

THE VOICE

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HILLSBOROUGH HIGH SCHOOL: 466 RAIDER BLVD, HILLSBOROUGH TOWNSHIP, NJ 08844

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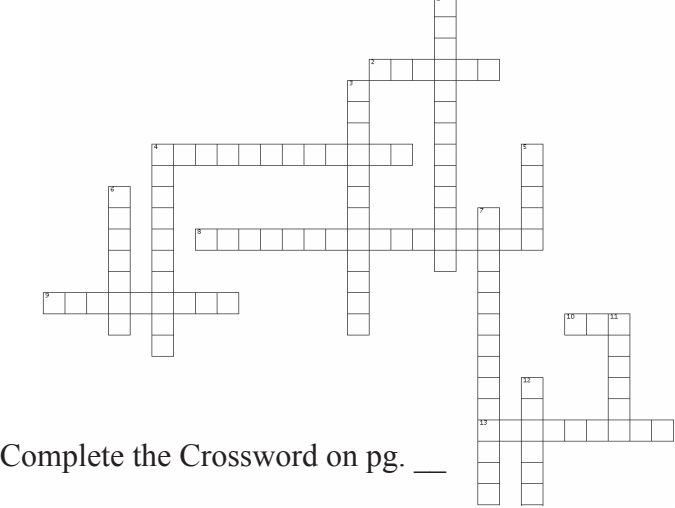
GRADUATION ISSUE

Class of 2026



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Class of 2026 Yearbook



Complete the Crossword on pg. __

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Newly appointed Commissioner of Education visits HHS

New Jersey’s Commissioner of Education Lily Laux is welcomed by students and administrators in HHS to see the extensive programs offered throughout the school.

By Nicholas Rios
Features Editor

New Jersey’s Commissioner of Education Lily Laux visited the high school April 11, meeting with students, teachers and administrators. Laux took over after previous commissioner Kevin Dehmer stepped down February 24 for another position. “I went to a small rural school growing up. Wonderful, but much more limited,” said Laux. While her former school was something she appreciated, she shared that she didn’t have as much access to as much programs as other schools, which caused her to not have as much opportunity in college when she grew up. “While it limited what I was able to do when I got to college, look at me now” Lily added.

Lily Laux worked her way up from her middle school teaching position in Tennessee all the way to New Jersey’s Acting Commissioner of Education, and was soon nominated and approved as the Commissioner of Education for New Jersey by Governor Mikie Sherrill.

After becoming Commissioner of Education, Lily Laux decided to tour a several school districts and see the way New Jersey’s education programs work for both teachers and students. Of approximately 427 public high schools that the state oversees, Lily Laux landed on one choice with a positive reputation: Hillsborough High School.

Laux alongside members of the state’s Board of Education entered Hillsborough High School and were offered a tour by both the Student Council and Principal Jeffery DiLollo, which they accepted. “We heard wonderful things about this school and its programs, and we wanted to take a look at them ourselves,” Laux said.



Senior student Spencer Marso assists Commissioner of Education Lily Laux in making her own wooden scraper inside room 502.
Photo by Nicholas Rios

Laux visited a total of eight classrooms, representing both core subjects and several electives. She stopped by the Culinary Arts class at room 520, and then entered the Education and Training classroom a few doors down. After that, she stopped by classes 607 and 804, both of which teach chemistry at different academic levels.

Teachers from these classes shared their thoughts and first impressions on Laux. “She seemed engaged in what the students did. She observed what they did and asked questions about the subject,” Jill Kalyankar, culinary arts teacher, said.

“I was very happy she came to my class, and she did a great job at engaging with the students,” said Carole Cieless, an education and training teacher. “I looked her up and saw she recommended the book “Be Kind,” which I’ll purchase for the lil’ raiders as a way to teach them kindness,” she added.

“It was exciting that she chose HHS out of all schools,” chemistry teacher Anjana Iyer said. “She remained engaged with students, asking questions about the subject. She was also impressed with our use of AI in class,” she added.

Next, she visited room 812, Research in Molecular Biology Honors, and soon after, headed towards room 502, Wood Technology. After a quick hands-on tutorial from the teacher, Laux crafted her own wooden scrapper, with the assistance of senior student Spencer Marso.

“She’s a very nice person, and she seemed very interested in the work we did in this class,” Marso said. “You don’t see blue collar classes often, so showing her there’s more to school than chromebooks is awesome,” he added.

Hillsborough School district approves its final budget for next year

After the BOE meeting on March 22, the meeting on April 30 finalized the budget for 2026-2027

By Dhruti Patel
News Editor

The Hillsborough Board of Education approved a final budget with a 1.31 percent levy increase at the April 30 meeting. In the initial budget meeting, the board discussed increasing the general tax levy from \$2,891,204 to \$147,451,418. Michael Volpe, the superintendent, said he believed that this money could be used in many ways for the district. Additionally, in that meeting the board stated how the residents are still paying the tax increase from the last year.

Despite residents being upset over high taxes, this increase is due to reduced state funding this year. In the meeting, some residents expressed how the inflation throughout the years has been increasing and their affordability to live is being challenged.

Many reductions were made in the budget throughout the schools such as for the architectural fee for a proposed transportation center. Some other intended cuts were a kindergarten teacher, K-6 math supervisor and an automatic license plate reader. Initially, Volpe’s original budget included hiring more teachers, but due to lower student

enrollment, not as many teachers may be needed.

