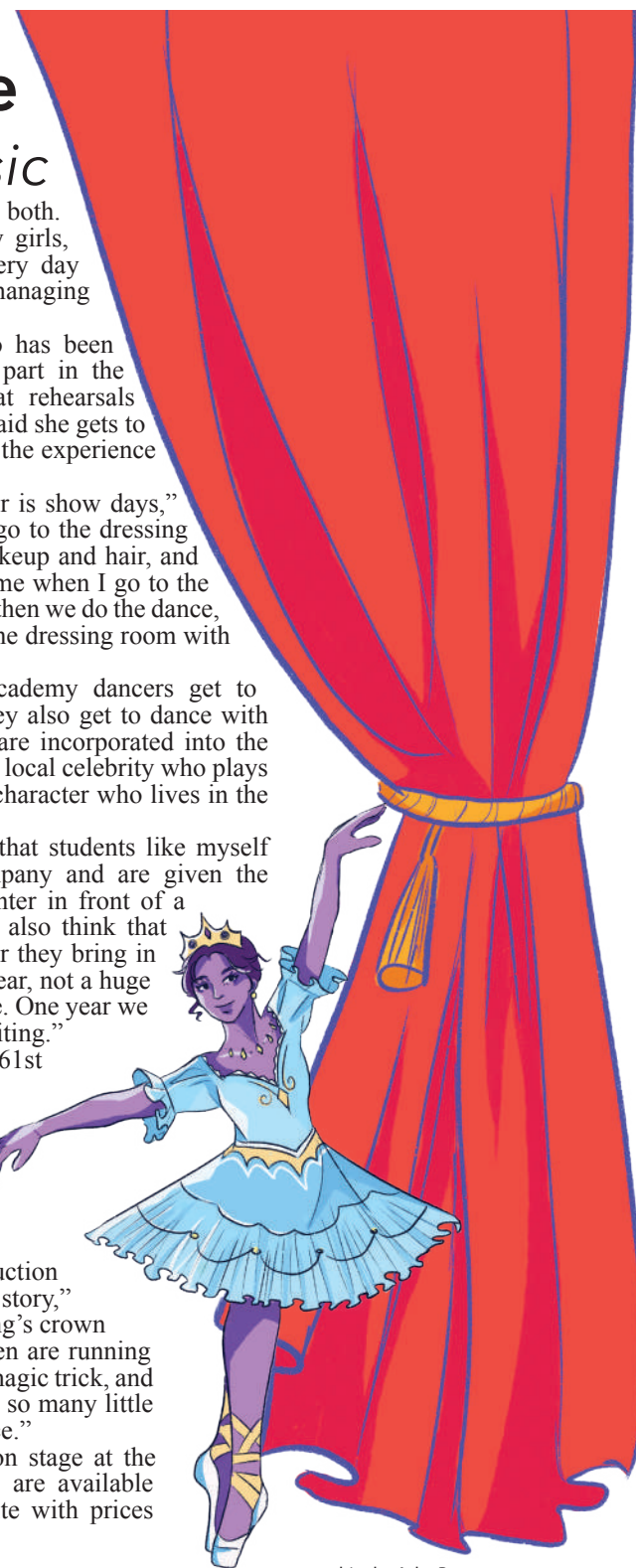
Not only do the Ballet Austin Academy dancers get to dance together in a full production, they also get to dance with professionals from the company who are incorporated into the cast as well. They share the stage with a local celebrity who plays the role of Mother Ginger, a motherly character who lives in the land of sweets.

"I think the most unique aspect is that students like myself get to work with a professional company and are given the opportunity to perform at the long center in front of a real paying audience," Bernal said. "I also think that it's very unique how for Mother Ginger they bring in a different celebrity to play her every year, not a huge celebrity but a decently well-known one. One year we got Kendra Scott, which was pretty exciting."

This year's production is the 61st Nutcracker for Ballet Austin. According to their website, it is the longest-running production of The Nutcracker in Texas, and according to Herbert, it is even more magical to be a part of than to watch.

"The most unique part of the production is all the little details that add to the story," Herbert said. "For example, the Rat King's crown is made of cheese. Or when the children are running around Drosselmeyer asks him to do a magic trick, and he pulls flowers out of thin air. I notice so many little details when I'm part of the performance."

The production will be appearing on stage at the Long Center from Dec. 2-23. Tickets are available for purchase on Ballet Austin's website with prices ranging from \$15-\$125.



graphics by Asha Rountree

graphic by Amelia Coleman

## Whimsy in the woods

### Alley Cats Put on A Midsummer Night's Dream

**PRATIK GURIJALA** | staff writer

The magical forest where the mischief of Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" takes place was brought to life this past October in the LASA theater. Donkeys, meddling fairies, and helpless head-over-heels mortals alike were embodied by LASA actors as the chaos and confusion of the story unfolded.

The Alley Cat Players, LASA's theater troupe, typically perform one play and one musical a year, however, this year they are performing two plays as well as a musical. "A Midsummer Night's Dream" was their first production of this school year and the first play. The play was performed four times over the course of two weeks: Oct. 19-20 and Oct. 27-28.

Jason Escandell is the director of the Alley Cat Players and directed the production "A Midsummer Night's Dream". Formerly solely a LASA English teacher, Escandell took on the responsibility of the theater department last year and has been directing productions ever since.

"I began coming up with the concept of this production and designing sets near the end of the last school year, and announced it as the fall play in May," Escandell said. "I worked on planning, logistics, and script edits over the summer so that we would be ready to begin full-scale production right at the beginning of the school year."

The process of choosing roles for the play wasn't easy, according to Escandell. It took many weeks to decide who was going to get which part. For actress Astrid Gothard, a junior who played the role of Hermia, one of the head-over-heels mortals, the auditions were not a long and grueling process, but rather a fun and memorable time.

"Auditions began in early September and we had our shows in late October," Gothard said. "Seems like a lot of time, but it went so incredibly fast it feels as though we just started, and now it's over."

Throughout the process of the show, there were certain events that the crew couldn't prepare themselves for. According to junior Simon Auby, who worked on props and makeup, this led to many obstacles that the cast had to face.

"Two of our main actors contracted COVID the day before opening night," Auby said. "Because I didn't have an acting role in this show but still act in other

shows, I was asked to learn the role of Theseus in the 24 hours before the show. It was incredibly difficult, as Theseus has the second most lines in the show, but it was worth it when the show was able to go on without a hitch."

The crew not only faced difficulties with actors getting COVID-19, but they also encountered many difficulties with the theater building. Many of the props and costumes were damaged or destroyed due to complications with the roof.

"During one night of the show, it began to rain, and our theater roof is not equipped to handle rain," Auby said. "At one point it literally appeared to be raining inside the theater, torrents and torrents of water ... we had to hang tarps over our equipment and protect the set pieces."

Besides the set pieces getting soaked in water, there were also problems with the sewage system in the backstage area. The whole backstage area was covered with sewage and the actors were forced to stand on top of it, according to the backstage crew members, also known as A2s.

"There was also a rather unfortunate problem with the draining system, wherein literal sewage was on the floor backstage," Auby said. "The A2s were quickly able to mobilize and prevent people from encountering the sewage, but we lost some set pieces we were storing backstage for future productions."

According to all of the actors and backstage crew, the donkey was the hardest prop to make. Auby said all the work was worth it, however, as it was the most important prop.

"The donkey head is the most iconic image from the show, and it may very well be the most iconic prop in all of Shakespeare's plays, so there was a lot riding on it looking good," Auby said. "My fellow company members are very thankful I finished it. If I hadn't, we would have been forced to use a cheap burlap donkey head Mr. Escandell had bought to help Riley Wayt (the actor playing Bottom) get accustomed to lowered visibility before I finished the real one. It's difficult to overstate how time-consuming each of these steps were, and I believe the full process took at least 15 hours."

Even with all of the issues with the facilities and COVID-19, the Alley Cat Players made a show they all took pride in, according to Escandell. Gothard and Auby said the outcome of the play was amazing and that they learned new skills and gained new experiences.

"I don't think I will ever be able to express how much I enjoyed participating in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'," Gothard said. "Sometimes circumstances were difficult, but overall everything and everyone was incredible."

## Taking Center Stage

### Student Bands Rock LASA

**APOLLO DAHMUS** | staff writer  
**MEGAN GEROLD** | entertainment editor

From Greenday to Radiohead, bands have been born from the depths of high school years into a world of music. LASA is just one of these high schools where bands make their start. At LASA, student bands have opportunities to showcase their musical experience and the hard work they put into their music through concerts and musical events.

For LASA sophomore and Heart Market guitarist Savit Verma, he feels that his band is more than what you might experience in a typical high school band. Being in a band with people that you can get to know in a non-academic or competitive environment makes it a different experience from school band or orchestra.

