

THE VOICE

VOL. 2 NO. 1 HILLSBOROUGH HIGH SCHOOL: 466 RAIDER BLVD, HILLSBOROUGH TOWNSHIP, NJ 08844 MAY 2026

Beyond the bean: Bloom adds another option for daily dose of caffeine

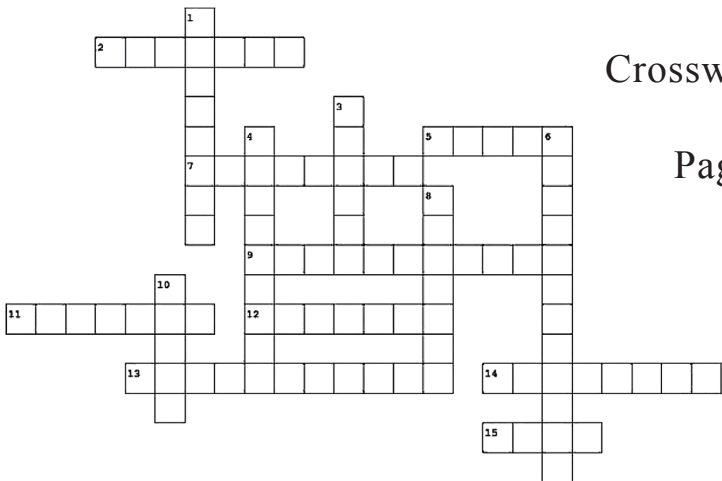
By Nicholas Rios
Features Editor



At the start of the 2025-2026 school year, Hillsborough High School started to sell Bloom, a sparkling energy drink, in the cafeteria following student requests for the drink. “We’ve had many students ask for Bloom to be sold in the cafeteria,” said Kathy Major, head of food services in the school cafeteria. Students in the cafeteria throughout the lunch periods have bought many energy drinks, with the school selling almost 40 energy drinks a day alone. Caffeine itself isn’t new in the cafeteria; the school has sold many drinks with caffeine, such as Coke Zero, Colombe Iced Coffee and even coffee. However, Bloom contains 180mg of caffeine, which some health organizations consider almost double the recommended amount of caffeine a teenager or young adult should be consuming. To compare, a 12-ounce cup of coffee contains about 120-150 mg depending and a can of diet soda comes in around 35-45 mg, depending on the brand options like Colombe contain around 120 mg, depending on the flavor.

daily.
on the strength
and flavor. Iced coffee

Major said that she thinks that Bloom is a vitamin drink and should not be referred to as an energy drink. Bloom markets the drinks as a healthy alternative to other energy drinks, which use natural products and contain vitamins. On Bloom’s official website, CEO of Bloom Mari Llewellyn said, “I started Bloom to help everyone bloom into their best selves. That’s why I made a better-for-you energy drink so you can enjoy the benefits without the sugar crash.” Adults within the high school shared their take Bloom being sold in the cafeteria. “I’m fine with them being sold in the high school. Even if they weren’t, I’m sure students would just bring them in themselves,” said Thomas Fiduk, an HHS nurse. However, Fiduk does show disapproval for Bloom’s caffeine levels for young people. “Students should be consuming around the CDC recommended amount. Some students drink Bloom daily, while they should have around 90 mg or a cup of coffee.” Students offer mixed feelings about the availability of Bloom in the cafeteria. Some students believe that Bloom should be sold, since it can help students function in the morning, giving them a boost. “I don’t drink Bloom. I’ve never really had one before,” said junior Kayla Cebedo. “But it really depends if you need them.” Other students suggested that Bloom should be available to purchase, but there should be some restrictions on the drink considering that drinking them may be habit-forming. “Lately, I haven’t drunk a lot of Bloom, but back in December I drank two a week,” said junior Vanessa Reinoso. “There should be a limit on how much you should be able to buy,” Reinoso added. Principal Jeffery DiLollo said that while he knew that there were new drinks being sold within the high school, he was unfamiliar with the types and specific brands. “I worry about Red Bull and Monster because of the cardiac incidents they can cause,” DiLollo said. DiLollo shared that he was not aware of the caffeine content of Bloom, but said he plans to research the product further.



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More time, more learning? HHS may adopt a new schdule for student success

By Dhruti Patel
News Editor

A new rotating drop schedule has been proposed, allowing for students to take eight rather than seven classes. Many other schools in Somerset County and the state have already implemented a similar schedule. This was proposed by the HHS administration team and presented to the BOE in September 2025. Only HHS will be adapting this schedule out of all the other schools in the district.

Principal Mr. DiLollo explained the reasons behind the proposed change. “It will give a lot of additional opportunities for students to follow passions and enter into things in which they want to have experience in.” Due to students having to prioritize core classes, students have to narrow down their options, not leaving time to take advantage of other opportunities. By having an extra period in their day, it would allow them to do this. Teachers would still teach the same number of classes which they normally would.

One major benefit of rotating-drop are different classes every day. If a student comes late or leaves early for sports or an early dismissal, this absence wouldn’t always impact the same classes. Another benefit according to DiLollo is that the new schedule would allow time within the school day for students to get extra help in their classes. “We also liked this schedule because it would give us an opportunity to do some intervention for students who have to meet teachers during the school day. The new schedule would give us the opportunity to elongate classes, so you would only see six a day with 58 minute periods,” DiLollo said. Additionally, there would be less transition time and less wasting time moving from class to class. Students will have a variety of classes rather than the same ones everyday. For example, students may have one class in the morning, then the next day in the middle of the morning, then before lunch, and the fourth day it will drop off, and



Students going down the commons stairway.
Photo by Dhruti Patel.

come back up in the same rotation to follow. This rotating schedule has also shown a high success rate for students.

The process of having a P.E. class before or after a science class would end in the new schedule, according to DiLollo. When a student has a lab in their science class (based on the level of science), it would take place when the class rotates beside the lunch block. The student would remain in that lab one out of every four days for an additional 25 minutes (which is one-half of the lunch block). The lunch block consists of the students having lunch for 25 minutes and having study hall for 25 minutes. For example, if a student has biology class period 3, on day 1, during lunch for that day the student would remain for the full 58 minutes of the regular period and the additional 25 minutes of the first lunch to accommodate the lab. Then, they would eat lunch for the second 25 minutes. So on a lab day, they would have no study hall. This schedule would also give teachers more prep time.

Upon interviewing students and staff, there were mixed reviews about the change in schedule. “Wasn’t there a rumor that the schedule was going to change last year too? Even though I will be graduating next

year, I cannot imagine sitting in a class for 8 minutes extra, 50 minutes is dreadful enough,” senior Arianna Johnson said.

However, senior Innaya Hussain had a positive perspective towards the change, “I think a change in schedule is great. I would prefer having different classes every day so it is not boring, plus having only 8 minutes extra is not that long.”

Similarly, business teacher Ms. Leah Alfaro-Vega who went to a school with a rotating drop schedule shared her perspective. “My only issue is that we have 8 class periods and meet with 6 of them daily, and there is a split in the middle,” Alfaro-Vega said. “This is a very large school. We have three lunches right now, so I am wondering how we would work around that with just one period.” Also, students wouldn’t feel sleepy or hungry in the same class every day because of having different classes everyday, according to Ms. Vega.

Ms. Marina Devino had a similar perspective as well. “I’m excited for the new schedule because students will have two less classes per day, but you still actually get an extra class in addition to what you already do,” DeVino said.

Where there’s Smoke, there’s a vape: Vaping reports in school bathrooms reaches double digits

By Julian Eckhart
Staff Editor

Teachers report up to a dozen incidents of vaping on school grounds each week, according to school administration. The primary location of these reports is the school bathrooms.

“85% of our reports are directly coming out of the restrooms,” Principal Jeffrey DiLollo said.

