



## How the High School Admissions Process Has Changed In 2020

*Hannah Torok, Grade 11, Staff Writer*

The past year has been filled with stress-inducing uncertainty for prospective New York City high school students. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the highly intensive high school application process unique to NYC has changed in key ways.

In the NYC public high school system, there are two major groups of schools: specialized and general. Apart from Laguardia, all the specialized schools look at the performance of students on one test, the Specialized High School Admissions Test (SHSAT). General high schools traditionally follow a variety of admissions methods, such as screening, audition-based admissions, and zone-based admissions.

Each screened high school has specific admissions criteria. In the screening process, high schools look at seventh-grade report cards, attendance, state test scores, and other requirements. Screening processes have not been changed for this year's high school applicants. However, due to the pandemic, the graduating class of 2021 has no current official school grades or state test scores, so high schools may look primarily at pre-pandemic grades and test scores when admitting students and ignore seventh grade and eighth-grade report cards and test scores.

Susanna Steinberg, an eighth-grader attending Booker T. Washington Middle School, was upset with these changes.

## HSAS Temporarily Suspends Lehman College Classes

*Jackson Parker, Grade 9, Staff Writer*



Lehman College courses are no longer available for High School of American Studies students, a cause of disappointment for many.

The High School of American Studies has temporarily lost one of its most prized programs: its classes at Lehman College.

The economic downturn from the Coronavirus has hurt the New York City education system, including the City University of New York. As a result, CUNY has been forced to cut off funding for Lehman College programs at HSAS. Lehman College needs to prioritize its own students, leaving HSAS in a difficult situation given the program's importance to the school.

Alessandro Weiss, the principal of HSAS, revealed some of the reasoning behind the pausing of the programs and his objections to some proposals for reopening them. For example, it was proposed that the PTA could attempt to sponsor the entire program, but he does not believe this solution is fair to the school nor viable for it. "I don't think it's right for the PTA to have to pay the full cost of the college program when this was part of a partnership with CUNY," he said.

Even if the school were to find funding, Weiss believes that providing college courses online is not

worth the effort. "If we were going to look for funding for this program we decided we would rather look for funding and spend it on real live college classes than on virtual college classes which are probably not as good," he said. Upperclassmen who took Lehman College classes virtually last year echoed Weiss's statement, saying that online learning made college courses difficult to digest.

All of this is having a painfully real impact on HSAS students, who have looked forward to taking college classes since freshman year. College classes are especially important for HSAS because it is too small to support a variety of quality programs on its own, Weiss noted.

HSAS senior Spencer Lorin took college classes before the pandemic and found them to be extremely valuable. "You get to learn something in much more detail and [it's] more interesting," he said. He added that in terms of college applications, "some colleges don't just like it, they expect to see it."

Equally worse off were the juniors, who were expecting to start their

Lehman courses this year but lost the opportunity. "I was deeply disappointed," said Bernard Condon, a junior at HSAS. "College classes are a hallmark of HSAS. They are what sets HSAS apart. Students can take strange and unusual classes that they otherwise wouldn't have access to." This feeling is shared by many in light of these funding cuts.

Despite this, the future is looking bright, and Mr. Weiss and the rest of the administration are working hard to make sure it stays that way. Mr. Weiss is communicating with CUNY, the DOE, and local politicians to find funding for fall courses, and is also looking to ensure that every senior who has not taken a college course with Lehman College has the opportunity to take one this semester.

In the meantime, both Lorin and Condon affirmed that they believed HSAS would be worth it even without its beloved classes at Lehman. "It was one of several appeals of HSAS," said Condon. "The school is a tight-knit community with warmhearted and endearing teachers and staff. This was a massive loss, but HSAS is still HSAS."

## HSAS Students Voice Opinions on New Biden Administration

Common Sense asked students at The High School of American Studies to share their hopes and concerns about the new Biden Administration. Their responses are as follows:

"I'm looking forward to having a president who trusts science instead of fighting it." - Talia Homer, Grade 11

"I'm worried Biden will not take climate change as seriously as he did campaigning." - Kathleen Halley-Segal, Grade 9

"I'm looking forward to having competent officials in office." - Elizabeth Murray, Grade 11

"I'm hopeful that the new administration will control the pandemic so we can all get our lives back. I'm also hopeful that some of the polarization that our country is experiencing right now will die down." - Laura Yam, Grade 11

"I hope there is a specific and aggressive plan relating to climate change." - Noa Greene-Houvras, Grade 9

"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. Hopefully, we will be able to hold the Biden Administration accountable and have them effect positive change." - Anya Mateu-Asbury, Grade 11

"I wonder what Biden will do about Amy Coney Barrett in the Supreme Court." - Lisa Dang, Grade 11



# News

## High School Admissions Process

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“I’ve worked hard all of seventh grade because that’s what high schools usually look at, and now all they will be able to see are my sixth-grade grades,” she said. Steinberg added that many of her peers felt far less motivated to work hard at the end of seventh grade once they found out high schools would not be considering those grades.

Another factor of the screening process is geographical preferences. Around 250 individual high schools give preference to students who live within a certain distance of the school. This policy has allowed schools in wealthy neighborhoods to fill up their schools with local students, many of whom are white and of higher socioeconomic status. Geographic preference has been at the heart of debates over desegregating NYC schools.



The NYC Department of Education changed the high school admissions process due to new circumstances caused by COVID-19 for the near future.

This year, the geographical preference policy was changed by Mayor Bill De Blasio. Over the course of the next two years, geographic preferences will be eliminated. According to a DOE statement, “Approximately 250 total high schools have some type of district or geographic

priority in place, such as borough-based priority and district priority, limiting opportunity for hard-working students to attend some of our most in-demand schools based on where they live. This will expand opportunity and increase choice for all rising high school students.”

Furthermore, after a long debate, it was determined

that the SHSAT would continue to be the application process for the eight specialized high schools. Some feared the test would be canceled due to the pandemic while others hoped the mayor would use the circumstances to eliminate it. However, since the test is required by state law, the city was forced to administer it. The test was moved from the traditional date in October to a later one, and to minimize the risk of Coronavirus exposure, students took the SHSAT at their own schools instead of taking it at designated testing sites across the city.

The uncertainty of the SHSAT caused tremendous stress for eighth-grade students. “[We] didn’t know when the test was going to be administered or if it was even going to be administered at all,” said Steinberg. “No one knew how to structure study plans; it was stressful.”

Additionally, screened schools are now going to be required to post the rubric they use to rank students

online. The ranking will be done by the Education Department’s central office instead of individual schools.

Some, especially those who have advocated for more diversity in schools, are satisfied with these changes, such as the end of geographic preference. However, advocates of school integration are calling for further changes to the screening process and the SHSAT.

On the other hand, many parent groups are glad that the screening process was not removed. They argue that children who benefit from the process gained entry to the school through hard work, not through other advantages such as racial or socio-economic privilege.

The uncertainty of the present circumstances has exposed the varying opinions of parents and children across the city. Although the admissions process has not changed much overall, the pandemic has brought to light issues within the New York City school system that need to be addressed.

## The Traveling Effect of Covid-19 on Public Transportation

*Olivia Kahn, Grade 11, News Editor*

As students were deciding whether to attend in-person school last fall, one concern was the safety and availability of public transportation. Many New York City students rely on the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) to get to school. Before COVID-19, this was not an issue, as the NYC Department of Education gave students who live half a mile or farther from their school a free MetroCard. But dirty subway stations and tightly packed train cars seem like ideal places for disease to spread, causing worry amongst students.

To address these concerns and increase safety, the MTA has implemented new procedures. Riders are provided with hand sanitizer and masks, subway cars are

disinfected with more regularity and rigor, and technology helps track the number of riders each day. All are listed on the MTA's 13-point plan to improve rider safety.

Because the High School of American Studies accepts students from all over NYC, many students use public transportation to commute to school. This included the group of students who elected to attend in-person classes before highschools returned to full remote learning in November of 2020.

"I do feel safe taking public transportation because usually I can avoid crowds, and it is usually rare that someone doesn't have their mask on," said Antonina Volvovskaya, a junior at the HSAS. The abundance of people wearing masks is due to the MTA's face covering mandate, which states that all riders must wear masks or face coverings or they could face a 50 dollar fine.

As for lack of crowds, public transportation ridership declined



Art by Min Lin Yang, Grade 11

The MTA underwent many changes to address safety concerns due to the pandemic.

significantly due to an increase in people working from home and schools transitioning to remote learning starting in mid-March of 2020. According to graphics presented by the MTA at its board meeting in September of 2020, subway ridership was down 93% and bus ridership 78% in April of 2020. Although this has changed since April, the MTA still shows a decrease in ridership of 70.7% on the subway and 56% on the bus for dates as recently as January 7th.