"Well, it's different because I feel from my past band experiences I haven't been friends with people I performed with," Verma said. "These guys I can actually talk to about other stuff besides music, and we were friends before we even formed a band so we're just altogether more tight."

The experience of being in a student-run band also differs in terms of commitment, according to senior Jacob Nelson, a drummer for metal band Tomorrow's Ruin. For Nelson, being in a band in high school is a segway to an eventual music career.

"We care about the music we're making a lot because we want to make it big," Nelson said. "We're doing everything we can to make sure we don't take any loopholes or easy ways out. We don't want to play dive bar shows forever. We want to do something to stand out."

Music and school take commitment, and balancing school with a future career also takes time. While being in high school allows for the opportunity to play music for lifelong, academics can change how an artist spends their time, according to Nelson.

"I do care really deeply about music and I do really want to make this my career," Nelson said. "So, as soon as I finish my homework, I go home and practice my instrument. I practice the songs I've made or think of songs to write, even during school when I have off periods, and every weekend we have band practice and we always write and practice for new things."

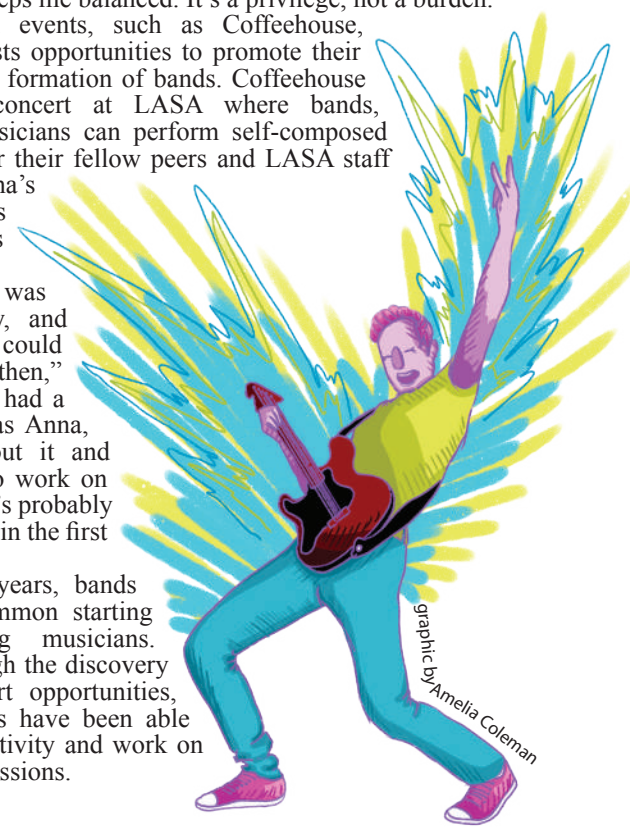
Senior and Royal Academy of Jazz drummer Kir Kraus enjoys the benefits of being in their jazz band when it regards academics. It can be something that helps them be well-rounded, in better control of their free time, and stay up to date with deadlines.

"It's really a pleasure," Kraus said. "I have a lot to do, but I make time for it all because music keeps me balanced. It's a privilege, not a burden."

School-sponsored events, such as Coffeehouse, can give young artists opportunities to promote their music and spark the formation of bands. Coffeehouse is a student-run concert at LASA where bands, performers, and musicians can perform self-composed or popular music for their fellow peers and LASA staff and faculty. In Verma's case, Coffeehouse is what precipitated his band's start.

"Coffeehouse was coming up actually, and I wanted to see if I could try and perform then," Verma said. "And I had a friend, her name was Anna, and we talked about it and we decided to try to work on music together. That's probably why we got together in the first place."

During teenage years, bands have become a common starting point for aspiring musicians. Whether it be through the discovery of music or concert opportunities, high school students have been able to express their creativity and work on future careers and passions.



graphic by Amelia Coleman

# Required Reading Wrecks Love for Stories

IZZY CRAVOTTA | staff writer

Texts upon texts are given to students throughout their education. At LASA, students are required to read about four to six books each year as part of the curriculum, most of them selected by their teachers, eliminating any personal preference for certain books in most of the projects based on literature.

There are ongoing studies, such as the Krashen study, that analyze whether reading as an assignment versus for leisure affects one's love for reading. Stephen Krashen, an American activist and educator, started the discussion over the drive to read back in the 80s, which inspired many studies replicating his findings. These results demonstrate that when you read for the sake of fun, it in turn leads to more reading.

Daniela Recalde, an English I and IV teacher at LASA, gave some insight into her students' experiences. She wishes everybody saw reading as pleasurable as she does.

"I think students think that when you make reading an assignment, it automatically turns it into a task instead of it being something that's for leisure," Recalde said, "even though literature by design is supposed to be something that is entertaining and something that's relatable and connects us to the larger human experience."

Freshman Akweano Udosen, a student in Recalde's English I class, thinks reading is fun but doesn't agree that reading at school is enjoyable. She struggles with finding a balance between reading for enjoyment with the amount of schoolwork she's given.

"[LASA] requires me to do a lot of homework," Udosen said. "So though I would like to read more at home, so I could enjoy it, I don't have the time. It becomes more of a stressful thing because I'm like 'do I have enough time to go to bed?'"

For Udosen, reading at school doesn't motivate her to read more outside of class. Instead, it lowers her desire to open a book.

"It makes me feel like reading is a lot of work," Udosen said. "It can make you feel like picking up a book is super hard, but it's actually not. But it makes me feel that way."

LASA librarian Elizabeth Switek has more knowledge of the Krashen study and agrees with it. She believes that having the ability to choose what you read is what motivates students to continue reading outside of school.

"When you get to choose, you are more likely to want to read the current one [book] and you are more likely to read the next one," Switek said.

Recalde agrees with the idea that book choice is key, and she tries to promote this at LASA. She noticed that when students are

able to pick what they read, their attitude immediately changes.

"One way that we try to find that sweet spot of students reading for leisure, of the sorts, while still learning necessary skills is by having choice units," Recalde said. "The seniors, for example, are currently starting their Best Books project in which they get to choose a book to read and analyze with a partner. When students are given agency in choosing their task, the 'task' part of it lessens, and it becomes a little more palatable for the students—a little more sustainable and enjoyable for the learning process. Our required texts aren't bad, but as soon as you say, 'You get to choose your book,' the whole tone of the class changes and students become instantly engaged."

Recalde also notes that literature meant for school use is supposed to be educational and beneficial for student learning. Choice reading does improve students' motivation to read, but students have to realize that in order for teachers to fully educate them, this can't always be done.

"Books are meant to be mirrors and windows," Recalde said. "We are supposed to be able to see ourselves in them, as well as explore worlds and concepts previously unknown to us. It is our job, as teachers, to give you the skills you need to read, understand, analyze, and evaluate pieces of writing. But it is just as much our job to give you the opportunity to apply that broadly, not just on the written works that we've chosen for your core curriculum. Don't get me wrong, the core curriculum is good, but this is a magnet school for both liberal arts and science, so the learning opportunities should extend far beyond the core."

The English teachers and librarian work together to give students some of this free will by adding choice units to the curriculum and offering students books in the library each year. This encourages them to want to read in the future.

"Ultimately what we're trying to do is develop you guys [students] into just being adults that want to read," Switek said.



graphic by Amelia Coleman

## opinion Keeping an Eye on the Threat of Binge-Watching Rapid Rise of Streaming Services is Detrimental to Health

MILLER WILLIAMS | staff writer

Many people may remember sitting down as a little kid to watch whatever show was on television that night with their family, but chances are, these days most people associate the word "television" with turning on Netflix or Hulu. According to the National Library of Medicine, the popularity of streaming services has been extremely influential in the past few years, but not always in a beneficial way. A Medium article studying the impact of streaming services concluded that these services can cause various bad habits to form, such as binge-watching and troubled sleeping.

Binge-watching is the act of streaming many movies or television episodes in one sitting, and it tends to have negative effects on mental and physical health. Precious time that was once spent exercising, talking to friends and family, and completing goal-oriented tasks is now often spent binge-watching and sitting on the couch. Since the introduction of streaming services such as Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime in the early 2000s, binge-watching has become increasingly popular due to the structure of streaming services. Many drop full seasons at a time, giving people the opportunity to binge-watch that traditional cable tv does not provide.

Binge-watching is projected to keep growing, with Forbes predicting that streaming services' revenue will rise \$43 million by 2026. According to a study conducted by Psychologist Res Behav Manag in 2020, binge-watching can lead to stress, loneliness, and insomnia. Especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, these issues have been prominent in people of all ages. People found themselves surrounded by immense amounts of isolation and loneliness due to quarantining, which often led them to turn to their favorite TV shows and movies for comfort. Although sitting down and watching an episode of a show is not detrimental to one's mental health, it is the continuous binge and addiction to that form of entertainment that makes it unhealthy.