Volpe gave his insight on the budget. “I view the outcome as a good,constructive compromise for our community. While budget seasons always require balancing competing priorities, this final version allows us to maintain our core educational commitments while remaining fiscally responsible.” Additionally, he talked about his plan for the future. “My primary hope as Superintendent is that we can establish an earlier direction for next year’s budget. By setting priorities and parameters ahead of schedule, our administrative team and the board can collaborate more effectively, thoroughly vet our options, and streamline the process. In fact, we are already beginning the groundwork for that next cycle now.”

Before the final budget which was proposed, \$7,000 were

added to the district's robotics team for support. About \$1 million was cut from the proposed budget. After the vote of 5-4, a spending plan of \$181.7 million spending was passed for the 2026-7 school year.



Picture of Hillsborough High School, one of the schools from the Hillsborough school district. **Photo by Dhruti Patel**

Longer Spring Break or Summer?

The student body shared their thoughts in a poll created by a senior regarding the proposed spring break schedule to be implemented for the 2026-2027 school year

By Mariama Luckay
Social Media Manager

The Hillsborough Board of Education is responsible for creating a calendar every year. It features important dates for staff and students to have as reference points when deciding if their personal schedules overlap with the schools agenda. The total number of days of school required by New Jersey and Hillsborough schools is 180 days, and the planned amount of days for each school year determines the length of school breaks and holidays. This time frame serves as the basis for how many days we are allowed to have off for snow days and other instances.

One factor Superintendent Mr. Michael Volpe and the Board of Education looks into is making sure that there is equity among the days our school recognises as off days. Jeffery DiLollo, Principal of Hillsborough High School said, “As it pertains to the diversity of our school, key religious holidays also come into play when the BOE maps out the calendar for the school year.”

During this process, the BOE

came to the realization that spring break was potentially an area that could be shortened, so the end of the school year would not extend farther in the month of June. The BOE asked the community for input. Collectively, the district needed to decide between two options, elongating the school year by a few days in favor of a longer spring break. Or, having an abbreviated spring break to allow for the school year end to be earlier.

Paul Marini, Hillsborough BOE member said, “We have two calendars. Option one is the shortened spring break, and option two is referred to as a full spring break. Between the members of the board we need to agree to move forward with one.”

The decision of the board was influenced by the voices of the student body. According to DiLollo, Student Representative Cassandra Montoya gathered results of a poll she conducted with over 400 students participants, including freshman, sophomores, juniors and seniors. “The majority of students preferred

to have an extended spring break as a much-needed rest in the year as opposed to the plan to shorten the length of their holiday,” DiLollo said. “Montoya’s effort to carry the views of the student body heavily influenced getting their shared majority opinion to the BOE to make their final decision.”

Montoya shared her role in voicing the opinions of the students. “I love being looked at in a mature and serious environment and being able to represent everyone who otherwise may not have had a say,” Montoya said. “58.1% of responders from my google form wanted a longer break and later end to the year. After presenting that info to the board yesterday, they ended up deciding on that calendar for the 2026-27 school year. It is super cool to have a voice on the board and one of my favorite parts of this year. I’m so happy that I can make an impact,” she said.

The final 2026-2027 district calendar can be found on the district website.



Hillsborough School Logo. Published under fair use.

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The Voice staff is committed to providing fact-checked, original articles that interest and are inclusive of the whole HHS student body. We welcome guest writers with interests in student life, pop culture and community happenings. Editorials signed by the Editorial Board reflect opinions by the majority of the staff. Letters to the editor can be sent via email, which may be edited.

Email us for business inquires & letters to the Editor: thevoicehhs@gmail.com

Goodbye High School, Hello Student Debt

Students are paying enormous amounts of money and starting their young adult lives with student debt. Why is that?

By Rachel Corgo
News Editor

Every second semester high school senior knows the feeling of anticipating graduation day and excitement of getting ready to walk the stage, but no one tells you what comes next. Payment deadlines start approaching rapidly. You’ve already made a hefty deposit, but you’re not done yet. Before the semester even starts, you’re putting money into the tuition fees for the semester. Room and board definitely isn’t cheap. You’re paying for meal plans, books and supplies, as well as figuring out a way to get to your classes.

As a graduating senior for the Class of 2026 that’s finished the whole process of applying to schools and thinking about my offers, I decided to attend Raritan Valley Community College in the Fall. This was a decision made by myself and my parents because the cost of going straight into a four-year college is an endeavor I’m not willing to take on.

While staying in-state for school can be cheaper most times, it’s still a really big financial burden for many families across the country. Why has pursuing higher education become so expensive over the past couple years? Well, states have actually been decreasing funding that is going into their colleges because of economic recessions and tight budgets. Money that’s left for schools is flowing into K-12 education, which doesn’t leave much for public colleges.

Today, many well paying jobs require at least a bachelor’s degree. Going to college is more accessible now more than ever because of financial aid (scholarships and grants). This benefit just makes it all the more competitive, leading schools to raise their tuition costs.

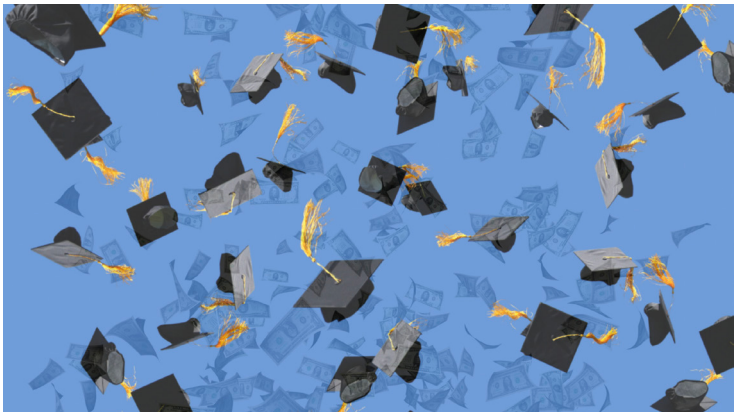
Most colleges will be upfront about their cost of attendance, so upcoming students aren’t left in the dark. All information can be accessed online provided by the universities. Using one of New Jersey’s most popular state schools, Rutgers University, as an example, they offer a sample cost of all charges that could be made while attending to earn an undergraduate degree. These numbers differ for everyone, but since most families won’t be able to pay this number upfront, students will end up

graduating with massive student debt every year.

