



The Hellgate Lance

Missoula Faces Uptick in Gang Activity Not Seen in Decades

Will Hansen
Editor

In recent history, Missoula has benefitted from blissful ignorance of the issue of communal gang violence. The city's small size and relative ruralness have protected it from the gang-related issues seen across the country, including in neighboring cities such as Billings and Spokane. But recently, a dramatic increase in gang related activity has given Missoula officials cause for concern and prompted them to take action.

"In late summer, we started having a number of instances pop-up with indicators that the people involved with them were gang affiliates or associated themselves with some type of gang," said Missoula Police Department Chief of Police Mike Colyer. These instances can be tracked all the way back to the sum-

mer of 2023, but became much more prevalent in 2024. Crimes with gang affiliation continued to increase moving into Fall of 2024, and that caught MPD's attention.

"There were things that we really associate with serious crime," Colyer said. These occurrences ranged from "gang graffiti" all the way to theft, display, and threatening of firearms as well as aggravated burglary and other more serious felonies. "We've also had some shootings; thankfully no one's been hit," said Colyer. "With the frequency and seriousness of the offenses, and the nexus of some type of a gang affiliation, [the issue] quickly became a very serious thing to us."

Justin Ekwall, a Deputy County Attorney with the Missoula County Attorney's Office who focuses on juvenile prosecution, defined a gang as "a group of people associated together for some kind of criminal



The Missoula Police Department has adopted a policy of "zero tolerance" when it comes to gang activity in Missoula. Photo by Will Hansen.

or otherwise antisocial purpose," in the eyes of law enforcement. Ekwall said that gangs will often express association through colors, hand signs, graffiti, or tattoos.

The instances Colyer discussed fit Ekwall's definition perfectly, suggesting law enforcement was facing an issue they hadn't dealt with in years: organized gangs in Missoula.

Sergeant Joshua Johnston, a

detective sergeant with the Missoula County Sheriff's Office, said that the two most common criminal offenses these gangs are taking part in are gun violence and theft.

"Drugs and alcohol certainly play a large part in [this activity]," said Johnston. "They're definitely contributors and enhancers to poor decision making like this."

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What gives these serious crimes another level of attention from law enforcement is the prevalent claiming of specific gang association many of the offenders have. Ekwall said many suspects have been identified as members of the 'Zootown Crips' or 'South Side Bloods', and more recent incidents have involved members of the Billings-based groups 'M-7 Monster Mob' and the 'Young but Dangerous' gang.

Ekwall said the former two groups do claim affiliation with the national gang sets, the Crips and the Bloods, but he doubts there is any true connection.

Colyer also described how "nonresident gang affiliates" can and are worsening the problem. The term "nonresident gang affiliate" refers to the phenomenon where a member of an already established gang from elsewhere comes to a city, in this case Missoula, to establish a gang presence or drug-dealing structure.

Colyer, Ekwall, and Johnston all agree that there are two main motivators when it comes to this recent uptick in Missoula gang activity, but also gang activity in general. The first is economic, or "getting in the business of committing crimes to make money," as Colyer puts it. "That can be through selling drugs, through human trafficking, through doing burglaries or robberies," he said.

The second motivator is more of a conceptual "societal issue," according to Colyer.

"There's a lot of men, especially younger men, in our society that don't feel respected or like they belong to anything," said Ekwall. He said that these men sometimes see gangs as a way to solve both of these problems: in their eyes, in a gang, you're both respected and part of something bigger.

Colyer said that a lack of role models or stable home life plays a part as well. Young people who feel like they need protection or security can find that in gangs.

"But this is just the wrong way of going about trying to approach it," said Ekwall. "Anything that's going to embrace violence, that's going to harm other people, is going to end up going beyond what they actually want it to be. It's going to result in consequences from the legal system, and other consequences just from the nature of that lifestyle."

This isn't Missoula's first bout with gang violence.

"When I got hired here in the mid-'90s Missoula was going through something similar to what we're experiencing now," Colyer said. He went on to discuss a familiar situation: an uptick in gang related crimes, including a number of fatal shootings, primarily by juveniles who didn't feel respected or like they belonged to something.

"MPD took a really affirmative stance on it, and really employed successful offender-based investigations. You focus on

people who are committing the crimes and you do not tolerate it," said Colyer. "That was really successful then, and so since then we've enjoyed decades of little to no criminal gang activity in Missoula."

Colyer said that because of the success this "zero-tolerance" strategy had in the '90s, MPD is attempting to replicate it. "That's the position we take today: we are not going to tolerate it, we're going to focus on people that are engaged in these types of organized criminal acts and pour our efforts into that," said Colyer.

"Basically everyone in the legal system has a lot of discretion," said Ekwall. This discretion can be used by individual officers, prosecutors, or judges to make case-by-case decisions on what's best for not only the community at large, but also getting the individual in question on the right path. Ekwall said this is especially important for juvenile cases, like with the majority of the gang-related incidents we're seeing in Missoula.