Social interaction is essential in every person's life, especially young adults. According to the National Institutes of Health, the introduction of every type of screen, especially at

very young ages, prevents this social interaction and provides less room for mental and interactional growth. It also causes many young adults and students to struggle academically and procrastinate.

Not only can binge-watching cause various mental health issues, but also physical health issues. Important exercise and exposure to nature is often sacrificed in order to watch TV. According to the American Heart Association, without this necessary exercise, many people can develop health issues such as blood clots as they forgo movement to watch just one more episode. Insomnia is also a negative aspect of watching copious amounts of television. One component of screens, such as phones and laptops, is blue light. According to Harvard Health, when this type of light is used, it tricks the brain into thinking it is daytime and prevents the release of melatonin, which leads to people getting less sleep.

Before the introduction of streaming services, the only way to access a show was through a television. Now, shows can be accessed anywhere and at any time: on a phone, computer, at school, at home, or even at the grocery store.

Organizations such as Ways to Enhance Children's Activity & Nutrition provide methods on how to limit screen time and provide children and teenagers with the social and nutritional exposure they need. "TV Turn-off Week", also known as "Screen-free Week", was started in 1994 due to concern about mental and physical health issues caused by screens and TV. This week takes place April 21-27 every year, and many families are encouraged to take part by staying off of screens and limiting their television viewing for the week. Sources and events like this help adults and children everywhere to limit their TV intake and become more involved in their environments and communities.

It may seem impossible to find a balance between work, school, and entertainment, but it is possible. Things like set screen time and work timers can help to find a balance. Although there is not a problem with television itself, the over-accessibility of streaming that can be found anywhere and at any time at the touch of a button is a detriment to society.

graphic by Asha Rountree

## opinion Are Book-to-Screen Adaptations Worth It?

LILAH O'DAIR | staff writer

From "Harry Potter" to "Little Women", book-to-movie adaptations have been a hot topic in both literary and film communities. Some adaptations exceed expectations and expand on the words originally written by the author, while others have left fans disappointed by a movie that feels like an obvious cash grab. After experiencing some abysmal results, it might seem like a hopeless endeavor to adapt a novel to a screenplay. But despite the weight of expectations, many directors still take that leap of faith hoping to satisfy die-hard fans and produce a loved film.

One pro of creating adaptations for books is their tendency to perform well in theaters. Movies adapted from books on average gross 53% more than their normal counterparts according to WordsRated, which is an incentive to adapt a book to film. These films even have an advantage before the release of their first trailer: an abundance of literature super-fans who have been begging to see their favorite book translated into film. More interest in a movie will mean more initial tickets sold and therefore more money made.

Just because a movie might be of more intrigue to fans does not mean that it will automatically be considered high quality. For example, the 2010 movie "Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief" grossed a decent \$226 million worldwide according to BoxOfficeMojo, and then went on to receive a disappointing 5.9/10 IMDb rating. Even the author, Rick Riordan, shamed the movies for straying so far from the book plots, saying in a tweet from 2020, "I judge them from having read the scripts because I care most about the story. I certainly have nothing against the very talented actors. Not their Fault. I'm just sorry they got dragged into that mess."

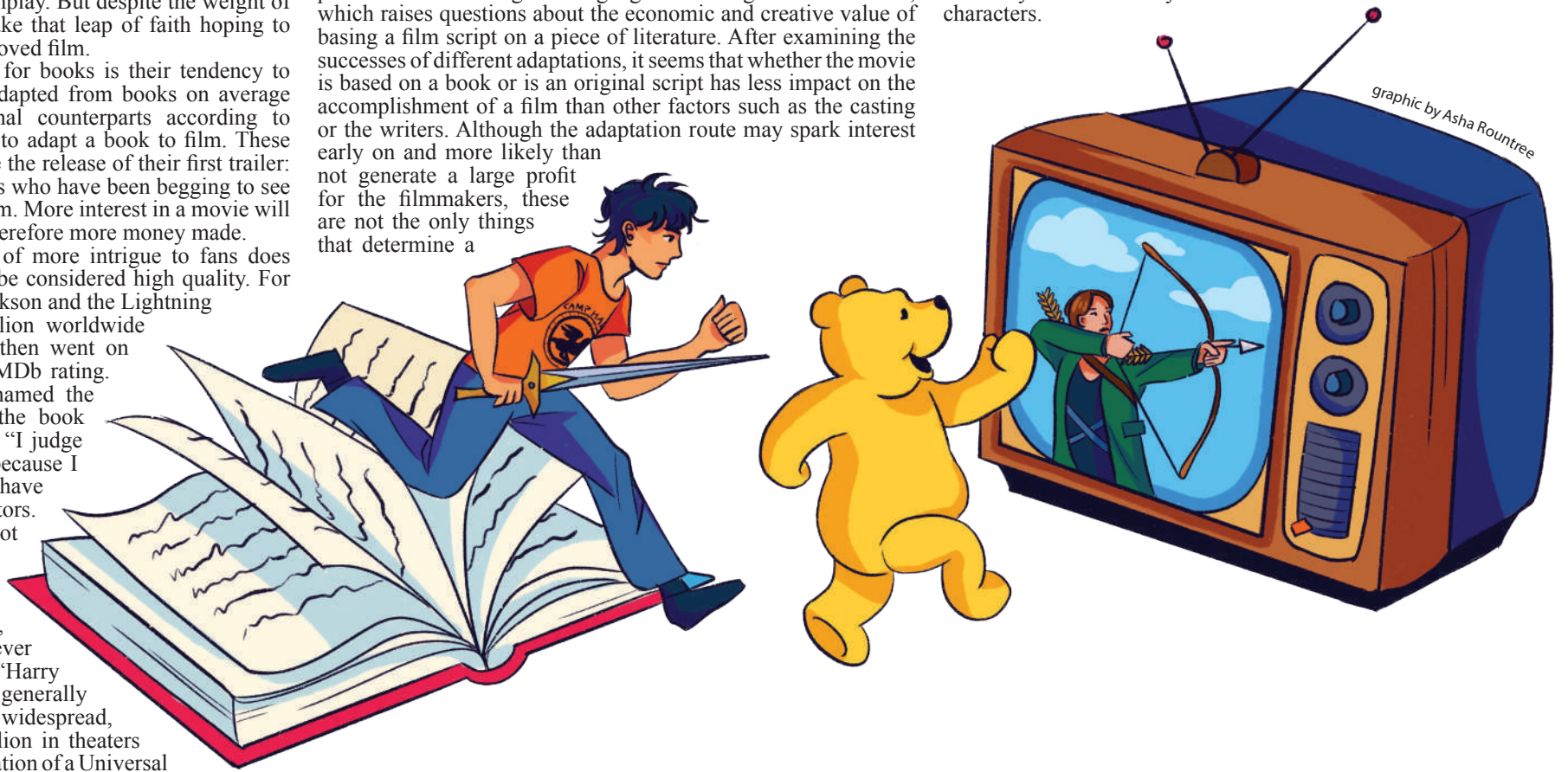
A book-to-movie adaptation, when done well, can also expand the world created by the author, helping the story reach people it never would have in written form. The "Harry Potter" movie series, an adaptation generally considered to be well loved and widespread, has not only made around \$7.7 billion in theaters worldwide, but has also led to the creation of a Universal

Studios park entirely dedicated to the fantasy world described in the book. The "Harry Potter" film series did many things right in the production process, from always staying true to the text to impeccable casting, which helped contribute to the growth of the world of Hogwarts into the worldwide phenomenon that it is known as today.

Currently, films adapted from books make up 28% of all movies produced in the English language according to WordsRated, which raises questions about the economic and creative value of basing a film script on a piece of literature. After examining the successes of different adaptations, it seems that whether the movie is based on a book or is an original script has less impact on the accomplishment of a film than other factors such as the casting or the writers. Although the adaptation route may spark interest early on and more likely than not generate a large profit for the filmmakers, these are not the only things that determine a

"good movie" and any story can be good in its own right with good production.

To achieve the task of creating a good adaptation, the developers need to be able to visualize the book in cinematic form. Creating a movie based on a good book should not be a job taken lightly if the filmmakers want to do the original text justice. If the producers want to create a film adaptation that surpasses expectations, then they must stay true to the story and the characters.



graphic by Asha Rountree

## All is Fair in Arts and Crafts

### Austin Creative Markets Exhibit Local Artists' Work

BRIDGET DUNLEAVY | staff writer

Thriving art communities, markets, craft fairs, and pop-up shops can be seen in many places around the Austin area. Shopping opportunities like these allow customers to personally engage with artists and buy one-of-a-kind, handcrafted items. These markets provide sellers with important opportunities to showcase their work and gain more business.