Teachers on lavatory duty and school administration are working to alleviate this problem. According to DiLollo, teachers on lavatory duty report the time and place of the suspected vaping, the administration takes the investigation from there. “The vast majority of our approach has to do with the health and well-being of our students, solely. The rule is in place for you to make healthy decisions and be safe and healthy here in school,” DiLollo said.

The rule means that students will be caught, but the administration’s goal is to help students understand the consequences of vaping rather than implement a different or stricter system to catch more students. “I’m not looking, at this point, to do anything more than what we’re currently doing, which is to be responsive to faculty and staff who

identify it administratively, so that we can have good conversations with students, close down the bathrooms, identify who’s there and hopefully get them some help, and if need be, consequence them accordingly,” DiLollo said.

Teachers have also reported vaping, particularly in the school bathrooms. Ms. Ashley Dermek, one of the school librarians, has walked by the 500s bathrooms and stated that it was obvious there was a student vaping. An anonymous lav duty teacher has also seen people vaping in the bathrooms. “Usually, there are multiple monitors, and they stand outside to see any smoke, but they can’t go inside and invade privacy,” the teacher said.

Dermek has also reported to

have found vapes hidden all around the library, including stuffed in chairs, hidden in bookshelves, put on top of the tall stacks of nonfiction books and underneath tables on the floor. She also pointed out that students are nowhere near legally allowed to purchase vapes. “It’s very addictive. It scares me a lot,” she said.

DiLollo said he cares about the students affected by vaping. “I’m concerned about the number of students who are using it. It’s larger than I would like it to be,” he said. However, DiLollo underscored that the majority of students are not vaping. “If I thought it was an epidemic, I would look at ways we would go about adressing it.” he said.



A student waits to enter the girls' bathroom in the 200's. **Photo by Julian Eckhart.**

Former Gov. Murphy signed statewide school cellphone ban into law

By Afreen Sultan
Editor-In-Chief

Former New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy signed legislation Thursday, Jan. 8 requiring public school districts throughout the state to restrict students' usage of phones and other devices during school hours in the effort to reduce distractions in the classroom.

“Students are more focused, they’re less anxious, and they are socializing and laughing with each other, not through a screen, but in the hallways and classrooms,” said Murphy. “So with the legislation I’m signing today, we’re going to fundamentally improve the learning environment for every K-12 student by requiring every school district to follow the lead of campuses just like this one.”

Under this “bell-to-bell” ban, the state Commissioner of Education must issue a policy within 90 days addressing student’s phone use during school hours, on buses and at certain school events where students are under supervision. After which, the statewide board of education will be required to adopt these guidelines. However, while this law establishes statewide standards, local school districts retain authority over how the restrictions are enforced.

“At this time, we are awaiting further specificity from the NJ DOE before implementing anything new. We should know more shortly,” Micheal Volpe, Superintendent of Hillsborough Township Public Schools said, when asked to provide more information on how Hillsborough plans to implement upcoming changes.

The law requires state policy to include different standards unique to each grade level that still prohibit non-academic use of phones and social media during class time. The legislation also requires it to include accommodation for students with disabilities under Individualized Education Programs and Section 504 plans. It also requires phone

use to be permitted in emergency situations like perceived threats or when phone access is necessary for the best interest of the student’s health.

“For all the freshmen, sophomores and juniors at this school, this law completely changes the way that our high school career will look like,” sophomore Ali Sultan said. “Taking away our phones doesn’t decrease distractions in any way considering that phone jails already exist, and the biggest source of classroom distractions right now are our chromebooks. A phone ban is more a risk for our safety than anything else.”

Additionally, the law must also address how smartphones, smartwatches and other devices must be stored; some options include locked pouches or lockers. The state budget includes \$3 million in grants to assist schools in deciding how devices will be kept.

Former Gov. Murphy, a Democrat, whose second term ended Jan. 20 made this plan limiting phone use a priority in his final year in office. This policy is scheduled to be put into effect at the start of the 2026-2027 school year in all K-12 schools.

Governor Mikie Sherril, who took office this month, has also voiced support for limiting student phone use—and is expected to guide the implementation of the new requirements.

This new legislation makes New Jersey one of a growing number of states that adopt rules with this purpose.



A student holding a cell phone in class.
Photo by Dhruti Patel.

Gym Teachers crack down on dress code

By Christopher Gray
A&E Editor

For the entirety of their time at HHS, students have been warned time and time again to always wear sneakers and never wear jeans in gym class. Though some may have been able to get away with wearing non-athletic wear in the past, gym teachers have begun to crack down on the dress code.

The continued enforcement of the physical education dress code has affected quite a number of students. Here, some share their thoughts on these regulations.

“I genuinely dislike it. It prevents me from showing who I am through my appearance,” junior Daniel O’Reilly said. “I also hate having to carry around clothes that barely fit in my backpack.” Junior Katie Sanchez has a similar viewpoint on the dress code. “My outfits aren’t that good anymore, because I don’t get to wear jeans,” Sanchez explains. “I have to change out of them all the time. It’s kind of annoying, and I’m not a big fan.”

Teachers and administrators have a different point of view on the dress code. According to physical education teacher Daniel Clements, teachers have begun cracking down on the dress code because of a negative trend they noticed among Physical Education students. “What was happening is, because they weren’t changing at

all, they weren’t participating at all. It kind of gave them the mentality that they didn’t have to put forth the effort that’s expected,” Clements said. Clements also connected the heightened enforcement to other implementation of existing school policy. “We’re kind of going back, just like the school in general is going back to no phones,” Clements said.

The relation of certain articles of clothing and gym performance seems to be the largest motivator of the heightened enforcement of the dress code. According to Daniel Polles, the Health and Physical Education Supervisor of Hillsborough Public Schools, the aim of the dress code is so students can participate in gym with no physical restrictions. “Typically denim is heavy. It’s not stretchy. It limits students’ full range of motion,” Polles said. “We want them at their best, participating actively.” Polles also explained how certain articles of clothing can pose a safety risk while worn in physical education classes. “The metal rivets, zippers, belt loops, those sorts of things, can get caught while [students are] playing,” Polles said.

Although this policy may be frustrating and seem restrictive to students who are affected by it, physical education teachers see it as a way to encourage students to participate.

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One minute isn’t enough: Students deserve more time to change after gym

Students are being pushed out of the locker room feeling rushed, stressed and out of time.

By Afreen Sultan
Editor-In-Chief

The moment I walk through the doors of the locker room after a long gym period, I immediately feel as though I’m already behind and in a rush. Before some of us can even reach our bags, there’s a teacher calling out, “Make sure you guys are out before the bell” reminding us that we need to leave the locker room before the bell rings, which, often, more times than not, is in less than three minutes. At this moment, gym feels like a race set up for students to lose.

At Hillsborough High School, students are sometimes given no more than a minute to change after gym class before rushing off to their next class. This gives students one minute to change their clothes, gather their belongings, and leave the locker room in a rush. This expectation is unrealistic and adds completely unnecessary stress to students. Not to mention, discourages them from properly participating in physical activities, since they are aware that they won’t have time to change out of dirty clothes for the rest of the school day. As a student who does not have

a lab day, I have gym every day out of the six-day cycle. This means that there is very, very rarely a day when I can wear jeans and go to school knowing that I won’t be required to change to earn participation in gym. As jeans are not allowed during gym, I have to either give up the choice to wear jeans completely or scramble to change in the one minute I’m given. Knowing that I’ll barely have time to do so, I often opt out of wearing jeans. If we were given a few extra minutes after gym, students like me could dress the way they wanted to and still participate in gym, without feeling as though we are punished for having gym every day.