Volvovskaya, who takes the B and D trains from the Upper West Side to HSAS, observed this decrease in

ridership, especially among younger people. "What I noticed while taking the train the few times that [I] did in the fall, was that I didn't see any high school or college students, and there were a lot [fewer] adults on the train too," said Volvovskaya.

Less crowded trains allow for more social distancing but also lead to a lower income for the MTA. At the same time, there has been an increase in costs for intense cleaning procedures. "Relative to the MTA's February 2020 financial plan, fare and toll revenues and income from economically-sensitive dedicated taxes and other

subsidies are projected to decline in 2020 by \$6.85 billion ... When combined with higher COVID-related costs, these revenue losses have plunged the MTA into the most severe financial crisis in the agency's history," reported an NYU Rudin Center for Transportation and Appleseed study. After analyzing the MTA's current situation, the study suggests that the future of the MTA's finances is bleak.

Overall, a decrease in the use of public transportation services will have long term effects on both New York City and HSAS students.



## Trump Supporters Storm the Capitol

Rachel Wong, Grade 11, Co-Editor-in-Chief

On January 6th, 2021, shock waves rippled through the country after Trump-supporting rioters stormed the Capitol. They were protesting the 2020 presidential election, which they believed to be fraudulent.

When Joe Biden was named the president-elect on November 8, President Trump claimed the election was stolen from him. He urged his supporters to travel to Washington for the "Save America March" in January when Congress planned to ceremonially count President-elect Joe Biden's win. The chaos that ensued will go down in history as one of the saddest days the United States has had to endure.

Prior to the riot, Trump gave a speech nearby, telling his supporters to "fight much harder" against the "bad people."

"You will have an illegitimate president ... we can't let that happen ... It's all part of the suppression effort," declared Trump, moments before dispatching the crowds to the Capitol. "We fight like hell, and if you don't fight like hell,

you're not going to have a country anymore."

The crowd, filled with Proud Boys, QAnon conspirators, people carrying Nazi flags and wearing Nazi shirts, people wearing Make America Great Again hats and holding Trump flags, and people wearing eccentric costumes, marched to the Capitol. Breaking down the barricades that had been set up, they started to storm the Capitol steps. Some even scaled the walls of the building to get above the crowds.

"I remember watching the riots on January 6th and wondering whether our democracy would crumble right before my very eyes," said Bernard Condon, a junior at the High School of American Studies. "Seeing the rioters storm the Capitol, the building at the core of our country, was harrowing but somewhat expected after four years of Trump."

Rioters started breaking the windows and doors, trying to get in. Once they breached the entrance, they were met by one or two armed security guards who lacked the power to remove them. With the lack of response from authorities, the rioters had free reign in the Capitol. A man in a Viking helmet was pictured trying to take over the Senate. Another photo showed a man wearing a

MAGA hat and sitting with his feet up at a government official's desk. One man posed for a picture while stealing a government podium.

Congressmen, Congresswomen, Senators, and other officials were hiding behind courtroom seats. The few armed security guards present used podiums and other furniture to barricade the doors. They were given masks to protect themselves from tear gas, a last resort.

Meanwhile, the Washington state police enforcement did little to stop the crowds. People quickly noticed the disparity in the law enforcement's treatment and reaction towards the "Save America March" compared to the Black Lives Matter protests that had taken place earlier in the year. Instagram and Twitter feeds were soon filled with images of the National Guard guarding the Capitol during the Black Lives Matter marches in Washington D.C., with the caption: "Just a reminder: this is what the National Guard looked like during the BLM protests."

"It's really disappointing that this is what America has come to; that peaceful protests fighting for equality would be treated more horribly than rioters who were looting from the



Trump supporters storm the Capitol during the "Save America March" on January 6th, 2021.

Capitol," said Talia Homer, a junior at HSAS. "The fact that some police officers were taking selfies with rioters shows how truly unequal our country has become."

Everyone awaited President Trump's response, hoping he would tell them to retreat and go home. However, President-elect Joseph Biden was the first to denounce the riots. Making a quick speech, he called on Trump to call everyone home and end the violence.

Finally, after much chaos, Trump made a short video, saying, "I know your pain. I know you're hurt. We had an election that was stolen from us. It was a landslide election and everyone knows it, especially the other side. But you have to go home now. We have to have peace. We have to have law and order ... This was a fraudulent election. But we can't play

into the hands of these people. We have to have peace. So go home. We love you. You're very special."

Eventually, the crowds dispersed, and the Senate returned to session at 8 PM to continue counting the vote. However, the building was not deemed clear until 1:30 AM, nearly twelve hours after the chaos had begun.

Five people died as a result of the riot. One of them was Ashli Babbitt, a woman who was shot during a standoff between rioters and law enforcement in a stairwell outside the House Chamber.

January 6th, 2021 will have a lasting impact on America's political scene. It was a disappointing day for America and should stand as a reminder of the atrocities Trump has committed and incited during his time as president.

## Senators Baseball Team Members Wonder When and If They Will Return to the Field

Stephen Nichol, Grade 12, Staff Writer

In the middle of the fifth inning of a pre-season scrimmage against the Inwood Academy Gators, the High School of American Studies Senators baseball season came to a grinding halt. With one phone call, Coach Peter Nizzari was informed that the Public Schools Athletic League (PSAL) had suspended all activities due to the Coronavirus pandemic, and the game would get called then and there. The Senators team has now been stuck in baseball limbo for the past ten months, never knowing

when they might be able to return to the diamond.

At age 70, Nizzari has never spent a spring outside the dugout and does not intend to break that streak. "I'm confident that there will be a season, and the boys will be ready; they're great kids, and they work hard," said Nizzari. "We are as



Art by Amy Yu, Grade 9  
With all PSAL activities canceled, the Senators baseball team is unable to play this season.

strong a team as anybody, and this is a great place for the boys to grow outside of academics." The experience has been frustrating for many, and Nizzari awaits his fifth season as head coach once local Covid-19 regulations permit.

The players themselves are also ready for a PSAL season. "I think we can have a great season if there is one," said Anderson Kovesci, the team captain and a senior. "We haven't been able to practice much, but I'm optimistic." If there is a season, Kovesci will play a crucial role in the outfield and top of the lineup. A key contributor to the team's success in his sophomore campaign, the senior had slugged a 0.306 batting average supplemented by an outstanding 0.510 on-base percentage, along with

thirteen RBIs and sixteen stolen bases — all in just fourteen games.

With uncertainty surrounding the season, the fact remains that this Senators team is one to be reckoned with once permitted onto the field. Perhaps the most damage will be done while in the batter's box, as the team is looking to boast a powerful lineup of six seniors. Though the majority of these players have yet to play a full season in its entirety, they have the fortune of being backed by players with experience. Dashiell Handler, another senior captain, has shown a knack for coming up in the direst situations since his days as a freshman, hitting a walk-off single to win against division rival High School of Info & Network Technology at the Lehman College Field. Handler's

experience comes along with his excellent offensive production. A solid hitter, Handler hit for a 0.286 average in his sophomore season along with a 0.583 on-base percentage and an exceptional 1.200 OPS, which is unheard of at the major league level.

At the end of the day, it will be all about mindset for the Senators. "You just got to stay focused," said Handler. "I know a lot of the guys have been on top of their workouts and training, and I think that's all you can really do at this stage in the game."

America's favorite pastime has yet to make its return to New York City high schools, but when it does, there is bound to be an exciting season for the Senators.





## Technology in School: A Positive Consequence of the Covid-19 Pandemic

*Mia Penner, Grade 11, Co-Editor-in-Chief*

If there is one good thing to come out of the Coronavirus pandemic, it may be the advent of modern technology at the High School of American Studies.

Before school went online, HSAS was largely a relic of the past. Broken SMART Boards lined the classroom walls, and students completed most of their assignments with pen and paper. Few teachers made regular use of online learning tools like Google Classroom. The Coronavirus pandemic has seemingly changed all of that.

The unforeseen school closure on March 13, 2020, forced schools across the country to quickly adapt to online learning platforms with little preparation. The result was a difficult transition to remote school for both students and teachers. "It has definitely been an adjustment," said Charles Evans, an American History teacher at HSAS. "I had never used many of these computer programs before and some are still a challenge."

However, educational technology eventually proved to have considerable benefits. "It's nice to have all of my notes on my computer, in one place. It's definitely helped me stay organized," said Bernard Condon, a

junior at HSAS. "I also think that having all of my assignments on Google Classroom has helped with organization."

Students are not alone in this outlook; many teachers at HSAS also found technology to be beneficial in the classroom. "I actually like uploading videos to YouTube," said Evans. "I think it's an expeditious way of getting through a lot of material."