Dawn Ciranna, the creator of Next Chapter Books + Bookmobile, used her background as an English teacher to spread her love of literature through her mobile second-hand book store. Since her start in July 2022, local markets have been an important way for her to meet with her clientele.

"In Leander, I noticed we didn't have an independent bookstore and I thought 'I'm going to start one,'" Ciranna said. "Some of my favorite places are these family-friendly breweries in Central and North Austin. Those have been really interesting and fun because not only do I sell to the customers but also to the employees like all of the servers and bartenders."



**ART IN MOVEMENT** Fashion creators display their works in Austin Studio Tour. This display of craft took place Nov. 4 - 19 of 2023, allowing designers to show off their own form of art. photo by Katie Busby

Relationships that she's developed through fairs help support her business. While the outcome of the markets is worth it to Ciranna and her customers, the work leading up to the market takes preparation. "Figuring out how many crates to take and how many books I'll sell is important and if it's indoor or outdoor," Ciranna said. "If it's outdoors I need a tent and power to make sure books are safe from rain."

Mimi Sanada, the jewelry maker behind Mimi's Origamis, also takes time to prepare for the markets where she sells her creations. These art fairs provide beneficial opportunities for Sanada to sell her handmade origami earrings.

"Typically, organizations that host markets or events provide an application, which asks for specifics about your business," Sanada said. "There is often a booth fee, which is collected upon your approval. Details about the event are shared along with graphics on social media, and from there you can share with your audience about the event."

For Sanada, markets play a key role in allowing people to reach her designs, which are inspired by her Japanese culture. Her art allows her to connect with customers and sell to clientele she wouldn't otherwise meet.

"Selling at in-person events has been crucial to my success as a business," Sanada said. "With how saturated the internet is, it's hard to generate traffic to my online shop alone, so having the opportunity and space for my work to be seen in person is what helps increase my sales."

Another factor that contributes to the success of

markets is the organizations hosting them. Clover + Maven is a business that hosts market events and provides female artists a space where their work is prioritized.

Shelley Moon is one of the three founders of Clover + Maven and also runs an independent jewelry business called Shelley Moon Designs.

"To host a market, it's completely different than attending or selling," Moon said. "You need to do a lot of research and know who your competitors are. I've seen so many new pop-up markets this year that I haven't even heard of. I need to know how to attract makers and artists by defining what type of market we want to be."

While hosting a market takes a lot of time and research, the support that they can provide is very helpful to local sellers. For Moon, this creates a community that can contrast the



**LOCAL ART GALORE** Art lovers gaze upon Austin craft at Blue Genie Art Bazaar during their holiday market. They have two shows during the year that allow artisans to showcase and sell their handmade work. photo by Katie Busby

loneliness that comes from starting your own business.

"I don't think there's enough support sometimes so we're here to provide that," Moon said. "If you're starting your own business, it's a very lonely space to be if you don't have a team to support you. You have to do everything: shipping, making, selling. To have women friends in the same boat as you is very helpful."

Both sides of these markets, the sellers and the hosts, make it possible for the greater Austin community to experience and own local art. With all the work that both groups put into the markets, there are benefits for everyone involved including profit, but most of all being part of a joyful community, according to Moon.

"In my 20s and 30s, I was chasing after money and success," Moon said. "I had both, but I was not happy. So in my 40s, I chase joy because when you chase joy, and you have found the purposes and happiness in what you are doing, money follows."



**ACROSS THE CANVAS** Shoppers peruse the goods of Blue Genie Art Bazaar, taking their time looking for their art match. This market takes place Nov. 17 - Dec. 24, 2023, and draws in many different products from folk art to jewelry. photo by Katie Busby

## STRING FEST

from page 1

Throughout the festival, Ramanathan noted that the sixth graders learn the importance of confidence in their performance and how it all comes together in the ensemble. For the piece to work, every individual's contribution matters.

"Some of them think 'If I don't play, no one's going to notice because I'm one out of 800,'" Ramanathan said. "But we wanted everyone to play...and a lot of them were obviously shy at first to talk to high school seniors. But after getting to know them and giving them tips, most of them actually knew everything. But we gave them that motivation to do it, because in the long run that's gonna obviously help them."

For the sixth graders in orchestra, Horvitz mentions that she thinks it's inspiring for them to see students stick with it all the way through high school. Interacting with the seniors gives them something to aspire towards.

"It's part of that connection, that musical community, and seeing that continuity of these students who stick with it, and continue playing their instruments is inspiring for them to see," Horvitz said. "Our seniors are very helpful with the events. So they help tune and

help teach them the notes and the bowings. They're just generally encouraging, so they make those personal connections to the kids too."

According to Jallepalli, there was some nervous excitement amongst the students. Many students volunteered to lead the pieces.

"There were definitely some students that were a little on the shy side, but I could tell that they were excited to perform," Jallepalli said. "It is so cool that AISD offers such opportunities for beginner string players. I attended many string camps when I was younger and we had similar play-in experiences."

Even though they did not go to the String Fest in middle school, these seniors see this as an amazing experience and opportunity for beginner players and themselves alike. This festival is also very important to strengthening the relationships between schools around the district, according to Ramanathan.

"This connection between our middle schools, even elementary schools and high schools, had gone completely out the window," Ramanathan said. "But, I feel like [String Fest] is one thing I can say AISD actually does okay at, is bridging that gap."

String Fest was also one of the last events that the seniors in LASA orchestra will do together. Ramanathan mentioned that because of this, the festival became much more meaningful to them.

"I loved just seeing how far they'd come in playing," Ramanathan said. "Even though it was just beginner pieces and playing for their parents or their orchestra directors and AISD faculty. It was super cool to see them actually playing with more confidence than when they entered."

The Fall Festival for Strings brings together mentorship, musical enthusiasm, and community cohesion. It not only commemorates the musical journey of each participant but also guarantees that the threads of connection between them echo through generations within AISD.



**ENSEMBLE** LASA Orchestra students lined up in front of the Delco Activity Center. String Fest, or the Fall Festival for Strings, was established in 1973 by William Dick. photos courtesy of LASA Orchestra.

## Editor's Picks

### Niche Interests

#### Isopods

AMELIA COLEMAN | graphics editor

Imagine a pillbug bigger than a football living deep under the ocean. This is the giant isopod. Its jointed limbs and exoskeleton, main characteristics of crustaceans but difficult to see in smaller varieties of isopods, are very prominent in this large freak of nature. While isopods can be mere millimeters long, giant isopods can grow up to 16 inches, making them the largest isopods in the world. Like the giant squid, giant isopods are so massive because of a phenomenon called abyssal gigantism (the tendency for animals at the bottom of the ocean to become really really big). The reason this happens is not known. It would be so crazy to have an offshoot of humanity living deep below the ocean surface, growing hundreds of times bigger than a person, but that's just Tuesday for the average isopod. They don't have to live with that fact because they don't have brains, and they probably wouldn't understand it if we told them their cousins were gigantic oddities of the deep. Giant isopods also have interesting diets. They are scavengers, often feasting on whale carcasses that float down to the sea floor. While giant isopods do eat, they don't do it often and have been known to go years between meals. Sometimes giant isopods can be spotted coming together in large groups, devouring a whale carcass whole, but these are not social creatures. The life of the giant isopod is a solitary one, but hopefully, its life is not one of sadness. They are wild amazing creatures, and I love them so much.

#### Bad Movies

MEGAN GEROLD | entertainment editor

From romantic comedies to blockbusters, there's a fair share of bad movies whose terribleness has the ability to span not only genres, but time. I don't have a specific interest in bad movies as a genre itself, but I can't help it when my eyes are drawn to the films that have the ability to make me feel as if I could do better than the actors on my screen. I'll sit transfixed for hours watching something rated 2 out of 5 stars simply because it made its way across my phone or streaming service. For many, a bad movie with terrible actors and bad writing gives them fuel for scathing criticism and a low score across the board, but whenever I'm able to watch a movie where the actors won't win any Oscars, or when the script could have been written by a fifth grader I'm plunged back into my childhood of watching trailer after trailer before movie nights. Then when we finally finish watching the movie we painstakingly chose, we discover that it might've been the worst thing we've ever seen. There's a difference between what's good, and what your favorite is. For me, my favorite will always be the bad movie.

#### Urban Planning

MARS LESLIE | web editor

I love it when I visit a new city and it instantly feels like home. Except, home doesn't just mean Austin. It's a word that represents feelings: those of coziness, enjoyment, and belonging. From the smallest details, like the greenery and the way the ambient city's sounds echo across the buildings, to huge projects, like the construction of new areas, road layouts, and city-wide public services, urban planning completely determines the atmosphere of a city. Urban planning is so much more than looks. It's a science of how people interact with the world around them but on a larger scale. The most interesting part about it is the road and transit network. It varies worldwide, and certain layouts and networks are suited to different places, like an intricate puzzle. Networks like roads and rails also follow terrain, with curvy turns, elevation changes in hilly areas, and grids or long stretches of straightness in the plains. I often find myself sketching cities from the top down, and designing the neighborhood streets and various districts with niches and region-conscious history. Including population changes, public services ranging from water to healthcare, parks, historical figures, zoning, and attractions immerse you in the creation aspect of planning and help provide a sense of how it works in real life. Each is an important part of every modern-day city. Where you call home wasn't built in a day. It's a combination of years of history and trial and error. That is what makes this topic so rich. Every city is, and will always be, a work in progress to make you feel more at home.

