

APRIL FOOLS' EDITION AVAILABLE BETWEEN PAGES 8 & 9

LASA LIBERATOR

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Raise Your Hand for Rally Day

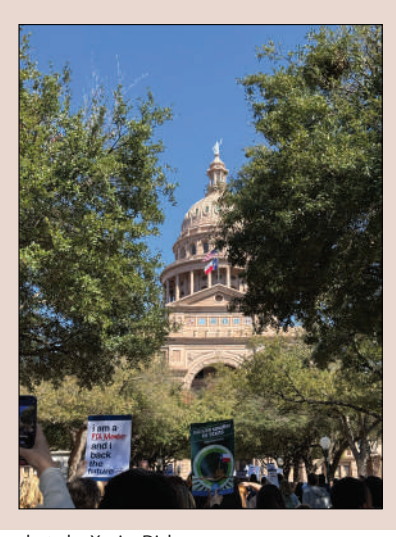


photo by Xavier Dickenson

ETHAN STERN | news editors
LEAH LASHUS | news editors

Rally Day is a biennial gathering of educators and students that occurs when the Texas legislature is in its regular session. It is led by the Austin Council Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), an organization that includes teachers, parents, students, and education workers from all over the Austin area.

The event was established in 1976 as “PTA Day at the Capitol,” where members started the tradition of rallying in support of public education. This year, the event took place on Feb. 24. LASA partnered with Raise Your Hand Texas, an organization that emphasizes public advocacy, to send a group of students to the Capitol and discuss education matters with their legislators. The student caucus was made up of LASA students and other Austin Independent School District students and teachers. They marched from First Baptist Church on 901 Trinity to the Capitol, with many Texas

students starting chants, waving flags, and holding signs in support of education.

photo by Leah Lashus



One student was sophomore Connor Praba, the events director for the Student Advocacy Alliance, a student-run organization where students are given opportunities to advocate and share their stories throughout this legislative session. Praba explained that students value Rally Day as an outlet to express their unique voices in the conversation.

“Texas students are 5.5 million voices strong, so let’s make sure we’re heard from our classroom to the halls of Congress,” Praba said. “We need to remember that in this time of uncertainty, advocating for the change you want to see is increasingly important.”

Raise Your Hand Texas’ student participants, such as Praba, were able to set up meetings with specific representatives and senators. This allowed students to engage with the representatives and bring their own important perspectives to the conversation.

see **RAISE** page 6



photo by Leah Lashus

what's news

photo by Apollo Dahmus

see **TUNES** page 16

photo by Ellington Tough

see **LASA** page 11

photo by Sam Waelbroeck

see **LASALIBERATOR.COM**

History Often Rhymes

America Marked by Second Gilded Age

MEGAN GEROLD | editor-in-chief
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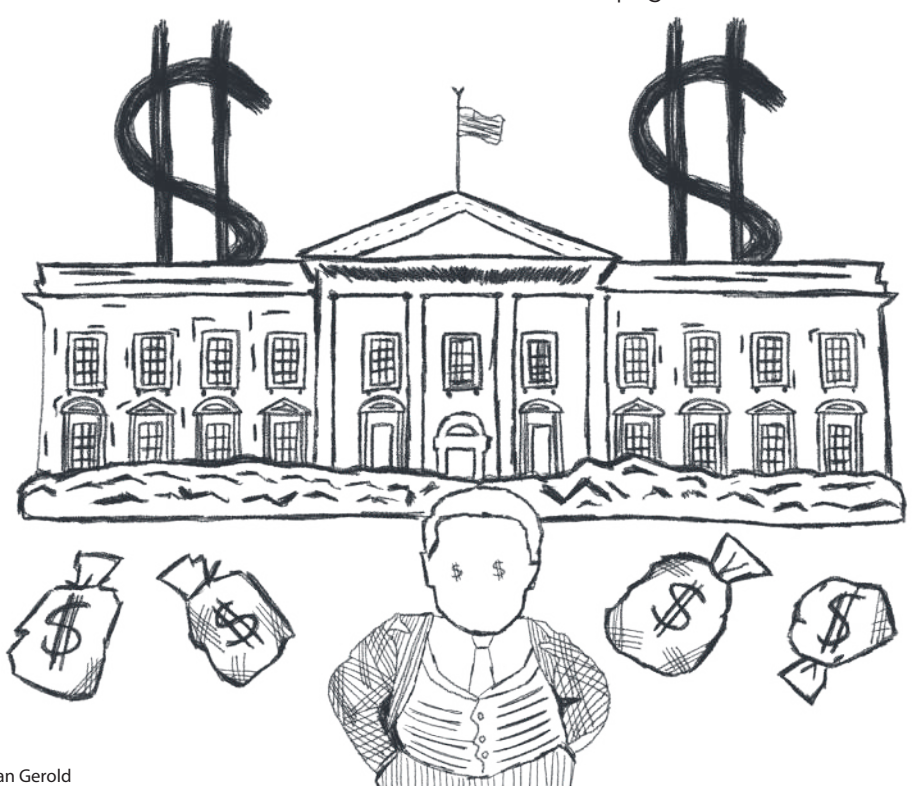
A majority of Americans are now closer to poverty and financial ruin than ever before. According to CBS News, nearly 60% of Americans cannot afford a \$1,000 emergency expense and are essentially living paycheck to paycheck. Yet, with the election of Donald Trump and the growing influence of billionaire allies such as Elon Musk and Peter Thiel over governmental and political affairs, many fear that a self-enriching oligarchy will only exacerbate the growing wealth divide in the U.S.

Recalling a period in American history of deregulation,

extreme wealth inequality, and corporatist control over society, the current era has already been termed the Second Gilded Age of America by a number of historians and economists alike. Professor of economics at the University of California, Berkeley, Brad DeLong, one of the most vocal opponents against the current trend towards extreme wealth inequalities, views many attributes of the first Gilded Age in modern American society.

“The original Gilded Age (roughly 1870-1900) was defined by extreme income inequality, the dominance of a small elite over political and economic life, the erosion of democratic norms, and the disillusionment of the working class,” DeLong said. “The parallels with today are stark.”

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graphic by Megan Gerold

TEXAS DISTRICTS IN THE RED

REBECA GONZALEZ | student life editors
ISABEL KRAMER | student life editors

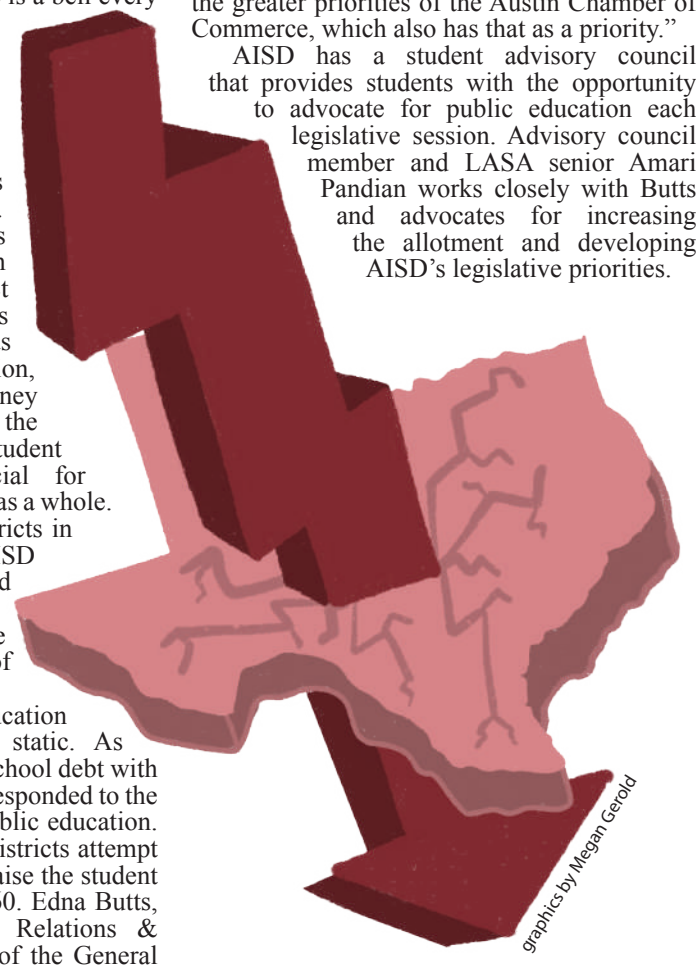
In the 2024-25 school year, LASA faced many changes. One loud change is a bell every day at 10:28 a.m. Students may hear the school’s sounds or their teacher’s phone alarm to remind the teachers of a very important task: submitting attendance. Although it is a small and simple change, this quick alarm is keeping the heart of LASA alive.

The presence of students has become important to the Austin Independent School District (AISD) as a whole. This is because the school district has a budget deficit of \$110 million, according to AISD, and the money that schools receive from the attendance of a student, the student allotment, has become crucial for sustaining education in the state as a whole. Over 50% of public school districts in Texas are in a deficit. Houston ISD has a deficit of \$250 million, and Dallas ISD has a deficit of \$186 million. A recent study at Rice University found that 73% of Texas schools are underfunded.

Since 2019, Texas public education students’ allotment has been static. As inflation has grown and public school debt with it, the Texas legislature has not responded to the needs and demands of Texas public education. Each year, workers for school districts attempt to work with the legislature to raise the student allotment from its current \$6,160. Edna Butts, director of Intergovernmental Relations & Policy Oversight at the Office of the General

Counsel for AISD, is one of these workers. “I would guess that every single school district in the state advocates for raising the basic allotment,” Butts said. “And it’s also on the greater priorities of the Austin Chamber of Commerce, which also has that as a priority.”

AISD has a student advisory council that provides students with the opportunity to advocate for public education each legislative session. Advisory council member and LASA senior Amari Pandian works closely with Butts and advocates for increasing the allotment and developing AISD’s legislative priorities.



graphics by Megan Gerold

see **TEXAS DISTRICTS IN THE RED** page 8-9

editorial

School Safety Suffers While Students Spiral

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

Gun Violence of America reported that 971 school shooting incidents occurred in 2024 alone. The public schools in the United States are not apt to continue operating regularly with current measures in the face of threats. Therefore, significant changes should be made to current school safety measures, such as gun regulations and the availability of mental health resources for students.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, from 2000 to 2022, there were 328 total casualties from active shooter incidents at elementary and secondary schools. The number of people left dead or facing serious injury from school shooting incidents in America is appalling. Even with the new rules and guidelines, such as House Bill 3, which requires every school under its jurisdiction to have at least one armed security guard, schools still aren't safe. The bill provides every school district \$15,000 to help cover the costs of whatever new security each district sees necessary. Not only have different districts reported that this money is not nearly enough to follow this new law, but the bill's vagueness doesn't provide any useful guidelines for Texas school districts to help protect their schools.

In addition, a lack of gun regulation directly contributes to a lack of safety in schools. One of the most significant issues with this subject is the easy access to firearms in individual households for youth. Everytown, a gun safety support fund, conducted a study that reported that around 40 percent of young people in the survey have "somewhat easy" access to a gun in their home. In addition, 21 percent stated that they could get access to a weapon very easily if they wanted to. This is a problem, as kids should not have access to guns in their households.

On top of this, the Texas State Law Library confirms that Texas no longer requires people to have a license to carry a handgun in the majority of public areas. This is concerning because it is getting increasingly easier to own and operate a handgun in the U.S., increasing the threat of school shootings and decreasing the safety of schools.

Not only do a lack of security measures and gun control contribute to the abundance of school shootings, but the absence of adequate mental health resources for students in schools is a major contributing factor. A study conducted by the National Library of Medicine highlights the link between mental illness and an increased number of gun violence incidents, further proving the point that poor mental health or unstable home lives cause school shootings.

Although school shootings, safety measures in schools, and

mental health resources may seem complicated and almost impossible issues to solve, there are simple solutions to help mitigate the issue of school shootings. For example, improving safety in schools can include more strict, serious active shooter drills. The majority of drills here at LASA are rarely taken seriously by the student body, and many students slowly saunter out of the hallway to take advantage of the opportunity to get out of regularly scheduled classes rather than consider the importance of an active shooter drill. Something as simple as an announcement over the intercom about specific instructions and helpful reminders or guidelines for students to keep in mind during the drill could help alleviate this problem.

Additionally, the Supreme Court should seriously consider a ban on bump stocks or gun attachments that significantly reduce firing time by capturing the energy from the kickback. These bump stocks increase the effect of the gun by allowing the shooter to fire more shots per second, which increases their danger.

To address the mental health issue and its influence on school shootings, more professional counseling staff should be funded by the government and available to students at school.

We are fortunate at LASA to have access to two wellness counselors ready to listen to and help students who are struggling. However, the reality that school districts do not have funds to supply the most at-risk schools is still an issue that needs to be addressed.

Although all of these solutions will drastically help the school shooting issue in America, some U.S. citizens believe that incorporating gun regulations into our government is an active infringement upon the rights of citizens outlined in the Second Amendment of the Constitution. However, the Second Amendment was created to allow Americans to protect themselves from threats from British forces because the war between the U.S.

and Britain did not officially end until 24 years after it was written.

In the 2008 court case, District of Columbia vs. Heller, local police officer Dick Heller disagreed with the recently passed D.C. law that prevented individuals from using a handgun in their homes. In opposition to Heller's case, Justice John Paul Stevens argued that the Second Amendment was written to protect a person's right to a "well regulated Militia," and not to preserve an individual's right to own and operate a gun. This valued opinion from a Supreme Court Justice supports the idea that the Second Amendment should not be applied to an individual and does not fit within the context of modern-day America.

Schools are not safe enough. We need better safety measures in schools, better gun regulation, and mental health counseling for students to prioritize the institutions that provide the foundational knowledge and education necessary for fueling the future of America.



graphic by Amelia Coleman

Raptor Chatter

Why do you feel safe at LASA?



photo by Luca Sims

David Dame
Freshman

"There's not really many threats ... I don't see the point [of some safety measures]"



photo by Luca Sims

Conner Praba
Sophomore

"I feel safe at LASA ... because of the student body."



photo by Luca Sims

Bella Castaño
Junior

"I trust [school officials] to do everything that they can to keep the students safe."



photo by Luca Sims

Miles Ford
Senior

"I feel safe at school ... I don't feel like the school has any active policies that make me feel safe"

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LASA LIBERATOR

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 LASA 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 LASA 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 LASA 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 LASA Liberator will attempt to publish a range of opinions within reason.

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This or That: For every other issue, Commentary presents two opposing arguments on LASA-related or local topics to let readers form opinions in a would-you-rather fashion.

Typing Up Notes Versus Handwriting Notes

TINGYU CAO | staff writer

THIS: Being a junior in high school means that note-taking is an integral part of everyday life. Since I take notes in almost all of my classes, it is important for me to find the best method to optimize my notes. With this comes the debate about the superiority of taking notes by hand versus taking notes digitally.

Writing one's notes on paper is clearly the superior option. Studies from NPR, Forbes, and BBC show that taking notes by hand requires more brain power. When writing, more parts of the brain have to be engaged compared to when you are typing. As a result, note-takers tend to memorize what they write down better than what they type.

Another benefit of writing is that it is a more demanding task, which forces the writer to summarize. Summarizing helps memorization because it requires the note-taker to actively think about what they have written down and process that information to reword it. Furthermore, taking notes by hand can also provide opportunities to make specific graphs, charts, and illustrations that arguably cannot be done under time pressure on a digital document. Taking notes by hand helps students avoid distractions, such as the need to go on Instagram or other social media platforms. Additionally, many teachers prohibit the use of digital devices in their classrooms at LASA, which makes handwritten notes the only option.

ARIANA RODRIGUEZ | staff writer

THAT: Word after word, my

Some might argue that digital note-taking has the same effects as physical notes because instead of typing on a document, one can take a stylus and an iPad and take notes. For example, studies from NPR show that a stylus on an iPad can achieve the same quality of brain activity and memorization as a pencil on paper. However, this still does not help when your teacher bans electronic devices in their classroom, or the fact that the iPad is highly expensive in comparison to paper and pencil, highlighting it being an accessible way to maximize the absorbed information.

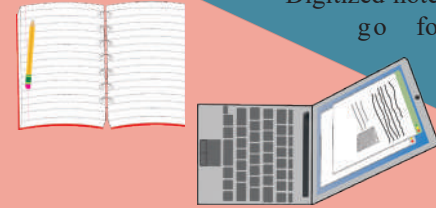
It is still better to stick with the old trusty pencil and paper. Writing is widely accepted by teachers, improves memorization, and limits distractions. Why take notes digitally when you can write?

mind continues to spiral as the teacher's fast-paced voice spews out confusing information. During writing, the phrases I thought I grasped during the lecture jumble together, turning into nothing I could understand. As the flimsy notebook endures more and more erasing, each piece of paper deteriorates, and my patience wears thin as each second goes by. I'm infuriated when I realize that I have to type up all the notes for an online assignment, which adds more stress and time to the process.

This is an issue that is all too common among students, but there is a solution. What if life could be as organized and

simple as a note page without any smudged pencil markings? Welcome to the world of digitized note-taking! According to a study conducted by Imed Bouchrika, PhD, chief data scientist, note-taking online advances the retention of information by forcing students to process and rephrase the information because they aren't writing verbatim. The Learning Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill agreed with Bouchrika, recognizing that digital note-taking is more effective for the comprehension of factual information rather than conceptual information.

In addition, digitized note-taking is faster, can be easily uploaded to Google Drive or other platforms in an organized way, and is quicker to edit and reorganize for later retrieval. As LASA students, it is crucial that there is a reliable and trustworthy method of note-taking: one where we don't have to depend on our flimsy notebook being durable. Digitized note-taking is the way to go for the countless hours of note-taking ahead.



graphics by Ellington

Higher-Level Education Means Higher-Level Stress

ANITA SOSA | staff writer

It's September of my first semester of senior year, and I'm drowning. I'm staring down the barrel of over 20 college essays on top of trying to keep up my GPA, prepare for debate tournaments, practice for band, and manage my social life. This stress is the reality most high school seniors face.

According to a survey by Princeton Review, 74% of students feel overwhelmingly stressed about applications, and another survey by the National Association for College Admission Counseling said that over three-quarters reported fearing one small application error could lessen their admission chances. With the popularity of social media acceptance posts, many students feel increasingly pressured to get into their top choice, and they feel that their application must be spotless to even have a chance of securing a spot at any university.

At LASA, an already academically competitive environment, this is especially true. Juniors and seniors often discuss GPAs and SAT scores or what schools people are applying to, creating an environment where many students tie happiness or self-worth to their grades. According to a Harvard Business Publishing article, this emphasis on results such as grades or test scores can hinder a student's ability to effectively learn by hurting their self-confidence and desire to actually master the content. Rather than focusing on the benefits and rewards of making mistakes throughout the learning process, students focus only on the perfect grade, which is detrimental to their mental health.

There is an unhealthy amount of stress associated with students

attempting to gain leadership in groups or pad their resumes with extracurricular activities. College isn't the only reason teens join clubs, but the pressure of trying to perfect a college application often forces students to believe they must find a club, create an event, or even cure cancer before they graduate.

The pressure to get into a competitive school incentivizes many students to overapply to schools, hoping to hit the lottery due to dropping acceptance rates. However, this overburdens students with a mountain of supplemental essays, interviews, and financial aid forms that must be completed. Combined with the fact that these materials are expected to be perfect, this creates even more stress, preventing students from being able to enjoy their senior year.

This can also be costly in terms of paying application fees or extra college counseling. Many students choose to take additional SAT prep classes or pay for a tutor to help with standardized tests, which can further exacerbate issues for families with fewer resources.

