



A Look Into New African American Studies Elective

Ava Sexton, Grade 12, Staff Writer

In the summer of 2021, the High School of American Studies Committee for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (CEDI) approached Principal Alessandro Weiss with an idea for a new elective: African American Studies. The proposal was accepted and the new elective was implemented in the 2021-2022 school year, taught by Ms. Jacqueline Waite Johnson.

The idea of incorporating Black History into school was not new for Ms. Waite Johnson. "The curriculum has been in the making almost for a lifetime, or the lifetime of my teaching," she said.

During the pandemic, Ms. Waite Johnson started a book club with her brother and his wife. Their focus was African American history; soon, they realized how much rich history was missing when the American narrative left out the African American perspective. Ms. Waite Johnson knew "this [was] information that students and young people need."

Ms. Waite Johnson's goal with the class is to give her students a more well-rounded view of their nation's history. "U.S. history cannot be effectively taught without African American studies, because when we as black people move up, society moves up," she said. According to students in her class, this has been achieved so far.

When asked about the impact of this class, Alicia-Nicole Dekle, a senior, said, "[There are] gaps in my knowledge [that] have definitely been filled in a way that I don't think they would have been able to if I hadn't taken this class."

How the Recent NYC Elections Will Directly Affect HSAS Students

An Exclusive Interview with City Councilman Eric Dinowitz

Mathilda Simons and Sophie Brettschneider, Grade 9, Staff Writers



The recent changes to the NYC government are bound to affect students in profound ways.

The elections on November 7, 2021, were not as highly publicized as they have been in the past, but their significance still remains. Everyone in New York City will be affected by these changes to the city government, including students at the High School of American Studies. The now Mayor, new city council, borough presidents, and other administrative officials have the power to make an important range of decisions, many of which influence students directly.

One controversial issue in this year's election was whether or not specialized high schools like HSAS should continue to exist, seeing as many of these schools lack diversity. Eric Adams, the new mayor, previously supported Mayor Bill De Blasio's plan to completely scrap the Specialized High School Admissions Test (SHSAT), but has since backtracked, stating his support for the continuation of the current SHSAT model.

The new city council member for HSAS's district,

Eric Dinowitz, also commented on this issue. "All students do not learn in the same way, and all students do not excel at test-taking," he said. Regardless, he "does not believe that the SHSAT should be removed, as some students excel with exams." As an alumnus of a specialized high school himself, he "deeply appreciates that specialized high schools play a key role for our students to realize their potential, and can offer a world-class education."

Instead of entirely removing the SHSAT, Dinowitz suggested that the city "expand the number of specialized high schools and programs to become more inclusive, and provide more opportunities to New York City's one million students." Dinowitz added that, "More attention should be paid to the years of development and education that exist before a student ever sits for the SHSAT."

Dinowitz recognizes the inequitable nature of the SHSAT schools, but he believes the issue can be resolved through more inclusive preparation and an

increase in the number of specialized high schools. While he doesn't specify how this will specifically help underrepresented demographics, it will allow for a greater number of students to have access to high-quality education.

Another relevant topic during this year's campaign cycle was how schools will address and prevent the spread of COVID-19. At the center of this issue is the debate over vaccine mandates. Dinowitz expressed his approval for vaccine mandates in schools. "Science has proven that these vaccines are safe and effective in saving lives," he said.

Eric Adams said he wants to revisit certain issues regarding vaccines but supports a vaccine mandate for students. He also wants to create a remote learning option, which could be used by families who do not feel comfortable having their children vaccinated.

Additionally, Dinowitz expressed a strong stance on addressing students' mental health, especially during the pandemic.

The End of Gifted and Talented?

Jolie Futterman, Grade 10, Staff Writer

On October 9, 2021, Mayor Bill de Blasio of New York City announced his proposal to end the Gifted and Talented Program. Under the plan, students currently in the program will be allowed to continue, but no new Gifted and Talented classes will be created. Mayor de Blasio's policy marks a major shift in the New York City education system.

The Gifted and Talented program separates "gifted" children from those in a general education program. These children are tested and then, based on their scores, admitted to separate classes. They receive accelerated, intense academic lessons that differ from those being given to students in general education classes. The program intends to offer students an education that caters to their abilities.

Mathilda Simons, a freshman at the High School of American Studies, enjoyed her time in the Gifted and Talented program at The Anderson School. "It was a positive experience for me," Simons said. "The school was, in general, gifted and talented. There wasn't a separated group so there weren't obvious inequalities."

Simons also enjoyed the academics. "The academics were stronger, I learned more. It was challenging, but all of my teachers were ready to help," she said.

However, other students do not think the program set them on a path of academic success. "I would describe my experience as beneficial to my learning but I don't think it put me ahead academically," said Celia Powers, a junior.

Ostracized to Romanticized: The Swift Reversal of how East Asians are Portrayed in American Media

Jessi JiaXin Zheng, Grade 9, Staff Writer

As East Asian media becomes more widespread in America, East Asians themselves have been brought into the limelight. This new attention is controversial in the Asian American community.

Asian American men have been surrounded by negative stereotypes, often viewed as nerds with strange accents. Now, there are millions of avid fans flocking to buy the latest merchandise of their favorite group of Asian men, like K-pop group BTS. This drastic change highlights one of the determining factors in the general opinion of the American public—the media.

“Overall, I’m glad that we’re [Asians] getting represented in the media more,” said Olivia Wong, a senior at HSAS and the co-founder of Asian Mythbusters Project (AMP), an organization dedicated to breaking down Asian stereotypes. “Hopefully it’ll teach more people to respect Asian culture and the Asian entertainment industry.”

Many are quick to point out how peculiar this sudden change is and how it has led to more negative consequences such as the fetishization and romanticization of East Asian culture.

For instance, at the beginning of quarantine, a TikTok trend encouraged people to go to Asian grocery stores and try Asian snacks. Social media feeds were filled with countless pictures of people posing in snack aisles surrounded by Asian candies and foods. This outraged a large portion of the East Asian community as they openly pointed out



As East Asians are brought farther into the limelight, their social media presence has gone from negative to positive.

the blatant appropriation of their culture. Posing with Pocky is the equivalent of posing with a Twix in a Walmart. Perhaps all this attention is not for the best.

As schoolchildren, many Asian Americans can recall several instances of being labeled as the black sheep

due to their race. Rena Chen, another senior at HSAS and co-founder of AMP, recalled one instance in which “obnoxious kids liked to joke that [she] was a communist because [she is] Chinese.”

Additionally, Asian children in the past often did not feel comfortable bringing

their own food from home to eat during school hours because it looked or smelled ‘weird.’ However, this does not seem to be the case anymore. Suddenly, Asian foods have become trendy.

So, what changed? How come when a third-grader brought dumplings to school in 2010, they were met with unkind glances and pinchings of noses, but when a grown woman makes salmon rice with seaweed, her video has millions of views?

The determining factor at play could be a shift in perspective. The combined popularity of K-pop and Asian TV shows and movies has led the American public to openly embrace East Asian culture. Chen sums it up perfectly saying, “Some horrible people may have switched from being racist to fetishizing Asians, [but] this does not accurately reflect the general trend. Their actions should not discount the genuinely positive progress other people make.”

More Seniors Opt for Early Decision as COVID-19 Causes College Acceptance Rates to Plummet

Fiona Shuldiner, Grade 11, Staff Writer

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all areas of life for high school students, from having to adjust to remote learning to maintaining mental health during quarantine. In addition to dealing with difficulties brought on by the pandemic, high school seniors, including those at the High School of American Studies, must tackle the college application process. Over the past few years, this process has changed significantly due to the pandemic.

In the 2020-2021 college admissions cycle, acceptance rates at many elite universities fell to record lows. Ivy League universities and other institutions of similar caliber are a typical choice for HSAS applicants. Students spend their four

years of high school working towards acceptance to one of these highly selective schools.

The COVID-19 pandemic drastically changed the college admissions landscape. Many colleges adopted test-optional policies as SAT and ACT administrations were canceled during the pandemic. Even as testing centers began opening up, most schools, including the most elite universities, maintained their test-optional policies for the 2021-2022 admissions cycle.

Many students welcomed the change, as standardized tests have long been criticized for denying low-income students access to elite universities. “Test-optional gave students the deserved chance to try for more established schools without having to worry about test scores or finding a testing location.”

testing location,” said Chloe Metz, a senior at HSAS.

Declining acceptance rates accompanied the adoption of test-optional policies in the 2020-2021 admissions cycle. Admissions pools greatly increased as more students thought they could gain admission to top universities without having to submit a test score. Yale University’s acceptance rate, for example, fell from 6.54 percent for the Class of 2024 to just 4.62 percent for the Class of 2025.

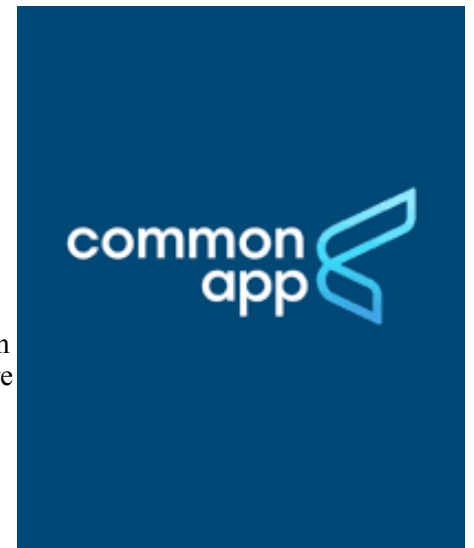
After observing last year’s statistics, it seems that many HSAS students, intimidated by the low admissions rates, decided to apply early in larger numbers. Early Decision has a smaller pool of applicants and often involves binding decisions, and therefore tends to have higher acceptance rates. Senior Fiona O’Reilly chose to apply to her top school Early Decision, but the factor of increased security in such a stressful time ultimately pushed her to eliminate other

options in favor of it. “If you don’t apply Early Decision, you won’t get in anywhere,” O’Reilly recalled hearing as advice.