#### Floral Prints

KATIE BUSBY | entertainment editor

As an enjoyer of fabric, clothes, and most things to do with fashion, I always find myself recognizing trends that come back around and show up again and again: silhouettes, colors, textures, and more. One thing that never stops being in fashion is floral patterns. Fabrics adorned with floral motifs have been worn for decades and are always evolving to be in season and on trend, never leaving the public eye. From the bold stylized flowers of the 1920s and 1960s, to the more delicate feminine prints of the 1910s and 1930s, and to the distorted blurry flowers of the 2010s (though I am personally not a fan of those), floral patterns play an important role in textile history. In addition to printing, florals have been incorporated in many other ways such as embroidery, applique, beading, and even in larger more modern designs like Loewe's spring summer collection 2023, featuring their hyper-realistic sculpted anthurium flowers as big as a torso. Florals have a long held synonymy with spring, growth, and beauty that gravitate people. From your grandmother's heavy tapestry fabric floral couch to the ribbon rose adorning cami tops, florals in clothing are forever.



**LASA FOOTBALL WRAPPED** Since the addition of Coach Derrick Lewis to the football team in 2022, LASA football has improved in both skill and morale. Many of this year's games have played out as if they were a scene from a feel-good sports movie. The contentious circumstances were overcome against the odds to secure the win, even if only by a single point. These images document snippets of the amazing season the Raptors had this year, showing their hard work and dedication paying off. LASA high school football took home 6 wins this year and the team will only continue to rise. photo collage by Kamryn Reys

## Sports Betting

TITA GONZALEZ | staff writer

Sports betting has garnered increasing attention for the mental health threats associated with it. The National Football League (NFL), a league that has been at the center of many sports betting controversies, has been called out for corporate greed and controversial partnerships. Sports betting, or sports gambling, is the practice of wagering money or prizes based on the outcome of a sporting event.

Historically, the NFL has been firmly against sports betting. Anti-gambling policies have been in place since 1963 when Paul Hornung of the Green Bay Packers was suspended for betting. In the past two years, ten players have been on probation after being accused of gambling, even when evidence against them was scarce. According to the Washington Post, the NFL's stance on gambling also affected advertising opportunities for associated businesses. Las Vegas city officials have tried multiple times to create a partnership with the NFL, but they were quickly shut down and dismissed by commissioners.

In 2003, former NFL spokesman Brian McCarthy issued a public statement regarding this gambling policy at the time, saying that "The NFL has a long-standing policy that prohibits the acceptance of any message that makes reference to or mention of sports betting."

After the federal restrictions on sports betting were lifted in 2018, the league has cautiously delved into the realm of legal gambling. In 2020, the NFL announced on its official website that it would partner with multiple different betting sites, including BetMGM, FOX Bet, and Pointsbet. In conjunction with this embrace, Las Vegas is no longer a forbidden ground for professional football, as the 2023 Super Bowl will be held in Paradise, Nevada, just south of the entertainment capital of the world.

The scheduled Las Vegas Super Bowl is an example of how the realm of professional sports is changing after the legalization of gambling. However, professional players are often excluded from this facet of the industry. The NFL has endorsed third-party gambling for sports viewers, but restrictions remain in place for football players and coaches. The current policy on gambling states that all NFL personnel are not allowed to bet on any professional sports game or be associated with casinos or online betting platforms.

A suspension for gambling has historically been detrimental to aspiring player's careers. In April, the Detroit Lions wide receiver Quintez Cephus and safety C.J. Moore were indefinitely suspended for betting on football games. They are allowed to submit a ban appeal after the 2023 season; however, both players are missing experience and training by being sidelined. According to the Associated Press, the Lions quietly released them from the roster shortly after the suspensions were announced. Cephus and Moore are not currently associated with any professional football team and are unlikely to be sought after by other coaches.

These punishments for players have often been criticized for being excessively harsh on individuals. Despite public outcry, the NFL has made it clear that current policies will not be altered, putting out an official statement declaring, "NFL Personnel shall not maintain social, business and/or [sic] personal relationships with persons generally known to be professional, problem, and/or sports gamblers." This means that individual football players and coaches are not allowed to have any association with sports gamblers, even in their personal lives. In contrast, the NFL itself maintains lucrative sponsorships with companies in the gambling industry. Many fans are asking: why is the league so hypocritical in their policies? The answer can be found in statistics. Currently, the NFL makes about \$132 million per year on sponsors who promote gambling, a large source of revenue for the league. Business executives saw the potential sponsorships as a greatly beneficial business venture and subsequently leaped at the opportunity after the federal legalization of sports betting. However, this advantage is limited to a select few, namely NFL business executives and the gambling companies themselves.

Many professional players have expressed their frustration with these policies. Julio Jones, Philadelphia Eagles wide receiver, shared a post on X, formerly known as Twitter, stating his thoughts saying, "I understand rules are rules, but I can risk my life so that my team wins but I can't risk 1k [sic] on my team winning."

This debate has fueled the long-standing argument on the ethics of gambling in professional settings. The massive generated by sports betting makes it a venture that might continue.

## The Growing World of Esports

GIOVANNI ALEJO-AGUILAR | staff writer

Video games have been an ever-changing industry for the last two decades, piquing the interests of people with a love for simulations and adventures. The evolution of video games has made it so that earning money playing them is a common occurrence. With the evolution in video games also comes the increasing popularity of one of its specific branches, electronic sports, or Esports.

Connor Stillwell is the CEO of The eSports Cave, which is located in Cedar Park, TX. He has been passionate about online games since he was a child, and chose to turn his hobby into a profession.

"Well, I've been a passionate gamer since I was a kid, and that passion eventually led me to create 'The Esports Cave,'" Stillwell said. "It was the thrill of competition and the rapidly growing Esports scene that inspired me to turn my hobby into a career by providing a space for others to enjoy Esports."

Involvement in the company, and ensuring that everything runs smoothly and is up to date can be a difficult task due to new trends constantly gaining popularity, according to Stillwell. With the ever-changing industry it's never guaranteed that what's in stock is what will sell.

"Staying up-to-date is crucial for us," Stillwell said. "We follow game updates, industry trends, and engage with the gaming community to ensure we provide the latest and most exciting gaming experiences to our customers. While I'm not directly involved with a team, I aim to support and promote Esports culture in our community."

Hans Goss, owner of the Valhalla Esports Lounge, located in downtown Austin, offers people a place to enjoy food, drinks, music, and games all at once. Combining various interests at once has led to a highly successful company, according to Goss, who said Valhalla Esports Lounge is the number one Esports lounge in Austin.

"Over the past year, we've seen continued growth in the Esports industry, with a surge in interest from investors and sponsors," Goss said. "Additionally, mobile gaming and the emergence of new Esports titles have expanded the player base. This growth has heightened the competition and increased the overall professionalism of the industry, making it an exciting time for Esports."

Something that Goss feels is important to the Esports community is providing a safe environment where players feel

valued. He said that his encouragement and efforts to help everyone have a good time is a contributing factor to the success of his company.

"We've faced challenges coordinating large-scale tournaments, where different teams and players need to work together smoothly," Goss said. "One particular situation involved addressing disagreements over rules. To resolve it,



Graphic by Asha Routree

we brought in experienced referees, communicated clearly with all parties, and ensured that the rules were applied consistently. Open communication and a commitment to fairness helped us overcome these challenges."

In Esports, it's also important for players to be aware of their physical and mental health, as this can directly affect their performance, according to Goss. Although Esports don't require the amount of exercise done in traditional sports, physical health is still prioritized in the community.

"Balancing training and well-being is a priority," Goss said. "We encourage healthy routines, like exercise and nutrition, and provide access to mental health resources. Our team also has

dedicated rest days to prevent burnout and ensure they perform at their best during competitions."

Cody Hendrix is the co-founder of the Esports team Gamers First. He also emphasized the importance of his team maintaining their physical health in order to compete at their best in tournaments.

"Player health is a top priority," Hendrix said. "We have fitness and wellness programs, mental health support, and regular breaks to prevent burnout. It's vital for players to strike a balance between practice and self-care to perform at their best."

Interaction within the Esports community has resulted in the sport increasing in popularity, according to Hendrix. Hendrix described how he made efforts to spread the value of Esports to video game fanatics.