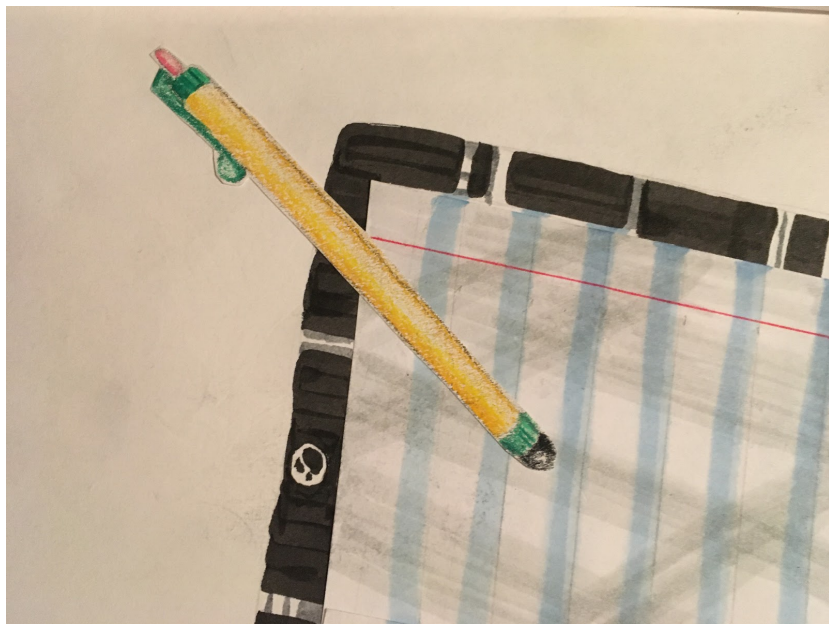
It seems that the increased use of technology at HSAS may be a lasting legacy of the Coronavirus pandemic. Many teachers say they will continue to use online learning platforms once the pandemic ends. "I'm pretty sure I'm going to use Google Classroom in the future mostly to post assignments," said Evans. "I'm also pretty sure I'm going to continue using YouTube to post mini-lessons on material that I might not have had a chance to cover in class."

This may not be an isolated phenomenon. Teachers across the country seem to be more willing and able to integrate technology into their classrooms as a result of the pandemic. According to EducationWeek Research Center, 87 percent of teachers say that their ability to effectively use educational technology has improved since schools closed. The same study found that 58 percent of teachers say their opinion of educational technology has improved due to Coronavirus shutdowns.

The pandemic has undoubtedly proven the value of technology in education. However, funding barriers will prevent a complete technological revolution at HSAS. The COVID-19 economic crisis hit New York City especially hard, and much of the burden fell on the city's education system. In July, NYC's education budget was cut by \$707 million. New York City public schools, therefore, are unlikely to gain access to costly educational technology. Still, HSAS teachers are expected to continue using free online learning tools, which include Google Classroom and YouTube as well as other educational platforms.

The increased use of technology in schools may have positive ramifications beyond the classroom. Technology has become the lifeblood of the American economy, and the tech industry is expected to grow more than any other industry in the next decade. By incorporating more technology into the classroom, HSAS will help prepare students to succeed in an increasingly digital world.

The birth of modern technology at HSAS may be one of the few positive consequences of the Coronavirus pandemic. "I think before virtual education, we underutilized a lot of technology as a school," said Evans. "I think the silver lining to come out of all this is learning a lot of new tools that can be useful going forward."



*Art by anonymous HSAS student*

Pencils are being swapped with styluses and paper with iPads in this new digitalized world we have come to know a bit too well.

Check out the  
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website at

[https://  
www.hsascommonsense.org!](https://www.hsascommonsense.org!)





# Entertainment and Features

## Meet the Co-founders of HSAS's Newest Club: The Advocacy Club

Nora Demak, Grade 9, Staff Writer

Social justice campaigns have come to play a large role in American politics. Even those who are not eligible to vote are passionate about finding ways to be heard. The importance of informing students on various social issues and encouraging activism has spread to the High School of American Studies. Two students, Talia Homer ['22] and Anya Mateu-Asbury ['22], founded the Advocacy Club, one of the school's newest clubs, which is designed to provide resources and information to students who want to contribute to social justice movements.

It is important to Homer and Mateu-Asbury that HSAS students feel that they can make an impact, even if they cannot yet vote. They spread their message through a newsletter about certain causes, including places to donate and other ways to help. Mr. Iurato distributes the newsletter to the student body. One newsletter has already been sent out and the club plans to send out another in a few months.

To join the Advocacy Club, students can fill out this form at any point in the school year: <https://forms.gle/5VWeZvbwx77TpnxM8>. Any member of the HSAS community is welcome to join. The club meets every Wednesday at 4:00, and meetings last anywhere from fifteen to forty-five minutes.

The meetings usually start with a check-in with members about any current projects. "Then, if we are talking about a new topic, we will have an open and honest discussion with our group members about it," said Mateu-Asbury. "After that, we will brainstorm to decide how we would like to spread the information we discussed. Last, we decide what we would like to have done by the next meeting."

## How Students Are Volunteering During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Kathleen Halley-Segal, Grade 9, Staff Writer

As every aspect of students' lives turns online, soup kitchens and nursing homes are left abandoned. This begs the question, how can students help their communities during a pandemic? Non-profit organizations must change the ways they operate, pushing volunteers to find innovative and safe ways to support their neighborhoods.

### Community Service Club: Letters of Love and Care Packages

Sadly, this year, the High School of American Studies Community Service Club has been unable to carry out its yearly community service projects, such as working with a local soup kitchen, Part of the Solution (POTS), and running food drives to donate to the Lehman College food bank. However, the community service team has been doing great work in their own homes despite Covid-19 restrictions. One of their first initiatives was writing encouraging letters to senior citizens through the organization Letters of Love. The club is also hoping to create care packages for essential workers in the new year. "It has been hard to find ways to give back virtually besides asking people for money, so we have been focusing on ways to help each other while we figure out the logistics of getting back into volunteering somewhat in person," said Marissa Edelstein, a senior.

### Distance Volunteering In the Boy Scouts

Amidst the pandemic, many organizations have become entirely virtual, but some volunteers are still doing socially distanced work in person. Luke Hoppa, a freshman at HSAS, participates in Boy Scouts volunteering, which was once working in soup kitchens but has been replaced with painting fences. Even though he wishes he could form connections with the people in his community, he has found new pleasures, like finding hidden treasure in the trash he collects at the park. Although Hoppa believes he learned more from Boy Scouts prior to the pandemic, he still enjoys helping out his community through his new volunteering work.

### Adopt A Neighbor

Just like HSAS classes, tutoring outside of school has shifted online. Ethan Lader, a freshman at HSAS, signed up for the tutoring program, Adopt a Neighbor. The program finds high schoolers and connects them with elementary and middle schoolers according to subjects they struggle with. "I decided to volunteer since I know a lot of people are struggling academically throughout Corona and that tutoring help is more important now than ever," said Lader.

### North Carolina Democratic Party

Jolie Futterman, a freshman at HSAS, volunteered to register voters in North Carolina during the 2020 presidential election. Futterman made calls to North Carolina voters asking which candidate they planned to endorse and if they knew how and where to vote. She also put together documents listing what each candidate had done that day. Contrary to many other students, Futterman believed that the pandemic made this experience more achievable. "[This was] something I wouldn't have been able to do before the pandemic or mainly just wouldn't have had time to do," said Futterman. She felt very happy with her experience helping the North Carolina Democratic Party and feels she learned a lot.

Although the pandemic can feel debilitating in many ways, new opportunities can arise to help individuals who are struggling at home. Organizations all over New York and students at the High School of American Studies are finding ways to support their community while abiding by social distancing guidelines.



Students volunteer from home through different organizations to help their community in its time of need.

The club already has a press secretary, and they plan to create more leadership positions as they continue to develop the club. A press secretary is key as the club seeks to reach more and more people. "We have started an Instagram account to have a larger impact on the student body and reach more people," says Homer. "We have even accumulated some followers who don't attend HSAS."

Homer and Mateu-Asbury started the club after they participated in the ACLU Summer Advocacy Institute this past summer. It was then that the pair became more committed to social justice issues. "We wanted to share what we

learned with the HSAS community," said Mateu-Asbury.

Like all school organizations, COVID-19 has forced the Advocacy

Club to adapt. For now, the meetings are virtual, and future events may also take place online. Homer and Mateu-Asbury say they are considering a phone-banking

Zoom meeting or some sort of fundraiser.

When the pandemic restrictions are lifted, the club will have closer contact with HSAS faculty, whom the club leaders hope will facilitate the changes they would like to make. Presumably, protests will resume after the pandemic and the Advocacy Club hopes to attend those protests together.

Not surprisingly, COVID-19 has made it difficult to get the club started. Still, "[w]e are really excited about the positive response we have received. We are definitely just getting started, but we hope to accomplish a lot more in the future," said Homer.



The advocacy club aims to educate students about important issues and organize campaigns for social justice causes.