The stresses of college applications are not a problem exclusive to students, either. According to U.S. News, many parents also become stressed out by their child's application process. The increasing complexity and competitiveness of college applications make the process challenging for parents to navigate, with a multitude of deadlines and parts for every new application. Locally, according to the University of Texas

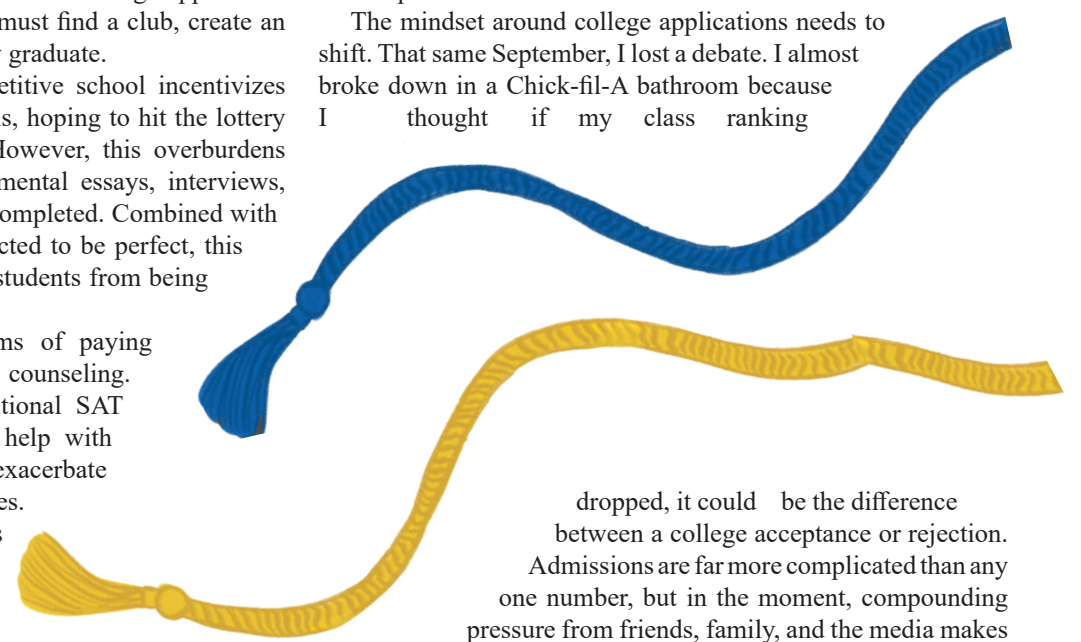
at Austin (UT) News, 72,885 students submitted freshman applications in Fall 2024 for UT, showcasing the competition that amplifies the stress seniors face.

The mindset around college applications needs to shift. That same September, I lost a debate. I almost broke down in a Chick-fil-A bathroom because I thought if my class ranking

dropped, it could be the difference between a college acceptance or rejection. Admissions are far more complicated than any one number, but in the moment, compounding pressure from friends, family, and the media makes any mistake feel make-or-break.

This environment isn't healthy for students, their parents, or schools. At worst, it can take away from creating meaningful experiences in what deserves to be the best year of high school.

graphic by Tita Gonzalez



Should the Bible Be a Part of English Class?

LUCA SIMS | staff writer

Texas' new 'Bluebonnet Learning' teaches religion as a part of its curriculum. From the Sermon on the Mount to the Last Supper, this reminded many LASA students of their own AP English 3 curriculum, which contains the Bible as a four-week-long discussion piece. According to the syllabus, the religious text is taught as a part of a wider focus on helping students focus on how American identity and the American dream changed over time. Although these insights provided by the Bible can be somewhat useful, the Bible and other religious texts should not be taught as a part of high school English curriculums.

Setting aside the religious nature of the Bible as a text, the intricacies of the book itself make it unsuitable to be taught. The Bible fundamentally uses antiquated language, with grammar and vocabulary that make reading the King James Version, recommended by the English department, a challenge. This, along with the sheer thousand-page length of it, means that most of it is skipped over, defeating part of the purpose of reading the Bible in the first place because it allows only a shallow dive instead of the complex meanings it is meant to provide. For example, countless scholars spend their careers dedicating themselves to understanding and interpreting the complexities of the Bible. The four weeks of reading dedicated to the Bible in class is not long enough to understand this religious text. Instead, the Bible should be taught as part of university-level religion classes, where more time can be spent unpacking the various ideas, which would allow students to actually reap better understanding of the various impacts of it on Western ideologies.

Surpassing LASA, in Texas's new curriculum, the breadth

and depth of the Bible are also skimmed over. There are many complex interpretations of the Bible, and this specifically becomes an issue in the New Testament, where there are many different interpretations of important events like the Sermon on the Mount. Each interpretation needs to be examined more properly to help students place the Bible in relation to its importance in Western literature, but currently, we are unable to stop and analyze in depth the specific choices made in how the story is told. As a consequence, providing only a survey level of depth to the Bible decreases the quality of the actual English lessons.

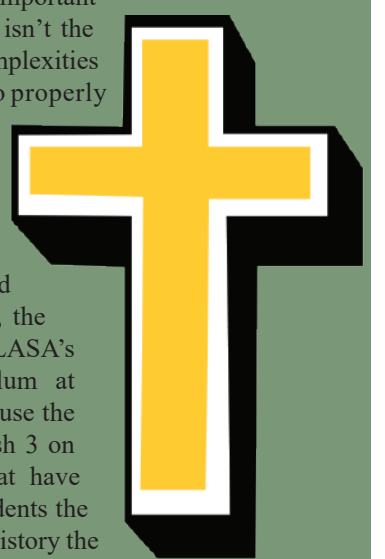
The missing complexity in the curriculum means there is a lack of tact when it comes to the Bible's religious nature. Fundamentally, school and church should be entirely separate as the idea of church and state separation is one of the fundamental values of the United States, an idea intentionally outlined by the Founding Fathers during a time with a highly religious environment. Respecting the ideals of our government's structure, America's government and schools must remain secular to uphold the founding ideals, and the improperly outlined curriculum involving the Bible blurs the lines of secularism for students.

The Bible, regardless of its religious nature, is not the best book or most effective methodology to convey the lessons educators and lawmakers are seeking, such as kindness, sharing, and even when it comes to teaching the importance of it on American history. Rather, to achieve these purposes, there are an abundance of American texts, all of which contain these valuable messages.

A great example of this is books highlighted in AP U.S. History, which provides a smoother and more directly understandable message and understanding about their contribution to American history. Take for example "The Jungle" by Upton Sinclair, a

text that not only furthers students' understanding of the Gilded Age but also contains timeless messages about immigration and poverty in America that are applicable and easily connected to students' day-to-day life. To name even a few more: "The Catcher and the Rye" by J. D. Salinger; "Fahrenheit 451" by Ray Bradbury, a personal favorite of mine; or Joseph Heller's "Catch 22". All of these texts are from the Library of Congress's collection of 'books that shaped America' from 1950 to 2000 and are great material for those learning more about American classics in a high school curriculum.

Although the Bible has important messages, a high school setting isn't the proper place to unpack the complexities behind it. The lack of time to properly explore this long work allows for a lack of consideration of its religious nature, which both minimizes ideas of keeping religion out of school and the understanding actually provided by the Bible. For these reasons, the Bible should not be part of LASA's curriculum or Texas's curriculum at large. Rather, we should instead use the little time we have in AP English 3 on other, truly American texts, that have shaped our history, that give students the education and understanding of history the Bible attempts to, but falls short on.



graphic by Asher Zvi-Nova

Gentrification Moves to East Austin

ANITA SOSA | staff writer

For the past two decades, Austin has been one of the fastest-growing cities in the country. This growth has affected the city's social, cultural, and economic fabric, mainly due to gentrification forcing out older residents due to rising rent costs.

Many factors have contributed to gentrification since the mid-19th century, such as new jobs from economic growth that draw people into Austin, the city's cultural appeal to outside residents, improving infrastructure, and a limited supply of affordable housing. Limited housing, combined with a surge of new citizens into East Austin, skyrocketed competition for available land, with recent trends such as the tech boom of the early 2000s accelerating the process. As wealthier residents move in, demand for affordable housing decreases, causing a feedback loop that further exacerbates housing prices.

According to The Uprooted Project by the University of Texas at Austin, families making at or 80% below the median family income are most at risk of displacement. Those on fixed incomes, such as the elderly or disabled, have difficulty paying increased property taxes with an unchanging income. Renters and households with children are more vulnerable to displacement, which affects many already struggling communities.

The impact has been severe. According to an article by Mount Bonnell, median household incomes rose in East Austin specifically by 74.3% from 2010 to 2020, making it increasingly more difficult for local homeowners to pay their rent or mortgage. Ultimately, this has led to many locals leaving the city, making room for newer, wealthier buyers to build in Austin.

Gentrification is especially impacting low-income neighborhoods in East Austin and disproportionately affects racial minorities in the area. In 1928, Austin implemented the 1928 Master Plan that racially segregated neighborhoods by placing facilities and institutions for Black residents east of what is now Interstate 35. This effectively forced out a large majority of African Americans in West Austin, as schools and services for these Austinites of color were now exclusively available in East Austin.

These historical lines have created the blueprint for the present displacement as undervalued land has become increasingly developed. This has raised property taxes and the price of rent as white and wealthier residents started populating East Austin, with unaffordable housing pushing out residents of historic communities. Rental property owners often choose to renovate less profitable mobile home parks into more expensive high-rise condominiums, meaning that once residents move out, only wealthier residents are able to move in.

This is not only limited to residential displacement. These shifts also hurt local businesses that now must compete for rent. Wealthier residents change spending patterns in the area, causing many local companies to lose their crucial customer bases of Austinites who tend to buy from more affordable places. This has reshaped historic African American and Hispanic cultural enclaves in the city, as many local businesses have been forced to relocate. Businesses such as the Pinata Party Palace, a local party supply store that has served East Austin for 40-plus years, are forced to relocate to neighboring suburbs, either leave the Austin area entirely, or shut down permanently.

According to a study conducted by the National Library of Medicine, culture and society have an impact on mental health, proving that the loss of many landmark cultural institutions and long-standing businesses often has a negative psychological impact on those who remain. Many people in East Austin feel increasingly disconnected from the neighborhoods they grew up in, feeling that their city's cultural personality has shifted and now outright excludes them.

Additionally, a growing focus on environmentalism has led to a new kind of green gentrification where sustainability-branded housing is built at higher costs, aimed to attract wealthier residents and improve the neighborhood's desirability and image. In Austin, the new Mueller project was designed to be a more ethical and environmentally friendly development project. However, according to a Public Citizen article, many vulnerable communities nearby are at risk of being displaced. The development is being built just east of I-35, where significant demographic change is underway.

Attempting to stem the tide of displacement is challenging for city leaders who juggle social, economic, and environmental concerns. Several financial tools are used to help those most affected by gentrification, such as property tax abatements and tenant rent stabilization. These can help make housing affordable for residents in gentrified neighborhoods.

Historic preservation practices and recognizing areas as cultural districts can help protect

significant institutions from being erased. Through these measures, city leaders can prevent landmark buildings from being torn down, and non-profit organizations can give money to help sustain them. Gentrification is a multifaceted issue with many potential solutions, likely requiring a combination of several to support Austin's historic communities.

In the meantime, gentrification remains one of the most pressing issues facing Austin. Even as the very nature of the city grows and changes, we must learn to make room for all of our citizens.



City

Keep Austin



graphic by Leah Lashus

graphic by Ellington Tough

Our

SADIE SARRAT | commentary editor

Local legend Red Wassenich coined the slogan "Keep Austin Weird" over 20 years ago. Perfectly embodying the quirky, laid-back culture of Texas' capital city, this phrase has served as motivation for locals to preserve and support Austin institutions such as the Cathedral of Junk, Waterloo Records, and Guerro's Taco Bar that shape the city's weird vibe in the face of retailing giants and increasing rent prices. However, recent changes have left many locals wondering if Wassenich would still say Austin has any weirdness left to keep in 2025.

For example, an iconic part of Austin culture, South Congress, is becoming noticeably more polished and mainstream. Chain stores and trendy brands such as Hermès, Lululemon, Aviator Nation, and Alo have popped up on what Austinites call SoCo. A street that used to be lined with small businesses, such as Mi Casa, the Good Company, and Sunroom, has been replaced by nonlocal retailers, resulting in significant changes in the city's signature vibes.

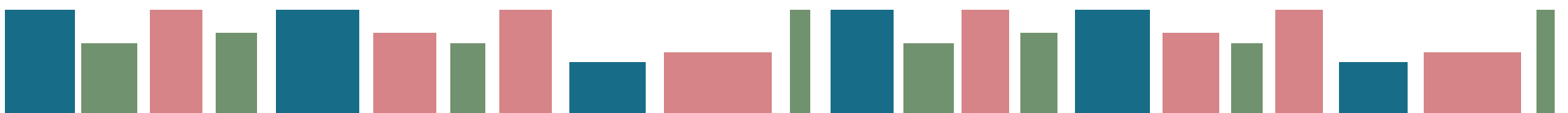
Small businesses and independent creatives fuel Austin's weirdness, and increasing rent prices have made it hard for these unique stores and restaurants to stay open. According to KUT News, from 2021 to 2023, the average rent in the Austin area rose 29%. Although in the last two years, the prices have lowered slightly. As of December 2024, according to Zillow, the average price for Austin rent was right around \$1,645, which is still very high and unsustainable for the Austin population that works in small businesses or independent corporations. This makes paying employee wages incredibly difficult for small business employers, and lower wages force many employees to work multiple jobs or quit entirely and move out of the city.

Additionally, Austin is known as the Live Music Capital of the World. According to Go Banking Rates, Austinites must make \$122,000 to live comfortably in the city. However, according to Indeed, the average salary for local Austin musicians is \$28,765 per year, 45% below the national average. These musicians are the foundation of Austin, and because of the current economic state, they cannot survive in the city, leaving a hole in Austin's culture.

The loss of local treasures like Shady Grove and Threadgills has disappointed and even angered many Austinites. However disappointing it might be to see local businesses replaced by large chains, this mix of new and old is the defining factor of Austin's weirdness. The constant ebb and flow of new businesses moving in and out of the city attracts new creators, thinkers, and entrepreneurs annually, making Austin so diverse. Although remembering the past is necessary to preserve our history, Austin's culture is defined by change, and it's impossible to change if we cling to events, places, and ideas from years long past. Instead, we should appreciate the ingenuity and creativity that flourishes in Austin, even if that means saying goodbye to our favorite restaurants and stores.

For example, an Austinite living in 1884 might not have appreciated the construction of the newest Driskill hotel that drastically changed the city. However, today, the Driskill is an integral part of the city, hailed as a symbol of hospitality and luxury. In reality, Austin is always changing, and that's what makes our capital city uniquely weird.

Jonah Popinski contributed to this article



History

from page 1

First coined by Mark Twain, the Gilded Age began in the second half of the 19th century. At the height of the Industrial Revolution, the U.S. was able to emerge as an industrial powerhouse as new technologies from the steam engine to petroleum refining, as well as rapid railroad expansion, facilitated massive economic growth, per the Library of Congress. Dr. Brian Ingrassia, an associate professor of history at West Texas A&M University, explained that this progress created a new class of American industrialists who, not unlike today's billionaires, made enormous fortunes by monopolizing industries and promoting technological innovation.

"I would say the biggest analogy that I see is that there are a lot of huge fortunes made in the Gilded Age, based on new technologies, in particular," Ingrassia said. "...What I see today is a number of individuals who have also built very, very large fortunes on a new technology and that technology specifically is computers and the internet. I think if you look at the biggest fortunes today, the Carnegie, Rockefellers, and Vanderbilts of today, it's Jeff Bezos, it's Mark Zuckerberg, it's Bill Gates—people who took the new technology of computers and especially the internet, and used that to create economies of scale and then extract lots of wealth from a large market using those technologies."

While the first Gilded Age's captains of industry expanded American industry and some engaged in philanthropy, according to Dr. Ingrassia, they were also known as robber barons because of their ruthless business practices and their oligarchical influence over American politics via bribes and political machines. Though today's billionaires are not as flagrant, DeLong still sees similarities with 19th century robber barons in them.

"Just as the Gilded Age had railroad barons, steel magnates, and oil tycoons funding political campaigns and controlling policy through backroom deals, today's billionaires wield enormous influence over political parties, media narratives, and even social media platforms," DeLong said.

During the first Gilded Age, old press barons such as William Randolph Hearst, once the architect of one of the largest media conglomerates in history, pioneered yellow journalism and sensationalist stories to sway public opinion for political gain. In 2025, DeLong believes the billionaires controlling social media today utilize its algorithmic nature and lax standards to control public narratives in a way that eclipses even Gilded Age-era social engineering.

"The old press barons like Hearst could manufacture consent, but today's media is more fragmented, algorithmic, and less bound by journalistic ethics," DeLong said. "Social media monopolies exert a level of influence unimaginable in the 19th century."

In an opinion piece published in the Guardian, former Secretary of Labor Robert Reich sounds similar alarms, pointing to Jeff Bezos' decisions to shift the Washington Post's opinion section's focus to conservative themes such as defending free markets and barr its editorial board from endorsing Kamala Harris as an example of the billionaire bending the knee to President Trump as a political favor. Additionally, both economists pointed to Senior Advisor Elon Musk's transformation of X, formerly Twitter, into a platform

demonstrably favoring right-wing narratives and influencers as further evidence of oligarchical efforts to consolidate political power and create an echo chamber that feeds into the current administration's agendas.

"The first term already showed that Trumpism isn't about 'draining the swamp' but making the swamp work directly for his allies," DeLong said. "Expect even greater political favoritism for corporate donors."

As a counter to the elitist control of politics and industry and the economic struggles most Americans faced, the populist movement was born during the first Gilded Age to forward the interests of farmers and the working class. However, unlike Trump's now-pro-business, conservative populist base, Ingrassia says the original Populist Party was less concise in their goals and actually opposed free market economics.

"One of the things the populists wanted in the 1890s is they wanted inflation because they thought that was good for farmers," Ingrassia said. "...Populism is less about the specific solutions and policies, and it's more about how those solutions and policies get marketed to the people. I think today we're seeing a populist movement that is different: it uses similar tactics, maybe similar concepts, but it's approaching these problems from a very different angle than 130 years ago, let's say."

In stark contrast to their predecessors, according to history department chair and University of Texas at Austin (UT) professor H.W. Brands, modern-day populists find themselves on the side of the billionaires and oligarchs they once opposed. In Brands' view, the billionaires' key to winning working-class Americans and getting them to support policies enriching the one percent was in winning the favor of a political outsider and populist vanguard.

"The connection is Donald Trump," Brands said. "The ordinary people of America don't identify with Elon Musk or Mark Zuckerberg. The ones who voted for Donald Trump like him, and he, at the moment, likes leaders of Silicon Valley. Now, if he should decide he doesn't like the leaders of Silicon Valley, then they're going to be out in the cold, and they won't get any comfort from the ordinary folks of America."

With the Supreme Court, Congress, and the current administration now all being held by Republicans favoring deregulation and eliminating federal oversight and Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) looking to gut several departments such as the Department of Education according to Fox News, there is no indication that the extreme wealth inequality or the populist fervor engulfing the U.S. will diminish in the near future.

Still, much like the Progressive Era succeeded the first Gilded Age, Brands nonetheless sees some possibility of a progressive resurgence taking the place of the current populist wave and retaking political power in the U.S., with climate change currently being among the biggest issues uniting progressives in opposition to the current administration's policies.

"If there's a backlash against Trump, then another administration could come in, presumably, a Democratic administration with a bit more of a mandate to do something about climate change," Brands said. "The Biden administration did, so will the next Democratic administration? Quite possibly."

Homelessness in Austin

MRIDHULA KUMARAVEL | staff writer

Tents line the sidewalks under I-35, makeshift shelters cluster under wooded areas downtown, and thousands of residents are left without stable homes following the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As Austin's skyline grows, so does its homeless population, according to the Austin Monitor, which underscores a crisis that has become impossible to ignore. The city's rising housing costs, combined with a shortage of affordable shelter options, have left people struggling to make ends meet. While efforts to address the issue continue, advocates stress that more long-term solutions are needed.

