



CHOATE UPGRADES ITS WI-FI NETWORK IN THE NEW YEAR

By **Anya Shah '25**
Associate Editor

Blue and Gold may still be Choate's school colors, but they are no longer the names of the School's Wi-Fi networks: Information Technology Services (ITS) recently made the switch from the "Gold" network to "eduroam," a network access service used in higher education institutions around the world.

Director of ITS Mr. Andrew Speyer announced the transfer to "eduroam" at School Meeting on Tuesday, January 9. He requested that all community members connect to the new Wi-Fi as ITS plans on shutting down "Gold" in the near future. "Eduroam" aims to improve school security while increasing the speed of internet access around campus. "Everybody knew the 'connect19' [pass-

word], and that inherently makes it insecure," Mr. Stephen Glassman, Manager of Network Technical Services, said.

With this change, on-campus faculty residences will also have access to ResNET, a network to make their home spaces feel more separated from school life. The network will support Internet of Things devices, such as smart appliances. "They live on campus, and we want them to be treated like they [are] at home and [have] nothing to do with Choate," Mr. Glassman added.

According to Mr. Speyer, the switch to "eduroam" was a two-step process beginning two years ago. First, ITS replaced the more than 700 physical access points located in campus buildings. Next, they established more secure wireless networks, including a new guest Wi-Fi process that allows guests to connect with a code sent via SMS or email and will limit external use of Choate's main Wi-Fi network.

"Eduroam's" appeal lies in its connection to higher education institutions worldwide. "We liked that you could go to another college or another member institution and log

in with your credentials," Mr. Speyer said.

Mr. Speyer also hopes that community members experience a faster network and more seamless connectivity on "eduroam." "It should be faster because when you walk from building to building, you connect on one access point, you leave it, and you connect to the next one," Mr. Speyer said.

With the majority of the school community now connected to "eduroam," there is only one more step before the transfer to the new network is fully complete — Mr. Speyer and his department are developing a fourth wireless network for boarders to connect their other devices, such as gaming consoles, too. "That will allow anybody on campus, any boarder on campus, to register their own games ... if they're the right age and form," Mr. Speyer said.

Following its predecessors of "Blue" and "Gold," "eduroam" will bring faster connectivity, higher security, and additional perks for the entire Choate community. "

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Students Explore Study Abroad Program in Japan



Graphic by Izzy Cook '27/The Choate News

By **Ethan Zhang '26**
Reporter

On January 8, the dining hall tables were surrounded by not only students enjoying their meals but also information about the Toin International Exchange Student Program (TIES). Mr. Norikazu Okuyama and International Coordinator Mr. Michael Cooke, from the Japanese private school Toin Gakuen, provided students with information about a potential opportunity for students to spend their summer abroad.

While arts and athletic activities may prevent Choate students interested in a term abroad from

studying internationally, the TIES Program offers a summer-time opportunity for students to go abroad without interfering with other commitments.

In the program, students attend Toin Gakuen, a private institution in Yokohama, Japan, from mid-June to early July. During their three-week stay, they live with a local host family and are paired with a student-host sibling of similar age.

TIES Program students are immersed in the normal schedule of a Toin Gakuen student to ensure that they get the best experience while living in an un-

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Health Center Launches Student Wellness Contest

By **Jolie Zhang '26**
Staff Reporter

In an effort to address the growing concern of sleep deprivation among students, the Health Center has launched a new initiative entitled "The SLEEP Contest." This competition is part of a larger contest series that aims to tackle health-related topics relevant to campus life. To encourage students to participate, the Health Center awarded contest winners prizes related to the topic at hand. For instance, winners of the SLEEP Contest won a pair of sleep headphones.

The overarching goal of the series is to instill and promote healthy habits within students' daily lives. By focusing on topics that directly impact the wellbeing of the student body, the Health Center hopes to provide valuable information and support.

As such, the SLEEP contest aimed to educate students about the importance of establishing consistent sleep sched-

ules. Director of Nursing Ms. Karen Klein shared, "Recently, kids are coming in, and they are talking about things that are affecting them, and sleep is always a big issue here."

Recognizing the significant impact of sleep on overall health and academic performance, the Health Center hopes that this initiative will empower students with the knowledge to make informed decisions about their sleep habits and, by extension, their overall wellbeing.

To promote student engagement in the contest, the Health Center set up a simple participation process where students can enter the contest by writing their names on a piece of paper and placing it in a designated box in the Health Center's waiting room.

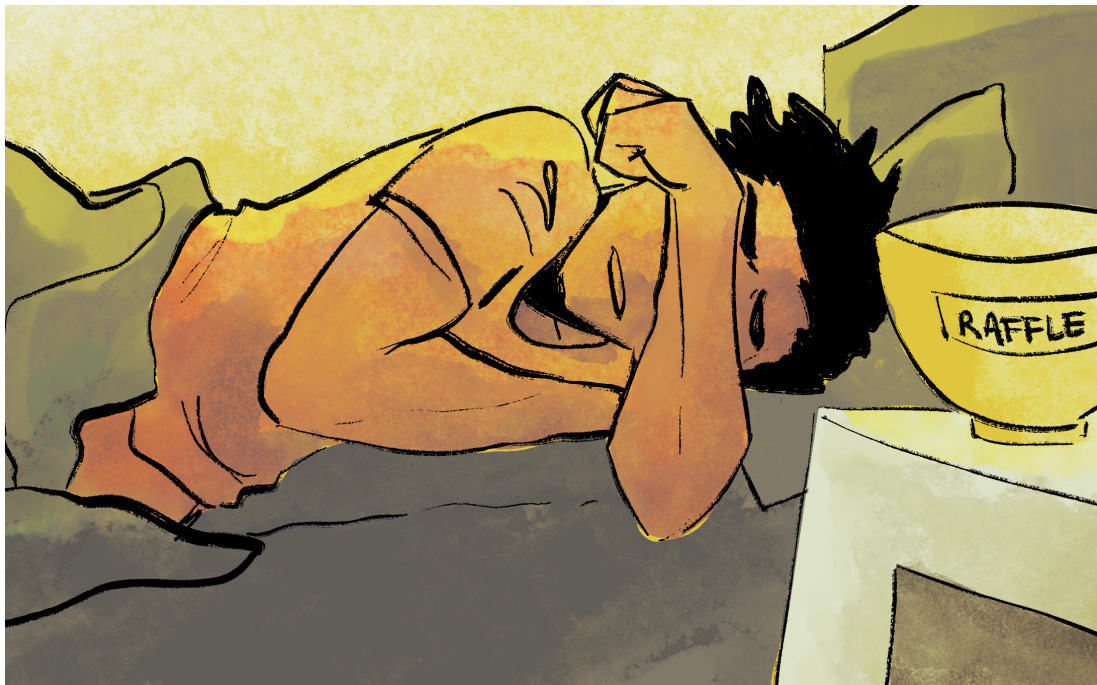
Posters in the waiting room provided additional information on the contest and offered practical tips for improving sleep quality. Some of these tips included: limiting light expo-

sure, establishing a consistent sleep routine, limiting caffeine intake, avoiding looking at screens before bed, and creating a calming bedtime routine.

The primary objective of the SLEEP contest was not only to raise awareness, but also to implement lasting behavioral change. "We wanted to reach the students through an educational way," Nurse Klein said. The Health Center hopes that students will take away strategies to improve their sleep.

In the future, the Health Center plans to cover other topics such as colds and flus, staying healthy in the colder months, and prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in future contests. By fostering broader ideas and providing valuable information, the Health Center is striving to create a healthier and more informed student body, one contest at a time.

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Graphic by Melody Qian '24/The Choate News

COUNSELING OFFICE INITIATES SUPPORT GROUPS

By **Addy Hawthorne '27**
Reporter

Although the Counseling Office has traditionally focused on one-on-one meetings with students, they introduced a new approach this year. Three times per week during the fall term, Psychology teacher and counselor Ms. Tiffany Rivera led 45-minute-long mental health and wellness support groups for students.

"At the beginning of the school year, I sent out a survey with a variety of topics that are common among teenagers and high school students. I used that feedback to then build the curriculum for each of the topics," Ms. Rivera said. Some session themes included perfectionism and imposture syndrome, balancing responsibilities and self-care, healthy versus unhealthy boundaries, living community values (within a dorm) setting, and managing winter clues.

In addition, Ms. Rivera wanted to increase engagement by bringing the support groups directly to dorms, so she held mandatory mental wellness group meetings for Nichols House, a freshman girls' dorm. These group counseling sessions were designed to address mental health problems at Choate in a way that connected students and lessened the stigma surrounding mental health and counseling.

Nichols resident Cindy Tian '27 appreciated the sense of solidarity the big-group format offered. "Sometimes, when you discuss things as a group, you can see that you're not the only one that feels that way," Tian said.

English teacher and Nichols's Head of House Dr. Mary Roca reflected on the impor-



Graphic by Rielle Reyes '27/The Choate News

tance of mental health. "A school like Choate has about a million things going on at any one given moment. I totally get that feeling of wanting to make the most out of your time here, but that leads to overstimulation, feeling overwhelmed, and taking on too much," she said.

Nichols resident Rielle Reyes '27 added, "We have a heavy workload, so it's important to keep all of us in check since it's very competitive and it's important to be healthy."

However, Students' busy schedules proved to be a barrier to the program's efficacy. "One of the challenges, to be fully transparent, has been participation," Ms. Rivera said.

While the compulsory format of the Nichols sessions helped with attendance, it came with its own set of issues. "It's hard for students to feel fully comfortable or fully engaged if it's not something that they had a choice in going," Dr. Roca said.

Tian agreed, saying, "I don't think it should be mandatory."

Despite these concerns, there seems to be a consensus among students and faculty that the groups have been helpful. "I've gotten positive feedback from students that have participated, and if anything, they're recognizing that it's normal to talk about mental health," Ms. Rivera said.

The sessions in Nichols from the fall term proved to be helpful a few months later. "I think it was beneficial, especially now that it's winter term, and there's going to be a lot more stress," Reyes added.

Sessions in the winter occur two nights in a week on Monday and Wednesday evenings. The Counseling Office will be piloting virtual sessions as well. Ms. Rivera encouraged everyone to "come and try it once and see if you benefit from it."

