

SPACE AGE STUDIES

A group of 25 LBJ students from the Project Lead the Way class were invited to celebrate the Apollo 8 mission anniversary at the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum. The group toured the museum and spoke with astronauts via live-stream. "I think the biggest thing was exposure to something that they haven't been exposed to before," Project Lead the Way teacher Randy Bryant said. photo courtesy of Randy Bryant

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LEARNING ON THE GO

Former University of Texas genetics professor turned Austin ISD bus driver Dr. Burton Pierson spends his daily bus routes giving lectures. Topics discussed include religion and science, Appalachian 'hollerin' and the dangers of vigilantism. "Whenever I talk about something, I encourage the kids to go ahead, look it up online and form your own opinions," Pierson said. "What I'm trying to do is stimulate them to think about these topics and do some of their own research."

see page 12

SPANISH SUPERSTARS

Members of the LASA Spanish 6 class hosted the recent Noche de las Estrellas performance after choreographing dances to and practicing the lyrics of 21 different Spanish songs throughout the semester. "I want to thank Senora Browne for making this possible," LASA senior and Spanish 6 student Pablo Villafuerte said. "She is the best." photo by Clara Gibbs.

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the liberator

Liberal Arts and Science Academy and Lyndon Baines Johnson High Schools

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AISD Board of Trustees updates transfer policies for 2016-17 school year

SAM ZERN
Editor-in-Chief

As part of an ongoing effort to relieve overcrowding in the Austin Independent School District (AISD), the AISD Board of Trustees recently decided to adjust the in-district transfer policy. In previous years, transfers such as majority to minority, sibling and tracking have all been priority transfers, meaning they are automatically granted. However, according to Associate Superintendent of High Schools Kathy Ryan, that is about to change.

"What has changed is that for next school year majority to minority transfers will not be priority," Ryan said. "If it is a frozen school and you request a majority to minority transfer it is the same process on any other transfer. So first come first serve, then you're on our waiting list for the available room."

The first transfer category to be removed from the priority list is the majority to minority transfer, which will no longer be automatic beginning in the 2016-17 school year. Majority to minority transfers allow students who are in the racial/ethnic majority at their home school to transfer to another school in the district in which their particular race or ethnicity is a minority. District 5 Trustee and Vice President of the board Amber Elenz said that, while the program might have started as a means of increasing diversity, at this point the overcrowding facing the district is a more pressing issue.

"I do believe that this practice is designed at least in part to increase diversity on campuses, so this change in policy could have a negative effect on that intended goal," Elenz said. "We will be watching that issue closely to get a better understanding of its specific impact. However, we need to balance the negative effects that overcrowding has on a school's ability to educate all students against the positive aspects of increased diversity. At this point in time, overcrowding has tipped the scales in its favor at too many of our campuses."

The 2017-18 school year will see the removal of the sibling and tracking transfer programs from the priority list. A sibling transfer lets a younger sibling go to school where their older sibling did, and a tracking transfer allows a student to follow the majority of their elementary or middle school classmates to middle or high school if they were not originally zoned to that school. The sheer number of automatic transfers, Elenz said, largely contributed to the overcrowding in many of the schools throughout AISD.

"The problem that we saw is that some overcrowded schools would not be overcrowded if the district had not automatically accepted all priority transfers," Elenz said. "In Bowie's case, for instance, there are about 400 transfers into the school and it is overcrowded by about 400 students. So, we are hoping that these changes in policy will be beneficial to schools like that. Not all overcrowding across the district is caused by transfers however, so we know that this policy change is not going to solve all of the overcrowding problems. However, it was a first step in the process."

Still, not all schools in the district are equally affected by overcrowding. According to LBJ registrar Debbie Elder, LBJ is not facing the same issues as many other schools in the district and will likely not be nearly as affected by the changed transfer policy as other schools.

"We have some kids that are transfers, but the majority of our students are neighborhood kids or kids that live two miles or more," Elder said. "We do have some [transfers], maybe less than 50."

Despite the overpopulation in some schools, the district on the whole is losing students. So while the in-district transfer policies are changing to address overcrowding, according to Ryan, the out-of-district transfer policies are changing to address district-wide underenrollment.

"We are opening up transfers to out-of-district employees so that families outside our district boundaries who have shown an interest in the past to attend our great schools are able to do so," Ryan said. "We have moved the dates of those transfers up much earlier in the process so families will know much sooner if they will be able to attend an AISD school."

Elder said the out of district transfer policies will affect LBJ more than the in district changes will. As for the changes overall, Elenz said the new policies will have positive effects and that, no matter where a student is in the district, they will have other good options to choose from.

"There has been both positive and negative feedback regarding the policy changes," Elenz said. "Parents at overcrowded schools are rejoicing, while families who had hoped to get directly into those overcrowded schools are disappointed. There is some 'grandfathering' written into the policy, which might delay some of the positive effects of the changes. However, the board thought it was important to give families more time to adjust to the changes so that they could make new plans. The district is working hard to ensure that all schools across the district are offering exceptional programs and opportunities, so that if a transfer is denied for any reason, that student will have many other great options to consider."

HOOPING FOR CHARITY

LBJ teachers take on Austin firefighters in basketball game



LBJ counselor Ms. Tiffany tries to block an Austin Fire Department firefighter at the Dec. 14 charity game. "We barely won at the end," LBJ teacher and SLIME club sponsor Rhyman Barnes said. The game, hosted by SLIME, benefited the Capital Area Food Bank. photo by Isabel Saralegui.

SAM ZERN
Editor-in-Chief

Bleachers fill with students while cardboard boxes fill with canned goods. A whistle blows and the ball is tipped, signaling the start of the first annual LBJ faculty versus Austin Fire Department charity basketball game.

"We're very excited to be playing; we're very happy to be helping out with the food drive and to work with the staff here at LBJ, and you know seeing all the students," firefighter Darren Hyson said. "We're really

excited and happy to be here."

The game, which is a part of a weeklong canned food drive, was facilitated by the LBJ Significant Leaders in Male Education (SLIME) club. SLIME president and LBJ junior Robby Joseph said that the idea came about while the club was discussing how best to help out the Austin community through charity.

"We were in a meeting and we were trying to figure out how should we feed the homeless, how should we donate, and then we thought about a fire fighters versus faculty basketball

game, so we set it up to raise food for the homeless," Joseph said.

SLIME already hosted an LBJ student versus faculty basketball game in May, but decided to make the first semester's event different by playing the Austin Fire Department. Joseph, a student in the LBJ Fire Academy program, said that his involvement with Fire Academy indirectly helped SLIME decide to invite firefighters to play against the LBJ teachers.

see Charity page 14

Debate senior leads team on national circuit

SARAH LUCAS
Staff Writer

It's a Friday night, and instead of spending the evening with friends to celebrate the long-anticipated arrival of the weekend, members of the LASA debate team are hunched over their laptops. Among them is LASA senior Isaac Cui. As he blankly stares at the bright screen in a dimly lit hotel room, he contemplates why he subjects himself to the stress debate induces. Part of the answer is presented to him in the form of posing for a team photo at the tournament's conclusion the following day, with all beaming while clutching trophies triumphantly in their hands.

"Because it's not just winning, but being on the team and learning all of these new things, getting all this experience in thinking critically, it's really worth it — although part of it might sound crazy," LASA sophomore Cameron Murdock said.

This year marks one of the most successful seasons for the LASA debate team. LASA Debate has had strong showings at several invitationals throughout the fall semester, allowing all varsity teams to qualify for the state tournament next March. More notably, their strong performance at national circuit tournaments has also permitted two individual teams to secure sufficient bids and qualify for the Tournament of Champions (TOC). The prodigious TOC serves as the championship of tournaments part of the national circuit, and is a forum

for the country's best high school debaters to compete in various types of debate. As this is the first time in school history LASA has qualified for this tournament, acquiring multiple bids to the tournament marks yet another unprecedented accomplishment of this season for both LASA Debate as a whole and Cui, a member of one of the two qualifying teams.

see Debate page 12



LASA senior Isaac Cui and LASA sophomore Cameron Murdock prepare at the 2015 St. Mark's School of Texas Tournament. There, they qualified for the Tournament of Champions. photo courtesy of LASA Debate

Saving the date: AISD proposes new calendar options, debates length of holidays, breaks

GRANT MCCASLAND
Staff Writer

The Austin Independent School District (AISD) Calendar Task Force is working with AISD administration to create the 2016-17 school calendar. According to Dr. Gloria Williams, the director of the task force, students come first during the calendar's creation. The task force has proposed two different calendars for the upcoming school year; one calendar, 'Draft A,' is similar to this year's calendar, whereas 'Draft B' has many changes. According to Williams, even though many things changed with Draft B, there were still certain things that had to stay the same due to state law.

"There were parameters that had to be met," Williams said. "[The] first class day could not be scheduled before the fourth Monday in August, [and] 177 instructional

days for students [were required]."

Both drafts have school beginning and ending on the same dates, but Draft A has a three day long Thanksgiving break whereas Draft B's break is five days long. According to Williams, this difference is due to the fact that one of the five groups within the task force thought an extended Thanksgiving break could be beneficial.

"[That group] felt it would be a good idea to extend the Thanksgiving holiday from three to five days," Williams said. "[This would mean] trading off two current holidays: one winter break day and Good Friday."

Because of that change, Draft B only has nine weekdays off for winter break, which means there would be a two day school week before starting break. Draft A has eleven weekdays off during winter break, like the current calendar.

see Calendar page 7

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Responsibilities of a Free Student Press: Serving the primary communication link within the Liberal Arts and Science Academy and Lyndon Baines Johnson High Schools and between the school and the local community, this newspaper accepts the responsibilities inherent in being a free press. *The Liberators* staff strives 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 way with the utmost regard for integrity.

Editorial Content:

1. The students on *The Liberators* staff will print articles which have been researched to the best of their ability to obtain most complete information.
2. The information will be presented in an objective, 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, and then presented with the best ability of the writer. In addition, all opinion or commentary will be clearly labeled as so.
4. 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 Liberators staff will be governed by an editorial board comprised of the following individuals: editors-in-chief, section editors and the business manager.

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 disciplinary or other inappropriate behavior of staff.
5. Vote on removal of staff members.
6. Change or add policy as necessary with three of four board members voting favorably.

Viewpoints:

Printed material which is a view 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 and Lyndon Baines Johnson High Schools 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 viewpoint of the publication.

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 goes 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.

Non-Staff Contributors: Bylined contributions are welcome.

Correction of Errors: The staff makes every effort to print accurate information. In the case of 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 Liberators* is an open forum.

The staff thanks: Ann Phipps, Kathy Cox, Parul Desai

STAFF STANCE

Politicians need to get on board to stop carbon dioxide emissions and burning of fossil fuels

In 1965, Lyndon B. Johnson became the first U.S. president to speak about the existence of global warming. In his message to Congress, LBJ said "this generation has altered the composition of the atmosphere on a global scale through radioactive materials and a steady increase in carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels." Though this year marks the 50th anniversary of his warning, it seems that even in 2015 not all Americans have taken LBJ's wise words to heart.

Based on recent political debates, it is evident that Republican politicians overwhelmingly deny that anything should be done to limit greenhouse gases, and some still argue that climate change is not even occurring. Despite the fact that 54 percent of Republicans in the general public believe that climate change is a threat, there are still prominent politicians who claim differently, including GOP presidential candidate Ted Cruz who says "climate change is not science, it's religion." In the aftermath of the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris, where world leaders drafted a plan to combat global warming, it is alarming that high-profile Americans choose to ignore this issue. And even closer to home, certain politicians in Texas who deny climate change exists are interfering with climate research by intimidating scientists. We, the *Liberator*, believe that while our representatives are certainly entitled to their own opinions, a politician's personal biases should not hinder their ability to make objective decisions regarding environmental policies. As we move forward into the 21st century, the United States needs to unite against global warming in order to cut back on emissions.

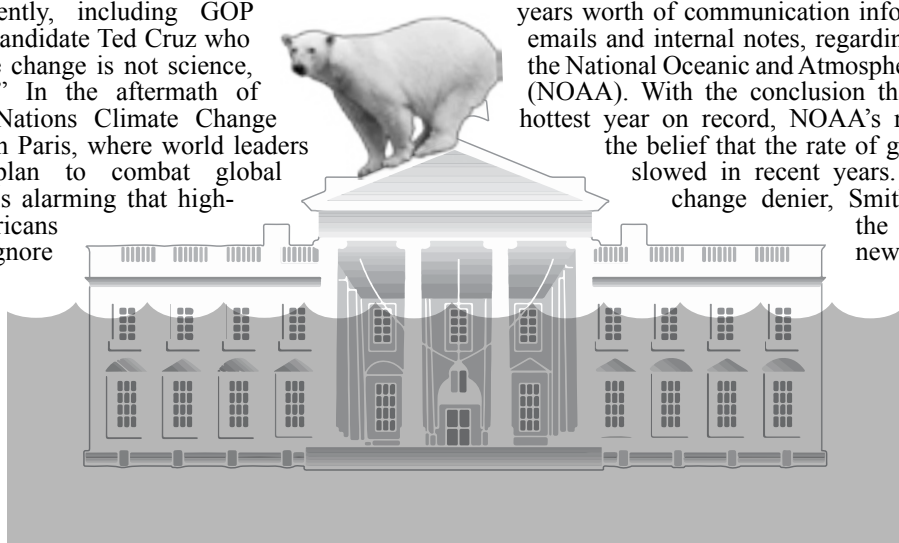
Regardless of what Cruz may argue, there is plenty of evidence to prove that the earth is getting warmer. According to Live Science, the temperature of Earth has increased 0.4 to 0.8 degrees Celsius over the past 100 years and is expected to spike between 1.4 and 5.8 degrees Celsius by 2100. While this is a distressing thought, even more distressing is the fact, says a Pew Research Center report, that only 45 percent of Americans believe that climate change is very serious. Pew's studies indicate that the publics in countries with very high carbon emissions per capita--including the United States, Australia, Canada and Russia--are not as concerned about the adverse effects of global warming as compared to nations with lower emission levels. The worst thing

the United States can do now is to call climate change is a hoax and continue to do nothing about the situation.

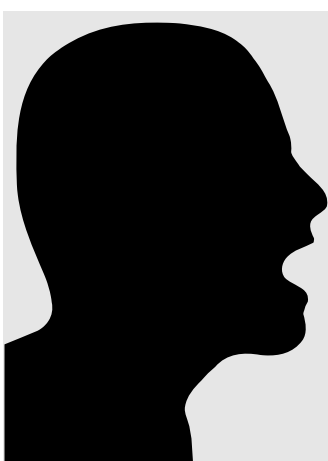
But since many Republican politicians persist in denying the existence of climate change--and some are actively trying to discourage climate scientists from conducting research--the only thing that can be done is remove them from positions that give them power over environmental committees. Lamar Smith (R), for example, the representative for Texas's 21st congressional district, has repeatedly rejected the scientific evidence that carbon dioxide emissions and burning fossil fuels are negatively affecting the environment, yet he is chairman of the House Committee on Science, Space and Technology. Time and again, Smith has attempted to intimidate researchers because their studies have revealed data he does not agree with. In October, Smith subpoenaed almost seven years worth of communication information, including emails and internal notes, regarding a study done by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). With the conclusion that 2014 is Earth's hottest year on record, NOAA's research disproved the belief that the rate of global warming has slowed in recent years. But as a climate change denier, Smith hoped to block the spread of this new scientific data that conflicted with his own ideology, an action he was able to do as committee chairman.

It is unacceptable to put someone in charge of a committee that reviews scientific studies if they do not agree to analyze the evidence objectively. In this vein, politics have no business interfering with science. Climate researchers should not have to worry about blowback from ignorant politicians--they are simply conducting nonpartisan work that contributes to the betterment of our world. Smith and others like him are being given ridiculous opportunities to run thorough investigations on climate change studies in order to find out-of-context bits to leak to the media; these scientists they're attacking often don't have the resources to defend themselves or their work. Eventually, researchers may decide the price of political objection is not worth the time they spend looking for answers to solve our climate change disaster.

It is time to face reality. Climate change is real, and anyone who says otherwise is ignoring the evidence supported by the world's leading scientists. At Paris, a consensus was reached to limit average global warming to 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial temperatures. As the second highest carbon emitting nation in the world, it is the responsibility of the United States to get on board and fight climate change together.



graphic by Claire Cannatti



liberated minds

Should political views play a role in governmental policies regarding climate change?



Jacelyn Calderon

LBJ senior

I don't think that politics should be involved because that causes a lot of tension. I think somebody should deal with that in one area and not have people argue back and forth.



Elizabeth Frey

LASA senior

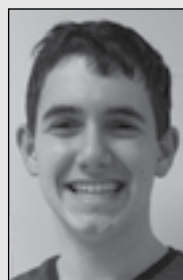
I think it is inevitable that they do, but ultimately we have to recognize that climate change isn't just an opinion, it's a fact, and something has to be done about it in the interest of the future of our planet.



Audrey Davis

LASA sophomore

No, I don't think climate change should be something that becomes either Democratic or Republican, but something that we should all see as a problem and try to fix.



Ethan Schaffer

LASA sophomore

Every politician that exists gets their say, that's the idea of being a democracy. And they can portray their views...whether or not they're correct is up to the general population body to vote a good president into office.



Have an opinion about a new school policy? Have a bone to pick with something the *Liberator* has published? Anything else on your mind? Write us a letter and drop it off in room 265 or in the boxes in the school offices.

Call for longer lunch period

Dear Editor,

One thing I would change is the lunch. I would make it an hour lunch.

— LBJ junior
Quanta Waker

More time for LASA elective

Dear Editor,

I think SciTech should be longer. I think we should have more time to work on the devices and maybe have a longer semester.

— LASA freshman
Arnov Mohan

Poor start time

Dear Editor,

I want LASA to start at a normal time. Every other school in the district starts at 9:15.

— LASA senior
Kathryn Christian

A more inclusive campus

Dear Editor,

I think we should be one school instead of two and less divided.

— LBJ sophomore
Aron Calloway

No president without precedent

Candidates need political experience before running for elected office



CHLOE EDMISTON
Sports Editor

Three Republican presidential hopefuls are polling at a combined 43 percent. They have absolutely no political experience. Donald Trump, CEO of Trump Organization, has never held elected office. Dr. Ben Carson, former head of pediatric neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins, has never held elected office. Carly Fiorina, the former CEO of HP and current president of Lucent, ran an unsuccessful Senate campaign in 2008 and has never held elected office.

This abundance of political outsiders in the GOP race may seem like an anomaly, but it represents a trend in the Republican party since 1980. According to an article in The Atlantic, Republican candidates have regularly had three to four years less political experience than their Democrat counterparts. This largely represents the polarization of the Republican party; 60 percent of Republicans polled say that they feel betrayed by their party politicians in their inability to keep campaign promises. Most recently, anger has been focused on Senate and House Republicans who, after gaining majorities in 2012 and 2014, have been unable to follow up on campaign promises, failing to pass appropriations bills and focus on the middle class voter. However, the political history of the US will ultimately realign this presidential race in favor of the moderates; Trump, and Fiorina will fade out in favor of candidates like Marco Rubio who resonate with more people than just radical Republicans.