LifeWorks is an organization that works to solve youth homelessness for young people ages 16 to 22 by providing housing, mental health support, education, and workforce services. Many youth struggle to find stability in their life on their own, and they lack the proper skills to enter the workforce. Ken Bodden, director of marketing and communications at LifeWorks, emphasized the importance of early intervention and wraparound services to prevent youth homelessness before it becomes a long-term crisis. They do this by helping them address potential issues that prevent youths from receiving long-term housing.

"When a youth turns 18, they age out of the system and have nowhere to go," Bodden said. "We work with DFPS to identify at-risk youth, and try and find them housing before they become homeless. Lack of experience is a big factor when a youth tries to enter the workforce, so we partner with many organizations in the community like Austin Community College (ACC) for learning opportunities and to try out various careers. We also work with youth on resume building, navigating the job search, and preparing for interviews."

One of the biggest barriers for the homeless is securing stable housing amidst a spike in high rent prices and a shortage of low-income housing, according to the Texas Tribune. LifeWorks worked to try to break these barriers by building its own apartments in 2011. The Works Apartments is located in East Austin, next to LifeWorks' main offices, and is within walking distance to ACC's East Campus, and they have also helped youths find housing vouchers to pay rent and utilities and stay housed.

"We treat each youth as they are, and help fill in the gaps of support wherever they need," Bodden said. "To find stability and pursue a life they love, they need more than a roof over their head—they need the chance to heal through counseling and to pursue a life they love by earning a diploma and finding a career path."

The Sunrise Homeless Navigation Center (SHNC) has played a crucial role in addressing the housing crisis by providing low-barrier access to support services, serving as a critical resource hub for people experiencing homelessness. The center offers a wide range of services: daily meals, a computer lab, a mailroom for vital documents, hygiene kits, showers, and assistance with housing applications. Meg Jang, a member of the SHNC's community partnerships team, helps clients navigate essential services.

"We were able to pay \$1,500 to \$2,000 to house a

whole family, which is really important," Jang said. "They were housed thanks to the deposit, and we were also able to accommodate their digital needs by giving them devices. It was a whole family of three, and they were now able to use their computers for ACC and go to school."

Beyond providing direct services, Sunrise works to challenge misconceptions about homelessness by promoting public awareness. Jang emphasized the importance of education and empathy, noting that homelessness is a complex issue that can affect anyone under the right circumstances.

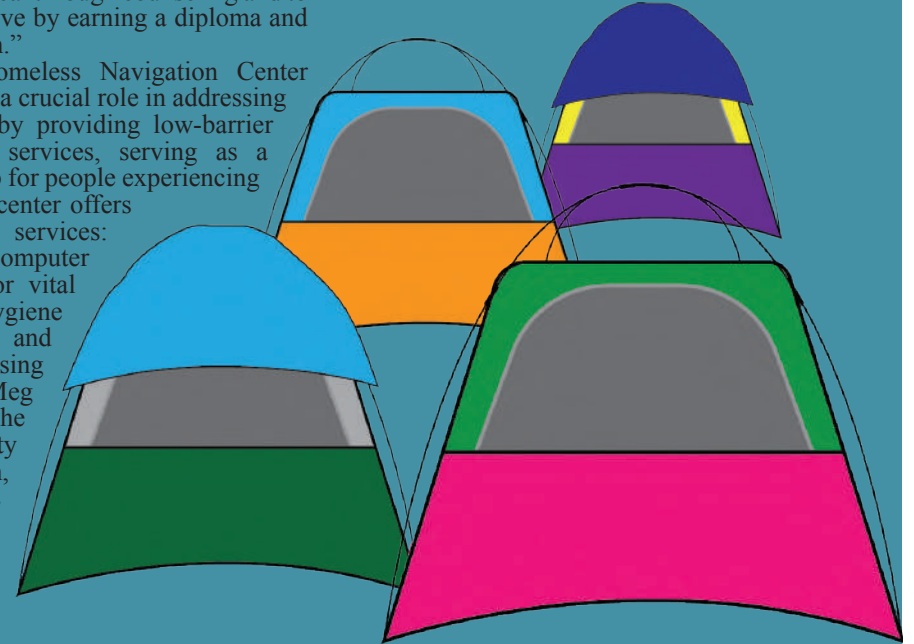
"The truth is, you've met somebody who has experienced homelessness, whether you realize it or not," Jang said. "I always think that I could be just one life event away from being in that situation. Anyone could."

Looking to the future, Jang sees Sunrise's impact as a source of hope. She values the time and effort Sunrise takes in helping people in need.

"Sunrise gives me hope," Jang said. "Even growing up in Austin, I didn't know it existed for most of my life. But the thoughtfulness and care that go into every program, every person who works here, it's really amazing. We're not just handing someone food and sending them away. We're addressing people as individuals, with real compassion and long-term support. That's what Sunrise is all about."

Homelessness in Austin is an issue recognized among students at LASA. The Hope Initiative Club, founded by sophomore Kate Wright, is dedicated to addressing homelessness in Austin through thoughtful and impactful actions. With approximately 30 members, the club meets monthly to assemble care packages filled with essentials such as socks, food, water, and sunscreen. These packages are then distributed by members who keep these bags in their cars and hand them out when they encounter homeless individuals in need. The club's mission stems from Wright's personal desire to make a difference in her community and address the growing homelessness crisis in Austin.

"Homelessness has always been a really personal issue to me," Wright said. "It became even more real when I saw the need in Austin, and I wanted to do something about it. The Hope Initiative is all about taking small steps—packing bags with essentials that can make a difference in someone's day. Every time we hand out a bag, it's a moment of connection. And it feels good because we know we've done something that truly matters, even if it's just in one person's life."



graphic by Ellington Tough

Time is Ticking Down for TikTok in the U.S.

TESSA WHITNEY | staff writer

For a bleak twelve hours on Jan. 19, the 170 million active American users on TikTok opened the app only to be met with a disclaimer stating that TikTok was now banned in the U.S., according to Amnesty International. Many users, seemingly as an alternative, fled to the Chinese-owned social media app Xiaohongshu, more commonly known as REDNote. The app flew to the top of Apple's free-to-download list, contending with apps like Threads, Instagram, and Facebook.

On Jan. 16, three days before the ban date of TikTok, REDNote gained nearly 3 million U.S. users, according to Forbes. The app's typical content of shopping and reviews was washed out with thousands of American users making parody videos about the ban. The ban was prompted after American government officials alleged its owner, the Chinese tech company ByteDance, may be using the app as a source of espionage, according to CBS News, putting pressure on the company to transfer ownership to an American company or have its app banned. However, President Donald Trump signed an executive order that allowed TikTok to be used within the states for another 75 days. Trump appointed Vice President JD Vance and National Security Advisor Michael Waltz to oversee the sale of the app to a trusted American buyer, using the extra time to work with his administration to find a solution that protects security concerns without permanently banning the multi-billion dollar app.

LASA freshman Hana Vikalo explained that they were happy with TikTok's swift return. Vikalo is among those who got to experience the app's ban in real-time.

"At first, I thought my Wi-Fi was lagging," Vikalo said. "Nothing was loading, and I kept refreshing the app. On my third refresh, I got the message that it was banned. I was confused because everyone was saying it wouldn't be banned until midnight. I guess I moved to REDNote to cope."

Vikalo added that REDNote or Instagram Reels didn't compare to TikTok's algorithm.

The TikTok algorithm, used to recommend content tailored to the user, took a team of data scientists months to perfect, according to BBC. It seems more addictive than competing apps because of the large amount of user data it consumes, according to The New York Times. On top of this, its algorithm is unique because it serves content from followed accounts as well as

unknown, and uses factors like playtime, likes, comments, and plays to decide how engaged" the user was, according to Buffer, a social media manager. Due to the app's success, many like Vikalo were hesitant if the ban will truly go through.

"The app is too influential and makes too much money for it to be banned," Vikalo said. "And you know, there's been 'ban scares' on the app since 2023."

'Ban scares' on TikTok are recurring waves of panic where users feel the app will be banned usually due to policy changes, according to TechTarget, a data company. The scares typically gain popularity through viral videos about exaggerated claims, reactions, and debates over potential censorship. They are not usually taken seriously due to the amount of them that have previously flooded the app's feed multiple times, according to Culture.

Salwa Yordi, an Austin-based influencer and activist, agreed that banning TikTok in the U.S. may not be worth it for reasons such as security, censorship, and confidentiality. She argued that data privacy is a problem throughout many platforms, and it's not specific to TikTok.

"The fact that the [U.S. government feels they] have to sell it to someone when they're doing so well financially is crazy to me," Yordi said. "Especially knowing that at the end of the day whenever we post something on social media, everybody gets to see it, we don't know what the security is like."

Yordi expressed concerns for influencers that make a living off of TikTok. She explained that the app pays much more than competitors like Instagram or YouTube, so creators may not be able to receive the same kind of earnings on different platforms.

"My concern is primarily how, [for] so many people, their full-time job relies on TikTok," Yordi said. "If they were not to have that platform, many of them would be without a stable income, and that affects not just them but the economy"

TikTok has helped Yordi personally by providing her with a space to share her beliefs and promote her organization, the Latinitas. The Latinitas is a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering girls through media and technology. Through the platform, she has been able to grab the attention of sponsors and donors. If the app's ban does become permanent, Yordi believes that where users will flee differs between generations.

"I got into REDNote just because I was curious about it," Yordi said. "It's a Chinese platform too. I do think that if TikTok

gets shut down, many of us would go to Instagram, and perhaps Gen Z would explore REDNote and the other applications."

However, LASA freshman Scarlett Miranda-Benitez feels the other applications will not bring the same shared sense of community and influence TikTok currently does. She emphasized that the app represents more than just a content-sharing platform.

"I just think it's too much of our culture," Miranda-Benitez said. "Most of the current trends—like fashion and language have come from there. You can see one video of a girl wearing a hoodie that goes viral then everyone has that hoodie, or you see one video of someone using a new word, and it's in every comment section for like a month."

However, the negative effects of TikTok can stem from such influence, making some feel out of the loop, effectively worsening some user's mental health, according to medical articles by Yale Medicine. The app has been linked to reduced attention spans, body image issues, and social insecurity, according to the University of California at Davis Health Department. Miranda-Benitez still feels the problem is bigger than any one app.

"That's more of a social media problem in general," Miranda-Benitez said. "TikTok is more authentic. I've seen a lot of posts where people are just being themselves or talking about relatable things. I mean, a lot of people

wouldn't know what to do in their free time, so maybe if it got banned they would be productive with that time, maybe they wouldn't."

Overall, the potential TikTok ban raises concerns over privacy, content creators' well-being, and the app's influence on digital culture. According to its users, regardless of the outcome, TikTok has left a mark on the modern age.



graphic by Jonah Popinski

AI and the Environment

MILES ANDREW | staff writer

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping societal norms and industries by offering new information for disaster preparedness, energy efficiency, and resource management. However, this progress comes with a growing power demand which raises concerns about sustainability.

According to Bhoomi Gadhia, senior product marketing manager at NVIDIA, a California-based tech company, AI's precise calculations allow for unprecedented weather and natural disaster prediction. She believes that AI's advancements in meteorology will help improve disaster preparedness and help combat climate change.

"Taiwan is crucial to global technology, supplying chips for phones, TVs, and computers," Gadhia said. "By improving typhoon prediction accuracy, AI helps them develop better evacuation plans, reinforce buildings, and protect critical infrastructure."

The increase in AI usage has required a lot of additional power. In 2023, Statista estimated that AI's power usage would be 4.5 gigawatts, enough to power 3.5 million U.S. homes and accounts for approximately 8% of data center energy consumption. Haynes Strader, the Chief Development Officer at Skybox Datacenters, commented on the need for support as AI use expands.

"AI is creating huge demand for computing power, but it's also driving profitability for some of the biggest companies in the world, many of which are committed to carbon neutrality," Strader said. "This alignment presents an opportunity to invest in energy solutions that benefit both the environment and the economy."

Based on the power that AI uses, there have been some legislative bills relying on sustainable energy. In January 2025, there was an executive order put out by former President Joe Biden that outlined the timeframe and structure for developing AI, emphasizing the development of clean energy production to power AI. Strader views sustainable energy being a long-term goal for data centers that can be accomplished through large-scale funding.

"Transitioning to truly sustainable energy solutions requires long-term investments in nuclear and hydropower," Strader said. "For example, the last commercial nuclear power plant built in the U.S. was completed last year in Georgia. It took 30 years to get permitted and constructed and was billions of dollars over budget."

As AI progresses, its capabilities increase longevity in many fields by providing help for challenging projects. A noted example is in the mining industry where locating rare metals is made easier with the help of AI, according to ScienceDirect

"AI is helping improve mining efficiency," Gadhia said. "Instead of digging blindly, AI-powered models allow more precise targeting, reducing unnecessary excavation and waste. Once lithium is mined, we have a library called Coolito, which optimizes the chip design process with nanometer-level precision. This reduces material waste, making chip manufacturing more efficient and environmentally friendly."

According to Liberman, a video manager at NVIDIA, AI does undoubtedly consume a large amount of energy. However, while AI innovation remains rapid and its future is still, to a certain extent, speculative, Liberman explained that its potential to benefit humanity is ultimately greater than its environmental impact.

"Every industry has some environmental impact," Liberman said. "The question is whether the benefit outweighs the impact. AI has the potential to do great good for humanity, but to reach that potential, it must become sustainable, ubiquitous, and accessible."

Raise

from page 1

"Advocacy is the lifeblood of American civil society," Praba said. "We are in the midst of Texas's 89th legislative session and one of the most tumultuous times in American history."

Specific education issues the PTA were emphasizing include raising the student allotment, or the basic amount of money Texas gives public schools, school safety, and vouchers. Many representatives collaborate with the PTA to help them succeed in these goals, one being State Representative Gina Hinojosa of District 49, who discussed the importance of the PTA's objectives.

"We've seen this pressure on our classrooms and on our schools, and it is, one, a safety issue," Hinojosa said. "Because the more caring adults we have on the campus, the safer our kids are. There is probably actually no single greatest safety issue than having enough caring adults on a campus. But it also is getting in the way of teaching and learning when we don't have the adults on campus that we need. Basic allotment allows for us to hire more teachers on campus."

Rally Day provides a chance for students around Texas to talk to various people around the capitol and to learn more about the Texas government. Mike O'Connor, the chief of staff for State Representative Maria Luisa "Lulu" Flores from District 51 explained the need to communicate your message.

"If it's got your address on it, if it's got your name, if it looks like it's written by a real person, we care a lot more about that," O'Connor said. "Another thing is, ask for something. If you don't ask for anything, there's nothing we can really do with your communication."

Rally day allows for citizens and constituents to educate their legislators on the realities of the public school system. This is commonly in the form of telling personal accounts of your experiences to better inform your representatives.

"It's important to stress your stories," Hinojosa said. "Many legislators in this building have no connection to public schools. They don't have their kids in public schools. People don't know how dire things are. People don't know how dire things are."



CAPITOL CRAZY LASA students meet at the Capitol steps before an exciting day of rallying for education. photo courtesy LASA PTSA



RALLY DAY WONDERS Students and Texas PTA members rally at the capitol steps for public education support. photo by Leah Lashus

Texans Prepare for Possible Deportation

ABBEY WU | staff writer

As immigration and deportation become increasingly prominent topics under President Donald Trump's second term, Austin faces a potential loss of nearly 107,000 non-citizen immigrants, approximately 10.9% of its population, according to the United States Census Bureau. Across the country, the new immigration policies and enforcement measures threaten thousands of communities more across the country.

One of the ways a person can be deported is through expedited removal, which is when a U.S. Customs and Border Protection officer rapidly deport an undocumented person or a person who has committed misrepresentation or fraud within two years of their arrival. According to the Vera Institute of Justice, upon taking office, President Trump expanded this policy to include those who were paroled during the Biden administration. Anne Chandler, director of the Texas Immigration Law Council, which serves as a legal resource and advocacy center throughout Texas, explained how Trump's move to nullify Biden-era policies is causing alarm across Austin.

"You could not traditionally use [expedited removal] to deport people if they were not apprehended within 14 days of arrival," Chandler said. "President Trump expanded that to two years. We are on the lookout to see, are they going to use that to apprehend and deport people who cannot prove that they've been in the Austin area for up to two years?"

Another form of removal is administrative removal. This is where the U.S. government can remove someone convicted of an aggravated felony or who does not have legal permission to be in the United States. This process is often completed by an administrative immigration judge.

"Some individuals who are being deported from an immigration court in an administrative hearing have literally been waiting and have been present in the United States for six, or seven years," Chandler said. "The process is broken. There are too many cases in the system."

Many cities and counties have been realigning their policies regarding immigration and deportation to not run afoul of pressure from the federal government. However, there are sanctuary cities that are currently refusing to cooperate with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), according to Chandler.

"In Texas, you don't hear any law enforcement officers say they're not going to cooperate just because we have specific laws passed at our state level, like SB 420 [and SB 17] that prohibit law enforcement from taking that type of statement," Chandler said. "When it comes to Texas, you see state agencies—the Department of Public Safety, Texas Rangers, and other state entities—taking a more active role in participating with the federal government in enforcement mechanisms than you do in other states."

Chandler explained that there are a number of ways in which undocumented immigrants can challenge deportation orders. One way is filing a family petition, which is when a U.S. resident or lawful resident files a petition for a foreign relative to immigrate. Another way someone can request removal orders is asylum.

"Asylum is where somebody actually has a fear of returning to their home country... and they can prove that they're going to be harmed by the government or an organization that can't be stopped by the government, then that individual may be able to win something like asylum," Chandler said.

The Trump Administration rescinded a memo that was put out by the Office of Management and Budget under the Biden administration that had called for the freezing of certain federal program funding. Some of the programs at risk for a loss of funding were those that provide essential services to immigrants.

"21 states challenged that effort by the Trump administration to freeze grants and freeze financial assistance loans going out if they didn't comply with the federal government's policies to protect the nation," Chandler said. "Under all that pressure from lawsuits and people saying this isn't right. The government changed its mind."

Chandler mentioned that she understood President Trump's interest in fixing the immigration system,

and she noted that it greatly needs an update. However, she called for Congress and President Trump to instead rewrite immigration laws to better fit current and future realities.

"This type of approach, one of just mass deportations and enforcement, is really misguided," Chandler said. "We need something much more comprehensive to get us set for the next century."

Deportations have an effect on many different workforces and communities, including education. Sara James, a kindergarten teacher, works at a low-income elementary school where the majority of the population is Latino or Hispanic. James expressed her understanding of the call for increased deportations, saying that she believes people who are causing constant harm to others should face some sort of punishment. However, she conveyed her worry for the many families who have immigrated to the U.S., both documented and undocumented, as they have sacrificed a great deal to get here.

"America is seen as this place where you get to fulfill your dreams," James said. "They're coming here to do exactly what America has portrayed itself to be. With the deportation, it's going back on what America is said to be, what America is supposed to be."

James described how the immigrant communities she grew up in and continues to teach in were safe, protective, and supportive atmospheres. She works to make sure every student feels safe in the classroom and to inform their parents about their rights.

"I'm not Hispanic myself, but this is my family," James said. "These are my people. This is my community. So we're all here, really to support them and to support whoever needs our help."

According to James, there has been a large drop in attendance out of fear of being in an ICE raid. She mentioned how it feels eerie to be in a classroom with so few students. She still continues to support the remaining students as much as possible.

"I teach kindergartners, so they're only five and six years old," James said. "They don't even know what's going on in the world that they live in, but they're seeing it firsthand with their parents, or seeing the fear. They're hearing the conversations at home, and they're feeling secondhand whatever they're surrounded with."

James explained that she wished people better understood how to empathize with immigrants because sometimes undocumented immigration is the only option for a safe life for their family. According to her, recognizing the sacrifices parents have made for their children and their potential faults is important as we continue through new legislation.

"The lack of empathy and the lack of perspective and just being able to sympathize with others is a big issue," James said.

John Goodell is a Latino AP Government and AP U.S. History teacher at LASA with a background in law, having served as a military lawyer and in Texas state agencies. He emphasized the importance of respecting the law while reflecting on how stricter policies may have impacted his own family.