College applications are always a stressful process and have been getting more and more competitive in recent years, regardless of the pandemic. Acceptance rates are going down, and due to the test-optional adjustment, added weight has been placed on other components of the application like essays and extracurriculars. Increased competition among students creates a stressful environment at HSAS and puts a lot of pressure on seniors.

O’Reilly said students recognize that they are in direct competition with each other. “Every assignment is multiplied by 10 because it feels like it carries the weight of your whole future,” Metz added.

As many schools roll out their first round of decisions,



College application season has begun at HSAS, and the pandemic has impacted the way many students are going about the process.

some acceptance rates have continued to decline, while others have actually increased. Duke University’s early acceptance rate rose from 17 percent to 21 percent after receiving over 1000 fewer applications than the previous year.

The true effect of the pandemic on this year’s college admissions remains to be seen. Statistics from the Regular Decision round may provide a better picture of the new college admissions landscape.

COVID-19 Impacted New York's Most Rigorous High Schools' Admissions Processes - But to What Extent?

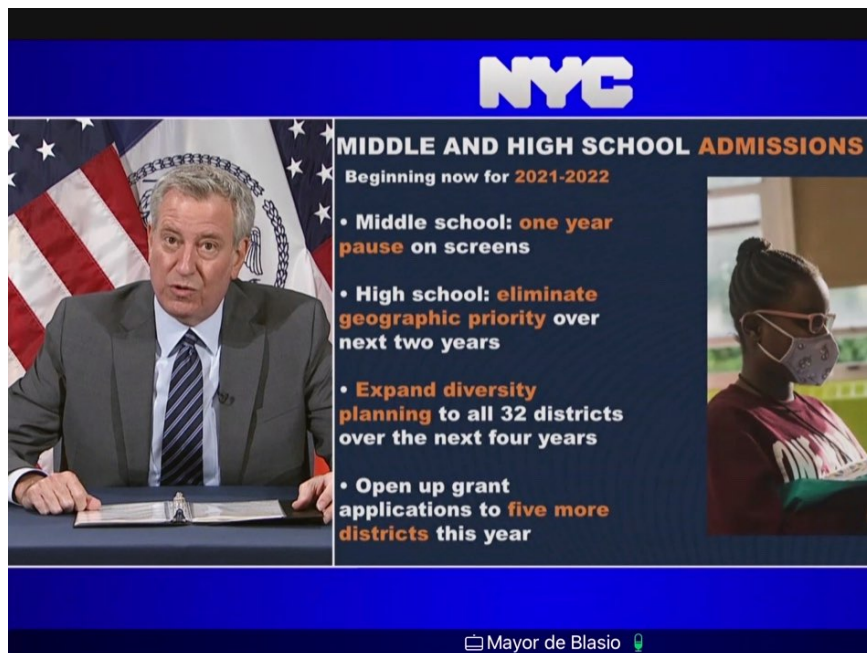
Adelaide Sutfin, Grade 9, Staff Writer

The New York City High School Admissions process is notorious for being one of the most difficult in the country, even rivaling the college process. The Specialized High School Admissions Test (SHSAT) has been criticized on numerous occasions, and the specialized schools themselves are known for their academic rigor. During 2020, however, the application process had to change to accommodate for the complications that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic.

One of the major changes last year was the pushing back of the SHSAT from October 2020, when it would normally be taken, to January 2021. There was even a period of time when students and parents were left questioning whether or not the test would be administered. According to Riya Sundrum, a freshman at Stuyvesant High School, "It was a bit of a mess, especially because they kept pushing back the test date, so we never knew what was going to happen, or if we should even be studying in the first place."

Many prepare for the SHSAT through tutoring via private organizations, which also faced issues during the pandemic. Sundrum was one of the many middle schoolers who took this route. "I attended Queller Prep ... for ... the spring session, and that went pretty well, except then the pandemic hit, so it shifted to online," she said. Though there was a pause in her tutoring, she ended up spending most of the summer of 2020 doing test prep through online classes, which she found unhelpful.

Sadie Hart, a freshman at LaGuardia High School said she studied "for fifteen months because of the extended time" but still found that "the test was harder than ... expected."



Former Mayor DeBlasio makes changes to the high school admissions process to adjust for COVID-19 restrictions.

The SHSAT itself was given at students' middle schools, rather than in testing locations around the city, as it had been done in previous years. Students sat socially distanced with masks for three hours, the duration of the test. Many found this environment more stressful, worrying about safety and health concerns. "The SHSAT would have been less stressful [in a normal year] because when I was taking the test there were a lot of other kids in the room, and I was worried about getting COVID," said Hart.

Non-specialized high schools retained their use of a twelve-school ranking system for students, matching students with their highest-ranking school that accepted them.

However, the requirements and ways in which schools accepted students underwent the largest changes.

In most years, high schools that required applicants' grades would primarily review their seventh-grade transcript. But applicants in 2021 had spent a large portion of their seventh-grade year remotely, which led to the question: which grades would be used? The general policy Mayor Bill de Blasio instated was that, rather than seventh grade, sixth-grade grades would be used. This resulted in heavy pushback from parents and students who had been under the impression

their seventh-grade year was the most important.

Two other important changes to the admissions process were made to allow for more equality. District prioritization was no longer considered in an attempt to diversify the top schools city-wide, and some schools reserved seats for low-income students.

Typically, New York City art schools would hold in-person auditions with unique requirements. However, all 2021 auditions were pre-recorded and standardized, so students only had to record one video for every school and track they applied.

Some students prepared for their auditions in advance, like Hart, who said she took two years creating her portfolio. Hart applied for visual arts, so she took photos of the required pieces and submitted them through an online portal. She found the extra time to work on her portfolio helpful.

Learning about the schools themselves was yet another issue this past year. School tours, normally held in-person, were either shifted to a remote setting or didn't happen at all. As a result, students were forced to find outside resources to learn more about schools they were interested in. "There is this one website that cataloged a bunch of the schools and had a bunch of surveys about whether or not people liked it or how it's going," said Sundrum.

Other students attended remote tours, which they often found unhelpful. "I don't think they really influenced my opinion on the schools," said Hart.

However, Hart also believes there are some positives to touring schools remotely. "I think if I got to tour the schools in real life, I would've maybe not applied to LaGuardia," she said. Hart is pleased with her

decision to attend LaGuardia and feels it is the right school for her. But she also explained that being able to see the schools in real life would have given her a better idea of the commute, an important part of high school applications for New York City, where students can spend hours commuting between school and home each day.

Now, as we enter a new school year, many are left wondering how the changes to the admissions process in 2021 will impact this year's application process. Ila Berstock, an eighth-grader at M.S. 54, said she has been prepping since February for the SHSAT. Her main method of obtaining information has been through contacts within schools and the high schools' websites, as help from her school has been "very, very minimal."

Micheal Sorgen, another eighth-grader at M.S. 54, said the SHSAT and high school process so far has been "overall just a pain [and] ... very grueling."

Ultimately, the changes to the NYC high school admissions process will be long-lasting, and many are left wondering what effect these changes will have. Thus far, a common theme has been stress. The amount of pressure NYC places upon thirteen and fourteen-year-olds during the high school application process is massive. While the reforms to the application system may have some benefits for students, the stress it places upon them remains a key part of their experience.

NYC Elections

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"A mandatory class on mental health would be a great start, but social-emotional learning should be a key aspect for every class a child attends and be integrated into all curricula," he said. "Students must be equipped to handle stress, learn goal-setting, and identify and properly address their emotions."

Other council members, including Mark Treyger of District 47, have also pushed for more social-emotional resources.

Dinowitz is also committed to helping homeless children and those living in shelter systems. He has publicly advocated for the hiring of 150 dedicated coordinators to help thousands of students experiencing homelessness receive better access to education.

As for the arts and athletics, Dinowitz believes they are "integral to the education of our students," and through directory funding, he has directed hundreds of thousands of dollars to non-profit organizations that can provide students with these services.

Council Member Mathieu Eugene of District 40 has also partnered with non-profit organizations to expand the arts and athletics. He partnered with Youth Education and Sports, bringing their program to thousands of Brooklyn children, and wants to continue to do so.

The new changes brought about by the recent elections will affect everyone and everything within New York City, including the school system and HSAS itself. It opened up discussions regarding a vast array of issues, from the SHSAT and the continued existence of specialized high schools to social-emotional learning and arts and athletics.





After the introduction of a new African American Studies elective at HSAS, students and faculty are left debating whether or not it should become a required course.

African American Studies Elective

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Brianna Gallimore, a senior and the co-head of the CEDI, agreed, saying that the only disappointment was that she was “actually hoping more students would take it so ... more of the collective school [would] learn about African American history.”

Gallimore’s statement brings up a question: should this class remain an optional elective, or should it become a required course?

Ms. Waite Johnson believes it should be required and provides a few reasons why.

Chiefly, making the course a standard graduation requirement rather than an elective would open doors to more resources for the class. Because the course is an elective, Ms. Waite Johnson has based the curriculum on her personal research because “there is no [organization like] AP College Board that supplies certain information or gives certain instruction” for her.

Secondly, because the course is not mandated, students who already have an interest in African American History are taking it, whereas those who would otherwise be uninterested are arguably those who need it more. “I really would love the course to be something that is not an elective,” said Ms. Waite Johnson.

“Because an elective means you can opt in or opt out.”

Her students agree. “I don’t think it’s okay for people to be able to opt out of an important part of history or plead ignorance to not knowing things about the black community when they chose to do so and decided not to,” said Deckle.

“It’s already the kids that would already be doing the work on their own [in the class], whereas other kids who need it more aren’t in the class,” Gallimore added.

Currently, the emphasis of African American Studies in HSAS’s curriculum is the development and abolition of slavery, the civil rights movement, and the Harlem Renaissance. There is of course more than those three topics, which is why the CEDI advocated for a new elective to introduce students to the world of history they’re missing.

“I don’t always like to view it as Black History or African American studies, I like to think of it as the true American Story,” said Ms. Waite Johnson.