Locker rooms are already crowded and lack privacy, so the pressure to be out in under a minute before the bell only increases student’s anxiety. If given extra time, students could avoid going to their next class feeling sweaty or flustered because they didn’t have the proper time to gather themselves after class. This rush can affect focus, confidence and force students to be uncomfortable for the rest of the day.

If students know that they won’t have time to properly change after

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance is a reminder of mutual respect, guaranteed freedom and unique opportunities—students should stand up while it is recited.

By Sophia Bianco
Staff Writer

The United States of America, land of the free. In this piece, I ask you to read with an open mind of my opinion concerning the Pledge of Allegiance. I am junior Sophia Bianco, and I am a proud American who hopes to instill similar pride within my readers. I stand, put my right hand on my heart and recite the pledge of allegiance to the flag every day. It is an incredibly heartwarming feeling when everyone, at once, mimics the same action at the same time. It brings our school together as a community. With this piece, I hope to inspire you to join this show of unity and embrace this feeling each morning at Hillsborough High School.

The HHS Student/Parent Handbook states, “No student may be required to recite the pledge, stand, otherwise profess respect for the flag or be sanctioned for declining to do so.” Respect is not an option, but something that is already within each and every one of us. Everyone united in standing for the values and symbolism in our flag. Standing up for the Pledge of Allegiance is acknowledgement to the beauty that is woven into our flag. Standing up amplifies appreciation for the U.S Army, Military and all our First Responders who fight to protect us everyday. It also offers respect to those around you, including the very person right next to you. Despite all strong beliefs and various perspectives towards the flag, I aim for all to come to an accord for one belief that we all can stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. Protected by the First Amendment, we the people have every right to freedom of religion, speech, press,



A large flag hangs high in the HHS commons. Its stars and stripes remind us of the beauty of our country and the privilege of our freedoms.

Photo by Sophia Bianco.

assembly, and the right to petition the government. We may stand to hold a common courtesy for all who live in America no matter their values. Our flag symbolizes a united nation full of opportunity. No one has to live up to anyone’s beliefs except their own, but I suggest that we stand up for the beliefs of others, which includes standing up for the flag. No one should feel obligated to say promises they do not wish to profess, but they also should not opt out of standing for our country just because peers may not be standing or worse keep chatting during the pledge. Our very own Principal of Hillsborough High School, Jeffery DiLollo, chooses to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. “It unites us and that we all should just have respect for each other. I feel like respect is overlooked,” he said.

The Pledge is a script we have been saying since elementary school. It is only appropriate to

continue to show acknowledgement to our flag. Everything has a reason and the reason for the Pledge of Allegiance is to unite all people of our high school to take a moment into honoring one another and the beautiful country we live in. How lucky are we to be educated? How lucky are we to have the privilege of speaking loudly in public settings? How lucky we are to be whomever we want to be? How lucky are we to have a dream in a world where chaos roams and violence follows? I encourage all of you to stand up when our morning announcements begin reciting our pledge.

You may not agree with me, and that is ok. That’s the beauty of our country, but if you do, stand with me. Stand with me because the pledge is for you, for your family, and for our country. The United States of America, the land of the free.

Schools should not embrace AI

By Christopher Gray
A&E Editor

Since the beginning of the decade, Artificial Intelligence has been rapidly advancing and making its way into our everyday lives, in so many different ways. One such way is the classroom. It has changed the way students learn and study, and debates about AI in education have been prevalent since the beginning of this “AI Boom” that we are currently experiencing. Slowly, educators have been embracing AI instead of forbidding it altogether.

In my eyes, with all the negative effects that AI has to offer, this is not a good thing.

To start off, it is quite clear that AI is enabling students to cheat. In my eyes, cheating in schools is inevitable. Many students feel pressured by the weight of their assignments, or their grades, and although I am not condoning the act of cheating, I do sympathize with those that engage in it. Artificial Intelligence has made already inevitable cheating way easier, of course, as students can have an entire essay done in seconds. If schools embrace these tools, they are only inadvertently encouraging the act of cheating to students.

To continue, I believe that AI is highly dangerous to a student utilizing it to study, or even “cheat.” Artificial Intelligence programs such as ChatGPT and Gemini are infamous for giving out misinformation. According to the New York Times article “When A.I. Chatbots Hallucinate” by Karen

Weise and Cade Metz, generative AI models are trained on vast amounts of internet data, which leads to AI offering a variety of differing information.

Furthermore, there are also the general negative effects of artificial intelligence. A major concern of mine is its environmental impact. According to a study by the Washington Post, a single 100-word email generated by ChatGPT-4 requires 519 milliliters of water, little more than a bottle. But this clearly piles up, as one email per week for a year requires 27 liters of water, according to the study. If that still doesn’t seem like that much for what it is, imagine a student body of 1,000 generating one email a week. That’s 27,000 liters of water a year, wasted for something that isn’t a necessity. This high energy consumption also leads to high greenhouse emissions, worsening the already horrible impact that global warming has had on our planet.

Of course, there are potential pros to AI use in education. It could help both teachers and students complete their tasks more quickly and efficiently, allowing them to be more productive in their respective roles. It is also understandable to see not adopting artificial intelligence as being “behind.” There are problems to be found with both of these reasons, though.

Teachers and students should not compromise quality work in the name of efficiency, and educators should not give in to the societal pressure of “modernity.”

Outward Bound: An exciting and unique experience

By Julian Eckhart
Photo Editor

Two crews set out on their new adventure with Outward Bound into the Delaware Water Gap and the Appalachian Mountains last summer. They arrived at Life Camp in Tewksbury N.J., with their families to see them off on July 6, 2025. They met their new instructors and crewmates, the people they spent the next two weeks getting to know on their expedition. They had a duffel bag in hand, carrying everything they thought they would need: clothes, a hat, notebook, pen, bug spray and maybe a disposable camera, all the essentials. It would also be an emotional moment as they said goodbye to their parents and siblings. They wouldn’t be able to be in contact for two weeks, which was scary for some, but they were about to embark on a new adventure.

This year, Philadelphia Outward Bound came to Hillsborough High School for an interest meeting about their program New Jersey Youth Leadership Corps (NJYLC). Ritam Chakraborty, Student Engagement and Alumni Manager at Philadelphia Outward Bound School and other instructors spoke with students who were interested in the program. Instructors discussed expectations, requirements and what students would experience during the trip. The trip spans two weeks, from July 5-July 18, 2026, this summer. During the trip students will be hiking through the Delaware Water Gap and Appalachian trails, this part will take seven days. The canoeing portion will also take seven days and that will be in the Delaware River. Only current freshmen, sophomores and juniors can participate. It is also a no-device expedition, so devices of any kind are not permitted on the trip and

can be left at home. There will be two trips with 2-3 instructors and up to 12 students per team. There will most likely be no functioning bathrooms on the trip. This means no showers and no flushing toilets. Of course, experience is not required as students will be taught everything they will need to know.

There will be opportunities for students to rock climb, do park service and do a 24-hour solo camp. As the expedition goes on, the instructors will step back so the crew can use their newly learned skills and put them to the test. This experience follows a challenge-by-choice philosophy, meaning students are welcome to try the listed activities, never forced to participate. Chakraborty explained the philosophy. “For some people, this might not feel exciting and that’s ok,” he said. “It’s not the right time and that’s ok. If you have an interest to try something new, to go out on an adventure to work with other high schoolers then I would encourage them to apply.” Students can apply at the official Philadelphia Outward Bound School website under the “Programs” tab. The tuition is \$100 and each student will need two letters of recommendation (250-500 words) and a personal essay (500+ words). They can get letters of recommendation by any teacher or non-familial adult. Students have until March 7, 2026, to apply and interviews with Ritam are either April 5 or 6. Notifications of acceptance or denial will arrive shortly after.