I would like to state that I’m not shaming anyone that chooses to attend a four-year College right after high school because ultimately it’s your education.

The reason I personally chose Raritan Valley Community College is because of the affordable tuition it provides, and I want to share that with students considering pursuing higher education.

The school itself has grown in massive numbers over the past few years because of its flexible scheduling and accessibility to students looking to transfer into universities. By sacrificing part of my college experience, I can save well over \$30,000-\$40,000 in just two years.



Made with Canva elements.
Photo by Rachel Corgo.

Higher Education for All

Talented students with a lower income and middle-class backgrounds are held back due to financial hardship.

By Sabrina Santiago-Cruz
Staff Writer

Many high school students dream of earning a higher education degree. But many do not want the burden of having to pay for college as each year it increasingly costs more to attend an in-state school. It’s harder to get a job anywhere where you get a good paycheck to pay back your loans.

Public colleges and universities should transition into a tuition-free school system, to ensure everyone gets an academic education, without the burden of being in debt. Schools should not focus on the financial status of their students, but rather determine the potential success a tuition-free based school can have on their students.

Many talented, driven, curious students are often discouraged due to not being able to afford a top-ranking college. Modern tuition is usually often discouraging to low-income and middle-class families due to not getting enough financial aid to help pay for school. An article from the CollegeRaptor says, “If an American college student is able to graduate with less than \$10,000 in student loan debt, they are considered lucky (the current average is around \$38,375 in federal student loan debt alone).” By removing the cost of college tuition, families do not have to worry about having to repay school tuition. This gives the student and families the ability to use the money to invest, or have the opportunity to buy houses and cars sooner.

Implementing a tuition-free college is not just free money or a

gift to students, but it essentially is a strategic investment in the country as a whole. By providing a good education to students, these young learners will flourish, knowing there is no burden of having to pay back loans, essentially rewiring the brain to do better. Less stress, and less worries develops a strong mind. In the same article it says that over 50% of students drop out of public universities because they can’t afford it. This is half of the population of those at public universities, which makes the drop-out rate a big problem. Many of these students could have used their knowledge to help out their communities. Eliminating tuition would end this constant cycle of worrisome debt and allow the next generation to start their professional lives on stable ground.

Some people often argue that “free” college isn’t actually free and would only burden tax payers

or even devalue the degree. While this may be true, the long-term return on investment is evidenced through higher education and higher earnings. A degree is valued by the rigor of the school, neither of which are diminished simply because the cost of attending was removed.

To implement a free tuition-based college or university, the government would need to cover the tuition before any scholarship or any other aid is implemented. States should be required to maintain the level of funding in order to actually lower costs.

Higher education should be viewed as a positive idea. We must demand that our representatives prioritize the future of their people, of the country, by supporting tuition-free public education. It’s time for universities and colleges to allow every capable mind to go to college for free seeking higher education.



Free college allows capable minds from all economic backgrounds to pursue their academic dreams without the shadow of student debt. Made with Canva elements.
Photo by Sabrina Santiago-Cruz.

School should not start this early

Current school start times are flawed and harmful for students.

By Christopher Gray
A&E Editor

As high school students, we know the struggle of getting up in the morning. Waking up after a long night of studying when it’s pitch black outside is an experience I’m sure is common. The effects of this are felt throughout the whole school day, with many students clearly feeling too tired or drained to come to school. Making kids wake up so early to go to school is extremely harmful and will damage them in the long run.

First, it is detrimental to teen health. Teens are recommended to get eight to ten hours of sleep per day. If students are balancing studying, work, extracurriculars, sports and their social lives, this goal is hard to achieve. In addition, a study by the CDC found that teens who do not get enough sleep have an increased risk of poor academic performance, obesity and depression. Waking up early and, therefore, being tired will also lead to teens relying on the consumption of substances such as energy drinks and coffee to keep them awake, which have their own additional health risks.

Waking up early also has a negative impact on the morale of students. Waking up before

sunrise is unnatural, and it leaves teens feeling groggy and staying that way for much of the day—especially during the winter months when the weather is bitter and depressing, which makes this bad feeling even worse. I’ve noticed that later in the school year, when it’s brighter earlier, I’m much more “awake” when I wake up. I’m actually ready and motivated to start the day. If schools want students to perform to the best of their abilities, early start times must be abolished.

Though they are a problem for the most part, current school start times also have some benefits. The current system allows students to participate in after-school activities such as sports, clubs or jobs, which they may not be able to do if the current seven-hour schedule were to start later.

Despite these benefits, the cons most definitely outweigh the pros; school districts across the country should greatly consider altering their schedules to support their students’ needs, especially as the consequences of the early start times become more and more detrimental.

You Did It! Now What? Steps to Take After Committing

The college decision has been made, but your college career is just getting started.

By Sabrina Santiago-Cruz
Staff Writer

It’s undeniable that there is relief after committing to a college. After months of drafting essays, tracking recommendation letters and anxiously checking the admission portals, you’ve finally made it! May 1 was decision day. Holding your sweatshirt and updating social media bios, felt like a massive weight off your shoulders. In reality, there’s still so much more to do.