The polling data may be affected by this appeal—until the November elections, it is the most polarized of voters that voice their opinions, and it is these voters that loud-mouthed, radical presidential hopefuls draw in.

As for Fiorina, her appeal is that of being a woman in a Republican party characterized by liberals as hating women which gives her exposure in the media. Her business history is largely unsuccessful, with HP losing half its profits during her tenure as CEO. It is likely, with her currently polling at 5 percent, that she will fade out before the election season.

The possibility of having Trump or Carson as president is both a terrifying and ultimately unlikely prospect. While polling data may have the both of them in the number one and four positions, their political inexperience will ultimately be their downfall, and they'll go the way of Herman Cain, who ran failed Republican senatorial and presidential campaigns in 2000 and 2004 and 2012 respectively. The American people have only ever elected three presidents who had no prior political experience.

However, Ulysses S. Grant, Dwight Eisenhower and Zachary Taylor all had significant and well-known careers in the armed services before becoming president, and both Taylor and Grant had largely

unpopular and unsuccessful presidencies.

This trend towards candidates with less political experience has created what political analysts know as the "14 year rule." This rule, where candidates with more than 14 years from their initial senatorial or gubernatorial election to their campaign for president are more likely to lose the election or not even gain the nomination, is largely the reason that candidates with less experience feel they may be able to run a successful campaign. In having less or no political experience, presidential hopefuls have few connections to disappointing party politicians and are able to distance themselves from unpopular party decisions. Additionally, the popularity of these candidates comes from their ability to connect with voters through social media. As "outsiders," presidential hopefuls with no political experience can act as one of the people, connecting with voters who would feel alienated by a Washington politician.

Thankfully, history tells us that it's almost completely improbable that Trump, Carson or Fiorina will receive the Republican nomination. The only candidate without political or military experience to receive a party nomination for president was Wendell Wilkie, and he lost the 1940 election to FDR in a landslide. Right now, Trump and Carson appeal to the most radical members of the GOP, yet when choosing a nominee the party will be heavily influenced by moderate Republican voters. Political experience cannot be made up for by promises to fix the nation, as it will take more centrist candidates willing to work with Democrats and independents alike to combat the stalemate in Congress and the Senate. As voters realize that a president with no political experience will encounter great difficulty compromising with legislators across the aisle, they will begin to seek out a more realistic and functional candidate.

As the general surge towards younger presidents with less political experience continues, it represents the changing political climate in the US.

Increasingly angered with legislative stalemate, voters are attracted to more and more radical and polarized candidates, thus increasing the ineffectual nature of government. Trump, Carson and Fiorina are capitalizing on this trend, though in doing so, it will ultimately spell doom for their campaigns. In appealing to such polarized voters, Trump, Carson and Fiorina will ultimately alienate the undecided American voting population who actually choose the president.



graphic by Claire Cannatti

Gentrification effect

Student dislikes monotony of Thanksgiving, hopes for change



EMMA MORAN
Staff Writer

Gentrification has become a large and highly debated subject in Austin, which, according to Forbes, is the fastest-growing city in the country. Forty people move to Austin every single day. I live right in South-central Austin in one of the areas most affected by gentrification, the Bouldin Creek neighborhood. When my parents moved here in May 1986, it was a lower-middle class neighborhood with mixed ethnicity, some old folks, drugs, gangs and prostitution. Back then, it was actually controversial for my parents, a young "professional" white couple who both had college degrees and worked in restaurants, to move into the neighborhood.

But that was before downtown moved. Over the last 30 years, downtown Austin has shifted southward so that it is just north of the Colorado River, making my neighborhood the optimal place for new Austinites who want to be close to the heart of the city.

Today, Bouldin Creek neighborhood is unrecognizable from its former self. Although all of the drugs, gangs and violence have been pushed out by the higher property values in the area, the negative effects far outweigh the positive. Most of the people who want to live here are young, wealthy, white people, who want to be close to downtown. Because of the increased popularity of the neighborhood, the prices are going up and many of the people who have lived here forever are being driven out because they can't pay their taxes. They consequently have to move to the suburbs where housing is cheaper and where they have a long commute to work which they can't afford. The small, old houses are being demolished to make way for the

modern monstrosities that loom over and invade the privacy of their quaint neighboring houses. Many houses are also being turned into short-term rentals, and the people who stay in the rental homes don't have any investment in the neighborhood. Gentrification has destroyed Bouldin Creek.

A similar transformation has just come to light in East Austin. According to a Martin Prosperity Institute report, Austin/Round Rock is the most segregated large urban area in the country. This is because of the Koch Proposal that the City of Austin passed in 1928 which forced minorities to live east of I-35 by making it the only area where they could access schools and other public facilities. Now, low-income, predominantly black and Latino East Austin is being overrun by new, wealthy, white Austinites who are attracted to the low housing prices and closeness to downtown. Now blacks and Latinos are the ones being forced out of their homes due to the rising cost of housing, and they are losing the identity of their neighborhood and its historical culture.

However, because of the past discrimination that minorities have suffered, they have learned to band together more effectively than residents in white or mixed neighborhoods, and we are hearing an outcry from the East Austin community. Central East Austin issues have been getting far more press than my Bouldin Creek neighborhood because of this community activism. In fact, Jordan French, the CEO of F&F Real Estate Ventures, was forced to resign this year due to public pressure after his company demolished a pinata shop located in a building in East Austin that F&F had purchased even though the store owners still had two years left on their lease. This issue has helped bring to light the degradation that gentrification is causing in East Austin and has given the topic much more media coverage. Perhaps there is hope after all that the East Austin community won't be ripped apart.



ALIA SHAUKAT
Staff Writer

The air is filled with a lingering scent of cooking turkeys, and as I look down to the streets, I can see crowds of hurried shoppers moving along the sidewalks, carrying their belated purchases of apple pies and sweet potatoes. Though it seems as though everyone else is excited about Thanksgiving, in my opinion, it's an overrated holiday, unnecessarily hyped up to the skies.

Once the end of October passes, most Americans are sorted into three different groups. First, there are the romantics who immediately start preparing for the winter holidays, bundling up their houses in twinkling lights and littering their shelves with reindeer or dreidels. Second, there are those who make it their life's duty to remind every single person in that first category that "you are not allowed to get ready for December since Thanksgiving hasn't even happened yet." They decorate their homes with cartoon turkeys and fall colored fake leaves. And of course, there are those without a single spark of spirit. They are the ones who are bent on realism, barely surviving on their minimalistic lifestyle. I fall into the third category; my experience with Thanksgiving has never been exactly pleasant.

The madness starts early at my house. The few days before Thanksgiving are a cleaning frenzy in anticipation of my relatives. While I'm put to work cleaning out years worth of dust, my parents create

intricate napkin foldings which will be used maybe one time at the most.

Once Thanksgiving starts, the routine is unalterable. Most of the men in my family grab their beers before the sun has completely risen, and they settle down onto couches to watch the game and pretend to be busy. After all, when there's so much to be done in the kitchen, the obvious thing is to kick your feet onto the recently polished coffee table and watch men tackle other men on the television.

When we've managed to usher everyone into the dining room and get them to sit in their assigned seats, the true fun begins. Water is spilled, wine is drunk and complaints are given to the chef. As always, the children whine about being seated at the kids' table, and one uncle drinks away his sorrows on this family holiday.

Soon the meal is over, and the tension between one sobbing aunt and one burping uncle is close to unbearable. The entire family spreads out, each person's palms coated in a slimy film of turkey grease. Stomachs are sickeningly full from the binge of food, each participant violently suppressing their urge to send all the food they just ate back where it came from.

After the meal, the day is useless. No one wants to participate in the awkward conversations with people they see once a year. "No, I don't have a boyfriend. No, I'm not sure what I want to major in; I'm a freshmen. Yes, I have gotten taller this year." Once everyone's stash of unpleasantly repetitive questions has run out, we are left in silence besides the few shouts at the television by one all too enthusiastic person.

At the end of the night, when everyone returns home alone, it's as if the world was paused all throughout Thanksgiving afternoon, and now we're all just trying desperately to catch up. I guess that's the "magic" of family holidays; your life seems to slow down just the littlest bit until you realize every year is the exact same, and this unoriginality is close to suffocating. Despite this, the sameness of the holiday is close to suffocating. Every year, I wish for it to get better. I'm aware that it most likely never will, but one can only hope.



graphic by Claire Cannatti

Thumbs Up

- Candygrams
- Hello
- Winter break
- Carrot cake
- Kittens



LASA senior Bailey McDonald

- Malaria
- Finals
- Trans fats
- College apps
- Broken glass



Thumbs Down

Above are the opinions of The Liberator staff and not the individual featured.

Weighing religious freedom



EVA STRELITZ-BLOCK
Staff Writer

The McIntyres are eagerly awaiting the Rapture. For Michael and Laura McIntyre, who have been homeschooling their nine children for over ten years, educating their kids in reading, writing, arithmetic and good citizenship is not one of their priorities. Today, the McIntyres, an Evangelical Christian family from El Paso, Texas, are knee-deep in a legal battle with the Supreme Court of Texas about whether or not the state can compel them to provide the school district access to their homeschooling curriculum. This would ensure the district can assess the quality of their curriculum and therefore uphold the interests of the state in the McIntyre children's education.

The big question at hand is this: what should the state do when its support of religious freedom conflicts with its obligation to ensure that students are learning? Currently, the Texas Supreme Court is hearing arguments that will decide if homeschooling curriculums have to be approved by school districts in Texas. If the Court decides that religious freedom trumps learning accountability, then I am concerned that this will promote the misuse of the religious freedom argument and undermine, rather than ensure, freedom for all - and not just in education.

The McIntyres originally got in trouble with the law when the school district received an anonymous complaint about the quality of the schooling the McIntyre children were receiving. The children's grandparents and uncle both told the district attendance officer that they never saw the children learning or doing schoolwork because they were waiting to be "raptured." In fact, the McIntyre's 17-year-old daughter, Tori, ran away from home in order to get access to an education. After the district received the complaint, district representatives asked the McIntyres for documentation outlining the children's homeschool curriculum, but the McIntyres refused to provide them with any information.

Unlike the McIntyres, most homeschoolers are not motivated by the prospect of the Rapture. Homeschooling is a necessary alternative to traditional school settings for some families. Students who may benefit from homeschooling include children with learning differences that make the structure of school challenging, as well as children who have encountered social difficulties in schools that undermine their learning. Supporters of homeschooling suggest that homeschooling offers families the opportunity to create their own schedule, pursue non-traditional subjects and give their children more time to play.

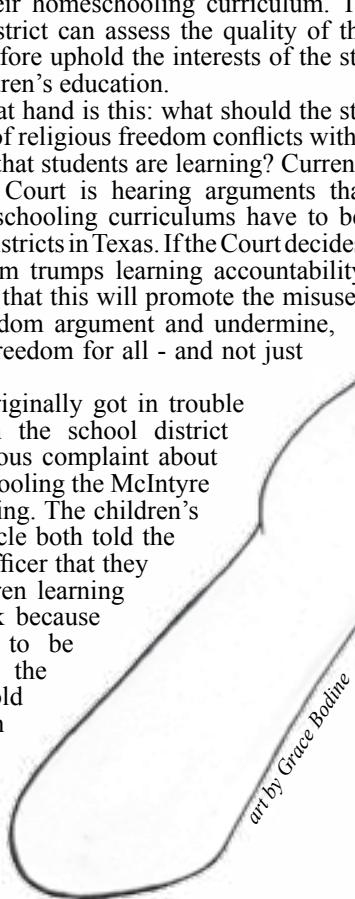
On the other hand, critics of homeschooling like Dr.

Brian Ray, author of "The Harms of Homeschooling," say that children who are homeschooled may lack socialization skills because they do not interact or form relationships with other students every day, and may feel entitled to a kind of ongoing customization of their experience which does not always translate into real life. Moreover, critics are concerned that some homeschooled students will not learn the fundamental basics of reading, writing, math and citizenship as well as children who participate in traditional schooling do. Hanging in the balance is the question of the interest of the state in ensuring that all students receive an education that prepares them to potentially enroll in higher education, and readies students for life outside of their home. These arguments make sense to me; without learning to read, write and do basic math, how is anyone prepared to navigate the real world, even if a student's goal is not to attend college?

The McIntyres, like many other families who opt for homeschooling instead of traditional education, are claiming a "religious exemption" to the requirement that they enroll their children in an accredited school. Texas is one of eleven states in the country that do not require parents to notify school officials that their children are being homeschooled, according to the Home School Legal Defense Association. In addition, in Texas, home schooled students do not have to take any standardized tests to demonstrate learning proficiency.

This case raises a critical concern with broad social implications. When is it legitimate to claim a religious exemption and when is it not? Related questions have come up several times recently: should parents be allowed to not vaccinate their kids if they indicate it is against their religion? Can pharmacists decline to provide customers with birth control or the morning after pill because interfering with pregnancy is against their religious beliefs? Can public employees opt out of certain job responsibilities like signing a marriage license for a gay couple if it conflicts with their religious views? These examples indicate that religious exemptions are being misused with increasing regularity to paradoxically justify discrimination.

Certainly, religious freedom is a necessary aspect of a functioning society and a core American value. Support for religious diversity is enshrined in our Constitution; the first amendment states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion." Appreciation for religious freedom ensures that all peoples' religious practices are respected. However, when religious freedom is used as a rationale for denying others basic rights, like the McIntyre children's right to basic educational fundamentals, there is a problem. If the Supreme Court of Texas validates the misuse of religious freedom in homeschooling, it validates the misuse of the religious freedom argument in other instances.



art by Grace Bohlme



Attack of the pumpkin spice: trend takes over in December



LENI MILLIKEN
Staff Writer

We're all familiar with the pumpkin spice mania that hits at the start of the fall season. From a classic latte to a new bronze hair color trend, everything is pumpkin spice head-to-toe. This craze began in 2003 with the introduction of Starbucks' first pumpkin spice latte. Pumpkin Spice--a traditional spice mix containing cinnamon, nutmeg and ginger can now be found in orange Oreos, M&M's and cookies and cakes. I have to admit, that's insane! How does one country love a single flavor so much and why only during one time of the year? However, this love of the spice mix doesn't seem to spill over to the actual fruit (who knew that a pumpkin is a fruit?). CNBC reports that retail pumpkin sales have dropped since 2011.

To me, this fall obsession is crazy. Sure, I can enjoy a slice of pumpkin bread or muffin once in awhile, but pumpkin spice coffee creamer, lasagna, potato chips and air freshener? No thanks. Pumpkin spice seems to take over American lives each holiday season, but not all Americans are fans. According to CNBC, about 37 percent of the U.S. population spent their money on these popularized pumpkin-flavored items last year leaving another 63 percent who chose to opt out.

Pumpkin has always been a fall item in our country because of its bright orange tint that mirrors the hue of fall leaves and the popular appeal of the Thanksgiving pumpkin pie. Since I'm not the biggest fan of this flavor, I'm glad it tends to stay during a limited time period. The fact that pumpkin spice products are only sold during part of the year may contribute to why they are so trendy. People anticipate the flavor's return and then go mad because they only could get the chance to eat or drink these items during this specific sliver of time. So maybe it makes sense that people would go insane over a flavor, but the pumpkin spice-scented body lotion still seems a little overboard in my opinion.

The pumpkin spice craze becomes even more polarizing when you consider the potentially harmful stereotypes associated with it. Many people tend to accuse pumpkin spice fans of being "basic," the stereotype of someone wealthy and ignorant with no defining or interesting personality traits. But can you really understand a person solely from their drink order at Starbucks? It's troublesome to think that someone would assume they know everything about you just because you prefer a particular flavor of coffee. Perhaps pumpkin spice--whether you embrace the flavor or not--offers us an unsuspecting yet welcomed point of debate, both on the usefulness and potential danger of stereotyping as well as on the deliciousness of a certain winter squash.

Need for more education to stop U.S. heroin epidemic



EMMA JANE HOPPER
Staff Writer

Heroin is not just a lifestyle choice. I thought it was, initially, but I've realized that the heroin epidemic in the United States is not just something to be brushed away with a quick blaming of the victim and a disappointed shake of the head. Addiction to heroin is dangerous--both physically and emotionally--to the user as well as those around them.

I decided, when I first began to research the epidemic, that people who choose to shoot up are fully aware of the consequences. I thought, "how could they not know the complications of heroin?" We live in the age of the internet, where terrifying portrayals of addicts are a click of a button away. It seems impossible to not know each and every drug horror story available to the public if one is interested enough to look. But what I didn't understand is that sometimes addicts don't start with heroin-- instead, it begins with gateway drugs like post-surgery painkillers or abused antidepressants. From there it's just drug to drug, and heroin is just another step on that ladder. People may know the results of heroin, a household name drug mentioned on every other crime show on prime time, but they don't know about every dangerous drug.

The heroin epidemic is not getting better--only deadlier. According to the Drug Enforcement Agency, approximately 120 people living in the U.S. die every single day from an overdose of heroin. However, this epidemic affects more than just the users. Property crimes, burglaries, larcenies and shoplifting are often driven by drug addiction. These are not victimless crimes. Heroin promotes crime and takes advantage of the unsuspecting. Further, infants can be born addicted to opiates. When the first thing a child experiences in this world is the craving of his mother's vices, it is the truest of crimes, and the heroin epidemic promotes this misdeed.

Here's the part where I'm supposed to offer a solution. I guess I should advocate for better education, but I sat through the "Just Say No" campaigns just like everyone else and I goofed off as much as anyone through all of those assemblies. It's not as though those assemblies could cover everything, though. There are too many drugs available for education to be a plausible way to prevent our kids from using any of them. And this is only considering how to educate children; we have no way to force adults to attend those assemblies. Education is the idealistic answer. I think the idea of easily accessible opioid addiction treatment centers is the best option. The National Institute on Drug Abuse advocates for that, and I agree that if availability and visibility of the centers were to increase then the issue would be helped.

The heroin epidemic is a very real issue that threatens to affect many people, but it's not entirely on the shoulders of the users. Everyone must do their part in promoting visibility of this issue so the funds can be directed and we can move toward change.

Student learns to accept culture



MARLEN AVILA
Staff Writer

I never thought of my culture as something to be proud of. Though my friends raved about their family traditions during the holidays or what their grandmothers prepared for dinner on special nights, I was never able to relate. They bragged about certain aspects of their culture like being able to travel to so many far away places or being able to afford a nice home and fancy things, establishing the fact that they believed their culture was "better." I'd always felt neutral about my own cultural background, as if there were no unique details to my heritage. But starting high school, surrounded by other insightful, conscious students, I've taken a second look at my history, helping me come to the realization that I truly am influenced by my family but also by what others say about my culture.