"The president's executive order struck me personally as pandering to some of the members of his base who would want that," Goodell said. "If that had actually occurred, it would have been a complete disaster for him publicly."

Goodell also discussed the variability of each situation. While doing his best to remain unbiased while presenting to his students, Goodell mentioned speaking to his classes about some of the many possibilities in immigration and deportation cases and that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' story to immigration.

"We have a court process for this," Goodell said. "Just because somebody has deportation proceedings started against them doesn't mean that there couldn't be an asylum request on the road. Each case is specific and so there is an asylum process that's separate from the immigration process. It's like an offshoot."

graphic contributed by Eloisa Espetia-Gorostieta

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Trump Tariffs Foreign Powers

ASHER ZVI-NOVA | staff writer

As President Donald Trump reaches three months into his second term, tariffs have emerged as his preferred method of boosting the American economy and influencing foreign relations. The tariffs are a tool President Trump has proposed to pressure other countries such as for minimizing the fentanyl, a deadly drug, that enters U.S. soil, according to PBS.

A fact sheet released by the White House on Feb. 1 explained that the U.S. federal government found that due to an influx of drugs, such as fentanyl, tariffs are a method of improving the well-being of Americans. Accordingly, President Trump imposed a 25% tariff on Mexico and Canada, along with 10% tariffs on China until the fentanyl crisis has been resolved, according to the White House press release on tariffs. Additionally, he intends to use this protectionist tariff policy to end the \$100 billion U.S. trade deficit. Jonas Gamso, an assistant professor of international trade and global studies at Arizona State University, explained that tariffs are a tax on imported goods to incentivize customers to buy from U.S. producers.

“Imagine that I am looking to buy tomatoes for my grocery store based in California, and I have two options: pay \$1 per pound for tomatoes from Mexico or \$1.20 per pound for tomatoes from Arizona,” Gamso said. “Of course, I will buy them from Mexico to save myself 20 cents per pound. But if the US puts a 25% tariff on imports from Mexico, then the cost to import Mexican tomatoes rises, and they may end up selling for around \$1.25 per pound. Suddenly, it makes more sense for me to buy the Arizona-grown tomatoes.”

While tariffs have been high at points in U.S. history, especially in the early 1900s, they fell sharply in the 1940s as the U.S. moved towards more open trade policies, according to Gamso. Now, Gamso thinks that the Trump administration is attempting to win over voters by lowering the trade deficit, which occurs when the value of a country’s imports exceeds the value of its exports, according to Investopedia.

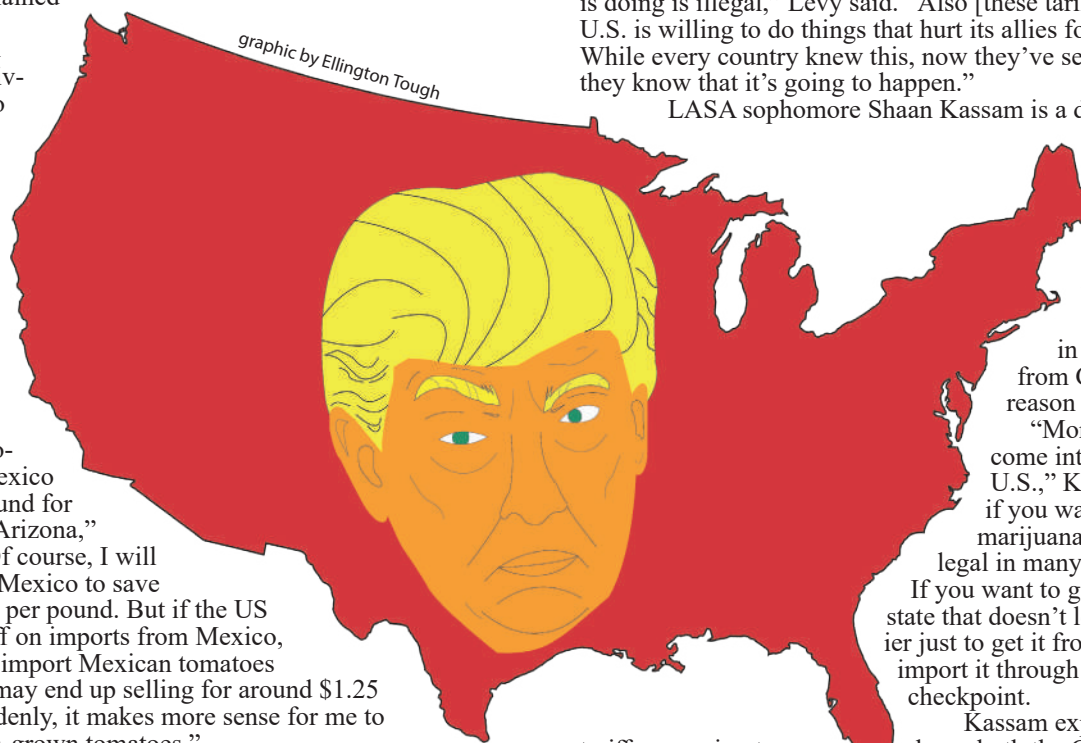
“Tariffs produce ‘winners’ and ‘losers,’” Gamso said. “Tariffs create more ‘losers’ than ‘winners’ because while they protect certain industries, they also lead to higher prices for consumers and potential job losses in export-dependent industries”

LASA senior Ben Levy, president of LASA Model U.N., finds that Model U.N. gives students opportunities to understand government perspectives when making crucial decisions, offering chances to understand the changes the U.S. is attempting to make with tariffs. Levy believes that Canada and Mexico will back down and work to stop the flow of migrants who may assist in the fentanyl trade, as well as the 86.4% of fentanyl smugglers who are U.S. citizens, according to the U.S. Sentencing Commission.

“In these simulations, just like in real life, tariffs are a tool for governments to get what they want,” Levy said. “[Trump’s] intention is to try to strengthen America’s ability to put pressure on its neighbors so that the United States will be able to, whenever it needs to do something, be able to extort Canada and extort Mexico.”

Similarly, tariffs, Levy argued, may help American producers by putting more emphasis on their produced items. Although this is a possible solution, Levy still believes tariffs will bring possible consequences, such as inflation, that will still harm some American companies and the U.S.’s global standing.

“It is alleged by some countries like China, that what the U.S. is doing is illegal,” Levy said. “Also [these tariffs] show that the U.S. is willing to do things that hurt its allies for its own gain. While every country knew this, now they’ve seen it firsthand, and they know that it’s going to happen.”



tariffs are going to economy. After the ada Agreement, which countries, the majority of Canada’s imports have come from the U.S. Similarly, the majority of Canada’s exports are to the U.S., which supplies America with large quantities of lumber and oil, according to the Observatory of Economic Complexity, an online trade database.

“What we are seeing right now is what we have been able to achieve,” Kassam said. “Canada’s economy and America’s economy is so great because we have this free trade agreement, and to a lesser extent, Mexico also contributes to this.”

LASA sophomore Shaan Kassam is a dual citizen of the U.S. and Canada and believes that this approach to stopping drugs is flawed. With only 1% of illegal narcotics in the US coming from Canada, he sees no reason for tariffs.

“More drugs per capita come into Canada from the U.S.,” Kassam said. “And if you want to talk about marijuana, marijuana is legal in many American states. If you want to get marijuana into a state that doesn’t legalize it, it’s easier just to get it from California, then import it through an international checkpoint.”

Kassam explained that the harm both the Canadian and U.S. signing of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement, which allows for free trade between the countries, the majority of Canada’s imports have come from the U.S. Similarly, the majority of Canada’s exports are to the U.S., which supplies America with large quantities of lumber and oil, according to the Observatory of Economic Complexity, an online trade database.

Update: Onion Creek Flooding

In 2013, the Liberator published an article that covered the 2013 flooding of the Onion Creek neighborhood in Austin. The article referenced the regions affected by the flood as well as AISD initiatives to help students and their families.

ETHAN STERN | news editor

1970s-

The Onion Creek area became a popular neighborhood with thousands of single-family homes. Due to mapping errors, some homes were in areas where floods were present every 25 years. According to the Austin-American Statesman, the construction was made possible due to a lack of federal regulations against building in a floodplain.

1998-

A major flood hit the Onion Creek area destroying over 100 homes. This came after heavy rains fell over south and southeast Texas, causing Onion Creek, an area prone to flooding, to overflow rapidly. Urban areas such as San Antonio and Austin were majorly affected with severe damages in Travis, Bexar, Guadalupe, and Caldwell counties.

1999-present-

Austin-American Statesman estimates the city has spent \$35.5 million buying 322 homes in their 25-year flood plain since 1999 to prevent more devastating floods in the region. Of that, an estimated \$7.5 million has come from FEMA. This was prompted after the major flood in 1998 and previous floods in 1921 and 1869.

The Onion Creek neighborhood has a history of flooding, with floods in the late 1800s and early 1900s leaving a mark on the neighborhood, according to Atlas Obscura. The first major flood occurred in 1998 which led to the destruction of over a hundred homes. In 2013, a flood on Halloween devastated the Onion Creek neighborhood as hundreds of houses were torn apart and as a result, millions of dollars were used in government spending, according to estimates by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). This made way for many initiatives proposed by the city to remake the Onion Creek area into a park and a safe neighborhood, according to KVUE.

2013-

On Halloween night, a flood destroyed hundreds of homes in the Dove Springs and Onion Creek areas, killed an estimated four people, and displaced many families. The flood prompted the then-mayor Lee Leffingwell to declare a local state of disaster. According to USA Today, the height of water reached a record 41 feet, surpassing the previous 1869 and 1921 record of 38 feet.

2014-

Six months after the 2013 Halloween flood, many of the residents who had damaged homes struggled to fix them. Letters were sent out from the city informing those with “substantially damaged” homes that they were prohibited from making any repairs until they were raised above the floodplain which can cost tens of thousands of dollars, according to the Austin-American Statesman.

2021-

On December 2, the Austin City Council unanimously approved a resolution that came roughly two years after Phase 1 of the master plan was completed to transform many acres of the floodplain into a park. Through this resolution, the city aims to rejuvenate the area and create an Onion Creek Metro Park, KVUE reported. The park’s masterplan report estimates the park to be 555 acres along the creek.

THE LINE

Global News

Pope Francis Faces Health Issues

On Feb. 14, Pope Francis was hospitalized after being diagnosed with double pneumonia and a respiratory infection. For Pope Francis, lung and respiratory issues have affected him for a while, starting in 1957 when a part of his lung was removed due to infection, according to USA TODAY. On Mar. 3, he suffered two episodes of acute respiratory failure, putting him back on a ventilator until Mar. 4, as his condition improved, according to the Washington Post.

Panama Canal Ports Purchased

On Mar. 4, an investment group led by BlackRock, a giant American asset manager, announced it will purchase two Panama ports which are owned by a Hong Kong company, making it a central focus amidst international tension between President Donald Trump and Panama, according to the New York. CNN reported this exchange comes after Trump announced numerous times before he inaugurated his plans to “take back” the 51-mile canal, which controls roughly 4% of the world’s maritime trade and over 40% of U.S. container traffic.

National News

Trump Takes Timber

On Mar. 1, the White House released an executive order signed by President Donald Trump expanding the area that can be cut for timber resources. Trump ordered 208m acres (113m hectares) of national forests and other public lands. The report named the timber industry being too reliant on foreign imports as a cause for the order, according to The Guardian. In this order, Trump allowed the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management to increase logging targets, as well as allow for the officials to circumvent the U.S.’s Endangered Species Act, effectively ignoring the protections given to vulnerable creatures’ habitats.

Oscars Premiere on Primetime

On Mar. 2, the 97th Oscars premiered, recognizing excellent cinematic achievement since 1929. The live event, hosted by Conan O’Brien, was streamed via ABC. According to Variety, the Oscars hit 19.7 million views, a 1% increase from last year. Of the 23 categories, “Anora” won 5, making it the biggest winner of the night. The three-and-a-half-hour special was mainly streamed on Hulu, according to the New York Times, and marked the first time the Oscars was available to watch live on a streaming platform. The Washington Post reported that Hulu glitches in the final moments left two categories unwatched.

Uruguay President Takes Office

On Mar. 1, President Yamandú Orsi, a former history teacher and mayor, took office running on a leftist agenda pledging to improve safety and economic stagnation. Orsi replaces the country’s outgoing conservative president, Luis Lacalle Pou. He claimed victory on Nov. 24 in a tight runoff which ousted the conservative governing force, making this South American nation one of the latest which rebuked its incumbent party.

State News

Former Uvalde Mayor Takes Action

On Mar. 3, State Rep. Don McLaughlin, who was mayor of Uvalde at the time of the elementary school shooting, filed a bill aiming to address potential police failure, such as response time in tense situations, according to the Texas Tribune. House Bill 33 criticizes the roughly 400 law enforcement officers who actively went against active-shooter protocols by waiting more than an hour to respond. The bill would ensure school districts and law enforcement meet once a year to create response plans in an active shooter situation.

Measles Outbreak Materializes

On Mar. 4, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced the measles outbreak in West Texas had reached 159 cases since it was first noticed in late January, according to CNN. The CDC has been in the region for weeks attempting to curb the spread amidst vaccine-resistant rhetoric. Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the United States Secretary of Health and Human Services has urged residents to get vaccines, despite previous anti-vaccine theories, according to NPR.

Dust Storms Douse Dallas

On Mar. 4, strong winds from West Texas carrying wind arrived in the Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) area with skies in North Texas tinting orange, according to Fox 4 Dallas-Fort Worth. Strong winds swept the dust as it moved across Texas in the afternoon, reaching 60 mph, according to AccuWeather. The visibility plummeted to just 2 miles as the dust moved to San Antonio and Austin in the evening. The winds blowing in from Eastern New Mexico carried a “haboob”, or an intense dust or sandstorm generated by wind, which blanketed the Central Texas region.

Local News

Austin Ranked First

On Feb. 17, WalletHub released their rankings of the best state capitols to live in, with Austin ranking first, according to Newsweek. WalletHub compared the 50 capital cities across 48 metrics. Austin particularly scored well in affordability, economic well-being, quality of education, and health, reaching a total score of 64.75. The city of nearly one million ranked first in economic well-being and scored.

REBECA GONZALEZ | student life
ISABEL KRAMER | editors

“Part of what the council does is create a list of legislative priorities,” Pandian said. “They’re priorities that push public schools forward. We are anti-voucher, and we are pro-increasing the amount of student allotment.”

Butts and Pandian’s meeting was not a one time occurrence. In fact, the council has held meetings in the past months at the Texas Capitol with legislators and received some support for their priorities.

“Currently, we’re trying to figure out how to partner with the Austin Council of Parent Teacher Association (ACPTA), to try to get a bunch of students together to testify for the legislature,” Pandian said.

However, according to Butts, results can be unguaranteed when it comes to passing legislation. Many bills have already been introduced to increase the allotment in support of public schools, but the actual process makes it difficult for them to get far.

“I don’t think those are the bills that are going to pass,” Butts said. “Because what normally happens is that if there is a significant bill that’s going to do something, like increase school funding, it’s usually carried by the chairman of the committee that will hear the bill. And none of these people are the chairs of the committee.”

Butts believes there is a chance of an allotment increase to make it past the Texas house. However, considering bills require both the Senate and the House vote, the actual decision can be uncertain.

“I don’t think it will pass the Senate,” Butts said. “I am hopeful that it will pass the House. So, if the House passes an increase and sends the bill to the Senate, I don’t know what the Senate will do. It’s just very uncertain, unfortunately.”

Missy Bender, the executive director at Texas School Coalition, is heavily involved in advocating for public education in Austin. Bender explained that although she finds the future for allotment in this session to be uncertain, she’s still holding out hope for change.

“It is early in the legislative session,” Bender said. “We are hopeful that legislators will listen to constituents who remind them that investments in public education strengthen our future workforce and our economy.”

Because the allotment has not been increased since 2019, schools have faced increased costs as a result of inflation. Therefore, Butts believes there should be specific legislation to tackle these costs.

“Hopefully, they’ll raise the basic allotment and include a provision that would automatically adjust [for inflation] every two years,” Butts said.

In opposition to calls from Texas schools’ calls for increased allotment, the Texas legislature is actively pushing for the introduction of vouchers. Vouchers’ main purpose is to provide \$10,000 to families in Texas in order to hypothetically give them the choice of public or private education. However, the voucher program would actually be more damaging to public education, and according to AISD, opposing vouchers is a main priority.

“Funding in AISD is by attendance and so if you’re pulling students out of the school, not only are you decreasing enrollment, but you’re decreasing student attendance,” Pandian said. “And then you’re decreasing public school funding. That’s gonna lead to a really, really bad situation for public schools.”

However, according to Butts, besides the drastic effect vouchers can have on public education they have a lot of issues on their own. At times, the voucher bill’s purpose is not well executed or regulated.

“The Senate doesn’t have any parameters or any guardrails around who gets a voucher,” Butts said. “They don’t have a certain income level. So in some states that have vouchers, they prioritize lower income families or families with children with special needs. They prioritize those students. This bill that the Senate passed doesn’t have any of that.”

In addition, vouchers would only provide \$10,000 for families to attend private schools, while most are more expensive than \$10,000, raising the question of whether families will truly be able to afford the private education the voucher promises. Butts believes that the answer is unclear, especially when considering the high costs parents will need to pay.

“If a private school charges the tuition at \$25,000, and a family is just getting \$10,000, can the family afford the extra \$15,000?” Butts said. “Transportation is another issue. Some private schools don’t have to offer transportation. So, it would depend on whether the parent can transport the child to and from school.”

The voucher also does not include any pricing for students to afford extracurricular activities, which can be expensive at some schools. Butts sees this as a crucial fallacy of vouchers.

“If a student is interested in being in the band or playing a sport, or doing extracurricular activities, does that private school have those?” Butts said. “A lot of that is going to factor into whether or not a student wants to go to a private school or whether they are even able to.”

Pandian has her own disagreements with the private schools vouchers will benefit. She explained that she sees

private institutions as less beneficial sources of education.

“Private schools are institutions where you shed your rights at the class gates,” Pandian said. “So from that perspective, it’s a lot harder to have regulation and safety for students.”

Pandian believes that vouchers will be used in Texas differently than in other states and cases. In other cases, vouchers are used for rural cities, but in Texas they will be greatly affecting urban towns.

“I think the way that other states used vouchers is they’ve used it for a district that’s really, really rural and students can’t get to school,” Pandian said. “So they give them private school vouchers so they can have access, but that’s not how we’re using them here.”

Pandian believes the purpose of the voucher may not be beneficial to Texas. She thinks there is not enough information or research available to have a clear understanding of whether vouchers can be beneficial or not.

“There’s no real data to support that in Texas, in the situation that our district is in, it would be helpful to have vouchers,” Pandian said. “And a lot of the rhetoric around why we’re putting in vouchers is to save children from the woke indoctrination.”

To her, private education does not have much more to offer than public education. She argued that any negatives in public education are a direct result of the lack of funding from the Texas legislature.

“I think public school has a lot of merits and a lot of flaws,” Pandian said. “But I would argue that a lot of those flaws come from lack of funding and lack of infrastructure. So getting rid of that funding even more so is just gonna take from public schools. It’s vicious.”

Regardless of the negatives, vouchers are still making their way past the House and into the Senate, and Pandian can see the bill passing in the future. However, she has found resistance to vouchers throughout the Texas legislature.

“I think a lot of people are saying that vouchers are an absolute,” Pandian said. “I was talking to some people in the ACPTA and people within the legislature, and it seems like there is actually bipartisan support for not doing that.”

However, Pandian believes that if vouchers pass, the legislature must make an attempt to proportionally increase the allotment. She explained that this is crucial for public schools since vouchers can already create such a dire effect.