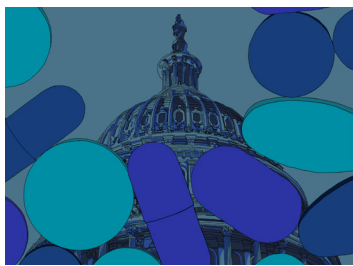
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Students Feel Holiday Spirit at Tiz the Season



Photo courtesy of Jolie Zhang '26

Students enjoy hot chocolate and candy canes at Tiz the Season outside of Lanphier Center.

By **Eliana Li '26**
Staff Reporter

Tiz the Season, founded by Math teacher and holiday connoisseur Mr. Marquis Tisdale, has become a cherished tradition among the Choate community. Taking place during the final stretch of Winterlude between the Thanksgiving and winter breaks, the event landed on December 12 this year and mark the end of 2023.

"Fourteen years ago," Mr. Tisdale shared, "I asked then-Dean of Students Mr. John Ford if I could steal the last School Meeting block of the calendar year to throw the School a party of sorts, and Tiz the Season was born. I felt that it was important for the community to get together for fun without any specific agenda."

During a free block abundant with hot chocolate, homemade treats, and festive cheer, students come together to celebrate the holiday spirit and clear their

minds from the stress-filled week. "Apart from the treats, I really just wanted the students to take some time to breathe and laugh with each other," Mr. Tisdale said.

Students responded to the event with much enthusiasm. "My favorite part of the event was definitely getting to relax and spend time with my friends. The last week of Winterlude is always super stressful, and it was nice getting a break from that," Emilia Stahura '26 said.

Bladen Hawthornthwaite '24 added, "The hot chocolate was delicious, and I really enjoyed being able to just talk with my friends without thinking about school."

Months of careful planning preceded the actual event; Mr. Tisdale collaborated closely with Director of Student Activities Ms. Alexandra Long, Manager of Campus and Community Events Ms. Raquel Simoneau, and SAGE Dining Services to secure a holiday menu and festive decorations. "Having people

around me who understand the purpose and the meaning of the event was extremely important," Mr. Tisdale said.

In addition to the treats and music, this marks the third year of the card signing table. Decorated with fun stationary and festive cards, students could sign cards with uplifting messages that were delivered to a retirement home in Wallingford. Mr. Tisdale shared, "In a small way, we came together to bring smiles to others who needed them."

Kara Wang '24 added, "It was a great feeling of brightening someone else's holiday in a small act that also brightened my own."

Observing the event unfold, Mr. Tisdale reflected, "My favorite part of hosting Tiz the Season is always to stand back and simply watch the school community gather, smile, and enjoy each other's company."

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SCHOOL CELEBRATES RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS WITH FESTIVITIES



Graphic by William Gao '24/The Choate News

By **Eshana Hora '27**
Reporter

While Choate students braced themselves for cold gusts of wind and shorter days in the beginning of the winter term, campus was warmed up by the multitude of religious celebrations hosted by spiritual groups. Two key events during this period were the Hanukkah Party and Lessons and Carols, held on December 8 and December 10, respectively.

Rabbi Barbara Paris hosted the Hanukkah Party to celebrate the Festival of Lights. At the event, students prepared Jewish latkes and spent time playing traditional games like dreidel. They also received chocolate gelt, lit the menorah, and retold the story of Hanukkah over a hearty meal.

According to Rabbi Paris, most students stayed at the well-attended event for close to three hours. Rabbi Paris explained

that her goal with the dinner was to "create safe spaces where people can explore and learn and be together," adding that there was a "place for everybody."

The Lessons and Carols service, hosted by Reverend Aaron Rathbun, Director of Spiritual Life and Protestant Chaplain, invited a mix of both Choate students and Wallingford residents to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

The echoes of hymns filled the Seymour St. John Chapel, accompanied by the voices of Choate's Festival and Chamber Choruses, a group of student instrumentalists, and the pipe organ. Students from Christian Fellowship read aloud scripture detailing the birth of Jesus, which was followed by a candle-lighting ceremony at the end of the service.

By the end of the event, 200 candles had completely melted, and 250 pre-prepared bulletins were gone. Rev. Rathbun hopes students gained both an

opportunity to observe Christianity in action and a chance to enjoy the music.

"I hope it's a blessing to those for whom they belong to that tradition, where they get to celebrate the birth of Jesus and observe their faith," he said. "And from an aesthetic perspective, for students to be able to appreciate the arts, it's a nice service to hear some great singing."

Behind the success of each event was the time spent planning and coordinating. Rabbi Paris said a lot of the "legwork" and scheduling took time to figure out, especially with the fear that students wouldn't show up because of other conflicting events.

In the end, both Rev. Rathbun and Rabbi Paris expressed that all the behind-the-scenes work was worth it because of the high attendance and the joy that people experienced.

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SENIORS FIND COMFORT IN SENIOR SLEDDING

By **Ellie Porter '25**
Staff Reporter

Racing down the freshly-powdered hill is synonymous with a particular Choate tradition: senior sledding. On January 7, at around 8 p.m., sixth-formers rushed to the hills of Gunpowder Creek.

There are only two conditions for senior sledding: there must be greater than four inches of snowfall, and the event must take place during study hours. Director of Student Activities Ms. Alexandra Long said she knew Sunday was the day: "We looked at the weather and then looked at the hill and thought it was perfect."

For many of the 100 seniors in attendance, senior sledding was an opportunity to bond with the entire grade and spend time together after returning from winter break. Christian Madon '24 said, "The highlight for me was reconnecting with friends I hadn't seen in a while, and I also got to make some new friends with people I hadn't necessarily met yet."

Ivie Ojior '24's favorite moment from the activity was when she and her friends "all linked up like a train and went down the hill."

Sixth-form Deans Ms. Amy Howland and Dr. Yaser Robles

supervised the event with help from the Student Activities Center (SAC). "You look to the top of the hill and see all these masses of students as they are sledding down, screaming and laughing," Ms. Howland said.

Senior sledding provided the senior class with the opportunity to take a break and have fun: "It served as a great way to destress from school and college applications," Madon said.

Ms. Howland also hoped that an activity as simple as sledding will help bring back nostalgic memories, which seniors experienced.

Claire Liu '24 said, "I had a great experience senior sledding, and I thought it was really fun to spend time with our entire grade and enjoy an activity that reminds me of my childhood."

While senior sledding is a senior-only tradition and rite of passage, sledding during the winter season is open to all. Ms. Howland hopes that students will head to the SAC with their IDs the next time it snows enough, check out a sled, and make some memories.

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Photo courtesy of Cassatt Boatwright '24

Seniors sled down the hill together while linking arms.

STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT TIES

Continued from Page 1

familiar environment. To help with integrating into Japanese school life, students are guided by their host siblings and form close bonds with them as they attend school together.

"You won't find another homestay program in Japan where your homestay family is your host sibling and a student who will go to school with you daily," Mr. Cooke said.

A typical day in the TIES Program consists of a two-hour Japanese lesson, exchange student activities, and cultural experiences such as Kyudo Archery, Shorinji Kempo (a Japanese martial art), and Koto Harp lessons. Free periods and meal times are also sprinkled throughout the day.

After school and on weekends, students embark on domestic excursions to Kyoto, Nara, and Tokyo, as well as

several cultural monuments. "We encourage students to immerse themselves in the local culture," Mr. Cooke explained. "You have to have an open mind and maybe do things you don't want to do."

Last summer marked the revival of the TIES Program after a brief hiatus during the Covid-19 pandemic. Jacqueline Yan '24 was the only Choate student who applied and attended.

Reflecting on her experience, she said, "I'm so grateful for my host family and the program coordinators. I gained so much from my time there — I learnt the basics of the Japanese language, enjoyed delicious food, experienced traditional Japanese schooling, and made tons of amazing friends and memories."

The homestay aspect of the program was particularly rewarding for her. "From my host family, I learnt about the culture of itadakimasu. In Japan, it is

customary to say "itadakimasu" before a meal and "goshisousama deshita" after to express their gratitude for receiving the food," she shared. "I loved the simplicity and expression of the act."

Even after students depart from Japan, the impact of the TIES Program does not end. Having been a host sibling himself, Mr. Okuyama said he still keeps in touch with the visitor he hosted 30 years ago.

Mr. Cooke also highlighted the program's ability to have both an educational and emotional impact on its participants. "It's bittersweet because you have all the students departing from their host families; everybody's crying," he said. "But it's rewarding for me to know that I'm doing something so valuable as an experience for these kids."

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Counselors Present Wellness Seminar on Relationships

By **Annelie Hang '25**
Staff Reporter

On January 5, fifth- and sixth-form students attended a Wellness Session centered around social attachment styles. Counselors presented on the two main groups of attachment: secure and insecure. In bringing awareness to this topic, Choate's counselors hoped to encourage students to reflect on the relationships they have established with others, both within and outside of school, and understand how their relationships with their parents or guardians have shaped them.

When choosing a topic, the Counseling Office considered what would be most beneficial in a singular meeting — something short, simple, and relevant to student lives — before settling on attachment styles. Ms. Raynetta Gibbs, Director of Counseling, explained, "Sometimes students don't have an idea why they relate to people the way they do, and we thought it would be a good idea to introduce that."

The Counseling Office hopes that through these presentations like this one, they can become more familiar with students who are not in counseling or have nev-

er interacted with them. By having a larger presence on campus, they hope students will be able to see the counseling team as adults they can feel comfortable reaching out to.

Although form meetings were held a day prior to the Wellness Session, the interactive nature of the presentation kept students engaged. The counselors gave candy to those brave enough to share in front of their form, and small-group discussions allowed for moments of vulnerability and reflection.

"I feel like I now know better how to approach Choate's social environment and have learned a lot about myself through the activities during the program," Chloe Crowell '25 said.

Ms. Gibbs hopes that students left the meeting with a better understanding of their attachment style and the way that it has formed the relationships they currently have or previously had.

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Graphic by Leah Han '27/The Choate News

WALLINGFORD VICTORIAN INN RECEIVES A MAKEOVER



Photo by Kino Liu '26/The Choate News

The Wallingford Victorian Inn sits on the corner of Main Street and Curtis Avenue.