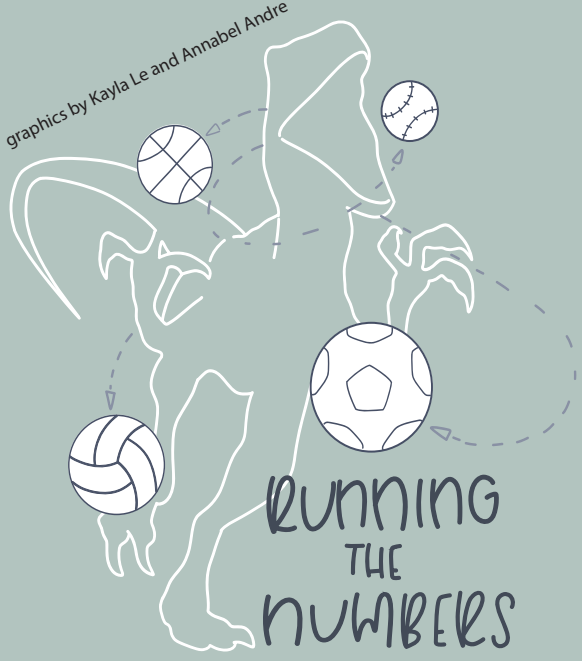
"We've embraced content creation and broadcasting to connect with our fans," Hendrix said. "Social media, streaming, and content collaborations are fantastic ways to engage our audience. We value their support and continually seek ways to interact with them."

Goss believes in the importance of forming a connection with supporters. He has a mission to help others understand the true value of Esports.

"Building a sense of camaraderie and creating a positive environment where players can grow and flourish is crucial for team success," Goss said. "We believe in creating a sense of belonging and making Esports more than just a spectator sport."

**Sanwi Sarode and Charlotte Whalen contributed to this article**

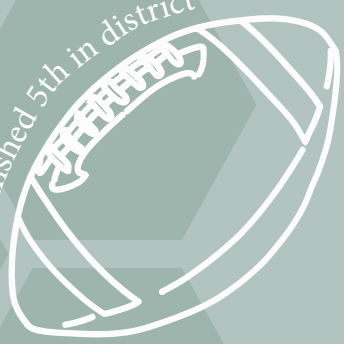
graphics by Kayla Le and Annabel Andre



RUNNING THE NUMBERS

LASA'S WINS AND LOSSES  
as of Dec. 5

finished 5th in district



WINS	LOSSES
6	4
football	

finished 2nd in state



WINS	LOSSES
11	0
varsity team tennis	

finished 2nd in district



WINS	LOSSES
24	5
varsity volleyball	

THE RAPTORS RUN DOWN

GRIFFIN BEAM | photo editor

Every issue, The Liberator sends a reporter into the field to try a new sport and write about their experiences.

What happened in the weight room used to be a mystery to me, but that changed after I attended an after school practice for Weightlifting Club. Although I was nervous about the meeting at first, when I saw many of my friends bench pressing and using equipment like dumbbells, that fear gradually faded away. I was inspired to start working with the dumbbells after watching other members use them confidently.

I picked up two 30-pound dumbbells and then club member Jose Gonzalez, a sophomore, demonstrated how he works out his arms and legs with them. He instructed that before I started lifting, I needed to stretch in order to prevent muscle strain while lifting. After stretching, I asked Jose how I should do bicep curls with the dumbbells, which was an exercise that intrigued me after watching other members do it. Jose showed me the correct form for the exercise and explained to me what the difference was between sets and reps, two important measures of consistency and growth. He specified that reps are the amount of times you repeat an exercise while sets are the amount of reps you do. Based on Jose's advice, I decided to aim for 15 reps and three sets of bicep curls on my first day. I was surprised to find that it was manageable, and I suspected that the main reason for this was because of my Boy Scouts training, where I've built my arm muscles by carrying items like full water jugs and ice chests on a regular basis.

After my bicep curls, Jose suggested that we work on calf raises next as a way to train my lower body and give my arms a rest. He

explained that he likes to do these by grabbing a plate and two dumbbells, holding one in each hand, and then putting the first half of each foot on the plate to position his feet at an incline. As I mirrored his movements, he showed me how I should then push off the ground and hold myself up for a few seconds before lowering myself down again, finishing one rep. Together, Jose and I repeated this motion for three sets of 25 reps. After the first two sets my calves were burning, but it felt rewarding to know I was getting stronger. I knew that the more my muscles hurt, the better workout I was getting.

In the corner of the room, almost hidden by all the other weights, I caught a glimpse of a wooden stick attached to a rope that was wrapped around a small plate. This immediately had my attention because I'd never seen anything like it before. I met another club member, Varik Choudhary, and asked what this setup was used for. He explained that it was used to help members develop their forearm strength. In order to use it properly, I had to turn the stick, which slowly wrapped the rope and caused the weight to rise with it. Varik explained that the higher up I held the rope during the exercise, the more my forearms would develop. Taking this to mind, as I used it I tried to hold it up and high as I could, rolling the rope up until the weight reached its max height. My forearms started to burn, and I thought it might have even been as hard as the calf exercises. However, I was able to work through it and did the motion for two more sets.

To finish off the practice, I did a couple sets of push ups to train my upper body like my pecs, triceps, and shoulders. At the end of practice, I thanked everyone who helped me before leaving. Learning different exercising techniques at Weightlifting Club was a fun experience, and I can definitely see myself going back for more in the future.



WATCH AND OBSERVE Photo editor, Griffin Beam, learns how to do a bicep curl during lifting club. Sophomore and club member Jose Gonzalez assisted Beam throughout his workout. photo by Kayla Le



PUMPING IRON Photo editor, Griffin Beam, completes three sets of bicep curls. The club meets after school every Wednesday and Friday in the LASA weightroom. photo by Kayla Le

Raptors Claw Their Way to the Top

LASA Sports Make History with Fall Sports Performances

VICTOR MARTINEZ | sports editor

Ranked as the 32nd-best school in the U.S. according to U.S. News and World Report, LASA has long been known for having an athletics program that is overshadowed by its status as an academic powerhouse. However, with the continued success of the Raptors on a competitive stage under new coaching direction, people like head athletics coordinator Derrick Lewis are projecting even greater successes in the seasons to come.

According to Lewis, LASA is projected to move up in the Austin American Statesman annual ranking of Austin-area high school athletic programs. With multiple teams winning district, regional, and state titles in the fall of 2023, LASA's athletic department as a whole is already showing a significant improvement from last season.

"We were number 12 [last season], and a few of our teams didn't make the playoffs or didn't have a winning record," Lewis said. "This year, our records have increased, so I'm expecting the Statesman to take us up from 12 to somewhere in the top five to the top eight."

Under Lewis, LASA's athletics programs have continued to climb in the 5A district. According to Lewis, in the case of volleyball and football, these improvements will only add to LASA's chances of moving up in rankings where they could have subtracted from its chances last year. The football team achieved a record of 6-4, a boost from last season's 2-8 record, and the volleyball team finished second in the district.

"With football, we won more games this year than we had in the past three years, so our power ranking in football jumped tremendously to the top 100 in 5A," Lewis said. "In volleyball, we also made the playoffs. Last year, they didn't make the playoffs because they lost in the play-in tournament, but this year, they finished second in the district. Competing in playoffs is going to help us to raise that ranking even more."

In addition to making school history, according to head tennis coach Vincent Vizcaino, LASA also made city history this past fall. After last season's exit at the state semi-finals, the LASA tennis team kept an undefeated season this year and made it through the area and region competitions again, losing only to Frisco's Centennial High School in the state final.

"[This season's run was] the best any school in the Austin Independent School

District has ever done in history," Vizcaino said.

Senior Vance Mader is a varsity captain of the LASA Cross-Country team. In his final season as captain, he led the team to one of the best competitive performances in their history, with all four boys and girls JV and varsity teams taking first place at the 5A district meet. According to Mader, a large part of the team's success was the new, younger talent unique to this season's roster.

"Looking back over the summer, we had practices and there were a few freshmen that consistently came to the practices," Mader said. "They were quite good... I didn't know how big of a part they were going to be of the team, or how big they were going to contribute to the team. We ended up having five freshmen on the varsity squad that went to regionals with us."

Not only did the freshman runners improve the team's results, but they also continued to improve upon their past results with consistency. According to Mader, the team as a whole would see multiple personal bests as the season progressed.

"Quite a few freshmen ran sub-20 (under 20 minutes)," Mader said. "I think over the year, over the season, we had a lot of PRs (personal records) every single meet. A lot of freshmen were improving quickly because they had already started at such a good pace, their improvements meant a lot."