"What they're saying with zero-tolerance is if the behaviour is [gang-related] or if it's a kid that's known to be a gang member, they're not really going to exercise their discretion in favor of doing less," he said.

"I think that officer discretion is important," said Colyer. "But it is going to be the exception rather than the rule to cut people breaks if they're involved in criminal gang activity."

Missoula law enforcement and prosecutors take this issue very seriously. They've adopted this zero tolerance policy, which shifts the emphasis towards protecting the whole community out of necessity as opposed to an individual.

In addition, Colyer said MPD has conducted "broad training

sessions" not only within their department, but also with other agency law enforcement, youth court, and prosecutors to better handle this relatively new issue. Colyer emphasized the importance he places on getting all disciplines of law enforcement on the same page, and how these training sessions have really assisted that process.

A large number of individuals engaged in this recent gang violence are high school-aged. Therefore, Colyer said that another thing MPD is doing is engaging in open communication with Missoula County Public Schools.

"We told them what we are seeing, and they told us what they are seeing, and it's almost the exact same thing," said Colyer. "With young people, if you nip this type of thing in the bud early, that can be a really good approach." He said that one of the main priorities in the cases of juvenile gang members is getting them out of this crime-related lifestyle before it's too late.

"I think our community just really needs something more positive for those kids to latch on to," said Ekwall.

Colyer, Ekwall, and Johnston all emphasized that while the issue is something to keep an eye on and "could get out of hand," it's not something to be paranoid about.

"We still have a safe community," said Colyer.

Any problem should be solved at its root, and in the case of this recent spike in gang activity, the root is the social and societal issues that young people may face. Kids simply need to feel seen, feel protected, feel heard, and feel like they're a part of something. If that sense of belonging was universal, Missoula wouldn't be facing this issue.

"It is going to be the exception, rather than the rule, to cut people breaks if they're involved in criminal gang activity."

**-Missoula Police Department Chief of Police
Mike Colyer**

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Missoula Schools Grapple with Budget Cuts Amid Challenges

Carsten Bowen
Reporter

Missoula County Public Schools (MCPS) are continuing to navigating one of their most difficult financial times in recent memory,

after facing a shortfall of \$8 million dollars that already triggered the elimination of around 100 staff positions. While much of the focus has been on declining enrollment and the expiration of federal COVID-19 relief funding, education advocates say state and federal policies have also played a major role in the crisis.

The cuts, which affect teachers, administrators, and support staff, are a direct result of both local enrollment drops and broader systemic funding issues. Superintendent Micah Hill noted that the end of the federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER)

However, many school districts across the country grew dependent on them to backfill positions and programs that were already underfunded at the state level.

Montana's education funding model, which heavily relies on per-pupil state allocations, left districts like MCPS vulnerable as enrollment declined. Hellgates principle, Judson Miller, explains it as "...We haven't gotten a corresponding raise from the state, inflation costs, how much the state is allocating per student. That is a whole separate and additional topic to the funding there."

Since 2019, the district has lost more than 470 students, a drop that significantly reduced its share of state funding. Critics argue that Montana's Legislature, dominated by fiscally conservative lawmakers, has failed to modernize the funding formula or provide adequate safety nets for districts hit hardest by demographic shifts.

The current crisis also ties back to long-standing trends that began under the Trump administration, which prioritized school choice and sought to shift federal funds toward charter and private schools. Although those policies did not directly cut funding for public schools, education experts say they helped shape a climate where public education was increasingly expected to "do more with less." Trump's former Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, was a vocal proponent of reducing the federal footprint in public education and empowering states—many of which, like Montana, opted to maintain limited education budgets.

Montana legislation has always significantly struggled holding onto a healthy education system. Jeff Waniata, head chair for the social studies department at Hellgate, said, "Montana does not take good care of our teachers".

Beyond the numbers, the human impact has been stark. Arts programs have been especially vulnerable, with the district's Arts Education Director position on the chopping block. "I'm worried over time these fees will increase," Laura Elliot, the current chair of the art department at Hellgate said.

Although MCPS has promised to maintain music and visual arts instruction, students and parents worry about the loss of leadership and coordination that could come with such cuts.

In an attempt to cushion the blow, the district is considering increased fees for extracurriculars and rentals of school facilities, but these measures are unlikely to significantly close the gap.

Looking ahead, MCPS will revisit its budget in May. Officials hope that staff attrition and potential community support could soften the impact. But as it stands, Missoula's public schools are another example of what happens when short-term federal relief meets long-term underfunding and policy inertia at the state level.



Hellgate High School is one of the three high schools affected by MCPS budget cuts. Photo by Carsten Bowen.

funds, which were allocated during the COVID-19 pandemic, left districts like MCPS scrambling to make up for what had become essential operating dollars.

According to Montana Free Press, The district's 2026 elementary budget could see a \$1.1 million increase, mostly from the 3% inflation allowed by the Legislature, says Pat McHugh executive director of business and operations

These ESSER funds, part of pandemic relief passed under both the Trump and Biden administrations, were never meant to be permanent.