By **Sophia Liao '25**
Associate Editor

On the corner of Main Street and Curtis Avenue sits the historic Wallingford Victorian Inn, which is soon to become Choate's newest addition to campus — Inn at Choate Rosemary Hall. In 2021, Choate purchased the Wallingford Victorian Inn. Since then, the School has been renovating it into accommodations and an event space for Choate families and guests.

The space was initially a private home built as a wedding present to Georgianna Hull and Charles Tibbits from Ms. Hull's parents Gurdon W. Hull and Elizabeth Simpson Hull. Later, it housed various businesses and doctors' offices before it was converted into the Wallingford Victorian Inn.

Complete with five elegant suites and an accommodating morning breakfast, the Wallingford Victorian Inn welcomed guests looking for somewhere quiet and homey to stay. In 2021, the property was put up for sale and officially purchased by Choate.

When Choate bought the inn, they intended for it to resemble the function and space of the Sally Hart Lodge and Alumni Center that sits at the four-way intersection between

Christian Street and North Elm Street — a central location on campus. The Sally Hart Lodge houses seven guest rooms for guest speakers, alumni, parents of current or former students, prospective students and families, and summer program families.

However, with over 10,000 visitors that come to campus annually for events like Commencement, Family Weekend, Alumni Reunions, and Opening Days, "seven rooms doesn't really offer that much flexibility," Chief Communications Officer Ms. Alison Cady said. With the "extraordinary uptick in interest in the School over the years," according to Ms. Cady, the School was quick to take up the opportunity to buy and renovate the inn. "It's helpful to have some level of flexibility or elasticity in terms of accommodation," Head of Student and Academic Life Ms. Jenny Elliott said.

While the added guest rooms may not suffice for the large demand that comes with big weekends, "we just feel like it'd be really nice to be able to offer options for people on campus," Ms. Cady said.

Mirroring Sally Hart Lodge, the new inn will also have seven guest rooms with breakfast included. All of the infrastructure will be made electric to

eliminate the use of fossil fuels, natural gas, and heating oil. Additionally, the new inn will incorporate features to make it more accessible to people with disabilities, such as an elevator in the back.

While the location of the new inn is less central to Choate's campus than that of the Sally Hart Lodge, it is in close proximity to downtown Wallingford, which will allow guests to explore the town. "It's a really nice way to get a feel for the campus," Ms. Cady said. "If you're an alum[nus] and you want to come back and visit, this is a really nice way to fully immerse yourself during your visit."

In the spirit of inheriting the historic building, the School is renovating the inn with architectural charm and historical elements in mind. A Victorian touch will be implemented in honor of the inn's long history since its founding.

However, "it will not be decorated in Victorian style as ornately as would be appropriate for that period," Ms. Cady said. The inn will be cozy and modern like the Sally Hart Lodge, but with a bit of Victorian flair to it.

According to Ms. Cady, the inn will be open to guests after spring break concludes.

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EXPLORING WALLINGFORD'S WINTER MARKET

By **Rachel Fan '27**
Reporter

The Wallingford Winter Garden Market, an initiative sponsored by the Coalition for a Better Wallingford and the HUBCAP Wallingford, is a new event for local vendors to sell seasonal produce and artisanal goods. It takes place every Saturday from December 2 to March 30 inside the HUBCAP Wallingford building on 128 Center Street. While the Wallingford Garden Market occurs annually over the summer, this is its first appearance in the winter season.

Sharing insights into the creation of the event, Mr. Jon Scagnelli, the organizer and supervisor of the Winter Garden Market, explained that the concept emerged as a natural extension of the community's desire to support local vendors during the colder months. "It started as a way to provide a platform for local farmers and artisans to continue their trade beyond the traditional market season," Mr. Scagnelli said.

Initially focused on boosting small businesses and local producers, the Winter Garden Market has now evolved into an essential part of Wallingford's winter activities, attracting residents to shop and engage with the community.

Each week, the Winter Garden Market features up to 21 vendors carefully selected to offer a diverse range of products. These vendors

include long-standing local businesses, such as home bakery Tasty Sprinkle, and newcomers, like this week's addition Ideal Fish, a fish vendor selling fresh, quality fish raised in stress-free environments. From freshly baked sourdough bread to handcrafted pasta, the market is a showcase of culinary diversity and craftsmanship.

"Our aim is not just to provide a shopping venue, but to create a space where the community can learn about and engage with the people behind these local products," Mr. Scagnelli said. The market also serves as an opportunity for new businesses to gain exposure. Mr. Scagnelli noted, "Participation in the market can be a significant step for new vendors to introduce themselves to the community."

Despite the winter months limiting the availability of fresh produce, many vendors at the market have adapted by offering preserved items as alternatives to their usual offerings. One such vendor is Meadow Walk Farm. Known for selling farm goods during the summer, they have shifted their focus in the Winter Garden Market to a selection of homemade jams.

"Our faith in the market's supervisor, who has excellently managed the summer events, inspired us to join the winter version," Meadow Walk Farm's vendor said. "We've seen his great work at the Farmers Market, so participating

in this winter event was a natural decision for us."

The Winter Garden Market also features a range of exclusive products that are hard to come across otherwise. Pinebrook Farm, for instance, is a family-run farm that offers a selection of American wagyu and quail eggs.

"As newcomers to the local market scene, we've recently begun engaging in community events like this one," the farm's owner said. "Our goal is to introduce our produce to more people, helping them discover that high-quality products like Wagyu beef are locally available and cultivated right here in Wallingford," he continued.

Mr. Scagnelli hopes that the Wallingford Winter Market will become a longstanding tradition in the town. He sees potential for the market to evolve, extending access to certain seasonal goods year-round. Mr. Scagnelli also mentioned ongoing discussions with various stakeholders, including local merchants and the Wallingford Parks & Recreation Department, about broadening the scope of the market to feature seasonal themes throughout the year. "There's a wealth of ideas on how we can grow and adapt the market to make it a year-round feature for Wallingford," he said.

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Photo by Rachel Fan '27/The Choate News

The Garden Market welcomes the Wallingford community.

SWING BY BACK 9 SOCIAL FOR A TEE-RRIFIC TIME

By **Constanza Aportela '24**
Reporter

Parallel to the Wallingford Walmart Supercenter sits a metallic structure with an unassuming facade. Behind its walls lies an oasis from Wallingford's gloomy winter weather — Back 9 Social, a virtual golf facility and gastropub.

Back 9 Social's interior is lined with 11 bays containing TrackMan 4 golfing simulators, offering a plethora of courses and games that customers can enjoy. There is also a bar serving various cocktails, non-alcoholic beverages, and snacks — from chicken tenders to garlic knots that can accompany players as they perfect their swing.

The choice to use Trackman was largely influenced by the fact that "it is the launch of monitor of choice for the top players," as stated on the Back 9 Social website. Trackman is a golf simulator producer that uses high-end technology to provide golfers with data on their swing and ball flight, giving insight into one's golfing ability regardless of level.

Ernie Mok '25 visited Back 9 Social in 2022 with his family.



Photo by Constanza Aportela '24/The Choate News

Back 9 Social features virtual golf and a gastropub.

Recounting the experience, he said, "It's really cozy. The restaurant and bar area is right next to the golf simulators, so you can eat and also play with big groups of friends."

However, regarding the simulators, Mok said, "I would recom-

mend it to people who want to try out golf, but not necessarily to people who want to use it to train."

Mara Rojas '24, who visited on January 14, said, "You can also play your own music, so it's definitely a great place if you just want to have fun with friends."



Photo by Constanza Aportela '24/The Choate News

Mara Rojas '24 takes a swing.

According to Manager Mr. Nace Schimldr, a game of "capture the flag and playing at least nine holes of any course around the world" are musts for visitors.

Back 9 Social is open seven days a week, so Wallingford

residents can visit regardless of snow, hail, wind, or excruciating heat. "The owners' goal was to give people an alternative option for something fun to do that is indoors and doesn't rely on Mother Nature," Mr. Schimldr said.

Regarding the decision to set up operations in Wallingford, Mr. Schimldr said it "offered a good location and good savings because Wallingford electricity is pretty affordable at this time."

For amateur golfers, Back 9 Social can be an affordable way to try the sport. "It's pretty expensive to play golf because you most often need to purchase a club membership," Rojas said. "This is a much less expensive way to try out and explore golf versus going to golf courses."

Customers can reserve a bay on Back 9 Social's website. One hour at a bay ranges from \$45 to \$60 depending on the date and time. At peak hours, 60 minutes is \$50, 90 minutes is \$75, and 120 minutes is \$100. Customers can also host larger parties and book Back 9 Social's suites with lounge areas. "It's a great way to release some energy and have a great time with a group of friends," Mr. Schimldr said.

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How I Survived A
Plane Explosion



Graphic by Xyla Kiang '26/The Choate News

By **Brendan Beng '26**

Opinions Staff Writer

Flight JL516 was a routine trip from New Chitose Airport in Sapporo, Japan to Tokyo's Haneda Airport. For all I knew, it would be just like every other flight I had taken. How wrong I turned out to be.

The mood on the flight was calm. There wasn't much to do but wait until we landed — it was barely a one-and-a-half-hour-long domestic flight. I almost slept through it entirely to prevent jet lag. I awoke just as we were about to touch the ground, anticipating my connecting flight to New York City.

It was a relatively normal landing before I was suddenly jolted upwards. I felt as if I was floating for a brief second before crashing back into my seat as the entire plane lurched forward. There was a momentous boom behind me, which sounded like a bomb. The jet engine on the left wing burst into flames, and out of my window, I could see sparks flying. Then, there was a sudden screeching of metal grinding against tarmac until the plane skidded to a halt.

Smoke started billowing out from the cabin. The windows were illuminated by an eerie orange glow. I had never been more afraid in my entire life, yet despite the hellish situation that we were in, everyone else on the flight seemed rather calm — excluding the flight attendants shouting instructions and some passengers pushing

and shoving to reach the exits. The sudden catastrophe left me so shocked that I was unable to panic in the moment. I was focused on one thing: survival.

I lay low to prevent myself from breathing in too much smoke and quickly crept towards the emergency exit door at the front of the plane. I jumped out and slid down the evacuation slide until I was on the grassy ground. I then ran as far away as I could. I watched from afar as the flames snaked their way up to engulf the plane until a smaller explosion went off as the cockpit exploded. I felt a wave of relief wash over me. I was alive.

