



The Hellgate Lance

MCPS Faces Massive Budget Cuts for 2024-25 Year

Ila Bell
Editor-in-Chief

An eight million dollar budget cut proposal drew in crowds to the MCPS board meeting on Feb. 13, as students, teachers, and Missoula community members arrived to offer public comment. The mass budget cuts pushed through during the meeting would remove several administrative positions such as the fine arts director as well as lead to teacher layoffs. After extensive public comment and deliberation lasting over five hours, the meeting concluded that over 100 positions, MCPS wide, will be up for cuts in the 2024-2025 school year.

The cuts pushed forward on Feb. 13 are some of the worst cuts that the district has seen in years. "This type of reduction hasn't happened since 2004," said first-year District Superintendent, Micah Hill.

Hellgate Principal Judson Miller is a member of the district budget committee, one of the few principal representatives. "This was a worst case scenario proposal, from the superintendent, to meet what is an eight million dollar shortfall," said

Miller. After the conclusion was reached that numerous positions within MCPS would be cut as a result, the gravity of the new budget became evident.

With a lack of administration in the coming years, Hill said that absorbing the extra responsibility will fall on the teachers. "Teachers and principals end up becoming jacks-of-all-trades instead of focused specialists. The ship may keep moving with reduced crew, but not necessarily in the right direction or with great efficiency. The building administration and teachers will bear the burden of making up for the missing leadership, coordination, and support," Hill said. "Without question, our students and staff will feel the impact of these cuts."

A large point of contention from the board meeting, which resulted in many hours of public comment, was the proposed removal of the fine arts director position. With a target seemingly placed on the art departments, many students and arts educators from around Missoula were enraged at the cuts being focused on the arts.

Jesse Dochnahl, Hellgate band teacher, said the impact of the cuts was a shock.

"From the perspective of a high school band teacher, I was relatively surprised. I didn't realize that the arts director position was at risk, because the arts director did not know that the position was at risk." Dochnahl also highlighted how there was seemingly little conversation between current fine arts director, Monte Grise, and administration.

Hill said that the decision as a board came from the lack of options for places to go. "The board has a legal obligation as elected officials to propose and adopt a balanced budget. With the decline in enrollment, the rising inflationary costs for utilities, property, and liability insurance and paying for current staffing obligations, the board has no choice but to trim from the existing budget," he said.

"Sometimes difficult decisions need to be made, but what I try to remind everybody is that these are always a forced choice. If it wasn't the fine arts director, it would have been something else," said Miller.

Hill said that he doesn't see the fine arts as being a specific victim of the cuts as many other departments faced reductions. "There was a lot of public comment and media coverage about the arts being



Community members sit outside of the board meeting waiting to give public comment. Photo by Wilson Freer.

'targeted' or identified for cuts, but the reality is that from the general fund, the only position that was recommended for reduction was the Fine Arts Director position," he said. Hill also emphasized the fact that the arts director will not be the only administrative position taking the brunt of the cuts as several other director positions are seeing cuts next year as well along with non-tenured teachers.

Continued on Page 2

Avalanche Safety



Page 8

Juried Art Show



Page 12-13

Spring Sports



Page 21

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MCPS Faces Massive Budget Cuts Cont.

Miller wants to work to try to minimize the visible changes within Hellgate specifically for the coming years, pointing out that the loss of the arts director was also a choice to keep teachers in classrooms. "One of those positions was the fine arts director. And yes, it went away, but the flipside of that was that we were able to keep fine arts instructors, as a trade off," said Miller. "It would have been instructional staff. Faces that kids knew differently." In total, about fourteen positions at the administrative level will face cuts with all non-tenured teachers facing layoffs.

Dochnahl said that the arts director plays major roles within the department and the programs will feel the loss. "The arts director coordinates all fine arts, music, and theater courses for K-8 especially and he is a big proponent for high school teachers and courses as well," he said. The work from the arts director will be directly placed on the teachers next year, Dochnahl said, "It goes to me. It goes to Mr. Davis, it goes to Mrs. McKenzie, it goes to the high school teachers."

With the loss of advocacy from the arts director for the programs and the increased workload for teachers, Dochnahl anticipates things such as trips and travel to potentially go away. "We suspect that we might have to drop some opportunities, just to be able to teach," he said. "The risk is that we start losing festivals. Those extra opportunities for kids that are really into music. And even things like marching band and pep band. Right now it seems infeasible to try to do all of that together. So maybe we have to do a lot less games with the pep band, and that would be sad for the community."

With the need to make up for an eight million dollar budget alteration, the board pushed for numerous cuts. Specifically, the board suggested cuts for the arts and special education directors, CTE, community service, student service, and work co-op coordinators, as well as library staffing and services, and assistant principals in the middle schools. Along with these, non-tenured teachers are also at risk for layoffs in the coming year. "Everybody in the school district I think is feeling [it]. This budget cut is gonna hurt everyone," said Dochnahl.

The large scale of the budget cuts forced the district into layoffs, Miller highlighted. "The

most expensive thing that we have in our district are people," said Miller. Hill said, "Essentially, cutting back central administration doesn't eliminate the need for their job functions - it just decentralizes them."

According to Hill, the layoffs that will be faced next year will not come easily. "We educate children and it takes caring, compassionate, educated staff to do that work - telling 100+ employees that you no longer have a job is incredibly difficult because we care about them," he said. "There isn't one member of our staff, no matter what the job is that they have in the district that isn't important and those are what I have to take into account when making recommendations."

Hellgate is known for its arts programs, and the thought of losing them was a shock to many students. However, Miller emphasized that the Hellgate art program will still remain strong. "I don't want to minimize the work of the fine arts director, that work has to go somewhere, but I chose Hellgate partly because of our arts programs. I meet with our art and music teachers on a regular basis, they are the reason that our school is so amazing. And so for us, I want to try to minimize monetary cuts, or people cuts, at the building level," said Miller.

The budget cuts for the MCPS district is a combined result of the ending of grants from Covid, along with a loss in enrollment in the lower grades. "The eight million dollars comes from two areas. One area we've known about, and that's that ESSER money that they were talking about. That was a grant from the federal government from Covid that had a definitive ending so this is the last year for that grant," said Miller. "Our revenue didn't go up enough to be able to absorb those costs." The money from the Covid grants accounted for around five million dollars that the district was unable to compensate for going forward. The remaining money comes from the drop in enrollment in the elementary schools. "That currently supports and pays for approximately 75 staff positions," said Hill.

Despite the end of the ESSER funding, Dochnahl still feels saddened to see positions go that have existed for years at MCPS. "What is a little sad for us is that a lot of these cuts come from the ESSER funding that is

disappearing...but the arts director position has been there for almost 50 years," said Dochnahl.

A large portion of community members demonstrating and showing up for public comment on Feb. 13 were Hellgate students. The arts being a large part of the Hellgate community led students to rally around their teachers. "I love it," said Miller. "I was there for the whole thing pretty intentionally. I think it's incredible. I want to reiterate, we're here for the same purpose. The arts are such an important part of Hellgate specifically, and so I love that Hellgate students are super passionate about that," he said.

Many students from Dochnahl's music class showed up as well to offer public comment. "It means a lot to me to see students stick up for anything," said Dochnahl. "Whenever students stick up for something that means a lot to them. Not just for them but for the future, for people that get to follow in their footsteps, I think that's the bright side of the whole thing." Students along with writing letters to administration, spoke at the board meeting, offering student perspectives.

Miller said that looking into next year, he hopes to have as little change as possible within the school. "Moving forward we're working to make sure that our programs grow. We're actually-at Hellgate-we're actually up in enrollment next year. So I'm looking to make sure our programs expand, the kids get what they need, those types of things," said Miller. "I'm committed to our art and music programs."

Miller emphasized that whatever can be done to avoid major changes to student life will be done. "I think what we all try to do is preserve your-as a student--experience." However, next year will undoubtedly look different as far as staffing and programs.

Dochnahl is prepared to work to try to preserve as much of the music and art program as possible. "[Art] helps provide so many opportunities for kids to listen more attentively, to work in more creative and collaborative ways, to align with other people, while at the same time being individual and unique," he said. "It mostly just brings joy."

City Council Votes Against Proposed Ban of Temporary Rental Homes

Amity Rogalski
Reporter

The City council recently voted on a proposed ban on short-term rental homes in Missoula. The majority vote was against this ban, so it will not be put in place at any time in the near future. This temporary ban would have banned all temporary rentals in residentially owned areas of Missoula.

Jen Savage, a City Council

member said “I think housing, in general, is our number one issue in Missoula. We don’t have enough affordable housing in Missoula. And for many years we haven’t had enough new homes (called housing stock) coming into the market to satisfy demand.” She agreed that proposals like this in city council are very important to Missoula right now and more housing legislation should be focused on.

She said that she voted no on the proposed ban. “I believe prop-

erty owners should be allowed to run short-term rentals in residential areas,” she said. She also added that consultants who were tasked with studying the situation in the residential areas advised that Missoula was not at a point to limit temporary rental homes and this drove several voters to take their advice and not take an action with the ban. She also said code reform is taking place and will clarify the rules and recommendations of Missoula housing. “This is a comprehensive process and I think it’s important that we let it play out. It will address short-term rentals as part of the whole municipal code and it’s important to me that we let that process unfold,” she said.

Savage also lists several acts that have been put in place in recent years in order to maintain the stability of short-term rentals in Missoula, which has remained a regulated 1.5 percent of all municipal rentals. “We raised the fee last year from \$60 to \$500ish to register for a short term rental, we have software that we subscribe to that continues to monitor the number of short term rentals and last week me and two other councilors brought a referral to require short term rentals

to have a listing number,” She said. She said that this ban was not necessary with these current monitors and rules put in place and that she was happy that the overall census was no.

Though the ban that intended to help with Missoula’s housing crisis was voted against, this raises other options to help with the issue such as funding to build more affordable housing in the city. Missoula’s housing crisis is a prominent issue to the city council right now, but the majority of them feel that a ban on short term rental homes does not help with this issue in the most effective way and aim to find another solution.

In recent years, due to growing popularity of Missoula as a vacation area, temporary rentals have grown in popularity to an extent that may concern some. Though Missoula’s housing market is in a very dire situation right now, according to experts and researchers in the city, temporary rentals are not the roocause of this, nor are they the most prominent issue to be focused on in order to fix these issues. In many cities that become popular like Missoula, it is not uncommon to see an uptick or increase in tempoary rental homes on private properties.