In Lewis' opinion, the new and exciting talent coming to LASA across all sports is no surprise. With the increased media attention that comes with LASA achieving exceptional success competitively as an athletic underdog, according to Lewis, investment in athletics from LASA's existing student body and prospective students will only increase as seasons go on.

"I think part of it is that kids are realizing that we can compete on a high level and that we can be more than just an academic school," Lewis said. "Kids are starting to see the recognition we're getting in social media and in the news... They're seeing that we're getting the recognition that they've been hoping for. It is a kind of correlation to the recognition: it's turning into expectations."

Ben Goodman contributed to this article



BREAKING RECORDS LASA's tennis team finished their fall team tennis season second in the state. The team had an undefeated season and advanced further than any other year after tying for third in the state in the 2022-2023 season. photo courtesy of LASA Tennis



XC SWEEPS DISTRICTS The Cross Country team had one of the best performances in its history this season. All four boys and girls JV and Varsity teams placed first in the 5A district meet. photo courtesy of LASA website

# Preparation for Paris 2024 Summer Olympics Underway

ESME KESSLER | staff writer

## Introduction

The 2024 Olympic Games will be held in Paris, France and will be much different from all other Olympic games. For the first time in history, the Olympic games will not be held in a stadium, but rather along the Seine River where France plans to hold the opening ceremony as well as other aspects of the games, such as the swimming events.

## Crunching the numbers

France is advertising the games as not only being very safe and secure for spectators by clearing out migrant and homeless camps, but also environmentally friendly by encouraging clean energy sources. According to Paris 2024's website, "Our goal is to halve the emissions arising in relation to the Games, while offsetting even more CO2 emissions than we will generate". The games will be fully powered by clean electricity like wind and solar energy, and biogas that would replace diesel generators, which is projected to save 13,000 tons worth of carbon emissions. Paris is taking this opportunity to set a precedent of sustainability, social activism, and innovation for future games to follow.

Hosting the Olympics is no easy feat, according to the Council on Foreign Relations. While the Games increase tourism, it also drains resources and money for the hosting country, with the 2020 Tokyo Olympics costing over \$15 billion, exceeding the projected limit by \$8 billion.

## Set-backs

The commitment to sustainability entails cleaning the Seine in preparation which has proven difficult. Swimming in the river has been banned since 1923 due to risk of water pollution. Paris is planning to work around this by implementing the Swimming Plan, a plan that involves placing an intricate system of underground pipes, pumps, and tanks to help block dangerous bacteria from entering the river. If all goes to plan, the river will not only be clean enough for the Olympic swimmers, but for public swimming as well.

In addition to the challenge of maintaining Paris' public health, Paris 2024 has also had to find ways to uphold public safety. According to AP News, many Parisians have expressed concerns about the migrant camps around Paris. The camp expulsions are growing in frequency as preparations for the games hasten. The Paris Organizing Committee for the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games (COJOP2024) held meetings with the aid groups and NGOs raising concerns over Paris' homeless crisis and Paris 2024's handling of it, stating that they strive to have this issue addressed as quickly as possible, promising to have the Games be an inclusive event.

## Corruption

The French Anti-Corruption Agency (AFA) has proven to be another setback for COJOP2024. According to Paris 2024 spokesperson Jonathon Firpo and COJOP2024 President Tony Estranguet, police have raided multiple offices and homes of those in charge of hosting the games, including businesses responsible for the construction of the Paris 2024 games, in an attempt to uncover any possible fraud or misuse of the billions of euros being poured

into the organization and to investigate suspected illegal conflicts of interests and misuse of contract dealings and public funds. Despite all challenges, COJOP2024 is determined to make 2024 an incredible year for the Olympics and set a good example for games to follow.

## Bidding

National Olympic committees (NOCs) are responsible for selecting cities within their nation to bid for hosting the games. Many are calling for reform of the bidding system due to the large sum of money being invested into their nation's bids considering there is a chance that it could be for nothing. For instance, Tokyo spent \$150 million bidding in 2016, but ultimately Rio de Janeiro hosted the Olympics that year. This has resulted in many cities, such as Toronto, withdrawing their bid for the 2024 Olympics. The costs of hosting outweigh the revenue generated from the games, and according to the Council on Foreign Relations, Beijing's 2008 Summer Olympics generated \$3.6 billion in revenue, compared with over \$40 billion in costs. While the International Olympic Committee (IOC) introduced reforms in 2019 to curtail costs and lead to more open dialogue between NOCs and IOCs, recent hosts have nonetheless consistently lost an excess of \$10 billion.

Sources: Associated Press News and CNN



graphics by Amelia Coleman

## Q2 Gives Back to Community

BISHOP BRITT | staff writer

From its home stadium Q2 to the food and culture, for the Austinites featured, the Austin Football Club (Austin FC) team has brought a lot to the city of Austin. Austin FC hopes to establish and support a flourishing community in Austin for all, one kick at a time.

Established in 2018, Austin FC played its first Major League Soccer (MLS) season in 2021, making it Austin's first professional sports league team. According to MLS' National Writer, Charles Boehm, the club is known for its multiple supporters and devoted fanbase, exemplified best by the 36 home games sold out since their debut, the longest active streak in the MLS.

Eamon Griffin is a sophomore at LASA and a passionate Verde fan, the name given to Austin FC's supporters. For Griffin, the team has brought much joy, spirit, and a lot of apparel.

"I've been playing soccer since I was little, so when they founded the team it was really exciting for me to go to the games," Griffin said. "The atmosphere is really energetic. I love to put on the gear for every game and rep the apparel. I have many, many hats."

Griffin appreciates the diversity of local food the stadium highlights, which has opened the door to new undiscovered spots for him. For Griffin, the stadium cuisine is a reflection of the city's vibrant, rich culinary culture deserving of a larger audience.

"The way that they incorporated local restaurants into the actual stadium is super cool," Griffin said. "It lets you get a taste for the local cuisines around the city and discover new places, as well as brings popularity to businesses that might not get that exposure in that area."

Not only does Q2 expose Austin's culture to a larger audience, it also helps to bring its Austinite fans together more. The team also has united the city and is a great bonding experience for families such as Griffin's.

"It's a way for me and my dad to bond because we both love soccer, so we usually go to the games together," Griffin said. "Generally my family bonds through games as well. Even though my sister and mom don't go much, it's still a great way to have fun with your family and spend time with them."

4ATX is an Austin FC branch foundation that aims to use soccer to help tie communities together through education. Wesley Davidson, a Senior Program Manager at 4ATX, describes the goals that he and the foundation have for Austin communities.

"[W]e use the power of soccer to help communities thrive socially, emotionally, and physically," Davidson said. "Our vision is really to make an accessible, healthy, and unified Central Texas community, harnessing soccer as

the power to do that."

Education is the primary goal of the foundation. Many underprivileged students can get behind in schoolwork, so 4ATX takes it upon itself to use soccer as a means to assist the underprivileged youth of Austin with certain subjects through Verde Leaders, its youth development program.

"We really aim to use the soccer field as the classroom for Verde Leaders," Davidson said. "And so, through a super unique curriculum, we offer free soccer programming at five middle schools through Verde Leaders, and it combines soccer with social-emotional learning, mindfulness practices, and restorative justice."

4ATX also seeks to supply the underprivileged and those who are in need with game equipment and events to provide a safe soccer environment for young students. According to Davidson, through community enrichment programs, 4ATX brings players and students alike together by teaching them the beautiful game.

"There are one-day events, pop-up clinics, you know, like 100 to 150 students are out there," Davidson said. "We have Austin FC players that come and appear to take part in each of those. So really cool events to once again get students, elementary school students, playing and also give them those touch points with Austin FC to meet players and feel connected to the club."

According to Davidson, as a nonprofit organization, 4ATX uses all of its funds for the good of the Austin communities. Through private donations from partners such as Piper and SolarWinds, they are able to receive benefits such as sponsorships for the chapters of their Verde Leaders program.

"As a registered 501c3 organization, we raise all of our own funds," Davidson said. "We have an amazing pool of donors and corporate partners that help make our programs possible."

According to Davidson, 4ATX plans to expand its efforts further than just inner Austin communities to better support those who can't afford the city's living expenses. 4ATX seeks to grow alongside the city of Austin and its rising prices.

"We're right now in the midst of strategic planning and thinking about the future with the backdrop of a changing landscape in Austin," Davidson said. "The landscape of Austin is constantly changing, with increased costs of living and families often being forced further outside of Austin... We're in a constant state of asking how we can better serve and impact Austin, and that's always gonna be the case."

## The Rise of Fantasy Sports

CHANDANA DUBAKULA  
club contributor

Created in the early 1960s, fantasy sports is an online activity where players draft their imaginary professional sports teams to compete against each other in virtual leagues revolving around real-life statistics and rankings. According to an NFL-commissioned survey, fantasy sports boomed in popularity in the early 2000s all over America, making what once started as a hobby grow into a multi-million dollar industry.