My siblings and I are the first generation of my family to grow up in the United States. Both of my parents were born and raised in Mexico, and their heritage is still important in their lives. But living in the U.S. sometimes made it difficult for me to hold onto the culture that is so important to my mom and dad. I went to an elementary school where 80 percent of the students were of Hispanic origin. Though the majority spoke Spanish, I soon started to forget the language because we were disciplined for speaking Spanish in class. My teachers constantly placed a strong emphasis on learning English, explaining that people wouldn't take us seriously if we didn't know proper grammar and words. When I returned to my Spanish-filled home, I was instead accustomed to speaking and hearing English. My parents were disappointed, but there

wasn't much they could do when I was younger because they were busy working 10-hour shifts; my dad was a construction worker, and my mom spent her days cooking at a retirement home cook, all to provide for me and my four siblings. It was normal not to see my parents until it was dark outside each day.

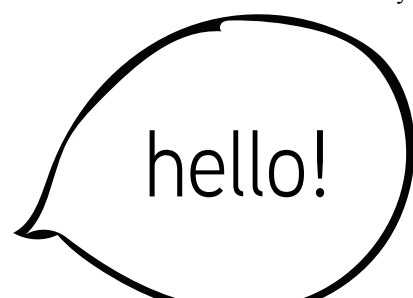
As a young child, I didn't see anything out of the ordinary. I didn't see any consequences of losing that part of me, the part that was still associated with Mexico. Back then, I thought learning English was a required part of the curriculum. I believed the teachers were just doing what was best for us by teaching English and discouraging Spanish. There wasn't anything from school that suggested that outside our bubbles, some people discriminated against Hispanics.

In middle school, however, I began hearing the negative things people said about Mexico. There was the constant degrading about Mexican culture from non-Hispanic people as well as from other

people what they should think about Mexico or its culture. Nowadays, all that most people would associate Mexico with is everything that is constantly mentioned about the country in the media--the recent events regarding drug cartels, illegal immigration problems and more prominent, the comments made by Donald Trump and other politicians.

When I look back to my experiences in Mexico, it's clear to people that there are slight advantages to living in the United States. But that doesn't necessarily indicate that one country is better than the other. It seems like people who aren't familiar with the culture or heritage of Mexico are quick to judge by what they hear in the media. Most people associate Mexicans or people of Hispanic heritage with common stereotypes such as having low grades, not making a lot of money, not speaking English well or even being an illegal immigrant in certain cases. It's very

frightening that almost all the stereotypes affiliated with being of Hispanic or Latino(a) background indicates something negative. As I became more exposed to some of the negative comments in middle school, I came to realize that there is more to my heritage than there seems to be. I know from my own experiences that not every Hispanic fits into those stereotypes. And once realizing this, I began to look past the stereotypes labeled on Hispanics. This was one of the first steps I took in order to begin being positive about my culture. I learned that once I accepted that there will be negative comments about my culture, I started to feel better about both myself and my culture.



art by Claire Camnati

Field day revamped, LBJ and LASA plan to come together to create joint field day, make new events

CAROLINA GOKINGCO
Staff Writer

Field day was once regarded as a signature event at LBJ and LASA that normally took place at the end of November on the Friday before Thanksgiving break, and its popularity among students once rivaled other events like Coffeehouse. It's a day full of team-building and competitive challenges for teachers and students alike. The recurring unfortunate luck of bad weather has left recent field days canceled and kids confused.

Both the LBJ and LASA administration plan for a combined field day this spring, which will be the second field day to include both schools. Field day is normally scheduled separately, but through these and several other changes, the administration hopes to revise and improve field day to reestablish it as an unforgettable event.

"It's great to play team sports with a forum class because it gives you more of a sense of unity to compete together against other forums," LASA science teacher David Walker said. "Also, it makes the whole forum name and shirt thing a lot more relevant. It's great to see a bunch of forum teams during field day, each with their own names, colors, themes and personalities."

Like many others, Walker and his forum prepare for field day. He said his forum was always especially into the kickball game, specifically with coming up with lineups and strategies.

"Some forum groups [and students] are always more into preparation for the actual kickball game and other events, while other students are more into preparation for the team aspect of things—coming up with a team name, making shirts or other ideas for field day," Walker said.

In the past, field day generally consisted of both kickball tournaments that set forums against forums and students against faculty, as well as a few carnival booths. LASA assistant principal San Czaplinski is in charge of field day.

"[There's] typically [been] bounce stuff... like the challenge ones where you have the sumo-wrestling and obstacle course and velcro wall and bungee run," Czaplinski said. "There's also been an area space where kids could play board games or do just like some relaxing stuff like ultimate frisbee, soccer, and that's if students want to bring their own equipment from home."

Field day may take place in the spring instead of the fall and both on campus and on the fields due to the weather. Czaplinski said that, three years ago in her first year at LASA, she went with

whatever had been done in the past with the guidance of previous teachers and what had been saved as far as documentation. After a year or two, Czaplinski took note of certain aspects that needed improvements.

"We started going more towards, 'We have to find activities that students can complete here on campus,' because it'd be so cold out [on the fields], and they're sitting there, trying to play board games, [so] it's miserable," Czaplinski said. "That was the first year I'd been here, and after that, I [said], 'Okay some things need to change.' The second year I was here, it was canceled and we rescheduled the last Friday in December, of all days."

Last year, due to heavy rains, field day was canceled. It was rescheduled for the spring, but was canceled again.

"The fields were so swamped with mud and water; the district would not allow us to use the fields because [baseball and softball] season was right around the corner," Czaplinski said. "They were worried about the fields being completely destroyed by having 800 kids out there...The hope is to propose it for the Friday before spring break, since kids are already checked out, but I don't know, we'll see."

LASA Principal Stacia Crescenzi and Czaplinski considered moving field day due to multiple years of uncooperative weather. As a result, a solution was found that appealed to both LBJ and LASA.

"At the same time [LASA was considering moving field day], LBJ approached us asking about how we coordinate field day because they were considering having one in the spring," Crescenzi said. "This seemed like the perfect opportunity to bring students together and have one big event."

Crescenzi plans this year to have a Super Smash Brothers tournament, per request of several students. Like the gaming tournament, a no-bake contest, similar to the TV show "Chopped," was one of the events planned for last year that will hopefully be incorporated this year's field day. In a no-bake contest, students, on different teams, would receive a basket full of secret ingredients, which they would use to make a dessert.

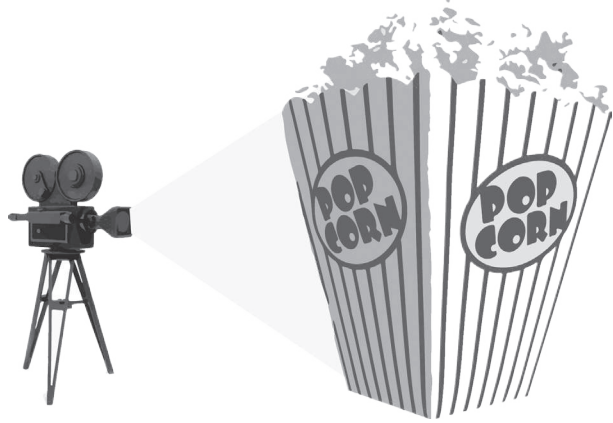
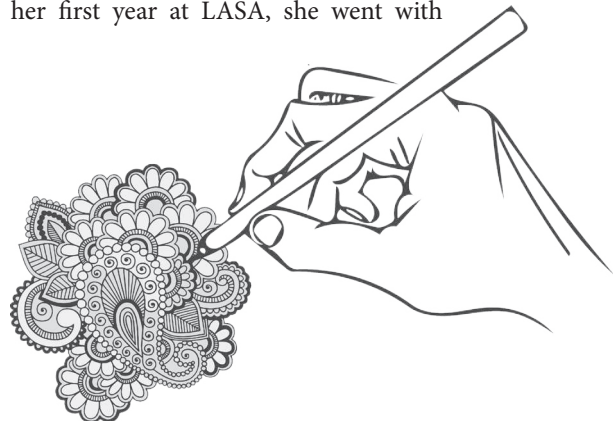
"There were going to be some other rooms [with] Henna-tattooing, [where] they'd learn a little bit about the history, the importance and when it's used," Czaplinski said. "Then, students would actually go through the process of completing Henna tattoo. Also, there was a movie that would be seen in the theater, where someone [would] come in and come talk to them about—like have a panel discussion after the movie. There were all these wonderful things planned, and we didn't get to have them."

The plan is for a combination field day in the spring with new activities, some of which were requested by students and planned for last year's, which can take place both indoor and outdoor. However, in the past, getting students and faculty excited about field day always proved to be a challenge.

"It takes away instructional time, so lots of faculty don't like it," Walker said. "It means coming to school for something other than what's required for tests, so lots of students skip it. If no one is into it, it's no fun. That being said, when it's done right and everyone is into it, it's an absolute blast."

With the new improvements and additions, the LASA and LBJ administration hope to make field day an enjoyable day for students and faculty to wind down in time for spring break.

"If we can figure out a way for this to be a fun, team-building, competitive day that people -- students and teachers -- want to come to school for, then it will surely be reestablished as a LASA signature event where] lots of people show up and enjoy it," Walker said. "Not because they have to, but because they want to."



THE SKINNY

AISD goes with the flow, Halloween blackouts due to major flooding and tornadoes

MAX IRBY
Staff Writer

After hours of downpour, the power in both LBJ and LASA shut off near the end of first period on Oct. 30, 2015. The only light entering the classrooms came through the windows; classes couldn't continue any longer. Everyone on the second floor was sent to the first floor as a tornado warning lit up students' phones. People were sent to classrooms and hallways on the ground floor as well as the cafeteria. Even though the situation was unfamiliar to the LBJ/LASA administration, faculty, and students, the emergency response was handled well. LASA freshman Marcel Gonzales said the blackout affected his classroom productivity.

"During the flood, the school had a blackout, making it difficult to actually do work in classes," Gonzales said. "For the most part my classes just played games until the power came back on, which took a few hours."

LASA Sci-Tech teacher Jackson Pace thought that the situation was handled as well as it could have been by the district.

"Overall it was handled as well as could be expected when you have nearly 1200 souls you are responsible for you must think on the spot what is best for the most people," Pace said. "It is tough to make large, important decisions on the fly when hundreds, or thousands in the context of the whole district, of people looking to you for leadership."

According to LBJ security guard Lorenzo Ray, even though LBJ and LASA have not experienced an weather-related emergency situation recently, he felt prepared for the flooding.

"We'd been properly trained," Ray said. "We go through the exercise all the time. We could do it all over again and we'd do the same thing."

The Emergency Management Bureau is an organization within AISD whose responsibilities include improving the preparedness and response to emergencies by analyzing risks in facilities and response plans. The organization also is responsible for recovery after disasters have struck and restoring facilities to pre-disaster conditions. Pace said that the main thing that helped AISD handle this situation well was its emergency plans and good communication during the situation.

"All public facilities and organizations are mandated to have emergency plans for all emergency situations," Pace said. "We practice them and discuss them throughout our careers. Yet, each emergency situation has its own set of circumstances that have to be assimilated and adjustments to the general plans must be customized to the situation. And during each event communication from leadership to the organization is paramount."

Is the safety on? Seniors revamp gun club, new focus on gun safety, visits gun range for practice

GUS ALBACH
Staff Writer

For the past few months students of LASA and LBJ have been meticulously reviewing gun safety and operating instructions leading up to their trip to Red's indoor shooting range in Pflugerville. This trip was one of many trips the club will be taking throughout the year. According to co-founder LASA senior Sam Pastor, the club takes the trips to shooting ranges to teach students gun safety. Pastor said the club has existed in the past, but died out, and he decided to revive it this year.

"I created the club this year because it didn't exist the year before," Pastor said. "I co-founded the club with Chloe Edmiston. The club had existed in the past, but fell apart."

It was an interesting club from what I've heard in the past. It's definitely a fun experience for people who haven't shot guns in the past."

The main reason the club was disbanded, according to LASA government teacher and club sponsor Ronny Risinger, was for economic reasons.

"Gun club was put on a hiatus shortly after Barack Obama was elected," Risinger said. "There was a concern that democrats would ban guns. This created a huge demand for guns and bullets. It double the price of bullets. At that point you couldn't afford to shoot guns regularly... At that point it was literally going to cost a dollar per shot."

According to Pastor, the club's goal is to raise awareness about gun safety. Some members have shot guns before, but other students have not had the chance. Pastor said that exposure to guns at home has a large role in the experience level of members.

"I personally haven't done much outside of school with guns because we don't own any guns," Pastor said. "Overall, I'd personally say I've had a pretty limited experience [with guns]."

The club has about 10 people attending each meeting, with most having shot guns before and a handful who have not. Other members of the club, such as LASA senior Franklin Li, have had experience with guns before.

"I've shot guns with my dad before this," Li said. "Not really hunting or anything, just at the shooting range."

Risinger said that students also tend to have interest in guns for different reasons too. Some students are interested in different types of guns ranging from modern sniper rifles to old 1700 muskets.

"Some people are into black powder guns," Risinger said, "Some people are into revolvers, some people are into so called assault rifles. So I want to make sure they get exposed and learn about all of them."

It varies what happens every meeting, but according to Risinger it roughly goes by the following.

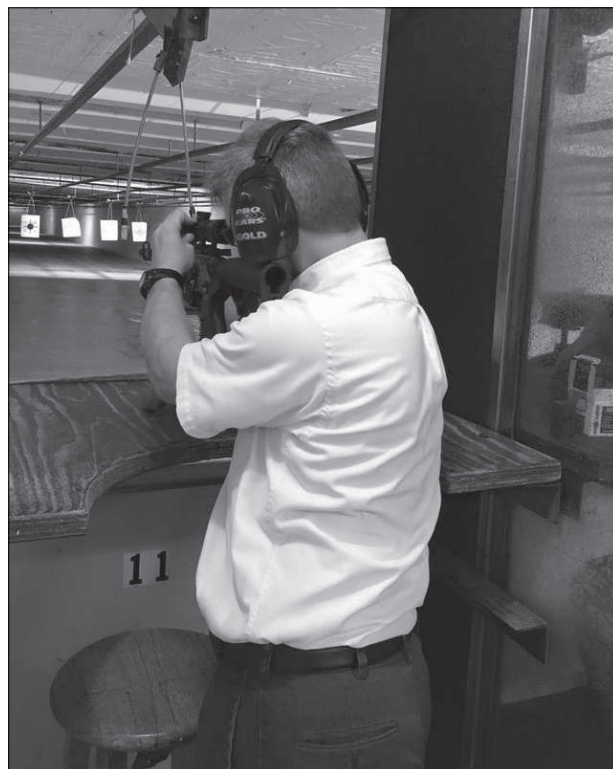
"At the beginning of the year and throughout the year I have several powerpoint slides that detail gun operation and safety and things like that," Risinger said, "So we spend a lot of our time going over things like pistols to various types of rifles, shotguns, etc. and discussing how they operate and how to use them safely."

According to Li, shooting guns has benefits in addition to their intended purpose. Li said that gun club exposes students to these benefits.

"I definitely think there are some benefits to guns and gun club," Li said. "Stress relief is a big one. It's nice to go out, lodge a few rounds into a target and feel better about yourself."



LASA senior Ryan Compton practices his aim at Red's Shooting Range. "Going out with gun club was a good introduction to shooting and gun safety for my first time," Compton said. "Mr Risinger was super helpful and calm." photo courtesy of Chloe Edmiston



LASA teacher and gun club sponsor Ronny Risinger shoots his AR-15. "You're never done with gun safety training that's the key...Most of these 'accidents' are preventable if you vigilantly follow the safety rules," Risinger said. photo courtesy of Chloe Edmiston

Split success in AISD, six more schools achieve state standards, two schools still improvement required

CLARA MORSE
Staff Writer

This year when the Texas Education Agency released the Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPRs), reports mainly based on academic performance, Austin Independent School District (AISD) received a Met Standard, the highest rating. Four AISD schools, including LBJ and Eastside Memorial, were moved from Improvement Required (IR) to Met Standard (MS), while seven remained IR. AISD Superintendent of High Schools Kathy Ryan said that these schools meeting standards has been a long, but worthwhile, process.

"Each campus did something a little different to help them get out, but I think the bottom line and the thing that they all had in common is everybody came together as a community to do whatever it took to help make the kids successful," Ryan said. "Whether that was some additional tutoring on the side to help out, which happened at some of these schools, or...whether it was community members coming in and mentoring kids, all the stakeholders were on that campus and had a common mission: to help this school be able to help its kids."

AISD Executive Officer of Accountability and Assessment Debra Ready said that one of the main factors of success at these schools was the individualization of learning.

"The success we saw at our high schools was really tied to tailoring the learning to each individual student's needs," Ready said. "I think that data-driven decision making and the individualization of student learning were probably the two things that make the biggest difference, as you'd expect."

Last year Pearce and Garcia Middle Schools were decommissioned after being rated IR for several years in a row and replaced with Bertha Sadler Means Young Women's Leadership Academy and Gus Garcia's Young Men's Leadership Academy, respectively. According to AISD Superintendent Paul Cruz, these schools were turned into single-gender schools to fulfill the vision of creating new, prosperous schools in the place of the old failing ones. Now, both schools are in their second year of existence and were both rated MS in the TAPRs.

"Both of them moved to a different approach and really changed the design there," Cruz said. "The [main] move was to focus on a culture of high expectations for all students, a culture about safety and a culture that's about brotherhood and sisterhood."

Cruz said that pulling schools out of the IR designation was a community effort, and a lot of the improvements were made over a long timespan. Ryan said that the long-term focus, while important, ended up being a detriment to a few schools due to the quickfire way that TAPR assessment standards can change.

"A large part...of it is the rules changing and schools having to be familiar and take into account what's being assessed now," Ryan said. "I always tell people that it's like, during a football game if the ref says, 'Oh, you know what? Field goals don't count and they don't count from the beginning of the game.' So if you were somebody who puts a lot of energy into the field goal, and you made a couple, and they said all of that didn't matter and didn't count, [that would hurt]."

Cruz said that one example of a rule change that heavily impacted schools was a change in the requirements

surrounding math. Until this year, math had always been a performance indicator at the elementary and middle school level, and Cruz said that many schools spent time improving their math programs this year to bring that section of the TAPRs up.

"In the past, math was included as a performance indicator at elementary and middle schools, and this year it was not," Cruz said. "So that was something that we didn't know [about] or expect...math was a higher performing area in general for most of our schools."

The fact that math was not counted this year, Ryan said, severely impacted the ratings of certain schools. And according to Ready, even though the schools have specific

"Our total budget to pay teachers and fix schools and have supplies and materials is about \$750 million," Cruz said. "So \$280 million on top of that is a lot of money that we could actually use right here in our district. We are a district where 60 percent of our students are economically disadvantaged, and they receive free or reduced lunch. And that's a significant number, out of 84,000 students. We need [more] resources to help educate our kids."