According to Outward Bound, the ultimate goal of the trip is to get kids excited about reconnecting with nature and to have them nudged out of their comfort zone to try new things, gain leadership skills and self-confidence. Chakraborty said he has seen many crews go on the expedition and come out with new skill sets. “The biggest way I’ve seen is developing

self-confidence. Just feeling like ‘Wow, I can do hard things, I can do things that I’ve never done before and I can really put myself out there physically and socially,’” Chakraborty said.

The school first started having Outward Bound come to the high school when Tobi Fleig, a guidance counselor, was contacted. “My goal originally, when they first contacted our school about it, I thought it was something really cool and different that we don’t have,” Flieg said. “I thought it was a great opportunity.”

Student alumni were also encouraged to give their own personal experiences from their trips in 2025 and 2024. They shared advice and funny stories about mistakes they made and how much they had bonded with their crewmates. Katie Trujillo, an alum from 2024, was at the interest meeting and she said she loved going on her trip. “Meeting people that come from such different experiences than me was really the people are the best part and outward bound,” Trujillo said. “t was such a beautiful experience to reconnect with myself as well as reconnecting with nature.”

When the interest meeting concluded, students took fliers with more information and how to apply. One student, Violet DeFilippis, said she was very interested in the expedition. “I do hikes on my own, but being a kid, you can’t really do as much, so now that I’m old enough my parents will let me. I really wanna do this because it seems like such a fun experience,” DeFlippis said. “The goal of the expedition is to help young people build leadership skills and self-confidence by working together and traveling through the wilderness for two weeks.” Chakraborty said.

Volunteering at the Turkey Takedown

By Lia Famula
Staff Writer

The fifth annual Turkey Takedown was held at Iron Peak Sports & Events on Nov. 29, providing an opportunity for young wrestlers all around Central New Jersey to showcase the skills that they’ve worked on. This fundraiser is carried out to better Hillsborough’s K-12 Wrestling program. Hillsborough’s Head Wrestling Coach, Rhys Weinberger, said “The event was a huge success thanks to the help of all of our volunteers.”

Hillsborough High School wrestlers and team managers were required to volunteer at these tournaments to ensure this process ran smoothly and efficiently. Wrestlers showcased their abilities through set up, admissions, check-ins, tablework, and clean up to help provide new wrestlers with an understanding of how wrestling is normally planned out, giving them a head start of what to look forward to before the season began.

Wrestlers shared their perspectives on volunteering. “It just feels good to know that you helped,” senior Jana Abdalate said. “We’re a part of something bigger and united with your community over something you love. It’s just inspiring to see my teammates that I know worked very hard for this opportunity go out and try their best.”

“It feels good to become a team

and unite over something we are all passionate about after so long of what sometimes feels like an individual sport,” junior Isabella Tauriello added.

Coach Rhys emphasized the importance of volunteering, not just for the Turkey Takedown, but at other chances where opportunities present themselves. He said wrestling is more of an individual sport, while volunteering is a chance to work together. “Whether brand new or a long-time member, we expect all of our program’s wrestlers and family members — despite wrestling being more of an “individual” sport — to come toget her, pick up each other’s

slack, and do what is required to get the job done rather than one person’s individual job. That is one of the many ways that the “team” and “individual” aspects of wrestling overlap, and without that camaraderie, our Wrestling Program would not be able to achieve the success that we seek.”

Over 30 volunteers participated in the event, supporting youth wrestling and contributing to the fundraising efforts of the K-12 Hillsborough Wrestling Program. The sixth Annual Turkey Takedown Event is expected to continue to embark a world of success for youth athletes.



HHS girls wrestling team admitting coaches, wrestlers, and spectators. Pictured left to right: Isabella Tauriello (11), Sinéad McLouglin (12), Jana Abdalate (12). **Photo by Lia Famula**



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How do English classes use AI?

Hillsborough students and teachers explore how AI tools like Gemini are reshaping learning in the classroom.

By Corinne Kramer & Bhuvana Vasantavada
Staff Writers

With the 2025-26 school year kicking off, there have been teachers that are finding ways to use AI in a positive way, mainly in English classes. Teachers even let their students use AI as a helpful tool during school hours. “We actually give students suggestions of ways that they can use AI. Some ways we’ve suggested they use it are study guides. They’re able to create practice tests and vocab quizzes,” Mrs. Nicole Rokoszak said. In the classroom, students and staff members, like Rokoszak, have noticed the AI usage rate going up, because teachers are allowing their students to use it when necessary. Instead of swapping essays with classmates, students open a new tab with Google Gemini AI. Within seconds, suggestions and feedback appear. Artificial Intelligence is slowly finding its place in classrooms, not to replace traditional learning techniques, but to help students think, edit and express their ideas in a better way.

Many teachers have started introducing AI as part of their lesson plans rather than avoiding it. In some classrooms, students use AI to brainstorm essay topics, summarize lengthy readings, or for generating practice questions before a test. What used to be seen as “cheating” is now being called “smart studying,” as long as students use it responsibly. Teachers, though, are still trying to figure out where to draw the line. Some see Gemini as a good learning tool, but other teachers worry that it would take away the student’s creativity and originality, said Mrs. McCabe, one of our vice principals.

Teachers like English teacher Mrs. Kimberly LaHart share that they like using Gemini. “I think Gemini has been really helpful, for sure,” said LaHart.

Teachers like LaHart see AI as an extension of the students learning habits. Instead of replacing their creativity, it gives them a space to refine their ideas. Senior, Sia Shah mentioned that English subject teachers are encouraging students to use AI tools as a “second reader” to check for clarity, grammar and structure while reviewing their

college essays. “I think AI is both helpful and really destructive. It helps a lot with schoolwork and research because it saves time by compiling all the websites and gives you everything in one spot,” said Shah.

“It can be helpful in a school environment, to provide information for various sources across the web when it cannot be easily found just through a search engine,” sophomore Josephine Pfeiffer said.

Vice Principal McCabe shared that AI is being introduced as a research and learning tool, but not a tool to cheat from, she explained that when AI is used appropriately, AI can help students save time by summarizing information and gathering sources. McCabe also noted that the school has formed an AI committee to guide this process, “The committee is made up of myself, Mr.DiLollo and several teachers,” said McCabe.

Across different subjects, from science labs to history projects, AI is becoming a quiet partner in the learning process. Students use it to review complex concepts, generate explanations and practice tests. Instead of taking away their effort, many say it actually encourages them to understand the material better. One of these students includes senior Rachel Paul Johnson. “It’s effective because it helps me summarize my notes. Or if there are any other concepts that I don’t understand, I plug in the video or note and ask for a summary of something I don’t get,” Johnson said.

As AI is more commonly used in the school, students are starting to learn that how they use it matters. According to many, AI tools are effective when provided with the right prompts like asking for help creating a study guide or practice tests.

According to the Hillsborough High School’s academic integrity policy, AI tools such as ChatGPT may be used for learning and research when permitted by a teacher, but all final work must reflect the student’s own work and submitting AI generated content as original work is considered a violation of academic honesty expectations.

One Track, One Goal: Unified Programs of HHS

By Mariama Luckay
Social Media Manager



The Unified Basketball and Dance teams gather before their first game of the season.

Photo by Kristin Comune.

Hillsborough High School offers a variety of ways for students to find an activity they feel showcases their strengths to help them get connected to the environment. It is a helpful resource to find people with similar interests and goals for the year. One of the best ways to take part in an activity in school is to participate in a fall, winter or spring sport here at HHS. With different coaches and teammates for each sport, students can venture out and explore their interests to find a calling that best fits their personality.

Diving into sports available at HHS, Unified programs were implemented and strive to encourage students with disabilities to feel welcome into a space where they are comfortable taking part in teams and partnerships. Helping solve the issue of limited opportunities for students that face challenges getting involved in activities that have difficulty aiding to their needs. Unified Programs are a great alternative to integrate special education students with their peers into an inclusive space to train, socialize, and make friendships with students their age and gain confidence in their personal talents. Students are rewarded for their time and effort, and provided with varsity jackets, letters, and offered the chance to go to games and competitions with an enjoyable and non stressful atmosphere.