The Younger Generation is Pushing for Voice in Education Decisions

Violet Pehan
Reporter

educational policy decisions. As debates around school funding, curriculum changes, standardized testing, and mental health support intensify, many teenagers are asking a simple but powerful question: Shouldn't we have a say in the decisions that affect us every day?

Advocates for youth voting rights argue that teenagers, especially those in high school, are directly impacted by education policies and should therefore have a voice in shaping them. Groups like Vote16USA and local youth-led organizations have been lobbying school boards and state legislators to lower the voting age for school board elections or to allow non binding student votes on education issues.

Some districts have already made moves in this direction. Takoma Park, Maryland, became the first U.S. city to lower the voting age to 16 for local elections in 2013. Since then, several other cities—including Berkeley, California, for school board elections—have followed suit.

Supporters argue that teens are informed, passionate, and already engaged in civic life through volunteering, activism, and student government. They say early voting experiences can build lifelong habits and increase civic participation overall.

Critics, however, worry about whether teens have the maturity and knowledge to make complex policy decisions. Still, studies suggest that 16- and 17-year-olds perform as well as older voters in terms of understanding political issues and making informed choices—particularly when it comes to topics like education that affect them directly.

While federal and state laws currently prevent minors from voting in most elections, there's growing pressure to rethink the role young people can and should play in democracy. Some school boards have started experimenting with student advisory votes or including student representatives in decision-making meetings.

As education becomes a political battleground, teens are no longer content to be passive participants. They are raising their voices—and increasingly, demanding the right to vote.

In classrooms across the United States, students are speaking out—not just in discussions or essays, but in the growing movement for voting rights in

So what does Hellgate think? Sophomore Yvette Ballantyne agrees that students should be able to have a voice “100 percent”.

On a less optimistic note, Hellgate math teacher Jessica Hurd states, “I think you should have a voice, yes, do I think that's going to happen, no.”

However the movement is already happening, and the critics are being drowned out in the call for the next generation to have a voice now.



Sophomores Ayanna Baty-Zdziebko, Dahlia Crost, and Emi Dady show their support for students having voices in board of election voting. Photo by Violet Pehan.

No One Wants To Visit the United States

Quinn Stromberg
Reporter

Nearly 66.5 million people travel to the United States each year, and Tourism Economics forecasted that incoming travel would be up 9% in 2025. Though, now it seems that it will be down 5.1% in wake of President Trump's newest policies; many people are beginning to grow weary of the US and rethink their travel plans. This is due to a number of factors, including Trump's tariffs and the possible danger for LGBTQ+ individuals upon entering the country.

Denmark, Finland, Ireland and Portugal are four countries that have expressed their concern on the subject. Denmark has been at odds with the United States since President Donald Trump threatened to buy Greenland, which is owned by Denmark, even after they had repeatedly said the country was not for sale.

Denmark, as well as Germany, has warned their citizens that if they have an X marker on their passports---meaning that the person is non-binary or prefers not to specify their gender---then they should contact the US embassy for guidance before traveling. Finland has issued a similar statement to its citizens as well, stating that if the gender on someone's

passport doesn't match their assigned gender at birth, they may be denied application for a travel permit or visa to the US.

Portugal has warned that the possession of an ESTA or a visa doesn't mean someone will be allowed to travel into the United States, and that final decision will be made by the border agent when they arrive. The country recommends having proof of return travel and to refrain from making any false or misleading statements about the nature of their stay. They have also made sure to point out that citizens who identify as non-binary can only check "male" or "female" on immigration forms and should choose their sex assigned at birth for safety purposes.

While these countries are participating in this boycott of US travel, Canada is seemingly leading the charge due to the heavy tariffs Trump has placed on their country. Canadian travel across the border dropped 24% in February compared to what it was last year, and United Airlines has reduced the frequency of flight routes between Canada and the United States due to this as well.

Canada, Britain and Germany have warned their citizens against traveling to the United States even with a visa, because it is still possible they could still be stopped at the border. A Canadian woman made international headlines because she had been detained by ICE for two weeks after her visa got revoked.

A French scientist was detained as well after immigration officers searched his phone, on which they found messages that expressed criticism of the Trump administration and Elon Musk. US officials denied the claim.

Now, a new travel ban is being drafted that would put restrictions on citizens of nearly 43 countries on entering the United States. The severity of this ban is variable; for a group of 10 countries including Afghanistan, Syria, Cuba and North Korea, a full travel ban would be put in place; for 5 countries, a partial ban would be enforced; and 26 others would be given a probationary period.

People outside of the United States are already having their doubts about traveling here at all, and so this formal ban might not be necessary. Other countries have already gotten the message and are avoiding the US; no one has to tell them to stay away.