Ms. Waite Johnson believes it might be more realistic than one might think to make African American Studies a required course. “I think that it is [tangible], because I had gone on election day to a professional development that was hosted by the NYC Public Library System (NYPL), and they are actually working on creating an education center that would help educators like myself be able to effectively utilize the NYPL in order to make resources available to students,” she said. If resources become more available to teachers, it would become easier to develop a full standard course that all students could benefit from.

Overall, everyone involved in the class believes that taking it is necessary to have a full understanding of American History. The African American History course, whether it’s an elective or a requirement, offers students an important perspective on the American story.

The Freshman English Curriculum and the Diversity Debate

Zarya Hubbard and Mollie Kuritzky, Grade 9, Staff Writers

Beowulf, *The Odyssey*, and *Julius Caesar*. These are a few of the books read in the High School of American Studies’ ninth-grade English class. They are considered some of the most important classics in literature, but have they held up the test of time? Some believe that the ancient classics do not reflect the diverse society we live in today, while others think it would be difficult to incorporate this diversity into a classics-oriented curriculum.

A study from the Economic Policy Institute found that 70 percent of Black students attend segregated schools. With this separation, it is difficult for students to be exposed to people of different backgrounds. Many feel that books with representation are a mode of connection between these otherwise divided groups, and can help students empathize with one another. In New York City, home to the most segregated school system in the country, this is an especially prominent issue.

Ms. Pamela Ridge, the ninth grade English teacher, is responsible for choosing the books on the syllabus, with approval from our Principal, Mr. Weiss. When the topic of gender roles arose, Ms. Ridge feels that the curriculum is male-centered, though she does believe there are areas in these books where strong female characters are featured. “The heroes are male. There are powerful women in *Julius Caesar*, so you shouldn’t think there is no feminism in these books,” she said. “But if you want a modern feminist track, that’s not what this course is about ... this is not a feminist literature course.”

The fact that freshman English class is not a specialized course is

something to keep in mind when using a critical lens on the chosen texts.

However, students had additional concerns about the lack of racial diversity, which Ms. Ridge felt was not a clear-cut issue. Ms. Ridge also mentioned that, while there are no specific texts read in class that address these issues, students are assigned opinionated writing about such topics during an editorial writing unit in the spring—one way to add diversity. When it comes to literature, it must be recognized that the time period of the books is a big factor, one that might cause Ms. Ridge to feel that her hands are tied.

With these stated difficulties in mind, Ms. Rockfeld, the senior AP English Literature teacher at HSAS, has made efforts to combat this issue, as she feels there is value in being represented in books. “Everyone likes to see themselves in literature,” she said. “There are many ways to see yourself in the literature, but one way, of course, is to have a character who speaks the same language you do, or eats the same food that you do, or has the same cultural norms as you.” Finding novels that tackle these topics can be difficult in a classics-oriented syllabus, but Ms. Rockfeld suggested “supplement[ing classics] with poetry that is related to the themes that are discussed in the text and then to find a way to create diversity that way.”

Jay May Fox, a freshman at HSAS, is unsatisfied with the current curriculum. “As a[n] ... openly queer, Jewish person, I feel like it isn’t

inclusive enough for me,” he said. “I just feel like all throughout history there have been amazing queer authors, authors of color, etc., who have written other epic poems and stories we can tell.”

When asked for suggestions on how to potentially improve the curriculum while still focusing on classics, he said: “Think about Sappho, she wrote classic poems and she was very openly gay in all of her poems that were centered around queerness. And I think poems about minorities are more relevant to this time period when people are being more open about their identities and tolerating racism less, and it might take some extra research, but I think that we can make it happen.”

However, not all students think the HSAS English syllabus is missing much in regards to representation. Jenny Ly, a freshman, feels that the absence of oppressive tropes may make up for the shortage of minority presence. “Representation doesn’t really come up but nor is it really going against. She [Ms. Ridge] really isn’t going against anything in the curriculum about diversity nor is anyone in the class,” she said.

Even though Ly is satisfied with the current reading list, she still sees room for improvement. “It might be possible to include diversity like ... people of color authors, ... gay authors, LGBTQ, stuff like that, but I am satisfied with the books we’re reading now.”



HSAS students and teachers consider the diversity of the English curriculum.

One Year Later: The Biden Administration Report Card

Gertie Angel, Grade 9, Staff Writer

Joseph Biden, the 46th President of the United States, has been in the Oval Office for nearly a year. Biden was inaugurated at a time of national crisis. He assumed the presidency of a nation suffering from an economic calamity, climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, and intense political polarization.

While the entire nation waited with bated breath to see how this administration would differ from the last, High School of American Studies students were interviewed on their hopes and concerns for the then-newly-inaugurated president.

"I am definitely looking forward to an administration that keeps the well-being and best interest of the population at the forefront of their minds," said Anya Mateu-Asbury, then a junior. "Hopefully, we will be able to hold the Biden Administration accountable and have them affect positive change."

Other students had a more concerned outlook on the future of our nation. "I'm worried Biden will not take climate change as seriously as he did campaigning," said

Kathleen Halley-Segal, then a sophomore.

In this past year, Biden has both radically departed from the previous administration and upheld some of his predecessor's policies. This year, *Common Sense* conducted follow-up interviews to see how people's expectations and opinions had changed.

Reflecting on the past year, Halley-Segal said that she is, in fact, pleased with how the Biden administration is handling climate change: "I think Biden [is taking] climate change a lot more seriously than I expected him to," she said. "Often I feel politicians use climate change as a talking point but do not implement real policies of change. The infrastructure bill, which is pushing for improvements like an electric grid system, has proven to me that [Biden] is pushing funds into making changes in the level of greenhouse gas emissions in the United States."

Halley-Segal did, however, say that she believed Biden "could be taking climate change more seriously by negotiating with Congress to emphasize more green proposals."

Mateu-Asbury has mixed feelings about



President Biden was inaugurated in January 2021 amidst a pandemic and a polarizing political climate; HSAS students revisit their comments prior to his inauguration and add new insight.

whether the administration has lived up to her expectations. On the one hand, she believes that the Reconciliation Bill is a great step forward for our nation: "Providing free childcare care and free community college to everyone and paid family leave ... [will] really ... help so many people," she said. However, she critiques the bill as being "watered down," and she believes that it may not be able to help as many people as Biden had wished. She does hold out hope that Biden will push the bill through the Senate noting that it would be "really amazing legislation for his administrative path and ... could help a lot of people."

Both Mateu-Asbury and Halley-Segal feel disappointed in the Biden Administration's handling of the immigration policies left in place by the Trump administration. Halley-Segal noted that "Biden does not seem to be doing an adequate job to clean up the horrifying situation Trump and previous presidents have left him with" and Mateu-Asbury called the administration's lack of concern for the immigration situation in America "shocking." She is primarily upset that Biden will not repeal Title Forty-Two, an executive order which "allows migrants to be deported because of the pandemic, which is basically an excuse to deport people."

The pandemic was also an issue at the forefront of HSAS students' minds, including Laura Yam, then a junior, who was hopeful that the "new administration [would] control the pandemic so we [could] all get our lives back." Today, Halley-Segal gives Biden high marks for his handling of COVID: "I think Biden is doing a good job handling COVID," she said. "[A]fter the Trump administration's COVID disaster, I think he has done a pretty good job distributing vaccinations and implementing stricter rules surrounding COVID."

When comparing students' opinions before and after President Biden took office, it becomes apparent that people have very mixed feelings about the struggles facing our country and the world today. Mateu-Asbury summed this up: "There's still a long way to go and ... politicians are politicians, they're not always going to have the best interests of the people in mind. I think at the forefront ... they're thinking about their careers." She added that Biden, and all politicians, are always going to be concerned with how they can "put [themselves] and the administration in a positive light and keep everyone happy—and that's really impossible to do."

HSAS Students Share Opinions, Concerns about New Mayor

Jackson Parker, Grade 10, Staff Writer

Eric Leroy Adams—a former police captain in the New York Police Department—is the new Democratic mayor of New York City. His decisions, good and bad, will soon play a major role in the city High School of American Studies students call home. Many students have strong opinions regarding his past and future leadership.

One of the most well-known and controversial aspects of his ascent to power is his police background. He served



HSAS students expressed concerns about Eric Adams surrounding his police background and his plans for the NYC school system.

nearly 22 years, starting in the transit police and eventually becoming a captain within the NYPD. His history in law enforcement, along with his statements on the efficacy of stop and frisk, has left a sour taste in the mouths of some in the HSAS student body.

"I know he's [Adams is] a former cop, and I don't

know how that will affect him as a mayor," said Huckleberry Hannemann, a sophomore. "I'm really afraid that he might favor the police over other aspects of the government." However, Hannemann did express that this did not mean he supported Adams' soon-to-be predecessor

DeBlasio, bluntly stating, "I hate DeBlasio."

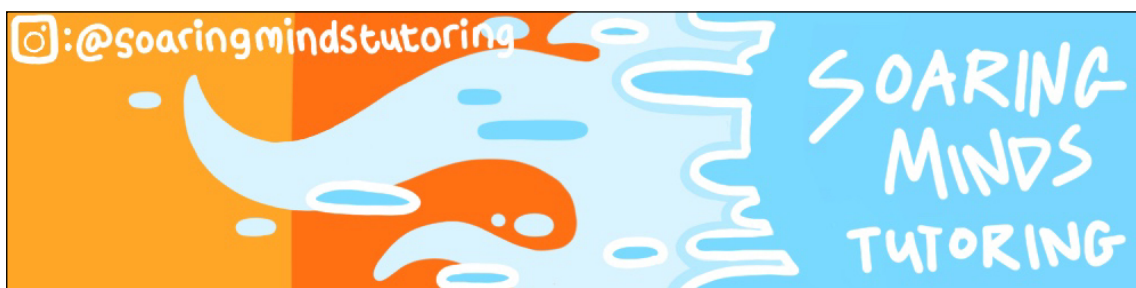
Sophomore Wahidur Rahman echoed Hannemann's concerns about Adams lending support to the NYPD. "He's gonna try to increase the police force," he said. "We need to lower funding."