Unified Soccer (Fall)

Unified Soccer runs from August through November. When asked what it's like being a coach, "Unified Soccer is a very rewarding experience," Ernest Bernhard, the Unified Soccer Coach said. "The players don't normally get to have the athletic competition their peers normally would, and they really enjoy playing against students from other schools. We also have student volunteers who are members of the team, and everyone plays the game together. New friendships develop and there is interaction between

students who would probably never meet during a typical school day. It is a great experience for me as well. Being able to see the players interact with each other, compete against other schools and learn the meaning of sportsmanship."

Unified Soccer usually has a combination of three games or practices each week. Some weeks consist of two practices and one game. Other weeks it is reversed. Unified Soccer tries to get out on the field three times every week and has played a total of nine games against five different schools.

Unified Basketball (Winter)

Unified Basketball spans from November through March and is coached by Paul Johnson and Daniel Chiappetta. "Coaching unified has been one of the most rewarding experiences I've had since becoming a teacher. The mission behind unified sports is inclusion and the partners who we've had over the years embody that goal. Seeing our athletes progress in their basketball abilities and socially has been the most rewarding part of being a unified coach," Chiappetta said.

Unified Basketball meets twice a week, whether that be practice or games. They are scheduled for 12 games this year and will focus on working on their skills and gameplay for the future.

Unified Dance (Winter)

During the same winter season, United Dance operates through November into March. Kristin Comune is the coach of Unified Dance. "This season of Unified Dance is made up of seven members and it is integrated with the Hillsborough High School Dance Team," Commune said.

Unified Dance meets two times a week and dances during half time for six basketball games. Unified dance had first competition of the season on Jan. 25 where they showcased off all of their hard work and moves they learned so far.

Unified Robotics (Winter - Spring)

The most recently developed Unified program at HHS is Unified Robotics, creating a shared interest in the field of science amongst all students in November through June. The group is advised by Anjana Iyer, Catherine Zavacki and John Askew. "This was Hillsborough's first year running a unified robotics team. We discovered the organization earlier in the school year and were able to organize a team early in the season. Mrs. Iyer and Mrs. Zavacki ran team meetings once or twice a week, where the teams would build and test their robots, while I worked closely with our student mentors from team 75 to ensure we were on schedule for the season and had the materials we needed," Askew said.

Unified Robotics has attended one official competition early in December where the team won the entire competition. They are now planning to run a mini season here in Hillsborough to try and expand the program, offering the same experiences to other students.

Unified Track and Field (Spring)

Unified Track runs from April through June. "Coaching gave me the opportunity to be in touch with the two things that I loved, working with the special needs population and track," said coach Carlin Dunne. "Unified track was a program that existed about a year before I took over. I was in high school through college participating in track and then became an assistant varsity coach. Unified track is so important in high school because there are little extracurriculars for students with special needs that had the support that they needed."

Unified Track is an eight-week season, and the state meet depends on the calendar but is usually at the beginning of June. Practices are twice a week, and they aim to have around five to six meets. Everyone practices and specializes in all events to become exposed to everything and potentially try something they never have. Meetings are held to gather student interest by showing pictures and videos from the previous seasons to students to see if they would be interested in taking part.

Impact

The Unified Programs are an effective approach to bridge the gap between special needs students and high school sports. Because their education has differences to the student body, they are often separated and need help finding ways to reconnect. They are ultimately more seen and appreciated by the school as a community through Unified. Keeping these programs accessible to students enlarges understanding of the student body as a whole and allows students with special needs to feel they play an essential role here at HHS.

World Language Honor Societies welcome new members during the induction ceremony

By Nicholas Rios
Features Editor

World Language Honor Societies including German, Latin, French, Italian and Chinese welcomed the new junior and senior members during the induction ceremony October 29, in the auditorium. Since their society is so large, the Spanish Honor Society had their own induction ceremony the day before.

The World Language Induction Ceremony is an event where the honor societies of each language welcome their new members with open arms. Every language teacher, alongside their president and officers, speak about their interest in their languages. The teachers talk about why they became so committed to teaching it, while the president and officers explain why they were committed to learning it.

At the end of the speeches, every student nominee rises from their seats and heads toward the auditorium stage. In their language, they recite a short devotion to their honor society while their candles are lit by the language officers. After finishing their devotion, they blow out their candles, and have officially joined their language's honor society.

This year, 191 students joined the five language honor societies, and interviews with society members reveal how students feel about learning their languages. "Chinese was just really different and cooler than other languages, and XuXu is

such a nice teacher," Steven Blanco, President of the Chinese Honor Society said.

"Latin is fun, unique, and something you don't hear commonly," Latin Honor Society member Pranet Godavarty added.

Teachers have noticed that students remain interested in studying world languages and joining the honor societies. "The students have been and still are very interested in Italian," Italian teacher Oneida Encarnacion May said.

The language induction ceremony helps spread not only cultural appreciation in HHS, but also outside the school as well. Language classes in New Jersey have helped many people communicate with others. And sometimes, language classes help inspire people to pursue language as a career. District Supervisor of World Languages and ESL, Robert Fugo talked about why he pursued the world language supervisor role. "My family was my main inspiration," Fugo said. "Being able to communicate with them in different languages really stuck out."

"Having access to different cultures is just something that fascinates me," Fugo said.

Throughout the year, the various world language honor societies spread awareness about different cultures to students, staff and the community. The groups participate in cultural events, fundraisers and end the year with a talent showcase this spring.



Members of the French Honor Society blow out their candles during the Induction ceremony.

Photo by Nicholas Rios.

Helen Machat, HHS Nurse, Retires in December

Helen Machat, HHS Nurse, reflects on nine years serving Hillsborough Township Schools.

By Katie Roteman
Staff Writer

The day before winter break, on Dec. 23, one of HHS's longest serving nurses (nine years), Mrs. Helen Machat, leaves her position. Machat started in Hillsborough Township Public Schools as a registered nurse at the middle school in 2016, where she started becoming a supportive and trusted figure to many.

One of Machat's most important lessons is as follows: "Don't judge a book by its cover. Every person who walks in is a human and they need something — they all deserve kindness." Machat continued, "When you're busy and frustrated, it's easy to say you've been here ten times, but maybe by the tenth time, they really do need you."

Another notable quality about Machat is that she always is looking for a reason to smile and to make

others smile. Machat reflected on how she evolved from acting as a mother figure for students to seeing them as patients and individuals.

Machat highlighted her favorite memories. "I couldn't say there's one. The best thing is when I'm at my desk and someone comes in to say hi, when they come out of their way to say hello," Machat said.

However, something that students may not know about her is that she loves science. Prior to getting her nursing degree at Raritan Valley Community College (2014), after she got her degree in biochemistry at Rutgers (1986). "I'm a science geek, you see," Machat said.

The recent retiree plans to spend her time with family, while traveling and being a grandmother. "We're going to the Dominican Republic. Then in August we are going with my youngest son's in-laws on a cruise to the Mediterranean. There is a full eclipse during it," Machat said.