Missoula neighborhood streets. Photo by Amity Rogalski.

New FAFSA Proves Difficult For Many

Wilson Freer
Reporter

Between the 2023-24 and 2024-25 school year, the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) underwent serious changes in order to ease the process for students across the country. However, these changes have proven to be more complicated than many could have expected.

The FAFSA has always been a way for many students to get vital financial assistance in order to help them afford attendance at different universities. This year, FAFSA announced that there would be several changes coming to the form that affects so many. However, it became clear that there were going to be substantial setbacks when the form was no longer going to be available on October 1, and would instead be released at the very end of December, starting with a 'soft launch' period. This soft launch allowed students and families to work on the form during certain times, with many breaks for site maintenance in between work sessions.

Andrea Janssen works as the director of the Financial Education Program at the University of Montana, helping students and their families with financial literacy and paying for college. Janssen assists students with any problems they may have and has worked through much of the trouble that has been caused this year. "The biggest challenge, I would say, for the students and families this year is getting into their FAFSA account with their FSA ID," she said. "Students might have created one, or maybe a parent has, but the information might have been mixed up, causing problems verifying your information and recovery. Parents who have made an account in the past might have difficulties recovering/resetting their password as the

phone number or email once used is no longer accessible."

Anyone who planned on filling out the form was required to make a Studentaid.gov account that allowed access to the form. Setting up this account requires time to process which can be yet another setback for those who have already been waiting to complete the form for months. However, this was the first of many challenges that users might have faced. "It kicked [my dad] out the first couple times he tried to do it," said senior Chloe McCulloch. "It kept giving him new dates of when he would be able to log in and he seemed frustrated."

"I tried to get in many many times," said senior Lucy Johnstone. Johnstone encountered a problem that did not allow her to log in for over a week. "The solution to it was to just not type in your address, so I was able to get in, but then I wasn't able to type my address again so they just don't have my address."

Janssen says the process has been difficult all around. "As you know, the FAFSA launch has been difficult for the students but challenging for the Financial Aid teams. There have been trainings and webinars that I have been a part of. I know the Financial Aid team has been working on understanding the software that works with the FAFSA form." However, Janssen sees this process improving in the near future. "We hope that once Federal Student Aid releases the FAFSA application to the schools, they have time to test the software to help them process the FAFSA on time."

For many, it wasn't necessarily filling out the form that became the most stressful part of the experience, but dealing with the delays and anticipation for receiving financial aid informa-

tion. Because of these delays and the problems that have occurred, many colleges are even changing the date that students are required to reply about their admissions decisions from May 1 to June 1.

While many changes may have caused problems, there have been some that are helpful to those who filled out the form. "I was most excited about the new Financial Aid Direct Data Exchange. The Direct Data Exchange allows families to provide consent to have their tax information brought over from the IRS and not answer many questions about their finances,"

Each year, more than 17 million students fill out the FAFSA to receive financial aid.

said Janssen. This feature makes the process of providing financial information much easier. "Before, there was a Data Retrieval Tool where your information had to match the tax returns exactly. Even with your information matching, the Data Retrieval Tool might not work. With the Financial Aid Direct Data Exchange, the FAFSA is about 30 questions shorter compared to years past. Many students and families are surprised and concerned when I tell them they completed the FAFSA. They said, 'They didn't enter any financial information. How is it completed?' Because they provided consent, their tax information was imported automatically on the form," she said.

While FAFSA tries to make a better form for the following years, challenges continue to be posed for many of the students trying to receive financial aid.

A Case for Better Grading

Julia Key
Reporter

According to the U.S. Department of Education, 54 percent of American adults have a literacy level at or below that of a 6th grader. Over half of Americans don't have the reading comprehension to read *The Wall Street Journal* or *The New York Times*. We are setting up students in America for failure, and something in the education system needs to change. The first step to this process is changing the way that we grade.

Many classes are based on assessment and memorization, which often doesn't translate to a student's academic ability. "Our only way to show academic ability is to perform on tests, and for someone with test anxiety it's really hard to communicate exactly what I know," said Hellgate senior Annika Johnston. Oftentimes a student's ability and willingness to learn isn't taken into account with test grades.

The effort that a student puts into work can be overlooked in favor of grades. "I feel like you can put a lot of effort into something and work really hard on something and still not be great at it. Like math. Not everybody's great at math. You can try really hard, but that doesn't mean that you're gonna get a great grade, it also doesn't mean that you're not intelligent," said Hellgate senior Kaycee Metully. This can lead many students to just give up, when you're trying your very hardest, but your grades don't reflect your effort. "I feel like a lot of people that don't try hard in school feel like they're just going to fail anyways. That could be a reason that students may not be trying to the best of their ability," said Metully.

Hellgate senior Eddie Rosbarsky elaborated on this point stating "I think that the grading system is both a motivator and a hindrance simply depending on where you find yourself at the start of your school career. Let's say that you have like a 3.5 or a 4.0 GPA, you're motivated to keep that, just based on the expectations that are put on you by your teachers and the belief in you from your peers. But if you are a 2.0 or a 1.5 GPA student that is really struggling, it's hard to motivate yourself to come to school in the first place. So you're not really motivated to give it your best effort."

Students who are struggling or learn a different way are often labeled as lazy or disobedient, instead of taking a different approach to their education. This can create an aversion to school, if you know you are going to fail a

class, it's much easier to not put in the effort.

If you are a student who struggles in school, having mountains of assignments from each of your seven classes can become extremely overwhelming. "I sometimes don't understand my assignments very well or I feel a lack of motivation to do them. So sometimes I just end up not doing them," said Hellgate junior Maximo Iverson Corona. Sometimes it can feel like teachers don't understand how fast the workload piles up, leaving students feeling swamped and unmotivated.

Our current grading system is failing students, and it doesn't focus on success after college. A few minor changes could include focussing on study skills, gaining and gathering information, how to use your resources to your advantage, and interactive and hands-on curriculum. These can be implemented in many ways through open book tests, in-class discussion, giving students more choice in topic matter, activities like posters and videos, and cutting back on homework. Make learning fun, and students will show up and want to learn.

While many of these strategies are already being implemented in classrooms, they often fail in engaging students, due to the pressure of keeping or raising grades. Students focus on hitting all the right marks, instead of engaging and focussing on the content of a class.

According to a 2019 study conducted by the Pew Research Center "Most teens (61%) say they personally feel a lot of pressure to get good grades, and another 27% say they feel some pressure to do so." This is the biggest obstacle in the way of our learning. Students stress about keeping an A in all of your classes rather than the content of a class, we are not set up to be learners for life.

Ungrading is one of the most popular grading alternatives being suggested in the world of academics. Duke University describes ungrading as "a form of 'grading for growth,' in that the primary purpose of the assessment is to help students learn and improve their knowledge and skills, rather than to create a summative score that students use to compare themselves against an external credential." This system could radically transform the way we learn.

Ungrading focuses on both student and teacher feedback, which can happen without a grade attached. Having students grade their own work and explain their process can help the student process what they learned and make goals for future work. This can also help the teacher understand a student's thought process to offer more suitable feedback.

Ungrading also gives students the opportunity to

revise work without any consequences. This style of learning encourages students to accept feedback and turn in their best work possible. This positive feedback loop is extremely beneficial to a student's understanding of a subject. It puts students at the forefront of their learning, helping them gain critical thinking skills, and setting them up for success.

Of course this sort of progress relies on the entire U.S. school system to make a change. The biggest problem we face in changing the traditional grading system is the current shortage of teachers in the U.S.. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics there were 567,000 fewer teachers in the public school system post-pandemic. This leads to larger class sizes, and more pressure on public school teachers. 60 percent of teachers experience school related stress frequently or often. Teachers are underpaid, treated poorly by students, and are viewed as glorified babysitters. It's really no wonder that teachers are opting for other job options. Teachers don't have the time or aren't allowed to stray from curriculum and teach in more productive ways, even if they wanted to.

Changing our grading system won't happen overnight, and there are many obstacles that have to be overcome. I hope for a better future for education, where student engagement and growth are rewarded in ways other than a grade. Where class can be fun and engaging, a school where students are excited to learn.



Pesticides Hurt Environment Yet We Keep Using Them

Bea Reintjes
Guest Writer

Many people use pesticides unknowing of the dangers that these chemicals can cause. Pesticides are most commonly used on lawns, parks, and crops. They are also used as a way of getting rid of things like insects or rodents.

Though pesticides may be helpful in these areas, they are also highly toxic. The most common pesticide used on lawns and crops is glyphosate, also known as Roundup. These environmental toxins are quite harmful. Pesticides in general have been directly linked to causing cancer and other illnesses. Beyond Pesticides says, “Pesticide exposure can be linked to cancer, endocrine disruption, reproductive effects, neurotoxicity, kidney and liver damage, birth defects, and developmental changes in a wide range of species.”

Currently there’s a lawsuit against Bayer (also known as Monsanto), which is a company that sells Roundup. This lawsuit started on June 1, 2018, and has continued to this day. Plaintiffs are suing Bayer because they or a loved one has developed cancer due to exposure to Roundup. Bayer failed to warn users of Roundup that it can cause cancer. Drugwatch says, “Researchers found agricultural workers exposed to a large amount of glyphosate had a 41% increased risk of developing non-Hodgkin lymphoma compared to people with light or no exposure.”

Many farmers are involved in this lawsuit on the account of the fact that they are more likely to be exposed to Roundup, as many farmers spray it on their crops.

Bayer gave 10.9 billion dollars trying to prevent more than 100,000 Roundup claims, however thousands of cases are still unresolved. Bayer also tried to offer 2 million dollars to prevent future claims, but the judge in this trial refused, saying he wants both sides to come up with another proposal.

Though it may seem like the plaintiffs are winning against Bayer in this lawsuit, they are not. They are battling cancer that has been caused by Roundup. There are no real winners, the plaintiffs are only fighting so others are aware of how dangerous pesticides are.

The lawsuit is still active, and recently in January 2024 the Roundup plaintiffs once again won. Over the past five years that this case has been ongoing plaintiffs have been awarded more than 4\$ billion in damages. But what does money matter when you’re dying of cancer?

Roundup isn’t even the worst pesticide out there. 2,4-D is used on lawns, forestry sites, fields, and fruit and vegetable crops. The EPA says that around 60 million pounds of 2,4-D are used a year in the U.S. 2,4-D was used to make Agent Orange, a harmful toxin used as chemical warfare in the Vietnam war. Agent Orange killed over 400,000 Vietnamese citizens and 300,000 U.S veterans. It was used in the 1960s and only a decade later was banned by the U.S due to the amount of people it killed. Now we use its remnants on our lawns that our children play on; we use it on our food that we consume. We use it on our forests that we hike through. What does this say of our society that we prefer tidy looking lawns to the health of our neighbors and ourselves?