## Spotlight Interview with Freshman Representatives Amy Yu and Noa Greene-Houvras

*Sakari Jackson, Grade 9, Staff Writer*

The High School of American Studies student government is a fundamental part of the school community. Since the freshman class has not had the opportunity to meet all of their peers in person, most do not know much about their grade's representatives. Sakari Jackson, a staff writer at Common Sense, interviewed the freshman representatives, Noa Greene-Houvras and Amy Yu, to ask them about their experience at HSAS and their goals for the future.

**Question:** What's it like to have your first year of high school be online?

**Amy Yu:** It's definitely been a challenge. Nobody knows who anybody is, and as freshmen, we are in new environments. It's really been a struggle to connect with others.

**Noa Greene-Houvras:** I totally agree. Mainly, it's hard to make connections with anyone else since it's all remote.

**Q:** Why did you want to be a freshman representative?

**Yu:** I've also always wanted to be a part of student government. I've gotten to know a lot of people and have become propped up on this pedestal, and I just felt like I'm in a position to help out with this change.

**Greene-Houvras:** I [became a freshman representative] because I've always wanted to be involved in student government. But, this year especially, there's a lack of connection and I wanted to help out with that.

**Q:** Do you plan to run for representative, or any other positions, in the following years?

**Yu:** I definitely want to run again, [but] I don't know [for] what position. Maybe I'll become president, maybe I'll become vice-president, [I] can't say for sure at this point. But you will definitely see more of me in the future.

## To Be or Not to Be? How the Drama Club Has Persisted Through Quarantine

*Lila Sharp, Grade 10, Staff Writer*

With COVID-19 cases and deaths across the country at an all-time high, New York City High Schools have gone completely virtual. While this is bad news for sports and performance-based clubs, which usually require members to meet and practice in person, some clubs have found ways to adapt to today's conditions. One example of this is The High School of American Studies Drama Club.

"Well, obviously we meet over Zoom nowadays," said Morgan Perlstein, a sophomore and the drama club's co-head of acting. "We've really been focusing on creating and staging skits that can be pre-recorded or performed live over Zoom. We spent the first few meetings reading a lot of different scripts and seeing what was easily translatable to a virtual setting. Then, we picked a few that we liked and are planning on using them in future shows."

According to a study published in the American Journal of Public Health, having a creative outlet helps

combat anxiety and depression. During these uncertain times, it is commendable that the club members are doing their best to preserve the spirit of the club in their meetings and productions.

However, according to the heads of the club, it has not always been a perfect fix. They have seen a drop in regular members since the spring, partly due to last year's seniors making up a significant portion of the club. The deficiencies of virtual club fairs and limited word-of-mouth have made it a challenge to attract new members.

Additionally, although the pre-recorded aspect of current shows has taken some of the pressure off of the performers, acting virtually has its own set of difficulties. "A major problem we faced was keeping the dialogue snappy, as it's hard for someone to immediately jump in after a line is said. There's a lot more of a delay," explained Perlstein. "Though nowadays the great thing is that we can just do it over again until it's perfect. And so far, we can still convey the emotions in the scene properly. It's not that much different in that way."

While acting in and of itself has not changed much, the role of tech in the club has shifted greatly. Before the pandemic, the students in charge of tech would spend weeks leading up to

the show building a real set for the actors to perform in, but now they edit the videos that the actors pre-record. Using iMovie, the tech students take the footage and cut it down. Then, they add titles and credits to the beginning and end. To make the shows more realistic, tech students are also put in charge of creating virtual backgrounds behind the actors.

Despite this new role, some tech students feel like their importance in the club has decreased dramatically since quarantine started. "I feel like the role of tech has definitely diminished, just because there's nothing to build right now," said Agatha German, a sophomore and the drama club's head of tech. "I wish we could be working on the stages at Lehman, actually building things. Working on sets is all about creativity, and it can be hard to find your creativity when you're stuck inside. Last year we got to do woodworking and painting; it was really fun and gave us a chance to stretch out artistically."

Despite these barriers, the club has demonstrated exceptional strength in its fight to stay active through quarantine. Their fortitude is apparent in their productions and the effort they put into maintaining the true spirit of the club.

**Greene-Houvras:** I will [continue to] work [with] student government. I love it. There's definitely a bit of Imposter Syndrome going on right now, but I would like to be Secretary in the future because I'm very organized and like to take clean notes.

**Q:** What's one thing you want to accomplish this year as representatives?

**Yu:** Honestly, just getting through this [school] year. It's a bit of a short-term goal, but I think it's important ... It's difficult being online all the time, but making it through this year is a big hope of mine.

**Greene-Houvras:** I want to make a peer association group, like the parent-teacher association, but more geared towards helping students with homework and mental health. So kind of [combining] the PTA and Chocolate Milk Club. I also really want to put a bigger emphasis on mental health, with more focus on students [getting] in a better mindset. Also, putting trigger warnings on important videos and topics we discuss at school to better prepare students and help those who may experience trauma. And

introducing students to the school therapist.

**Q:** What is it like to be a school representative online? What do your duties look like?

**Yu:** We use the Discord for most of our conversations. I won't even realize it, but soon I'm getting pinged for all sorts of things—trigger warnings, ideas for student government, etc. Then Noa and I would look through all these messages and talk [them] over with the other student government members. It's a lot, but we know what we signed up for.

**Greene-Houvras:** It's kind of weird [and] harder to

know the people you're representing. You end up going out of your way to get everyone's opinion and make sure everyone is heard. You have to keep messaging people to make sure everyone got [the announcement], but you don't want to annoy the people you already talked to. But overall it's fun, like a puzzle: challenging, but rewarding.

**Q:** What qualities would make a good representative?

**Yu:** I think you need to be easily accessible. If you can't be reached at any time, you aren't really doing your job correctly. Both Noa [and I] are good at responding to

emails fairly quickly. It's part of the job, really. And you should be accepting of all ideas, and listen to everyone. You have to be willing to listen to any idea, no matter how crazy, or else you won't really get any at all, or any you can use.

**Greene-Houvras:** I agree. I also think that being articulate is important, cause you have to be a middleman between the freshmen and the student government. You also have to be open-minded, as Amy said, and give everyone a chance. Everybody should be free to share their ideas. I think [having] the ability to be a leader is also important; you can't be a follower in a position like this.

**Q:** What is one goal that you personally have for the future?

**Yu:** [To] make it through the rest of the year. 2020 has been a wild ride, and I'm looking forward to 2021. What's the worst that could happen?

**Greene-Houvras:** This is going to sound a little sad but I want to make new friends.



Amy Yu (left) and Noa Greene-Houvras (right) are working to make the freshmen experience as enjoyable as possible during remote schooling.



## Teacher Spotlight: New HSAS English Teacher Ms. Arlette Crosland

*Lila Sharp, Grade 10, Staff Writer*

Meet Ms. Crosland, a new English teacher at the High School of American Studies. Ms. Crosland joined the HSAS faculty at the beginning of the school year and currently teaches AP English Language and Composition as well as a writing elective.

**Q:** Was teaching your childhood dream job? If not, what was?

**A:** Hardly, I never considered teaching as a child, I had many different interests and wanted to work in a creative field.

**Q:** What made you want to teach in the first place? Why did you pick English?

**A:** I began my teaching career through cataclysm and circumstance. It was when the publishing and technology sectors were experiencing a great amount

of upheaval and instability. I read an article in the Los Angeles Times, that there was a need for English, Math, and Special Education teachers because of legislation that had made changes to class sizes. I had an English Degree so I thought, why not? I'll do this for a while, and when things get back to normal, I can go back to publishing - that was 19 years ago.

**Q:** Do you have any specific teaching philosophy — something you stick to, no matter what?

**A:** I use the Socratic method; all questions are usually answered with another question.

**Q:** Where did you teach before HSAS?

**A:** I taught for seven years in Los Angeles at a large, traditional, and storied high school. Since moving to New York, I have worked at a school for students whose educations were interrupted, and most recently at a school that is part of the New York City Performance Consortium.

**Q:** Do you have a favorite job you've held in the past?



Ms. Crosland, a new HSAS English teacher, says her favorite part about teaching at HSAS is her students.

**A:** My very first job at Macworld Magazine in San Francisco was my favorite. I loved working in publishing, and the technology sector was a very exciting place to be. I began as a production coordinator in the art department and worked my way up to a graphic designer and eventually became an art director. It was exciting, the people were brilliant, the perks were great, and I learned so much. It was fun to be at the center of the tech revolution and, in retrospect, pretty cool to witness an industry radically change our

world. It was a once in a lifetime experience. But, teaching is my true calling. I have met many truly amazing students and teachers at all of the schools I have worked at and remain in contact with many of them. The rewards are intangible and take a bit longer to experience, but no editor ever thanked me for making a difference in his life, so there is that.