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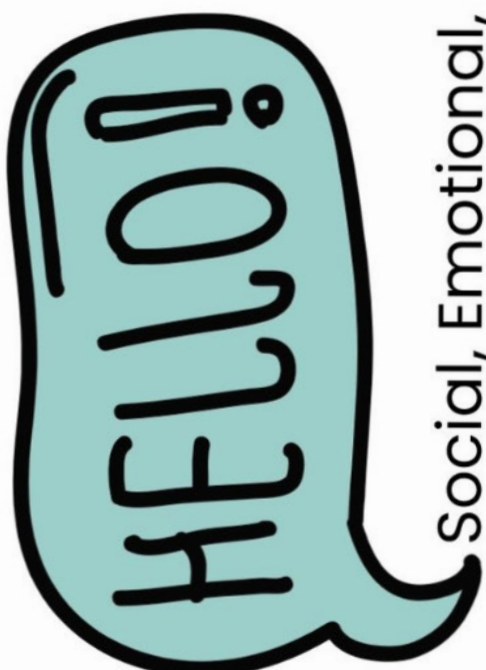
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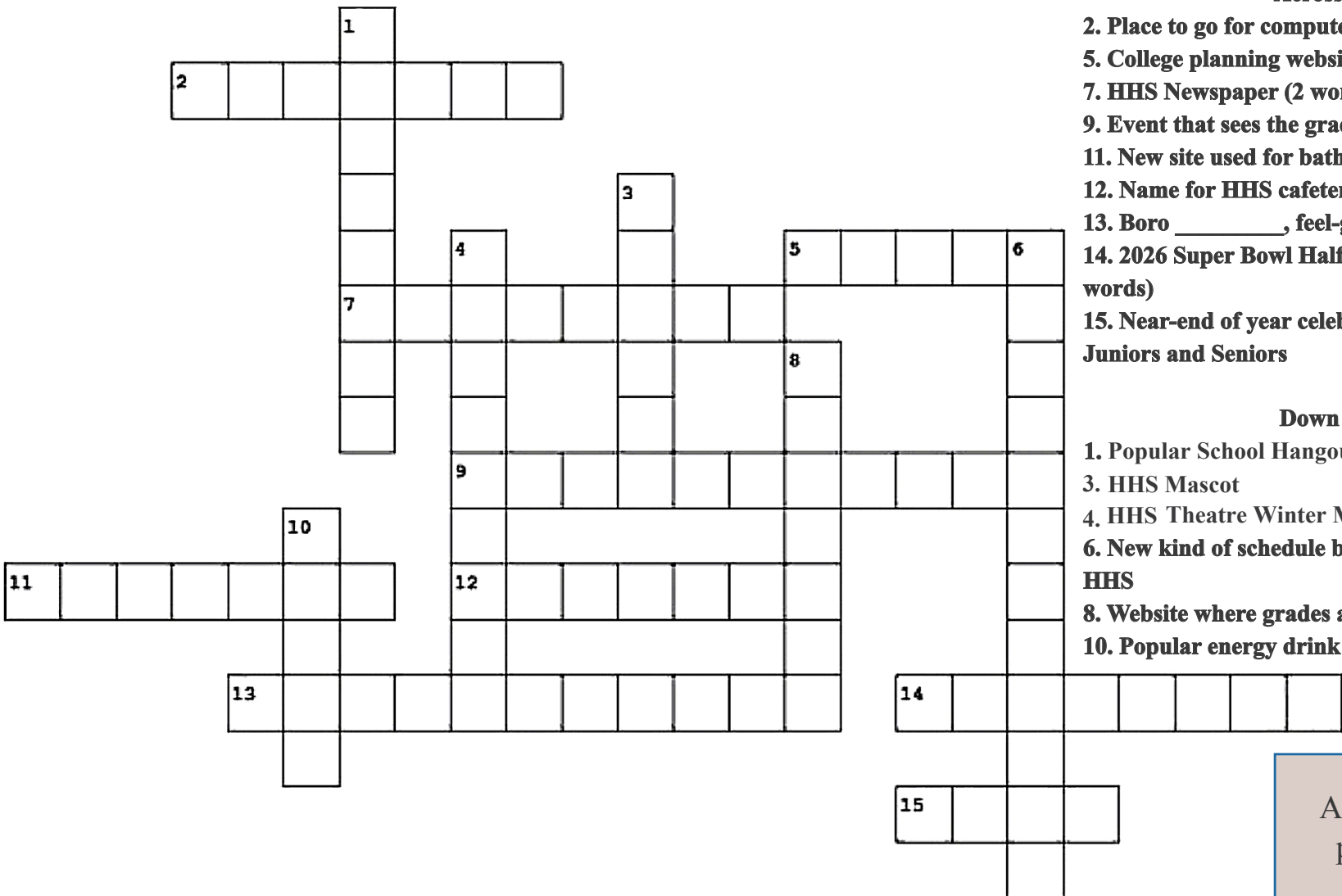


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CROSSWORD



Clues

Across

- 2. Place to go for computer problems (2 words)
- 5. College planning website
- 7. HHS Newspaper (2 words)
- 9. Event that sees the grades compete (2 words)
- 11. New site used for bathroom passes
- 12. Name for HHS cafeteria
- 13. Boro _____, feel-good Instagram page
- 14. 2026 Super Bowl Halftime performer (2 words)
- 15. Near-end of year celebration for Juniors and Seniors

Down

- 1. Popular School Hangout spot
- 3. HHS Mascot
- 4. HHS Theatre Winter Musical
- 6. New kind of schedule being considered for HHS
- 8. Website where grades are posted
- 10. Popular energy drink sold in the cateteria

Answers will be posted on our instagram: @thevoicehhs

HHS Choir’s winter concert performance sends a chill down the audience’s spine

By Amy Loeza-Cortes
Editor-in-Chief

As the audience began to file in and find their seats the lights began to dim and choir members filled the stage. The show opened with a performance of “O Lux Beatissima”—a beautiful symphony that set the mood for the rest of the performance. HHS’s Choir hosted their Winter Concert on Thursday, Dec. 11 at 7 p.m.

HHS’s choir is composed of several subsections such as Treble Choral and Legacy Show Choir, some of which students must audition for while others are based off of grade level. Succeeding the harmonious opening performance, Treble Chorale who usually represents HHS during festivals or other community events, took on the stage to perform. Starting with a joyous and jolly sounding piece titled “30 Second Fa La La” followed by “Winters Waking” by Amy Bernon, a much calmer and more delicate sound. They concluded, with a traditional German carol “Kling Glöckchen Kling” which directly translates to “Ring Little Bells Ring,” returning to the more upbeat and spirited sound that



Photo by Amy Loeza-Cortes

the group had started off on. Their incredible execution of the triad was proof of their powerful performance skills.

The audience was certainly enjoying the performance so far and it was clear that the performers deserved to be proud of themselves and the hard work that they had put in. “I like that we get to show our friends and family our hard work. We always talk about how the process is more important than the product but it’s fun to show off what the process can achieve,” Zel Quinn, a senior member of Treble Choral said.

Seniors Anushka Nair and Inaya Siddiqui then followed up by introducing the next portion of the event, Legacy Show Choir, and the piece that they would be performing, “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas” arranged by Mark Hayes. Booming with holiday cheer is the only way to possibly describe the performance given by the Show Choir. Their harmonies were brought by the energy boosted by the warm feelings that everyone has during the holiday. The powerful harmonies showcased a skill that is unique to the members of choir.

“The students and I were chatting, and we thought it’d be fun, since it’s going live on the radio tomorrow (Dec. 12) for you to get a sneak peak at it tonight, so this is the 12 Days of New Jersey,” director Ashley Mathews said. “The text is

actually from the listeners of 101.5 (the radio station), and the harmonies and arrangement was kind of done collaboratively with myself and the students.” Mathews added.

The performance that followed was a special interpretation of the “12 Days of Christmas” playing on specific events that had gone on in New Jersey throughout 2025. These events included “12 planes not flying,” “11 drivers raging,” “10 films-a filming,” “9 fires burning,” and finally “a new governor Mikie.” The humor and originality definitely managed to inspire some laughs in the audience.