Many fans profess that this cultural phenomenon offers them a more interactive way to engage with their favorite sports and take charge of their own fictional team. LASA junior Sarvajit Madala, a fantasy football enthusiast, illustrates his role as a player.

"You draft skill positions and manage the team," Madala said. "You always have to look at what's available in the market, see if you can bring in new players that have a high chance of giving you extra points to win your games. It's important to keep a close eye on authentic games during each sports season to achieve victorious results in the hypothetical world."

Ashwin Geeni is a LASA sophomore who enjoys fantasy sports. According to Geeni, the rise of the industry also catalyzed an increased engagement in viewership and attendance across the sports leagues.

"The game can give you a greater understanding of how players will

perform and how each team works day in and day out," Geeni said. "It also keeps you interested in teams outside of whatever team you're a fan of, so you'll watch more games with other teams to keep track of their players. Personally, I like fantasy sports because I get to make all the decisions and act as the manager for my ideal team."

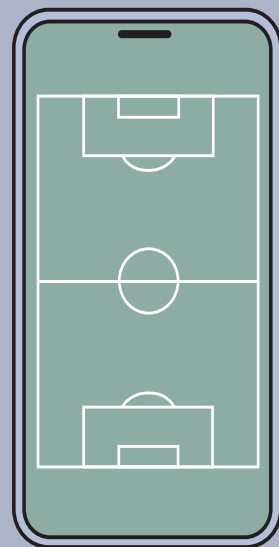
The game doesn't just appeal to a younger audience. In fact, several adults have been participating in fantasy sports like fantasy football. For quite a while, older audiences have come up with fun ways to raise the stakes, according to University of Texas at Austin student Vandana Dubakula.

"I've been playing fantasy football for the past five years, and it's such a fun activity for me and my friends," Dubakula said. "I'm doing it with a group of 10 people, and we all put down \$10 for the draft, so whoever comes in first place gets \$50, second place gets \$30, third place gets \$20. That's our incentive to want to do well."

However, fantasy sports aren't always easy, according to Madala. One of the biggest challenges with fantasy football is unpredictability.

"If a team member gets injured, it affects how you do in your games," Madala said. "You have to take those people out of your lineup and replace them with different players. But that's what makes the game so interesting."

Fantasy fans enjoy fantasy sports for its interactive elements that make it one of the most popular ways to engage in sports. For those interviewed, the opportunities are limitless in the imaginative world of sports, and it brings a whole new sense of realism to the sporting fan experience.



graphic by Annabel Andre

## IN THE HOLIDAY SPIRIT

**JOLIE GROGAN**  
**AVANI GANNE** | photo editors  
**GRIFFIN BEAM**

## Sprachfest

**GRIFFIN BEAM** | photo editor



**BOOKWORM** Commentary editor, Wintyr Rice reads up on German history. photo by Griffin Beam.

**NEEDLE AND THREAD!** Students display hand embroidered pieces for the Needlework category at Sprachfest. photo by Griffin Beam.

graphic by Kayla Le

Soon, the aroma of fresh gingerbread will fill the halls of the T-Anex as Sprachfest rolls around again this year. Sprachfest is a regional contest and state-run fair celebrating the spread of German culture and language through competitions in Texas on German art, music, drama pieces, and more.

LASA's German teacher Cristopher Parks explained how Sprachfest is heavily tied to German culture. Due to the fair's celebration of German customs, it also serves as an example of how various Western practices have been influenced by conventions found in Germany.

"Sprachfest is a regional competition for South and Central Texas high schools and middle schools," Park said. "At both competitions, students can compete in dozens of different types of events, highlighting their skills and talent in art, drama, prose, poetry, music, trivia, and various types of written and oral tests. Some of these traditions reach back into early pagan Alpine culture, like the Krampus legend. [They] eventually led to some of the common American holiday traditions like stockings, candy, and coal."

Sophomore Aditya Ghatty participated in Sprachfest last year and explained how it was a very enjoyable experience for him. He also stated that he was planning on competing in Sprachfest again due to his previous positive experience with it.

"It went well, it was really fun, everyone involved

loved it, and it was at a school we hung out at," Ghatty said. "I liked Sprachfest so much that me and my teammates are going back again this year, and I think everyone who can should go."

Parks also explained how there are many things associated with Sprachfest beyond its academic competitions. For example, Sprachfest also has a contest based on gingerbread houses that originate from historical traditions and stories in Germany, which Parks explained senior Isaac Rivera was the reigning champion.

"Isaac Rivera has the longest-running reign as a gingerbread 'Master-Builder,'" Parks said. "Last year he did an entire city-scape made of gingerbread."

LASA students visit Sprachfest when it occurs in February and get to experience it as a fun and engaging commemoration of German culture and language.

## Hanukkah

**JOLIE GROGAN** | photo editor

Hanukkah, the festival of lights in Jewish culture, is a holiday celebrated by millions of people worldwide. Among these people, about 5% are Americans, including many Austinites who gather to celebrate the rededication of the second temple of Jerusalem, according to AP-NORC. In the Hebrew calendar, Hanukkah starts on the 25th day of the Hebrew month Kislev, which tends to coincide with

December. The Jew Crew is a club at LASA that discusses and celebrates Jewish culture. The vice president of the Jew Club, junior Scarlett Neulander, explained Hanukkah's origins and the meaning behind it.

"Hanukkah is the holiday that celebrates the recovery of Jerusalem and the rededication of the second temple after the Maccabean revolt," Neulander said. "The Jews only had enough oil to light a lamp for one night, but magically the light lasted and the oil burned for eight days. This is known as the miracle of Hanukkah."

Judaism is one of the oldest monotheistic religions that still exists and is often practiced differently per family. According to Neulander, her family celebrates by eating traditional food and participating in traditions like lighting the menorah candles.

"My family celebrates Hanukkah by lighting the candles each night, playing dreidel, eating traditional foods like latkes, and getting doughnuts on the first

night," Neulander said. "We also usually go to a Hanukkah party on one of the last nights to enjoy Hanukkah with our other Jewish friends."

While there are many ways to celebrate Hanukkah, making and eating food is a beloved tradition by people such as Jason Hasik, a junior at LASA who also celebrates Hanukkah. The most popular dishes used to celebrate include kugel, latkes, and brisket.

"I celebrate Hanukkah because religion is important in my family and I enjoy seeing my family and friends," Hasik said. "I love my Mom's brisket that she makes every year and getting to see family that lives far away from me. I also obviously like receiving presents from my family and friends."

This year, Hanukkah starts on Thursday, Dec. 7, and ends on Friday, Dec. 15.



**HAPPY HANUKKAH!** Photo editor Jolie Grogan's family lighting the menorah together. photo by Jolie Grogan.

graphic by Kayla Le

## Diwali

**AVANI GANNE** | photo editor

Celebrated every year between October and November, Diwali is a holiday originating from India and is celebrated all over the world. The festival commemorates the return of Prince Rama, a prominent figure in Hindu mythology, to the Kingdom of Ayodhya after his victory over the demon Ravana. In modern times, Diwali is celebrated through many traditions, such as lighting candles and sparklers, eating particular foods like pani puri and mango lassi, and dancing with one's community.

According to junior Chandana Dubakula, these traditions are what make Diwali a special celebration that everyone can enjoy. From lighting sparklers with her friends to eating special food for the holiday, she says that there is so much to do when celebrating the holiday.

"I absolutely love this holiday because of the festive energy," Dubakula said. "I usually go to the temple, and there's always really good food, fun activities, and fireworks. At home, we usually put tons of lights on our porch and I do sparklers with my friends. Not to mention the sweets! Diwali sweets are always the best, and my house smells so good because of whatever my mom is making."

Similarly to Dubakula, junior Janani Easwar spent the holiday celebrating the festival's representation of good's victory over evil with her family and friends. According to Easwar, the holiday's origins contribute to its uplifting and happy nature.

"Diwali is celebrated symbolically as the triumph of good over evil, using light to signify the dispelling of darkness in a person's life," Easwar said. "Because it is recognized as the festival of light and hope, [Diwali] is very uplifting and quite enjoyable. I celebrate Diwali because it is a way for me to connect with my roots and to celebrate together with friends and family."

Furthermore, Diwali promotes positive values in the lives of those who get to experience it, according to junior Triyatha Jammula. It serves as a reminder of the success of all that is good and encourages everyone to nurture these values in themselves. "Diwali not only emphasizes the triumph of good over evil but also allows us to embrace togetherness and share love," Jammula said. "As we light the diya lamps, we illuminate hope and positivity, making Diwali a constant reminder of the power of unity."



**FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS** Austinites celebrate Diwali with stands of traditional clothing and setting off sparklers. Diwali is the celebration of light prevailing over darkness. photos by Avani Ganne.

graphic by Kayla Le