“There’s been some conversation. I don’t know if this is within the legislature, but I know that in meetings we have talked about, if they’re gonna pass vouchers, then they need to increase the student allotment to the amount that vouchers will be,” Pandian said. “So, if we’re giving kids \$10,000 to go to private school, we also increase the student allotment

“Public school has a lot of merits and a lot of flaws, but I would argue that a lot of those flaws come from lack of funding and lack of infrastructure. It’s vicious.”

- Amari Pandian, LASA Senior

to 10,000.”

A major factor for AISD specifically is the recapture program, or nicknamed the Robin Hood. The recapture program takes 50% of the AISD budget and 25% of the Austin taxpayer dollars and redistributes them to surrounding school districts that have less property taxes and therefore a smaller budget.

“The recapture log was first instituted to provide school districts that don’t collect a lot of property taxes budget,” Butts said. “These school districts, therefore they weren’t able to spend a lot of money on their school, and therefore

[the] Texas legislature created this law that classified some school districts as property wealthy and some as property poor, and so this is how recapture came about.”

However, according to Butts, now that Austin and AISD have grown in size, the recapture program is outdated. It is not clear whether or not it should still be enforced, considering the sheer amount of money being distributed would be enough to recover AISD from its deficit. Yet many of these school districts are still in a deficit themselves, and Butts believes the recapture should continue, just changed to be more effective with the current financial situation.

“It’s supposed to be used to equalize funding for all school districts in the state, and so that’s not going to go away, and it probably shouldn’t go away,” Butts said. “But the amount of recapture that the states are collecting is really, really extreme.”

It may appear to be a difficult task to assist so many school districts with their deficits. However, Butts makes it clear that this is not true. In fact, there aren’t many barriers keeping the allotment from being raised other than the legislature actually implementing it.

“Last session, the legislature had a 32 billion dollar surplus, and they didn’t raise it by a nickel, so it’s not due to lack of effort.”

Butts had clarified that she and AISD are preparing for there to be no increase in funding this 2025 session. In fact, AISD is already implementing a hiring freeze and Eanes has had to make some cuts themselves.

“All school districts are going through this,” Butts said. “They’re looking at their budgets and seeing how they can cut. Eanes ISD is closing a campus. They just announced it a couple weeks ago. Some school districts are increasing class sizes. They’re closing campuses and consolidating closed campuses within another campus.”

As school districts search for a way out of their debt, many community members, parents, and even students have stepped into the role of helping the public education system’s funding that the legislature has not increased. Bender acknowledges that regardless of any change in funding, school districts and community members will still

TEXAS DISTRICTS

graphics by Isabel Kramer



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find a way to carry out public education.
“Funding for public education has not kept up with rising costs,” Bender said. “As a result, Texas ranks 46th in the country in per-pupil spending. Students, parents, and educators have worked very hard to ensure that our schools continue to carry out their mission in difficult circumstances. Our legislators can certainly help our students succeed by making needed, overdue investments in public education.”

Vending Machine Snacks Snubbed For Students

LAUREN VANDERVEEN | staff writer

Every day, students find themselves hungry during a lecture or work time and come up with the perfect solution: a vending machine snack. A reliable source of food, the LASA vending machines are available throughout the day. However, while the specific date is still unclear, the LASA administration has stated that vending machine access will be restricted in the future. The new policy aims to address disruptions during class time by preventing students from sneaking their phones out of the classroom to buy from the vending machine.

A part of the reason vending machines are greatly used is that students rely on them for food when they do not have time to pack lunch in the morning or do not want to wait in the lunch line. Although students can still access the vending machines during lunch, the restrictions will affect many students' routines. LASA freshman Carlos Villalobos explained that his use of the vending machines would be hindered drastically if the machines were closed during class.

"I always get [snacks] during my classes," Villalobos said. "Most times I don't get lunch if I don't have time or something, and I just get my snacks."

LASA freshman Marcelo Weimer explained that many rely on food from the vending machines to fuel their bodies and remain energized. As a result, the time restrictions on the vending machines can impact students' energy levels throughout the day.

"I think that if you're hungry you're not gonna be able to focus as well," Weimer said. "So, limiting the food you are able to access as you're trying to focus can really impair your ability

to focus. I think it's a negative, bad thing to do."

According to Assistant Principal and Campus Behavior Coordinator Neno December, the school administration has noticed students abusing their privilege of visiting the vending machine during class. December described how this tendency is the main reason in enforcing the restriction.

"The decision to limit the availability of the vending machines comes after noticing a pattern of students leaving class under the pretense of going to the bathroom but heading to the vending machines instead," December said. "This diversion leads to a loss in instructional time, and we've seen that it correlates with academic performance."

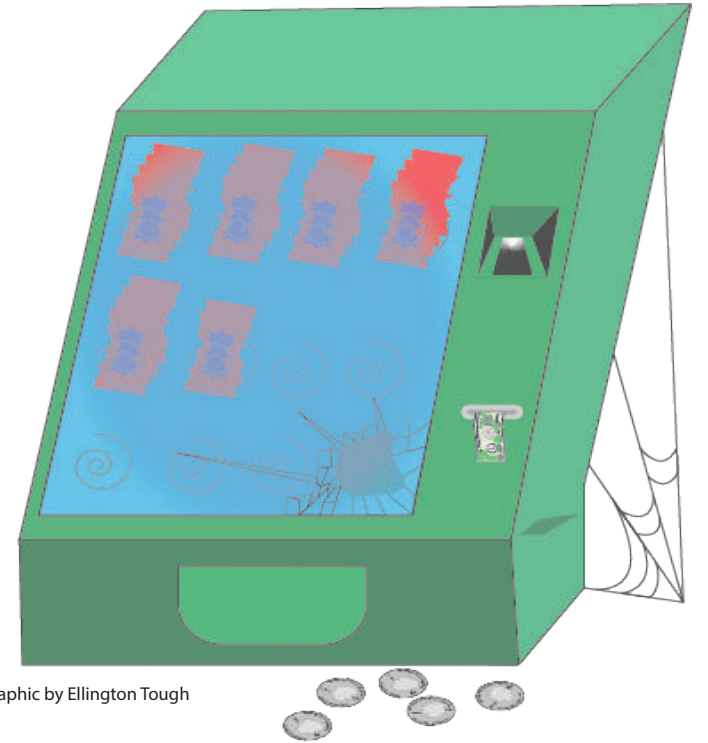
December explained that LASA has a strict phone policy, detailing that phones cannot be used during class without permission from the teacher. This becomes problematic as many students who frequent the vending machines during class often use ApplePay to buy food.

"Another issue we've encountered is students sneaking their phones out of class to use them for purchasing, which leads to further distractions and misuse of phones during school hours," December said.

According to Weimer, many students want the administration to reconsider this policy. The administration welcomes students to voice their concerns about the new policy, however, according to December, the vending machines will still be open before and after school, and the purpose of the policy is to ensure that instructional time is maximized.

"We recognize that circumstances may change, and should new data or feedback suggest a different approach, we are open to reassessing the situation," December said. "Our goal is to ensure

that our policies best support student success and minimize disruptions to the learning environment."



graphic by Ellington Tough

graphic by Asher Zvi-Nova



MRIDHULA KUMARAVEL | staff writer

NOTE: The advice column contains real responses from underclassmen students at LASA that were submitted anonymously. Upperclassmen then answer them.

Love section:

When is the right time to start dating in high school? - A Stressed Out Student

Lib: Dear Stressed Out Student,

There is never a "time" to start dating in high school. It's whenever YOU feel that you are ready. Don't feel pressured to start dating just because your peers seem to be getting into relationships. Not everyone is on your timeline. You'll know when it's time when you meet the right person. Being a student at LASA can be stressful on its own, so ask yourself if you're ready to juggle both. It's ultimately your call and no one else's. Best of luck!

Sports Section:

How do you balance academic responsibilities and being in a sport/extracurricular activity? - A Stressed Out Student

Lib: Dear Stressed Out Student,

Balancing academics and sports can be tough to juggle, but it can be done with a bit of planning. Think of high school like a game. Use a planner to map out assignments, practices, and events that are coming up so you're not caught off guard. Prioritize like a professional. If homework can be done during downtime between classes, do it. Get your assignments done the day it's assigned. Space studying for tests out throughout the week, so you're not stressed the night before. Don't be afraid to communicate with your teachers and coaches when you're at your limit, and put yourself first. Give yourself a breather now and then, and soon enough, you'll be at peace with maintaining everything that's going on. Stay strong!

School section:

Stu: In SciTech, I was put into a group with someone who wouldn't do any work. I feel like if I have to work with them for one more day, I will die. I don't want to be rude because I don't know what's going on in their personal life, but I also need to keep my sanity for the rest of the year. How can I tell this person to help with the project in a polite but firm way? - Clueless and Fed Up

Lib: Dear Clueless and Fed Up,

Been there, done that. One thing that Sci-Tech emphasizes is learning how to work with anyone, even people who are unproductive or hard to get along with. I suggest that you approach them in an understanding tone, clearly address the issue, set expectations, and then frame it as a team effort. For instance, you could say, "Hey, I just want to check in about the project. Is everything okay on your end? I've noticed that I've been handling most of the project, and it's been a little overwhelming." Being positive about the situation will ease your partner into doing their own work. Hope this helps!

Friendship Section:

I don't know who to talk to at school, and I am recently grounded so I don't have my phone to talk to people with. I have a lot of friends who are guys and girls, but I need help with building close relationships. How do I make a close friend with the right people? I just want to feel involved, but I don't know who I want to be involved with. Help would be greatly appreciated! - A Grounded Guy

Lib: Dear Grounded Guy,

It's pretty unfortunate that you can't talk to others online, but I think it's a much better experience getting to know someone in person. To build a close relationship, be authentically yourself. This way, you'll know who likes you for yourself and not for others. As for making friends with the right people, notice those who don't put up a front for others around them. People who put you down or dig into your insecurities are major red flags. Find someone who makes you feel good and doesn't want to alter or change the way you are. Don't rush a friendship, the best things in life take time.

RAPTORS in the wild

REBECA GONZALEZ | student life editor

Raptors in the Wild is a segment for the LASA Liberator that highlights former Liberator editors and follows their career post-Liberator or in the wild. For this issue, the Liberator interviewed JC Ramirez Delgadillo, the former editor-in-chief for the web.

The LASA Liberator: How was your experience working at the Liberator?

Delgadillo: It was definitely life-changing, that's for sure. Mostly because right now, I'm studying journalism because of that, funny enough. It had a big impact on what I wanted to do and helped me find out what I was good at and what I wasn't.

The LASA Liberator: Do you have a specific area of journalism you're currently studying?

Delgadillo: I'm currently studying at the University of North Texas, and I have a journalism degree, but they have five different concentrations. The one that I am doing right now is digital in print. That's kind of working with magazines and online content. But I've also done a little bit of other work outside of that, such as broadcast and photography.

The LASA Liberator: How does working at the North Texas Daily compare to your time at the Liberator?

Delgadillo: Working at the Liberator prepares you for the foundation of it. We do eight pages every week, and most of the workers are journalism majors, so we know we have to work on deadlines and hurry up with them.

The LASA Liberator: Are you planning on pursuing journalism as a career in the future?

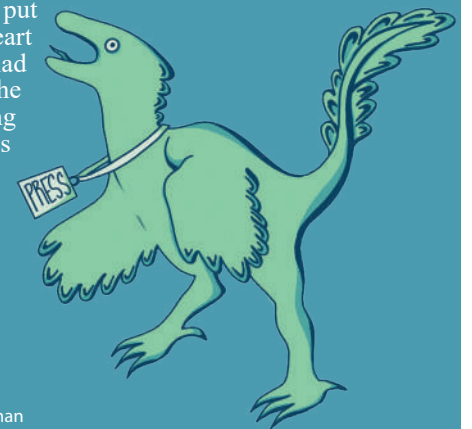
Delgadillo: I mean, with the way that the job market is going, I've got to have an open mind with everything. I want to pursue journalism. I see myself mostly writing editorials, but I've kinda recently, this semester, gotten into arts and life and entertainment-type journalism. But yes, journalism is ultimately my goal, and I also want to do teaching. Teaching journalism.

The LASA Liberator: You once said that The LASA Liberator has had a big impact on you and that you're reaching for great things, and you specifically said 'winning a Pulitzer award or being added to the CIA watchlist.' Do you still have these goals?

Delgadillo: The CIA one was clearly a joke, but the Pulitzer—that I see has the biggest award there is. It has changed because it's gotten more specific. I would still want to win a Pulitzer. That would be very cool but for commentary or editorial writing.

The LASA Liberator: What are the lessons that you learned from the Liberator?

Delgadillo: I think the biggest lesson that I learned working at the Liberator is you are gonna work with a team, and no matter what you do... as long as you have the drive to do something, it can be accomplished. The Liberator was something I put my mind and heart into, and I'm glad to see many of the traditions growing and new ones coming along!



graphics by Amelia Coleman

The LASA Student Union's Rise

TINGYU CAO | staff writer

Have students found themselves late on Sunday night, realizing that they have three tests and a project due the next day? Have they felt like they worked the entire weekend and yet there is still a mountain of work ahead? "Why deal with this?" they ask themselves. This is how the members of the LASA Union felt. As a result of the extreme workload, they have decided to form.

Reese Armstrong, the founder of the LASA Union and former student at LASA, explained that the school overworks its students. According to him, LASA's school work leached into every aspect of his life, from sleeping to family time.

"I feel like students should have a right to live their lives and not just be expected to work crazy hours all the time and sacrifice their health, their safety, their ability to see friends and family, their sleep," Armstrong said. "For what?"

According to Armstrong, the entire point of LASA is no more than just another point for a student to include on their college application. Armstrong opposes this as he

believes that the school should be more than that.

"The expectation should not be that you have to give up your life for LASA," Armstrong said. "We should come together, and we should fight for something better. I would say that what keeps the system intact in a lot of ways is this idea that we have to live this way for the sake of college applications."

Armstrong explained that the LASA Union hopes to get what it wants through collective bargaining. Armstrong has found that many people at LASA want change: like extending the due dates and advocating for a more defined balance of life and work.

"For example, a policy that would be great is to make schoolwork that is assigned one day not due immediately the next day if you have a double B week to give students time to do work," Armstrong said. "And I think that all the demands are going to have to come from the students."

LASA junior David Hamer, a LASA Union member, believes that something must be changed. He believes mental health should be high on the list of reforms and union demands.

"[The problems] vary a lot," Hamer said. "There's a lot of people saying there's not enough mental health services at LASA [or just generally that] LASA is making mental health worse. People say there's not a lot of time, outside of school and school work."

Isaac Braman-Ray, a junior and the current co-chair of the LASA Union, thinks the union still needs more people for it to be effective. The LASA Union currently has about 8%, or 116 students, and according to the LASA Student Union social media, they do still plan to expand.

"We haven't been able to accomplish much yet because we don't have enough support..." Braman-Ray said. "We might be a little above 8% now. We're hoping to get up to 20% by the end of the year or more."



graphic by Tita Gonzalez

LASA Theater Revamps

PAXTON TIDRICK | staff writer

After years of silent suffering, the calls to renovate LASA theater's aging walls and outdated equipment have finally been answered. Starting in the summer of 2024 and scheduled to finish at the end of the year, the theater has undergone various renovations, including installing a new pulley system, fixed lighting, and even a refurbished roof. Thanks to the parents and school's fundraising efforts, the equipment has been replaced and the roof has been repaired.

Ben Burford, an English and one of the theater teachers at LASA, was affected by the previously unsolved issues surrounding the problems with the theater. His biggest concerns were regarding the danger of the roof to people working in the building, especially with the water problems.

"Sometimes when it would rain hard, water would get into the theater building and cause mold on the carpets, floor, and drapes," Burford said. "It was also a safety hazard because of the amount of lighting and electrical equipment in general."

According to LASA senior Naman Mishra, the Alley Cat Players' student manager, the breaking of technical equipment, like lights and pulleys, and rain has heavily affected the ability of students to hold rehearsals and build sets. He explained that this was a large problem that wasted a lot of students' and teachers' time when preparing for their "Importance of Being Earnest" production.

"We were able to get things done, but we were severely limited," Mishra said. "Sometimes an entire rehearsal would be lost because we would have to mop up the stage, or because the light stopped working, and we had to figure out why before we could go back to using it."

However, Burford explained that simply replacing the theater's technical equipment, such as the pulley system and lighting, wouldn't have addressed the building's structural issues. Because of this, he stated that renovations included upgrading key stage equipment and rebuilding a lot of the roof, allowing the Alley Cat Players to enjoy their newly improved space.

"It was stressful to feel that costumes and set pieces were molding from rain," Burford said. "That was on top of an already stressful time working on a production. And so having that taken off of our plate has been great... We were already doing a lot with a little, so it's exciting that students can experience technical opportunities that are closer to real-world application."

The renovation wasn't as simple as simply remodeling the theater and fixing the old equipment. Juliet Auby, the ACP secretary, says aspects of the renovations required emptying the entire theater, which was a hassle for everyone involved. She explained the process that was required to enable the crew to come in and fix up the theater.

"It was really inconvenient for the last play because we couldn't rehearse in there while they were working on elements of the remodel," Auby said. "The stage had to be completely clear, which was a pain to do because it's just about never empty. I've only ever seen it empty once or twice in the whole time I've been here, so that was a major problem. It was really difficult to clear out the stage for them to be able to come in."

According to Mishra, many theater students were enthusiastic about the renovations. Students appreciated roof repairs, but specifically, they appreciated the new equipment in the theater, such as the lighting and pulley system, that were previously unusable.

"It's been quite a lot better for a few things," Mishra said. "It's really nice to be able to make really cool, complicated lighting designs like we weren't able to before. We have a brand new pulley system. We were never able to use it before because its age made it not safe to hang really heavy things. But now we're able to do that, and that was something we were able to use in our winter play."

No longer threatened by the difficult working conditions, the Alley Cat Players have been able to focus on making their productions better. Mishra described the students' appreciation of having more time to spend on productions.

"The biggest benefit, honestly, has probably been that now we have to spend so much less time on working around these problems," Mishra said. "Now we've really been able to leave that behind and focus on our truest potential."

LASA's theater community has embraced the long-awaited changes to its space. According to Burford, now that the improvements are complete, they're eager to leave the past behind and step into a future filled with new possibilities.

"All of the renovations have been fantastic, and we're very appreciative about them," Burford said. "If anything, I just wish they would have happened sooner, but it's wonderful that they're happening at all and happening now. So I don't want to focus on the time that we had with the old roof and just appreciate the fact that these improvements are occurring."

Small to Large: Austin's Comedy Growth

LILY ANTONY | staff writer

Austin is the second fastest-growing city in the U.S., according to the census data by the city of Austin, and as it changes, so does its culture. Specifically, in recent times, comedy has been a rapidly growing scene as more homegrown comedians and famous comedians settle in the city.

Austin has a history of local comedy with clubs and festivals such as the Moontower Comedy Festival, which has existed for over a decade. However, the scene has exploded recently with even more comedians and comedy clubs. In 2020, popular comedian and host of one of the largest podcasts in the world, Joe Rogan, moved from California to Austin. In 2023, he opened a comedy club named the Comedy Mothership, bringing new elements and attention to the Austin comedy scene.



A NEW AGE Joe Rogan's Comedy Mothership on 66th Street. One of the many newer comedy clubs in Austin. photo by Ellington Tough

Colton Dowling is a comedian and co-owner of The Creek and The Cave, which is a comedy club on 7th street. Dowling originally came to Austin for a two-week visit, but those two weeks quickly turned into eight years. He decided to stay and do comedy because of Austin's space to grow his comedic career.

"The amount of stage time that I could get as a new comic was more than any other place," Dowling said. "If you go to New York or LA, you're not getting as much stage time."

Seattle native Yola Jean Lu, a comedian now based in Austin, originally planned to

move to New York or Los Angeles to pursue comedy, but after a visit to Houston, she was drawn to Texas. Choosing to stay, she settled in Austin, where she became part of Coldtowne Comedy Club, a club for alternative comedy, and built her career alongside the city's comedy scene.

"I had never been to Austin before, but I had this feeling that Austin is probably an artsy city, maybe with more of a comedy scene," Lu said. "Then I started finding a really supportive comedy community here in Austin."