Mixed Choral then came on and continued the show with the arrangements “Gaudete” by Mark Burrows,” and John Rutter’s “I wonder as I wander,” before finally ending off their sector with a jazz arrangement of “Jingle Bell Rock,” a classic and hallmark of the winter time.

Ending off the show was a haunting performance of “Carol of the Bells,” by all choir students. This unearthly feeling was only enhanced by the positions that the members took, taking a break from the stage and surrounding the audience. Coming from all angles the members’ voices mixed and swirled together creating a symphony, leaving the audience with an unforgettable experience to look back on.

“So Close To What???” (deluxe edition) Review

By Afreen Sultan
Editor-in-Chief

Songwriter Tate McRae dropped “So Close To What” (deluxe edition) with five new songs added to her existing album that released in February of this year. The Grammy nominated pop star featured five new titles in the recent release.

These new songs included “TIT FOR TAT,” “NOBODY’S GIRL,” “ANYTHING BUT LOVE,” “TRYING ON SHOES,” and “HORSESHOE.” “TIT FOR TAT” took inspiration from her preceding breakup with her boyfriend and popular artist The Kid LAROI who had been the source of some more love based songs in the past. At first glance, it’s clear that these tracks come from a place of newfound anger, annoyance, and hurt—especially considering these are the only 5 titles written in all caps. Opposed to some of the other emotional and slow tracks in this album, these five set a different stage. These songs highlight that the love McRae once felt for LAROI is never returning. In her song “TIT FOR TAT” she says “Thought I might love you again, I’ll see how I feel / Now that you’re acting like that, boy, I never will.” However, there is also a sense that these new tracks act as a gateway for her to heal and get past the things her ex-boyfriend put her through. In her song “TRYING ON SHOES” she sings, “Trying on shoes, putting on glitter / Anything to make

me a little less bitter.”

My personal favorite of the new additions is without a doubt “TIT FOR TAT” that was actually surprise released a little earlier than the others in September of this year. The song was released soon after the split of the two artists and more importantly right after LAROI released his own song in which he called her out. Out of all the new songs the rhythm and lyrics of this song show McRae raw and unhealed resentment. In the song she sings “I was nothing but respectful, and you know that / Why you changing up the narrative to write?” This is a hint towards the idea that after their break up, her ex changed the story to make it look like McRae was in the wrong. “I’m not that big of a Tate McRae fan, but “TIT FOR TAT” is a really good song. I listen to it in the car, and it feels genuine.

As a strong and long time Tate McRae fan, I had absolutely no notes for this album. As a writer that has always written according to the phase of life she was experiencing, this seems right on track. Additionally, as someone who has listened to McRae since she sung while playing on a piano, her growth leaves me astonished.

However, to some who prefer McRae’s more emotional and heartfelt songs, these songs might not become favorites. Compared to others, these ones definitely show an angry side to her sadness.

Overall, these new tracks can be enjoyed regardless of the events taking place in your life. Even if there isn’t currently something specific you can relate to in these songs, the beat alone is enough to have anyone dancing along to the music. Now more than ever, I can’t wait for the chance to see McRae perform in person so that I could sing along to “TIT FOR TAT” with one of my favorite artists.

A true American celebration: Bad Bunny’s LX Superbowl Halftime performance

By Skylar Haynes
Staff Writer

Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio, a Puerto Rican artist who’s topped the charts as “Bad Bunny,” performed on Superbowl Sunday, Feb. 8, for the halftime show held in Santa Clara, California. Besides a guest performance from Lady Gaga, the show was presented entirely in Spanish – making it the first of its kind in Superbowl Halftime show history.

The performance began with Bunny playing the top-streaming, “Tití Me Preguntó,” and the camera panning over artificial sugar cane fields tended to by dancers portraying jibaros, Puerto Rican country farmers. As he sang, Ocasio walked through the field, the camera leading him onward, and interacted with several sets which hold symbolic importance to Latino communities. The order of such symbols is as follows: a coconut stand, a nail salon, a piraguas (crushed-ice) cart, — with each flavoring bottle clad in a different flag — a taco stand, a boxing match, and a pawn shop. All representations are regarded as things of Hispanic “calles,” or streets. Their inclusion is not decorative, but rather a clear depiction of several important cultural elements.

Following this, was yet another ornate set – a pink and yellow casita. Atop it stood the headliner, and beneath him, on the house’s perimeter, there were several celebrities who were given a brief cameo in the performance. Most

notable among the group was Cardi B, Pedro Pascal, Young Miko, Karol G, and Jessica Alba, all of whom were shown dancing and singing along. At the conclusion of Bunny’s singing of “Yo Perrero Sola,” he crashed through the roof of the house, interrupting a gathering. The singer proceeded to kick down the door of the casita and return to the opening set, where a run-down white truck now sat idly.

Marking the midway point of the 13-minute long show, the performer addresses the camera, or rather his viewers, directly. “Estoy aquí porque nunca, nunca dejé de creer en mí. Tú también deberías de creer en tí. Vales más de lo que piensas. Confía en mí,” Bad Bunny said. In English, this loosely translates to: “I’m here because I never stopped believing in myself. You should also believe in yourself. You’re worth more than you think. Trust me.”

Succeeding this message was a wedding, which unlike other sets, was real. Two Bad Bunny fans had requested his presence at their wedding, but as was unable to attend, he requested they marry during his show instead. They appear throughout the performance at several intervals, and after being legally married, can be seen dancing, kissing and smiling alongside the dancers.

After this, Lady Gaga performed an alternative version of her hit song, “Die with a Smile,” and accessorized it with salsa instrumentals and choreography. The guest performer herself was clad in the appropriate attire, including a light blue dress and red and white floral corsage. These

colors were chosen purposefully, as they correspond to the original Puerto Rican flag, which utilizes a shade of blue lighter than their current one.

From this point forward, the performance continues just as vibrantly as the first half had. It includes titles such as “BAILE INOLVIDABLE” and “NUEVAYoL.” During the performance of the latter, an older woman is seen pouring Ocasio a shot. She was none other than Maria Antonio Clay, the owner of New York’s oldest Puerto Rican bar. This is one of many moments in which Bad Bunny makes an effort to share his platform with all who share his culture. He even does so for his younger-self, who is portrayed by a young boy. Bad Bunny interrupts said boy, who is found watching the Grammys, by handing him an award from the event. It commemorates not only his recent Grammy nomination and win, but the extensive journey he took to get to where he is today. The scene is truly a beautiful one.

Just as gut-wrenching was the last guest-performance of “LO QUE LE PASÓ A HAWAII” which was originally written by Bad Bunny himself and covered by fellow Puerto Rican artist, Ricky Martin. Paired with live acoustics, Martin’s vocals were phenomenal, and perfectly captured the essence of the song’s lyrics, which are based on the traumas of colonization.

“Together we are America,” read the football that Ocasio raised to the camera at his performance’s conclusion. Surrounding him as he did so were the flags of all of the American countries, as well as

cheers from the crowd following his redefinition of America. According to Bad Bunny, America is as follows: “Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, Perú, Ecuador, Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, Panamá, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, México, Cuba, República Dominicana, Jamaica, Antilla [not a country, but a generalization for all Caribbean islands], the United States, Canada, and Puerto Rico.” Unlike those of the States, many regard “North” and “South” America as one – believing that there are a total of six continents rather than seven. These people believe that the only reason such a division has been made in the States’ education system is because of systematic prejudice that has worked to separate predominantly Hispanic countries from the “American” culture. It was the sixtieth Superbowl Halftime

performer’s intent, however, to let it be known that these countries are American ones.