After all the passengers were accounted for, we were piled into three buses and taken to a holding center in the terminal. They handed out water and snacks and gave out information forms for us to fill out. We were held for nearly three hours before they let us out in groups to shield us from the swarming press. The ordeal was finally over.

To describe a near-death experience as life-changing would not remotely do it justice. While I would not wish this experience on anyone, it has shown me how important it is to live life to its fullest — for but in an instant, it can all be taken away.

Brendan Beng is a fourth-former from Singapore, Singapore. He may be reached at bbeng26@choate.edu.

STANDARDIZED TESTING FUELS
INEQUALITY AND INSECURITY



Graphic by Evelyn Kim '25/The Choate News

By **Ana Isabella Bury '25**

Opinions Writer

To standardize any particular system is to assure consistency and regularity. The College Board and ACT Corporation insist that the scoring processes for their respective tests, the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and American College Testing (ACT), are fair and “standardized.” But how can they emphasize these ideals when the system itself is inequitable?

The standardized testing system is unfair and outdated. Furthermore, the weight that these arbitrary tests carry for our academic futures, as well as the impact they have on our own self-worth, is detrimental to student mental health. Standardized testing is akin to the traditional secondary school grading system: both are influenced by factors beyond an individual's talents and work ethic.

Researchers at the University of Pennsylvania found that SAT

and ACT results are heavily influenced by family income. Stanford University's Educational Opportunity Project (2009-2018) found that school districts in lower-income areas also have lower average scores on standardized tests. Why is this the case?

Well, students from higher-income families can hire private tutors, enroll in standardized testing courses, and generally have more time to focus on their studies because their families have their finances covered. This inequality amongst families of varying socioeconomic statuses leads to lower test scores in lower-income groups, making the college admissions process even more difficult.

I believe, however, that inequality within the standardized testing system, or any grading system in general, is only part of the problem. These scores and grades are damaging to student mental health not only because they are influenced by factors out of students' control — such as

where they come from and their family income — but also because they have developed into determinants for our own self-worth.

In my Moral Reasoning class, we discussed the effect of these grades and numbers on our livelihoods and how they influence our level of self-confidence.

“When you're an 88 average student, you just carry yourself differently than someone who feels like a 95 average,” Peter Carini '24 said. “[Grades] just keep you in a box,” Pearson Hill '24 agreed.

I strongly agree with both Carini and Hill — grades and test scores poison our self-confidence and, in turn, our access to opportunities. Receiving poor grades or poor standardized test scores can make one feel unintelligent, lazy, or inadequate; the wrong number or letter can destroy one's chances of attending a good college and achieving a desirable future.

Worst of all, we use grades and test scores to decide someone's worth. Colleges use these

letters and numbers to determine our value to their school, and we use these letters and numbers to determine our own value to society.

“You're not able to think more than those grades because you think, ‘All right, that's who I am, and these grades are my value,’” Hill said. Carini agreed, describing this phenomenon as “dangerous.”

Although 80% of universities in the U.S are currently test-optional, there is still pressure to submit scores amongst these schools because grades and scores have become so deeply embedded into our self-image. The only way to combat this issue is to restructure the education system in and of itself, replacing the emphasis on numerical test scores with an emphasis on hard work, academic growth, and intellectual curiosity.

Ana Isabella Bury is a fifth-former from Coto Laurel, Puerto Rico. She may be reached at abury25@choate.edu.

Community Conversation Opened Channels on
Political Identity Raised Important Issues

By **Francesca Howard '26**

Opinions Staff Writer

As Choate's Community Conversation on political identity drew near, it quickly became the most anticipated event on campus. An arguably more contentious topic than ever before, it was predicted to spark sudden controversy.

From dining hall small talk to English class discussions, speculations about the heat it would provoke and bold opinions it would uncover were rampant. Everyone, myself included, was eager to see how the conversation would unfold.

When the day arrived, the conversation didn't disappoint; it was every bit as interesting as we had hoped it would be. Choate's Community Conversations are all-school discussions designed to promote awareness within our community. This particular one undertook the arduous task of breaking down barriers around one of the most polarizing topics: politics. Subtopics arose on the day of the conversation, such as how people develop their political identities, how they have changed over time, and most controversially, how Choate has shaped them.

Students from various sides of the political spectrum spoke up, but there was one thing almost all of them agreed upon: Choate is a monolithic community; not necessarily in political identity, but in the beliefs that students feel safe expressing. In other words, Choate community members are uniform in political expression in order to be accepted by others.

Students, particularly those with conservative political views, argued that Choate discourages independent thought by pushing an agenda that favors

progressive beliefs. They mentioned how grades, especially in their humanities classes, are influenced by their teachers' personal opinions; therefore, they feel pressure to conform to their teachers' beliefs in order to receive a good grade.

Choate's Community Conversation was juicy — yes — but needed to address the root cause underlying many of our community's problems. Unfortunately, it did not. Most of the phenomena that Choate students flagged in the political identity Community Conversation are real, and I think it is up to the students more so than the School to solve these issues.

As someone who doesn't firmly identify with any particular political party, I resonate with the challenges of holding opinions that don't always align with the majority. Growing up in a conservative-leaning household while attending a progressive school in New York City, I've always had two opposing spheres of influence in my life, neither of which I fully identified with. There was

always pressure to align myself with one of the two parties even though deep down, I couldn't.

While I haven't necessarily found a space I fully associate with, my educational background has taught me that unanimous agreement is rare, which is a good thing. Disagreement should be a catalyst for discussion, not division. Our education system is contingent upon learning, and learning is contingent upon difference.

Many Republican students think that they have to be armed with the most flowery vocabulary and must be the leaders of the discussion to even participate in the debate in the first place. More students attend the Young Democrats club than the Young Republicans club because young Democrats can blend into the crowd. Self-proclaiming Republican students, on the other hand, must defend their intellect and beliefs much more often because they are the minority at Choate.

Be that as it may, my problem with political discussion in classes, clubs, and at Choate

in general is that many of the arguments are shaped by misinformation. This might stem from Gen Z's preference for sourcing news from social media, which isn't the most reliable. I often see my peers repost on their story and call it activism. Activism isn't activism if it is purely performative. Activism isn't activism if you haven't done actual research outside of Instagram and TikTok.

I think Choate needs to offer more political education that teaches beliefs from multiple parties so that students can develop their own political identity rather than having it be decided for them by the School. Choate could offer workshops in political literacy or in current events. Additionally, students need to make Choate a more welcoming place for conservative views or any other sort of view that doesn't align with the majority.

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Graphic by John Jannotta '25/The Choate News

FEDERAL LEGALIZATION CAN END WAR ON DRUGS

By Stan Cho '25
Section Editor Ops N/W

Marijuana laced with cocaine, recreational fentanyl usage, and needles coated in heroin — these are just some of the key identifiers of the ongoing drug epidemic.

The United States is no stranger to an excess of these illegal substances, with a rise of over 100,000 overdose deaths in 2022 since the year before, according to Data for Progress. Despite the government’s numerous attempts to squash the production, distribution, and consumption of narcotics with programs such as D.A.R.E. and the FDA , it seems that the one possible solution to America’s drug problem — characterized by widespread addiction and overdose-related fatalities — is for the government to establish its own management over Schedule I substances like cocaine, heroin, and marijuana.

Since former President Richard Nixon declared the war on drugs fifty years ago, hundreds of thousands of Americans have been incarcerated, yet illicit drugs remain abundant via operations helmed by criminal organizations.

Solutions that the U.S. government has tried have not gone far enough. Take Oregon, for example, the first state to decriminalize all drugs. Rehabilitation programs are not being utilized, and fatal overdoses rose by 23%. The initiative, Measure 110, sought to reduce arrests for possession and instead offered a phone number for users to seek



Graphic by Stan Cho '25/The Choate News

out treatment. However, this program failed to adequately support users in rehabilitation programs. Unrestricted drug use, in other words, is a short-term solution for decreasing the number of incarcerated individuals while continuing the long-term problem of addiction.

On the other hand, aggressive law enforcement has encouraged cartels to engage in an arms race to establish control over drug markets. The inefficient legalization of marijuana in select states has been met with controversy, with 44% of Americans surveyed by the Pew Research Center in 2015 arguing against the legalization of marijuana.

Arresting drug consumers has only created market opportunities for replaceable low-level dealers, which acts as further protection for criminal organizations.

Cracking down on drug distribution will not inhibit these organizations from continuing their operations. To remove the influence of criminal organizations whose finances are fueled by drug sales, it is imperative that the U.S. exploit the continuous consumer demand for drugs to establish its own narcotics market.

There are many different ways to accomplish this, whether that be through cooperation with private pharmaceutical compa-

nies or by supplying drugs produced and controlled solely by the government. If handled and distributed strategically, a complete legalization of drugs secured via the government could be the solution.

Though it may seem reckless for the U.S. to produce and distribute its own drugs, ranging from recreational products to opioids, there are a slew of benefits in a drug distribution operation overseen by the government.

The catalysts to the war on drugs were the consequences of its consumption. Of these repercussions, the most prominent are overdoses. Regardless of whether or not it is fatal, exces-

sive consumption of narcotics has depleted medical supplies and endangered the lives of millions. The increasing frequency of overdoses can be attributed to poor education on drugs, which encourages the reckless abuse of narcotics. These factors then contribute to widespread addiction, further fueling the demand for drugs, which is supplied by criminal organizations.

However, this relentless cycle of punishment can be resolved through federal distribution of drugs. The government would be given ample opportunity to educate their consumers before distributing their drugs, allowing potential consumers to

rethink their purchase and providing the opportunity for drug users to stray from abuse.