Ready agreed. Although AISD pays more money than any other school district in Texas back to the state, over 27 percent of its students are English language learners, about 56 percent are at-risk students, and nearly 10 percent of students are in special education programs. Ready cited the out-of-date funding system as one main issue.

"The current state funding system was developed in 1984 and it really hasn't been updated significantly since that time to reflect the current standards and student expectations," Ready said. "What students are expected to know now is far different than what students were expected to know in 1984. Yet our funding system hasn't kept up with that change. If you think back to the cost of living in 1984—salaries, maintenance of buildings—those costs have continued to rise, and the funding formula hasn't kept up. It simply no longer covers the cost of meeting our student's needs."

Ready also said that the recapture that AISD pays to the Texas government to be redistributed to poverty-poor districts, along with the funding cuts, is limiting AISD's ability to help its students, especially in the IR schools.

"I'm not the CFO, but I think the CFO would say, and we all do sort of readily recognize, that the current state funding system limits the investment that we're able to make in our kids," Ready said. "We're limited around the investment that we're able to make to individualize learning for those students. The state formula doesn't reflect the needs of Austin ISD students. Funding plays a significant role [in this]."

Ryan said that the end goal of all of these changes is to help schools to create students who are able to navigate today's highly competitive job market, and that the first step to doing that was to prepare students for college.

"Requirements to hold jobs have changed drastically over the last 20 to 30 years," Ryan said. "For more and more jobs, you need a college degree... to get even an entry-level job anywhere. The businesses coming to Austin require it even more so. We need to do a good job preparing our kids to be able to stay and work... and we need to make sure that they have the education that they need. So we have a goal to get them prepared for college."

Cruz said that, while the tests and TAPRs are valuable measuring tools, the most important thing is for students to have learned how to work through adversity. He also said that defining a student's worth by a test is not accurate, and that many important things aren't testable.

"Good test scores and good grades may get a student into college, but there are also other factors that can be more important, like resiliency," Cruz said. "Life's tough sometimes, and sometimes it throws a curveball at us, but you have to have resilience in saying, 'Okay, that didn't happen the way I wanted it to but I need to get up and go at it again.' That doesn't show up on a test score, but resilience is important. Responsible decision-making is important, but again that isn't a test score, but that's just a life factor and a life skill and those are essential."

Report Cards	
AISD Texas Academic Performance Reports	
School	Grade
Bertha Sadler Means Young Women's Leadership Academy	MS
Gus Garcia's Young Men's Leadership Academy	MS
LBJ High School	MS
Eastside Memorial High School	MS
Travis High School	MS
Ridgetop High School	MS
Lanier High School	IR
Reagan High School	IR

MS = Met Standards
IR = Improvement Required

graphic by Claire Cannatti

objectives they must meet from year to year, AISD wants each school individually to spend more time working on all aspects of its education.

"That's a challenge with the state accountability system is that it's constantly changing, and sometimes late in the year, before we have the final decisions," said Ready. "But we feel confident that if we're looking at individual student progress, and we're monitoring those students, and we're constantly going back and making adjustments, that the accountability system will take care of itself."

Cruz said that, while many of AISD's efforts are going towards helping these IR schools, many of them are in less 'property-wealthy' areas of AISD, which makes them more vulnerable to funding cuts from the state. In a property-wealthy district such as AISD, Cruz said this can be problematic since the district is already required to pay millions of dollars to the state annually. Last year, \$185 million of AISD's budget was sent off to the state; this year it is about \$280 million.

AT&T selects LBJ as one of 20 schools for Distributive Education Clubs of America chapter

GRACE BODINE
Staff Writer

In hopes of inspiring the next generation of young entrepreneurs across the nation, AT&T chose LBJ as one of 20 high schools nationwide to participate in their new partnership with Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA). LBJ Career and Technical Education (CTE) teacher and department chair Randy Bryant was contacted by AT&T when they heard about the CTE program at LBJ. After some negotiations, AT&T and Bryant were able to come to an agreement.

"AT&T is going to financially back us to go to different competitions and conferences," Bryant said. "They wanted to reach out and show that they're there to help us."

AT&T has invested money into the DECA organization to help students in poverty stricken be a part of the entrepreneur competitions and a growing global economy. DECA is a career and technical student organization and is geared towards students and teachers of marketing, management, entrepreneurship and finance.

When Bryant was in high school, he was a member of Business Professionals of America and went to conferences similar to DECA ones. He finds this club important because it exposes students to the opportunities around them and expands their view of the world.

"I always tell them about how I grew up in [southside] Chicago," Bryant said. "In my mind [downtown Chicago] was so far it might as well been a trip to Tahiti. As I got older and I got more exposure through high school and being in different programs that help young black males in Chicago, downtown was like ten minutes from my house. That's how small my world was and being able to go to these different conferences and see these different people and job shadow, it then becomes not that far-fetched."

By being a part of DECA and this partnership with AT&T, Bryant said students will compete in multiple competitions, attend conferences, receive professional development from AT&T mentors and job shadow at an AT&T site. Once students join DECA, they are lifelong members according to Bryant. Opportunities for recommendations and travelling for competitions and conferences will allow students to network with different people and have conversations about business and marketing ideas. LBJ junior Mayly Jaimes said she is excited about creating business proposals and other

projects for the competitions.

"[I've] done a project before [with others] and it was really fun because we all got along so well," Jaimes said. "It was fun because we all had different roles, so in the end it was a well-balanced [project]."

Jaimes, along with some other LBJ students, are creating a business proposal for an upcoming competition. Jaimes said their idea is to make an alternative to a diploma, an everlasting item for high school graduates.

"Instead of having a paper copy of a diploma that can easily be torn or ripped up, it's going to be a glass engraving of a diploma," Jaimes said. "You'll be able to customize it as you wish, with cool colors and stuff like that. Hopefully it'll be a new innovation."

Jaimes heard about DECA and its partnership with AT&T through Bryant. She decided to partake in the student organization because her close friends are also participating.

"We're all just going to work together and [we] hope to achieve the goal of traveling somewhere outside of Austin and also getting LBJ's name out there," Jaimes said.

In April 2016, the DECA International Career Development Conference will take place in Nashville, Tennessee. Jaimes' goal for this year is to be able to attend this conference and strengthen LBJ's team. Bryant also wants to travel to Tennessee, but first wants to focus their short-term goals on the upcoming competitions.

"[I want] to have at least two or three groups of students actually compete in the DECA competition," Bryant said. "Hopefully we will make it to nationals as a team competing and not just there to be a part of the conference."

In the future, Bryant said he wants LBJ to have a community presence with their DECA club.

"[I hope we'll have] a strong local DECA chapter where we have community service projects and that we make an impact from high school all the way down to middle school and elementary school," Bryant said. "We have seven year olds with portfolios. We're just that strong financially and mentally."

According to Jaimes, by participating in the AT&T-DECA project she will be able to gain experience and improve on working with others and listening to their opinions. Jaimes said she has not planned on being an entrepreneur or studying business in the future, but the idea is not impossible.

"Right now, it's something that I haven't looked too much into, but with what I've been doing with Mr. Bryant and all the other students, it's definitely something I could end up doing," Jaimes said.

LASA hosts second Model UN competition

LASA held its second Model United Nations (Model UN) conference, UNLASA, on Dec. 5, a conference where other Model UN clubs across Texas came to compete on LBJ's campus. LASA senior, Model UN officer and UNLASA Director of Crisis Mason Clark said that this conference required a lot of preparation in order to be ready for all of the schools coming to visit.

"UNLASA has been running conferences for middle schools for years, but this is only our second conference for other Texas high schools, which meant it needed to be much more in-depth and well thought out," Clark said. "We also decided to make every committee historical to differentiate from other conferences, which added way more research than we normally would have had to do and the development of crisis staff."

Model UN sponsor and LASA history teacher Kimberley Pettigrew said that the goal of all Model UN conferences, including UNLASA, is to correctly simulate real United Nations meetings, whether the students are representing real people or countries.

"In Model UN you are simulating discussions in committees and you are representing either countries or a person and you are trying to be authentic with that person's role," Pettigrew said. "There is a topic and you are trying to get a solution for the topic."

Clark said that though it was only UNLASA's second year, they received only good reviews from the people who attended. He said that he felt the conference was very successful.

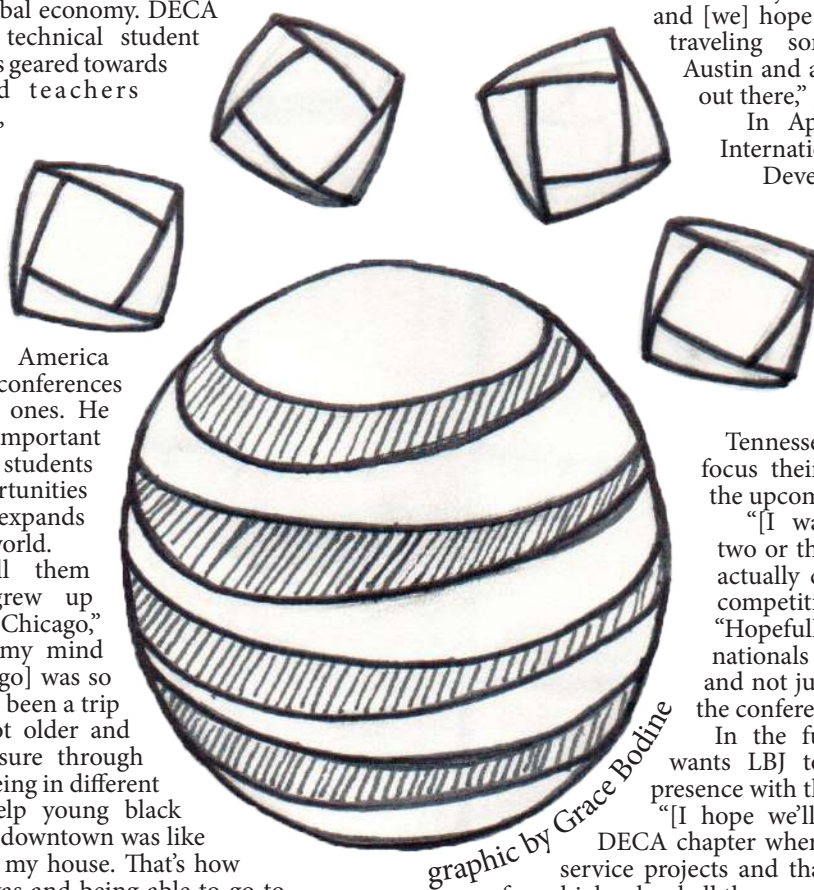
"The conference went incredibly well, better than any of us hoped really," Clark said. "There were barely any issues and despite a number of delegates not showing up, we got glowing reviews from nearly everyone."

Now that UNLASA has ended, the Model UN students are preparing for the Model UN San Antonio conference the first week of next semester, which Clark said is the biggest conference every year. LASA senior, Model UN officer and UNLASA Chief of Staff Elizabeth Frey said that Model UN is a great experience because it allows students to begin contextualizing the world they live in and form their own opinions about policies and the government.

"I think that current issues and understanding the globe around you is extremely important," Frey said. "So being able to also see from other points of view from different countries, especially when you have to represent countries you disagree with, is very important."



Delegates from across Texas act as famous politicians and debate the Berlin Crisis at recent conference. photo by Campbell Stuart
story by Meagen Allgood



ROBERT E. LEE ELEMENTARY



graphic by Claire Cannatti

AISD to consider name change for five elementary schools due to names' history of Confederacy

EMILY KOLODNEY
Staff Writer

The Austin Independent School District (AISD) Board of Trustees held a meeting at the beginning of November regarding the names of Robert E. Lee Elementary School, John H. Reagan High School, Sidney Lanier High School, Eastside Memorial High School at the Johnston Campus and William B. Travis High School, because of its mascot (the Rebels), since they are all named after Confederate icons. After months of public request, a board meeting was held on Nov. 2 to discuss changing the names of these five AISD schools. AISD District 5 Trustee and Board Vice President Amber Elenz said that although the names might offend people, they still matter.

"The names of schools are significant in different ways to different members of the community in which they reside or the students [or] families that they serve," Elenz said. "They still have meaning to people."

The first time this issue was brought up was in July, when residents in the area began mentioning a name change for Robert E. Lee Elementary. Four months later, board members discussed several solutions and opinions, and in the end they assigned the issue to the board's policy committee,

led by AISD District 1 Trustee Edmund Gordon, and the outreach committee, led in part by AISD District 9 and At Large Board Trustee Kendall Pace.

"The first thing that was discussed at the outreach meeting was, 'Should the board even consider it?'" Pace said. "We recommended that we have a formal discussion about the name changes before making any decisions."

According to the Austin Monitor, Gordon said during the meeting that he has very strong opinions on the matter. He said that this issue is personal for him, being the only African-American on the board of trustees, and that he is deeply affected by the namesakes of these schools. Pace agreed, saying that she understands how the names make people feel.

"I get the sensitivity to it and we need to be aware of it," Pace said. "I also think that we need to take into consideration what the community wants."

According to the board, the popular opinion is that the names of these schools are no longer relevant. AISD District 2 trustee Jayme Mathias has an opinion on the issue similar to this. Based on information gained via the Community Impact, a local newspaper, Mathias said that he believes that the names should be changed because they represent something that should be frowned upon. According

to Mathias, the names are legitimate issues that have been brushed over too many times. Also, Elenz said that requests to change names have been happening for a long time.

"People outside of these schools have been making these requests for as long as I can remember," Elenz said. "I believe that this particular community is needing closure fairly soon, and this conversation has put children ages five to 12 on the front lines of the debate."

Elenz said that a change in the name of Robert E. Lee Elementary would cause confusion and many repercussions, even by doing the suggested abbreviation to Lee Elementary. Along the same lines, LASA guidance counselor Carole McPherson attended Reagan High School and was not aware of the possibility of changing the name. She said that this is a sensitive subject for her, and that the school is so different now than it was years ago.

"I think the names of things and where people come from are really important to me," McPherson said. "It's hard to change the name of something that was part of your identity. I still feel nostalgic to my neighborhood and the old memories that I have about that."

If this were to come into action, a change of an elementary school name could cost up to \$14,000, including website changes,

sign changes and all new branded items. There are also four high schools on the list for a potential name change. A change in the name of a high school can cost up to \$77,000, plus \$230,000 for all branded items. That includes all sports uniforms, gear, clothing, gym equipment, band equipment, decor and transportation. Despite the alarming prices, Pace said that there is a process that all the board members have to go through to even begin to change the name of one school.

"We're pretty far from changing a name of any school," Pace said. "We will need strong support to change the name of any school. It's not just going to pass by a single vote."

Pace said that even if it is very difficult to come up with a general policy that will work, they still take into account the opinions of the community. McPherson also said that although the school is very different from when she attended, and she still feels a connection to it, she would understand the name change if it was going to solve so many problems.

"It's definitely not the same school that it was when I graduated in 1988. It's very different, they only thing that's the same is the building, and even that, they've added parts to it," McPherson said. "[But] if it's flat out upsetting or hurting someone, then I could, of course, move on from it."

Calendar

continued from page 1

"The team had to stay within the 23 paid holidays parameter by not adding another paid holiday," Williams said. "An additional holiday would cost the district more than \$371,000."

LBJ reading teacher Abby Lincoln-Hilling favors Draft B of the calendar because of the week-long Thanksgiving break. AISD is one of the only school districts in the greater Austin area which does not have a week-long Thanksgiving break. According to Lincoln-Hilling, three days isn't enough time for students from outside of Austin or Texas to visit family out of state. She said that she feels every student should be able to visit family, regardless of geography.

"Judging from this year and [my] past experience, no one is usually here that week," Lincoln-Hilling said. "Since a lot of our funding comes out of attendance, if you have a week scheduled where no one is at school, that's losing a lot of money. I think finally, everyone's like 'Let's reexamine our approach here, because it doesn't seem to be working.'"

LASA sophomore Kate Williams said that she doesn't like Draft B, because the week off for Thanksgiving is unnecessary.

"[I have heard about the proposed calendars], the one that takes a week off for Thanksgiving, I don't like it," Williams said. "Because I like a long Christmas break because we do stuff, like we don't travel over Thanksgiving we travel over Christmas."

LASA freshman Christian Salinas agreed, saying that the two days prior to Thanksgiving break are already not filled with schoolwork, while winter break is already much longer.

"I think that a week-long Thanksgiving break is an absolute must as those two days are useless and almost always unproductive as people look to the long break," Salinas said. "I would prefer cutting out of summer break but cutting from winter break is okay."

Other differences between the two drafts include changes in staff development days. Draft A has staff development days on Nov. 11, Dec. 19 and May 26, while Draft B has Jan. 3, Apr. 14 and May 26 listed for those days. Lincoln-Hilling said that she does not care whether or not the staff development days change, and instead said she believes the days no one is here are more important.

"Right before Thanksgiving it starts to get really long, it feels like we haven't had a break in a really long time, so I think a full week would be nice," Lincoln-Hilling said. "We could relax and come back, prepare for finals. And no one's going to miss two days out of winter break."

NOVEMBER							NOVEMBER								
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa		
			1	2	3	4	5				1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12	6	7	8	9	10	11	12		
13	14	15	16	17	18	19	13	14	15	16	17	18	19		
20	21	22	23	24	25	26	20	21	22	23	24	25	26		
27	28	29	30				27	28	29	30					

DECEMBER							DECEMBER						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
				1	2	3					1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31	25	26	27	28	29	30	31

staff development day holiday, staff and students

graphic by Claire Cannatti

Apollo 8 visits earth, astronauts video chat LBJ

MATEEN KONTORAVDIS
Staff Writer

As part of the Apollo 8 mission anniversary, LBJ High School was invited to attend a celebration at the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum. A panel of these students were selected to ask questions and speak with astronauts currently in space through a live feed. LBJ teacher Randy Bryant said that the students got to miss a day of school for the event.

"President LBJ was such an instrumental person with the whole space thing and our school [is] named after LBJ," Bryant said. "[People] thought it would be great if kids from LBJ would come and be a part of the anniversary of the Apollo 8 mission."

The LBJ students invited are part of Project Lead The Way, a program which is working to help students become more interested in careers in engineering and Computer Science. Bryant said that the event was engaging and a good way to show the students something interesting related to engineering.

"Kids in my classroom came up with questions that they would like to ask some of the people that were a part of the Apollo 8 mission," Bryant said. "[They would also] be able to ask some astronauts that are currently at a space station that were broadcasting live and ask them some questions as well."

25 students were selected to be in the discussion panel with the astronauts, and a total of 50 to 60 LBJ students and their families attended the live discussion over webcam. In addition to talking about the Apollo 8 mission and space, the astronauts also performed some anti-gravity tricks, such as letting go of the microphone while it spun in mid air. LBJ senior Shanell Crimer said that she attended the talk because she was interested in the way anti-gravity affects the bodies of astronauts.