Austin also hosts homegrown comedians, such as Jessica Arjet, the co-owner and the Youth Programs Director of Hideout Theater. Arjet grew up in the Austin theater community, and after college, Arjet spent 17 years as a clown before transitioning to improv. This eventually brought her to the Hideout Theater, where she performs and teaches improv and comedy to kids.

"You know, [I like] working with kids because they're very spontaneous," Arjet said. "I just fell in love with it and almost immediately they invited me to join a cast of a show"

Dowling explained that he has noticed changes in both the Austin comedy scene and comedy throughout their time here. According to him, throughout his time here there has been a significant amount of comedy growth.

"It used to be that you had to move to LA or New York," Dowling said. "And now people are moving here. So that's the biggest difference."

Austin's comedy scene is expanding, with new clubs offering a variety of styles, from stand-up and improv to sketch and experimental comedy. As someone deeply involved in the scene, Arjet has observed how comedy culture evolves. According to her, teaching improv to kids gives her insight into what younger generations find funny, which allows her to rack shifting comedic trends firsthand.

"There's a phrase that we use now that's called punching up," Arjet said. "So it used to be when you, in comedy, would punch down to make fun of people who were different than you, who were more vulnerable than you, and people thought that was funny. But now people don't like that as much, instead, we're like, 'you can make fun of white guys, you can make fun of British people, you can make fun of people who are sitting on top.'"

Lu acknowledges that Austin's comedy scene is supportive, but she also believes the culture is simultaneously shifting back toward a "punching down" mentality. More comedians are making jokes at the expense of marginalized groups. As a result, Lu and

other women feel less safe in the comedy scene, as sexist and abusive humor has become more common in Austin sets.

"Now you have all these anti-woke comedians," Lu said. "There's so much more comedians that are punching down, making fun of marginalized groups, and just making jokes that feel really hacky."

Dowling acknowledges that although times are changing and each of these comedians has different scenes and perspectives, most agree that their favorite part of doing comedy is the community. These comedians have found a great community in their spaces, and they love being able to share the comedy experience with their friends.

"Honestly, what I like about it is all my friends are funny for a profession, so I don't have an unfunny friend," Dowling said. "My favorite part is the community."

Arjet values the friendship she has with other comedians, sharing the experience of performing and growing within the comedy scene. Together, they support each other by watching each other's performances, experimenting with new material, and helping each other with their craft behind the scenes.

"My favorite part of comedy is when you've had a really good show with other people that you really like and you start repeating things that were in the show," Arjet said. "It's just like a group of friends all joining in together to do the comedy together, not for an audience"

Lu also loves meeting people in the comedy community. In the time she's been in Austin, Lu has met a variety of people with different experiences who have welcomed her into a community of people who all share the comedy dream.

"The friends that I make in the communities that I build, so many of these people have become lifelong friends of mine," Lu said. "There is something really special sometimes that everybody is pursuing this dream"

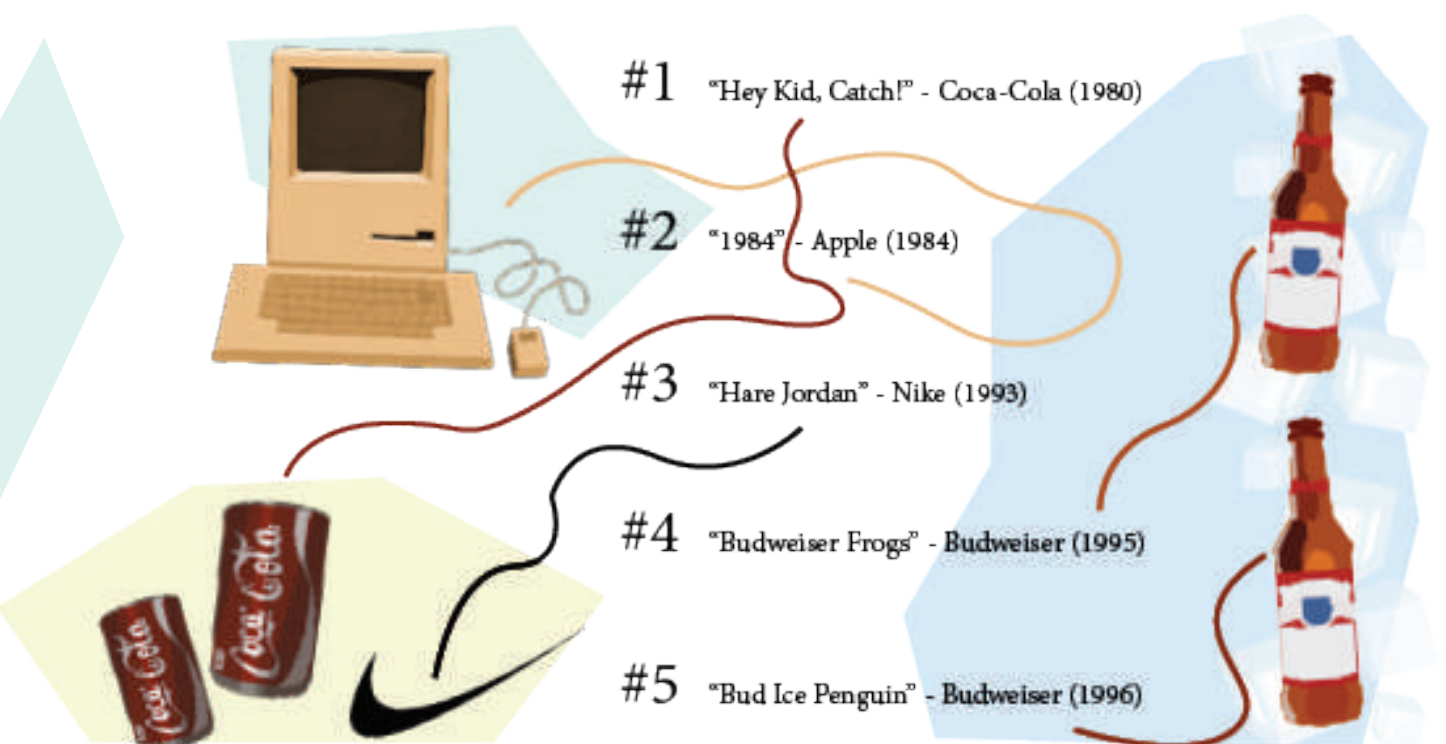
According to Lu, the Austin comedy community is growing and changing, but the roots of Austin comedy are still the foundation of the growing scene. She explained that more people are enjoying Austin culture because the city provides many new spaces to explore comedy for a wide range of audiences.

Hideout Theatre has regular shows and classes throughout the week from 7 a.m. to 5 a.m. with a large range of performances. Arjet performs "Glitter Witch" at 8:30 on Fridays at Hideout Theatre. Lu performs at the Fallout Theater every Thursday at 8:30 p.m. with her all-female and non-binary troupe.

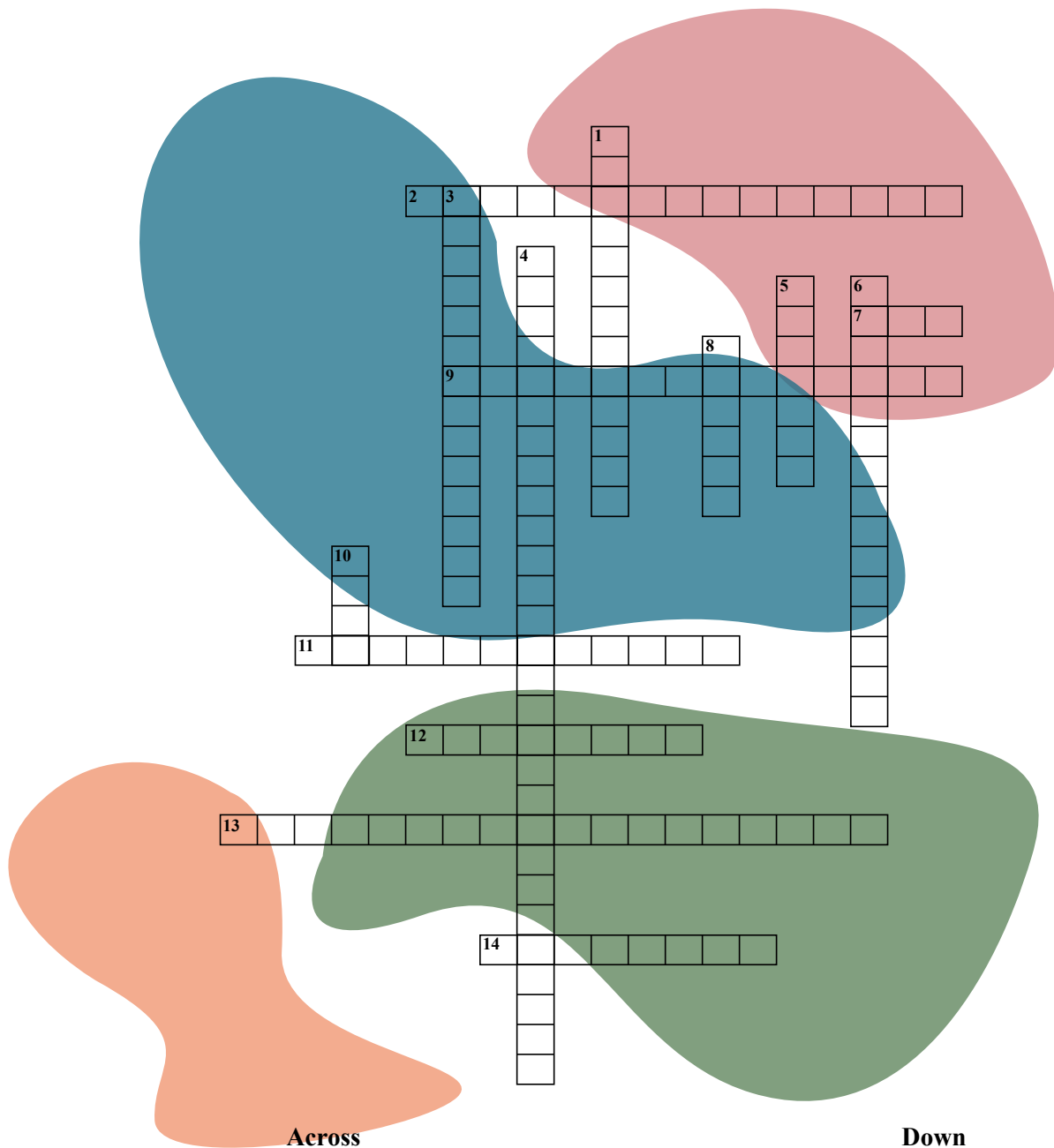
5 Most Popular Super Bowl Ads Of All Time

JAY WILKERSON | club contributor

The Super Bowl is the annual NFL championship game that millions of Americans watch every year, making the broadcast prime advertising space for companies. Super Bowl advertisements take up about 24% of its airtime according to Marketing Dive. A survey done by Statista states that 18% of respondents who watched the Super Bowl were only there for the advertisements because of the high production values, celebrity appearances, and creative storytelling. Some of the most popular advertisements from the Super Bowl have been "Hey Kid, Catch!" by Coca-Cola in 1980, Remembered for the emotional impact and timeless appeal of the ad, it re-aired in 2004; "1984" by Apple aired in 1984, based off of the George Orwell novel which shares its name, takes advantage of these qualities to create a memorable ad; "Hare Jordan" by Nike made in 1993 is remembered for the crossover between NBA star Micheal Jordan and beloved Looney Toons character Bugs Bunny.



LASA Themed Crossword Puzzle



Across

- 2. The gross senior tradition that takes place in the parking lot each year
- 7. The most previous school LASA was a part of before officially becoming its own school and gaining its own campus
- 9. The magnet program that began at the school from 7 across
- 11. The extinct animal that represents LASA
- 12. The school that originally inhabited LASA's current location from 1960 to 2008
- 13. The magnet program that began at the school from 12 across
- 14. The name of LASA's varsity dance team

Down

- 1. The senior tradition that takes place at dawn
- 3. The road in LASA's address
- 4. The name of LASA's theater, named after a principal from the school in 12 across
- 5. The name of LASA's Junior Varsity Dance team
- 6. The name of LASA's acting troupe
- 8. The mascot of the answer to 7 across
- 10. The name of LASA's mascot

The Black Pumas Prowl the Globe

ABBEY WU | staff writer

Black Pumas, the Austin-based psychedelic soul duo, has risen to popularity since their formation in 2017. Known for their electrifying shows and genre-blending sound, the group has gained critical acclaim, with more than three million monthly listeners on Spotify, and a dedicated fan base while also selling out multiple tours across North America and Europe.

By the end of 2017, Adrian Quesada and Eric Burton, the lead singer and songwriter of Black Pumas, had recorded enough music for fun that they decided to make their band official. After coming up with the name Black Pumas, the band played their first show in 2018. Adrian Quesada, the guitarist and producer of the group shared how it all began.

"I was introduced to Eric by a mutual friend, and we began to record music together that summer," Quesada said. "We didn't really have plans to make it a band. Officially, we were just kind of recording music and having fun."

As they continued experimenting, their influences naturally shaped their sound. Their environment is their main source of inspiration, and as a result, the duo's music is deeply rooted in soul, hip-hop, and psychedelic influences which adds to their unique flair.

"That summer in particular I was kind of trying to find inspiration and going on walks and bike rides and trying to find music," Quesada said. "One day, [I] came home and started to write some music."

That search for inspiration extended beyond his surroundings and into the music that shaped him. Drawing

influence from producers and bands, their influences are vast and varied, reflecting the diversity of their sound.

"I have so many it's hard to narrow it down," Quesada said. "But I would say some of my biggest influences have been producers, like Quincy Jones... the Beastie Boys, and The Beatles."

For Quesada, the songwriting process is spontaneous and fluid, never following an exact formula. He prefers to let creativity flow naturally by quickly recording ideas on his phone as they come to him.

"I'll just start with some drums that really inspire me to come up with an idea," Quesada said. "I will make a quick sort of demo version of it on my laptop or on my computer. I have a recording studio... I'll pick up a guitar and start to lay down an idea for a song."

He explained that technological advancements have changed his songwriting process. According to Quesada, the ability to record and produce music from a mobile device has made the music-making process more accessible.

"It's just easier now to quickly get your ideas down," Quesada said. "It used to be if you had an idea, you had to go into a recording studio, and it was a big process. Nowadays, you can really make a full album on your phone."

In addition to his work with Black Pumas, Quesada has a solo career. He remains busy with a continuation of his previous album and producing for other artists.

"I just finished an album of my own music with some other collaborators," Quesada said. "The album is called 'Boleros Psicodélicos'. I was just recently nominated for an Oscar, which was not even something that I ever imagined would happen. So that's just been very surreal and very humbling, just an incredible experience so far."

Reflecting on his recent projects and achievements, Quesada explained that he stays grounded in the experiences that shaped his journey. He stated that one of the most meaningful parts of his career is performing in Austin, where his musical roots are.

"Playing Austin shows is always really special," Quesada said. "It's our hometown, and I think in general, Austin crowds are more exciting than a lot of places around the world. I think Black Pumas is a band that couldn't have started anywhere else but Austin, so forever we're grateful for having been born in Austin and also just always having a lot of love and support from people in Austin."



AROUND THE WORLD Black Pumas performing on their tour. The show took place in Barcelona. photo courtesy of the Black Pumas

Editor's Picks

Best Trip

Tokyo, Japan

GEORGIA FINK | entertainment editor

My first time traveling alone was when I went abroad for a month to Tokyo, Japan. I left my parents to go through security with tears in my eyes, worried about traversing the San Francisco airport, where my layover was, alone. Throughout that time, I would take the subway to a language school every morning, participate in an activity through the afternoon, and explore the city by myself. It was quite an experience, having to trudge through the Japanese heat and humidity in the concrete jungle that is Tokyo, sweating buckets and staining shirts. But all of the tall buildings, old structures, and beautiful sights that we saw made the sweat worth it. Tokyo has many districts that are vastly different from one another. From the busy, fashion-filled, Takeshita street in Harajuku, to the less busy, guitar store-filled street right outside of the Ochanomizu station, there is something for everyone. My favorite part of Tokyo was Asakusa. It is a part of Tokyo that mixes traditional and modern culture, with food stalls and souvenirs lining the streets behind the Sensoji temple, it is truly a fun place to visit. This is the last area of Tokyo that I visited. On the night before we left, me and my friends walked around Asakusa, did karaoke, and did our last gachapon, dreading leaving Japan and each other the next day.

London, England

MARGOT MORGAN | entertainment editor

For some, visiting a giant clock tower might not seem to be the most interesting, but visiting Big Ben in London with my family was one of the best parts of the trip. The towering clock, standing tall against the cloudy sky, was even more breathtaking in person. We wandered onto a nearby bridge, stopping to take pictures with the River Thames shimmering behind us. The wind and fog surrounded us while we tried to get the perfect shot of the iconic landmark. After soaking in the view, we found a street vendor selling hot dogs. As the smoky scent filled the air, I took a bite, and the warmth of the food was a comforting contrast to the cold London air. Standing there, surrounded by the city's beauty, I felt completely happy at the moment, taking in the beauty of London one bite at a time. Even though Big Ben stole the spotlight, London's other landmarks, like going to Buckingham Palace and watching the Changing of the Guard, or looking at the Crown Jewels in the Tower of London, added to the city's charm, and made London a truly magical place. The mixture of history, culture, and beauty that surrounded us made it clear to me that London is a city of unforgettable experiences waiting to be discovered.

Niagra Falls, New York

ETHAN STERN | news editor

A trip to Niagara Falls has always been on my bucket list, so when my family took a trip to Canada over the summer, I felt it was a must-see stop. When we arrived by bus from Toronto, it was pouring rain, so much so that we had to run to the hotel, barely getting to glimpse at the majesty of the falls before we went inside to get dinner. That night, after I returned to the hotel, I looked out my window to see the beautiful falls. They were hardly visible in the night sky but still rushed with full effect. After a minute or so, lights behind the falls flickered on, putting on a show for all its viewers. Bright lights reflected, using the water as its canvas, it illuminated the city with vibrant lights amidst the calm air. Red, white, and blue surrounded both falls, merging the two seamlessly together. The colors danced back and forth as they unified in a wonderful harmony. The falls were not just part of the United States or just part of Canada but united to transcend national boundaries and connect us all over the shared beauty of nature.

graphic by Tita Gonzalez



LASA Climbers' Numbers Reach New Heights

LILY ANTONY | staff writer

As magnet students leave LASA at the end of the day, some go north, south, west, and east. But a growing number of them are choosing another direction: up. Climbing, an activity that bridges the definitions of a sport and a pastime, is drawing participants looking for a workout, a challenge, and simply fun.

Rock climbing is a general term for climbing activities, describing someone gaining height by climbing on a rock covered wall while attached to ropes and equipment for help and safety. Bouldering, a popular variation, is a type of rock climbing that covers short distances without the aid of a rope or harness and instead has mats under the rock face to cushion falls. In the 2023-24 school year there was a rock climbing club that brought the activity further into LASA. Though the club was not renewed in fall 2024, the sport has continued in its popularity. LASA freshman Ian Hawthorne took up bouldering after moving into Govalle 2 years ago.

"The big appeal for me is problem solving," Hawthorne said. "It's not all about just pushing as hard as you can to complete a climb, you have to know what steps to take."

Hawthorne likes to see the process of completing a climb as working out a series of problems. According to him, climbers always have to figure out where to move their hands and feet to ascend a wall.

"I think rock climbing is so popular at LASA because there's a gym nearby and because it caters to our population because of the aforementioned problem solving," Hawthorne

said. "My favorite part of rock climbing is completing a hard climb after lots of attempts. I may feel worn out, but I know that I got the climb done and pushed past exhaustion to get there."



LASA sophomore Alex Gilbert found that climbing can be used in place of things like lifting weights and going to the gym because of the physical effort it requires. He credited climbing's popularity among LASA students to how casual it is while remaining difficult.