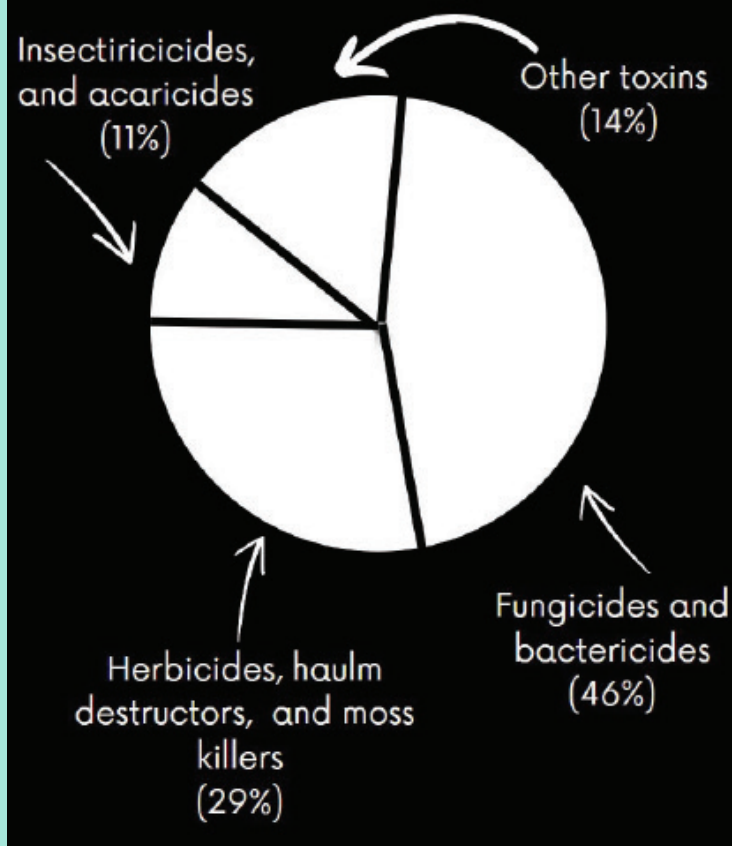
The plain and simple fact is that we don’t even need these environmental toxins. There are so many organic solutions to prevent weeds. Pour boiling water or vinegar on the weeds. Water your lawn, mow it, spread seeds twice a year, and use compost on your lawn if possible. These solutions work just as well as pesticides, and in the end they are much cheaper. Sumit Surf Services says, “With organic fertilizer, the functions of your soil actually improve. Organic lawn treatment can

help the soil hold water and other vital nutrients. As a result, the soil’s ecosystem will flourish due to the benefit of microbes”.

The reality is that we know that these pesticides hurt the environment and humans, yet we keep using them because of how strong pesticide industries are. Many petroleum companies also own pesticide companies since pesticides contain petroleum. Our government depends on petroleum and other fossil fuels, so we continue to pollute our planet with all these awful chemicals because of money. Let me repeat that, we continue to destroy ecosystems, kill endangered species, pollute water and skies, hurt ourselves with all the things we breathe in on a daily basis, damage the very soil that we stand, build taller and taller buildings, produce more and more fossil fuels, and create more CO2, which stays in the atmosphere, which in turn heats up our entire planet, because of money.

And yes, there are solutions (compost, recycle, spread the word, bike, use your car less, don’t buy so many plastic products, stop using pesticides) but do we use them? Sometimes. And sometimes simply isn’t enough. We need to realize what we’re doing to the world, and most importantly we need to change.

Pesticide sales pie chart:



Graphic by Bea Reintjes. Information courtesy of eurostat.



How Has the Pandemic Affected Your Education?

Julia Key
Reporter

Listen to the Joust on Spotify or at
hellgatelance.com

In 2020, it felt like our lives got turned upside down forever. Covid was a socially isolating time that affected every facet of our daily lives. For those of us in school, it became an extra burden, dramatically shifting our school experience. Many Hellgate students felt the effects of Covid, both good and bad, and many students noticed their learning style change with the pandemic. Covid changed the way we learn and affected our motivation in school. It felt like years of education were lost in the pandemic as students. We had to face this adversity and after a few years it feels like we've regained some normalcy.



Max Heiner (Senior)

Max: My freshman year I had two classes a week, and we had two classes each day. Yeah, because you were doing hybrid learning. We had four-hour days, so I didn't learn anything about how to be productive, because in middle school and elementary school, you can just do whatever you want. But in high school, it actually matters enough to where you are being graded. And I didn't get any of those skills that year and I had to learn that pretty much junior and sophomore year when we were supposed to be figuring out college and things like that.

Tanner: Freshman year for me, it was a nice segue into high school 'cause it wasn't the full on thing, just going straight into there and just getting all the stuff thrown on top of you. It was a nice, easy way to just transition from middle school to high school. But I like that we're back to normal now.

Max: I would take the Covid days school schedule back if I could. Oh yeah. Two days a week.



Tanner Paulson (Senior)



Malakai and Owen (Sophomores)

Covid hit sixth grade for us, but it mainly affected our seventh grade year 'cause everyone was socially distancing and we wore masks and we had the dividers at our tables and stuff. We had a cohort, so we're in the same class all year. And it was, it was crazy. Those 20 kids are together all day, every day for an entire school year.

And you think this is because of Covid?

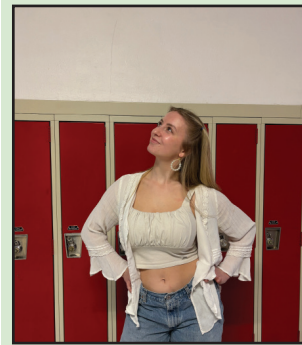
It was. Absolutely, well it was the effects of Covid. There were cults, there were cults that were based off of shapes. There was a class system.

And why was this because of Covid?

It was just, we were all so close for so long that we just started getting bored in the middle.

Do you think you learned during Covid?

We learned how to survive? Honestly, we learned more socially than academically that year. That year was kind of crazy.



Ava Saltzman (Senior)

Well, first of all, trips were canceled for a lot of us and I think that a lot of obvious experiences were taken away, but I think that I feel like a lot of learning was skipped as well. I feel like everyone's kind of behind. Which makes tests that they've had for years and years, that every student has to take regardless, harder because we weren't taught things because everything was backed up.



Sayer Henderson (Senior)

I went to two days of school each week for half a year and then school was still weird for the last half of freshman year. I'm a senior so it was so easy. I loved it. I loved not going to school ever. It was amazing. I miss it. I would go back to it. My life was easier. It was simpler. I fell in love with nature. It was amazing.

Do you think that you learned during covid?

I mean I learned, I made some pretty good geometry proofs. Like, I took theater. Mr. Dean made me

act like a monkey and now I can do it on command. Never went back, so I definitely learned probably not as much as a school quota would actually require me to learn, but I think I got a good bit of learning and it didn't inhibit the rest of my high school.



Skiers heading into the backcountry on an Avy 1 course. Photo by Will Hansen.

'Avalanche Level 1' Course is a Must Take

Will Hansen
Reporter

In the neverending quest of all skiers to find skiable snow in this infectious-disease-hospital-laundry-room-fire of a snow year, much like many people I know, I decided to move my efforts to the backcountry. This came with pros and cons. Sure, the snow might be better, stay for longer, and remain ungroomed, but there's still the ten-thousand pound elephant covered in spikes and lava to consider: avalanches. And because I didn't want to end up buried one to three meters (the actual average burial distance in Montana avalanches) down in the snow, I signed up for one of MissoulaAvalanche.org's Avalanche Level 1 courses.

Going into it, I wasn't really sure what to expect. I had heard both good and bad things about the program, but the overwhelming consensus was that no matter if I had a good or bad experience, I was going to learn a lot about being safe in the backcountry.

The course is split sixty-forty between online lectures and in the field training. I went into the first of two Zoom meetings with very little expectations, thinking most of the learning would happen in the field, but the lectures were actually really informative. It was helpful to learn about the language and terminology that's actually used in the backcountry, and our instructors did a good job of talking us through some of that.

During the second Zoom session, we looked at a case study on an avalanche that happened at a place called Cherry Bowl in British Columbia, Canada. The group was able to evaluate what the skiers did wrong or right, and having that knowledge in my

head will potentially be really helpful if I'm ever in an avalanche situation.

For our in-the field days, we were able to get a lot of practice working with our beacons, which is typically the thing that even "experienced" backcountry skiers who haven't taken 'Avy 1' struggle with the most. We also went through the process of rescuing someone from an avalanche; what to do and not to do, what procedures to follow, etc. Our instructors were super experienced and were able to give us a lot of insider tips that you wouldn't get taking an online safety course or just watching videos. We also got to tour around Lolo pass, dig snow pits to observe snow layers, and practice transitioning from skinning to skiing.

My particular session of the class got really unlucky with weather for our in-the field days at Lolo pass. It was raining pretty heavily the first day and a little lighter the second, but our instructors did an amazing job still making the class fun and informative, and because of the rain we were actually able to observe some really dangerous avalanche conditions which was sketchy but also really helpful. It's a huge indicator of how good the instructors are at their jobs that they were able to still run a really good class with the horrible weather, so big shoutout to Katie and Trask.

Overall, I would one-hundred percent recommend taking Avy 1 with MissoulaAvalanche.org if you have any interest in getting into backcountry skiing or splitboarding. The price is pretty heavy, but I'd rather pay a couple hundred dollars than be buried alive, know what I'm saying? That would suck. The course is incredibly informative, really really fun, and just overall a great experience with great people.

Avalanche Safety in Missoula County

Emma Puiggari
Reporter

Recently Missoula and surrounding areas have seen a dramatic increase of people going into avalanche terrain, and with that an increase in avalanche related accidents. Avalanches can be very dangerous and even deadly without proper training and education.

"With the increase of advancement of lighter backcountry touring setups more and more people are getting into the backcountry easier and faster," Elizabeth Fricke said. Fricke is the Senior Assistant Director for the outdoor program at the University of Montana.

Avalanche terrain is slopes between 35 and 45 degrees. With slopes that are less than 30 degrees there is a very small chance of any snow sliding due to it not being steep enough and slopes steeper than 50 sluff often enough not to build slabs. For reference, a black diamond is usually about 35-40 degrees.