Rahman also complained, "He's trying to get rid of summer vacation!" This complaint highlights another key issue HSAS students have with Adams: his education policy. On Adams' [website](#), he states he

wishes to "significantly expand learning options in the summer to prevent the summer slide and provide parents with more choices."

Adams has toyed with the idea of online mandatory year-round school on several occasions. This is worrying for many students of all ages, who cherished their two-month summer vacation.

Adams took office on January 1, 2022. Students at HSAS are eager to see how his first actions as mayor will reverberate through the city.



Why Covid-19 has Dramatically Affected Gen Z's Development

Erenei Ligh, Grade 10, Staff Writer

Whether it be experiencing tragedy and loss or being forced to adjust to a new way of life, the COVID-19 pandemic has, without a doubt, impacted everyone's life. According to multiple studies, the pandemic has specifically affected the development of Generation Z more than any other.

A national study by The Center for Generational Kinetics (CGK), a global research firm in Austin, Texas, showed that individuals ages 18 to 24 have been especially hard-hit from the pandemic.

"The study reveals that the experience of remote work is uneven and rife with anxiety," said Jason Dorsey, CGK president, in a press release. Over 1/3 of the subjects interviewed said Covid-19 has disturbed their work and believe their employer needs to provide them with better tools for working remotely.

In a survey sample of 1,099 U.S. employees, the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) found that half of their employees from Generation Z felt burnt out from work compared to only one-fourth of Baby Boomers. "The younger the employee, the more likely they were to report feeling emotionally drained from work," SHRM said in its report.

Generation Z has had the most negative experience with Covid-19 because it hit during their most formative years. Generation Z currently ranges from ages 9 to 24 and the brain generally does not finish developing until age 25. This means that in 2020 when the pandemic hit, the majority of those in Generation Z had not yet finished developing. The pandemic only complicated their mental development, forcing them to adapt to life in quarantine as rites of passage such as graduation were delayed or reconfigured.

Specifically, college-aged members of Generation Z, in the most transformative

years of their life, were forced to face an additional world of obstacles amid the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the usual job-hunting, apartment-buying, living alone milestones a young adult might experience, they have also been forced to navigate the new normal that is remote work, virtual learning, and social distancing.

Meanwhile, the younger side of Generation Z has to completely change their way of learning in uncharted territory. Children need the developmental years spent in elementary, middle, and high school to learn the basics, but remote learning serves as an extra barrier and results in less learning than normal.

According to a ReGenerations survey of more than 500 people from 29 states and six countries, 50 percent of Gen Z is worried about falling behind in their education, 67 percent is worried about job prospects and financial stability, and 41 percent think they will be worse off when the pandemic ends.

Additionally, although Generation Z has struggled the most mentally, they are the lowest priority due to their lack of physical struggles in terms of COVID-19.

The risk of Generation Z contracting COVID-19 is relatively low, and, even if they do, symptoms are often minor and the death rate is extremely low. Subsequently, Generation Z tends to be ignored in regards to the pandemic.

Despite Generation Z being the least likely group to become ill from Coronavirus, it has been hit disproportionately by what could very well be the biggest educational disruption in modern history. This includes an unemployment surge, the psychological effects of being isolated in lockdown, and young workers being the least likely group to have received financial support for lost jobs.

Since COVID-19, the country's social, political, and economic landscape has been reshaped. As a result, Generation Z now peers into an uncertain future instead of looking ahead to a world of opportunities.

COVID-19 Leaves Permanent Stain on American Educational Landscape

Celia Powers, Grade 11, Staff Writer

From mask mandates to snow days on Zoom, the COVID-19 pandemic has had an irrevocable effect on American school systems. Over the past year, students, parents, and teachers across the country have been pushed to find engaging and effective new ways to learn — without stepping foot inside a school building.

The most successful strategy of maintaining learning opportunities during the pandemic was moving millions of students and teachers to online platforms like Google Classroom and Zoom. School systems all over the country worked to provide laptops and mobile devices for students, with states including Texas and California handing out upwards of one million devices each.

Today, teachers still use these platforms to assign work or post resources for their students. "I used to have my own website, which I used to pay for and

everything, but this [Google Classroom] is a lot more user-friendly, and all the students have access to it, so now I actually use it for assignments. I don't think I would have otherwise," said Mr. Evans, a sophomore U.S. history and AP U.S. History teacher at the High School of American Studies.

Besides an increase in technology usage, a significant change to our school system regards colleges. Due to COVID-19-related test center closings, many universities have decided to go test-optional for 2021 and possibly further years of admissions. University of California schools, for one, have taken the step to permanently not consider standardized test scores as part of their admissions process. Instead, test-optional colleges will focus on student extracurricular portfolios, grades, and personal essays.

Amidst the changing college admissions landscape are letters of recommendation. Online school changed relationships built between teachers and students over the course of a normal school year, and teachers don't know the students asking for letters of recommendation for college applications quite as well.

"It was a bit of a challenge because a lot of the kids who ask you to write recommendations, you don't know them as intimately because it was Zoom school," said Mr. Evans. "I noticed I had [fewer] requests this year because a lot of kids who I just knew from Zoom didn't ask."

Teacher-student dynamics have also been changed by in-school health safety protocols. In New York City, this includes mandatory mask-wearing, socially distanced classroom layouts, and a daily health screening advising students and school faculty not to come to school if they're feeling sick.

As more of the population becomes eligible for vaccination, only time will tell how long all of these changes remain in effect during and after the transition from country-wide complete school shut down back to in-person school.

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Gifted and Talented

Continued from Page 1

While the program may help some students, critics are angry at its lack of diversity. According to the New York Times, 75 percent of students in the program were White or Asian in 2019, even though these students only made up 30 percent of those enrolled in public school. Powers, who attended P.S. 9, explained that the Gifted and Talented program was very segregated at her school. "The gifted classes at my school were predominantly white and Asian, and the non-gifted classes were more diverse," she said.

Some in support of the program argue that getting rid of it will leave students in low-income areas with no opportunity for improved education. NYC Schools Chancellor Meisha Porter hopes to improve education for all students, not just those that are considered gifted based on one test. "No single test should determine any child's future," she said. "There [are] so many more students who are gifted, who are talented, who are brilliant, who have special gifts, and I think this is a moment

about creating opportunities for all students to demonstrate their powerful learning abilities." Those with the same view as Porter want to divert funding that is given to the program to the school system in general and work to improve the quality of education for all students.

Mayor de Blasio plans to replace the program with "Brilliant NYC," which will expand the pool of students that accelerated learning is offered to. The plan was fully unveiled in December. "Brilliant NYC" plans to train all 4,000 public school kindergarten teachers to identify individual students' strengths and offer enrichment to these students without separation by classes.

However, Mayor de Blasio's term ended on December 31, 2021. Eric Adams, his successor, has the power to change course. Adams has said that he plans to keep the Gifted and Talented Program, but reform the system. Adams explained that he would not just test kids for the program at four years old, but at multiple ages. When asked if he would get rid of the program, Adams responded, "No I would not. I would expand the opportunities for accelerated learning."

Underclassmen Face Difficult Transition to In-Person School

Julia Wysokinska, Grade 11, Staff Writer

Students at the High School of American Studies faced the daunting task of returning to in-person learning after the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to operate remotely. The underclassmen have a unique perspective as they have never experienced high school before the pandemic. Their middle school experience was cut short, while the upperclassmen's foray into Zoom school was contained solely within HSAS.

Many underclassmen expressed concern stemming from their time away from school buildings. "I think I would still be very anxious [if schools hadn't gone remote] but probably not at the same level, because I just feel like I'm so far behind on learning so many things," said one freshman.

As students returned to school, freshmen transitioned to high school without finishing middle school under normal

circumstances. Meanwhile, the sophomores didn't have the opportunity to be at school in person during their freshman year, in which students coming from various middle schools with varying degrees of knowledge learn effective ways to take notes in class and study. Many reported feeling at a disadvantage as a result of this experience.

"We've kind of missed the crucial stages of all of ninth grade: work habits and learning how to organize things ... I think some of us have that, and some of us don't, and we're all kind of figuring things out as we go," said Noa Greene-Houvras, a sophomore at HSAS. "Our last full year was seventh grade and we're expected to be tenth graders, ... so that's a big gap."

Other sophomores at HSAS agree. "We don't really know what a high school experience is like," said Amy Yu, a sophomore. "Our teachers have kind of been treating us like sophomores (which I don't blame them because they're used to teaching sophomores), but we're just really freshmen, in a sense."



Underclassmen at HSAS are having a uniquely difficult time transitioning to high school.

In comparison, this year's junior class had most of their freshman year in-person, before schools shut down in March of 2020. Seniors were forced to begin their remote learning during their sophomore year, resulting in the upperclassmen being relatively familiar with HSAS before the lockdowns.

"I can't imagine how nerve-racking it would be to transition into high school, which is scary on its own, through a totally virtual setting," said Lola Musslewhite, a junior. "I also feel bad for this year's

freshmen. The transition from middle school to high school is already tough on its own, without a pandemic."

Yu recalled a situation in which a teacher claimed the class was the quietest sophomore class they've ever seen, presumably because they didn't have a chance to bond with one another in the previous year. As a result, underclassmen have worked to find effective ways to bond with their peers following their recent isolated school years.

"One thing I notice is that there are some people in my grade that I don't have any classes with, and so the

only time I have to talk to those people is during lunch or outside of school in clubs," said Amena Steenhuis, a freshman.

Many have also had the opportunity to meet students outside of their grades and form relationships with them. "I think with clubs and different sports, that definitely helped integrate different grade levels," said Ari Schaer, a freshman. "The fact that freshmen and sophomores have lunch together helps aid that." Schaer added that with clubs, it is easier to make connections due to shared interests.