Graphic by
Quinn Stromberg

Traveling Abroad as an American Brings Mixed Reactions

Rowan Hull
Reporter

As many people know, America is not a super popular country at the moment. But what is it like traveling to other countries? The actions of President Donald J. Trump, have resulted in other countries' hostility and dislike for our country (although the actions may not have been terrible for America.)

Recently I visited three bordering countries as an American and through talking to others I better understand how they are feeling. The countries I visited were France, Italy, and Switzerland. These countries aren't directly impacted by the actions America has taken so far but they are all fully aware of the situation.

Most of the people in other countries speak at least a little bit of English, so if you can get past the language barrier you can have very interesting conversations with them, but before that happens the question everybody asks is "where you are from?" For the most part everybody I talked to asked me where I was from before I could ask them. It felt almost like a precaution. I would tell them that I was from the United States, and they would give a concerned look, but I would make sure they knew how terribly sorry we are for our president and that we do not support the actions he has taken. A lot of people would get very excited and shake my hand or start smiling, and then we could continue our conversation.

On the other hand I saw Americans walking around a tiny little ski town wearing their bright red MAGA hats

and being absurdly obnoxious. It was evident that they were inebriated and just putting an overall bad rap on Americans. Multiple times we were asked if we knew them or felt the same way as them.

Most people were pretty welcoming and understood that what our president does is out of our control, but they are still not the biggest fans of America and what we stand for.

My friend took an alternate approach and told people he was from Argentina, because he can speak Spanish almost fluently. Nobody questioned him, and it was evident that they were much more interested in talking to him than they were to me.

Overall, peoples' opinions on Americans vary on where in Europe they are located. We talked to some Ukrainians who were very upset after finding out we

were Americans, but we also talked to some Swedish people who wouldn't stop asking questions about America. Age also played a role in it. Younger people who are probably less politically aware cared much less than older people. But as long as you are respectful (and apologetic) pretty much everybody will be kind or at least well mannered.



Street in Cheminee, France
Photo by Rowan Hull

Conserve Our Coral Reefs

Ellie Lopuch
J1 Reporter

Imagine you are underwater, in an entirely different world, yet it is still right here on Earth. This world stretches to unimaginable lengths, and reaches down to inconceivable depths. The vast majority of this world still hasn't been explored, and 80% of it remains unknown. The ocean.

Now imagine you are swimming through the most crucial part to this undersea operation. You look to your right and see hundreds of colorful fish swimming by in an orderly fashion. You look left and see playful dolphins swimming in circles and blowing bubbles. The sun rays filtered by the water shine down on the vibrant ecosystem, full of life, that is flourishing below you. Welcome to the coral reef.

Though this underwater habitat is less than 1% of the entire ocean, you will find a quarter of the oceans total marine life here. This includes fish, lobsters, clams, seahorses, sponges, sea turtles, sea stars, and of course, coral. Here, millions of sea creatures can find food for themselves and their families, protection in the crevices formed by coral, and the perfect nursery grounds to raise offspring.

Corals are in great danger as their population dwindles each day due to countless human threats. According to Coral Watch, we have already lost 50% of the world's coral reefs in the past 30 years due to global warming, pollution, overfishing, and more. Coral reefs are extremely important to both life underwater and life on land. But first, we need to understand what corals are.

At first glance, corals may seem like a plant, but they are actually made up of thousands of sessile animals, meaning they attach themselves to the ocean floor permanently. According to NOAA's National Ocean Service, these animals are called polyps. Polyps, only a few millimeters big, start out with a tender body and attach themselves to an underwater rock or the skeleton of another polyps. Here they create a hard outer skeleton made of limestone as more of these animals attach nearside them. After they die, their skeleton stays hardened onto the rock for other polyps to attach themselves to. They continue to follow this cycle, slowly creating the limestone foundation of the coral reef. Corals are able to live for a long time because of this continuing cycle, living for around 40,000 years.

Just like any animal, corals cannot produce their own food, therefore increasing the importance for a healthy habitat. According to Coral Reef Alliance, corals require shallow, warm, and clean saltwater with enough nutrients, sufficient sunlight, and a healthy amount of marine wildlife. Corals use their small tentacles to sweep their prey into their mouths. Corals diet consists of microscopic zooplankton, other miniature fish, and most importantly algae.

Coral and algae depend on each other to survive. The algae that lives in the outer tissue of corals provides protection and a food source, but too much algae can overtake and eventually kill the coral. Herbivores, animals that primarily eat plants,

keep the amount of algae growing on the coral to a healthy amount. Piscivores, animals that mainly eat fish, help keep the populations of smaller fish to a balanced amount to avoid overcrowding in coral reefs. Each animal and plant in the sea has its own job to keep coral reefs healthy in return for the incredible habitat coral reefs provide.

Coral reefs benefit more than just the underwater community, they actually benefit humans too. From food security to coastal protection, not to mention the amazing snorkeling and scuba diving sights, they offer much more than what people realize.