Committing to a college unlocks a brand new checklist of time-sensitive steps. Every university has their own strict timeline, and missing them can impact where you live, tuition cost and classes you take. If you want to ensure a smooth transition to campus, here are some essential steps to focus on next.

1. **New Student Email and Portal**
Your new University will issue you an official student email account and access to a fresh student portal. This email becomes unique to you for your four years of college. Make it a habit to check regularly for any new updates. This is where your college will send critical updates such as any missing documents like financial aid or housing waiver.
2. **Housing, your new future place**
Unless you’re commuting and starting at home, securing a place to live is the next major step to take. Housing can be very stressful. Depending on the college, some operate on a first-come, first-serve basis, while others use a lottery system. Find your roommate as soon as possible!

3. **Navigating Placement Exams and Class Registration**
Before you can build the perfect schedule suitable for you, many colleges require a placement test in subjects such as math, foreign languages, or chemistry. These exams ensure that they don’t place you in classes too advanced or one you have already mastered.
- Once those are completed, keep an eye out for orientation and your registration date. Meet new people and make connections!
4. **Send the Final Paperwork & Finalize Financials**
Colleges will require a final official transcript and any AP, IB or dual-enrollments scores. This is usually your counselor’s task after graduation, but it’s also the students responsibility to confirm it was sent and received.

Review your financial aid award letter one last time to ensure everything is lined up. If taking out loans, there’s often

mandatory counseling that you must sign up for before the fund can be released.



Picture shows chalkboard with the words “College Commitment” created in Canva.
Photo made by Sabrina Santia-go-Cruz

What’s Going on at Senior Prom?

With many flashy dresses and dapper suits, HHS seniors rolled into prom at the Hilton hotel in East Brunswick, a huge venue.

By Corinne Kramer
Staff Writer

HHS seniors had their prom inside Hilton Hotel in East Brunswick, Friday May 15. To kick off the night, all the seniors were welcomed into the lobby of the hotel to begin scanning their student IDs. Teachers Mrs. Kimberly LaHart and Mrs. Melissa Blevins sat at a table scanning everyone in. “The choice for the venue really comes down to the size. There are over 700 kids here tonight,” LaHart said about the Hilton Hotel, and the process of picking the place to hold the prom.

There is always a lot of anticipation leading up to Senior Prom Night and Prom Weekend. All of the stress of getting ready and having everything prepared is to make sure everyone has the most successful night that they can. “I was looking forward to dressing up and seeing all my friends,” Senior Lillian Duea-Ebner said.

Once everyone arrived at the Hilton, a big swarm of seniors gathered in the lobby, chatting and snapping pictures. All of the teacher chaperones were there to guard the doors until they opened, and once they did open, the crowd trickled in ready for a night of fun. The dance floor was huge, stacked

with electric tiles on the floor, and a personal DJ. Some songs that were played included, “Dj Got Us Fallin’ In Love” by Usher and Pitbull, “Oui” by Jeremih and “Only Girl (in the World)” by Rhianna, which helped set the mood and tone for a night of magic.

This year, Prom Weekend, an event that is not sponsored by the school was held in the Poconos, an area with a nice river, and Airbnbs available for rent. There were parties each night, with music, food and fun outside activities. “My friends and I had to plan what we were doing months in advance, just to make sure we could get an Airbnb that’s near the river,” Senior Jamal Jarrett said. The one limiting factor was the humidity, but even with the weather humid and dreary, that took nothing away from having the most fun that everyone could. “Although getting an Airbnb close to the river is great, it was very hot,” Junior Kate Robinson added.

Each year, Senior Prom brings a fun and exciting excursion for the seniors and gives them more opportunities to meet more people in their class.



Sia Shah,Marae Timmons, Bhuvana Vasantavada, Anvi Sharma,Ananya Angara, and Zinia James, stand in front of the Hilton hotel water fountain, waiting to go inside.
Photo by Corinne Kramer

Formal Fun: HHS Juniors dress up for a night to remember at Junior Prom

Junior Prom at Hillsborough High School was a unique night of memorable food, music and moments that said goodbye to the past and welcomed the future.

By Afreen Sultan and Amy Leoza-Cortes
Editors-In-Chief

A buzzing energy filled the air as the junior class hardly contained their excitement anticipating the joyful night to come. Antsy to rush home and get ready, the juniors sat waiting for their early dismissal. Hillsborough High School celebrated their junior prom Friday, April 10 from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Marigold, a venue used for junior proms for the last several years.

“School’s been really hard for me this year between all my AP classes and SATs, so I felt that junior prom was the perfect reward for all that effort,” junior Rayna Saxena said. This year’s Junior Prom was definitely one that will be remembered as it was a night filled with laughter and excitement that reflected the numerous friendships developed throughout the year. The Marigold was shining throughout the night as students posed for pictures, flashing their cameras, and creating photos that would commemorate this important event.

Doors opened for students at about 5:30 p.m., as juniors were allowed to begin taking pictures by the picturesque gazebo, a staple in most of the school’s junior prom photos. Additionally, a mocktail hour also began at this time where drinks like Shirley Temples and Piña Colada were served. Junior began to indulge in these treats, while they retreated back outside to snap more pictures before being called inside.