Steenhuis reported a positive consequence of remote learning, saying students could get more sleep. However, she stated that she believes distance learning was "absolutely unsustainable" in the long run. Other students agree that returning to in-person school has benefited their learning experience. "I was able to speak up in class a little more because it just felt a little less scary," said Greene-Houvras. "It's made me a little more confident and try out new things."

The Class of 2025 is Substantially Larger than Normal. Why?

Frances Grodsky and Maya Stone, Grade 9, Staff Writers

For most in New York City, a class size of 32 kids is standard. But here at the High School of American Studies, it's anything but normal. That's exactly why the Class of 2025 is such an anomaly.

126 students are in this year's freshmen class, whereas a normal class size is about 100. So, what changed, and how does the school community feel about it?

The ever-changing public high school admissions process largely accounts for the larger-than-normal class size. Unlike past years, most students did not get offers to both a specialized and non-specialized school. Especially for those who did not have private school as an

option, the high school choice was limited.

"I did not apply to private school this year, only regular admission to public schools and specialized schools," said Isaac Allen, a freshman at HSAS. "The only offer that I received was from HSAS." Ultimately Allen, like many other freshmen this year, had only one option when picking schools, HSAS.

Other students had a multitude of offers but still

picked HSAS. "For regular admission, I got into iSchool, specialized, HSAS, obviously, and private (Xavier and Fordham Prep)," said Max Hauser, another freshman at HSAS. As in past years, many students made the decision to attend HSAS even with other options.

The larger class size has ramifications not only for students, but also for teachers. "I do think it's better for both the teacher

and the students when class size is smaller," said Ms. Rice, the freshmen and sophomore Global History teacher at HSAS. "I am very slow at grading, so it does make me rethink assignments. And with larger class sizes, it's easier for someone to slip through the cracks."

Regardless, Ms. Rice still enjoys teaching her classes this year. "While it's not ideal to have so many students, I have two really good groups, and we are making the best of it," she said.

However, some teachers don't have as many qualms with the larger class size. "NYC teachers have an expectation that our classes can be as large as 34," said Mr. Elinson, the first year U.S. History teacher. My largest class this year is 32, making it well within expectations."

Mr. Elinson believes that the pandemic has disrupted the classroom dynamic, possibly more than the larger

class size. "Sitting in rows and the wearing of masks is absolutely throwing me off my usual stride," he said. "I cannot separate out that effect from simply having a larger class size at this time."

It will be interesting to see if this class size sets a precedent or if previous numbers remain the norm.



The High School of American Studies Class of 2025 has 126 students. Compared to the Class of 2006 (pictured), this is a huge increase.

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Entertainment and Features

Only Murders in the Building: Is it Worth the Watch?

Adin Linden, Grade 10, Staff Writer

In a high-end, Upper West Side building, The Arconia, live three true-crime-obsessed people. In Hulu’s new show *Only Murders in the Building*, Mabel (Selena Gomez), Charles (Steve Martin), and Oliver (Martin Short) are brought together in an attempt to solve what appears to be a murder in their beloved apartment building.

As the show unfolds, new pieces of the mystery are revealed, along with new suspects—various residents in the Arconia—like the mysterious Dimas family and the victim himself, Tim Kono. The show does a great job of building suspense and intrigue. As Mabel, Charles, and Oliver piece the mystery together, so do we.

Oliver, Charles, and Mabel initially come together to make their own true-crime podcast about the death of Tim Kono, which is where we are taken into the core of the story. While poking fun at certain “true crime tropes,” the three characters narrate their newest discoveries to their fans as the audience watches everything unfold. *Only Murders in the Building* is hilariously aware of the pitfalls and characteristics that are essential to every true-crime podcast, which is key to this show’s stellar comedy.

Martin Short, Steve Martin, and Selena Gomez are an unexpectedly hilarious trio. Gomez, though not as acclaimed a comedian or an actor as the other two, adds playful quips to the mix—using her age difference to poke fun at the two older characters—and has great chemistry with Short and Martin.

Short’s performance stands out as the funniest on the show. His character, a failed Broadway producer who struggles financially but clings on to his expensive apartment, adds a dramatic

flair to the show that keeps the viewer laughing.

Of course, the best part of the show is the setting: The Arconia. Inspired by a real building on the Upper West Side, each apartment gives the audience a look into the character’s life and personality. The building residents’ dynamic is the center of the show, with the three protagonists attempting to decipher which of their neighbors committed the crime. With hilarious characters like Howard Morris, whose life revolves around his cat, or the building manager Bunny, who’s known for her cold

exterior, each episode opens a new window into the Arconia.

However, *Only Murders in the Building* does fall flat in several regards. Although not a central plot point, the romantic subplot involving Mabel and Oscar towards the end felt unnecessary and didn’t add much to either character involved. Also, the answer to the mystery, while foreshadowed, wasn’t foreshadowed enough and the killer felt random.

Overall, I would rate *Only Murders in the*



Only Murders in the Building, a new Hulu original, is worth the watch.

Building a 9.5 out of 10. It is a perfect show for any true crime fan, New Yorker, or average viewer. It has

compelling characters, an excellent storyline, and is absolutely hilarious. Who wouldn’t like it?

The Best and Worst Trader Joe’s Holiday Foods

Maya Brener, Grade 9, Staff Writer

Trader Joe’s has a reputation for its seasonal foods. Several are great buys, while others may not be worth it this holiday season. So, I tried and reviewed them so you don’t have to.

1) Candy Cane Joe-Joes



Rating: 8/10
Description: Cream with crushed-up candy-cane between two chocolate cookies.
Review: You can taste the candy cane in these Joe-Joes—they have a very strong peppermint flavor and actual candy cane pieces crushed into the cream—and they strongly resemble

Oreos. I would recommend these if you enjoy Oreos and peppermint.

2) Peppermint Pretzel Slims



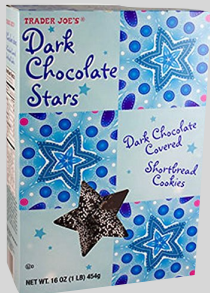
Rating: 5/10
Description: Thin pretzels coated with white chocolate and topped with peppermint sprinkles.
Review: I always enjoy a chocolate-covered pretzel, but the peppermint was bland and its taste was overpowered by the saltiness of the pretzel. Overall, there was not a great balance, and although I enjoyed the pretzels, they did not fit the seasonal palate. I wouldn’t recommend these if you want to get in the holiday mood.

3) Hot Chocolate Sticks



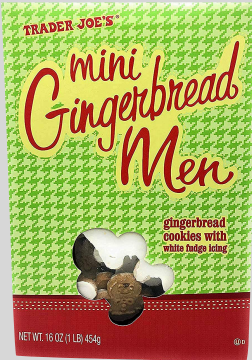
Rating: 3/10
Description: Chocolate sticks used to make hot chocolate.
Review: At first, I was pleasantly surprised at how fast the chocolate dissolved and happy that it didn’t leave any chunks. However, when I tasted it, I found it bland and lacking the rich chocolate flavor I expected. The hot chocolate tasted watered down, and I would skip these this season.

4) Dark Chocolate Stars



Rating: 7/10
Description: Chocolate-coated sugar cookies in a star shape.
Review: These cookies had a great flavor and a good chocolate-to-cookie ratio. They were decorated with sprinkles and mildly festive. Though simple, they tasted great. You can’t go wrong with classic cookies, especially when they’re shaped like stars, so I would recommend buying them.

5) Mini Gingerbread People



Rating: 9/10
Description: Gingerbread cookies in the shape of gingerbread people coated with sugary cream.
Review: Gingerbread cookies are a holiday classic. These cookies had the perfect amount of ginger taste and were fantastic. Each gingerbread person had a different expression, which was both creative and fun to look at. The cream was not too sweet and paired perfectly with the gingerbread. These are a must-buy

on your next Trader Joe’s trip!

6) Gingerbread House Kit



Rating: 10/10
Description: Gingerbread cookies, candies, icing, and instructions to help you make your own gingerbread house.
Review: The Gingerbread House is more of an activity than a food, but it is still my favorite out of all the treats I tried this season. It came with directions and various candies to decorate and eat! Making a gingerbread house is such a fun holiday activity to do by yourself or with friends and family. I had an absolute blast and would definitely recommend buying this one!

Common Sense Exclusive: State Senator Alessandra Biaggi

Noa Yolkut, Grade 11, Entertainment and Features Editor

HSAS is in the State Senate District NY-34, where Alessandra Biaggi has been the State Senator since 2019. In her heavily blue district, the Democratic primaries were the most critical part of the campaign, and she beat a more moderate Democrat by nearly nine points in said primaries. During her run, she became beloved by her soon-to-be constituents, and today, she continues to be a progressive voice in the New York State Senate. Here is my interview with her:

Can you tell the students who will be reading this a bit about yourself and your job? And for fun, what is your favorite restaurant in your district?

I'm four generations in this district [34]. I was born in Mount Vernon hospital. I learned to ride my bike at Seton Park, the White Hall is where we spend every Sunday as a very large Italian American family. So this district is very special to me, not just because of those memories, but because it is my home. And every day that I am representing this district, not only do I feel responsible because it's my job. So in addition to those

things, I went to Pelham public schools. I went to NYU undergrad, I went to Fordham law school, I practiced law for a little while I did storm recovery work. And then I worked on the Clinton campaign to national operations. I'm sure everybody knows what happened with that campaign. It was heartbreaking, really. And then I went to work for the [Former] Governor of New York, and that experience is really what catapulted me to do this, because I got to take the curtain and pull it back and see what was going on behind the scenes. And it was not pretty at all. So it made me see the truth. But it also made me motivated to run because I just thought, how could this be that we could have somebody like this representing us, and it just wasn't right, it wasn't somebody who really cared about the people.