According to NOAA's National Ocean Service, coral reefs are the largest structures of biological origin on Earth, and because humans play a huge role in the decline of corals, we are the ones who need to restore them. Coral threats include pollution, overfishing, destructive fishing practices, collecting live corals for aquarium markets, mining coral for building materials, and global warming.

Pollution is a huge problem in all areas of the ocean and affects every living thing in the water. Zooming in on the effects of pollution on coral reefs, pollutants in the water can lead to a dramatic increase in nutrient levels, raising the growth of algae which can take over coral if not kept at bay. Also, any trash or gases leaked into the ocean can kill or drive away animals in the area which, as we saw earlier, are crucial to the survival of corals.

Overfishing is already a problem on its own, but a lack of fish in a coral reef can have many negative effects including lack of food sources for other sea creatures, lack of animals to eat the algae off of coral, and it throws off the natural rhythm of things in general.

Many fishing techniques are very destructive to the environment. Damaging fishing practices include blast fishing (using heavy explosives to kill fish), cyanide (a spray that stuns fish), deep water trawling (dragging fish nets along ocean floor), muro-ami netting (pounding weighted bags to startle fish out of hiding), and anchored boats.

Global warming has caused ocean temperatures to increase and has also led to the changing of storm patterns and the rising sea levels. The outcome of these events is coral bleaching.

Coral bleaching happens when corals undergo an immense amount of stress from changes in conditions including temperature shifts in the water, overexposure to sunlight, high amounts of nutrients, or extremely low tides. According to NOAA's National Ocean Service, this causes corals to release the symbiotic

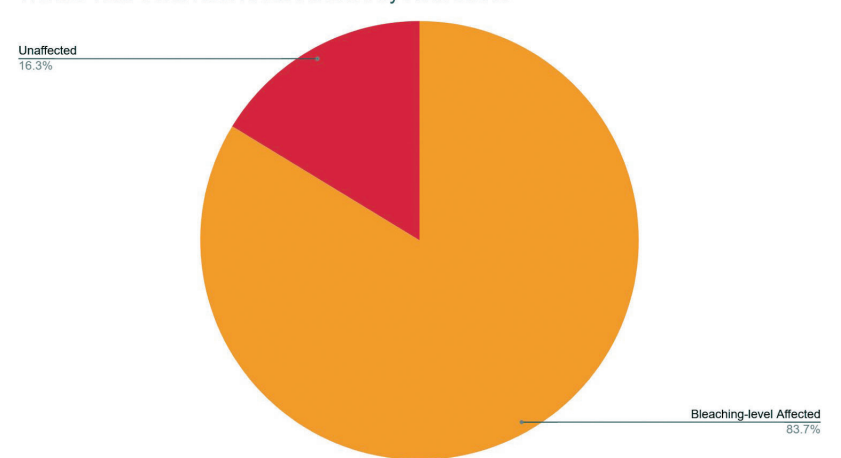
algae living in their tissues, giving the corals a bleached white look. As said earlier, coral and algae depend on each other to survive. Algae is the coral's primary food source, algae protects the coral, and algae gives the coral those vibrant colors they are known for. Though many corals die after becoming bleached, some have recovered if the stress wasn't too severe or for an extensive amount of time.

Whether you live near the ocean or live hundreds of miles away, there are many ways you can do your part to help save coral reefs.

- Do not touch, remove, or take any piece of coral out of the ocean, even if it seems to be dead or is a broken piece just floating around.
- Conserve water. Less water means less wasted, meaning unused water can stay in the ocean.
- Don't litter. This one is easy! Find a trash can. No need to harm the environment, animals, and plants, just because you felt lazy. Plus, it just ruins the beautiful Earth around you when there is trash all over the ground.
- Volunteer at a local beach/ reef cleanup or, for those not near the beach, help in a watershed protection project. This will also address other issues in the world as well!
- Become aware of the effects of your everyday actions. It is important to understand how the choices you make impact the world!
- Educate others. Spread awareness on this concerning topic and get others involved in saving our coral reefs.

The sooner we can stop harming coral reefs, the sooner they can begin the long road to recovery. According to Coral Guardian, if this coral decline continues, we could lose up to 90% of all coral reefs around the world by 2050, causing problems in many aspects of both land and ocean life, and affecting you more than you may expect. Do not wait until it is too late. Act now.

World's Total Coral Reef Areas Affected by Heat Stress



As of April 10, 2025, more than 4/5ths of the world's coral reefs are subjected to bleaching or have already been bleached from the dramatic rises in temperatures. We are currently in the world's 4th global coral bleaching event. Information from NOAA Coral Reef Watch

Debating AI in School

Is AI Destroying Our Motivation to Learn?

Rita Anastasia
Reporter

Artificial intelligence is taking over the internet more and more in various forms, and is now starting to be adapted in classrooms as a tool. While some people rely on AI on a regular basis or are taking preventative measures against it, there is no denying its strong and growing presence all around us.