"It's really fun for me and it's something I like to do to pass the time," Gilbert said. "It's a really good workout. I sometimes do it in place of going to the gym and lifting weights."

The LASA climbing community has been growing throughout the past few years. Gilbert explained that one reason for this is the climbing gym Austin Bouldering Project's proximity to campus.

"The gym is just so close. It's just so easy," Gilbert said. "Another reason is, Austin Bouldering Project is listed as an option for OCPE (off-campus physical education)."

According to LASA senior Astrid Gothard, a part of climbing's newfound popularity among LASA students stems

from the sport's identity between a competition and a hobby, both of which make participating with friends more fun. She herself has been climbing and bouldering for a year, often with her friends.

"It's a good sport to be able to see what you can improve on and know exactly what you need to work on," Gothard said. "It's really fun to do with friends."

According to Gothard, the activity is also great for young and inexperienced athletes, as it doesn't require a lot of prior experience to start. As a result, more and more LASA students have begun going to the gym close by after school and getting credit for it.

"It's a great sport at intro level, you can do it," Gothard said. "If you've never done it before you can jump right in and if you're already really strong or have a lot of experience, it's still fun."

The Austin Bouldering Project is a mile away from LASA on Springdale Road and open every day from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m. on weekdays and 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. on weekends. They offer classes, day passes, and memberships for anyone wanting to try out the gym and get into climbing.

"As LASA's size grows, I think more people will see rock climbing as a fun way to get exercise after school," Hawthorne said. "It's a great way to get exercise after an 8 hour period of sitting around looking at laptops and packets."

graphics by Asher Zvi-Nova

Unconventional New Sports Break the Mold

TESSA WHITNEY | staff writer

When people think of sports, they might imagine Friday night football games, Olympic track events, and packed basketball arenas. However, beyond these mainstream competitions are athletes who crave something different from the rigid structure of those traditional games. Alternative sports like underwater hockey, ultimate frisbee and pickleball have recently swelled in participation.

One example of this is an aquatic twist on traditional ice hockey. Originating in Britain, underwater hockey now has over 15,000 players across 40 countries according to ESPN. Tristan Reynard of the Confederation Mondiale Des Activites Subaquatiques (CMAS), or the World Underwater Formation in English, is the director of underwater hockey in New Zealand.

"Underwater hockey is similar to ice hockey, but it's on the bottom of the pool," Reynard said. "There's two teams that push the puck into the goal tray at each end of a standard court that is 25 meters long, 15 meters wide, and about 2 to 2.5 meters deep."

The game, originally called Octopush, is played with a mask and snorkel. The sticks are less than a foot long and have a flat, slightly curved blade to help push the puck along the pool floor. The game relies on teamwork, positioning, and quick dives to control the puck. However, despite its name, players do not typically spend too much time beneath the surface.

"It's not really an extreme sport at all," Reynard said. "The water is an equalizing factor. One of the American guys did a study and on average you'll only spend about 11 seconds underwater at a time."

Reynard became interested in underwater hockey when he saw it was being offered at his high school. Wellington Underwater Hockey Association described New Zealand as the forefront of the sport along with South Africa and Australia.

"In New Zealand, underwater hockey is part of the college sports," Reynard said. "Here in Wellington we have a school season from May to September each year for underwater hockey, and in high school I had a swimming background so I just decided to join it too. I just wanted to swim, naturally, and when you're around 14 years old you tend to stop competitive swimming in New Zealand and join more team based sports like water polo, and I just decided to do underwater hockey. We had a school league, and then there was a national

competition. We attended that."

While some sports thrive in the depths of a swimming pool, others stay dry on land. The bright green courts of pickleball pervade Austin, as well as many social media feeds. This colorful pastime originated in the '60s but has experienced a recent surge in popularity. LASA freshman Elias Siegal described how he has integrated pickleball into his weekly routine ever since playing it with his family on vacation.

"There was a pickleball court at the hotel, and my family started playing it there," Siegal said. "After we went back home we found some courts here in Austin. At first it was something for the family to do, but eventually we started taking it more seriously."

Siegal explained that the rules of pickleball are similar to tennis except that there is no serving overhead, and the paddles are made of solid plastic as opposed to a racket. He learned these differences while observing the shift in the sport's popularity firsthand at Austin's Jewish Community Center.

"I was one of the first to play on their pickleball courts," Siegal said. "In the past year or two, I've for sure seen some new faces. Also, in general just the quantity of people at the courts have gone up. It used to be you could come in at two on a Saturday and they'd be empty, but now if you want the court to yourself you're going to have to go earlier or later in the day."

Siegal noted that the increased attention sports like pickleball have gotten from a wider audience may be due to social media. He described how viral videos and influencers brought publicity to an otherwise obscure take on tennis.

"I remember seeing a professional pickleball league which I was not aware of prior to that day," Siegal said. "I looked them up and saw that they had thousands of followers on Instagram. Honestly, I didn't think that many people cared about pickleball. In other cities pickleball is just what older people play, but in Austin especially I see a lot of young adults. Those adults are probably on social media and post about it, and then their friends see, then their friends play, and it keeps going like that."

While sports like underwater hockey and pickleball put a twist on traditional sports, ultimate frisbee, offered at LASA as a club sport, has made its mark on fields across the country in its own way. LASA sophomore Lucca Ostrovich picked up the sport in sixth grade and is now the captain of one of the B teams.

"The more I played the more the community grew on me," Ostrovich said. "I've always had a fondness for the interconnectivity of frisbee, everyone is respectful and recognises at the end of the day it's just a game and you're there to have fun. I think that really motivated me, and also it's just a really fun sport. And I've carried that mindset and it just led to me now being a captain."

Ultimate isn't regulated by UIL, which, according to Ostrovich, allows for a more flexible and community-driven environment. He believes that the freedom sports like Ultimate have due to the lack of regulation of them is what draws more participants.

"I think it's really growing just because of the accessibility of the sport," Ostrovich said. "Maybe five years ago it was only 16 million people playing in the U.S., and now it's almost doubled at 31 million."

Turnover occurs if a pass is dropped, intercepted, or goes out of bounds, and is called by self-officiation, where players make their own calls without referees. According to Ostrovich, this requires athletes to communicate honestly and rely on sportsmanship to keep the game running smoothly.

"Ultimate Frisbee in general is a collection of misfits of sorts," Ostrovich said. "Which makes it so cool because you see people grow from being these scrawny kids, to being athletes."

Unconventional sports and the communities surrounding them are now abundant around the world. Those interested can play in Austin and even on teams at LASA.



graphic and photo by Ellington Tough

Athletes Hunt for the Mamba Mentality

ADEL WELLS | staff writer

Before every professional, high school, and middle school sports game there is time to warm up, to stretch, jog, practice your skills, and get ready to play. Between the ears of every athlete is one of the most important drills: preparing their mental game for the inevitable mistakes and issues they will face in the coming hours. Whether it's listening to music, repeating a mantra, taking deep breaths, every sport has a mental component to it and every player has their own strategy to take it on.

Senior Natalia Perez is the captain of LASA's varsity girls soccer team. She explained her routine involves drinking ginger fizz packets, being by herself, and listening to music.

"Right before warming up I like to eat a rice krispie to get some sugar in my body in order to prepare for a physical battle," Perez said. "Lastly, it's important to me to say a prayer and give myself words of encouragement. A lot of people skip this step because of how embarrassing it can be. I believe that this part is the most valuable to me because I am able to bring myself down to earth and shake those nerves away."

Coach Donnie Maibs, head of athletic performance and women's volleyball and men's tennis coach at the University of Texas at Austin (UT), described an athlete he used to coach. According to him, this athlete had an insurmountable mental block, and he detailed the way they worked together to help her move past it.

"They ended up giving her this herbal tea that she thought had all the stuff in it that made her feel better, and it's literally just normal tea, but because she thought it had something in it, the placebo effect helped her," Maibs said. "She ended up being a 2-3 time all-American middle blocker."

Maibs has coached football, tennis, track, soccer, and volleyball over his 29 years of coaching. During his career, he noticed that certain positions and sports can be more stressful than others.

"A volleyball player, the libero back there, a little tiny girl

that passes the ball, that is very stressful," Maibs said. "They have a mental block because the ball is coming right out and there's nobody to help. They'll fall flat on their face to keep it in. I've seen it. If they're not mentally resilient... they get exposed."

“Letting go of anxiety is tough, but it's crucial for players to remind themselves of their capabilities.”

- NATALIA PEREZ, LASA SOCCER CAPTAIN

LASA junior Elizabeth Bircher is a swim and dive captain for the school's team. She described the difficulties of being a successful diver, which, according to her, include the high degree of isolation and judgement that are crucial in the sport.

"The pressure of diving in front of judges in a silent environment makes it even more nerve-wracking because it is so different from the practice experience," Bircher said. "I have had mental blocks on some of my higher-difficulty dives such as back two-and-a-half somersault tuck on three meters. This dive is especially hard for me because you are facing backward to the water, so you must be aware and know when to come out of the flip to enter the water. Having a mental block on this dive made it difficult to work on in practice, which resulted in worse performance during competitions."

Bircher credited her eventual success and ability to overcome these mental blocks to forming the ability to let go of mistakes. She managed her anxiety by focusing more on how she felt instead of what her coach wanted her to do.

"Preparing my mental game helped me recently at districts; I was able to hit all of my dives and earn a new PR," Bircher said. "A greater emphasis on the mental game would improve my ability to succeed at meets."

According to Bircher, a mental mindset change can significantly alter your game, and it is pivotal for good performance to have a specific and well-developed mental game. Perez explained that it was mental stability and security that often determined winners and losers, not skill, as seen in star athletes having "off" games.

"Letting go of anxiety is tough, but it's crucial for players to remind themselves of their capabilities," Perez said. "With time and focus, these affirmations can shift their mindset, allowing them to reach that flow state where everything clicks."

Maibs explained that he likes to remind athletes that it isn't just about the game. He believes everything in a player's life connects back to how they play, and Maibs hopes to leave any athlete he meets with a key piece of advice.

"If your mental health is really tough [at home, in your personal life] you're not gonna have to budget bandwidth in your sports to be resilient mentally," Maibs said. "Sometimes, it's not a performance staying on your own or on the field; you gotta go home. You gotta get better sleep. You gotta get a better relationship at home. You gotta prioritize your time and not waste time so that when you come to your sports you have a lot more capacity and budget to handle stressful situations... That to me is 101 mental the most kids don't know how to manage."

THE RAPTOR RUN DOWN

file graphic by Kayla Le

JAMES CONSTANT | staff writer

While joining the LASA raptor baseball team's after school practices during their 2025 spring season, I got the chance to observe the incredible inner workings of the baseball program. My week there was very positive and fun, and I got to learn a lot from everyone I talked to.

I learned so much about the sport, and the friendly culture of its participants. Junior Henry Strandwitz, a captain, showed me how to throw properly, and freshman Connor Abell taught me what it takes to bat. The head coach, Eric Martanovic, kindly showed me the different drills and activities that took place during each practice.

The stretchy blue tubes of elastic hanging from the baseball field's fence bewildered me at first, but Martanovic explained they were resistance bands meant to strengthen players' throws. By fighting against the tension while pulling on them, players loosen their arms up for the day's activities. After a few minutes with this exercise, my teammates for the day started with warm-up exercises where they stretched, ran, and soon split up into respective teams.

One of the coaches, LASA alumnus Keegan Anderson, had the creativity to name two groups who would be playing each other the "Alphas" and "Sigmals". He assigned each player to one of the two teams, which would rotate in the batting cage, where I myself learned how to make consistent contact with the ball.

The other group would practice on the field. I was struck by all the different skills they had to employ: catching, batting, running, and throwing. The team always knew exactly what to do as a product of hours upon hours of practice; it felt like a well-oiled machine. At the end of my first day there, Martanovic got the whole team together to play 21 outs. The game was a good exercise to help players catch balls from the bat seamlessly. If the team was able to successfully get 21 outs, they could wrap the practice up. After making it to 21 outs, a difficult feat for

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

the players, the practice ended with an encouraging team cheer, leaving my ears ringing.

On another day, when JV-B was practicing on the field while JV-A and Varsity were rotating stations of the batting cage and running plays on the field, there was a clear sense of purpose shared between the players. I noticed they had no problem talking to and helping each other.

It was a very positive experience and refreshing to see such a great team with players who have high spirits. One player, junior Madoc Elder, explained how baseball is part of his life's purpose and something he looks forward to at the end of each day. I came to realize how the players on the team are all dedicated and driven by the sport, and I could definitely see that in practice, as Martanovic needed not even to teach, but to refine the players' skills.

During the practices, I learned how baseball works, the responsibilities of different positions, the equipment, and even some players' favorite exercises. As my final day at practice ended, a new perspective had been opened in my head. Thanks to Martanovic and the players, I gained a whole new insight into how collaboration can beget success.



BATTER UP James Constant swings at an incoming ball. This was his first full-length baseball practice. photo by Ellington Tough



AT PITCH James Constant pitches. During field practices, Constant learned a number of different skills, as well. photo by Ellington Tough

New Coaches Hit the Ground Running

ASHER ZVI-NOVA | staff writer

This year, LASA will have two new coaches leading the girls and boys track teams throughout the season running from Feb. 10 to May 3: John Goodell and Stephen West. Howard views them both as payers' coaches, loved by their trainees, and is confident that both of them together will drive the success of the team.

When a new head coach is needed, LASA athletics head coordinator Gary Howard is in charge of choosing the right fit. By looking at resumes, researching their background, calling references, and conducting interviews, Howard tries to determine the prospective coach's style of coaching.

"A lot I've encountered are like old school, which is kind of like me," Howard said. "Some coaches are very gruff, and they like to yell and scream. You have those coaches that are attached to their whistle. And then you have coaches whose style is very nurturing."

Howard wanted the new coaches to combine a deep knowledge of the sport with a balanced coaching style. He explained that it can be hard to handle student-athletes and parents, so the coaches need to be both nurturing and tough.

"[Goodell's] a teacher and a coach," Howard said. "Whether it's in the classroom or whether it's on the field, he's going to be the guy that's going to teach you what you need to know. [West] is a young coach, so he is able to relate to the kids being younger. His style is also nurturing, and he's also the powerlifting coach."

Howard highlighted Goodell's military background which contributed to him being well organized. Even though Goodell did the 100, 300, long jump, and hurdles in high school, it was in the military where he trained his body for distance.

"In the army, running is a part of your job," Goodell said. "It actually determines whether or not you get promoted. It was very hard for me... I had to train my body, my stamina, my lungs, literally build my muscle to get to the point where I could run two miles in 12 minutes."

After two years of teaching law, Goodell wanted to branch out. His daughter came home one day and said she was just

sitting there and reading books in class because the school was so short on teachers. Because of the shortage, Goodell felt like teaching was something he could and should do.

"I got called here [to LASA], and I love it here," Goodell said. "We're very lucky ... because you guys are a bunch of weirdos. It's awesome. You guys are lovely human beings, like 99% of you. There is a cohort that could be psychotic, but mostly you're just the best."

As the 2024-25 school year began, some of Goodell's senior students came up to him and asked him to coach track since they were worried about the program. As he was already a soccer coach, Goodell felt like this was an area where he could help out. He later approached West, who was coaching powerlifting at the time, and asked him to join the track staff.

"Running doesn't take coordination," Goodell said. "It doesn't take some exceptional ability. What it takes is determination. And every single kid at this school has that. Every single kid here has the ability to grind it. And if you're going to get up every single day and run for a month, you're a runner."

According to junior Sankarshan Balaji, there are some concerns about getting new coaches. While the track team has finished first in district the last two years, Balaji considers such an outcome to be unlikely this season.

"Mr. Goodell has never coached track before, and for a coach, adapting to a new team is a horrible challenge," Balaji said. "You're only a good coach if you know players, and... [our season's] not a long enough time to build a connection between a new coach and a player."

Despite his doubts, Balaji is excited to start the new season. He thinks it's important for coaches to be leaders and get results, valuing collaboration between coaches even more.

"All of [the new coaches] are LASA teachers this year, and I think that's going to help foster the kind of community we want," Balaji said. "Because they're in our school, it is easier to connect with them. We're able to go to their classroom and ask them, 'is there anything else I should be doing outside of track?' or something like 'how can I get ready for this meet?' and that communication is key."

LASA Archery on Target for State

LAUREN VANDERVEEN | staff writer

After countless practices and hard-earned bullseyes, the LASA Archery team's work paid off during a recent success at state qualifications.

When the team was founded in 2023, Head Coach Kat Davis offered her guidance to direct the team's focus and improve on weak areas, such as the archers focusing on proper shooting technique and strengthening their mental game. Davis explained how the team works to stay concentrated under pressure.

"Archery is over 90% mental once you learn the basics of how to shoot because, in essence, you're trying to do the exact same thing every time," Davis said. "When something goes wrong, what happens is we get in our head and the voice in our head that says mean things all the time. We work really hard to, for one, turn those voices around, focus on positive things, but also put enough inside our brains that that voice never even has a chance to talk."

Davis described how archers score points during competitions. According to her, archers shoot "ends", which are groups of arrows they shoot consecutively before scoring.

"Targets are scored 1 through 10," Davis said. "Archers shoot five arrows at a time making the best score 50 per end. They shoot three ends at 10 meters and three ends at 15 meters. The total possible score for an archer is 300. The total of the top 12 scores for each team makes the team score."

LASA sophomore Esme Gruber, who won second place at state qualifiers, shared her experience during practices. She explained the ways the team has improved throughout the season compared to previous years.

"The team has improved a lot in terms of practice, performance, and community," Gruber said. "During the two years I've been on the LASA archery team I have gotten to watch myself, my friends, and new archers learn and grow their archery skills as well as their community... thanks to our amazing coaches and captains."

The team practices four days a week with practices at 6:45 a.m. or after school until 8 p.m. Davis explained that this allows them to remain consistent and dedicated throughout competitions. LASA freshman Oliver Nelson described how this practice schedule paid off at the state qualifier.

"One thing I remember the most from that tournament is winning a one-arrow shoot-off, where all the archers line up to a target... and shoot one arrow, and whoever gets closest to the bullseye gets to advance," Nelson said. "I don't remember this moment because I won, I remember it because I had fun."

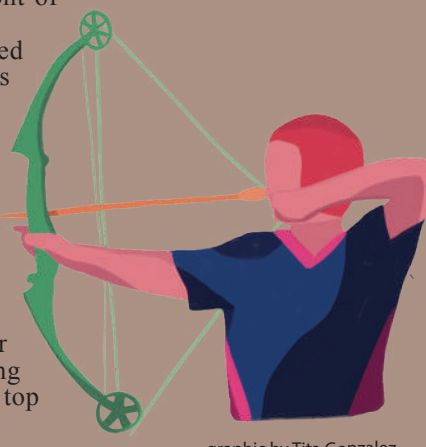
The archery team faces many challenges during tournaments, which can be especially difficult to conquer during the stress of a competition. According to Davis, the archers must remain concentrated through missed bullseyes and overshot arrows and maintaining this headspace of the team is critical.

"Individuals always face challenges," Davis said. "Especially if they're not having as good a day as they are used to having. When you shoot one arrow and it doesn't go where you want, it's easier for the second arrow to not go, and then it can snowball really easily. So, one of the things that we really have to do in archery is make sure to... only focus on the things that are happening right now in front of us."

The archery team scored 1,671 points at this year's state qualifiers, 75 points higher than at nationals last year. They will be taking 48 archers to the state competition and will attend nationals in Salt Lake City, Utah if they qualify during the state championship, which takes place March 25 to 26. After nationals, Davis is shooting for the team to be ranked top 10 or 15 in the country.



graphic by Ellington Tough



graphic by Tita Gonzalez

graphics by Amelia Coleman

RUNNING THE NUMBERS

LASA'S WINS AND LOSSES

as of March 17

home	visitor
9	1
Boys Soccer	

home	visitor
9	1
Girls Soccer	

home	visitor
7	1
Softball	

Trump Bans Trans Athletes from Women's Sports

Executive Order Changes Playing Field for Queer Athletes

ELLINGTON TOUGH | sports editor

During the 2024 election season, transgender athletes became a topic of contention between President Trump and former Vice President Harris. This dispute made its way through political debates as Republicans across the country targeted transgender athletes in their verbal messages and political advertising. The November elections have swept these politicians and their promises into office nationwide.