At 6 p.m. students were called inside to begin finding their tables. As they walked in students looked around and voiced their astonishment at the lights and decorations that adorned the entire room. “When I walked into the ballroom, I was so surprised to see all the lights, the centerpieces, and the countless flowers. I loved the ambience of the entire event,” junior Durga Mahesh Sethulekshmi said. Then, at almost 6:30 p.m. on the dot, juniors rushed onto the dance floor. Immediately, songs that caused the dance floor to erupt in chaos began blasting on the speakers. The biggest hits of the night were, “Starships” by Nicki Minaj, “Pink Pony Club” by Chappell Roan, “Baby” by Justin Bieber, “Titi Mi Pregunto” by Bad

Bunny, “Party in the USA” by Miley Cyrus, “Dancing Queen” by ABBA, “Call Me Maybe” by Carly Rae Jepsen and “Beauty and a Beat” by Justin Bieber. Additionally, the DJ included a few songs for the couples that wanted to slow dance with their partners.

One of the other biggest surprises of the night was the buffet dinner that included impressive options like steak, mashed potatoes, salmon, penne vodka pasta, rolls and salad. The food was set up in numerous rows so that students could comfortably join a line to get their food in a timely manner and return to their tables. In addition to the main course, there was an entire desert spread towards the end of the night that included cupcakes, a vanilla and chocolate ice cream bar, and chocolate chip and snickerdoodle cookies. Overall, this year’s food, decorations, DJ, and numerous other aspects of the prom made it a night for the juniors to remember.

Two people that had a special and significant role in planning this event were junior class advisors Mrs. Blevins and Mrs. Lahart who dedicated numerous hours into ensuring that it was executed in a flawless manner. “You have to imagine that planning the junior prom is like planning a wedding every year. Luckily, some things are easy. We usually use the same venue, hire the same company to DJ and build a similar menu each year.

But there are things that change each year like updating the informational packet, picking the dates to sell tickets and determining the price for tickets. Every year we think about how we can streamline the process to make it easier for us to plan and easier for students to purchase their tickets,” she continued. “Up until the day of prom, we’re stressed. There are always last minute problems that arise. However, it’s all worth it when we see all the students dressed in their finest, smiling, dancing and taking pictures. We’re always so happy to see everyone having such a wonderful time,” LaHart said.

An especially heartfelt and unique moment during this prom was when LaHart gave a heartwarming speech to the audience about how she and Blevins had been serving as junior class advisors together for years and this partnership was unfortunately coming to an end as Blevins moved on. LaHart did briefly mention a new teacher set to fill the now vacant position.

Junior Prom was a night full of magic that welcomed the class of ‘27 to the beginning of the end of their high school career. This celebration marks the hard work and dedication that these students showcase, while rising from freshman, to sophomore and now junior year. The entire night was filled with happiness, the celebration of friendship and fun.



Pictured left to right: Junior Sanjana Chiluka, Shreya Ghat-tu, and Annika Chadha pose during cocktail hour preparing for a night full of memories.
Photo by Amy Leoza-Cortes

Where are the best places in Hillsborough to enjoy ice cream?

With summer right around the corner, here are some must visit places in town.

By Esmeralda Lopez
Staff Writer

Now that summer is approaching, the weather is heating up. Everyone loves to cool down with a sweet treat, but there are so many ice cream stores within Hillsborough, so which ones are the best?

Rita’s has been a staple in Hillsborough for years, with most of their customers being the middle schoolers who walk there right after school. Once Ritas opens back up again, most people know that spring has arrived. Rita’s ice cream has been beloved by many, as they mostly serve Italian ice, milkshakes and many other cold sweets that many customers enjoy.

Fruity Yogurt is mostly known for their frozen yogurt and unlimited toppings, but they have always served soft serve ice cream like cookies and cream, chocolate, and vanilla. They recently opened up a new hard ice cream station that includes fun flavors such as Taco Choco, Strawberry Cream Dream, Cinnamon Churro, Chocolate Marshmallow and many more. With their endless amount of

toppings arranging fruit, sprinkles, to nuts, and their free samples, Fruity Yogurt is one of the best choices for a sweet treat as it has bright and fun decor perfect for family or friends hangout.

Sweet Parlor is another great recommendation for ice cream lovers. While it opened around just 4 years ago unlike other stores mentioned, Sweet Parlor’s ice cream has soon made itself a staple in Hillsborough. They introduced fun new flavors that aren’t seen too often in Hillsborough, like the Ube which is used in their popular U-Be My Bae Sundae, and their White Panda Sundae which includes their black sesame ice cream topped with condensed milk, oreo crumbs, chocolate pocky, and vanilla whipped cream. They also serve bubble waffles with ice cream and any fun toppings, for example the Cereal bowl Sundae includes the waffle, a triple scoop of their Your So Lucky Ice cream, topped with sweet cereal and caramel. Sweet Parlor offers many options to serve all, and it should definitely check it out.

The Ice House offers many different items for ice cream from ice cream cakes to ice cream dog

bones so even your furry friends can be included. The Popular choice has to be the choose your own scoop which offers three sizes of ice cream with any dry or wet toppings. Ice House also offers soda shakes that are a choice of soda topped with vanilla ice cream or soda floats which allows any soda topped with any ice cream. The Ice House also offers dairy-free alternatives, making it an inclusive spot for everyone.



Fruit Yogurt remains a popular ice cream spot.
Photo by Nicholas Rios

Just by a thread: Seniors Snatch 2026 Spirit Night Win

By some of the smallest leads ever, the Seniors win both Spirit Night and Spirit Year by just 150 points.

By Nicholas Rios
Features Editor

Every year on the first Friday of May, HHS holds its annual Spirit Night event in the gymnasium, where the school honors all of their grades with a celebration of fun and competitive games as a way to end off the year-long Spirit Night competition. With the Freshmen and Seniors already neck and neck for the win, this year’s Spirit Night was one of the most competitive and closest yet in HHS history.