The restaurant is so hard because I have so many in different areas that mean different things to me. Growing up, the Villa Barone, which is in Pelham Bay is where every single child in my family had their baptism, communion, confirmation, sweet 16. anniversaries, birthdays, even funerals. I'm sorry to all the other pizza places, Louie & Ernie's in the Throgs Neck area is one of the best pieces of pizza I have ever had ever. And I have had a lot of pizza. If you had to ask

me what's your favorite deli? Mike's Deli on Arthur Avenue, which is right outside the district because I share Arthur Avenue with Gustavo Rivera. That has to be honestly the best deli. Similarly, since I was the size of a crumb, I have been going there.

How would you recommend an everyday high schooler get involved in politics? What are the best ways/places to volunteer?

I want everyone who reads this to understand one thing that I'm trying to change actively, even as I'm talking to you right now. Politics is very exclusive. We blew the lid off the government because of Trump. And still it's hard for people to get involved in politics, in government, and campaigns. That's not good. And I don't usually do the good and bad dichotomy, but I don't think it's good because we do want everybody to be involved and we want all hands on deck, and to any person who feels like they're not welcome here means that we have failed as leaders and as a government. Politics, the best way to boil it down is like this. Every problem and everything that we do and interact with is politics. The air that we breathe, the computer that I'm on right now, the internet that's coming through the wires and the air, the ability for me to have access to why all of

these things are political, because a political decision went behind all of these things happening. So I think the idea that we are outside of the process is a myth. And it's a myth that I think the people in power want us to believe. The best way for somebody in high school to get involved is, I think, twofold. Number one, look for a problem, you can probably think off the top of your head, what's something that really bothers you that you don't like, and then look for the people who are trying to solve that problem. If those people don't exist, well, then the second route exists, which is that you create something, you organize. Number two is that every person has the ability to reach out to their elected officials. So what does that mean? The responsibility is on every high schooler to understand who represents them at every level, local, state, federal, everyone should know that. And if you don't know, it's okay, but look it up. Because you need to know and you need to know, because these are the people making decisions for you, every day, no matter what, no matter if you pay attention to them or not.

Were you politically active as a high schooler? If not, when did you start to become politically active?

So I grew up in a political family, so politics was very normal around the dinner table, like it was just what we did. And so that meant that even if I wasn't actively volunteering on a campaign, I still was always talking about politics. It really wasn't until after high school, and I got to college, that I would just do a lot of volunteering. But after I graduated from college, I interned as a congressional intern for congressman Crowley, and I got to work on constituent cases. And they were like, okay, here you go, because they saw that I could do it. And I enjoyed that. And they gave me a lot of responsibility. And I loved it. I loved it so much. But every experience after that along the way, just kind of built upon the other one. And ultimately, what it meant was that I was just continuing to learn. But I

think what made me feel confident about the ability to be here today is that I kept seeking out those experiences, even when I did not feel welcome in the room.

We're a school that puts a big emphasis on history. Is there anything you learned in history class that has stuck without throughout your political career or even just your life in general?

This is probably going to be a surprise answer. What has stuck with me about what I learned in history is what I didn't learn, meaning that I cannot believe how much they left out of the curriculum, and I am perpetually raging about it. Because it is such a dereliction of educational duties to leave out massive swaths of history, and to really brush over things like oh, we're gonna learn about slavery and colonialism, but it's fine. Everything's fine. It's over. Like, no, it's not over and also, let's learn about these things in a truthful way. The things that I feel like I learned were completely whitewashed. And were delivered to me in a way that just made everybody feel comfortable. Our history as a country is uncomfortable, it is uncomfortable. It is embarrassing, in some ways. There's things to be proud of, of course, but you know what I'm getting at here. I'm talking about all of the racial inequalities. And just the deeply rooted social inequity and racial inequity that runs from the beginning of this country, and still exists in so many rules and laws and regulations, and generational wealth and income inequalities and, and criminal justice reform systems and educational systems. I think that it's important that someone like me, and others who know that we were not taught these things educate ourselves about what really happened. I have done a lot of reading and research and listening and just trying to understand and wrap my head around. And a lot of things I've learned, I brought to my parents, and they didn't know it either. And so it just shows you how, just how,

Squid Game: The Netflix Hit that Masks a Dystopian Plot in a Utopian Setting

Nana Sam, Grade 9, Staff Writer

With 8.1 stars on IMDb, 94 percent on Rotten Tomatoes, and 142 million households tuning in to watch, it's safe to say that Squid Game is the new hit show that no one, not even the creator himself, was expecting. It already achieved the biggest series launch in all of streaming service history, Within the first 28 days, it was streamed for over 1.65 billion hours. Most significantly, it has become Netflix's most-watched show, ever.

Squid Game is a South Korean show about 456 players, who are all in deep financial debt and risk their lives playing six children's games. The last player standing wins 45.6 billion Won, which is approximately equal to \$28,132,191. Each game ends with several dead players and an increased pool of money. The story primarily focuses on eight of the 456 players: Seong

Gi-hun (#456), Cho Sang-woo (#218), Hwang Jun-ho, Kang Sae-byeok (#067), Oh Il-nam (#001), Jang Deok-su (#101), Abdul Ali (#199), and Han Mi-nyeo (#212).

Squid Game has a little bit of everything for its wide variety of fans. There is gore for horror fans, psychological thriller for those who enjoy it, and a bit of comedy for those who need a good laugh once in a while.

The creator of Squid Game, Hwang Dong-hyuk, based the show on his own personal issues. He wanted to highlight global issues regarding capitalism and class struggles. The global crisis examined in Squid Game actually parallels reality. Just like in Squid Game, the needy are often forced to turn to unethical means to live their lives.

In my opinion, Squid Game is a great show, and it deserves all the recognition and fame it has received. It dives into deep parts of the human psyche and has exposed America to a culture it has not fully experienced before. The show also has a fun, but scary, plot that entices the average viewer.

unfortunately, we've been really taught things with blinders on.

The High School of American Studies is one of nine New York City specialized high schools. In order to be admitted to eight of these schools, students must take and pass the SHSAT, a test that has become increasingly controversial over the last several years, as many students of color and students in poorer neighborhoods don't have access to the learning resources that wealthier students have. Some wish to keep the test, others wish to reform it, and several want to abolish the test altogether. Where do you stand on the issue? What are some ideas you have to fix it?

I have always been a straight A student. There has not been a time in my life where I've not been obsessed with getting straight As. But I've never been good at taking standardized tests until I took my last bar exam, my last standardized test ever. And that's because I did not know that I had testing anxiety and overall anxiety. And there's a lot of underlying things behind that. But because of that, and because I also had ADHD and dyslexia, I struggled so much unnecessarily. And if I had more time, I would have been fine. But I didn't and so I struggled with my SATs, my PSAT, my first bar exam. And also want you to know one more thing, I could not have had more access to help. I had a tutor for everything I ever needed. I had access to prep schools, prep programs, prep, whatever. I had every book, every flip card, I wasn't for a shortage of that. So imagine if you take away the ability of that. It's impossible, you're never gonna get anywhere because you're just not capable of doing it. So I think that for me this question, and just this issue, like the disparities among students that are admitted to specialized high schools, is very real, it is very concerning to me. This year, 4262 out of about 23,000 8th graders who took the SHSAT received an acceptance. And the percentage of offers, in

addition to that, for black and Latino students was 9%, compared to last year, which was 11%. So that's a problem, because what's happening is, it's obviously decreasing in terms of who has access to the schools. I know, I think we all know, that this is a disparity that is hurting black and Latino students, it harms the students who also attend specialized high schools, in my opinion, who really do not read the intellectual and emotional and social benefits from learning in a more diverse environment. And especially as a student in New York City, nothing represents New York City more than its diversity. I'm a co-sponsor of legislation that allows New York City to change the process of how specialized high schools admit students. Because currently, right now, under the law that we have, all of the specialized high schools are required to use the test, as their sole means for admission. And so since the enactment of the Hecht-Calandra Act in 1971, New York City has really not been able to make any decisions about admissions to specialized high schools. This bill is important because it does give the city school districts just the ability to determine if there are other metrics and to be able to determine if somebody should be admitted to schools. And I think that standardized tests are one of the most troubling ways, even though it's there to equalize the playing field. But in order to do that, everybody has to start from the same position, and everyone is not starting from the same position. So I think we can do better. I know we can. And I know that we can also put more responsibility on the admissions committees to look at a little more than just a standardized test score, because people are not only a number, that one time, one day you took that test.

As we're wrapping up, is there anything else you'd like to mention to the students of HSAS that I didn't bring up?

If you do what you love, you will truly never work a minute or day in your life.

And I can tell you that because not only do I feel like I don't work, but I love what I do. And I think a lot of the myths that we are told is that we are supposed to, you know, go to school, get good grades, get married and get a good job, and then have children buy a house. There's nothing wrong with that, but also, what do you do if you want to take an alternative route? What if you decide "You know what I want to do, I want to walk on glaciers. That's what I want to do for the rest of my life." That's amazing, you should do that. Because that's what makes you happy. When we don't do things we love, we actually have the ability to cause more harm. And I can tell you that firsthand, because a lot of the people that I serve with, do not love what they do. And are still not there for the right reasons. And they do cause harm. In fact, we see all the time. So it's an important thing to not let go of because nobody can take that away from you. And that is the most powerful thing in the world.

At the end of the interview, Senator Biaggi offered to make a short video saying hello to my grandmother, who lives in the district and is a big fan of hers. When she received the video, she could not have been more excited. Senator Biaggi, on top of being smart, qualified, and making important changes in Albany, genuinely cares about her constituents and community, which is what truly makes her great. This interview took place in May of 2021. In August of 2021, Senator Biaggi got a significant amount of news coverage talking about former Governor Cuomo's sexual assault allegations and resignation. If you'd like to hear more from her on the subject of former Governor Cuomo, she has several video interviews on various news websites. The entire Common Sense team thanks Senator Biaggi for agreeing to interview with us. It was such a pleasure to speak with her, and I hope to do it again.

New Teacher Spotlight: Ms. Waite Johnson

Isabel Frei and Saira Pannu, Grade 11, Staff Writers

Ms. Waite Johnson teaches the African American studies elective and Research at the High School of American Studies. We interviewed her to learn more about who she is as a teacher, and as a person outside of the classroom.