**Q:** How did you hear of HSAS? What made you want to teach here?

**A:** I heard about HSAS from a former colleague who had been a student at HSAS. I had spent five years at my last school. After the students I taught for four years graduated last year, I wanted a new teaching experience. A specialized high school fit that bill, and luckily for me, a position was open at HSAS.

**Q:** What's your favorite thing about HSAS so far?

**A:** Being that I have not been able to fully experience HSAS, I would have to say, my students. Despite the challenges of remote learning, I have come to know them and find them to be an interesting, talented, funny, and seriously motivated bunch of kids. I just wish I could experience them in a more traditional and personal way.

**Q:** Do you have any fun/interesting facts about yourself?

**A:** I have lived in three countries and on two coasts in the US, but I am and always will be a California girl at heart. And, I once piloted a blimp.

## How Social Media Has Affected Activism

*Danielle Kanter, Grade 9, Staff Writer*

Today, Instagram is filled with people reposting petitions to sign, organizations to donate to, and posts to spread awareness. Compared to the first days of Instagram, this is a big change. There has been an influx in activism since May 25th, 2020, when a police officer knelt on George Floyd's neck for eight minutes and forty-six seconds, killing him. Afterward, people on social media took to protesting police brutality, creating the #BlackoutTuesday movement in honor of George Floyd.

There were countless protests following Floyd's murder, many of which were spread through social media. Accounts were created dedicated to encouraging



attendance at these protests. These accounts also covered what people should and should not bring, and what to do if police officers used tear gas against protestors or exercised their powers in a way that may be dangerous to the crowds.

Since May 25, a surge of people started posting about racism and racial inequity. "Since the end of May, activism has become much greater on social media," said Nora Demak, a ninth-grader at the High School of American Studies, "Every day, I see people posting about issues they care about and want others to learn about, most frequently those having to do with racial

injustice and how individuals can help."

Social media is also used to spread information about countless other issues. The HSAS Advocacy Club uses their Instagram account as the primary method of communication for spreading awareness about issues.

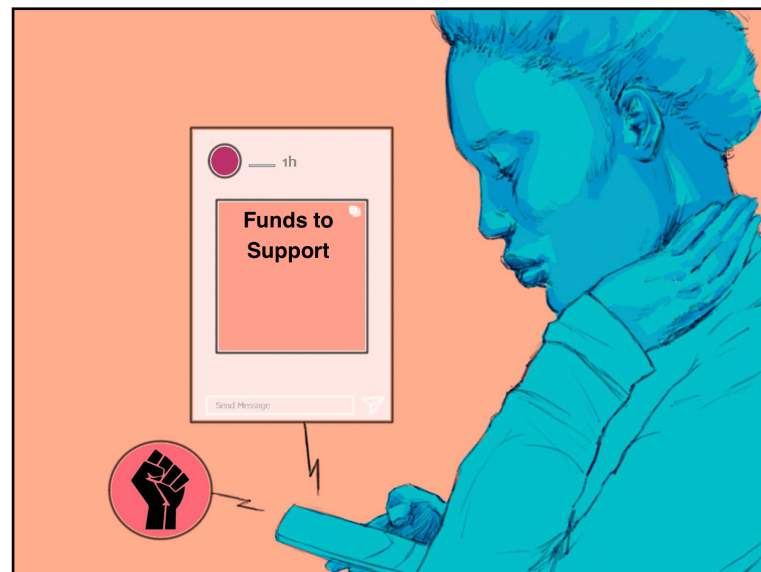
"[We have] given lessons to our club members on how to create these posts and how to make sure the information is reliable," Anya Mateu-Asbury and Talia Homer, the leaders of the HSAS advocacy club, said.

Many teenagers use their accounts to share issues they care about or believe are important for others to help with. "I use Instagram when I have a specific topic or issue I want to spread awareness about," commented Demak, "Yesterday, I reposted [the] HSAS Environmental Club's post about planting trees to offset the paper usage of our school, so people would donate money or order trees for themselves."

"Social media is effective in spreading awareness on issues, and guiding people to make a difference in other ways such as giving petitions to sign, places to donate, etc.," said Homer and Mateu-Asbury. Social media can be used beneficially to help share topics and issues which many are unaware of, and guide people to help by

sharing specific petitions and donations.

Although social media can be used to spread false information, it can also affect activism positively by spreading awareness. As technology evolves, these websites and apps have become increasingly popular, so it is important for individuals to use them as tools to fight for social justice.



Students take to posting on various social media platforms to advocate for change.



## Tips to Stay Productive During Virtual School

*Kara Anaya, Grade 10, Staff Writer*

The adjustment to a virtual setting has challenged students and created barriers to their learning. Last year, the presence of teachers and peers motivated students to stay focused. This year, sitting alone in front of a computer for hours makes it hard to stay concentrated.

Finding useful strategies for productivity can be challenging, so the following are tips that can help all students stay focused at home.

### Organize a To-Do List

Your workload can be overwhelming, especially when you are disorganized. Writing down all of your assignments in a bullet-point list will help you visualize your tasks and strategize in what order it would be most efficient to complete them. It would be extra beneficial to purchase a dry erase board or an erasable calendar to list each assignment and its due dates.

To go a step further, estimate how long it will take to complete each assignment and use a timer to limit how much time can be spent on the assignment. If more time is needed, put your work aside and finish it later on. Staying stuck on one assignment for an excessive amount of time will prevent the entire to-do list from getting completed promptly.

### Change Your Scenery

Everyone works differently, and sometimes your environment prevents you from focusing. It gets tiring to be stuck in a bedroom all day, and, even though seating areas in cafes and libraries may not be open, you can go onto your porch or living room. That small change can make a huge difference! Sitting at a desk for long periods can hurt a person's back or legs and make work more grueling. If moving to another room is not an



Staying productive and organized during online school can be very difficult, but with the right tips, productivity can change in an instant.

option, then sitting in a different part of your room can be helpful.

### Organize Your Work Area

Once you choose a work area, you should figure out how to make your workspace as efficient as possible. Students should take out what is needed for the task being done at the moment and put everything else neatly to the side. A messy workspace can be distracting. Buy baskets, dividers, or folders from a local container store or discount store. A strategy for organizing a workspace on a budget is to use items intended for other purposes, such as a make-up tray or bathroom organizer, to store writing materials. An organized workspace can be the difference between

focusing on the task at hand and getting distracted by everything that is out of place.

### Eliminate Distractions

Watching the television, playing a video, or having your phone nearby can pose as big distractions. Put your phone on Do Not Disturb, put it in another room, give it to a trusted person temporarily, turn off your phone, or set a screen time limit on social media, gaming, and other apps.

### Give Yourself Incentives

Lack of motivation can be a huge factor for procrastination, as it feels meaningless to do monotonous tasks if there is nothing to look forward to. Plan a day for baking, skateboarding, picnics, or

watching a movie once your work is finished!

### Get a Work Buddy

If working alone is not productive and you need to be held accountable, find another person to work with. Both of you can keep each other productive by calling each other out for procrastinating. You can work with someone over Zoom or FaceTime to abide by social distancing guidelines.

### Listen to Music

Listening to music can be an effective method for focusing. The best music for studying is instrumental music or ambient noise. Music with vocals or the instrumental versions of songs can become distracting. For people who focus best in cafes, searching for ambient cafe music can be worthwhile. There is also forest, cottage, jungle, village, seaport, and countless other types of ambient noise that can help a person feel as though they are in another location. Headphones or earbuds can maximize the experience. If white noise or ambient noise is not useful, then perhaps listening to classical, LoFi, jazz, piano, dark academia, or “royal core” music can help.

### Give Yourself Breaks

It is vital to take breaks while doing work. Similar to creative incentives, you can allow yourself a ten-minute break for every hour you spend doing work without procrastinating. This time should be spent away from an electronic because staring at a screen for long periods is bad for your eyes and health. In this time, you can do a short yoga or meditation routine, read the next chapter of a leisure book, walk around the house, have a short conversation, draw, write, or just relax and do nothing for a few minutes.

### Stay Hydrated and Eat Snacks

It is important to stay hydrated and eat snacks. Doing work requires energy and it is unhealthy to work without consuming anything. The snacks should be healthy, such as fruit, a granola bar, or yogurt. Eating helps people stay awake and be more alert, which will help them do their tasks more efficiently. Drinking water also helps keep people awake so it is important to stay hydrated. Investing in a reusable water bottle is beneficial, even for virtual learning, because you will not have to continuously get up to drink water.

## Soul Movie Review

*Isabel Frei and Fiona Shuldiner, Grade 10, Staff Writers*

Pixar's *Soul* premiered at the London Film Festival on October 11, 2020, and was released on Disney+ on Christmas Day. *Soul* is an inspirational, moving, and humorous film whose complex animated characters cater to a diverse audience.