Many have yet to legitimize Bad Bunny’s performance, arguing that he isn’t an American artist and that his songs don’t relate to the majority. To that, I rebut: Puerto Rico is an American territory and Bad Bunny was recently found, for the fourth time in his career, as the most-streamed artist on Spotify. It’s evident, therefore, that no sectionalization — essentially the creation of a “Northern” and “Southern” American continents — can work to remove cultures that have proven themselves a necessity to the American legacy. Identifying such is the heart of Bad Bunny’s performance. It will continue to stand as proof that we don’t have to speak the same language to love each other. Nosotros no necesitamos hablar el mismo lenguaje para amarnos.



Promotional image for Bad Bunny’s Superbowl Half-time show.
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Ice hockey shutout against Hopewell Valley

By Heidi Almendinger
Staff Writer

Hillsborough faced Hopewell Valley on Dec. 19 and celebrated their first shutout of the season with a final score of 5-0. The team coming off of a losing streak has been finding their opportunities and proving themselves to be a strong team. The game was a tight play and standbys were tense with anticipation to see what would happen next.

The Raiders took control of the game playing strong offensively while holding onto their defense. Just three minutes into the game, Senior Ansh Agarwal was first to get the puck in the goal bringing the score to 1-0. They kept the energy up on the ice all throughout the first period. Time was running out but that wasn't stopping this team. Senior Brody Horner looked for an opening with only 50 seconds left and scored with assists from freshman Advit Agarwal and sophomore James Casey. Finishing the first period the Raiders were determined to hold onto their 2-0 lead.

Throughout the game players have to stay focused on everything they're doing and communicate that with their teammates. "I'd say it's a lot of reading and reacting to what's going on around you and acting on your instincts," said Horner.

Going into the second period, Hillsborough wasn't letting down.



Senior Ansh Agarwal stays open to receive the puck.
Photo courtesy of Alaina Avanzato

They continued to complete their passes and the puck was in their favor. Advit passed to Senior Colin Marly where he was able to score the third goal of the night nine minutes into the period. The game had players slamming one another into the barricaded rink fighting for the puck.

With five minutes remaining on the scoreboard, a fight broke out between two players, each on a different team. Hopewell Valley grew more frustrated throughout the game based on their playing style, eager to get on the scoreboard. The period came to an end with Hillsborough still leading, now 3-0.

Third period and the Raiders were staying focused on winning this game. Horner earned another goal for Hillsborough early into the period bringing the team to 4-0. The

other team took notice of Advit's usefulness, with the most assists in this game, and continuously shoved him around. That didn't stop him from assisting sophomore Colton King in the last goal of the night. The Raiders ran the clock out and took home a well deserved 5-0 win.

"The team has well surpassed expectations for this part of the season," head coach Matthew Janos said. "The way we are playing, we believe we can compete with anyone in the state."

Their regular season ended with a phenomenal 13-11-2 and the team didn't let down. Making their way to sectionals, Hillsborough faced Southern High School on Feb. 25 in the first round of 2026 NJSIAA Ice Hockey Sectional Tournament and earned a 7-0 win. They lost



Junior Mete Ozbas swiftly swimming backstroke in the boys 200-yard individual medley event
Photo by Rachel Corgo

A senior night victory for the boys and girls swim team

By Rachel Corgo
Sports Editor

A red-and-gold hallway filled with posters, streamers and flags was decorated in honor of the swimmers who are part of the Class of 2026. Fans filled the bleachers and even stood shoulder to shoulder alongside the pool desk with glowing smiles while holding flowers.

The Raiders went up against the East Brunswick Bears on Jan. 8 at the Hillsborough YMCA. The girls team won 113-57, and the boys team won 111-59, keeping their winning streaks alive. Both teams have been pulling far ahead of the competition this season.

As the races commenced, senior Dylan Briones, junior Emily Sudol, freshman Olivia Kay and sophomore Marielle Colipano swam alongside other Hillsborough and East Brunswick students in the girls 200-yard medley race. This group in particular had pulled ahead of the other racers, each swimmer giving it their best effort. A time of 1:51.27 illuminated on the scoreboard, five seconds quicker than the other lanes. "Being my senior year, the season definitely feels different," Briones said. "There is a greater sense of appreciation for every meet and every moment with the team, since I know these moments won't last forever."

The boys team followed with their 200-mealy race; junior Josh Cetin, junior Luke Sudol, senior Gavin Grouser and senior Tiago Granados came in first at 1:41.08. The order consisted of the first

swimmer doing backstroke, then another followed with breaststroke, next was butterfly, and ended off with freestyle. "I listen to music to hype me up and watch videos of my previous races in the hours leading up to my race," Cetin said.

In the 50-yard freestyle, Hillsborough swimmers Kay and Granados came up on top gliding through the water seamlessly. Kay came in with the fastest time 25.20 for the girls team, and Granados brought an impressive 22.27 for the boys. This kept the momentum for the meet moving in the Raiders favor. The 500-yard freestyle requires a swimmer that has the proper training and the endurance to be able to achieve a good time 20 laps later. For the girls team, Junior Emily Sudol completed the event with the fastest time of 5:21.90. Senior John Eodice set himself apart from the competition by swimming a 4:54.33 leaving the rest of the swimmers to catch up. The events went on and Hillsborough took the majority of fastest times and won the overall meet.

There were swimmers that specialized in sprints, distance and medley. The world of swim has been on the rise with some really strong and promising athletes. In Hillsborough, the boys and girls varsity teams were ranked one of the top schools for the overall 2025-2026 Skyland Conference. Their season wrapped with final records 10-2 from the boys and the girls with 9-1.

An impeccable season opener for the wrestling team

By Esmeralda Lopez and Sabrina Santiago-Cruz
Staff Writers



Sophomore Sebastian Cabera-Lacan is taken down by opponent before turning the match around and winning.
Photo by Sabrina Santiago-Cruz

The match against North Brunswick High School did not start in Hillsborough's favor. However, the team put its best square stance forward, securing the first win of the season with a total score of 48-22.

An early highlight came from junior Demitri Deluca's pin in the 113-pound weight class against Raul Vicuna. Hillsborough pulled ahead 6-3 against its opponents. The momentum continued to surge as junior Ryan Spinelli scored a technical fall against Mekhi Guadalupe, giving the team a boost to lead the match 11-6.

"I grew up with the sport because my family made me get into wrestling. I've been doing it since I was 4, and I love the physicality of it," Spinelli said. He has been a member of the wrestling team since his freshman year

"What keeps me going during matches is just knowing that all the hard work I put in allows me to

succeed," Spinelli said. "Pre-match I like to get my confidence up by thinking that I'm the best out there on the mat and the work I put in will allow me to get the job done."

Senior Anthony Mayo and sophomore Brody Walton kept the energy high in the room with strong winning performances, extending the total score to 21-10. Both wrestlers held full control of the mat with quick takedowns and thundering applause. Mayo pinned his opponent Ricardo Machuca Diaz in just 1 minute, 11 seconds. The pin electrified the crowd. After each win, the gym came alive and the audience erupted with cheers for Hillsborough.

Seniors Gabriel Luna, Aren Hidalgo and Nick Duarte fought hard, taking back-to-back wins and scoring the final 21 points together by keeping their opponents down. All three seniors secured quick takedowns with times of 1:07, 1:14, and 59 seconds, respectively.



Senior Julio Rameriez
Photo by Rachel Corgo

"Before my match I was definitely feeling nervous, especially after getting bumped up into a weight class I wasn't used to," Luna said, "but the second my foot stepped onto the mat, my nerves left my body and all I felt was excitement and confidence from the cheers of my friends and family in the stands."

The victory highlighted the team's depth, with key contributions throughout the lineup. Strong performances across every weight class empowered the 48-22 win.

They have a season record of 7-21 and competed in the 2026 NJSIAA District 17 and District 7 championships on Feb. 28 for the wrestlers that qualified. Individuals had the opportunity to win themselves a district title in their weight class. Senior Nick Duarte led in the heavy weight class with junior Owen Miller and junior Ryan Spinelli following in their respective classes.

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