Question: What inspired you to teach?

Answer: I've always been a teacher, even with my nieces and nephews. I have nieces and nephews that are just about four years younger than I am, so although we were relatively the same age, I was always made the leader of the group. So, I was always leading and teaching them.

Q: What is your teaching philosophy? Do you have one thing that you always stand by?

A: To allow each student to be authentically who they are, and to be authentically myself in front of the classroom. If there is something that I encounter that I may not know the answer to, I tell them "that is a really good question and I'll investigate it and thank you for that, I'll get back" because we don't know it all. Sometimes I think teachers want to be the know-it-all, but learning is a continuous process. I can learn from my students and, hopefully, they learn from me. I don't think that there is a hierarchy in learning, to say that I am the master and you have to learn from me.

Q: Why did you choose African American Studies to teach?



New teacher Ms. Waite Johnson provides insight into her teaching experience and her life outside the classroom.

A: From my point of view African American Studies is American Studies, and now is the perfect time with so much reckoning that the country is going through. I think that there is a yearning for it from young people and it's just now the time to seize what is happening in our larger society and bring it into the school community. Because unless youngsters are taught, they won't know how to navigate the future that they're going to be a part of. Even as an older person, we have to teach what we know so that young people can go forward with that knowledge and make differences in this world.

Q: What did you do before coming to HSAS?

A: Well, for over twenty years I taught at a school right down the block [DeWitt Clinton High School]. I've always been a teacher. I think I've been a teacher all of my young adult life, and so when I was able to join this school, I felt right at home because especially within the history department, there were so many of my old colleagues.

Q: Was this your childhood dream job?

A: Well like I said in the beginning, I've always been placed in the role of being a leader. I used to play school with my nieces and nephews just because it was the one thing that I could do and assert being in control of them. I was only like four years older than my oldest nephew but I would have them sit them down and we would play school.

Q: What are two fun facts about you that people might be interested to know?

A: I ran track in high school and most of my family is from Belize.

Spotlight Interview: Sophomore Grade Representatives

Sabrina Silbert, Grade 10, Staff Writer

Sophomores Amy Yu and Noa-Greene Houvras were reelected as grade representatives after taking office as freshmen. Common Sense caught up with the pair to discuss their feelings about in-person school and their ideas for the new school year.



Sophomore representatives Yu (left) and Greene-Houvras (right) reflect on their experience in student government and share ideas for the school year.

Was it more difficult to communicate with the rest of the grade last year, virtually, or this year in person? Why?

Amy: Last year, virtually, for sure. With in-person [school], there are all sorts of options available to you for meeting people. You can stop people in the hallways, meet after school, or during lunch, etc. However, with virtual, it was hard to get a hold of everyone all at once, and it didn't help ... that we didn't really get to know our classmates and what they were actually like, as most of us knew each other simply as a face on a screen. Screen fatigue was also a huge thing, so I don't blame those who decided to turn off their notifications or screens after the school day to avoid having to look at it anymore. [I'm] really glad to be back in person. You can feel [a] buzz [in the air] and get a feel of what people think of this or that when we ask about their opinions on things.

Noa: It was definitely harder to communicate with our grade virtually. A lot of times it felt like we were talking into the vacuum, and being a representative in-person doesn't feel like this at all. It's been really awesome to have people come up to us and ask us questions, or to overhear people talking about how they liked an event we planned. There is a feeling of being heard and seen in normal school that, for me, wasn't there online. I'm so grateful to have both experiences, but ... it is way more rewarding to be a representative in-person.

Do you communicate with the representatives from different grades?

Amy: Of course, they're all absolutely amazing. We have weekly student government meetings where we all interact with one another as a whole, and if needed, we also message each other, etc. Everyone's glad to help ... each other in any way possible, whether it be about advice, how to navigate a certain club, anything at all really. There are no stupid questions or concerns, and everyone is really friendly, so don't be afraid to reach out at any given moment to any of the representatives, even if they're not in your own grade.

Noa: Absolutely! The representatives of the older grades are so incredibly nice, honestly, all of student government is, and I'm really grateful to have a supportive network of upperclassmen. We meet once a week and have group chats to communicate ideas. [H]earing what they are doing is really important to [help] inspire ... us [and] push our [own] platforms forward. One of my initiatives this year is also to help the freshman representatives a little more, so I will be communicating with the freshman [candidates] about the expectations and my experience, and I hope to help the freshman representatives with their work once they are elected.

What are some of your ideas for this school year?

Amy: I'm not much for ideas; my style is working the best I can to propel others' ideas forward and try to [implement] them. However, I did want to enact a way to make it less awkward for upperclassmen/lowerclassmen interactions,

a workshop [about] study skills and school, and of course we all would love to get the community suggestions box in ASAP. Like I said though, I'm not great at ideas. I'd much prefer working towards what others want to enact in school, and putting the effort there instead. If anyone reading this has any ideas of potential projects they'd like to see in the school, feel free to reach out (or to write a submission in the suggestion box that should be up and running soon)!

Noa: I have a lot of ideas and I'm so excited for this year. I want to advocate for eco-friendly cleaning supplies, set up an anonymous feedback box in school, hold a pre-registration drive, hold open Student Government meetings where anyone can come, and have a school supplies drive. It's really important to me to strike a balance between the representative duties (weekly meetings, school events, [etc.]) and these projects.

What was one thing you accomplished last year as the freshman student representatives?

Amy: This felt like centuries ago but one memorable thing we did was when we finally got a lunch break, some of the upperclassmen had a Zoom with the [first years], and we just hung around and some people played Minecraft till it was time to go to class. We had wanted more social events, and this went hand in hand with the whole upperclassmen plus lowerclassmen interactions. A short thing, but it happened.

Noa: One thing I am really proud of accomplishing last

year was establishing GSA [Gender-Sexuality Alliance]. I had gotten a lot of requests for one, but after asking around I couldn't find someone who wanted to take over it, so I began organizing it with some friends. It's become such an awesome community and I feel so lucky to be part of it!

Do you have any advice for new student government representatives?

Amy: Definitely enjoy your work, and know your grade well. Be passionate about what you're doing, and be prepared to also put a lot of effort into events and brainstorming execution. Meetings are Fridays after school, and there are a few occasions where there may be a few extra ones throughout the week leading up to a big event, or a time where you'll have to come in early, etc. It's all right if you don't have many ideas, but make sure you're putting in all the effort needed and giving it your all. I agree with Noa about teamwork and synergy, those are a large part of student gov in general, and it helps to have a balance between who does what. For example, Noa is great with ideas, but I'm geared more towards the execution of said ideas, so it works out between the two of us. All in all, good luck to those running! [S]tudent government, in my opinion, is absolutely worth everything, I love the type of stuff that we do.

Noa: The main thing I would emphasize is a passion for ideas and the ability to think outside the box. The thing about student government that really makes me happy is organizing projects and coming up with ideas, and I think it's really important to have that ability to bring something special to the table. I would also say that teamwork is really important. You don't run with anyone for representative, but you do end up being elected with another person. I couldn't have asked for a better partner than Amy, and I think it's important that the freshman representatives complement each other nicely and can work together really well.



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Opinion and Sports

Opinion: Why We Should Be Wary of #nyctiktok

Gigi Perlman, Grade 10, Staff Writer

The TikTok hashtag “#nyctiktok” has over 175 million views. If you scroll under the tag, you’ll find influencers sharing NYC ‘day in the life’ videos, luxury apartment tours, and five-star food reviews, all while being Ubered from one place to another. These videos are made attractive with filters, young people, and pricey items.

TikTok romanticizes city life. It portrays the idealistic life of white, upper-class twenty-somethings living downtown. New York City-related content has exploded in 2021, and as a result, more people are moving to the city and tourism has boomed, especially after vaccine distribution increased. Young people coming here for the first time are watching these NYC creators’ fun, carefree lifestyle—a false narrative of living in New York City.

Infamous TikTokers @gab_nyc, @theviplist, and @victoriaparis are just a few examples, having amassed over one million followers combined. They dine at high-end restaurants multiple times a week and live in luxury high rises, posting every envy-inducing experience. The portrayal of New York City as an upper-class utopia is far from accurate, and may also be damaging to the city.

New York City has a soaring homelessness and housing issue, with 47,916

homeless people living on the streets of New York in 2021, according to Coalition for the Homeless. Rich content creators are only adding to the issue. They advertise and encourage the “city-living” dream that out-of-towners have and push out low-income residents while failing to show what much of the city is made of: ethnic communities, lower- or middle-income communities, and those living anywhere outside of lower Manhattan. Those who can afford the most expensive city in the U.S. and flaunt it as their job are not what makes New York, New York.

Many native New Yorkers find it frustrating. Teenagers in the city, the primary viewers of these TikToks, consistently critique the unrealistic display of their hometown. “Well to newcomers it’s just a false, tourist perception. You aren’t going to get the rich, exciting, and pretty life that only the 1% live,” said HSAS sophomore Kathleen Halley-Segal. “These influencers sell the illusion that living luxuriously in New York comes at no cost or stress. Seeing a fifteen-second video of them showing off a day in their life or apartment tour leaves no one with the question of, ‘How can they even afford this kind of life?’”

The aesthetic of New York City on TikTok goes farther than a single eye-catching video. “There are big issues here that need to be addressed. These rich influencers contribute to them and don’t bother to address that because it’s not fitting to their lifestyle,”

Halley-Segal added. When those who can afford to give back to their communities and share this opportunity choose not to, they actively exclude the voices of those marginalized. It’s the least they owe to their new home.

Sports: Is it Finally Time for American Soccer Fans to Connect with their Roots?

Theo Schimmel, Grade 10, Staff Writer

For years, American soccer fans have avidly watched games in Europe while neglecting the teams playing in their backyard. This is fair, to say the least, as the United States Men’s National Team (USMNT) has been a running joke since their emphatic loss to Trinidad and Tobago that saw them miss out on the 2018 World Cup as a whole. The MLS, the first division of professional soccer in the U.S, hasn’t impressed either, as it’s been seen as the haven for washed-up European stars. However, both the MLS and the USMNT may finally be picking up some traction. But is either something that Americans as a whole can actually support?