Joe Gardner, the protagonist, is a middle-aged, jazz-loving, aspiring musician turned band teacher struggling to make ends meet in New York City. Right before Joe accomplishes his lifelong goal to perform at a jazz club with renowned saxophone player Dorothea Williams, he dies. In the afterlife, he evades death and winds up in the Great Before, where he embarks on a journey and meets the Lost Soul, 22. 22 is preparing to go to Earth and is searching for a “spark” that will send her there.

Throughout the movie, Joe explores his passion for jazz music and the true meaning of life. He embarks on a metaphysical journey and learns that his purpose is more complex than he initially assumed. *Soul* uses the abstract concept of the afterlife to teach that the little things in life should not be taken for granted.

*Soul* has also broken racial barriers in the film industry. Joe Gardner is the first Black main character in a Pixar film, and *Soul* is the fourth American animated film to feature a Black character as the lead. “To me, Joe represents a lot of people who are not being seen right now,” said Jamie Foxx, the actor who voices Joe. “Joe is in all of us, regardless of color. To be the first Black lead in a Pixar film feels like a blessing, especially during this time when we all could use some extra love and light.”

*Soul* also had a diverse crew behind the scenes. Kemp Powers, a co-director of *Soul* said, “When someone told me I was Pixar's first Black director, I said that can not be right. Pete [Doctor, a co-director] said — and my hope is — this is an indicator of changes that are going to be pretty rapid.” Hopefully, *Soul* is just the beginning of racial progress within the film industry.

*Soul* is an uplifting movie with heartwarming characters that leaves the viewer with a new outlook on and appreciation for life. It is worth the watch.



*Soul*, Disney-Pixar's latest release, helps teach a young audience about appreciating the little things in life.



# A Tale of Two Pandemics: The 1918 Spanish Flu Versus the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic

Rachael Romano, Grade 11, Staff Writer

The COVID-19 pandemic began in the Chinese city of Wuhan, and it swiftly spread to the United States. More than 40,000 people have died in New York, and the number continues to rise.

The only other pandemic in history that comes close to the mortality rate of COVID-19 is the Spanish Flu of 1918. It spread during World War I and killed about 30,000 people in New York.

Interestingly, the reaction to both pandemics has been similar.

In 1918, local governments took control of the situation by issuing mask mandates, which faced as much backlash as they do today. They also staggered business hours to avoid high-density situations. New York City Health Commissioner Royal S. Copeland considered the possibility of closing schools in 1918, but they ultimately remained open with daily medical inspections.

The federal response, however, was delayed due to Woodrow Wilson's primary focus on World War I. Unlike today, there were no epidemiologists or national task forces to deal with the crisis.

"There wasn't a good comprehensive national strategy that addressed the issue. Wilson even came down with the flu in 1919



Art by Caprice Turchiano, Grade 12

but we had no idea," said Elizabeth Rice, a global history teacher at the High School of American Studies.

The benefit of this, however, was that the 1918 pandemic was not nearly as politicized as COVID-19. "Political parties chose to make COVID-19 a partisan issue, for their own reasons, which you would not have seen Woodrow Wilson do in 1918," said AP US History teacher Arnold Mansdorf.

In comparison to neighboring cities, NYC fared better in 1918 than cities like Boston and Philadelphia. According to the National Institute of Health, "New York City's excess death rate per 1,000 was reportedly 4.7, compared with 6.5 in Boston and 7.3 in Philadelphia." New York City recovered after three waves of Influenza, spanning across six months.

Today, America has much better medical care than it did in 1918. Despite the absence of widespread treatment, two vaccines were authorized to combat COVID-19 in one year: the Pfizer and BioNTech vaccine and the Moderna vaccine. "I think doctors have become better at treating the virus, and it's a miracle that now

we have a vaccine, which is an improvement over 1918," said Ms. Rice.

While there were many vaccines created in 1918, few were effective. According to the National Institute of Health, "the medical profession had at the time no consensus on what constituted a valid vaccine trial, and it could not determine whether these vaccines did any good at all."

Additionally, today, COVID-19 resources can be found with the click of a button. During 1918, information was spread by newspapers, local health officials, or word of mouth.

The absence of information in 1918 also meant the absence of misinformation, which now is a prominent issue. Regulations in 1918 were more likely to be followed because it was seen as the patriotic thing to do. The lack of contradicting news sources led to a quicker national recovery from the 1918 pandemic.

The greater access to resources today is helpful to keep people informed, yet also allows for the advice of health officials to be flouted. "We live in an age when people are supposed to have more access to information and be more educated, but as a country, this has sadly made us more ignorant and susceptible to being manipulated, which is tragic," said Mr. Mansdorf.

Because of the increase in medical care today and overall societal change, little that was done in 1918 can be implemented to control COVID-19. The objective of regulations are the same as they have always been — stop the spread — but now there is a vaccine.

## Youth-Led Organizations in the Era of Covid-19

Saira Pannu and Fiona Shuldiner, Grade 10, Staff Writers

Over the course of the pandemic, the creation and membership of youth organizations have dramatically increased. High school students, with this newfound free time, are taking an active role in tackling important social issues and helping their communities. We spoke to High School of American Studies students Isabel Frei ['23], Dahlia Roe ['23], and Charlotte Hampton ['22], who have founded New York City High School Democrats Queens, Reach NYC Tutoring, and Teens for Press Freedom, respectively.

**Question:** Tell us about yourself and the organization you started.

**Isabel Frei:** Hi! My name is Isabel Frei. I'm a sophomore and I started a chapter of the New York High School Democrats in Queens. Our goal is to keep people informed and get people politically engaged, even though all of us are in high school and are too young to vote.

**Dahlia Roe:** Hi, my name is Dahlia Roe and I am a sophomore at HSAS. My organization is a free tutoring program to underserved families in New York for children in second through fifth grade over Zoom.

**Charlotte Hampton:** Hi! My name is Charlotte

Hampton. I'm 16 years old and I'm a junior at the High School of American Studies at Lehman College. The organization that I started is Teens for Press Freedom. It's an international youth organization that facilitates discussion among teenagers for press freedom and lobbies for the Journalist Protection Act, which was introduced in Congress in 2019, and would enact higher criminal offenses for attacking a journalist.

**Q:** What motivated you to start the organization/get involved?

**Frei:** I was inspired by the creation of the NYHSD Manhattan branch, started by other kids in our school. I wanted to find a way to get involved as well. Also, during this historic moment in politics, I thought it was an important time to try to get myself and other teens more politically involved.

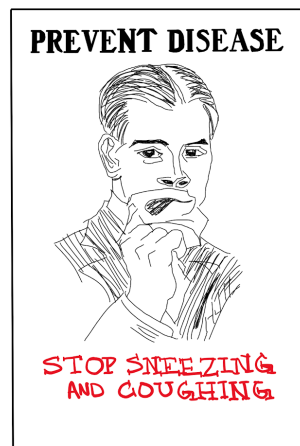
**Roe:** I was motivated to start this organization because we had a lot of free time during the pandemic and I knew that this could be a really helpful program, especially because of all the struggles that families were facing. I had originally created this organization in middle school but have restarted it in these last few months.

Also, I think that my mentor from my old school Jennifer Levin has been very helpful in this process, which has made it much easier for me to set up this entire thing.

**Hampton:** The Penn-America summer intensive about starting an advocacy campaign gave me a basic understanding of how to start an advocacy campaign. This is a topic that I am very interested in, and I think the

1918 Flu

COVID



Art by Rachel Wong, Grade 11

Although these times seem unprecedented, America has seen significant pandemics before, like the 1918 flu.



Teens for Press Freedom lobbies for the passage of the Journalist Protection Act.



bill that our group is trying to lobby for is something very important, and we should be trying to spread awareness for it. In general, [the] free press is something I have always been interested in. There are so many kids who are very passionate about this issue, but there are not that many outlets for it.

**Q:** How has it been going/ have you met your goal?

**Frei:** I think it's been going really well. We've had high membership engagement, and have a consistent attendance every month. We have meetings with guest speakers and discussions with good participation about different democratic issues. We also posted information on our Instagram about Weekly News in the state and the country to try and make sure we keep people informed, even if they can't come to all the meetings. Overall, my group's goal is to continue to expand the club, and hopefully in 2021 have larger attendance.

**Roe:** It's been going really well! We currently have twenty people working, and tutor around fifteen families at the moment. Our main priority right now is trying to expand the organization but eventually, we want to turn this into a non-profit.

**Hampton:** I started this group with another HSAS student in late August, and we currently have twenty-five members that come from all over the country, and even some international students. I think right now we are focused on getting

new members and gaining legitimacy, establishing a system. Then, we are going to focus on really making change and lobbying for the Journalist Protection Act.