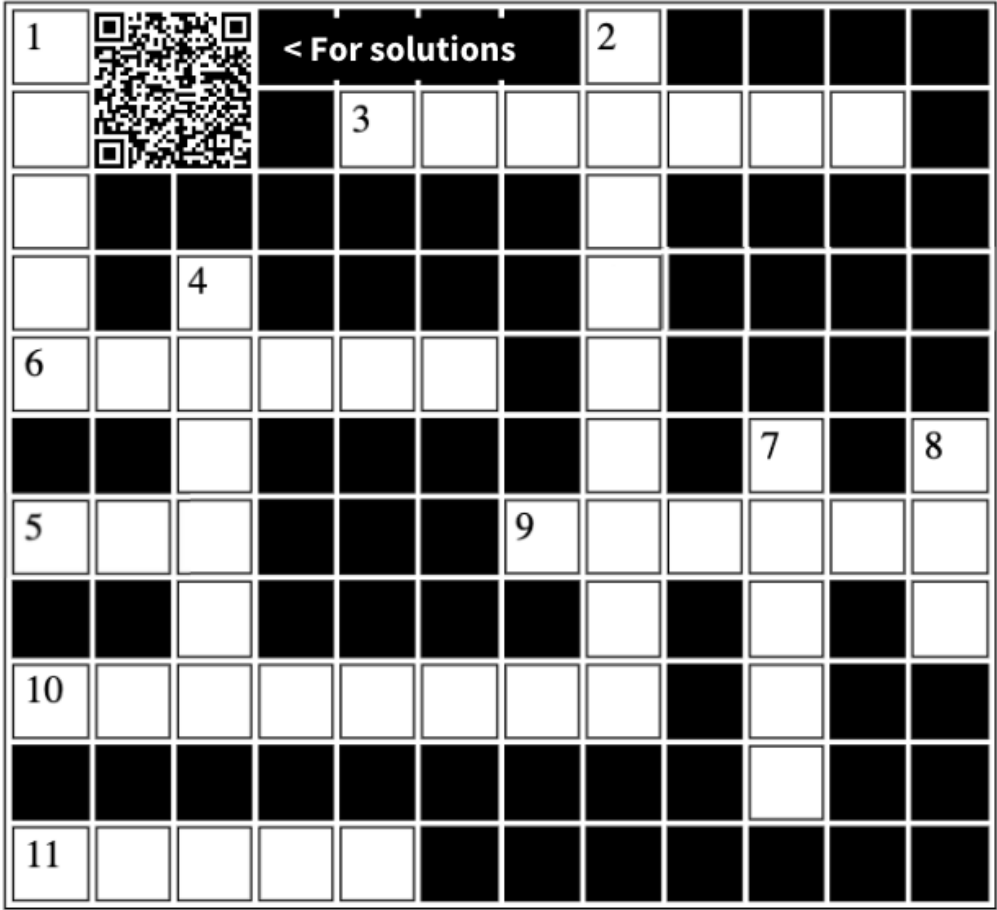
The government could maintain an extensive database of individuals who have previously been arrested for illicit drugs. This database wouldn’t necessarily track citizens and their habits; simply, it will keep a record of frequency and usage. This database would make it easier for the government to observe the purchasing patterns of consumers in case medical help is deemed necessary.

This way, those who would normally have been arrested would no longer be incarcerated; the government would instead provide constructive reprimand for civilians via community service.

The goal of the criminal justice system, when it comes to drug use, should not be punishment. If a model of government-distributed drugs is adopted, rehabilitation would instead be the primary focus. Those who have illegally purchased, overdosed, and distributed drugs to non-registered consumers would be given the opportunity to reflect and learn.

Extensive incarceration spanning decades has shown no progress on diminishing the demand for drugs or the rate of overdoses. Establishing a government-led drug distribution system would help to strategically organize and predict trends in drug use to ensure the wellness of American citizens.

Stan Cho is a fifth-former from Busan, South Korea. He may be reached at scho25@choate.edu.



Across

- 3. Replacement for “forever true to ____ and blue.”
- 5. Sally Hart Lodge dupe
- 6. Color Mr. Carey Kopeikin commits to.
- 9. From HPRSS teacher to wellness support group founder.
- 10. Extreme sixth-form winter sport.
- 11. Squash legend and \$ amount.

Down

- 1. ZZZZ contest.
- 2. Pinned history at Andover.
- 4. “I’m on the ____ of society,” say some actors with dramatic gestures.
- 7. “Astute and intuitive playwright.”
- 8. Test before Sun. Or past of sit.

By Zainab Khokha '24

Clues from the crossword are related to articles published in this issue.

Elon Musk Demonstrates Necessity for Accountability

By Ethan Zhang '26
Opinions Writer

Elon Musk has faced major backlash concerning his support of an anti-semitic post published on his platform X, formerly known as Twitter. Though Musk is theoretically free to express his opinions, influential individuals such as himself must be wary and cognizant of the weight of their words.

The post in question posited an anti-semitic conspiracy theory, a narrative often spread amongst white supremacist groups. It admonishes the Jewish community for pushing “dialectical hatred against Whites” and supporting the “hordes of minorities flooding Western countries.”

Of course, Musk, just like everyone else whose civil rights are protected by the Bill of Rights, is bestowed with the right to present his mind. Even so, the First Amendment should not be a shield or catch-all defense for those who articulate hearsay or hate speech.

In typical Internet fashion, it was not long before people began scrutinizing Musk’s anti-semitism, and the criticism surrounding Musk’s reply — both to the original post and his apology — helped to spread awareness of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East and the implications of Musk’s actions on the Jewish community. Major companies such as Apple, Lionsgate, and Paramount Global also ceased all of their advertisements on the

platform, further contributing to the punishment that Musk, who possesses 80% ownership of X, received.

And yet, there have been no truly tangible consequences for Musks’s actions. The media has forgotten about Musk’s misdeeds. There’s no stock to crash. The scandal involves a single apology and a couple of grudges, but it will ultimately be erased from memory.

A prolific angel investor, CEO, and CTO, Elon Musk seemingly has influence everywhere. This begs the question: was this all just a marketing scheme? A rage bait response to increase traffic and activity on his social platform all while he feigns ignorance?

In this specific instance, the Jewish community was fortunate enough to have received overwhelmingly positive support in response to Musk’s comment. But there’s a layer of politics hidden beneath Musk’s actions.

The man responsible for programming PayPal, creating self-driving electric automobiles and reusable spacecrafts must have had some idea about what his blatant anti-semitism would entail. And yet, he carried out his actions. Though it is speculative, Musk’s decision to respond to the original post may have been a financial one — a rage bait response to accumulate activity on his social platform cloaked as ignorance.

A world where companies use cruel methods to promote their products is indicative of both the profit-obsessed indi-

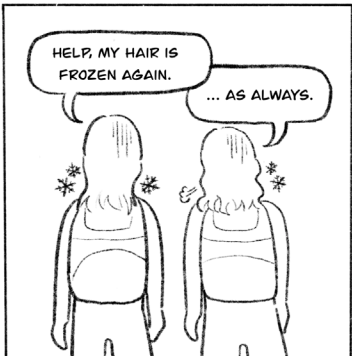
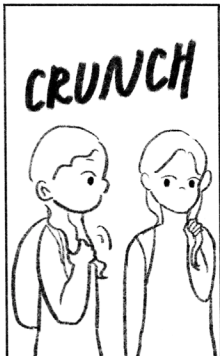
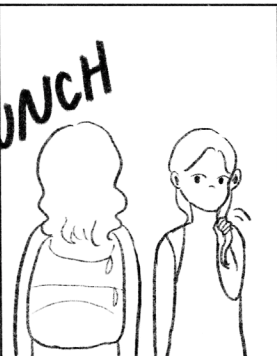
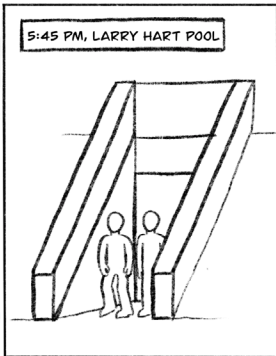
viduals and the extreme influence influencers of today have. Regardless of whether Musk was simply sharing his personal opinion or hoping to garner media attention, his real sin lies in his willingness to respond to a post that he knew had hateful intentions.

It’s undeniable that some would dismiss Musk’s moral transgressions as another operation of “the woke mob.” It’s not outlandish to note that despite Musk’s controversial actions, he may very easily become a scapegoat for perpetuated anti-semitism in America. In reality, it’s impossible to ignore the consequences of Musk’s ignorance, as this issue extends beyond either freedom of speech or ethnic discrimination. Rather, Musk highlights a growing trend of household names propagating hurtful ideologies.

The solution to prevent further attempts of recognition at the cost of others is to strip influencers of their power. Demonstrate that their fame does not equate to unconditional support. Continue fierce backlash when necessary. And, most importantly, encourage individual thinking.

Education and exposure should not wholly contribute to our ideologies. It’s easy to be influenced by the people that we admire, but we must resist the urge to simply absorb their opinions if we want to diminish the spread of hate and ignorance.

Ethan Zhang is a fourth-former from Acton, MA. He may be reached at ezhang26@choate.edu.



Graphic by Leah Han '27/The Choate News

THE FACES BEHIND THE EMAILS: MEET YOUR DEANS’ ASSISTANTS

By **Chelsea Branch ’25**
Staff Contributor

As the keepers of our schedules and masters of SISO, the Deans’ Assistants are Choate’s unsung heroes. We all recognize their friendly faces, but few of us know much more beyond that.

Ms. Kristin Thoelen

Every year, Ms. Kristin Thoelen, the third-form Deans’ Assistant, faces the Herculean task of keeping over 150 incoming freshmen organized. However, she loves connecting with the diverse student body. “I just like getting to know the kids, like where everyone’s from, [their] different backgrounds and different cultures,” she said.

Born and raised in Wallingford, Ms. Thoelen is naturally fond of her hometown. “I love it,” she said. “There’s a lot of good places to eat and restaurants and things to do.” As an only child, she spent a lot of time hanging out with her many cousins during her younger years. She treasures her large family and the time she spends with them during school breaks.

When she’s not in her office, Ms. Thoelen is all over the world. She recently traveled to Aruba for a second time. “It’s like paradise there,” she said. “The weather’s great. The water is super clear.” The next place on her bucket list is Hawaii.

If Ms. Thoelen is not flying across the globe, she’s driving to a concert venue for a taste of live music. Her music taste is diverse, but her top artists at the moment are Carrie Underwood and Daughtry.

Freshmen, the next time you need to sign out for the weekend, be sure to ask Ms. Thoelen about her traveling adventures or for some song recommendations.