"I am interested in physical therapy and the way they have to use their body up there in space," Crimer said.

Bryant said that the most important part of the experience was the exposure the students had to something that combined engineering and communication.

"A big part of education is communication," Bryant said. "Being able to talk to [the astronauts] was a great experience for the students."



From top to bottom: (1) LBJ students represent LBJ at the livefeed video conference with astronauts. (2) Panelists at the LBJ presidential library lead the discussion with Apollo 8 astronauts. (3) LBJ senior Dezhia Gorrer listens intently to the live presentation given by Apollo 8 astronauts. (4) LBJ students Ashton Williams and Johnny Williams participate in the question and answer session at the LBJ presidential library. photos courtesy of Randy Bryant

THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE TACKY: Holiday Edition

THE GOOD: Teachers' favorite holiday recipes

THE TACKY: Festive dress

Mr. Bertucci's Salami Pie

Ingredients for Dough/Crust (This is optional: you can buy pre-made pie crust—we use the Pillsbury dough that comes either rolled or folded from the dairy section—or make this one):
3 cups all purpose flour
1/4 cup sugar
1/2 cup cold butter - cut into small bits
1/4 cup olive oil
1/2 cup ice cold water

Ingredients for filling:
9 eggs (yeah, that's what I said—9! eggs!)—save one yolk
11/2 pounds of Ricotta cheese
1/2 lb prosciutto chopped into 1/4 inch cubes (you don't have to be that exact: we ask the deli guy to slice us 2 to 3 1/8 thick pieces)
1/2 lb ham—same here, get it sliced thick
1/2 genoa salami—same, coarse chopped again
1 1/2 lbs of mozzarella—use the package not the fresh the fresh is too wet
5 oz grated romano or you can mix some parmesan or some provolone in too
fresh ground black pepper.

Egg wash
1 egg yolk
pinch of salt
1 teaspoon water

Dough:

In a large bowl combine flour, sugar and pinch of salt. Add butter and mix until it crumbles, then add oil and small amounts of ice water (1 tablespoon at a time only) until it forms a dough (or go buy pre-made crust).

Knead lightly on floured surface and form a large ball. Cut in two make two balls and chill for 20 minutes.

When ready, roll out and put into two lightly buttered 12 inch round baking pans. The remaining dough can be rolled then cut into 1/2 inch strips for a lattice top. Keep refrigerated until you are ready to do this:

(Tip—use flour to keep dough from sticking to surface.)

Filling:

Preheat oven 350 degrees. In a very large bowl combine eggs, mix yolk and whites, then add ricotta until well blended. Stir in meats, grated cheese and then mozzarella. Spoon into crusts. Lightly sprinkle black pepper on top.

Add lattice, alternating strips to create basket weave. Brush with egg wash.

Bake for about an hour and 15-30 minutes until firm and lightly brown.

Let stand for at least 20 minutes before cutting.

Mrs. Tavakkol's Pumpkin Roll

Ingredients for cake:
1/4 cup powdered sugar (to sprinkle on towel)
3/4 cup all-purpose flour
1/2 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
3 large eggs
1 cup granulated sugar
2/3 cup 100% pure pumpkin (Do not use pumpkin pie mix!)

Ingredients for the cream cheese filling:
1 pkg. (8 oz.) cream cheese (use the good stuff; full fat not reduced fat), at room temperature
1 cup powdered sugar, sifted
6 tablespoons butter or margarine, softened
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1-2 cats (optional)

Note: For decoration you can sprinkle a little bit of extra powdered sugar on top.

Part I: Make the cake (and make your home smell heavenly)
Preheat the oven to 375° F. Grease 15 x 10-inch jelly-roll pan with vegetable oil and then line with wax paper. Then, grease and flour the wax paper. Sprinkle a thin, cotton kitchen towel with powdered sugar. Be sure to coat the towel generously with powdered sugar or the cake will stick to it when you roll the cake.

Combine flour, baking powder, baking soda, cinnamon, cloves and salt in a small bowl.

Beat eggs and granulated sugar in large mixer bowl until thick. Beat in pumpkin. Stir in flour mixture. Spread evenly into prepared pan.

Bake for 13 to 15 minutes or until top of cake springs back when touched. (Note: If using a dark-colored pan, it will be done a few minutes earlier so make sure to check it at ten or eleven minutes.) While the cake is baking, pet your cats. Immediately after taking pan out of the oven, prepare to invert the cake onto the prepared towel. Now, carefully peel off the wax paper and roll the cake and towel together, starting with narrow end. Let it cool completely on a wire rack for ten to fifteen minutes. Make sure to pet your cats once more while it cools.

Part II: Make the cream cheese frosting for the filling

Beat cream cheese, 1 cup powdered sugar, butter and vanilla extract in small mixer bowl until smooth. Carefully unroll the cake. Spread cream cheese mixture evenly over cake with a knife, making sure to leave a border of about half an inch from the edges. If you do not leave this room, the cream cheese frosting will spill out from the sides of the roll.

Wrap in plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least one hour. Sprinkle with powdered sugar before serving, if you want be EXTRA fancy.

'Holiday Flair Day' tradition revived at LASA with tacky sweaters, Santa hats

ROXY BONAFONT &
VICTORIA MYCUE
Life & Feature Editors

Santucci may not be roaming the halls dressed as a fully lit Christmas tree, but nevertheless, Holiday Flair Day is back. LASA wellness counselor Meagan Butler scurried through the halls during every passing period last week to post flyers and spread the good word of the flair.

"This is my sixth year at LASA, and my first two years we had a tradition of Holiday Flair Day, where everybody would dress up in festive outfits and it kind of helped people relax a little bit before finals week," Butler said. "I thought it was a fun celebration that got everyone smiling and laughing at funny outfits."

Holiday Flair Day disappeared from LASA tradition after the assistant principals closely involved with it left the school. Butler revived the event this December and worked in conjunction with LASA student council to screen movies in the orchestra hall. Students were encouraged to wear tacky sweaters, holiday accessories and dress as a personified version of their favorite holiday; Butler, for example, dressed up as New Year's Eve.

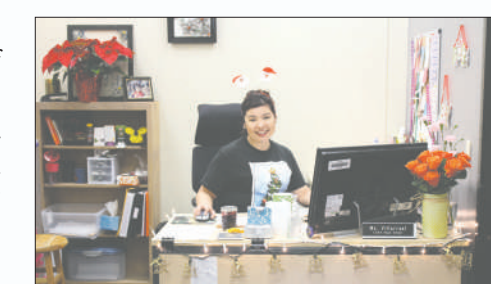
"Flair Day was very fun," Butler said. "I was wearing all sequins and a lot of bling, and a lot of people were smiling and laughing at all the fun outfits, so I loved it!"

LASA Pride Alliance (LPA), the club Butler sponsors, handed out rainbow candy canes and original, handwritten compliments throughout the day. LPA president Meagan Allgood aided Butler in heading the project.

"Every compliment was a holiday-themed pun," Allgood said. "There was everything from Christmas jokes to Hanukkah puns to just telling someone that they looked cute. We wanted to make Holiday Flair Day a lighthearted day before finals started."



LASA wellness counselors Meagan Butler and Marissa Rivera pose with therapy dog Bruce Wayne, all sporting their holiday spiritwear. photo by Victoria Mycue



LASA attendance specialist Claudia Villareal wears her Christmas tree loteria card T-shirt and Santa headband while sitting at her Christmas light-lined desk in the LASA main office on Holiday Flair Day. photo by Victoria Mycue



From left to right: LASA junior Dalia Roth, LASA seniors Maya Haws-Shaddock and Nick Blacklock and LASA sophomore Mateo Sarategui showed off their flair on Friday with holiday-themed tacky sweaters. photos by Roxy Bonafont and Victoria Mycue



From left to right: LASA college counselor Jamie Kocian, LASA government teacher Ronny Risinger and LASA assistant principal Marc Hernandez sported elf ears, antlers and extravagant sweaters to show their holiday spirit. photos by Victoria Mycue

First-year LBJ teacher brings holiday spirit to campus for students, faculty

VICTORIA MYCUE
Life & Feature Editor

Do you like to wear apple bottom jeans? What about boots with the fur? During the last week of the semester at LBJ, Tuesday was the designated "Boots with the Fur" day. In fact, each day of the week had a different holiday theme. LBJ Special Education teacher Kiera Hurst organized the event to bring holiday spirit to the school before the break.

"We want to get them excited... to leave for the holiday season and break," Hurst said. "Christmas is my favorite time of the year and I

love it, so maybe others will love it too."

Monday was specified "Santa Hat Monday," and Tuesday was "Boots with the Fur Tuesday." Wednesday was for holiday accessories, Thursday for Christmas sweaters and on Friday students were encouraged to wear Christmas colors. This semester is Hurst's first at LBJ, and after realizing the school hadn't yet established a holiday tradition, she decided to organize a week of spirit. She also planned a faculty Christmas party.

"It's my first year here," Hurst said. "I wanted to do something festive and bring the holiday spirit in."



Officer Anthony Andrew's dog Rocco and LBJ English teacher Daniel Vogt wore Santa hats on Monday for Holiday Spirit Week. The week was created by LBJ special education teacher Kiera Hurst to promote spirit during finals week. photos by Victoria Mycue

THE BAD: Consumer culture

Season of giving ruined by emphasis on expensive gifts, student finds alternative to brighten holiday season

CLAIRE CANNATTI
Graphics Editor

Christmas is the season of giving. That's what we are told in every cheesy holiday movie I can think of, in every cutesy picture book about the Christmas spirit, in every festive holiday advertisement. It's the season where we should think about others instead of ourselves for once—or at least that's what we're supposed to believe. But as far as I can tell, the holiday season in America is more about taking and wanting than anything else.

Almost everyone who celebrates Christmas participates in some form of gift-giving, because in our culture, giving someone a gift is a way to show you care. It's the same in the Christmas-pressurized Hanukkah celebrated with more fanfare and emphasis than most Jews believe it religiously deserves in an attempt to mimic the insanity of Christmastime for young Jewish kids, to prevent them from feeling left out by the rain of gifts at Christmas. This custom makes sense at a basic level—you care about someone, so you want to make them happy, so you give them something you think will make them happy. But the last jump in that chain of reasoning seems questionable to me. Why is it that we assume that material things are what will us happiest? We know scientifically that this is not the case. People remember experiences far better than we remember any given object, and we also get more joy from the memories and anticipation associated with doing things instead of having things. So why do we still focus so intensely on the acquisition of stuff?

American consumerism is far-reaching and extends beyond the bounds of the winter holidays, but it seems to me that our cultural obsession with having more things reaches a peak during this season. We all feel a little Dudley Dursley-ish, silently counting our gifts and their worth and also wondering if the gifts we bought other people match up appropriately with what they bought us. Only rarely do we promise time together or even give handmade gifts that in and of themselves involve an experience in crafting the gifts.

I admit to taking part in this culture most years. Last year, I bought each of my friends a different pair of funky socks, sourcing from more than three different stores to find these not-cheap socks with octopuses or teacups or Shakespeare faces covering them. The year before, I bought each of my friends a gift from the Settlement Home Garage Sale, priding myself on my thriftiness and all the money I was saving by buying gifts where I did. But the thing was, I was still spending money—a lot of it.

And all in hopes that my friends would love the gifts as much as I hoped they would. But this year, I'm channeling the 90's and making my friends mixtapes. Each one gets their own specific mix that has songs I want them to love, songs I think relate to our relationship, songs I associate with them for any number of reasons. Even if I'm not giving them an actual experience or memory of us spending time together, I hope that in listening to their mixes they'll create memories that will then bring us closer. And I hope to leave behind the nagging question about whether the gift I gave someone was worth more or less than what they gave me by giving them my time and effort instead of my money.

Christmastime consumerism can be grating to observe. The constant, manipulative ads, the constant "blowout" sales that don't even save you money, the pressure to get just the right gift for each of probably many rounds of gift exchanges, from white elephant parties to secret santa exchanges—it all gets exhausting. The jarring contrast between what we are told Christmas means and how we participate in American Christmas is sharp and ugly.



EAST AUSTIN STUDIO TOUR

LASA art students visit EAST, Austin's annual art show

KENZA MCKERRIHAN
Staff Writer

A giant inflatable pink Care Bear shadows the busy streets of East Austin, suspended in the air in front of artist Nancy Mims' home as a part of her installation art piece. During the East Austin Studio Tour (EAST) people are allowed to come and go as they please, walking around participating artists' homes and studios while the artists like Mims themselves engage with their spectators and their art. LASA art teacher Jessica Michlik has required her students to attend EAST as part of the art curriculum ever since her first year teaching in 2010.

"I hope that students are able to have a conversation with the artists and discuss their work together," Michlik said. "Having students see work that local and working artists are displaying is important to the development of their own artwork."

The tour is a free event every year for two weekends in November, where anyone can go tour artists' galleries and talk to the artists themselves. Artists on the east side of I-35 from Lady Bird Lake to 290 open up their homes or studio spaces to the public, and tour attendees can roam between studios across town. LASA senior Chloe Carlander, who has attended EAST once before, said that after attending the show her perspective on what it takes to be an artist changed.

"After talking to a few of the artists, I have even more respect for what they do," Carlander said. "It takes a lot of hard work to make enough money to live, especially in a city like Austin."

Michlik hopes that by going to EAST students both deepen their appreciation for art and are able to use the experience to develop their own work as well as observing the effort that goes into making a finished piece.

"Talking to the artists makes me think more about them than their artwork," Carlander said. "Now when I see a piece of art I also think about how much time and effort went into it, not just the final outcome."

Artist Nancy Mims has featured her work at EAST for the past two years and said she enjoys the entire EAST experience. This year, she showed her work in an outdoor space, making preparation a little more difficult for her than other artists.

"I do an outdoor show so pieces hang outside so I have to envision what they will look like in the outdoor space and figure out how to hang them quickly and take them down each day or if it rains which takes a lot of planning," Mims said.

EAST has played a large part in publicizing Mims' work. According to Mims, an Austin American-Statesman

Having students see work that local and working artists are displaying is important to the development of their own artwork.

-LASA art teacher, Jessica Michlik

art reviewer happened to come by her space and ended up writing about her work multiple times. Mims said that this has attracted many students to come view her work, which she said she enjoyed.

"There were a fair amount of LASA students who came this year and last year," Mims said. "I was interviewed by the students this year and last year which I love. I love that they came out and looked at art and talked to me."

LASA senior Sophia Amstutz has gone to EAST twice for her art classes. According to Amstutz, the tour opened her eyes to the diversity of Austin's art scene and the different forms of expression each artist chose.

"I was surprised at how many immensely different styles I saw at EAST," Amstutz said. "I walked through

galleries of abstract art, amusing prints of Nikola Tesla and Thomas Edison, pen drawings of incredible detail, even a gallery of prints made entirely on tea towels."

By going to EAST, students are able to experience the gallery walk in a casual manner. The experience of going to a gallery and being able to talk to an artist for Amstutz was a completely new experience. According to her, the artists she spoke to were able to elaborate on art in Austin as a whole as well as their individual work.

"The most memorable part of EAST was interacting with the artists," Amstutz said. "I heard so many different perspectives on the Austin art community, and its strengths and weaknesses, which was really interesting to me, not having any prior experience in the Austin art culture."

Amstutz reflected on how she was able to see how the choices made by the artists regarding the medium and subject was able to influence the end product. She said after talking with different artists about how they made their art, she realized that art represented a process of expression and not just a single message.

"Talking to artists about their method for choosing a medium for any given piece helped me look at medium as more than a mode of expression, but rather as part of the expression itself," Amstutz said. "Many artists said that they chose their medium based on the message they were trying to convey, and the emotion that they wanted to be behind that message."

Mims expressed that EAST not only was beneficial to the artist but also to the audience. In particular she said she hoped students would benefit from attending the show, experiencing something out of the ordinary for a high school student.

"I hope students get inspiration, maybe motivation, because you see such a wide range of art at the show," Mims said. "You see some that's really good and some that's maybe not so good but it's great to see such a wide range and be encouraged by how many people are showing people their art, letting the public see it."



photos courtesy of www.nancymims.com

Student makes public apology to father

MERIS MCHANEY
Entertainment Editor

My father is a smart man and I've looked up to him all my life. He sees me work hard in school, my sports teams and other extracurriculars. I would say we have a mutually respectful relationship. We enjoy evenings talking about politics and how I plan to save America. Like I said, we both look very highly upon each other. To be fair, the sibling I'm in competition with still struggles with defining "sum," "product," and "quotient," but still, I'm great. You're probably wondering why in the world I'm exposing my life to you people, and honestly, freshmen, I don't even know who y'all are, stop reading this. Anyways, back to my life. A few weeks ago the prestigious status I once held in the McHaney household dissolved. I'd like to take the time to explain my side to the public eye. Besides, being obsessed with "Keeping Up With The Kardashians" isn't even that bad.

Yes, my name is Meris McHaney, and I keep up with the Kardashians. Although my family has just discovered this secret, it's been going on for quite awhile now. The sheer shame I get thrown my way is outrageous, and I'm ready to take a stand. "Keeping Up With The Kardashians" is a QUALITY show people. My dad has a hard time grasping why I watch the show. Well, Well, Dad, I have a hard time grasping why you watch small, white dimpled balls roll around on grass all day. My dad loves golf and watches pro golfers because it's fun to see the lives we sometimes wish we had or fantasize about it. At least, that's what I think. How else do people justify

watching that stuff? When people ask me why I watch "Keeping Up With The Kardashians" I give them a simple response. A lot of the time, we watch TV shows that feature people we look up to and maybe want to be someday. If you're confused, let me give an example. I'm interested in law, and sometimes consider law school. I watch Scandal because someday I would be very content with Olivia Pope's job as a top dog lawyer in D.C. Watching this show gives me a bigger perspective at what that life is like. Thus, I bring you my main point: I watch "Keeping Up With The Kardashians" because yes, I would be perfectly content with one of their lives. I most definitely aspire to have a career like that, you know, those careers where you get paid for living. This is around the time my dad calls me shallow and is all "Meris, those people don't live 'full' lives." Well, Gordon, if you watched the show you would know that they give back to a fair amount of organizations, value family, live lives full of laughter and fun aaaaannndddd make millions of dollars a year. I don't who wouldn't want to know more about these people's lives. I'm not going to lie to you, of course I'm going to aspire to be a millionaire, and I must prepare myself for that life. I would be lost with knowing what color to make my future G Wagon if it weren't for this family. I need Kim, Khloe and Kourtney and someday, they'll realize they need me, too.

Also, PSA: if anyone has a guest room at their house, please hit me up because I probably won't be allowed at my house after defending K i m Kardashian's purpose on earth. Dad, I'm sorry, I'm a failure.

GRAMMYS WHO'S NOMINATED?