**Q:** How can we get involved?

**Frei:** Our Instagram is @nyhsdqueenschapter and we make up Forest Hills, Kew Gardens, and Rego Park. Even if you don't live in these areas you can still be a member if you don't have a local chapter. We have a Google Classroom for members as well that is on our Instagram page. And even if you aren't a member, you can come to meetings, especially if you're interested in hearing the guest speaker.

**Roe:** To get involved either email [dahliar2023@hsas-lehman.org](mailto:dahliar2023@hsas-lehman.org) or [reachnyctutoring@gmail.com](mailto:reachnyctutoring@gmail.com).

**Hampton:** To get involved, you can fill out the Linktree in the Instagram bio of @teensforpressfreedom, or email [teensforpressfreedom@gmail.com](mailto:teensforpressfreedom@gmail.com). There are many different levels in which you can get involved if you are interested!

Now more than ever, it is clear that HSAS students are getting involved in helping their communities. Whether through starting your own organizations or joining pre-existing ones, we hope you will get involved as well. The pandemic has proven to be a difficult time, but many students are taking matters into their own hands to help in any way possible.



The New York High School Democrats organization works to keep students politically active and aware.



Art by Joey Li, Grade 11

2020 seemed awful, but is it still possible to find some light within it?

## Three Stories That Prove 2020 Wasn't All Bad

Noa Yolkut, Grade 10, Entertainment Editor

The year 2020 will go down in history as one of the worst years America has had to endure. Hundreds of thousands of Americans lost their lives to COVID-19, racial inequities were exposed due to repeated instances of police brutality, and the presidential election revealed deep political divides. In a year filled with so much turmoil, finding the light seemed impossible. But despite that, little moments shone through. Three moments in particular, although not life-altering, may brighten what seemed to be such an awful year.

### A Giant Panda Surprise

Giant Pandas, native to Southwest China, have resided in the Smithsonian National Zoo in Washington

D.C. since 1972. Since 2000, Mei Xiang and Tian Tian have been the only two Giant Pandas at the zoo. On August 14, 2020, just a few months before the 20th anniversary of Mei Xiang and Tian Tian's arrivals in America, an ultrasound revealed that Mei Xiang was pregnant after having been artificially inseminated towards the end of March. Although there was some worry that the panda would miscarry because of her old age, a baby panda was born on August 21, 2020. Six weeks after its birth, a genetic test determined that the panda was a male. And on November 23rd, the panda received a name: Xiao Qi Ji (which translates to "little miracle"). On the National Zoo's Website, you can see the panda's many milestones, like its first Halloween, or when it took its first steps on Thanksgiving.

### A Round of Applause

Anyone in New York City remembers the fear felt



during the first few months of the pandemic. Healthcare workers went without personal protective equipment, thousands died, many people were laid off or furloughed, and some could not put food on the table. New Yorkers may remember the 7 P.M. clapping ritual every night for months. At this time, clapping and clanging could be heard across the city, and eventually, everyone knew the applause was for the people saving and helping friends, family, and neighbors, and risking their own lives doing it — essential workers. It brought New Yorkers together like never before, ironically because of the distance between us.

### A New Name

As of June 2020, at least 215 schools in 18 different states were named after Confederate leaders, even though the Confederacy lost the Civil War over 150 years ago. Renaming those schools and removing Confederate statues have only become major issues recently. In early 2020, a high school in Fairfax County, previously called "Robert E. Lee," decided to rename their school after a person who more accurately reflects American values: Georgia Congressman John R. Lewis. Although he did a lot for Civil Rights in our country, some of the things Congressman Lewis was most well known for were chairing of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, helping lead a voting rights march in which protestors were brutally harmed by segregationists (known today as "Bloody Sunday"), helping convince President Johnson to sign the Voting Rights Act, and receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom from Barack Obama in 2011. Congressman Lewis died of pancreatic cancer on July 17, and the Fairfax school chose their name less than a week later.

In history books, 2020 will look awful. But history books do not mention the little moments that brought some needed brightness into the year.



# Opinion

## Opinion: Republican Leaders Who Held Trump Accountable for the Capitol Riots Should Not be Forgiven by Democrats

Noa Yolkut, Grade 10,  
Entertainment and Features  
Editor

On January 6, 2021, the United States Capitol was raided by a Trump-supporting mob, incited by the President himself. This occurred while Congress was holding a joint session to officially confirm President Joe Biden's electoral college win, presided over by former Vice President Mike Pence. President Trump pressured Vice President Pence to overturn the election results in his favor, to which Pence did not comply.

Some conservative lawmakers, like Senator Mitch McConnell and Congresswoman Liz Cheney, spoke out against the actions of the President, which drew praise from many Democrats. Although we should have respect for their actions, this respect should not lead to forgiveness.

Since Trump has come into the political scene, he has mocked a special needs reporter, bragged about raping and assaulting multiple women, separated families at the border, continuously denied climate change, withdrawn from the Paris Climate Agreement, tear-gassed peaceful protestors, denied military aid to Ukraine unless they found dirt on Hunter Biden, and contributed to more than 400,000 American COVID-19 deaths. And those are just a few notable examples. Pence, McConnell, and Cheney did not speak out against any of these actions. It took an attempted coup and their own lives being on the line to incite them to act against the President's bidding.

During Trump's first impeachment trial in early 2020, 195 House Republicans and 53 Senate Republicans did not vote to impeach or convict him. So why, for Republican

lawmakers like Cheney and McConnell who voted to impeach and are considering voting to convict, was this crime worse than the last? Here is a hint: it is not about morality, it is about politics. During the first impeachment, they realized that an incompetent Republican in office was better than no Republican. These politicians did not want to mess up the image of the party going into the 2020 election. Now that Trump is out of office, they want to rid the Republican "brand" of Trump. They know that if the majority of Republicans continue to base their ideals on QAnon theories, support will continue to dwindle until the Republican party becomes obsolete.



House Republicans who voted to impeach Trump should not be forgiven for their past mistakes.

Above all else though, any Democrat giving praise to these three individuals likely disagrees with most of the actions they have taken over the course of their careers. When Pence was the Governor of Indiana, he signed a bill that allowed Indiana businesses to discriminate against LGBTQ+ employees, refused to reduce emissions in his state because he was a supporter of coal, delayed the response to an HIV outbreak in Indiana in 2014 because he didn't want to allow for needle exchanges, and refused to help Syrian refugees in his state. Holding up the election results is a low bar for a Vice President, and doing that does not make up for his past actions.

Cheney spoke out in protest of same-sex marriage during a congressional campaign, staining her relationship with her lesbian sister, sister-in-law, and their children. Additionally, she claimed, during her 2014 Senate campaign, that President Obama had

declared war on the First and Second amendments. More recently, she voted against a bill that would make knowingly spreading voting misinformation a federal crime. Once again, Liz Cheney's response to the most recent impeachment trial does not excuse her past actions.

Finally, McConnell blocked Obama's Supreme Court nomination of now-Attorney General Merrick Garland because of its proximity to an election. Four years later, he pushed Trump's nominee, Justice Amy Coney Barrett, through the Senate while Americans were sending in their mail-in votes. He refused to call the Senate into session early to convict President Trump and

single-handedly led the way in making America and the federal government extremely partisan. Throughout his career, McConnell has passed legislation that goes against much of what the Democratic party stands for. Any Democrat who praised what he has said over the last few weeks should remember all the awful things he has done, even when Trump was not in office.

Most Republican lawmakers have stood by the President and his despicable tactics over the last four years when they should have been standing by the American people. They ended up hurting America, maybe even to a point where things will never be the same again. One declaration, no matter how big, cannot change that. Trumpism is alive and well, even if Trump is out of office. There is no reason to forgive our leaders who were long-time accomplices to wrongful actions.

## Opinion: How the Patriarchy Shaped Fourth-Wave Feminism

Charlotte Hampton, Grade 11,  
Opinion Editor

One might expect easy communication in the digital age to make advocacy easier, but it mostly has complicated matters for feminists. The 1960s movement of "bra-burners" (second-wave feminism) saw a striking change, with women entering the workforce in increasing numbers, new vocabularies like sexual harassment and domestic violence created to describe the female plight, and Shirley Chisholm running for president in 1972. Today, young women have moved away from the radicalism that was the second wave and towards a new movement.

The movement's current incarnation (let us call it fourth-wave feminism), has gone soft, characterized by social media activism where young women promote meaningless slogans. One of these common slogans is the mantra that "all people are beautiful." Beauty is subjective, but only up to a point. It is intrinsically hierarchical, so the narrative that "everyone is beautiful" is an oxymoron.