Spirit Night is an event HHS held more than a decade ago, and after its love from students, was soon implemented into the HHS schedule as a once-a-year event. The themes chosen for each grade were Freshmen & Furious, Sophomore Supervillains, Junior Just Dance, and Seniors in Space.

During the build up to Spirit Night, many people from different grades practice their roles in Spirit Night, whether it be rehearsing for their dance, preparing for the mini-games Spirit Night holds, and so on. But it doesn’t stop there, other people not participating in the activities that happen on Spirit Night can still help with the event itself, such as creating the theme displays, producing short films created and painting murals in the weeks prior to Spirit Night.

What makes this year different than most other years is that the Freshmen decided to put up fierce competition against the other grades, gaining over 10,000 spirit points prior to Spirit Night through spirit day events, such as short minigames in the school’s cafeteria and dress up theme days. By doing this, the Freshmen remained in first place the entire year with a 2000-point lead, with the Seniors in second, Juniors in third and Sophomores in last.

“There was such great energy shown, way more than before. The Freshmen getting more involved this year really motivated everyone,” teacher and Student Council advisor Carlin Dunne said. Additionally, Dunne shares her views. “I’d say Spirit Night is

popular because it’s a healthy and positive outlet to friendly competition. It involves many different people’s help, like artists and film makers, to hold events like it,” she added.

But the day Spirit Night takes place, it’s anyone’s game. Any grade has the chance to win the Spirit Year depending on how good they do during the Spirit Night games, and none of them were willing to lose without a competition this year.

Through intense competition from games like tug of war, musical chairs, and the reintroduction of the ski relay, thousands of points were handed out to different grades. Alongside the debates between who had the best short film, shirt design, mural and more, it was nearly impossible to predict who would win this year’s Spirit Night.

Students from multiple different grades shared their experience with this year’s Spirit Night. “The entire gym was so energetic and loud,” Sophomore Abbey Fenton said. “I went this year because I wanted to see the competition between all of the grades, and my friends participate in the activities,” she added.

“I went this year to be with my friends and experience Spirit Night for the first time,” Freshman Gracie Johnson said. “Watching my friend do the dance and the hula hoop relay was really fun.”

“Spirit Night during my

Freshman year was a lot more fun than I expected, and this year was even more fun,” Junior Sadie Miliano said. “Doing the dance alongside my friends was so fun, and hanging out with them without any pressure was great.”

“I went once during my Freshman year. It was fun, but I couldn’t go to others throughout my high school experience,” Senior Khoi Hoang said. “This year I had the chance to go again and see my friend be a part of the games, way better than Freshman year,” he added.

After going through all of the games and dances, the winners were announced. For Spirit Night, the Sophomores ranked last with 14,350 points, in third place were the Freshmen with 17,450 points, in second place were the Juniors with 19,500 points, and in first place with a very slim lead of 150 were the Seniors with 19,650 points.

After the Spirit Night winner rankings, the winner of Spirit Year was announced shortly after. In last place were the Sophomores, racking up a total of 20,475 points. Next up in third were the Juniors, with 27,175 points. And with the entire gym silent, anticipation building up between all grades, it was announced that once again by another 150-point lead, the Seniors were the winners of the 2026 Spirit Year with a grand total of 28,300 points, while the Freshmen placed second with 28,150 points.



The Senior class celebrates their musical chairs win, the game that secured both of their wins.
Photo by Nicholas Rios

Commitment Day for the Class of ‘26

By Afreen Sultan, Amy Loeza-Cortes and Ciara Blair
Editor-In-Chiefs and Guest Writer

Every year, it has been a tradition for seniors to gather in the senior courtyard after school on May 1 displaying the college they committed to through apparel alongside their friends and peers. This event is a chance for the students to see all the different paths their classmates have chosen to pursue for the coming years of their life. This year on May 1, 2026 Hillsborough High School seniors gathered on the football field before the start of the school day to display their college commitments and celebrate this milestone with their class.

This year, the tradition had a bit of a twist. Student council faced a challenge when they realized that this year’s Spirit Night was also planned on May 1. This would be a problem as each grade also has a Spirit Night shirt that they wear to represent their class, making it impossible for seniors to wear both their Spirit Night shirt and college shirts for the entire day. Additionally as Spirit Night was scheduled to start at 3:30, celebrating Commitment Day after school would force seniors to rush such an important milestone. As a result, student council suggested a solution. “Due to Spirit Night being on the same day as Decision Day, we will have decision day pictures on the turf for sunrise starting at 6 a.m. and going until the start of first period,” said senior Victoria Byra, an executive senior class cabinet member.

“While no part of me wanted to wake up at 5 a.m. in the morning to get ready for school, I was really happy with how the whole moment took place and with the fact that I was able to celebrate both Commitment Day and Spirit Night separately but on the same day,” said senior Parvathy Koppara. So rom 6 to 6:30 a.m. seniors began to arrive at the school and gathered on

the turf. Students hugged, laughed and cried among one another as they captured photos that would become remnants of this important day.

Senior Ridhi Kataria and her friend group all plan to attend Rutgers New Brunswick in Fall 2026, and came together for a picture. “I’ve known some of them since kindergarten, and some since the beginning of high school. All of us attending Rutgers means I can be around people who have consistently loved and supported me, giving me a strong base to begin a new journey,” Ridhi Kataria said.

As first period began seniors remained in their college apparel, proudly showcasing their future. Later, before the start of period 9, the students changed into their senior Spirit Night shirts. “Yes, the change of shirts was nerveracking in the moment, but now all I can remember is how exciting the day felt with all of its events,” said senior Anya Anand.