Album of the Year

- "Sound and Color," *Alabama Shakes*
- "To Pimp a Butterfly," *Kendrick Lamar*
- "Traveller," *Chris Stapleton*
- "1989," *Taylor Swift*
- "Beauty Behind the Madness," *the Weeknd*

Record of the Year

- "Really Love," *D'Angelo and the Vanguard*
- "Uptown Funk," *Mark Ronson featuring Bruno Mars*
- "Thinking Out Loud," *Ed Sheeran*
- "Blank Space," *Taylor Swift*
- "Can't Feel My Face," *the Weeknd*

Song of the Year

- "Alright," *Kendrick Lamar*
- "Blank Space," *Taylor Swift*
- "Girl Crush," *Little Big Town*
- "See You Again," *Wiz Khalifa*
- "Thinking Out Loud," *Ed Sheeran*

New Artist

- Courtney Barnett
- James Bay
- Sam Hunt
- Tori Kelly
- Meghan Trainor



graphic by Claire Cannatti

NOCHE DE LAS ESTRELLAS

Spanish six students perform annual music performance

LANEY PHILLIPS
Staff Writer

Anxiety fills the chaotic dressing rooms behind the stage. After practicing their Spanish lyrics only moments prior, the performers try to organize dazzling dresses, Grease-style skirts and denim jackets for the characters they are about to portray. Students come out in their new personas such as Prince Royce, Shakira, Gente de Zona and Marc Anthony. Right before the hosts begin welcoming the stars of the show, LASA Spanish teacher Angie Browne gathers her students in one circle, making eye contact with each one of the performers of the night and wishing them the best of luck before the curtain falls.

"[Noche de las Estrellas] was my idea," Browne said. "I always wanted to educate and share with others a little of my culture, and show them that we have a lot to offer. The students [performed] some of the hits that made multitudes rise, dance, scream, laugh and cry from 1970 to today."

Many of the students enrolled in Spanish VI have looked forward to participating in the tradition of Noche de las Estrellas to show off their Spanish-speaking, dancing and lipsyncing talents since they first learned about the event. Since the beginning of the fall semester, this group of students, including former students of Browne who were asked to perform like LASA seniors Antonio Skillicorn, Jessica Lopez and Hannah Read, have been preparing for this spectacular. On Dec. 2, in the Don Haynes Theater, "Noche de las Estrellas" went live on stage.

"I remember her talking about Noche de las Estrellas and thinking that I couldn't wait to be a part of that," Read said. "It seemed so fun and a great way to celebrate the vibrant music from around the world."

Noche de las Estrellas presented songs by many well-known artists in Latino music. The students took on

the persona of the stars and exhibited their talents and achievements. In order to do this, the Spanish VI class memorized the lyrics to each of their songs and learned characteristic idiomatic expressions from whichever Spanish-speaking country their artist is from. LASA senior and Spanish VI student Pablo Villafuerte said the process of putting together the show required everyone in the class to play a part.

"Honestly, [I've learned that] it's really hard to actually plan something like this, a show that is this big," Villafuerte said. "I'm also learning that I'm better at dancing than I thought I was. I was given a chance to show off my dancing and singing skills."

The students did a phenomenal job and I feel very proud of them.

-LASA Spanish teacher Angie Browne

As part of practice, the students memorized and learned the choreography to all the songs they performed to create a synchronized dance and a few solo performances to display an individual's talent. According to Read, who played a double role as a performer and choreographer, speaking Spanish, memorizing the lyrics and dancing simultaneously meant many tasks for her to juggle.

"It takes a while to memorize the lyrics to a song and come up with choreography, but the most difficult part is rehearsing," Read said. "The dances tend to blur together and dancing in the moment can get confusing. I have been working almost every lunch to learn dances or teach

others the dances I have made up. Rehearsals can look very different each time... My favorite part is then teaching it to the other Spanish VI kids and watching them do the new moves."

Preparing for this intense and demanding performance, the Spanish VI students spent every class rehearsing and learning new lyrics or choreography. Having rehearsed for a semester, the class was well prepared for the intensity of the concluding performance. That night many students, families, peers and teachers came ready to see their hard work pay off.

"It was really good," Read said. "It went really well, everybody was really excited and I heard a lot of people say it was really cute and it was a lot of fun. I got to watch the whole second half, so it was really fun to see all of them doing the dances and it actually being real."

The performance was not just about the show itself, because there were also many technical jobs and issues to work out backstage. The students had to make costume changes and get ready for each song while thinking of the next set of choreography. LASA senior and Spanish VI student Ally Martin noticed the amount of camaraderie that this chaos brought to the surface.

"I just liked bonding with everyone because it got really hectic backstage and we all had to deal with it together," Martin said. "[The audience] thought it was impressive how fast we changed and how much work we put into it. We learned that communication is key to put together anything."

Browne started this tradition in 2010 in order to share her culture and what her students have to offer to the community. The final performance she said, made her feel satisfied.

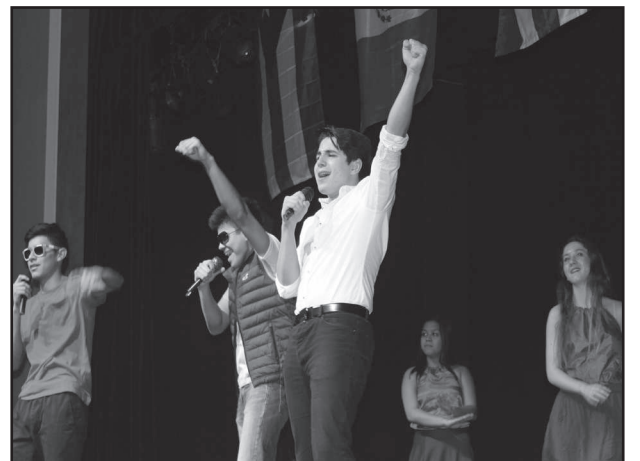
"I felt very proud for the work my students did," Browne said. "It was done equally well as every other [Noche de las Estrellas] performance. The students did a phenomenal job and I feel very proud of them."



According to LASA senior Ally Martin, who performed as Maria Jose and as a dancer for multiple numbers including "Unidos," she felt nervous. "Noche was one of those crazy lifetime experiences that I won't forget because it's the only time I've done a performance like that on stage," Martin said. "It was a little scary to perform." photo courtesy of Clara Gibbs



LASA senior Efrain Garduño sings as popular Latin artist Chayenne for one of his numbers. "I knew that I was crushing it on stage," Garduño said. "Once I stepped out on that stage and saw all those people I just went for it, I held nothing back!" Efrain Garduño said. photo courtesy of Keaton Goodwin, yearbook staff



One of the guest performers and former spanish student of Browne, LASA senior Antonio Skillicorn, said that he felt like the performance had been really successful. "Noche was a really fun experience, and a really interesting way to approach learning more about the Spanish language," Skillicorn said. photo courtesy of Keaton Goodwin, yearbook staff

TOP 5 FASHION TRENDS WE DON'T GET @ LASA

by Leni Milliken



OVERSIZED SHIRTS

Where are your pants? It seems as though there's a nudist trend going on I know nothing about. If I see one more fluorescent tee paired with naked legs and white Chuck Taylors I might throw a fit in the middle of the hall. It's winter people!

FAKE GLASSES

You don't know the life of a true glasses-wearer, so don't take advantage of your eyesight. Wearing glasses doesn't make you look indie and it's really confusing to everyone else when you can take them off and you can still see...

KENDRA SCOTT

"You people are all spending \$100 on a plastic jewel wrapped in a gold chain. I don't think people are truly aware of just how many Chipotle burritos that can buy." -Meris McHaney

ROLLING UP YOUR SHORTS

Everyone knows your off-brand shorts are really not Vineyard Vines so please unroll them. You're trying to imitate chubbies or something, but you don't look frat or cool (if looking frat even makes you cool) and it's winter, so roll down your shorts. If you want shorter shorts, here's a hint: go buy shorter shorts.

JOGGERS

You think that you're being fashion forward, but you are really just wearing sweatpants. They aren't that cool or fancy just because they cinch at the bottom. Also why are there so many crazy colors and patterns? Please chill.

YAAAS [FEMINIST] QUEENS

ZOE TRUNGALÉ
Staff Writer

Comedy Central's "Broad City" (aka my favorite show ever) brings together the perfect mixture of irony, femininity and New York. The show stars Abbi Jacobson and Ilana Glazer, and is full of hilarious, ironic moments that will have you laughing out loud. The eccentric mix of characters and irony can be ridiculous at times which only adds to the charm that it has already accumulated. One of the best parts of the show is the friendship between the two main characters as they navigate adulthood in the funniest way possible.

"Broad City" is a show about two women, about New York, about Jews, about stoners, about broke people. It's a show about life, the ups and downs and the challenges we all face. The show originated during real-life comedians Abbi Jacobson and Ilana Glazer's time in the Upright Citizen's Brigade, an improv group. Originally a web series, the women began pitching "Broad City" to networks and reached out to get the involvement of Amy Poehler, now one of the show's executive producers.

The series has grown greatly in the last year, averaging over 1.2 million viewers per episode last February, and the show became one of Comedy Central's top-rated among younger demographics.

What really makes "Broad City" so special for me is that under the layers of smoke and somewhat vulgar humor, lies a radical vision of women in television. Abbi and Ilana are obviously not the cookie cutter women often portrayed on TV. They are perpetually broke Jewish girls living lives that are definitely not ideal, who hate their jobs, spend a lot of time engaging in an activity considered illegal in a couple of states and discuss potential relationships. What

is so shocking about this to some viewers is not the content as much as the characters. Often men are portrayed as typical stoners or womanizers on TV, which is something that we as a society have come to accept and encourage in men in both the media and reality. Yet as soon as any of these typically male characteristics are attached to female characters, they transcend the rules of femininity and become trashy or indecent.

These qualities are only questioned when they are out of place on a woman, making her a bad example, and yet the unruly qualities that Abbi and Ilana possess are the same ones that make them real, relatable and hilarious. Although by rejecting the rules of the patriarchy, and doing whatever makes them happy, these "trashy" TV stereotypes also become my twenty-something heroes.

One of my favorite things about the show is the relationship dynamic between the two main characters. Often Abbi and Ilana seem like complete opposites as they lead separate romantic, professional and social lives, but when they come together they become partners in crime. Abbi is repressive with her emotions, timid and submissive at work and shy around her neighbor-slash-secret love interest, while Ilana says and does everything and anything she wants, slacks off at work and flaunts her share of flings. The combination of these personalities comes together and create the perfect balance of crazy and lazy.

Watching the series, from a girl's point of view, it feels like a huge feminist accomplishment; watching grown women who aren't perfect, and don't have everything figured out is so comforting and inspiring. Seeing Abbi and Ilana go through Facebook and message all their male friends, then get rejected by all of them under the pretext of a "feminist breakthrough" demonstrates the show's

dysfunctional ability to make you fall in love with it.

The increase in the shows on TV recently that portray women with unfeminine qualities, who aren't ashamed of them, shows like "Amy Schumer" and "Girls," give a glimpse into the future of TV and popular media moving away from stereotypical roles for women. By opening up a more realistic place in the media, girls become more accurately represented, and more welcomed into television.

My love for "Broad City" was sparked when my sister suggested watching it after she started watching it with her friends. I then grew both emotionally and physically attached to the show and all of its characters. I watched the two short seasons ferociously and forced it onto all my friends who now love it almost as much as I do. Of everything that makes the show great, the most important is the unique atmosphere it created on TV that allows girls to have behaviors which are considered unfeminine or whom are rejected on TV or the media, but are definitely occurring in real women's lives.

Abbi and Ilana are so free from the oppression of the patriarchy in everyday life, while the rest of us watching, dream of being so free. The constraints of society and predetermined gender roles push us into a box of behaviors that are forced upon us. It is Abbi and Ilana's disregard for societal and patriarchal norms that makes them my personal heroes, and why all teen girls and young women should follow their lead.

Besides what "Broad City" has taught me about feminism and the portrayal of women in the media, the most important thing I've learned from the show is that there is humor in everything, and life is more fun with a friend.

title graphics by Claire Cannati

Professing his love for student-driven learning

SARAH LUCAS
Staff Writer

On bus 0904 before and after school, students spend the ride listening to lectures, playing games and participating in activities all led by the bus driver, Dr. Burton Pierson (known to the students as “Dr. P”). Pierson, a former University of Texas (UT) genetics professor, lectures on everything from genetically modified foods to the ancient Asian game Go.

“At first, I thought it was weird because he sort of just started talking and it took me a minute to realize he was giving a lecture,” freshman Maya Martinez, who rides the bus on late start days, said.

Pierson was a UT professor for nine years and formerly the head of the biology department at

Concordia. On the bus, he covers topics spanning a range of fields, using his background in science, religion and philosophy to inform his lectures. He said he wants the bus ride to be an educational experience in addition to school.

“I think we are responsible for creating our culture,” Pierson said. “And I think that I want to contribute to school bus culture, so to speak. I don’t think that school bus rides should just be the driver not interacting with the kids, just sleeping and getting to school. I do realize that they need to socialize and sleep, but I also think the ride could be much more.”

He enjoys giving lectures on the bus because there is no specific curriculum he has to touch on. On the late bus, the conversation gets more philosophical, exploring the importance of defining science and creationism’s place in science.

“I talk to them about some of the problems in my view about genetically modified organisms being released into the environment,” Pierson said. “I also, whenever I talk about something, I encourage the kids to go ahead, look it up and form your own opinions. What I’m trying to do is stimulate them to think about these topics and do some of their own research.”

In addition to giving lectures, Pierson brings books and allows students to do activities and play games he thinks will stimulate the bus riders. They do origami and play a game, similar to Mafia, called Werewolf.

“The games don’t get old as easily as the lectures,” freshman , who rides in the mornings, said. “And it’s good for waking you up in the morning.”

The most involved of these activities, however, is what

Pierson calls “Imaginary Radio.” Inspired by community radio, Imaginary Radio allows kids, primarily on the morning / bus, to use the intercom to do their own radio shows based on their interest. One student does the weather, another Japanese culture, another . Two girls do a show called the Fabulous Show, in which they talk about all the things they enjoy.

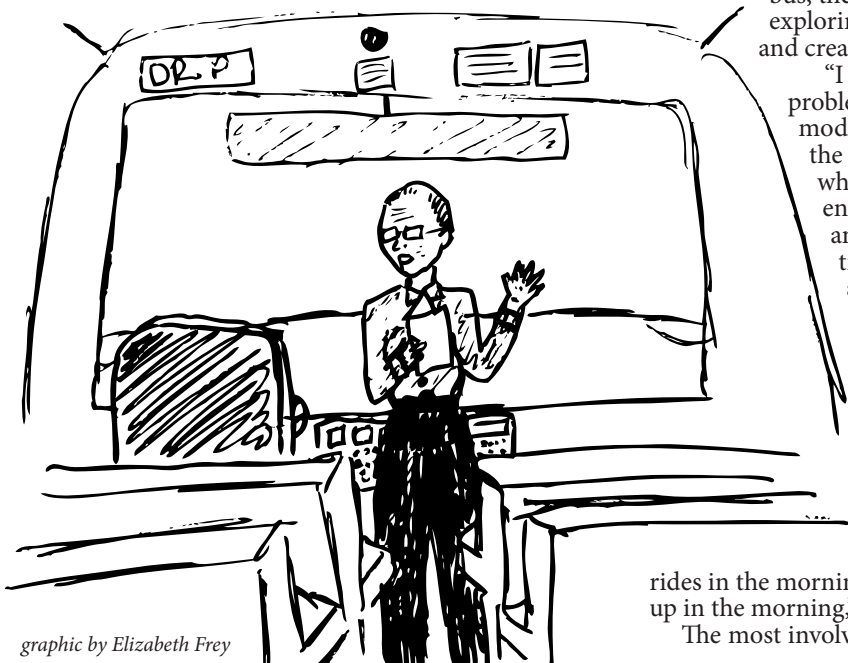
“Kids can have ‘call-in’ questions for them or I’ll transfer call-in questions to them from imaginary listeners,” Pierson said, “I want the kids to see themselves as participants in the educational process.”

The morning bus rides usually end with the bus theme song, written by a student who especially enjoyed riding the bus. They sing it before they arrive at school in the mornings. In all of these activities and lectures, there is a specific idea about education Pierson wants to convey to the students on his bus: they have to put in the time in order to truly learn something, and that everyone has the capacity to learn more.

“One thing we need to get into our public school and into the heads of our students is that your intellectual capacity is controlled by you and it does not have a limit,” he said, “So this whole bogus thing about smart kids and dumb kids is just a lie to those children.”

Another thing that Pierson wants taken away from his bus rides is that teachers require feedback in order to aid your learning. They need to know what does and doesn’t work each class. He says that all children are different and the teacher can’t always know what each student needs to learn best. Overall, Pierson wants students to be more actively involved in their educational process. He thinks that students and teachers have to work together in order to be effective, just like he hopes to do each morning and afternoon on his bus.

“It’s teamwork,” he said. “Education is teamwork.”



graphic by Elizabeth Frey

LBJ juniors attend AISD exploratory meeting

QUINN SIMPSON
Staff Writer

LBJ juniors Charles Boone and Robby Joseph take their seats in the rapidly-filling theater of the Millennium Youth Entertainment Complex. Seated around them are young men of color from all over the city, waiting in anticipation for the groundbreaking discussion that’s about to begin. Here they will share their struggles and successes, all with the goal of establishing a common narrative about what it’s like to be a male minority student in the Austin Independent School District ().

“[It was helpful] just to know that we aren’t the only ones going through these same things as far as school and life— that we still have to study, that we still have to make time for stuff,” Boone said.

Boone and Joseph participated in an exploratory town hall meeting called Young Men of Action through LBJ’s Communities In Schools () program, which is a leadership development and peer support program for at-risk males in high school. The gathering was focused on fostering discussion among young men of color from high schools around the district.

“It’s something that’s been placed just recently by the Austin district where they want to have a high school-led council where a few students will be chosen to sit on that council and maybe discuss different things that could be done to better [],” coordinator Gerardo Garcia said. “It’s still in the works. Nothing is for sure about what’s going to come out of this, but the Young Men of Action, what that is, [the meeting] was kind of the introduction of what it could become.”

scheduled the meeting in an attempt to gain a more complete understanding of the difficulties male high school students of color face as they work to improve themselves and prepare for college.

“We were talking about college and approaches that we would want to help get us registered for college and get us more exposed to colleges,” Joseph said. “We also wrote

down goals on sheets and gave them to the people to tell them what kind of programs would be good for LBJ to help us with that stuff.”

The conference was thematically similar in its goals to the club, which according to Garcia also seeks to help young men of color succeed in high school and prepare themselves for the future.

“It’s a leadership and character building program that allows students to come into the program and do group activities, do service learning projects and other things like that,” Garcia said. “It allows them to get into different roles that they wouldn’t have been a part of if this program wasn’t in place, and allow them to become leaders in the community and the school.”