For Gen Z, we have been exposed to rapidly expanding technology our entire lives. It is now so intertwined with our academics and normalized to use, making it harder to tell what is authentic or artificial writing for every assignment or essay turned in.

When AI in schools first became popular around November 2022 via ChatGPT, it felt disastrous to classrooms and teachers' purpose in teaching, because students could now do any amount of work in a matter

of minutes, leaving uncertainty about how they could get students to want to learn anymore. There was a very noticeable decline in students' motivations to complete any assignment given to them.

Using AI was certainly helpful to use as a last resort for work you didn't feel like putting effort into. All these little instances of pushing classwork aside to AI are gradually catching up to us. If we thought we had low motivation in school before, it's much worse now.

Are high school students unable to think for themselves? The main reason people resort to AI is that it's easy to access and it's fast. And we don't have to spend time thinking about something when we could have AI thinking for us.

This has now taken a massive turn in just two years. AI is being embraced in some class environments as a resource. The way teachers are now approaching it is as an assistant for research, encouraging students to use it more mindfully.

It's good that we are trying to put this situation in

a better light, but realistically, students will still likely keep using it the same way they have been.

AI has taken over almost every platform with chatbots and assistants. There comes a point when it's just too much. Google is very capable of doing a lot of what students are trying to do, it just takes more time.

It may seem like an easy solution right now, but in the long term, AI is creating detrimental gaps in people's motivation, attention spans, and ability to think critically.

People are getting less excited about learning, and it's concerning what will happen when we all grow up, having used it for all of high school and on. As AI becomes more developed and intertwined in our society, we still have to remember to use our own brains.

AI can definitely be a useful tool, but there can be extreme extents to it that we should be conscious of. At the end of the day, it's up to us individually how much we really want to get out of the education we have right now.

Schools Should Incorporate AI to Prepare Students for Future

Kai DiDomenico
J1 Reporter

As we start to enter a world where artificial intelligence will be used for almost all basic tasks as well as complicated ones, schools need to start adapting to teach

students about this new reality. Starting to teach AI and putting it into research won't only be beneficial to the school, it will be essential for the academic success of students and for their future preparedness.

AI has begun to rapidly change from science fiction to becoming an actual reality. Being able to learn how AI works will help students to understand the overall technology that is capable of powering our many different aspects of modern life. By being able to study AI and learn how to use it, students will be able to gain valuable insights into how big decisions like this can affect society. This knowledge will allow us as people to be informed about what is currently going on in our world instead of just being passive technology consumers.

When being used for research purposes, AI can very quickly change the way we gather information. The number one way it would help students is by allowing them to be able to sift through lots of information very quickly instead of spending so much time

trying to find the information. AI can also allow you to find more reliable sources faster. Instead of having to try to figure out if the site is reliable you can just ask the AI. AI is kind of like a calculator... Calculators didn't make it so students don't have to learn other math concepts, it just simplified and saved time on concepts they already understood. Even with AI students will still be able to use it and develop critical thinking skills and core concepts.

There are many people who worry that AI will make students lazy and not want to do their work. Most think students will just use AI to write their work for them, and that could very well happen if the Artificial intelligence sites aren't regulated. While there are many AI sites that are not regulated, there are also many that are regulated. Schools just need to find and allow the correct ones.

For education to keep remaining relevant, schools need to go with the current flow of technology instead of trying to push against the current. Artificial Intelligence represents one of the biggest and most significant evolutions of modern day technology. By making AI a part of the school system and incorporating it into classes schools will be completing their number one purpose: Preparing students for the future and the world.

The future will be held by those who understand and work with AI, not those who ignore it. Our current education system will need to reflect on this.

Hellgate Spring Sports 2025

Softball



Track and Field



Baseball



Tennis



Good Knight Theater Company Performs 'Hadestown'

Elliotte Banziger
Editor

Hadestown is arguably one of the most talked about musicals on Broadway today, and it has

finally been allowed to grace the high school stage, an opportunity that Hellgate is taking full advantage of for our spring musical.

If you are familiar with the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, then you know the general story. If you don't: "They fell in love, she died, he went to the Underworld to bring her back, Hades made him a deal. The rest you'll have to find out for yourself by coming to the show," said Laramie Dean, the Hellgate theater director.

When asked why Hadestown was chosen to be the Hellgate musical this year, Dean talked about seeing it on the big stage and how a twist of fate allowed Hellgate to get the rights for this play. "My husband and I saw it on Broadway two years ago and we both just loved it. I thought at the time, 'Gee, I'm very excited for this to become available for high schools!' But typically shows running currently on Broadway need to close before high schools, colleges, and community theatres can purchase the rights to perform them. But Concord Theatricals, who owns the rights to productions of Hadestown, made this maverick decision to offer them to high schools only while the play is still running on Broadway. So I jumped on the opportunity!" said Dean.