Over 200 seniors participated in a poll, sharing the distance and details of their plans. Senior Sharvi Gosavi, plans to begin her journey abroad, then attend Boston University. “I have always wanted to travel and explore the world, and when the opportunity to study abroad in my first semester arose, I had to take it. I also really love the city of Boston as well as the campus itself, so I'm really excited,” Gosavi said.

While Commitment Day is known to commemorate the seniors leaving behind all they know to move on to bigger and better things, May 1 also celebrates all the memories and moments that have defined the last four years of these student’s lives. While each one of these seniors can most likely recall patiently awaiting their Commitment Day for years, many are finally understanding how difficult it is going to be to leave everything they know behind.

New Club Makes Its Way to HHS: RUSH

By Julian Eckhart
Photo Editor

Russian and Ukrainian Speakers meet in room 154 after school on Tuesdays and Fridays from 2:30-3:30 p.m.. Their goal is to provide a safe space for all students who speak Russian and Ukranian. They gather to talk, help each other with homework, play games or have fun debates. A freshman and co-founder of RUSH, Karyna Voskanian, attends the club regularly. “We help each other learn, and sometimes we have days where we just go to this club and help each other with homework.” They celebrate Slovakian holidays such as Maslenitsa, a holiday of making crepes and dolls.

The club was founded when they realized the students needed some help with picking electives and moving around the school. They found that this club would help with finding more people like them, who struggle with English. Yaryna Kovalchuk is a senior who attends the club. “I like this school because it’s comfortable for me speaking my language because English is very difficult for me.” Khrystyna Voitykhouska, another senior, points out that students new to this country do not have the advantages of parents who can help them navigate the challenges

of school. “Everybody’s parents went to high school, and they know what to do, how to pick electives, how to know what grade you need for another class. We don’t know anything because we’re the first generation to go to high school here.”

RUSH brought their presentations to the student council in December of 2025. They were later approved in January. Vice Principal Mr. Colin School, outlined the process. “They give a presentation to the student council. The council talks about it and says ‘here’s the things we think are good, and here’s the things we don’t think will work or not.’ and then Mr. DiLollo and I sit down to talk about the feasibility of it and if we think that it’s worthwhile then we put it forth to the Board of Education,” Simpson said.

The club is dedicated to providing a community where everyone can come together, not just those who speak Russian or Ukrainian. Co-founder and freshman Iana Nasirova said, “The goal is to connect Russian and Ukranian speakers. Not only Russian and Ukranian, they might be from another country and speak Russian, so just to find new friends, to help each other.”

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CROSSWORD

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13

Across

2. Qualifying seniors are _____ from a final if they receive a 90 or above in the final two marking periods

4. Money awarded to stand-out students recognizing incredible work ethic, intellectual ability, or perseverance

8. Graduation location

9. Instagram page showcasing seniors and the college they have committed to

10. Overall average numerical summary of academic performance

13. Ailment affecting burnt out seniors nearing the end of the year

Down

1. Seniors wear merch from the college they will be attending on this day

3. Yearbooks are distributed to seniors and food is provided at this event

4. End of the year dance meant for seniors

5. Filling out this official form is essential for graduation

6. Designated destination for prom weekend

7. School unaffiliated activity in which seniors hunt down and spray each other with water

11. Once graduated the Class of 2026 will become _____ of HHS

12. Platform used to check grades and attendance

Invincible Returns for a Super Season 4

The animated superhero saga is back for fans once again.

By Chris Gray
A&E Editor

One of the greatest genre-defining shows on television right now is back. “Invincible” season 4 is the next installment of the saga based on the self-proclaimed “greatest comic book in the universe” by Robert Kirkman. Following the destructive finale of season 3, the wait has been too long. This season focuses on Mark’s further commitment to his role as a hero and protecting his family, no matter the cost. In addition, the season will feature the “Viltrumite War” storyline, which is the culmination of longtime buildup throughout the show.

At the beginning, the season continues a problem that I had with the beginning of season 3: it’s simply not captivating enough. I’m not expecting big, bloody, over-the-top fight scenes like the ones that are usually found at the end of each season, but I just expect the stakes to be a bit higher. Though the events put to screen happen in a very similar way in the original comics, with the show, it just feels like these openings don’t translate as well. I also believe that Amazon’s decision to premiere season 4 (and season 3 before it) with a three-episode premiere prevented each episode from standing out. In this season, though, the problem extended past the premiere, with episode 4, titled “Hurm,” serving as a completely unnecessary “filler” story that was not in the comics nor adds much to the story save for select scenes at the end.

Though the beginning was a little rough, the remainder of the season makes up for it. The end of episode 4 marks the transition into the “Viltrumite War” storyline, which closes up some loose ends and begins to open new ones, such as the threat of Thragg, the leader of the Viltrumites, who is one of, if not the main antagonist of the story. Of course, with this transition into a major story, the stakes are instantly lifted way higher, and the story becomes truly captivating again. As this arc continues, we are shown so many scenes of emotional tension done fantastically well. In addition, there are a couple great moments of shock and surprise guaranteed to

keep the viewer on their toes. As this storyline progresses, hype is built up for the climactic final showdown, which does not disappoint.