Ms. Gail Desrosier

For the next three years, the Class of 2026 will be working alongside Ms. Gail Desrosier. In her first year as a deans’ as-

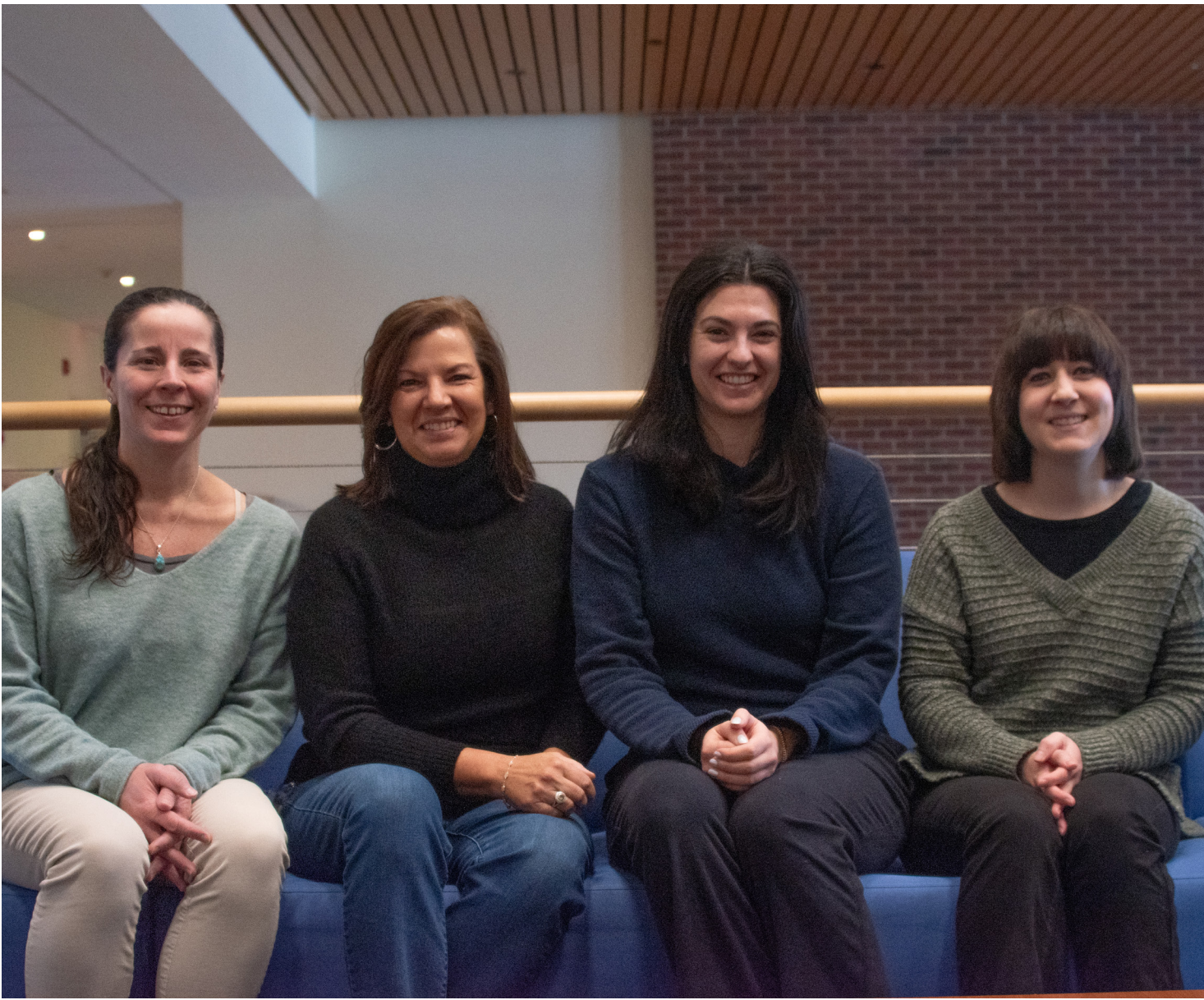


Photo by Toffy Prakittiphoom '24/The Choate News

Mrs. Michelle Dennehy, Ms. Gail Desrosier, Ms. Megan Radigan, and Ms. Kristin Thoelen (left to right) are the unsung heroes supporting the deans.

sistant, Ms. Desrosier worked with the Class of 2020, whose graduation coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic. “They left for spring break, and we never saw them again,” she recalled. “It was really sad.”

Though nothing can make up for the valuable time she lost with those students, Ms. Desrosier is thrilled to have watched the Class of 2023 have a proper Choate send-off and is excited to witness the Class of 2026 flourish right before her eyes.

Ms. Desrosier grew up in Massachusetts and moved to Connecticut when she married, raising her four children here as a stay-at-home mother for many years. Although all of her birds

(children) have left the nest, she still sees them quite often.

Beyond her office in the Student Activities Center, Ms. Desrosier is an avid cinephile. “I just watched *The Holdovers* the other night,” she shared. “That was entertaining.” She also enjoyed *Barbie* and *Top Gun*, but her all-time favorite film is *Slumdog Millionaire*. Though it has been a while since she was last in a theater, Ms. Desrosier prefers watching movies live in the cinema over using streaming platforms.

“I’ve been very happy working here. I feel blessed to be in this office because we get to see the kids so much,” Mrs. Desrosier said.

Mrs. Michelle Dennehy

Prior to her role as the Fifth-form Deans’ Assistant, Mrs. Michelle Dennehy was a stay-at-home mother to her two children with Director of Residential Life Mr. Pat Dennehy. “I met Mr. Dennehy, we got married, had kids, and I just wanted to be home with them,” she shared.

Fitness has always been an important part of Mrs. Dennehy’s life. She studied athletic training in college and loves practicing yoga whenever she has the time. Nowadays, she stays in touch with her sporty side by watching her students dominate on the fields, rinks, and courts. She especially loves

Deerfield Day and all of the fun traditions that come with it.

Mrs. Dennehy can sometimes be seen walking around campus with her dog, Nala. She loves exploring trails with her pup, and, when the weather permits, enjoying Connecticut’s beautiful lakes and oceans. “I just like being outside,” she said.

When she’s not having fun in the sun, Mrs. Dennehy is enjoying a good read. Over the summer, she finished *Lessons in Chemistry* by Bonnie Garmus in only three days. Though her job prevents her from reading quite as often during the school year, she always makes sure to find the perfect book to keep her busy during breaks.

The next time you stop by her office to grab something sweet from her famous basket of candy, sit down and chat for a while!

Ms. Megan Radigan

The senior class is enjoying a bittersweet final year alongside their deans’ assistant, Ms. Megan Radigan, who grew up in Mattituck, New York with her parents and two brothers.

In her adult years, she began working and living all over the globe. Japan, Switzerland, America, and the Czech Republic are just a few of the countries she has called home. Given her love for learning about different cultures, the offer to work at a school like Choate was especially appealing to her because “I knew I wanted to work in an international environment,” she said.

Choate’s sixth-formers are not Ms. Radigan’s only students. She also works as a dance teacher and has been dancing for nearly 30 years. In fact, her role as a choreographer and judge for dance competitions introduced her to her love of traveling. Now, she teaches contemporary, lyrical, strength and conditioning, turns and leaps, and stretch classes at a number of studios.

Ms. Radigan faced a similar plight to Ms. Desrosier when she became a deans’ assistant just one month before the pandemic hit.

“I was with the freshmen, and then four to six weeks later, we went remote,” she said. After persisting with the Class of 2020 through the unusual period, she went on to work with the Class of 2021, and now enjoys working with the Class of 2024.

Quoting her mother, Ms. Radigan said, “Food is love.” Much of her free time is spent cooking, as she finds the practice both relaxing and rewarding. Maybe if you’re lucky, she’ll share a recipe with you!

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THESE WATER BOTTLES ARE MORE THAN JUST A CUP

By **Deyi Meng ’26**
Reporter

What may seem like a dull metal cylinder that satisfies our daily hydration needs can hold a much deeper meaning. While some of us may not pay much attention to our choice of water bottles, certain Choate community members treasure their unique bottles, many of which have unique features.

The Gallon Bottle

Most people are not unfamiliar with Carter Foster ’24’s legendary gallon water bottle. Foster purchased the bottle his sophomore year because his dorm did not have a water fountain. After filling up his water bottle in the dining hall, he would have enough to last him a whole day. “It ended up being a genuinely practical measure,” he said.

Reflecting on the significance of his water bottle, Foster said, “It’s become a staple of mine. During the winter months, people recognize the bottle more so than me.”

In his English class, his teachers and classmates laugh about the size of his bottle. “We’d always make jokes as to how much water I needed, you know, that I’m overhydrated,” he said. While Foster said that he doesn’t subscribe to recent water bottle trends, he does think that it’s a good way to encourage others to drink more water.

The SodaStream Bottle

Latin teacher Ms. Diana Beste has a SodaStream water bottle that keeps her water carbonated. Due to her distaste for still water, Ms. Beste used to purchase individually packaged self-

zer water before coming to the realization that the method was not environmentally-friendly.

For a more sustainable alternative, Ms. Beste bought a SodaStream machine, which creates sparkling water that can then be poured into any container. “SodaStream is great because you buy the canister, you fill it with water, and then you create the bubbles yourself,” she said.

Ms. Beste’s daughter also purchased a smaller, portable SodaStream bottle for her, which she now brings to work every day. The SodaStream bottle can be carbonated directly from the SodaStream machine or filled up by a dining hall soda fountain, and the water bottle helps maintain the carbonation for two weeks.

The Colorful Flasks

Aria Ramnath ’24’s water bottle collection includes two white, one mauve, and one pink Lululemon bottle, as well as a yellow and a blue Hydro Flask. For Ramnath, color is the main factor affecting her choice of water bottles. Usually when she’s perusing the store, she will only buy a water bottle with an eye-catching shade.

“People actually do comment on my water bottles, such as ‘It matches your shirt,’ or ‘Is this one new?’ even when it’s not,” she said. Her water bottles serve as emotional support items, kept by her side at all times, and great conversation starters.

The Self-Cleaning Bottle

Steven Kee ’27 possesses a special self-cleaning water bottle from LARQ, which he originally saw on Shark Tank and received as a birthday gift from

a friend. The water bottle has a UV light installed, which helps sanitize the bottle’s contents and interior. He charges the bottle once a month, and the lid lights up every two hours to automatically cleanse itself.