In order for an avalanche to form there needs to be a steep slope, a slab of snow, a weak layer, and a trigger. "Slab avalanches are the kind of avalanches that are often the ones that kill people," Fricke said. A slab avalanche is formed by having a weak layer and a strong cohesive slab on top of that weak layer, a trigger for example a skier and a slope steep enough to slide."

In order to prepare yourself in the event of an avalanche it is important to have proper training and education. "I would say the best way for people to prepare themselves is to take an avalanche class. Education is the best way to get informed on how to identify avalanche terrain and familiarize yourself with all the resources that are out there," Fricke said. It is also important to have the necessary equipment. The bare minimum for backcountry skiing is a beacon, shovel, probe, warm layers, food, water, a communication device, a first aid kit, and the necessary knowledge of avalanche safety and terrain.

"Practice with your beacons and make sure you and your partners know how to use them... I would encourage people to keep their group sizes to four or under and to create good habits with your group. If anything happens you are the victims best chance of survival so make sure you know your stuff and are well versed in rescue," Fricke said.

Could a Chairlift Accident in Colorado Set Snowbowl on its Toes?

Will Hansen
Reporter

In the 2021-22 ski season, an accident that will sound all-too familiar to Missoulians occurred at Crested Butte Ski Resort in Vail, Colorado. Annie Miller, 16, and her dad were just boarding the Paradise Express lift when Miller slipped from the chair. After hanging on for her life as the chairlift continued to climb, the teen fell over 30 feet. Miller received a number of injuries, including major damage to her spine which caused her to become paralyzed from the waist down. This very unfortunate accident is being addressed

in a case which hit Colorado's highest court this February. The outcome of this case could change the entire ski resort system in one of the nations major skiing states, potentially changing how waivers work and if kids can even use chairlifts. Needless to say people (both Vail and the public) are, rightfully so, making a pretty big deal out of it.

But you know what people didn't make a big deal out of? When almost the exact same thing happened right here at Missoula's home mountain, Snowbowl. Last season, a toddler was thrown off of the Snowpark lift after it struck a tower. Thankfully, the toddler



The Paradise Express chairlift at Crested Butte. Photo courtesy of Wikipedia Commons.

was uninjured, but Snowbowl's initial response was horrible. Neither the lifties or ski patrol spoke with the kid's father when they finally reached the top of the lift (which at first continued to operate as usual).

Snowbowl could have been sued into the ground. Larger resorts could possibly have the resources to weather a lawsuit such as the one Vail is now facing. Snowbowl most likely does not.

Vail is facing charges of negligence, because reports say that the lifty was slow to stop the chair and respond to the situation. Could Snowbowl's response to their own event potentially be classified as negligent? I'm not

sure. But the two incidents do seem alarmingly similar, especially when considering the difference in their repercussions to Vail and Snowbowl respectively.

Personally, I've been happy with the changes Snowbowl has put in place this season because of the events of the previous year. It's been a very nice surprise seeing the additional updates and reports, more effective and tighter systems, and overall more positive attitude towards its patrons. If those changes didn't happen, this would be a very different type of article. But needless to say, if I was a Snowbowl owner, this whole Vail case wouldn't make me feel super cozy.



Skiers on a chairlift at Snowbowl. Photo by Will Hansen.

What Can Be Expected From The 2024 Voting Year

Kahlia Loewen
Reporter

Currently the Republican, Democratic, and Independent parties have three people running for the main spot to fight for presidential office in 2024. The Democrats currently have Joe Biden, the Democratic frontrunner, Marianne Williamson, and Dean Phillips all fighting for top spot. The Republicans have former President Donald Trump, the Republican frontrunner, Nikki Haley and Ryan Binkley still in the running. The Independent party options are Robert Kennedy Jr., Cornel West and Jill Stein. Behind these are 11 dropouts who gave up their fight a bit earlier on.

Sage Brown is a senior at Hellgate High School who currently considers herself part of the Republican party. Though this year is the first that she can actually vote, she has been exposed to political advocacy from both sides since she was young, like most people are in the United States. Some of the political mediums she was exposed to she said were very influential in the formation of her political ideology.

When asked about her most memorable experience with political media she said, “one political cartoon that caught my attention was a clever depiction of two politicians shaking hands with one hand while hiding a knife behind their backs with the other.” She stated that it was so powerful to her because it, “symbolizes the idea of hidden agendas and deceit in politics”. The way in which politics is projected onto younger children is important because it can be used to manipulate people young and old.

Many of the people of America are waiting for the political ad campaigns to begin swarming all forms of media. The most popular media sources such as Tik Tok and Instagram have already seen an uptick in politics-related videos as new and old voters are struggling to create their voting ideology as things are heating up. Brown said that she has been likely the most influenced in her voting ideals by her family, however she also stated that she doesn't agree with everything they say and stand for. She said that she shapes her own opinions.

Like many new voters, Brown is struggling to mix together the political ideologies she believes and knows while also mixing her own ideals. Because of this voters can't just vote Republican or Democrat because there is such a range of Republican and Democrat views. “I am able to vote this year so I have to

take in who I want to vote for, and how they will benefit everything in the next four years,” Brown said. “I have to wait and find out what I think the best choice is” in regards to candidacy.

As with all things politics related there have been countless political conspiracies, political ads and as we enter debate season there have been several heated arguments and the general pettiness associated with U.S. politics. Several interesting comments have been thrown against his fellow party runners, the majority of which were hurled against Marianne Williamson who has landed her second place spot in their party.

Even with all of this, the political season is just now heating up and there is much more to come. Already state primaries are being held to decide candidacy for the election, as well the presidential debates set to start in mid-September. In the most recent years the way people vote and the influences associated with it have changed drastically. Though for the great majority of people, voting is assured, however the ways in which we vote will continue to be greatly changed as the world around us changes.

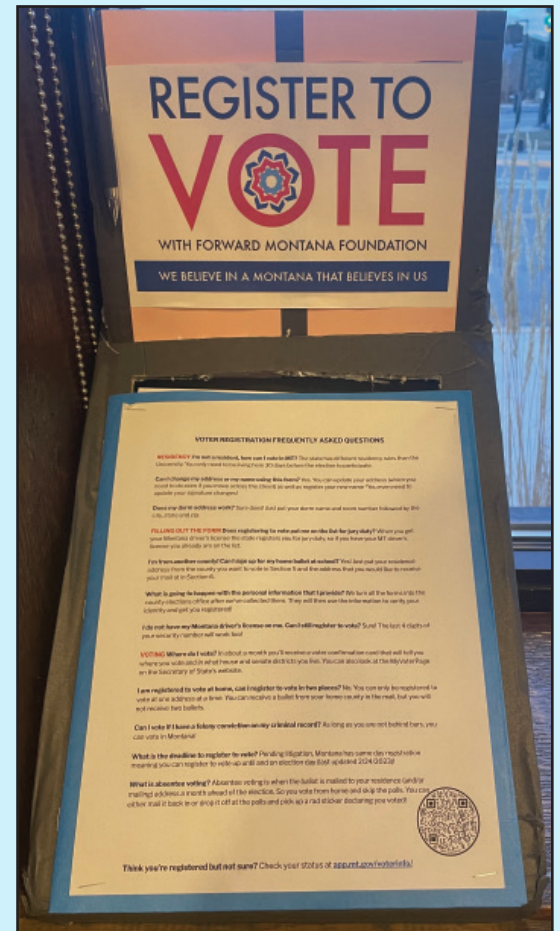
Several political officials have begun suggesting raising the voting age anywhere from 21 years old to 25 years old instead of 18 years old as it has been for the last 50 years since the early 1970s. When asked about her opinion in changing to voting age, Brown had a lot to say. She stated, “I think I'm smack in the middle. I think people who are 18 should have the right to vote with their young minds, they should have a say in shaping the future, but I do see where people who want to raise the voting age are coming from. We have not experienced that much life yet especially since we're 18, but I argue by saying adults who are at least 30 or 40 experience a different kind of growing up than we do today.”

She also stated “I kind of think it should stay the same since I do get the chance to vote this year so it's a different experience, but at the same time don't we want young people to be aware of politics. I thought that was the whole point so I don't see a reason to change the age”. If the voting age is moved so far as 25 people who were able to vote in the last election will have that right completely revoked which is bound to spur a lot of anger towards the government.

The addition of new voters and voices also help to develop the ever changing political cli-

mate into one made for the people by the people. So voters young and old can insert their own voices into the functioning of their country.

Thankfully throughout Missoula there are countless resources for new and old voters to register to vote. Any person who fits the voting guidelines can register by mail up to 30 days before the election day and if people register in person they can do it day of. Several businesses throughout Missoula offer various resources for registering to vote such as the locally owned and run restaurant Bridge Pizza. They have two locations that offer information about general registration requirements involved with registering to vote.



The Brooks St. Bridge locations voter registration stand with general registration requirements.

How Many Days Should Be in a School Week?

Joaquin Brodie
Reporter

With so many Mondays off this time of year, and with more expected for teacher preparations, one must wonder why not every week? Well the main objection is that this would mean less time for breaks and holidays. Which is enough to close down any conversation. After all, we all saw how bad this year's short winter break was, and the thought of having it even shorter is enough to close down a discussion.

Although this is certainly one way of organizing things, it is-

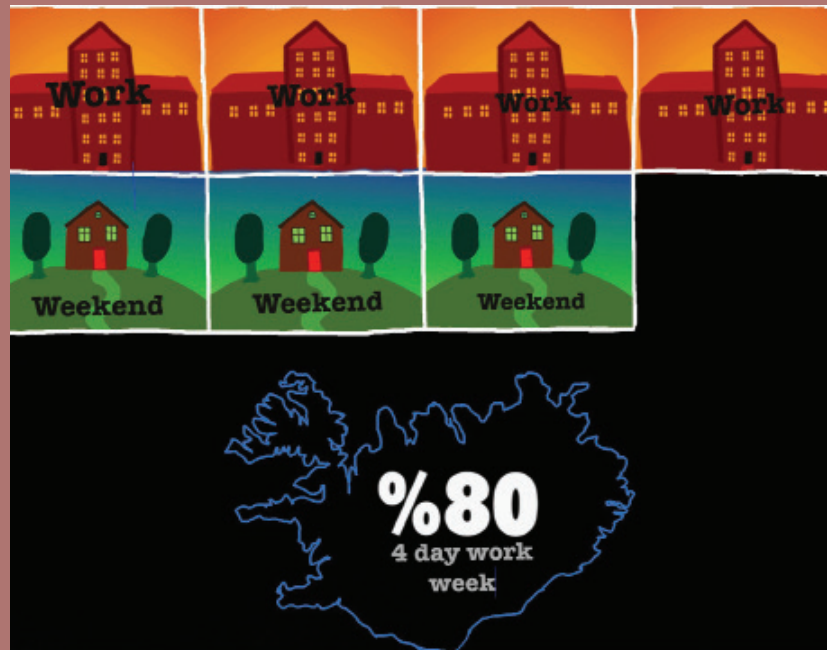
hardly the only way for us to cut down our week, for as many schools in Colorado have done, you can just as easily add an extra one or two hours onto each school day and obtain the same result. I would argue that this would be far preferable. But understandably, even the thought of elongated hours is enough to scare many away, especially those who have after school activities. Many days already end late, and having them even later is an unfortunate side effect of longer days.