The look of the show definitely improved this season, namely the animation. Probably the biggest critique viewers have of “Invincible” is that the animation really isn’t the greatest, especially after season 1. Though it’s still flawed, it’s clear the animators have noticed these criticisms and addressed them, since the animation has gotten smoother and less clunky than the last season. In addition, the voice acting is once again stellar, especially given that the show has cast numerous celebrities (celebrities typically tend to not give the greatest vocal performances). Newcomer Lee Pace, who plays villain Thragg, shines, despite some fans’ hesitance over his casting. Though many expected a rageful, ruthless performance, Pace portrays the character in a much more fitting direction, with his approach expressing the noble and menacing leader that Thragg is supposed to be

Despite its flaws, overall, season 4 of “Invincible” is a solid continuation of the story, and will most definitely have you looking forward to more. If you’re a fan of the show, and haven’t seen the new season yet, watch all 8 episodes streaming on Prime Video.



Invincible Season 4 premiered on March 18. Photo published under fair use



Promo of Project Hail Mary, released March 20. Photo published under fair use

“Project Hail Mary” Amazes Audiences in Cinemas Around the Globe

The sci-fi blockbuster starring Ryan Gosling has been a wildly successful box office smash.

By Carolina Giordano
Guest Writer

Ever since NASA’s Artemis II mission around the moon, an interest in space travel has taken the world by storm, with entertainment being no exception. “Project Hail Mary,” a science-fiction novel by Andy Weir, was adapted into a film earlier this year and was directed by Phil Lord and Chris Miller. Coincidentally, “Project Hail Mary” premiered on March 20, 2026, just 13 days before the Artemis II launch. The success of “Project Hail Mary” goes beyond its social popularity and into the box office, where it has globally grossed over \$639.4 million and has become Amazon MGM Studios highest-grossing film ever.

“Project Hail Mary” follows science teacher Ryland Grace, played by Ryan Gosling, when he awakes as the sole-survivor on a spaceship with no memory of how he got there or who he is. As Grace begins to regain his memory, he realizes that he was sent to save the Earth from Astrophage, an alien microorganism that is slowly eating away at the sun. If Grace can’t find a way to stop the

Astrophage from killing the sun, life on Earth will cease to exist. As Grace ventures further into space in search for a solution, he finds that he is not the only one trying to stop the Astrophage. Grace meets an alien named Rocky from the extraterrestrial planet of Erid. Together, Grace and Rocky team up in order to save both of their planets from the star-eating microorganism.

Personally, I went into this movie not expecting much. However, by the end of the movie, I was absolutely obsessed with this story. “Project Hail Mary” is more than just the typical “hero saves Earth” movie. It’s a heart-wrenching story about sacrifice, friendship, and discovery. This film shows how differences between two species fall to the side when they have a shared purpose. The relationship built between Grace and Rocky conveys to the audience that emotional connection can transcend both language and background. Gosling did a fantastic job as Grace. Audiences have never seen him play this type of role before; however, he perfectly embodied the compassionate, nerdy

and heroic Ryland Grace. Another highlight from the movie was the cinematography that allowed full audience immersion. While in the theater, it felt like I was actually in space with Grace. Overall, this film is the epitome of the perfect sci-fi thriller and has easily become one of my favorite movies of all time.

If there is one guarantee when it comes to “Project Hail Mary”, it’s that this film will have you laughing one minute and sobbing the next. I highly recommend this movie to fans of other science-fiction movies like “The Martian” and “Interstellar.” “Project Hail Mary” may have been deemed an “out of this world” film in cinemas; however, NASA’s new missions and technological advancements are slowly ensuring that Grace’s outer space journey may become a feasible experience in the distant future. One day, films like these will no longer be fiction, but reality as humans continue to reach for stars beyond our solar system.

The Boba Battle: Hillsborough’s Newcomer vs The Bridgewater Icon

Is the local Gong Cha shop better than the iconic Gong Cha shop at Bridgewater commons?

By Sabrina Santiago-Cruz
Staff Writer

With the opening of a new Gong Cha near our Walgreens at 706 US-206, customers seeking bubble tea can stop for a convenient treat in town, but does the new location have the same taste and vibe as the beloved shop at the Bridgewater Commons Mall?

This popular bubble tea, or boba, consists of a tea base, either milk-based or fruit-infused, that is shaken until frothy and poured over pearls. These pearls are usually chewy spheres of cooked tapioca. Many people may choose to go to the Bridgewater location as it is surrounded by a high-energy environment compared to the silence at Hillsborough, which lacks that energy. However, taste and texture are also factors to consider.

Gong Cha at the Bridgewater Mall, the established and primary boba destination in the area, outperforms the location at Hillsborough in both texture and taste. Despite the mall being crowded on weekends, the wait for the perfect boba tea is at the Bridgewater Mall due to the consistency of their tea and its quality. It makes it a definitive choice for those who prioritize flavor over a less crowded area. The Gong Cha kiosk at the Bridgewater mall is always busy with high energy. It features a very minimalistic aesthetic interior.

The best thing about the Bridgewater Gong Cha is the texture of the boba, or the pearls. It almost tastes so fresh, warm and perfect. At the Hillsborough location, the tea to milk ration

really is not the best, as one overpowers the other one.

When trying to purchase a boba tea at the Bridgewater Commons mall, the wait can be really long due to its high popularity and convenience at a crowded shopping destination. The line can be as long as 15 people waiting to order. Alternatively, the shop in Hillsborough is very quiet and calm compared to Bridgewater Commons Mall.

If you are looking for a sugary distraction, the Gong Cha at Hillsborough is the perfect fit for you. But if you are looking for a true boba experience, the Bridgewater Commons location is the clear winner. The cost can range from \$5 to \$8 depending on the toppings. It really is worth the money and the drive.



A side by side visual comparison of the Hillsborough storefront (left) and Bridgewater Commons Gong Cha (right) Photo by Sabrina Santiago-Cruz