According to Garcia, he chose Boone and Joseph to participate in the meeting because they have both demonstrated their dedication to improving themselves and contributing to the community. The two have already advanced to the highest level in the program relatively early in their high school careers, and Garcia believes they have the potential to carry their ideas and values forward to the next academic year.

“Charles and Robby, they’re both at the ambassador level, and the reason I chose them is because...they really, at least in the short time that I’ve been here, they’ve been showing me that they’re invested in the program and that they care about the program and that they want to go above and beyond,” Garcia said.

Boone said that the meeting strengthened his resolve to succeed in his high school career regardless of any challenges that could arise.

“[I learned] pretty much just to not give up, even though there are things that might get hard and difficult but still just try because there’s always some way,” Boone said. “Somehow you can be successful.”

DEBATE

continued from page 1

Cui joined debate at LASA freshman year, and was inspired to for a variety of reasons. While his argumentative nature and his brother’s previous experience drew him initially, debate soon became a niche where he was able to fit in.

“It’s an esoteric activity, but the result of that is that we’re a very tight knit community,” Cui said. “I think many of my closest friends are involved in debate.”

A majority of the debaters at LASA compete in policy debate. In this particular style of debate, teams must learn to advocate for both sides of a core controversy within U.S. policy. Students who participate in debate can be exposed to new concepts, and, consequently, form more views about the federal government of the United States. Cui said that he was exposed to a wide variety of literature bases, ranging from critical theory to communications studies, that he never would have come across sans debate.

“When you do this enough, you begin to realize that issues are rarely black-and-white, and, as a result, your understanding of the world becomes colored by nuance and interrogation rather than dogmatic assertion,” Cui said.

The exposure of students to public policy can cultivate interest that extends well beyond high school debate. This year’s topic, which covers the federal government’s surveillance practices, was interesting to Cui because of its legal justifications. Cui said it is for this reason specifically that he wants to attend law school and do constitutional law. Murdock has similar aspirations, as she is interested in becoming a lawyer or going into political sciences, and dreams of becoming a Supreme Court Justice.

“[Debate] has made me so much more interested and made me realize how much you can do when you’re in the government,” Murdock said. “If you help pass legislation, or help ;make decisions, you can change the way things are.”

According to Cui, traits found in good debaters include assertiveness, curiosity, and a willingness to learn from mistakes. Murdock said that debating has made her much more confident because she’s learned to speak in front of others and hold her own. Cui also identified motivation as crucial to success because debaters are responsible for allocating time to complete their work, which typically includes hours of research, case writing, making affirmative and negative positions and directly preparing for actual competitions. Cui spends at least four lunches per week at debate. LASA sophomore Kalyani Allums and Cui’s partner Murdock said they also devote much of their time to debate.

“Debate does a lot of things for me, it makes me better educated about the world; about philosophy, politics, the way our government works and awful things our government does,” Allums said. “But it’s also just taken a lot from my life, too. I don’t have much of a social life anymore.”

Unlike with school, debaters are not offered a reprieve from their work over the summer. Instead, it is a time they get more things done. Murdock said debaters begin most of their research for the year during vacation since the season begins with a tournament immediately after returning to school. They also develop their skills by participating in intensive debate camps over several

weeks during the summer: Murdock and Allums attended a camp for 5 weeks at Gonzaga University, while Cui attended a 7-week camp at the University of Michigan.

“Debate camp is all about immersing you into debate, so that you’re literally surrounded 24/7 by debate, whether in the form of lectures, practice debates, researching, or practice speeches,” Cui said. “The Michigan camp massively improved my skills as a debater, partly because the lab leaders [teachers] were so accommodating there. Essentially, they were willing to help you as long as you asked for it, so they were always willing to talk with me after lab or to listen to my speech redoes.”

Although its hypercompetitiveness makes debate stressful, debaters continue with the activity for that very reason. Murdock said gratification for their efforts is almost never immediate, which is discouraging. Allums said she’s wondered why she continues many times, but the addictive combination of winning and proving your knowledge makes debate tough to abandon.

“It’s taxing and difficult, but that also means it never becomes stale,” Cui said. “I once heard debate described as a ‘never-ending research project,’ which is a pretty decent approximation of it. It also attracts people who all have the drive and determination to win, which forces me to strive harder to beat them – and that makes winning so much more valuable.”

The major successes of this season are the TOC bids, as this accomplishment bolsters the team’s record, and adds on the attraction of the LASA debate program. However, Cui identified the main outcome of the bids as the team changing their outlook on measuring success.

Murdock said that securing these bids this year will add something to their efforts in the future, as the team will have more motivation to sustain their achievements.

“Five years ago, we hadn’t even gotten a single bid to the TOC before, so our goals back then were just to get the bid,” Cui said. “If we got a bid, we would’ve felt happy – but we also wouldn’t expect to win the next debate. LASA debate has always been a small-to-medium sized team relative to the national circuit, but we’ll be looking to be one of the bigger teams going forward.”

Cui identifies his biggest accomplishments as a competitor to be qualifying for the Tournament of Champions, and earning the fifth speaker award at the St. Mark’s invitational, as it was the first time he earned a speaker award at a major national tournament. While he takes pride in these accolades, Cui said he equally cherished the opportunity during his sophomore year to coach a team of then-novices (LASA juniors Ezra Serrins and Mason Marriott-Voss, both now varsity debaters) to the finals of the St. Mark’s Novice Round-up, a national tournament designated for novices.

“As competitive as I am, I think there’s something unique about the process of coaching — about seeing the novices grow and be rewarded for their hard work,” Cui said.

“I’m not exactly sure why, but there’s also something transcendental about that group effort — where all of the varsity and novices worked together towards that common goal — that made the result even more valuable than an individual accolade.”



LASA senior Isaac Cui (far right) and LASA juniors and Cameron Murdock (second and third from the right) with the rest of the debate team at the tournament where they qualified for the Tournament of Champions.



Getting the crew together

CHLOE EDMISTON & CLARA MORSE
Sports Editor & Staff Writer

Out on the waters of Lady Bird Lake, when most high schoolers are doing homework or watching Netflix, several dozen girls congregate. They sit together in freezing weather, in thin boats and thinner exercise clothing, waiting for their coaches to call for the start. All over the lake, rowing is growing.

Rowing is not a UIL sport, and requires an off-campus PE slip through the district to gain credit for PE. One club in particular, Texas Rowing Center (TRC), is a popular choice for LASA students who use rowing to fulfill their P.E. credits.

"I started for PE credit, which I think is how most people started," LASA sophomore Anna Davis said. "And then... I was like, 'I need to be doing something more with my life.' And I needed an extracurricular that was going to keep me occupied because I did nothing before [rowing], so I just sort of stuck with it."

Davis has been rowing at TRC for over two years now, and has been on varsity crew for a year. She's raced with TRC at several rowing races that are called regattas.

"Competing [is my favorite part of rowing]," said Davis. "It's a lot of fun because we really work hard all the time and then being able to strut your stuff on the racecourse is something that makes me really proud."

In addition to the Head of the Hooch regatta, 10 rowers from the juniors program and many more Masters rowers went to the Head Of The Charles, an international regatta that draws over 400,000 spectators every year. TRC boasts over 200 rowers between the recreational and competitive rowing programs. Yet according to Grim, although the teams have upwards of 40 rowers on them, it's

a very tight-knit community with a lot of team spirit.

"Rowing has helped me with teamwork because I'm able to focus on what other people are doing as well [as what I'm doing]," Grim said. "I really love the team spirit; I think it's one of the better parts of rowing. It's really nice to be around such supportive people."

Anna Odell, a member of varsity girls team who's been rowing at TRC for almost four years, agrees. "Everyone just

has to be on the same page," Odell said. "If [just] one person is moving out of sync, even just by a quarter of a second, it messes up the boat. And if people have their hands at different heights, it makes the boat unbalanced. Everyone just has to be working very hard and very focused at the same time."

Davis also appreciates the diverse crew. She said that she has met many of her closest friends there, and that despite the large team there is a lot of team spirit.

"I like rowing a lot because you get to talk to people in different grades," Davis said. "Some of my closest friends are seniors and juniors, where that doesn't really happen with people at school. So it's good to get advice from them, and a different perspective."

The teams have practice daily after school, regardless of weather, and regular out of state regattas that largely conflict

with school days. TRC Juniors Program head coach Falesha Thrash said that while school work, the daily practices and regattas on the weekends can be overwhelming for new rowers, most students establish a routine to cope.

"I think that a lot of the rowers that we see come through, if they struggle in the beginning, they find themselves with their time management and are able to really figure it out and unfortunately the ones that don't, they don't stick around as long as the other ones," Thrash said. "The ones who are most successful in their rowing are the ones who are most successful in finding balance. I think that it does help, just with the discipline and responsibilities, that they have with rowing and everything."

Odell is one of a few coxswains, who are in charge of steering the larger boats and motivating the rowers during races, on the varsity girls team. She has been to almost every varsity girls regatta over the past three years, and she said that rowing helped her to learn the importance of time management.

"It's made my time management skills a lot better," Odell said. "I know as a team, we have practices two hours a day, five days a week, but when we're really training for the big regattas... we bump it up to four hours a day, six... or seven days a week. And that's really intense. But you can't fail

school, you have to learn how to work with it. You have to really use every hour and every minute of your time wisely."

Although this is a heavily team-based sport, individual rowers can also make great strides. Many are using TRC as a launchpad for a possible college rowing career. Recruiters from schools such as the University of Texas often come and oversee practices.

"Pretty much when I started coxing I thought that this was what I wanted to do in college," Odell said. "[And now] I've committed to the Brown University--they're very well ranked in the NCAA. So I'll be coxing for them next year."

Odell was recruited by the Brown University and said that she was excited about the opportunity to cox for them, and glad for the extra opportunities and advantages that her coxing recruiting provided her. Fellow teammates such as Grim look to Odell and others on the team as models of where rowing could take them.

"I think I'll probably be rowing through high school," Grim said. "But if at the end of high school, rowing scholarships are on the radar, then I might consider doing it in college too."

Davis also said she would be rowing until the end of high school. Many of the girls at TRC have been on the team since middle school, which helps while developing long-term goals.

"[Last year] I talked to my coach... because I was upset that I wasn't being put in the best boats," Davis said. "She told me that you just have to stick with it, and you're not going to get results tomorrow or next month, it's years and years of work. And then it's just going to all turn out if you just stick with it. It's hard to remember sometimes, but that's what I keep in the back of my mind."

"The ones who are most successful in their rowing are the ones who are most successful in finding balance."

-TRC Coach Falesha Thrash

Languages broom[ball] so hard

ASHLEY THOMAS
Staff Writer

Rushing full force across a hockey rink, students went into full battle royale on Dec. 6 during the annual Latin Broomball event at Chaparral Ice from 12 a.m. to 2 a.m., hosted by the LASA Latin Club and open to all students. For LASA Latin teacher Byron Browne, this tradition has been part of his yearly teaching routine for over a decade.

"Broomball is not that important for Latin Club but, rather, I think it's important for the foreign language department and the school as a whole," Browne said. "I mean, most of these students need the cuts and bruises and a little bloodletting now and again."

LASA senior and Latin Club consul Raina Rahman describes broomball as a sport like hockey, only without skates. Sticks that resemble brooms are used to hit a puck into the other team's goal.

"It's very fun and incredibly amusing to watch people slip and fall over," Rahman said. "Usually about halfway through we switch to playing dodgeball, so it's just all around a fun time... there's lots of laughing and falling involved. Really it's huge opportunity to goof around. What could be better than running around on ice with a

bunch of your friends until 2 a.m.?"

For some kids, like LASA sophomore Kyle O'Rourke, it was their first time setting foot on ice without skates, while others have followed the tradition throughout their four years at LASA.

"Broomball was really fun," O'Rourke said. "It was a great experience because we just got to go and hang out

"I mean, most of these students need the cuts and bruises and a little bloodletting now and again."

-LASA Latin teacher Byron Browne

on ice and we don't get to do that, that often. I just had fun knocking people over. I didn't really play the game, I just kind of ran up and slid underneath people. I was really cold and I have a lot of bruises. I wish I would have worn a long sleeve shirt and gloves. Bring friends because

broomball is lonely if you're by yourself."

Over 60 students turned out to participate with their friends in the event, along with Browne. This number exceeded the predicted number of 40 students. According to Latin club council member and LASA senior Alisha Ahmed, the turnout was great, compared to recent years. In the past the majority of attendees were Spanish students, who competed against students of all the other languages. This year's Latin club officers hoped the event would reach a wider population of students and make the tradition as popular as it used to be.

"Broomball has been a tradition at LASA for over 15 years; it used to be a huge competition between the languages, usually the Spanish kids against all the other languages..." Ahmed said. "Unfortunately in recent years the competition kind of diminished when LASA got new language teachers... Students can help support Latin club by coming to broomball and making it as big of a tradition as it used to be..."

Ahmed has been working hard to generate interest in the event. According to her it's all about the first few people.

"All it takes is to get one student interested and they'll bring their friends who then bring other friends," Ahmed said. "The more people there are the more fun it is."



LASA students swarm the ball at Austin's Chaparral Ice late at night on Saturday, Dec. 5th. The broomball event has been a LASA tradition, run by LASA Latin teacher Byron Browne, with funds going to support the LASA language programs and a possible charity element, as is similar in past years of the event. "In all honesty, this event doesn't pertain specifically to Latin. We just do it because it's super fun and a great way to bond," LASA junior Alisha Ahmed said. photo courtesy of James Choi.



The real MVPs: Four of LBJ athletics' best

Isaac Metcalf: Cross Country **Dayla Woller: Volleyball** **Aduru & Yarlagadda: Tennis** **De'andre Wytaske: Football**

This year, the LBJ cross country team won the district championships with the help of LASA senior Isaac Metcalf. Along with a huge improvement on his running time, Isaac's leadership of the team really set him apart according to LASA guidance counselor and cross country coach Shannon Bergeron. Bergeron said that Metcalf was one of the players that really made all the difference this season.

"He's sort of one of these unsung hero type of people in that he was always there early, he always knew what had to be done and he always stepped up," Bergeron said. "Whenever I needed him for something he was there. Mostly I think he was just a really positive person to have on the team."

It's clear in Metcalf's words that cross country is something that he loves. Metcalf said that the meets were one of his favorite things about running cross country.

"The meets are always a lot of fun," Metcalf said. "You get to skip school sometimes and you spend all day at this really nice campus. You get to run a race and then just hang out for hours and have fun and play sports."

Metcalf's best performance came during the district meet.

"Every single 1500 that he ran was faster than the last one," Bergeron said. "We were all really shocked and I thought to myself, 'If you can run that fast on your 1500 then your 5K needs to be a lot faster,' and next week was districts, where he really shined. That was definitely his best event."

While the cross country season ended short, Metcalf still said he has big hopes for the future. Metcalf says that he hopes to see the LBJ team continue to grow and improve.

"I'm hoping to run in college, maybe not on the varsity team, but intramural at least," Metcalf said. "I hope that our cross country team gets stronger, and I hope that coach Trejo sticks around. We had a lot of freshmen who were looking really strong this year, so hopefully in three or four years we'll have a really strong team. I'd like to be able to come back and see us competing for state. That'd be amazing."

Finishing 9-17, the Lady Jags' volleyball team did not perform as well as many team members had hoped for. In acknowledgement of their poor season, LASA junior and team captain Dayla Woller said that the team could've put more wins on their schedule.

"We could've done better," Woller said. "There were some close games with Crockett and Cedar Creek that we probably should've won. Well we definitely could've beat Crockett but I was sick for one of the games so it didn't go as well as it could've. We did okay overall but we could've done better."

Woller plays as a setter for the Lady Jags, which she says is an important role. A setter acts as a leader for the team, especially during games.

"I'm our only setter which is pretty important because the setter is essentially the quarterback of the team, they're their leader," Woller said. "So during practice I'm kind of involved in every drill."

Woller attempts to keep the team in good spirit during the games by helping teammates get over poor plays. According to Woller, this skill is difficult to come by and varies from player to player.

"You have to make sure that people know how to get over their mistakes and keep going, which is a difficult thing to do as another person because it's very individual," Woller said. "I try to help them in that aspect but it also falls a lot onto their own mentality. I think that's one of the things that you have to figure out."

Since last season, Woller said she has become better at motivating the team, which helped the team improve from their 4-19 season last year.

"I stay on the court the entire game which is important because you have to keep spirits high," Woller said. "Volleyball is a very mental game as well as physical so you have to be able to keep the team going even when people make mistakes and I think I've gotten better at that. It's really important for winning games and becoming a team."

This year, the LBJ tennis team improved from last year behind the arms of Chaitu Aduru and Naveen Yarlagadda. Last year the team was district champions but performed poorly in area. This year however, Aduru and Yarlagadda led the team to go undefeated until their match against Cedar Creek. According to Coach Corey Snyder, both boys helped younger players get prepared for the bigger tournaments.

"Both of them are very patient with the younger players and help them work on a specific skill whether it's a drill or a stroke," Snyder said. "They're very patient. They've also not just been helpful doing strokes and skills, but doing fitness and setting good examples for fitness, and go out there and run to make sure everyone else does. They're good teachers."

Aduru and Yarlagadda both play in leagues outside of school and have been doing so for several years. Snyder believes that this additional skill and training helps them to lead the team and to be useful assets during practice.

"The most valuable thing they do at practice is help out the younger players," Snyder said. "They have a lot of outside training experience and they've had a lot of tennis lessons their whole lives, so they have a significant amount of knowledge they share with the younger players."

Both Aduru and Yarlagadda believe that practice the week before a big match helps them perform. For Aduru, practice is not the only important thing to do in preparation for a game.

"I just usually practice a lot the week before and make sure that all my shots are tuned up and checking to prevent injuries," Aduru said. "Also just eating right before the match."

With all the things both Aduru and Yarlagadda bring to the team, one of the most important is to act as a model for the younger players, according to Snyder.

"They give the younger players something to look up to and something to aspire to be, skill wise," Snyder said.

Last year, the Jags were led by LBJ senior quarterback Avery Jackson. After losing Jackson and many other senior players, there was much speculation as to who would take up the banner. Current LBJ senior De'andre Wytaske, last year's starting running back, was not who many believed would fill in the position. But according to Coach Andrew Jackson, Wytaske took the change in position in stride.

"We missed something in passing, but for not playing quarterback last year, he did a hell of a job," Jackson said. "He stuck in, that's a pressure spot and he did a great job."

Wytaske led the team to go undefeated in district and 8-4 overall. Wytaske said the recipe for this success was performing at key moments and being willing to take on a new position with no reservations.

"I feel like I contributed as a captain and leader that stepped up and played a quarterback position since we had nobody else to play," Wytaske said. "I made some great plays when we needed them."

For the first time in three years, the Jags defeated division rivals McCallum. Jackson said that during this game, Wytaske's skill and athletic ability were apparent.