Luckily there is a third option. We could simply lose a few hours of school. While this may seem too good to be true, it is supported by evidence from studies done in New Zealand, Spain, and Iceland. All of which indicated an increase, at the very least, no decrease when it came to productivity. In fact, these studies went so well that unions managed to give 86 percent of the population the right to work less according to the BBC.

These studies, although meant for work, can be applied equally to education, for the longer you work, or the longer you learn, the less effective you are, and the more time you spend daydreaming or scrolling social media. Think about how productive you are in second or third period compared to seventh period. In fact a separate Microsoft study done in Japan, found a 40 percent increase in productive capacity. Thus it may be that with less actual learning time, we may, conversely, learn more.

Aside from these obvious economic and fiscal benefits, we could also see many benefits to our mental health. The workers in that same Icelandic study also reported lower anxiety, and less stress. Aside from the obvious effect of actually getting to relax and enjoy our weekend. For we all know the feeling of the week beginning before you've even registered its end.

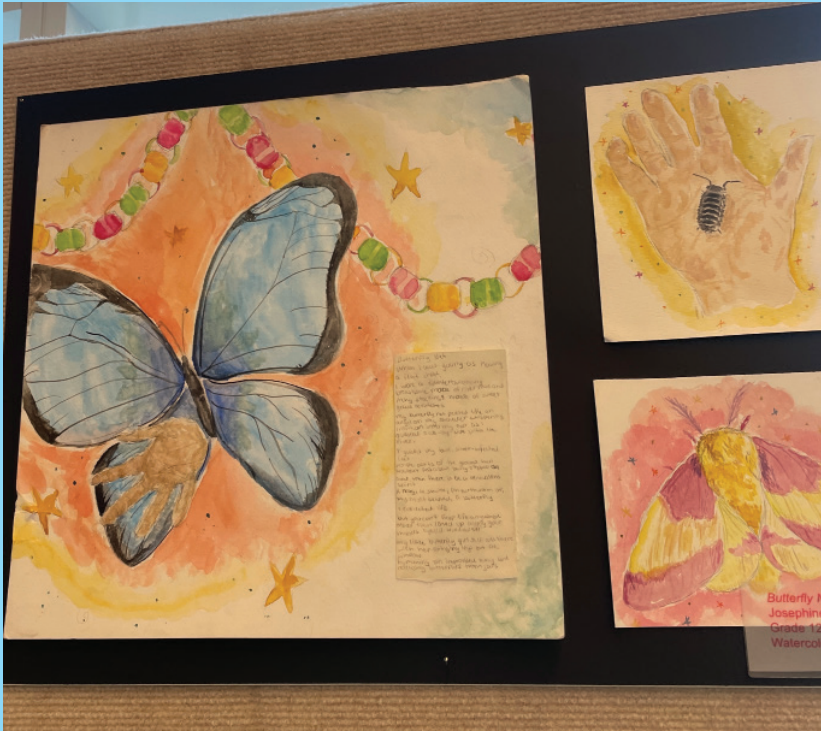
Finally, although it may seem impossible to imagine a world with a four day week, remember that for most of our history, we were not entitled to any weekend at all, and with so much more automation, and far better modes of education, we can finally afford a shorter week.



Representation of a three day weekend, which over 80 percent of Icelandic people have access to. Graphic by Joaquin Brodie

Ila Bell
Editor-in-Chief

Hellgate's Juried Art Show



“So I did a lot of things with insects because I remember being little and looking at them and I thought they were super cool.” -Josephine Bardin



Hellgate Band performs alongside the juried art show.



“I entered a caterpillar, The Hungry Hungry Caterpillar, and a sculpture of a bear fishing with a fishing pole and they just kind of like symbolize my involvement in the community and what Montana means to me. And also just my younger self with the caterpillar.”
-Harlen Bidwell

“I love the art show, it’s just a great way to bring the community together and share all this amazing stuff that people create, and to create like a big connection with the community and the school.” -Aralia Bidwell

How Highlights Student Artists

Hellgate High School's Art Club hosted its second annual juried art show in the Missoula Public Library on March 1. The show featured selected Hellgate students to showcase their artwork and win prizes. The art was accompanied by the Hellgate Jazz Band. Guest judges, Patricia Thorton, Marvin Pauls, and Janaina Vieira-Marques attended to help award prizes and honor Hellgate artists. The art show will be up until March 29 on the top floor of the Public Library.



“Last year I did a bunch of art pieces about like my family and pictures that sort of like brought up a lot of nostalgia and so I thought that would be a good idea to like bring them all together and bring them back to life.” -Aralia Bidwell



Community members admire student work at the top floor of the Missoula Public Library.

Exciting New Treatment For Parvo Virus

Emma Puiggari
Reporter

Parvo is a deadly virus found most commonly in dogs and puppies. Recently there has been a new treatment discovered, The Canine Parvovirus Monoclonal antibody. This antibody works by stopping the virus directly.

Parvo virus causes inflammation in the intestines. The virus most commonly affects puppies between the ages of six to sixteen weeks. "Anytime your pet is sick, not eating, vomiting, it is something that should be looked at by a veterinarian," said Marcos Puiggari, Veterinarian and owner of Alpine Veterinary Care.

The new treatment has been shown to effectively neutralize the infection. "It's exciting because this is the first treatment that has actually treated the viral infection," Puiggari said.

Before this treatment, treatment for parvo virus was symptomatic. "This monoclonal antibody treatment specifically targets the infection caused by the virus and it will decrease the morbidity and the mortality, so dogs don't get as sick, and they don't die from the virus."

So far this antibody has shown to be very effective at reducing the mortality and shortening the hospital stay. However the medication is very expensive. The veterinary clinic can buy a minimum of six vials running around sixteen hundred dollars. "Typically you are using it in addition to other treatments but it is not an inexpensive treatment at all," Puiggari said.

"We've been treating Parvo for a long time. It was first discovered in 1978 and it became an epidemic type of infection through the 80's. So a lot of dogs got infected, it was most likely a mutation of a virus that affected cats," Puiggari said.

It's very important to vaccinate your puppies to prevent them from getting Parvo in the first place. "We recommend vaccinating puppies between the

ages of six to sixteen weeks of age every three week with the Parvovirus vaccine to prevent the infection," Puiggari said.

When purchasing a puppy it's important to make sure that your puppy is properly vaccinated. If the puppy has not been vaccinated you should avoid areas where the puppy could be introduced to the virus such as areas with a large number of dog traffic. "The most important thing is to make sure it comes from a good reputable breeder where the parents have been vaccinated, and if you're adopting from a shelter make sure the puppy is over eight weeks of age and has at least had one vaccination. You also want to follow up with your veterinarian and get your vaccinations every three weeks until its sixteen weeks of age," Puiggari said.

Parvo virus is very expensive to treat. There are some new exciting treatments that can improve treatment but by far the most important thing to do is to try and prevent the disease with proper vaccination.



Dr. Marcos Puiggari, Mssoula Veterinarian who has access to the monoclonal antibody treatment. Photo by Emma Puiggari.



Parvo virus vaccination, single dosage. Photo by Emma Puiggari.

Avatar: The Last Airbender

Elliott Banziger
Reporter

The arguably better Avatar (the Last Airbender, not the blue people) has recently been remade into a live action TV show by Netflix, and it has been received with very mixed reviews.

As someone who watched the show growing up, I was looking forward to seeing how Netflix would adapt the 20-episode cartoon into an 8-episode live action season. And overall, I believe they did a pretty good job, all things considered.

Their greatest accomplishment, I think, was the bending (people can control the elements in this universe). The CGI was incredibly well done and beautiful to look at, which led to some gorgeous fighting scenes and some really pretty visual effects throughout the show.

I believe the casting for this live action show was spot on. I thought that all of the actors looked like they had been plucked from the original cartoon and put directly into this show. I found this likeness to the original characters to be extremely impressive. Especially the casting of Iroh (Paul Sun-Hyung Lee), who perfectly captured the essence of his character and in my opinion really brought him to life.

One issue I had with the show was that the writing was a little bit dry. At some points in the show the characters' dialogue seemed forced and it seemed that they were just saying things to say them, rather than to move the story along. In fact, I found that many of the jokes fell flat because they were so out of place in a scene. There was also quite a lot of exposition writing, by this I mean that the writers were telling instead of showing who the characters' were and background information about the world.

In my opinion, the biggest thing the show struggled with was, in an effort to condense the show the writers inadvertently took out some characters' essence. The character I felt was hit the hardest by this was Katara. In the original, she is driven by her desire to learn waterbending in order to protect those around her, as she was unable to save her mother when she was young. In the live action, it seemed like they stripped her of her initiative and made her meek, which goes entirely against her character. And I felt like this was a huge



Avatar: The Last Airbender Netflix show poster.

disservice to such a well-written strong female character.

Overall, I felt like it was a pretty well done remake. They did an excellent job condensing the show into a much shorter running time and it was pretty enjoyable to watch, though (as always) I felt like there were many places to improve upon for season 2.