The USMNT

There’s a lot to be excited about for the future of the USMNT. They’ve seen a host of Americans thrive in Europe and make a name for themselves with teams like Chelsea, Barcelona, or Juventus. Christian Pulisic has been poised to be the golden boy of American soccer since he stepped foot onto European soil about five years ago at just eighteen years old. While he’s had his fair share of injuries at Chelsea, at twenty-three years old, he’s the cemented leader of this youthful team. Backing him up are the likes of Weston McKennie (Juventus F.C), Sergiño Dest (F.C Barcelona), and Borussia Dortmund’s Gio Reyna. Scattered throughout Europe are Americans who could well make their way into the squad come the 2022 Qatar World Cup.

Aside from the actual players themselves, supporting the USMNT is slowly but surely going to become a more fun thing to do. After the 2014 World Cup, which the U.S. did oddly well in without

actually turning any non-American heads, they gained the status of underdogs amongst others competing. Such a status has always been fascinating to Americans, even while they’ve pretty much steamrolled over the competition in international basketball, baseball, and, especially, women’s soccer.

After the 2014 World Cup, the USMNT started to gain some traction and developed a hectic but large fanbase. However, after missing out on the 2018 World Cup in an embarrassing fashion, many were deflated and the fanbase dwindled as the team itself lost almost all respect. From 2018 to 2020, the fans who remained by the team’s side were thrust into an uncomfortably awkward position. With what went on politically during the peak of immigration issues in America, the Black Lives Matter movement, and more, supporters were forced to question their brazen patriotism towards the United States. It was an uncomfortable situation for both the players and those cheering them on. In October of last year, African American midfielder Weston McKennie spoke on playing for a country that he had trouble supporting: “I went back home to Dallas and I’m afraid to drive at night just because I don’t know what’s going to happen if I get pulled over. I’m representing a country that possibly doesn’t even accept me just for the color of my skin.”

Now, however, the fans are slowly coming back, along with players who have rekindled the fire in them to play for the USA. In second in qualifying in North/Central America and twelfth in FIFA’s most recent official rankings, the USMNT could bring back pride in being an American soccer fan.

Major League Soccer

The MLS has had a really bad reputation for years now. While, yes, it was a bit of a joke in the early to mid-2010s, its quality has increased tremendously in recent years. The old and regressing European stars who used to come into this

league to feel like a superstar one last time amongst the lowly competition are now struggling. Gonzalo Higuain, one of the biggest attacking names in Italy, and Blaise Matuidi, a World Cup winner, have come into the American League and have been, plainly, terrible. A host of players in the MLS are now linked with big moves to Champions League level teams and are following in the footsteps of other MLS-originated players including Alphonso Davies (Bayern Munich) and Gio Reyna (Borussia Dortmund).

While the quality of play is lower than that in Europe it deserves more credit than it gets. It takes a few games of getting used to, and you will surely be thinking that you know at least one person who could outclass a field full of MLS players, but over time it’s almost inevitable that you will gain some appreciation for what you’re watching, and especially the highly frequent “golazos” that are not anywhere near as common overseas.

Where to Start with the MLS

New York City Football Club, or, NYCFC is a great team to check out if willing to give the American League a shot. The young but bipolar team will have a crowd on their feet one game but have them leave the game early out of disappointment the next. They are based in the Bronx and play at Yankee Stadium. It’s difficult to get behind watching soccer on an oddly shaped field, but a diverse and loud fanbase makes up for it. NYCFC finished fourth in the Eastern Conference out of fourteen and is on the right track to soon make some noise in the league. The MLS is on the move and is deserving of American fans’ attention.

American soccer fans are a quickly growing community that has brought life to the MLS. At its best, Major League Soccer can offer Americans a completely different aspect of the game in live stadiums, and at its worst, it will keep you mildly entertained over the summer while there’s no action overseas.



Tik Tok influencers hurt the marginalized and homeless by promoting the romanticization of New York City.

Sports: HSAS Fall/Winter Sports Overview

Adam Freiberg and Noam Pri-Paz, Grade 11, Staff Writers

Despite COVID-19 concerns, sports at the High School of American Studies have thrived during the start of the 2021-22 school year.

Fall sports were a major success as the Cross Country teams and the girls' Tennis Team had fantastic seasons.

Boys and girls cross country both had a great turnout from underclassmen, which was crucial coming off a year with no sports. The Cross Country teams bonded on their long runs and made it to the State Championships, with co-captain Sheyla Zakashansky placing 137th.

In the fall, the Boys Cross Country team had an unbelievable season. Junior Paul Tarbutton, a veteran on the team, was proud of the way they performed this season. "The team improved pretty fast," said Tarbutton. "Even though it started later than a normal cross country season, we definitely saw some fast times from new and old members."

Tarbutton believes that the pandemic did impact the season, but the transition for new members of the team was strong considering the circumstances.

"COVID made the season start in September when normally it would start in August (Mr. Elinson would usually email the students to see which ones are interested over the

summer). The fact that the season only just started when we got back to school made cross-country seem like a low-commitment sport to most people, especially because it was advertised as 'Don't know how to run? We'll teach you!' Because of that, we got a lot of newcomers, especially freshmen. A lot of them were surprised to find out that it is four days a week and that they would have to run long distances, but the ones who stuck with it performed well."

Tarbutton says he believes HSAS remains the fastest school with under 500 members due to the exceptional times of the runners.

Additionally, the transition for returning players and the introduction of new sophomores and freshmen went smoothly.

"The tennis season was amazing coming off two years of not playing," says Carly Brail, captain of the Girls Tennis Team. "Everyone came in with such amazing energy and it was so great to see that translated into the season."

Other than enjoying being back, the team had a successful season. "In the season itself, we were competitive with many teams that we had previously lost to," said Brail. "It was amazing to see how far the team has gotten since my sophomore year. The team advanced to the semifinals of the playoffs, losing an unbelievably close 3-2 match to Hunter. I can't wait to see how this team will grow in the future."



The Girls Tennis Team advanced to the semifinals of the playoffs.

Heading into winter, excitement is high among the boys and girls Basketball Teams. Despite major limitations to their practice facilities due to COVID-19, both teams enter their respective seasons confident in their ability to compete. They have a good mix of underclassmen and upperclassmen and strong leadership and coaches that have a history of leading their teams to success.

Boys basketball is entering the season with no home court or practice facility. However, they are still finding unique ways to workout as a team and gain team chemistry. Some members of the team are playing during lunch and at

parks after school, doing everything they can to put themselves in the best position to succeed this season given the circumstances.

Junior Will Brody has high expectations for the team, despite the obstacles they face. "We have been practicing occasionally in different parks in the Bronx because the gym in Lehman College is unavailable to us at this point," said Brody. "Despite that, we have a lot of talent on this team, and I think we can win some games if we put it together. However, our primary focus is to have fun and get a break from the academic rigor of school."

Brody has a team-first mentality as he enters his second real season with the team. Regarding his personal goals, Brody states, "I just really want to help the team win. I don't care what my role is, but winning is my only focus."

Brody also believes that the stable team leadership will be an advantage this season: "Our captain Luke Caramanico and the seniors are doing everything they can to make sure we are competitive this season. I am a bit worried about the freshman and sophomores' development due to the lack of a real practice facility right now. I am really excited about their potential moving forward, though."

For the Girls Basketball Team, in particular, there are only two returning players and the rest are new. All seem to be adjusting smoothly into the beginning of the season. Head coach of the girls basketball team Ryan Hondorf says, "The new players are soaking up a lot of much-needed information about the game with every practice." Although this season will have its difficulties, the Girls Basketball Team will continue to have fun. "I believe that the goals and expectations of this year are simple. Have fun, and get better at the game of basketball" says Hondorf.

All in all, it is an exciting time for HSAS sports! The small school is exceeding expectations and showing great determination. Fall sports were a smashing success with more on the horizon this winter!

Sports: In-Person School is Back, and the Long-Awaited Return to HSAS Sports is Finally Here

Kisna Pande, Grade 10, Staff Writer

With the return of in-person school, sports teams are back in session. After the year-long break, student-athletes have returned with newfound excitement and energy. However, due to pandemic restrictions, things have not been the same as before.

According to the New York City Department of Education website, "PSAL teams will still be required to follow all PSAL health and safety guidelines during participation," including but not limited to vaccination requirements for all high-risk sports, facial coverings worn at all times, health screenings, and social distancing. These policies have been implemented city-wide and affect all NYC Public Schools.

However, the High School of American Studies has faced additional challenges, which makes organizing practices and

games more difficult. In the past, HSAS has used Lehman College's facilities to host games and practices. This year, however, Lehman has taken extra precautions and shut down many of the facilities HSAS previously used, including the Old Gym, where the HSAS basketball team would practice and hold home games. As a result, the HSAS basketball teams regularly do not have adequate facilities to practice.

Mr. Hondorf, the coach of the girls' basketball and softball teams, is excited about the return of school

sports. "I'm very excited to be back in person after being virtual for so long," he said. "Mostly, I'm happy that our students can have the opportunity to interact in person and have some fun participating in athletics!"

From September 9 through September 29, 57 percent of the roughly 1,200 games scheduled on the PSAL's calendar weren't played, according to Daily News. About 500 of those games, or 42 percent, have been postponed, while 180, or 15 percent, have been forfeited or canceled. Some amount of schedule reshuffling is typical at the

start of every season as schools iron out logistical wrinkles, but it has never been done at this level.

Reflecting on the changes and challenges his teams are facing this year, Mr. Hondorf said, "Things are a lot different now. The progress and momentum that we've gained in our athletic programs came to an abrupt halt, and we have to build some of that momentum back up again. We have all new faces on many of our sports teams, many who will have learned the sport very quickly."

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