“A couple days after I got it, I left it next to a water fountain, and I thought I had lost it,” he said. “That gave me a bit of a heart attack.” Seeing Kee’s water bottle has also encouraged other people, including his roommate, to purchase similar ones.

For those looking to up their water bottle game, Kee said, “I recommend you get the cheaper version of this water bottle because it does the same thing, but it’s a lot cheaper because I feel like this one’s a bit overpriced.”

The Stanley Cup

Sophia Kim ’24’s unique waterbottle is the pink Stanley Cup 40-ounce Quencher H2.o Flow-State Tumbler — a birthday gift from one of her friends. Kim applauds its pink coloring, which she said “caught her eye,” and its straw, which encourages her to drink more water.

Unfortunately, the bottle has its fair share of problems.

For one, it can be inconvenient to carry around at times. “I had it in my tote bag, and it spilled, and I was in an Uber, and I had water all over my back,” Kimsaid. “My MacBook actually broke down that day, so it was horrible.”

Cleaning the water bottle is also difficult because the top has to be dismantled and the straw separately cleaned.

Kim doesn’t quite believe that Stanley Cups deserves their trending popularity. “I don’t real-

ly know if it’s really worth hyping up so much over a water bottle,” she said. Kim herself has received many comments about her bottle, from friends sharing her TikToks on the recent trend to people checking to see if her water bottle has water in it (or if she’s just carrying it around for the aesthetic).

The “Stanley” Cup

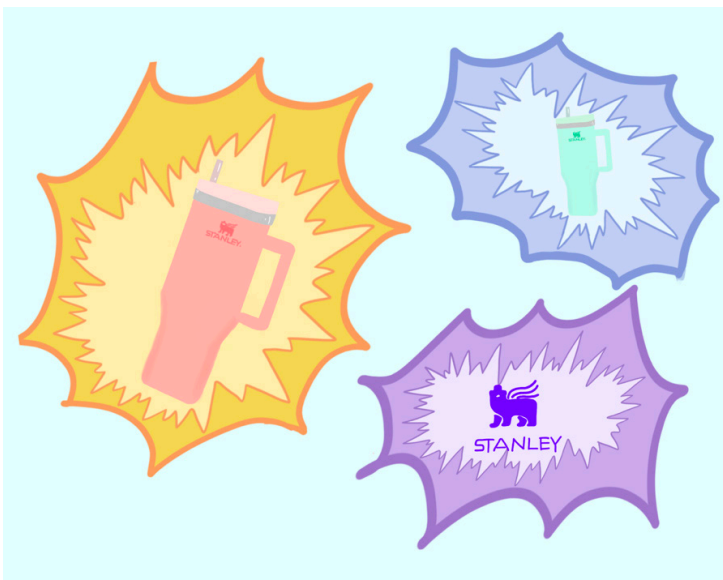
Putting a spin on the recent trend, Director of Spiritual Life Rev. Aaron Rathbun created his own version of a “Stanley” Cup based on *The Office*.

“I saw the trend of enormous Stanley Cups, and when I heard ‘Stanley,’ I immediately thought of the character Stanley Hudson,” he said. “So I made a ‘mash-up’ of the two, with Stanley’s face on the side of a gargantuan chug-jug along with the ‘Stanley’ logo beneath his face in the format of *The Office* show’s logo.”

Rev. Rathbun’s desire to own a “chug-jug” came from the Fortnite game, although he noted that “this thing is terribly unwieldy and awful to use and lug around.” Nevertheless, he enjoys how well-received the joke has been by students and faculty alike.

His invention also doubles as social commentary stemming from a deeper reflection on the impact of marketing. “Because we’re inherently social, we crave relationships, community, and belonging. And marketers know this and try to get us to buy products in order to fulfill this deeper longing and desire,” he said. “Are they successful? Many would argue that it’s fleeting or unsubstantive.”

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Graphic by Grace Ju '27/The Choate News



Photo courtesy of Reverend Aaron Rathbun

Rev. Aaron Rathbun takes a sip from his custom “Stanley Cup.”

ACCLAIMED PLAYWRIGHT Mx. GINA FEMIA VISITS CHOATE

By **Ana Isabella Bury '25**
Reporter

To ensure Choate students get the most out of their time in the classroom, the Arts Department invites an array of experts with diverse perspectives to speak to aspiring artists. At the beginning of the winter term, playwright Mx. Gina Femia visited Theater teacher Mr. Bari Robinson's Acting 350 class.

Mx. Femia discovered their love for the arts at a very young age through acting, and they were in all of their school's plays. "I took classes with an organization called Young Playwrights Inc. and wrote my first full-length play when I was 16 and decided I wouldn't ever stop! Telling stories for the stage is the way my art knows how to most clearly speak, and I hope to create characters that folks enjoy inhabiting," they said.

Mx. Femia takes inspiration from their upbringing as a Brooklyn native and life experiences while crafting their art. "Many of my characters are queer, and I explore that infinite spectrum through stories that don't shy away from reality but strive to embrace joy," they said.

Mr. Robinson got to know Mx. Femia during a 2021 acting workshop for their play *meet you at the Galaxy Diner*. Over the years, Mr. Robinson has acted in their plays, attended their performances, and even contributed to *Alondra*, a novel Mx. Femia recently wrote.

The Acting 350 class was recently tasked with writing one-person shows, making Mx. Semia's visit particularly timely given their experience with this genre. "He has asked me to teach

this class session for the last three years, and I'm always so happy to do so," Mx. Femia said.

To begin the class, Mx. Femia asked students about their favorite characters from theater and cinema. Then, they tasked students with creating characters of their own. They said, "I really just deliver some thoughts and writing exercises and then get to be in awe of the work that they create."

Students were fully immersed in the educational experience that Mx. Femia led them through. Mr. Robinson recalled watching the actors' faces light up after they were given a prompt in class. "As a teacher, whenever an idea can spark that kind of fear, joy, and courage, that's when I know the assignment is working," he said. "It's amazing to see where one simple idea can go when followed to its logical, or fantastical conclusion."

Acting 350 student Leanne Parks '25 said that the techniques that Mx. Femia used to unlock students' creativity and imagination, including one where they had a conversation with an imaginary character, gave her a sense of direction in her writing.

Mx. Femia's workshop also helped actors become more comfortable with performing their own scripts. Actors are used to working off of professionally written work: "It's a different feeling when you're doing your own thing because it's something personal. What if they don't like my story?" Parks said.

Mr. Robinson described writing, staging, and acting a one-person show as a "Herculean [task] that is unique to Choate and unique to an acting

curriculum." While Mr. Robinson said his job is "to get the actors to think on their feet," Mx. Femia's is to guide students through the process of developing their characters. Though the two have different approaches to their creative work, "the actors need both in order to accomplish this task," he said.

During the workshop, Mx. Femia also emphasized the importance of revision. "The first draft is only the first instinct — it's necessary and great, but the real work and the true joy of discovering your piece is in the second, third, forever drafts," they said.

Besides their visit to campus, Mr. Robinson has also integrated Mx. Femia's work into some of his lesson plans. Their plays speak to the experiences of young people, which inspired Mr. Robinson to use their work for scene study in his Acting 100 class. "I admire the honesty and authenticity of their characters and the frankness [with] which they speak," Mr. Robinson said.

Mr. Robinson described Mx. Femia as an "astute and intuitive playwright" and hopes that their visit taught students how to organize their thoughts onto page and bring their characters to life.

Reflecting on their experience at Choate, Mx. Femia was impressed by the students' confidence. "Each student so willingly gave themselves to the process and shared fearlessly — their work was imaginative and sharp. It was very inspiring to be in their presence," they said.

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Graphic by Melody Qian '24/The Choate News

ON THE FRINGES OF THE FRINGE FESTIVAL



Photo by Finn Wikstrom '26/The Choate News

Eve Stanley '24 directs actors in *Everybody Talks* by Tristin Hurst '24.

By **Nilan Kathir '25**
Associate Editor

For the 12th year, the annual Fringe Festival will feature student writers, directors, and actors in a series of original plays. Students are steeped in the rehearsal process in preparation for their performances on February 8-9 in the Gelb Theater.

This year, Fringe is hosting four plays, along with a selection of movies and a spoken word performance. In following years, Fringe hopes to re-incorporate "original songs and stand-up," Mrs. Kate Doak, the director of Fringe, said.

Among this year's works are Tristin Hurst '24's play, entitled *Everybody Talks*, which aims to spread the message of being comfortable with yourself despite external factors, and Harper Marsden-Uren '26's play, *The Writer*, which reflects on relationship dynamics.

Fringe is an ideal way for students to explore their artistic talents, with the production attracting many students with prior theater training.

For example, actor Blake Steremberg '26 has accumulated considerable acting experience through professional plays and Choate productions. Steremberg will be acting in both Marsden-Uren's *The Writer* and Max Leventon '25's *Talk to the Wall*.

Similarly, Marsden-Uren, who also wrote a play for Fringe last year, has gained experience through attending writing summer camps. "I have

been writing plays since I was a little kid," she said.

Although many actors and writers come with previous experience, Fringe is open to students with all levels of experience in theater. Mrs. Doak said, "The challenge that we have is making sure that students know that it's accessible to them as an opportunity if they don't have a huge amount of experience."

The planning process for Fringe is carried out over the course of an entire year. The Choate Fringe Festival Board, a group of students that select the plays, cast actors, and direct the chosen works, leads a large part of this process. The actors and directors then meet three times a week for an hour each time to prepare for the plays taking place during the winter term.

The process of producing a play is initiated by the playwrights, and the task of bringing the script to life is given to the directors. This relationship requires frequent communication between the two roles to enable adequate representation of both individuals' artistic preferences.

After the script is finalized, the actors are given their lines and scenes, which they spend months practicing. Their preparation then ramps up significantly during tech week on the weekend of January 27 before the show's opening nights.

According to Marsden-Uren, splitting up the roles in this manner is beneficial as "you get to see all of the exciting, different aspects of putting

on a show and how difficult and how rewarding it is [with everyone] being able to experience their own little theater in their own little way."