Kanye West Makes Controversial Return

Iris Lowe
Reporter

On Feb. 10, Kanye West, also known as Ye, released his new, highly anticipated album. After the recent years filled with much controversy surrounding

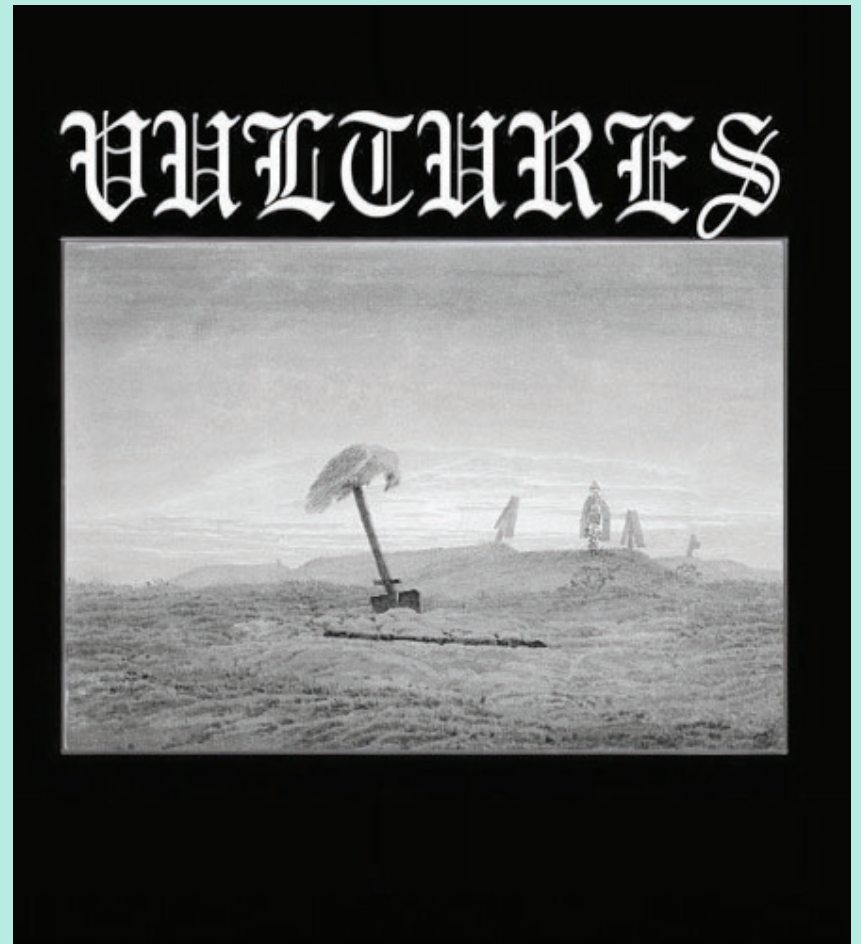
West, the public was unsure if he would make another appearance as a producer. But after his surprise appearance at Travis Scott's show on his "Circus Maximus" tour, he reentered the music industry like he had never left.

After losing a major-label record deal, West is now number one on Billboard's 200 album chart with his album "Vultures" made by both West and Ty Dolla \$ign. West has become notorious for consistently failing to release albums on schedule. This has made for his albums to sound unfinished or rushed. This was widely noticed in his last album "Donda". It was thought that now with his new partner Ty Dolla \$ign, it would be more complete. But senior Max Rosen said, "In terms of an album it sounds unfinished."

Separating the art from the artist is a difficult task with Ye, due to the abundance of controversy that he has created in the past year. But doing this helps to appreciate the actual work more. Throughout "Vultures" it is very clear that West and Ty Dolla \$ign compliment each other very well. For example, on the track "Burn" listeners are able to see how Ty has the ability to bring out the old Kanye that everyone knew. The familiarity that this album brought made me appreciate the music more than I thought I would.

In many of his works, West uses choirs in order to create more soul and spirituality. This is used in his most popular track on the new album, "Carnival". Its explicit and ominous nature makes it stand out from the rest of the album. When you take a look at the song closer, you can easily see the widely disliked side of West showing through. The track is filled with controversial lines surrounding explicit actions, wealth, and the lifestyle of artists like him. He blurs the line between mockery of cancel culture and advocating for strongly looked against actions. This distinction is what makes West such a controversial and confusing artist. In my opinion, his work has been able to stay at a high quality with a few exceptions. I didn't enjoy every song on the

album, but I saw that it was good quality work. Senior Nico Petrini has a similar opinion. "I think it has some all right songs but it's not my favorite of Kanye's work."



Where it gets confusing is when separating all the negative things that West has done from the actual music. When asked if he's able to support West's music knowing all the controversy Petrini said, "I am not supporting him by buying his merch, but I will listen to his music." This is a popular opinion among West's listeners. I am not able to appreciate the music to the same extent that I was able to. Although I think that separating the art from the artist is possible, West has made this increasingly difficult.

Boys in The Boat Movie Takes Theaters By Storm

Kahlia Loewen
Reporter

“The Boys In The Boat” directed and produced by George

Clooney has quickly become one of the most popular newly released movies. After its release it quickly gained traction amongst the masses and reached one of the top spots in most watched and searched so far in the year.

The movie is a retelling of the book, “The Boys In The Boat” written by Danial James Brown, and was originally released in 2013. The 404 page novel is a true story about the 136 University of Washington rowing team of nine that represented the United States in the 1936 summer Olympics in Berlin.

The movie itself was released on Christmas day 2023 and has just recently come out to streaming service. Within a few months of its release, the movie has already grossed \$55.1 million. The movie came out alongside several other classic remade or televised films such as, The Color Purple, Wonka, Dune Part Two and many more, making the movie theaters the place to be throughout early 2024.

The story follows the lives of several college students who are also Olympic athletes and their quest of winning the gold medal for the US in the Olympics, as well as the importance of teamwork and friendship in the face of adversity. The team’s friendship helped to keep them together throughout such difficult times.

The story is set around the middle of the Great Depression, and highlights the importance of some good light things in the time of struggle. The team of rowers is made up of; Joe Rantz, the main character played by Callum Turner, Don Hume played by Jack Mulher, Shorty Hunt played by Bruce Herbelin-Earle, Stub McMillin played by Wil Coban, Johnny White

played by Tom Varey, Gordy Adam played by Joel Phillimore, Chucky Day played by Thomas Elms, Roger Morris played by Sam Strike, and Bobby Moch played by Luke Slattery.

Other important characters in the film are Joyce Sundaes, Joe’s girlfriend and future wife, Al Ulbrickson the coach of the rowing team played by Joel Edgerton, George Pocock played by Peter Guinness and many more.

The climax of the story begins as the whole team is fighting in the final race all for a chance to win the spot in the Olympics. Joe and the boys push themselves to their absolute limits and in the end succeed after their most difficult fight and are ensured their spot In the Berlin Olympics. The fight against the other rowing teams is strenuous and shows a lot of the raw challenge and animosity that is seen throughout athletics.

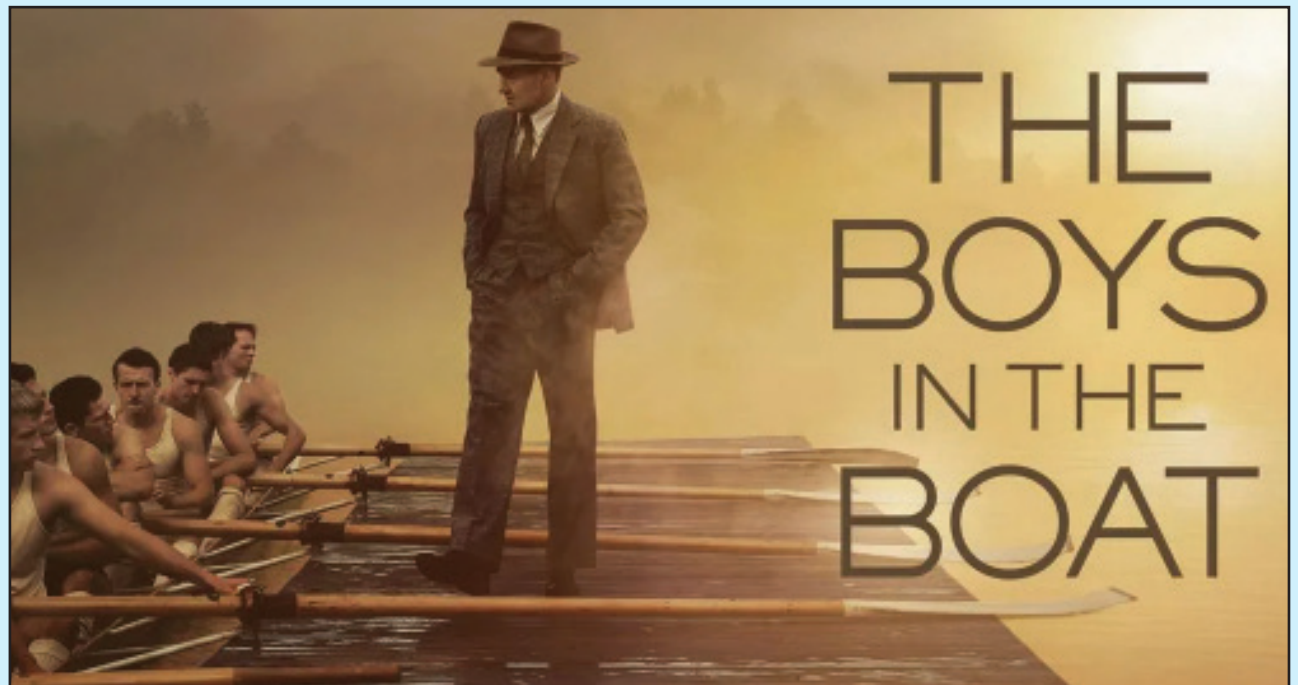
The story of triumph through hard work is one that many viewers in many situations can agree with. The many themes of the movie allow for almost everybody to find a way to connect with the story and characters. The beautiful cinema-

tography allows for viewers to feel like they are really there watching the fight for gold.

The underlying tension caused by the varying class systems during the Great Depression and the stress of competing to afford their schooling create an incredibly tense atmosphere throughout the film. However Joe’s sweet romance with Joyce also helps to warm some of the tensions caused by tensions of athletics and the Great Depression.

Joe’s character is one the viewers very easily relate to. After coming from a poor family and poor background and fighting his way through the Great Depression like many Americans, Joe is still a very determined and dedicated character that inspires his teammates to work their hardest, which truly pays off in the long run.

Overall the film is a beautiful story about the importance of perseverance in the face of adversity and how it can be seen throughout time. The Boys In The Boat is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful, cinematic and interesting movies to grace theaters and the movie fans this year and will undoubtedly go down as one of the classics.