The Tony and Grammy award winning show has it all. It has humor, tragedy, social commentary, and, of course, incredible vocals, which all make it a wonderful musical to put on. "I'm very enamored with the Fates, played by Rita Anastasia, Paige Laatsch, and Ellette Whitcomb. They can dance and they can harmonize," said Carlsen when asked what his favorite part of the musical was.

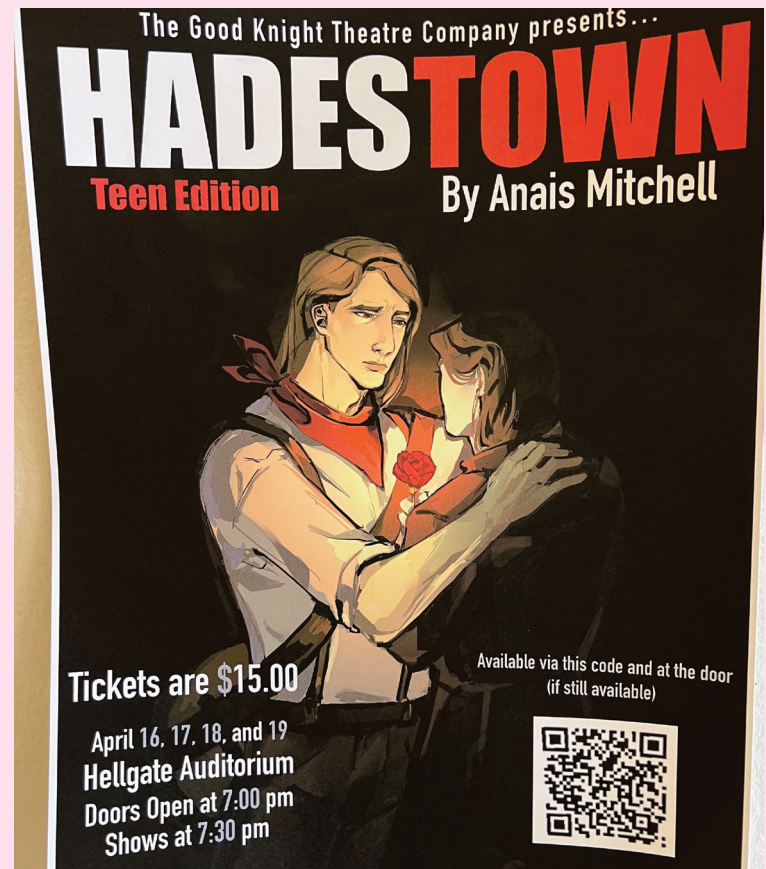
Kilian Kroenke played Orpheus, Eleni Spaliatsos played Persephone, Tessa Collard played Eurydice, Kanou Zunker played Hades, Olive Kreta plays Hermes, and as previously mentioned Anastasia, Laatsch, and Whitcomb were the Fates.

"Mrs. McKenzie (the choir teacher) and I held auditions the first week of January, then we cast and had our first readthrough of the play on Jan. 13. After that, it was all singing, dancing, and building!" said Dean. The Good Knight Theater Company has been working on this

production for almost the entire semester. The actors and crew spent hours upon hours after school to ensure that the production was up to par with their last couple productions, which have been phenomenal.

Given how much time and effort was put into this production, students were heavily encouraged to attend. The production took place Apr. 16-19 from 7-10 PM. When asked why students should attend, Dean said "Excellent singing, excellent dancing. You'll laugh, you'll cry, you'll tell your friends." And if that's not enough to convince you, I don't know what is!

The performance was truly incredible, it was clear how much time an effort was put into creating this stunning performance. The vocals were gorgeous, the band flawless, and the production was just all together amazing.



Hellgate's poster for Hadestown, designed by Kaya Schneider. Photo by Elliotte Banziger

Hadestown: A Spotlight on Stage Management

Emma Puiggari
Reporter

the hands of its stage managers. The stage manager's role is defined by precision, preparation, and problem-solving. For the school's bold production of Anais Mitchell's Tony Award-Winning musical the unsung heroes backstage turned controlled chaos into magic.

"Our job is really to do everything that needs to be done and be available at all times for any problems or surprises," said Amelia Calsbeek, a Hellgate junior who has managed six productions from Mean Girls to Dracula. "Stage management is necessary for the show's success because of all the organization and communication we bring." The stage managers connect the director's vision to every department while anticipating and solving problems before they reach the stage.

Behind the heavy curtains of Hellgate High School's auditorium, the heartbeat of Hadestown thrived in

Web, described the role as layered and "complicated to explain." Yet their goal is simple: "Make everything go as smoothly as possible and know all the actions and what's needed," said Calsbeek. For Hadestown, that meant coordinating a sprawling set, the largest in Hellgate's recent history.

When asked about the behind-the-scenes moments Calsbeek laughs, "It's like all the pictures, chaotic and unreal, with a lot of silent communication and tight shuffling in the blue darkness."