"He can really make you look bad too," Jackson said. "We ran a play 'Tamika' against McCallum, he split right open and he shot out of there like a cannon. Sometimes you just can't believe how fast this guy is."

Despite having a promising end of the regular season with shutouts against Crockett, Lanier and Travis in their last three games, the Jags were unable to put together a playoff run. Wytaske said that the team played well all season long but just couldn't perform at the end.

"The season went very well," Wytaske said. "We all played hard throughout the season, it just ended short."

Charity basketball game

continued from page 1

"I was in Fire Academy, and I was wearing my jacket and then one of the students said 'Hey, why not firefighters?'" Joseph said.

All of the cans collected at the event and in the weeks leading up to the event will be donated to the Capital Area Food Bank. This is not, however, the first charity event that SLIME, whose motto is 'reducing community negativity through excellence in community service and education,' has spearheaded since the club began last year. The group has also participated in food drives through A Legacy of Giving and has worked with the Gus Garcia Middle School National Junior Honor Society to benefit Meals on Wheels. SLIME sponsor and LBJ life skills teacher Rhyman Barnes said that the event was both a good way to end the semester and to benefit the community.

"It was a joint venture with the fire department to bring people together on a positive note... so it's kind of like our send-off for the year, pretty much," Barnes said. "We want to bring people together on a positive note. Everything is free as long as you kids bring in your canned goods to get in the game."

However, this game was not the only time to donate canned goods. Joseph said that this event was the culmination of a two week long canned food drive, and that planning the event was easy as the Austin Fire Department was quick to say yes to the invitation. LASA senior Cat Llamas attended the game with her Fire Academy

class, and enjoyed getting the chance to both support charity and the two teams.

"I liked seeing everyone come together for the food bank," Llamas said. "It was also great to [see] everyone supporting the LBJ faculty and the fire department."

Llamas said her highlights of the game were watching the fire department team consistently hit three pointers and lay ups, despite the overall casual nature of the game.

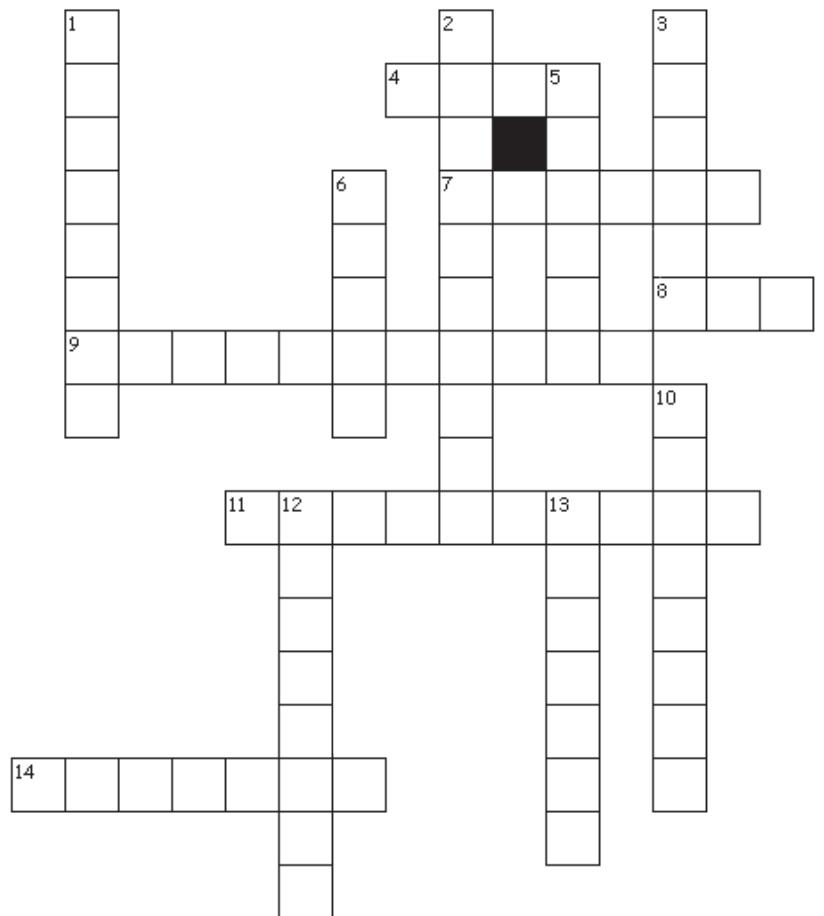
"My favorite part about watching the game was that it was not very good basketball but it was still very enjoyable," Llamas said. "I remember that they told us if you wanted to see some pretty bad basketball you should come to the game so that was funny."

As for the game itself, students had mixed opinions as to who they hoped would win. Joseph said, even though he wanted the teachers to win, he thought the firefighters, who are constantly training as a part of their job, would take home the prize. In the end, it was the teachers who won by a one point buzzer beater. Hyson, who was contacted by an LBJ coach to encourage him to play with his firefighter co-workers, said he was excited for the opportunity.

"I've been playing all my life, and I'm playing on the firefighter basketball team and I work here on the LBJ Fire Academy, so we've been working with LBJ for years - I've got a lot of respect," Hyson said.



The Austin Fire Department team poses prior to their basketball game against the LBJ teachers. Members of the team are from departments across Austin, and some work with the LBJ Fire Academy. photo by Mateen Kontoravidis



Across

4. Cross country runners got first team all-district.
7. How many years have the Jaguars beat the Raiders in football.
8. How many players are on the volleyball court at one time?
9. Many football players have quit the team this year due to getting hit hard and ending up with _____ last year.
11. As of Dec. 14 LBJ girls _____ was undefeated in district with a 3-0 record.
14. _____ football is a competition in which people select imaginary teams from among the players in a league and score points according to the actual performance of their players.

Down

1. LBJ football's _____ record was 7-0.
2. Who did LBJ play in first round playoffs? (Two words)
3. LBJ Volleyball beat _____ in all 3 matches on Oct. 16.
5. How many players are on the football field at one time?
6. What round of playoffs did LBJ football make it to?
10. Who competed at the USA Track and Field Regionals this year? (Two words)
12. The first game LBJ boys basketball won this season was on Nov. 24 against _____.
13. LBJ volleyball gained a new coach this year named Juan _____, who was previously a club volleyball coach.



LBJ Basketball: Hoop Dreams

LBJ seniors Jalen Spivey and Buddah Mott and sophomore Shasirae Harvey face off with the rest of the boys basketball team against Del Valle at the first day of the Bowie HS Basketball Tournament. The team lost 48-55, and in the championship game on the third day of the tournament, fell to Bryan HS 73-75. "I'm just going to focus on helping my teammates as much as possible," LASA junior Henry Harrington said. photo courtesy of Becky & Jim Gdula.

MAX RANDALL
Staff Writer

Dribbling and the squeaking of freshly worn sneakers signify the five-man LBJ basketball team has taken the court. Coach Freddy Roland, who has brought LBJ 18 district championships, stands off to the side, yelling at the players to hustle harder. Even though the team lost their first game against Austin High School on Nov. 16, Roland says he's confident the team can go far this year.

"We have an opportunity to do really well this season," Roland said. "At least as good as last year and maybe even better. We've got some new kids I'm anxious to see play and then we've got a very exciting schedule."

The team has spent countless hours to get the players at the top of their game in preparation for this year's season. LASA junior Zach Sessa said that the team has clocked in a lot of time to form the group they are today.

"We have just been trying to get chemistry together, working hard," Sessa said. "We've spent a lot of time in the gym trying to get shots up."

Much of LBJ's practice time has been spent training a whole new troop of underclassmen to star in their games, even though the bulk of high school teams sport mostly upperclassmen as the starting varsity players. The challenge of bringing the players up to standards has been left to Roland.

"Right now I'm trying to get the young ones to understand what hard work really

is," Roland said. "We'll have to grow up fast and we won't have time to mess around."

One such new face is LBJ sophomore Shasirae Harvey, who echoed the fact that there are a lot of new players on this year's team. However, Harvey said that the presence of new faces is not necessarily a concern of his.

"We've got a lot of new players," Harvey said. "But a lot of new faces that really know how to play."

Harvey said that in his first year on varsity, the legacy of the team as one of Austin's best is a definite factor in his dedication.

"This year I've got to be a leader," Harvey said. "I've got to take things seriously and not play around."

This level of skill is not only expected by old players and fans, but from the coaches as well. LBJ senior Jalen Spivey said that the coaches from day one assume the players can make up for lost talent.

"It's a lot of hard work," said Spivey. "The coaches come and expect you to be able to do what last year's players could do."

According to the players, going to the playoffs is as certain as always. LASA junior Henry Harrington said that he's

excited about both playing for the team as well as seeing where the season will go.

"It's really exciting to play with LBJ," Harrington said. "They're a really good team and they actually have a chance for the playoffs which is really exciting."

However the players were quick to articulate that being on the LBJ varsity team is no cake walk. Sessa said that being on varsity is a whole other level compared to junior varsity.

"Being on varsity is a lot [more fast] paced," Sessa said. "You have to release the ball quicker and you have to make decisions a lot faster. It's

"We've got a lot of new players. But a lot of new faces that really know how to play."

-LBJ sophomore Shasirae Harvey

a lot more intense."

The level of competition is also nothing to be trifled with. Spivey said that the opposing teams LBJ faces present worthy challenges.

"There are always going to be bigger, better people on teams you go up against," Spivey said. "It's hard, but it's a team thing and that's what [you've] got to do."

The playoffs are a long way down the road, but Roland said that the team has grown and progressed since last year's season, in which the team was stymied in the third round by Cedar Park's one point lead.

"What I think I've learned, and hopefully the kids have too, is that in close situations we have to be smarter and to have our head really in the game," Roland said. "We can't wait until we're in the playoffs and then disappoint everybody."

LBJ's strengths and weaknesses play a big role into how the season will go. According to Spivey, the team sometimes has some issues, but they are not to be worried about.

"The team sometimes has a bad attitude, and sometimes we'll rush for the ball without thinking," Spivey said. "That's about it though. Other than that we're good."

Many members of the team said that improvement is by far the biggest thing on the team's radar for the upcoming weeks. With time and the team's raw talent, thinking as a true team is the next thing in line to work on, according to Sessa.

"We've got a lot of talent," Sessa said. "It's just we have to focus more on playing as a team instead of thinking individually. We just have to keep practicing and improving."

With hopes of recovering from last year's dramatic loss in the third round, both the LBJ and LASA communities will watch with a keen eye at what these new, young players will bring to the table. However, according to Roland, he has the answers on how to climb the ranks.

"Hard work and listening by both the players and the coaches could get us there and hopefully I'm the coach to bring that trophy home," Roland said. "You've got to be a little bit good and a little bit lucky."

'The face of Austin 5A tennis'

ELAN McMINN
Staff Writer

The LBJ tennis team swung high and low through Districts, all the way to areas, where they were finally sent home with a loss. They improved on their last year's efforts, winning first in their district, but losing by a slim margin to Cedar Creek. The whole team is involved in competitions like these, so every player counts when it come down to it. One such player, is LASA sophomore Nirali Devgan.

The LBJ tennis team was defeated by a score of 9-10 to Cedar Creek in areas. It was down to the wire with the score going back and forth, both teams just waiting and hoping to get the final edge over the other. The matches kept finishing, LBJ winning some and Cedar Creek winning some. It was like a volley where no one was gaining an advantage. Finally Cedar Creek was able to win one extra match to break the 9-9 tie and clinch the match. Despite ultimately losing the match, the LBJ tennis team did not walk away empty-handed. This was the furthest they had made it in the fall season in team history.

"We made it to area, which is a big deal, and people don't realize it, but that means we did pretty well," Devgan said. "We are the best in our district."

The tennis team recently finished their fall team season in area after beating out McCallum, Bastrop and Cedar Creek. In the fall season, teams compete head to head where each player wins points for the team as a whole, whereas in the spring season, players advance individually. They have improved from last season, actually going into area. According to Devgan, this success can be attributed to a strong new freshman class, the returning sophomores who drastically improved from last year, and the upperclassmen who made solid performances from their previous years' experience.

"Last year we had a lot of freshmen come in with me, and we were playing for our first time in high school, so it was a little different," Devgan said. "This year we are more experienced, and we know how it works so we have been doing better and winning more."

The recent success could mean stronger years to come or an even stronger singles and doubles season, but having new freshmen means that they can be trained to exactly what the team needs up next. James Koepfer, and Rajan Topiwala, the two incoming freshmen, were both playing outside of school, so they made up for the lack of numbers with higher quality of play.

"It just brings in new blood," Devgan said. "We can train them to what we need, so if we need doubles or

singles players, then it is really helpful, and it just gives more people on the team, so more people have different opportunities."

A LASA junior English teacher, and the coach of the tennis team, Corey Snyder uses his knowledge of teaching to help kids in school, and of tennis to improve the tennis team on the court. Snyder said, though he didn't have any prior knowledge coming into tennis, he learned along the way, and has been able to grow into the coach LBJ has needed. Snyder said that he was very happy with the overall improvement of the team, this season, and with all the strong players playing for him.

He believes that carrying this improved squad into the spring season will allow them to go further in competitions, and possibly win some of the tournaments they will be

"This year we are more experienced, and we know how it works so we have been doing better"

-LASA sophomore Nirali Devgan

competing in.

"Last year, of the 16 players our district sent to Regionals, 13 were from LBJ, so we are the face of 5A tennis in Austin at the regional level," Snyder said. "Spring is also tournament season. We play five tournaments, plus district and regionals."

The LBJ tennis team has been especially strong in the spring season, and the momentum from making it to area will hopefully continue into this new season. Snyder said that there is a reputation to uphold, and this upcoming season will be no exception. Additionally, he said that they have built on the strengths of last year's team, and with the sophomores improving and the freshmen, this new varsity team will have no trouble putting down the competition.

"Our varsity boys are very strong and we have picked up a few new recruits to strengthen their side even further," Snyder said. "We have had trouble in years past getting as many wins on the girls' side, but that has been turning around this year."

The sport itself occurs year-round so that they don't get out of form and according to LASA junior Thomas Gilburg, you need to put in more work than just going to school practice, and to master the sport, you need a trainer working with you one on one. He believes that the sport is about mental strength, and adjusting to the learning curve of the sport as a whole.

"Tennis is all about technique and form, also it's about mental strength, one must have a strong mind in order to play but also a strong body," Gilburg said. "Tennis has a



LASA junior Aidan Evans-Strong reaches towards a ball during the 26-5A fall District meet, which the Jaguars swept, winning district and continuing on to area.



LASA sophomores Nirali Devgan and Alice Sullivan play a doubles match during the 26-5A Fall District meet, which the Jaguars won. photos courtesy of Kari Siegenthaler.

steep learning curve; one can't simply practice at school in order to get better."

Gilburg feels that this year was a very big accomplishment for not only him, but for the team, and he has high hopes for the coming spring season. He has helped LBJ to two district titles, but getting to area and coming so close Gilburg said, is a great feeling. Gilburg said that there isn't really an off-season when it comes to tennis, and if he wants to keep in form for more titles, he has a long break ahead of him. Despite the difficult learning curve, and the constant necessity to keep practicing, Gilburg wants to let people know that once you can play tennis, you carry it with you for the rest of your life.

"One has to practice for years with a trainer in order to get good but when one gets to that point, it's very fun and is a life sport" Gilburg said.

First LBJ grads leave high school with associate degrees

Jags win 12th consecutive rivalry game against Reagan... LASA robotics team wins 2nd place at Worlds competition... Floods strike Austin, leave power schools sans Oct. 30... LASA Science Olympiad team crowned 3rd in the nation ... Alley Cat Players members advance to Thespians nationals... Pool Jags win district... Project Lead the Way hosts summer community forum... LBJ wins Central Texas Get Schooled Attendance Challenge

Carter Pace and Maisie Sajbel crowned LASA homecoming king and queen... Luis Gomez and Cynthia Sanchez win LBJ homecoming king and queen... Swimming program begins to train LBJ students as lifeguards... Both boys and girls basketball teams win district... Lauren Graeber, Sarah Barrentine win LASA and LBJ Teacher of the Year, respectively... AISD superintendent Paul Cruz visits to learn more about new restorative circles program... Longtime band director Don Haynes retires after 39 years... Divine Canines visit campus to student stress relieve ... LASA leads teacher anti-bias workshops... SLIME and Ladies of Distinction lead Easter celebration

A year in review

2015 was filled with both highs and lows for LBJ and LASA, from graduating LBJ's first class of ECHS students earning associate's degrees in June to enduring a school-wide blackout in October. Students have participated in everything from five Alley Cat Players shows to holiday celebrations to homecoming traditions. As the year comes to an end, The Liberator reminisces on some of our favorite moments from 2015 while looking excitedly towards the new year.



photo courtesy of Sonya Richards-Ross



photo courtesy of Yoko Kato



photo by Mazie Hyams



photo by Emily Kolodney



photo by Isahel Saralegui



photo by Sam Zerni



photo by Sasha McMinn



photo courtesy of Peter Brancaccio

Clockwise from top left: 1. Seniors from the LBJ class of 2015 pose with Olympic track star Sonya Richards-Ross, who coordinated the donation of an entire prom experience to the senior girls complete with designer dresses, hair, makeup and prom tickets. 2. During their trip throughout Japan in June and July, LASA students along with chaperone and engineering and astronomy teacher Alison Earnhart take a group picture. The group traveled to different areas in Japan, taking a language and culture class and visiting schools and temples. 3. Strutting down the makeshift runway, LASA senior Becca Saulsberry models an outfit designed by LASA senior Emily Etheredge during the annual Threadfair fashion show in May. The show was entirely student-run, and featured LASA students and others from around the Austin area as designers, models, hair and makeup artists and behind-the-scenes help. 4. LASA juniors Dylan Baldrige and Corey Cochran-Lepiz act in "Midsummer Night's Dream," the Alley Cat Players' second show of the 2015-2016 season. 5. Five students in the first-ever class of LBJ students to receive an associate degree upon high school graduation celebrate before their official commencement ceremony with Austin Community College. The Early College High School program allows students to graduate with up to 30 hours of credit through Austin Community College, and many of the graduates went onto four-year universities to transfer their credits after graduation. 6. LBJ alumnus Aubrey Meeks swims a lap during a 12 week swim class last semester in partnership with the Austin Parks and Recreation Department and YMCA. YMCA swim instructors taught LBJ students in the program swimming skills so those students could be employed as lifeguards during the summer. 7. LBJ seniors Cynthia Sanchez and Luis Gomez walk down Nelson Field after the announcement that they'd become the 2015 LBJ homecoming queen and king. Right after her name was called, Sanchez jumped into her splits as she'd promised her friends on First Ladies she would do if she won. 8. LASA alumnae decorate cupcakes in anticipation of Valentine's Day. The event was hosted for LASA seniors in the class of 2015 by parents who hoped to help the students de-stress and enjoy their last semester at LASA.