American Fiction: A Thought Provoking Exploration of Race and Representation

Viv Steinberg
Reporter

Released in September 2023, “American Fiction” is a film that has sparked conversation and debate. Directed by Cord Jefferson and starring Jeffrey Wright, the film tells the story of a black novelist named Thelonious ‘Monk’ Ellison, who becomes disillusioned with the publishing industry’s expectations for black writers.

Central to the film’s plot is Monk’s decision to write a fictional novel under a pen name. The novel, filled with stereotypical portrayals of black characters and experiences, becomes a surprising success, forcing Monk to confront his own complicity in perpetuating harmful narratives.

American Fiction is a complex film that tackles nuanced themes. It raises important questions about race, representation, and the power dynamics within the creative industries. The film’s satirical approach can be both humorous and uncomfortable, prompting viewers to reflect on their own biases and assumptions.

Some of the film’s key strengths include the powerful performances. Jeffrey Wright who stars in the film delivers a compelling performance. He does an excellent job at capturing the character’s frustration, desperation and eventually self-reckoning. Additionally, the film captures the viewer’s attention with the thought-provoking themes of race in popular culture and the challenges faced by marginalized creators, as well as the engaging narrative.

The film’s trailer is not very telling of the depths of the plot. It makes it seem as though the film holds fewer layers and only touches on the humor. However, the film has much more to it and tells both a truly heartwarming story of family connections and a satirical education on race in this country.

Overall, “American Fiction” is a thought-provoking film that is sure to spark conversation. The film is nominated for five Oscars, including Best Picture. The film is a valuable contribution to the ongoing discussion about race and representation in American society.



Teens Push Musical Boundaries

Fox Winterer
Guest Writer

A diverse array of Zoomers have spent the last number of years establishing an invisible community amidst often ignored corners of the internet in which creativity is celebrated, musical boundaries are pushed, and diverse perspectives are celebrated. Their genre (loosely glued together by the terms ‘digicore’ and ‘hyperpop’) is difficult to define, as the common threads of musical influence found in each respective Soundcloud profile echo vastly different musical evolutions and often don’t stick around for long.

“What I love about this group of people is how open minded I feel everyone is,” 4cf, a notable artist within the space, said of the group of collaborators and music fans they interact with. “Like, if I have some weird new idea for some song, I feel like I’m surrounded by people who are gonna be just as excited to pursue this new idea as I am. It’s super sick.”

This sense of inclusivity extends itself toward identity, as queer representation has defined this emergent community. “Yeah, I think that most of us are gay,” kmoe, another popular artist, said. “‘Us’ being, you know, people who know what ‘digicore’ is, I guess.”

Perhaps the clearest founding event for this niche group of artists is the 2019 release of 1000 geecs, the debut full-length album from duo 100 geecs, made up of Dylan Brady and Laura Les. Sonically, the album is unpredictable, chaotic, abrasive, loud, texturally

and rhythmically inconsistent, and lyrically insane; of course, the only reasonable grounds for the creation of an entirely new musical community.

“1000 geecs came out and was crazy, and Spotify made the Hyperpop playlist which I think really kicked it all into high gear,” kmoe said of how the hyperpop/digicore community came to be. “I was just starting to make music at the time and something about the whole thing just spoke to me. Once I started listening to some of those songs in the early days of the Hyperpop playlist, that’s when I knew that’s what I wanted to make.”

Spotify, currently the world’s largest music streaming service, maintains a wide variety of editorial playlists which artists can pitch their songs to, some of which having hundreds of thousands of potential listeners. When the Spotify editorial team heard 1000 geecs, the Hyperpop playlist was born, named after the high-seed, high-volume, and generally high-chaos strain of pop music that 100 geecs pioneered. Soon, ‘hyperpop’ was adopted as the name of a new genre, and countless terminally online Zoomers would go on to try their hand at making it.

“I think you can primarily look at hyperpop as being most directly influenced by the trap beats, EDM, and bubblegum bass,” 4cf said. Trip hop and dubstep are also often named as influences. “But I also think that genre signifiers are pretty disregarded here. I see a ton of tracks of Soundcloud tagged as hyperpop while not really sounding at all like 100 geecs or early Jane Remover or anything

like that. No one here wants to sound like anyone else.”

Of course, that last sentence begs the question of where ‘here’ is. Hyperpop’s development as a genre is interesting in that it almost exclusively online; of course, live events and performances occur, but the vast majority of the music created by those who consider themselves hyperpop artists is made online, shared online, heard online, and discussed online, solely through various platforms like Discord, Reddit, and SoundCloud.

Not only have the avenues of music discourse changed, but so have the means of creating it. Ubiquitous today are what’s known as digital audio workstations, or DAWs. DAWs are pieces of software that enable audio recording, production, mixing, and mastering, and they’ve become mainstream in recent years, greatly reducing the barrier of entry for individuals to start producing and writing music. 4cf, kmoe, and almost any other artist with a ‘hyperpop’ tag on their Bandcamp profile all share the same formative years of learning to make music on a DAW, as opposed to the classical or band experience that has historically defined musical education.

Regardless of the means through which these avenues of creativity are expressed and shared, it’s clear that many have found meaning within this space. “Yeah, I was feeling pretty lost and alone for most of high school,” 4cf said, “but when this started popping off in senior year I just, I don’t know, felt empowered to like, be myself. Like, just having these people who love my music, it’s really cool because I never imagined that anyone would.”

'Dune: Part Two' Movie Review

Emma Puiggari
Reporter

Dune Part Two is a beautiful must see film. Dune has breathtaking cinematography and is truly a visually pleasing film to watch. Dune is an amazing science fiction film with a religious faith-based plot.

The shot composition of Dune Part Two is perfect down to every detail and creates aesthetic value. The visual effects of the film blend perfectly creating a very real experience in the theater, especially in I-MAX. The CGI was breathtaking and so immersive. The aesthetic value in the film makes it a very beautifully shot film focusing on the colors and landscape of Arrakis.

The action scenes in the film are paired perfectly with the sound effects. If you found the first movie pacing slow, that is not something you need to worry about when watching Dune Part Two. The movie is fast-paced and is filled with the intense action scenes that we didn't see a lot of in the first movie. Dune Part Two truly earned the title as a part two because it is really just an extension of the first movie.

Dune Part Two combines intense individual combat scenes while also being a war film similar to The Lord of the Rings, Star Wars, even Game of Thrones.

Dune tackles many different topics and themes such as religion, faith, and politics, all combining in one movie, creating a mix of different plots and stories to follow, while creating many complex problems in the film.

Timothee Chalamet did an excellent job of embodying the character of Paul Atreides. He showcased the character's development very well throughout the film, and you can see his character's behavioral aspects and the way he carries himself change steadily as the film progresses.

Austin Butler as Feyd Rautha stole the show. He showed incredible range in his acting and created a very compelling and complex character. He completely transformed himself into his character of a psychotic power seeking warlord.

Zendaya truly made this film. You see much more of her in this film than you do in the first. She gave it her all throughout the entire movie, playing a character that is very easy to fall in love with.

The entire supporting cast was very good and made the acting in this movie truly incredible.



I feel as though this movie was very targeted to not only science fiction fans but also the general viewer, creating a less specific movie experience. The film was very complicated and can be found as confusing so it is very important to understand the first movie or else it would be very easy to be lost and confused for the entire movie. Dune Part Two needs to be seen in I-Max in order to get that fully immersed viewing experience.

Overall I would say that Dune Part Two was a beautifully done science fiction movie, combining many elements. I would give Dune a 9/10 due to the incredible cinematography, CGI, action, acting, and plot.

Hellgate Spring Sports Looks to Dominate 2024 Season

Brennan Labbe
Assistant Editor

2023 spring season last year, picking up a whopping seven state trophies, including two in tennis and five in track and field. From freshman to seniors, Hellgate found success in all aspects of spring competition last year and they do not look to stop their progress. Here is a dive into each team and the success they'll continue to strive for this season.

Tennis: The Knight's tennis team is coming off a strong 2023 campaign featuring two AA State trophies. The girls team scored 32 points at state, led by sophomore Elliott Banziger, who was also the individual state champion. Her sister Laine Banziger teamed with senior Brooke Best to win the doubles bracket.

"Our whole team found success last year," said Best. "Even though tennis is a one or two person sport, we're still able to bring the same energy as any other team sport does. I didn't know that could be done until I started playing for Hellgate."

"This year I'm aiming for another state title and also to make the most fun out of my last season with one of the best teams I have ever been a part of," added Best.

Hellgate broke a 10-year streak held by the Bozeman Hawks team who were held to a mere 10 points at the state tournament last year. The boys team also found success taking three singles and two doubles to state last year, looking for even more this season.

Track and Field: The Hellgate track and field team struck gold last season carrying a near full bus to the state track meet and bringing home five

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Hellgate
Knights had
an amazing

state trophies, including a girls perfect team score in the 1,600. With five of the top six placers wearing red and gold, Hellgate dominated the mile which included senior Kaitlyn Skinner who took home gold with a time of 5:08.38. Junior Jamison Molloy won the 3,200 last year with a time of 11:11.05, and University of Montana pole vaulter Hannah Moses concluded a blemishing career for the Knights by winning state with a jump of 11 feet, 9 inches. On the boys side, senior Kort Lehman led the Knights last year in the 100 and 200 meters with a time of 11.60 and 23.27.

"It was a great season last year," said Lehman. "Everyone found their role early on, and we all had a great connection going into the first meet. Track is an individual sport, but in training you're working with a team and last year we did a great job of pushing each other everyday."

Along with Lehman, junior Corbin Weltzien dominated the 110 and 300 meter hurdles, with times of 14.98 and 42.50.

"This year we are hoping to do the same and chase a state title as we have a lot of promise with everyone getting faster and stronger," added Lehman.

Hellgate carries a team heavy of veterans and eager new faces to continue dominating the 2024 spring season.

Softball: The Hellgate softball team fielded a full team last year and they were led by Boise State women's basketball manager, Maddy Petrino who graduated last summer. Petrino led the Knights with a batting average of .378 and an on base percentage of .465. Sophomore Ella Lambert also had two stolen bases, three runs, seven hits, and four RBIs for the Knights in her open-

ing season last spring. Of those seven hits, three accounted for extra bases. Junior Kaija Nagle looks to lead Hellgate this year as their 2024 season opens on Mar. 29 at Billings Skyview. Nagle finished her sophomore year with a .241 average, .755 fielding percentage, and seven hits including two doubles last spring.

"Starting a new year we all just have to wipe away our past experiences and start fresh," said Nagle. "Becoming a team and creating that bond is definitely important to creating our outline for the season. I think with new faces and new coaches we can get more into a rhythm and hopefully achieve more as a team and have fun this season."