Even if these slogans were valid, they are not accurate, as young women's view of beauty is still based on archaic values. Most of the time, men at the top of corporations establish beauty standards for young women, and it is antifeminist for women to create themselves in that view. People must abandon their collective idolatry of beautiful people simply because they were born to conform to the patriarchy's standard. As the generation of "Instagram feminists" argue, liberation will come when women can dress however they want without being sexualized. Feminists must be very careful with how they go about this. Fourth-wave feminism sanctifies what Gloria Steinem fought against. Decades after her



expose on Playboy, young feminists largely accept an institution whose purpose is to cater to the male gaze.

The "feel good," idealistic, and self-gratifying feminism of the 21st century is self-defeating. The sweet-natured way we try to empower other girls is unthreatening to the position men hold in our society. The "girl power" narrative does not translate into real power. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is supported as a junior member of the House of Representatives because she is not threatening the male hierarchy. However, Elizabeth Warren or Hillary Clinton (or Ocasio-Cortez as a future presidential candidate) are not supported when they earn a position that could give them a shot at the presidency, and excuses are made to abandon them. This real power is too frightening to come close to.

Social media makes it easy to focus on the visual aspects of female empowerment — opting for feel-good slogans over real, legislative, global change. We focus on the issues of women in the US and ignore the high rates of child marriage of women in developing countries. In terms of national issues, a small amount of coverage was given to the skyrocketing amount of domestic violence during quarantine.

Gender equality may not be something we achieve in any of our lifetimes, but the younger generation must not shy away from shaking the bones of the patriarchal, hierarchical system that keeps women down. We cannot be placated with easy, virtual advocacy that centers itself around pleasing the archaic, male beauty standards.



# Opinion: The DOE Should Eliminate School Choice

Sam Ferrera, Grade 11, Staff Writer

Over the summer, High School of American Studies students formed the Committee for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (CEDI) amidst renewed calls for racial justice in America. The committee aims to diversify HSAS by expanding the number of students accepted through the Discovery Program, which reserves seats for low-income students who score just below the cut-off on the Specialized High School Admissions Test (SHSAT). The goals of the CEDI echo a greater push from students, activists, and educators in the Department of Education to integrate New York City schools and provide greater opportunities for students of color. Desegregating NYC schools and expanding affirmative action and other similar programs will not be enough. The DOE needs to better fund schools, which will require the phasing-out of school choice programs.

As the New York City Council found in 2019, 74.6 percent of Black and Hispanic students attend a school with less than 10 percent white students. Moreover, 34.3 percent of white students attend a school with more than 50 percent white students. The segregation of schools has a resounding impact on school performance because of how race and wealth are tied together in America. Concentrating minority students in certain schools leads to unequal funding, and the DOE has strategies to counter this inequality.

Since 2007, the Fair Student Funding algorithm has provided greater funding to schools with higher-need students. Despite this, the neediest schools in the DOE are still underfunded. The highest-need schools receive only 15 percent more funding than lowest-need schools despite having double the number of low-income students. These schools also suffer from inexperienced teachers, with one-quarter of their teachers having less than three years

of experience. The impact of racial segregation on schools manifests itself in the stark differences in educational outcomes. According to ProPublica, black and Hispanic students are, on average, academically 2.3 grades behind white students and have a graduation rate 14 points lower than white students.

To put an end to school segregation and educational disparities, schools must demand integration. School choice serves a large role in segregating the schools of a particular district. It begins at the kindergarten level, where students have very little dividing them. Despite this, 40 percent of NYC kindergarteners, or around 27,000 five-year-olds, do not attend their local zoned school. Overall, one in eight NYC kindergarten classes is racially homogenous, meaning 90 percent or more of the students are of the same race or ethnicity.

These trends continue into elementary school, where school choice helps to not only create homogenous schools but also consolidates wealth through Parent-Teacher Associations. PTAs rake in tons of money from the parents of students at a school, whose race and wealth are strongly tied together. P.S. 87, which is 64 percent white, had their PTA raise around \$2.1 million in 2019. In contrast, P.S. 194, which is 91 percent Black and Hispanic, raised \$391 in 2019.

By the time students reach middle school, segregation is already a reality. District 3 in Manhattan serves a population that is roughly about half Black and Hispanic, and half white and Asian. However, the district requires its students to apply to middle school, which leads to stark racial divides. Middle School 54 (located within District 3) is 70 percent white and Asian. Two blocks away, West Prep Academy is 97 percent Black and Hispanic.

The problem is clear: the implementation of school choice at every level of education creates the basis for funding disparities, which eventually culminates in the huge achievement gap between white students and

# Opinion: The School Day Should Be Shortened

Jolie Futterman, Grade 9, Staff Writer

The Coronavirus pandemic taught the world that a long school day is not necessary. In the High School of American Studies remote learning schedule, students spend three to four hours in live classes on Zoom. The rest of the classes are “asynchronous,” where teachers assign work that is done unsupervised. Although Zoom learning is far from ideal, it eliminates students’ commute time, giving them valuable time to rest. The pandemic has shown that high schoolers can learn from four hours of live classes while improving sleep schedules and overall health. Hence, the school day should be shortened to start at 9:00 A.M.

Before the pandemic, HSAS began at 8:05 A.M. The school day consisted of seven periods, ending at 2:48 P.M. Students arrived home only to stay up late finishing homework. This schedule allowed minimal free time and limited sleeping hours. Shortening the school day would increase the amount of sleep students would be able to get and improve their mental health.

Although students at HSAS only have about four live classes a day, they also have asynchronous classes — classes held off of Zoom. Teachers may assign work or videos, but overall, it is easier to handle compared to live lessons.

The first period online at HSAS starts at 8:05 A.M., but without the long commute, students are able to sleep in much later than if school was in-person. This extra sleep is more valuable than people tend to recognize. Teenagers are biologically wired to need eight to ten hours of sleep per night. Their circadian rhythm also makes them more prone to wake up later in the day. Sleep is essential for brain development and brain function.

Additionally, increased sleep has been shown to improve depression symptoms and overall mental health. One of the leading causes of teen death is suicide and self-harm, a result of the poor mental health found in teens today.

Studies estimate that 90 percent of children with depression suffer from sleep deprivation. Starting school at 9:00 A.M. would allow extra time for sleep.

Bradley Hasbro Children's Research Center in Rhode Island conducted a study in which a twenty-five-minute delay in school start times was implemented. With this extra twenty-five minutes, there was an average of a twenty-nine-minute increase in overall sleep time. Before the change in school start times, only 18 percent of students were getting over eight hours of sleep. After the change in school start times, 44 percent of students were shown to sleep over eight hours per night, improving their mood and focus.

This begs the question: shouldn’t we align school schedules with work schedules? To this, science replies that extra time is key to improving students’ sleep, thereby improving their mental health.

It’s time to stop ignoring the science and start paying attention to the students. School administrators must show their dedication to the overall well-being and success of their students. It is unacceptable to ignore the clear scientific evidence in front of them.

Many parents have to be at work by or before 8:00 A.M. and need to drop off their children at school, so this solution would only apply to high schools.

It’s important to recognize that these changes are not entirely up to HSAS. State regulations require a certain amount of hours in school. HSAS itself is not allowed to change these hours. However, that does not change the volume of the need for this change. Each generation of students learns differently, and why is our school system not evolving with our brains?

So, why now? The pandemic has shown that we can survive on a four hour school day, although it may be far from ideal. So, shouldn’t we be able to survive, and even prosper, on a six-hour school day, from 9:00 A.M. - 2:48 P.M.? Nothing is normal right now, except maybe (and finally!) a student's sleep schedule. Educators must commit to maintaining this improvement by shortening the school day.

minority students. School choice must be phased out in order to provide more equitable educational outcomes across racial lines.

Some would argue that rather than strip parents of their right to choose their child’s education, the DOE should implement greater affirmative action plans. Plans to reserve certain amounts of seats in “good” schools for low-income, or under-performing students (metrics that strongly correlate to Black and Hispanic students) are seen as preferable to ending school choice.

However, advocates of affirmative action plans have no solution to the persistent problem of segregated schools. Affirmative action plans in NYC schools, at their best, slightly increase the diversity of top-

performing schools. These plans do nothing for the minority students who are left to squander in their under-performing schools. Moreover, expanding affirmative action plans to achieve greater diversity would require “forced bussing” to transport huge numbers of Black and Hispanic students to top-performing schools across the city (due to housing segregation). Busing represents a greater loss of liberties for the parent than removing school choice.

Eliminating school choice at younger ages would in fact be the only way to preserve it for later admissions processes, like high school. By creating more equitable schools at a younger age (through eliminating school choice and more equally spreading

white wealth), older students would be on more equal footing, allowing the selective system of high-school admissions to continue.

To truly desegregate schools, NYC would have to first achieve housing integration and have truly diverse communities. But short of revamping the housing system, the DOE can achieve greater diversity and lower the achievement gap between students of different races by ending the practice of school choice. By eliminating school choice, needier schools would be more adequately funded through a more even distribution of the wealth of white families, creating more equitable educational outcomes.



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