For Mrs. Doak, the best part of being an organizer for Fringe is "working with the kids and the collaborative environment of the show." This sentiment is shared by adults and students alike.

With writers and directors in "constant communication," the success of the show is dependent on every participant fulfilling their varied responsibilities, Hurst explained.

Hurst appreciated the opportunities the Fringe Festival provided him with to develop as a leader. "[I grew through] pushing my cast to try different things [and] experiment with different emotions," he said.

However, even with the passion and talent that the Fringe Festival hosts, it has its associated challenges. "It can definitely be an adjustment to be in charge of your friends or classmates," Hurst said of the directing process.

As the curtains open next month, the months of hard work and preparation put in by the actors, writers, directors, and organizers will culminate in the two-day production.

Hurst shared, "It's just nice to have all this experience where I can build up my creativity and build up my skills with support."

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WALLINGFORD'S WINTER WONDERLAND



Photo by Junho Lee '24



Photo by Camila Granda '25



Photo by Anya Shah '25



Photo by Melody Qian '24



Photo by Victoria Layden '24



Photo by Junho Lee '24

FIELD
REPORT

Choate Winter Record

39 - 16 - 3

Varsity Games

Girls' Squash (6-1)
vs. Porter's, 7-0

Boys' Squash (6-2)
vs. Salisbury, 7-1

Girls' Swimming (1-2)
vs. NMH, 87-83

Boys' Swimming (2-1)
vs. NMH, 96-52

Wrestling (5-4)
vs. Pomfret, 48-30

Girls' Ice Hockey (10-3)
vs. Hill, 3-1

Girls' Basketball (6-4)
vs. Westminster, 41-20

Boys' Basketball (6-5)
vs. Exeter, 45-76

J.V. Games

Girls' Ice Hockey (4-2)
vs. Frederick Gunn, 6-4

Boys' Squash (3-2)
vs. Hopkins, 10-3

Girls' Squash (4-0)
vs. Hopkins, 7-0

Boys' Basketball (4-1)
vs. Exeter, 52-59

GIRLS' COHORT OF VARSITY WRESTLING
MAKES HISTORY AT ANDOVER MEET

By Grace LaPlaca '25
Associate Editor

The wrestling team made history on January 6 when they competed in New England's first-ever all-girls dual meet at Phillips Academy Andover. Although typical wrestling meets are co-ed and separated by weight class, the Andover meet was an opportunity for every female athlete to compete exclusively against other female wrestlers.

Despite the 24-39 final score, Choate had its share of success. "Calli Gilchrist [25] pinned a girl who was a national champion, and Sara McLaughlin [26] pinned a girl who was a national runner-up for Andover," Head Coach Ryan Roddy said. Tashi Bista '26, a first-year wrestler, also pinned her opponent.

"We made New England Prep history," Co-Captain and All-NEP-SAC wrestler Elsa Holmes '25 said. "Even though we didn't win, it was a huge learning experience for a bunch of our girls. All of them were able to compete, and some even ended up winning their matches."

Being a part of the first all-girls dual meet meant a lot to Gilchrist. "It feels like you're making history," she said. "Just being a part of women's wrestling every day feels like I'm a part of something bigger than me."

Gilchrist feels empowered through wrestling. "We're not just having individual goals; we are laying the stepping stones for



Photo courtesy of Mr. Wes Jenkins

Wrestlers from Choate and Philips Academy Andover at the first all-girls dual meet on January 6.

others to follow," she said. "I think that's a really powerful idea."

Coach Roddy viewed Choate's participation in the Andover meet as a signal to other high school female wrestlers. "It lets girls know that if their high school is not allowing space for them to wrestle, we will," he said. "And we'll put a lot of time and effort into it."

Since Coach Roddy joined the coaching staff in 2021, the team has grown exponentially. The first female athlete on Choate Wrestling was Gabby Nirmal '23, who joined in the 2020-2021 season, followed by Sachi Mehra '23, who joined in 2021-2022. Now, there are a record 16 female athletes on the team.

At Andover, all of the attention was on the female athletes, an unusual occurrence in wrestling. "Not only were all of the girls supporting each other, but we also

had all of the guys on the sidelines supporting us," Gilchrist recalled.

The mutual support in women's wrestling is something Gilchrist loves about the sport. "There's just such a culture of holding each other up, of being proud of each other regardless of the outcome of the match, and of congratulating each other for the small things," she said. "We were all excited to be there ... hugging your opponent after you win or lose, just having real respect for one another."

Ella Fraser '27 began wrestling this winter and felt her teammates' encouragement. "My first time competing, I was so nervous, but an upperclassman [Ella Martino '25] came up to me and told me how her first time she lost badly in front of everyone, and [that] it's really not that bad because everyone loses their first time."

Choate Faculty Compete
in Soccer League

By Steven Kee '27
Staff Reporter

Every Thursday night, members of the After School Special soccer team gather in the indoor arena of the Connecticut Football Club (CFC) to face off against nine other soccer teams in the second season of the Adults Co-ed Blue League.

Founded last winter by Math teacher Ms. Stephanie Neul and Science teacher Dr. Chris Hogue, the team's regular meets have resulted in great strides. On November 30, they won 9-4 against a team named DMFC, an improvement from a 1-13 loss on September 7.

Ms. Neul attributed the team's success to an improvement in skill and an increase in membership. "We definitely got better at passing and having a good approach to offense," Ms. Neul said. "We're also communicating better, and I think that we're playing more as a team than at the beginning."

During games, seven players, including a goalie, must be on the field. Additionally, teams are required to have three female-identifying players on the field at any given time. Dr. Hogue said, "We have players on the team who [have] rarely ever played organized soccer all the way up to people who [have] played competitively."

Dr. Hogue played soccer growing up and subsequently coached the University of California Berkeley soccer club from around 2006 to 2008. He also plays in a men's league outside



Photo courtesy of Reverend Aaron Rathbun

Members of After School Special at the Connecticut Football Club.

of the CFC and coaches Girls' Junior Varsity Soccer.

Faculty who are frequent members of the team include Language teacher Mr. Yassine Benzinane, Math teacher Mr. Rob Sanders, Math teacher Mr. Nick Tagge, and Humanities teacher Ms. Abby Kandel, among many others.

For now, the team uniform is casual, and the only requirement is for members to wear purple. The custom began with Math teacher Mr. Carey Kopeikin's refusal to join the team unless they wore purple. Mr. Kopeikin wears a purple clothing item everyday because it is the color of his favorite American football team, the Baltimore Ravens. According to Ms. Neul, the team is considering an official uniform.

Each member of the team had their own reasons for joining the team. Mr. Benzinane was inspired by his home country's success in the World Cup last year. "What excited me to go back to soccer

was the World Cup. Last year, Morocco did so well," Mr. Benzinane said. "I wanted to join the team, because I needed some exercise, and I love soccer."

Ms. Neul wanted to start the team because she thought it would be a fun social activity for the many Choate teachers who play soccer. In addition to the social aspect, teachers appreciate the exercise. Dr. Hogue said, "I also think people just want a way to exercise in the wintertime. It's indoor soccer, so rain or shine, it doesn't matter how cold it is, you can get out there and get a nice sweat going for an hour."

In their short time together, the team has created many fond memories. Ms. Neul's favorite moments are when the team is able to keep up a good defense against a better team. "Any time we have a really close game or when we hold off a team who is definitely a lot better than us is always exciting," she shared. Dr. Hogue's favorite moments are when players who do not usually score make goals as he enjoys "watching their faces light up."

At the end of the day, this Thursday night social activity gives teachers a chance to have fun with their colleagues. "Win or lose, we really just enjoy having an outlet, getting away from campus, and doing something together," Dr. Hogue said.

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PRICE '27 REPRESENTS
TEAM USA AT BJSO

By Reinah Lee '26
Associate Editor

In the squash world, third-former Jacob Price '27 stands out as a captivating player. This month, Price became the first Choate student to participate in the British Junior Squash Open (BJSO), the most prestigious international junior squash tournament.

Held at the University of Birmingham from January 3-7, 675 players from 49 nations competed in age divisions from U11 to U19. Price played nine matches during the tournament and came close to beating Egyptian player Philopater Saleh, who went on to win the U15 BJSO.

"The most enjoyable part was almost taking out the one seed on the full glass court," said Price. His last match was an exhilarating five-set battle against Saleh. "It was really fun because I was able to play on the show court, which is the center of attention."

To prepare for the tournament, Price trained at the largest squash facility in the country, the Arlen Specter Center, with the U.S. Junior Squash team from May 19-21, 2023. Price has been playing with his current teammates since they were only nine years old: "Once I got into playing tournaments, they've always been my friends," he said.

Price began playing squash at age eight after being introduced to the sport at his local country club, the New Haven Lawn Club. He explained, "I just started playing be-

cause that's what all the kids did [at the club]." Now, Price resides at the number three spot of the Boys' U15 U.S. Junior Squash rankings.

At six foot, two inches tall, Price's playing style involves a lot of volleying, a shot that is hit in the air before the ball hits the ground. "I'm a tall player, so I volley a lot. I volley, and I hit it hard," he said.

Price is no stranger to high-level competition. In December 2022, Price competed in the 2022 U.S. Junior Open as an eighth-grader. There, he ranked second in his division and took home two titles: U15 Boys' Doubles and U15 Mixed Doubles national championships. Price also won the German Junior Open and Canadian Junior Open at age 12.

Though it can be challenging to balance squash with his academic life, Price's dedication, work ethic, and love for the sport triumphs. "I love squash because I can let out my day on the squash court. I have a bad day, play squash; good day, play squash." He also appreciates the intellectual aspect of the game. "It makes you think. It's like chess in shorts," he said.

Chemistry teacher and Boys' Varsity Squash Head Coach Mr. Will Morris noted Price's contributions to the team. "[Price] is a really good sport, and he supports his teammates really well too. So he's an awesome part of the program, and we're really excited to have him," Mr. Morris said.

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Photo courtesy of Ethan Cheung '27

Jacob Price '27 plays the Loomis Chaffee School on December 9, 2023.

Team Stats (As of January 12th)		
Games Played		6
Wins		3
Losses		2
Ties		1
Goals For		34
Goals Against		26
Winning Percentage		50%
Rank		5/11

Graphic by Leah Han '27/The Choate News