In all aspects of spring sports, Hellgate looks to take on the 2024 season in stride. The first tennis meet is slated for Apr. 4 at Great Falls CMR, and the opening track meet is set for Mar. 26 at MCPS stadium against Sentinel, Butte, and Belgrade.



Cross country mile team last year at the state track meet. Pictured left to right. Rose Wiltse, Jamison Molloy, Kaitlyn Skinner, Sophia Miller, Stella Diaz. Photo courtesy of Wilson Freer.

Board of Trustees Makes Long Awaited Decision on High School Baseball

Devyn Deschamps
Managing Editor

The Missoula County Public School's administration 'A' building can be described in simple words- calm, monotonous, routine. But, these were the last words that could describe the last board of trustees meeting. Instead, with a crowd unseen since the public comment on Covid-19 years ago, the administration building was swarmed with parents and players alike of Missoula baseball.

For the third consecutive meeting, the parents and the players of the Missoula baseball community have shown up and spoken during public comment to encourage the board to allow high school baseball to come to three MCPS schools: Big Sky, Sentinel, and Hellgate.

The Board of Trustees approved baseball in 2022 as a MCPS high school sport, but yielded to the beginning of the process. The parent association created a slideshow outlining how the program could start this year.

In order to do this, the parents claimed they would pay the full cost of the program for the first year, a whopping estimated \$50,000 per school, so long as the district hired coaches and secured fields. The proposal for fields was to convert the Hellgate JV softball fields into ones for baseball.

The rest of the proposal reviewed costs of uniforms, empires, equipment, and most costly to the school, travel.

In lieu of the continued strong presence, the board had added high school baseball to the agenda. "There's a lot of passion there," said newly elected Superintendent Micah Hill before he went into the well prepared and thorough slideshow.

Passion doesn't account for the realisticness of starting high school baseball for the 2024 season. Potential challenges he mentioned were cost, potential impact of MCPS sport, a cut sport, space, and Title IX.

Title IX was especially spoken about, which requires that MCPS invests equal amounts into girls and boys sports. The addition of baseball, a male sport, would mean an increase into a girls sport- with the board members entertaining the possibility of adding flag football to equalize investments.

This however, was not incentive enough to the board

members, who intensely regarded the future end of senior contracts. These teachers would not be offered a position in future years, as they were hired during an interim period. The question was posed that if the district has the money to put into a sport, then why couldn't they continue maintaining a semi-full staff.

Hill provided 4 options: 1, decide not to offer high school baseball as an activity at MCPS, 2, delay the start of high school baseball until 2025, 3, approve high school baseball for 2024 and use current, one time only funds and direct the administration to make it budget neutral beginning in 2025, (budget neutral meaning they would add it by taking away funding from other male high school programs), and 4, approve high school baseball for 2024 and require that the entire first year be fundraised (with fundraising milestones) and look to add baseball to the general fund in 2025.

Noting that amendments could be made to any of these plans, and knowing there are dozens of other options, the floor opened for the elected trustee's questions. This lasted for nearly an hour and half, leaving tensions high and patience low.

Parents and players alike began speaking in public comment, in respect to the boards' conversation. Emotions ran high especially during this, with community members turning defensive as the plausibility of baseball becoming limited.

Ultimately, the board decided to retire ambitions for baseball in the 2024 season, instead making plans to go forth with the parents' plan in 2025.

Hellgate Principal Judson Miller spoke at the November meeting, notably not in favor of the long awaited arrival of the sport. "Baseball is incredible," said Miller. Logistically however, Miller believes the addition of the sport has many potential problematic outcomes, enough to the point where it makes it difficult to see the benefit.

Miller pointed out that the pool from which they are judging whether high school baseball should be implemented is primarily parent-based. There was no survey at Hellgate to see if those students wanted to participate, there was no communication whatsoever. So creating and funding something as costly as the entire sport with nothing but assumptions could be disastrous. Not to mention, the known budget cuts that MCPS will begin going into next year. "I would have really liked all of the things to be on the table

before we started making decisions," said Miller.

Miller also said, "Hellgate gets shortened on facilities issues, all the time." The most pertinent issue amongst high school students is not the inherent lack of sports at school, but instead the well-being of the already existing ones. Miller noted that the Hellgate tennis team is in desperate need of financial support, yet they cannot afford to dish out any more.

Miller even pointed out that Hellgate students in particular are at a notable disadvantage already compared to the other two Missoula high schools. Impletenmeting baseball may mean requiring Hellgate students to drive to Bonner daily to practice, lessening convenience and raising hazards.

All in all, the biggest issue is that there is a cloud of unknowingness within the student body. Miller claims he would have preferred an exhaustive survey sent to the student body, so he could argue for what the students want. Whether that includes the baseball team or not.

He proposed in the future, to avoid this position again, going forth with tactful meetings composed of representatives from all the clubs and sports to share opinions. This is in line with Big Sky's recent start of "Big Sky Town Hall" where all activities gather and share accomplishments and program needs. In the meantime, Miller said that no decision is really final until that season begins.

The only other representative from Hellgate that spoke at the board meeting was senior Brennan Labbe. Labbe has played competitive baseball since he could remember, and spoke in favor of its addition for the 2024 season.

"It would allow more kids to form into the high school community," said Labbe. The biggest incentive for high school baseball players would be to play against one another, fueling the local competitive drive.

Despite the ongoing financial struggles within MCPS, Labbe believes there is hope. "With enough fundraising and time to kind of put all the stones in place it would be a success," said Labbe.

With aspirations like this, the baseball program has a high probability of success. Only time can tell whether it will be realistic though.

Public comment is still open for this matter to be considered once again, perhaps swinging the other direction.

Charges Filed in World Junior Sexual Assault Case

Amelia Richmond
Reporter

Police in London, Ontario began a press conference on Feb. 5 with an apology. “I would like to “I want to extend on behalf of the London Police service my sincerest apology to the victim, to her family for the amount of time that it has taken to reach this point,” said Chief Thai Truong. He was addressing the victim of a six year old sexual assault case that finally has a resolution.

In July 2018 the Canadian Men’s Junior Hockey team attended a fundraising banquet for Hockey Canada. The next day Hockey Canada was contacted by the stepfather of a woman who had attended the banquet. He alleged that she had been sexually assaulted by eight members of the World Juniors team. Hockey Canada then contacted London police and both began investigating.

The police investigation was closed in February of 2019 and in September of 2020 Hockey Canada closed their investigation too with no suspects or even persons of interest. The case then lay dormant for two years until April of 2022 when the woman (identified as E.M.) filed a lawsuit against Hockey Canada and the eight players.

The lawsuit was settled privately out of court and once again the case disappeared from headlines. While the investigation wasn’t in the headlines, Hockey Canada still was as they began to undergo leadership and organizational changes. In June of 2022 their federal funding was paused as an investigation began into accusations of abuse against the organization. The CEO resigned and many major sponsors such as Tim Hortons and ScotiaBank pulled their funding. Many speculate that these changes were related to Hockey Canada’s treatment of the victim and lack of transparency surrounding the case.

Another issue within the organization was

the use of their National Equity fund. Every year players paid dues that went into this fund. In July of 2022 it was revealed that this fund had been used to pay millions of dollars in sexual assault settlements since 1990. After this was announced Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau condemned this use of funding and players also began to distance themselves from the 2018 team releasing statements saying they were not in-

that a woman was assaulted by five members of the 2018 World Juniors team. It is unclear if the investigation was reopened due to leadership changes or because new evidence became available, but either way the case finally began to move forward again.

In late January four NHL players abruptly took a leave of absence from their respective teams citing mental health or giving no reason for their decision. Many began to speculate that there was some connection to the case as they were all members of the 2018 team. Later that month London Police announced they would be holding a press conference on Feb. 5th to reveal new developments in the case. When that day finally came many tuned in curious to see a potential resolution to a six year long case. London police announced they were charging Dillion Dube of the Calgary Flames, Carter Hart of Philadelphia Flyers goalie, and Micheal Mcleod and Cal Foote who both played for the New Jersey Devils, and former NHL player ALEX Foreman with one count each of sexual assault. Lawyers for all five players have said that they are not guilty and on Feb. 28 the players requested a jury trial.

While disappointing that the case took so long to reach a conclusion it is promising that authorities never gave up. The case also highlights a promising turn in holding everyone accountable regardless of the societal standings. Following the #metoo movement there has been added scrutiny on all reports of sexual assault, which, in cases such as this one, has been extremely beneficial in holding all involved accountable. The added pressure from major sponsors of Hockey Canada also highlights a promising shift in the culture surrounding sexual assault. As people and corporations as a whole begin to put pressure on law enforcement to investigate cases fully, the culture of abuse that exists in sports will begin to shift to one that believes women and searches for the truth.



Hockey Canada has faced many allegations of abuse following their treatment of a 2018 sexual assault case

involved in the case and hoped a resolution would be found. During this period the National Hockey League was also first informed of the incident.

In July of 2022 the Scott Smith took over as CEO of Canada and promptly announced the organization was reopening their investigation into the sexual assault. Then in December of the same year London police say they believe

Spring Break Plans

Rowan Hull
Reporter

Say What?!

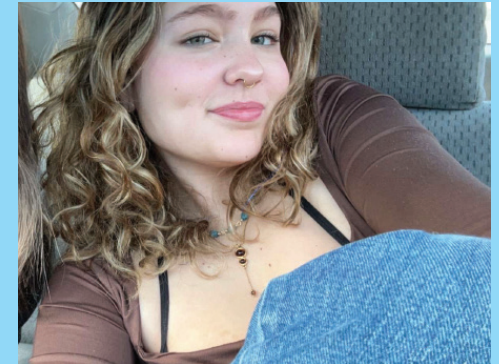
Spring break is coming around, so let's see where some fellow Hellgate Knights are going!

Claudia Guay
(sophomore)

"I'm going to Mexico with my family for spring break, it's a yearly tradition."



Julian Kocsondy
(freshman)
"I'm going to Cincinnati, Ohio to see relatives."



Sarah Craig
(junior)

"I'm going to Oregon and learning how to surf with my sister and her friends."

Araitz Trina (junior)

"I'm probably just going to go skiing with some friends."



Silas Chimielesk
(junior)

"I'm going to Torres Del Pines National Park in Patagonia, Chile with my mom and a couple of friends, we're going on a 5-day long backpack and hiking on a glacier."



March 2024

Today

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