On Feb. 5, President Trump signed an executive order forbidding transgender women from competing in the women's category of any sport, vowing to end funding to any programs or schools that allowed them to do so. On Feb. 6, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), the regulatory body of college athletics in the U.S., banned transgender female athletes in accordance with this order.

Carey Elmring Norland is a transgender non-binary athlete who competes in mounted horse archery in Oregon. They believe transgender Americans have been villainized in the eyes of their cisgender counterparts.

"The first thing we have to be aware of is there really aren't that many transgender athletes," Norland said. "I think a lot of it is because it's been politicized. Every election, there's a big issue topic that people will talk about a lot, and they'll try to fearmonger around it so that they can freak people out and then get them to vote for a certain candidate because they're worried or afraid."

According to CNN, NCAA president Charlie Baker reported there were 10 transgender athletes competing in the organization in 2024. Their small number allows individual cases to receive nationwide attention. One such focal point was Andraya Yearwood, currently a transgender graduate student at Columbia University. She competed in the women's category of track during high school, finishing second at the state 100-meter dash in 2017, attracting massive media attention as well as conservative backlash.

"My team was very supportive, my school as well, and maybe my whole town was very supportive of me running track," Yearwood said. "Initially, the backlash came primarily on media, people were making YouTube videos, and then some articles had come out about me running and how I should not be running. And then I remember at one

track meet during outdoor season my sophomore year of high school, there had been petitions going around. People were signing petitions trying to get me to not run anymore."

According to the Williams Institute, the amount of Americans who openly identify as transgender has yet to reach 1%. In a way, Yearwood believes the small number of transgender athletes actually contributes to their unpopularity.

"I think that a lot of it has to do with the unknown," Yearwood said. "There are a lot of things, particularly regarding biology, gender and sex in general, that the larger public and the Republicans themselves just may not be as versed in. Seeing trans people shake up or disrupt binary standards that are already in place makes people fearful."

In the past, Democrats stood up to Republicans' messaging concerning trans people and athletes. According to the Washington Blade, President Biden pledged to defend transgender children's rights during his 2020 presidential campaign.

Now, however, PBS reports that the Democratic Party seems to be avoiding the issue. Travis County GOP Communications Director Andy Hogue believes they have recognized the diminishing political returns of endorsing this agenda. He thinks public support has turned against their cause, supported by a 2025 Pew Research Center poll that reported 66% of American adults are in favor of requiring trans athletes to compete on teams according to their sex at birth.

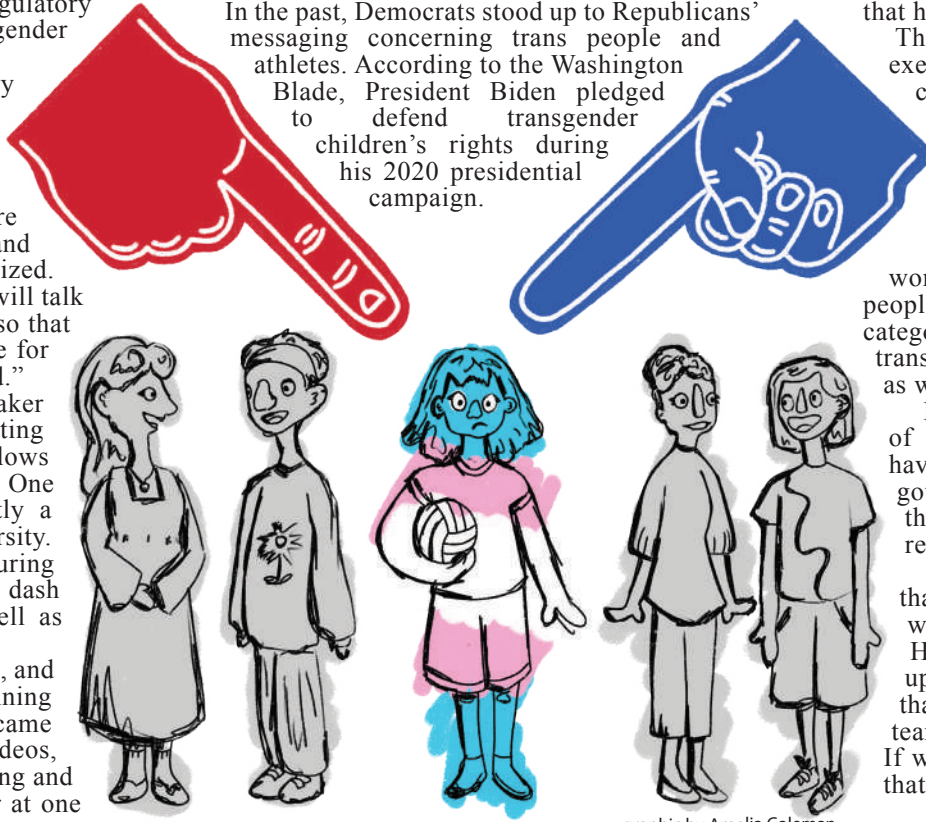
"I've never been a big sports aficionado... but I do understand there are concerns about there being advantages genetically between males and females," Hogue said. "If an underperforming male comes into a women's team, he dominates, why should that be any different for somebody that has a transgender orientation?"

The constitutionality of executive orders relies on them executing existing laws. Trump's order was technically constitutional because it interpreted an existing piece of federal legislation, Title IX, to mean that transgender women would make women's sports unfair by participating in them. Enacted in 1972, Title IX prohibits discrimination based on sex in educational institutions that receive funding from the government.

"Women's sports were originally intended to give women a chance to compete among biologically similar people," Hogue said. "And it's not fair to put males in that category for that reason alone. So if we're going to allow transgender male athletes in women's sports, then it might as well just get rid of women's sports entirely."

Hogue believes the issue can be expanded to the issue of an overly powerful government, which Republicans have long opposed. By putting these decisions into the government's hands, he says, one side will always feel they have been wronged, whereas a private entity can regulate themselves and those who chose to be part of it.

"If my optimist league wanted to have a baseball league that had transgender and non-transgender players, that would be my prerogative. It might be very successful," Hogue said. "Maybe it's a matter of that we've wrapped up so much of American life into government control, that most of our schools are public schools, most of our teams are subsidized by local governments at some level... If we were to consider it from a free market perspective, that might change the whole entire argument."



Hockey in the Heat

PRATIK GURIJALA | sports editor
ELLINGTON TOUGH

Under the sweltering sun of Central Texas, a hockey game seems a world away. But the Texas Stars continue to charge on.

The Texas Stars are an American Hockey League (AHL) developmental team for the Dallas Stars of the National Hockey League (NHL) currently ranked first in the Central Division. They are on the ice almost every week at the H-E-B Center in Cedar Park from October until the AHL playoffs in April. John Peterson, the manager of Broadcasting and Media relations for the Stars, is responsible for play-by-play broadcasting of games.

"The Texas Stars have been one of the hottest teams in the American Hockey League since mid-December thanks to a team record: a ten-game road winning streak," Peterson said. "A big reason for the Texas Stars' sustained success in this area has been the way this community has embraced the team."

When the team was established in 2009, it was uncertain how Texans would take to their presence, according to Community Impact. Now, however, the 6,800 seat H-E-B stadium routinely sells out. Peterson detailed the Stars' growing popularity and the steady rise in attendance over the years.

"Since the Stars arrived in Cedar Park in 2009-2010, the fan base has been consistently supportive and enthusiastic about the hockey, as well as the popular theme nights that are fun for all ages," Peterson said. "In each of the last two seasons, the Stars broke franchise records for average attendance and sellouts."

As an affiliate of the Dallas Stars of the NHL, the Texas Stars curate potential talent to be moved up to Dallas if management sees fit. Through this, younger players get time on the ice to practice and hone their skills.

"The Texas Stars serve as the primary development affiliate of the Dallas Stars," Peterson said. "Meaning most of Dallas' prospects get their start in Cedar Park, including current Dallas Stars players Jason Robertson, Roope Hintz, Jake Oettinger, Esa Lindell, Thomas Harley, and others."

Rosemary Arcuri is a resident of Vaughan, Ontario who became a first-hand witness to the process hockey players undertake to play professionally through raising her son, Texas Stars center Francesco Arcuri. Rosemary Arcuri noted that their family didn't play hockey at all, leading Francesco's immediate ability at the sport to surprise her.

"When Francesco was little, he took a liking to it right away, and we worked with

that," Arcuri said. "From a young age, he always played a year up. And he was always wanted by different teams. It wasn't like we had to ever try out for a team, they always wanted him. He was always a goal scorer. He had that touch."

A developmental league may seem destined to lose its best players by definition, but the Texas Stars avoid downgrading their team even as they move players up to the NHL. According to Texas Stars player Justin Hryckowian, this is because of the Stars' culture of mentorship: more seasoned players teaching and guiding newer ones.

"We have some great older guys here that you can watch every day and see how they act," Hryckowian said. "It's unreal to pick their brains and learn, hear stories from their experiences."

Hryckowian is from Toronto, Canada, but he isn't the only Texas Star far from home. Most players on the Stars grew up in countries like Canada, Finland, Norway, and Czechia. Tyler Ertel, founder of Holistic Hockey and

father of Stars forward Justin Ertel, believes this pattern of players coming from countries in the northern hemisphere and the U.S. is about more than just the cold weather.

"A lot of the players, on Texas and throughout both the NHL and AHL, come from small towns

where the rink is a hub of community where you get to come together," Ertel said. "You get to have your pride in your community, but also just have that time with family and friends outside of your home. It's a pretty neat thing that we have here in Canada."

Additionally, longtime Texas Stars fan Carl Jacobson explained that the games at the H-E-B stadium provide a fun and convenient way to support the team due to the distance from his home to the stadium. He added that the size of the stadium creates a feeling unique to the games.

"I already liked hockey," Jacobson said. "Since the Texas Stars play close to home, it was easy to go to games... I went to a bunch of games ever since I came to Austin and I really liked it. The games are really fun. The arena is not too big so you can see everything up close. The crowd gets loud and it just makes it exciting."



ON THE ICE Texas Stars center Justin Hryckowian prepares to pass the puck between his skates to his teammate, Antonio Stranges. The Stars were playing against the Rockford Icehogs in a game they went on to win 4 to 3. photo by Ellington Tough

Rowing to the Finish Line

ARIANA RODRIGUEZ | staff writer

"Row, row, row your boat gently down the stream" evokes memories of childhood's peaceful ease. However, many LASA rowers would say that rowing is much easier said than done. Unlike the serene and tranquil sound of the lullaby, the nature of rowing entails early mornings of hours in the draining and skin-scorching sun.

LASA sophomore and Varsity Girls rower Natasa Kinzy considers rowing, while a sport similar to the peaceful activities of paddleboarding, kayaking, or canoeing, far more grueling and intense on the whole body. She elaborated on the frustration she feels from the misconceptions that often arise surrounding this sport.

"A lot of people ask if rowing is canoeing or kayaking or paddle boarding which annoys me to no end," Kinzy said. "Whenever someone asks what it is, I say that it's a competitive sport that involves mostly your legs."

According to Cleveland Clinic, most of the power applied to the oar comes from one of the strongest parts of the body: the legs. When rowing a stroke, feet are strapped into the footplates in the boat, and the tension of the pushing motion on

the footplate is applied to the oar. LASA senior William Coury, a Varsity Boys rower, further explained the differences between rowing and other water sports. He noted some structural and physical aspects that set it apart from other water sports, such as paddleboarding and kayaking.

"The boats are easier to tip," Coury said. "The motions make no sense, but it's way more fun."

Shells, the kind of boats used for rowing, are very narrow to allow the boat to slice through the water. This makes them susceptible to capsizing, something Coury experienced at a race in Waco.

"It was me and Eric and another of our coaches," Coury said. "I just flipped off the dock in front of them. I was pretty embarrassed. Then I was like, 'wait a minute. That's the worst thing I could think of to happen in a race is you flip off the dock. No matter what happens, it's got to be better than this.' I went out and I had a great time."

Despite the high degree of competition in rowing, Kinzy highlighted how focusing on composure and camaraderie are key within any boat, allowing for the team's boat to go from winning to losing during a race. She explained rowers need to try to outdo rival

teams while remaining friendly with their own boat.

"During the race we started a little ahead, then fell a bit behind, and then for almost the rest of the 2K we were even with the other boats," Kinzy said. "But during the sprint in the last 300ish meters, we were going back and forth with other boats for the entirety of the sprint and pulled ahead for 3rd place."

Kinzy explained that having an uplifting community around her is an important part of her experience. She noted that having teammates who support and encourage one another to improve is what allows them to be successful.

"It's a really cool experience to be around such committed and athletic people every day and get better at rowing with them," Kinzy said. "Everyone there is super welcoming and friendly and they're wonderful people to be around. I have made some really amazing friends there and I feel like everyone is supportive of each other so it's a really positive experience all around."

Although rowing can be physically and mentally exhausting, Kinzy thinks that rowers who value passion and dedication within a team to help not only each rower but the team as a whole. Sophomore rower Molly Stromberger emphasizes the commitment and positive characteristics showcased in her team.

"I would describe [rowing] as a positive community and very open," Stromberger said. "Everyone's super disciplined and shows up for each other, and it's very great."

Coury emphasized how vital a boat's focus and commitment solely to rowing is. According to him, the boat is at its fastest when everyone is giving one hundred percent dedication.

"You need to be able to focus just on your boat," Coury said. "When you're rowing, you go faster if you focus on your boat rather than the rest of the group, how everybody else is doing, whether you're winning or you're losing."

Emphasizing focus, Kinzy explained the benefits that rowing has provided her. She highlighted her improvement in her mental state and social skills.

"Rowing has made it easier for me to overcome mental blocks in any field and also has increased my ability to work for long periods without slowing down or getting tired," Kinzy said. "My team has improved my social skills and openness and made me a better person simply personality-wise."



RUH ROW Senior William Coury (fifth seat) of Texas Rowing Center rows in a scrimmage against Austin Rowing Club. The Texas Rowing Center was established in 2002. photo by Ellington Tough

Tunes on Town Lake

graphics by Miller Williams

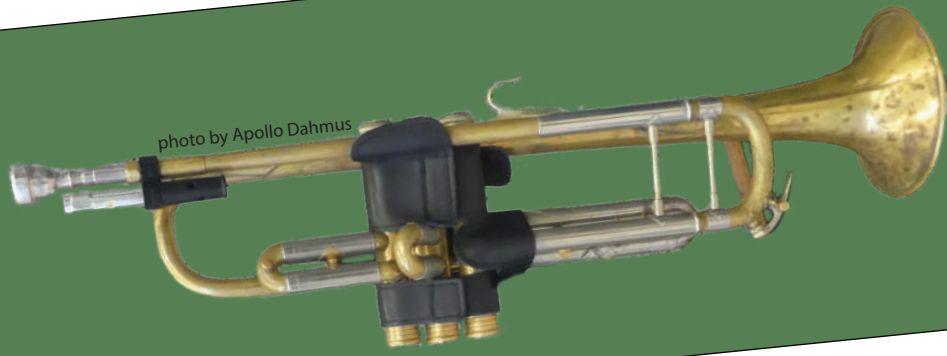


photo by Apollo Dahmus



BEAT OF THE DRUM Cash Kaven, a member of Riverside Jazz Collective, plays the drums. The band is made up of musicians who met primarily through the Raptor Band. photo by Apollo Dahmus

APOLLO DAHMUS
AVANNI GANNE photo editors
MILLER WILLIAMS

As the cool air above Town Lake flows across the pedestrian bridge in the form of a soft breeze, the smooth and deep notes of jazz are carried to the ears of the surrounding observers by the subtle wind. Passers-by walk along the pavement and stop for a moment to watch and listen, allowing the blend of music to wash over them for at least a moment in the music-loving culture of Austin, Texas according to the Austin City Council. First titled “the Live Music Capital of the World” by its City Council in the late 1900s, Austin is known for its live music performances nurtured by its music-loving culture such as those performed by the Riverside Jazz Collective.

Composed of young musicians from LASA playing at venues every weekend, the Riverside Jazz Collective started their band as a group of friends looking for a more professional experience in music. According to senior Ben Goodman, their alto saxophone player, this venture led them to new realizations they hadn’t expected before putting themselves out into the world of busking and playing at venues throughout the city.

“Near the beginning of the year, a few of my friends and I decided we wanted to get some experience playing in public, get our name out there,” Goodman said. “We started in Zilker Park, but we realized you’re not supposed to put out a tip jar there, so we decided to start busking on the pedestrian bridge over Town Lake. We started to get a regular group together and get in the habit of playing pretty much every weekend.”

As more of these performances occurred, the Collective’s members’ frequent practice sessions built trust between them that aided in their playing skills as described by their trumpet player, senior Kirby Barnhill. As they became used to playing together, their ability to work together was strengthened as band members and music lovers.

“We trust each other as musicians, [making] the music-making a lot easier,” Barnhill said. “We all are motivated to practice and prepare when we’re not together performing, so we all knew what we were doing despite having not played together very much. Over time, we’ve gotten more comfortable having fun in our playing, so it’s more relaxed and easy than it ever has been.”

While playing together resulted in many collective



photo courtesy of Parker Lasseigne



BRIDGEFRONT BLUES Riverside Jazz Collective plays a piece for pedestrians on the bridge over Town Lake. These performances are open to the public and provide entertainment for passersby. photo by Apollo Dahmus

breakthroughs for the group as a whole as described by Barnhill, this experience has affected the group members positively as individuals as well according to sophomore Brooks Bears. As a guitar and chordal instrument player of the Collective, he spoke about his perspective on playing intuitively, expressing who he is as a person through music even in a group environment.

“[My friend] was talking about how you can hear someone’s personality when they play, and I think that’s true,” Bears said. “You hear what they’ve been practicing, and how they shape or phrase their notes is unique only to them. I love improvising with the rhythm section. When I’m comping, it forces me to find my space between the pulse of the bass and the drums, while also being creative harmonically. When I’m soloing, I have to try and create a conversation between my phrasing, rhythms, and whatever else everyone is playing.”

Similarly to Bears’ perspective on how his playing is distinct to him even when creating a rich blend of music with other musicians, Barnhill delved into his take on preparing for performances. As performances take both physical and mental energy to pull off well, Barnhill focuses on both physical and cognitive preparation he takes to perform well in front of a crowd.

“Practice-wise, I start with listening to the song, then learn the chords and try to either play them on piano or improvise over a backing track so I can hear them in my head,” Barnhill said. “I’ll then try to play both the melody and improvisation from memory while listening to a backing track to kind of simulate how I play in the band. I prepare mentally by playing casually [when] I go to the Monday Jam session at the Elephant Room and busk with the band every few weeks. Playing in front of people helps me to be sure of myself and not worry about the eyes on me, so I can focus on my playing.”

According to Goodman, this comfortable feeling of playing even while in front of a large crowd grows from the confidence that comes with performing with friends and taking the risk of exposing

his music to others in a public way.

While playing privately feels safe, playing in front of crowds along with his friends led him to memories filled with this joy due to him taking a chance on a new experience.

“My main takeaway, I would say, is to always put yourself out there,” Goodman said. “You never know what will happen. If you never try anything new, go out of your comfort zone, you might not get the opportunities you want. That’s especially evident to me cause of my experiences with the band. It truly does just feel like we’re just hanging out every time we perform, and that’s something very special to me - getting to play great music with great people.”



photo courtesy of Parker Lasseigne



JAZZ JUBILEE Riverside Jazz Collective members play various instruments during a weekend performance. The band perform regularly on the pedestrian bridge above Town Lake. photo courtesy of Parker Lasseigne