The production's scale tested even the seasoned crew members. "This is one of the biggest sets we've built, with the most backstage lighting and sound control," Calsbeek explained. "My job is simply to help a vision come to life" That challenging vision, reimagines the underworld as a Depression-era factory, blending steampunk aesthetics with haunting folk melodies.

Calsbeek, who began stage managing freshman year with Charlotte's

For Calsbeek, the play's power lies in its duality. "This play is so beautifully put together. Everyone involved had a great vision to build something that's both modern and historical somehow." Calsbeek credits the cast and crew's relentless work ethic: "It's one of the most beautiful Hellgate performances I've seen because of how hard everyone worked on the choreo, harmony, and acting."

The camaraderie shone through, even during grueling rehearsals. "My favorite part is the community [theatre] brings," Calbeek said. "I'd recommend stage management to people with a lot of patience, dedication and love for theatre."

When the curtain rises, Calsbeek's stress melts into pride. "It's really the best part of the journey. Seeing the product makes all the hard work worth it, especially with how the audience reacts," Calsbeek said.

As Hadestown's final notes fade, Hellgate's theatre program proves yet again that its students are forces of creativity and dedication, and for Calsbeek the lesson is clear, theatre isn't just about the spotlight. It's about the people who make sure the spotlight turns on. Even though audiences never see the stage managers work directly, the outcome on the stage is a direct result of their tedious work. As Hellgate's theater production continues to grow in ambition, one thing remains certain; behind every spectacular performance stands an even more spectacular team of stage managers, turning chaos into art.



Hellgate's Hadestown stage managers, Sophia Rosenthal, Amelia Calsbeek, Maxwell Finn, and Noah Rigo after the last rehearsal.

Photo by Emma Puiggari

Matcha Faces Increased Demand and Global Shortage

Kingston Kimpell
Reporter

After the spike in popularity, Japan is no longer able to keep up with the high demand for the low caffeine umami green tea called matcha. With its vibrant green color and rich flavor palate and it being the perfect alternative for highly caffeinated drinks, the desire is insatiable.

Matcha comes from the plant that all true real teas come from, the *Camellia sinensis*. According to Breakawaymatcha.com, the main teas produced from this plant are: oolong, black, green, white, and puerh. Matcha production and harvest is very unique compared to other green teas. The harvest is tricky because not all *Camellia sinensis* plants are the same. The variations within the plant can completely change the quality and flavor of the tea. Matcha is only harvested in the spring and the farms are quite small.

High quality matcha is a dark green rich color and is typically grown in the region of Uji, Japan. Uji is considered the “holy land” of green tea. The culprit behind this global matcha shortage is the surge in demands from social media influencers and tourists. Since Japan is the only source of real matcha, they are no longer able to keep up with the demand after the popularity spike.

There aren't any set in stone solutions for this matcha shortage that aren't to stop buying so much matcha or to have matcha production be quicker and more efficient. There likely will not be a recession in the surge until the trend on social media dies down and influencers move onto their next fun colored drink.

What does matcha production look like?

To start the harvesting process, the best matcha is harvested once a year and the tea leaves are always hand picked in the fields. The harvest season starts in March and leads into mid-April. When March and April come around, the highest quality matcha is grown in the dark. The leaves are then steamed to preserve the dark green color. After the matcha is steamed, it is then dried, destemmed and de-veined. The final part of processing is to grind the leaves into a fine powder using a stone mill. The stone mill is time consuming and requires attention to detail. For culinary grade matcha, ceramic ball mills are used, this process is quicker and allows for mass amounts to be produced but there's a catch, matcha made using this ceramic ball mill compromises quality and discards the full flavor.

What does premium matcha look like?

Premium or ceremonial grade matcha has a distinct appearance. The powder's color is a rich dark and vibrant green, whereas culinary grade matcha is a more light green with possibly some hues of yellow. Ceremonial grade matcha will froth up nicely when a bamboo

whisk is used, influencers call this froth “the micro foam”. Even when milk is added to create a latte, there is still a dark green and vibrant color present, it shouldn't look overpowered by the whiteness of the milk. When it comes to storing all kinds of matcha it is best to do so in a dark space, preferably in the fridge. Storing in the fridge will eliminate the chances of matcha becoming yellow and expired.

This global shortage of the beloved green drink has caused some to limit their intake and purchasing. It has caused others to just hope for the best and discard the fact that there even is a shortage. Though harvest time is currently going on, there is still no say in whether there will be enough matcha to make us through to next spring. Knowing trends, this one will likely die down in a month or three, so always keep hope. A great matcha alternative is hojicha, a roasted green tea powder, though the color isn't quite as appealing, the flavor is rich and nutty with a slightly smokey undertone.



Cartoon by Kingston Kimpell.

Starbucks Celebrates Spring with New Menu Items

June Wiltse
J1 Reporter

Spring has sprung! The temperatures are beginning to rise, and summer is drawing near. Starbucks is celebrating by releasing their limited edition spring menu. The menu includes three new drink / cold foam combinations and a new lunch item.

The most intriguing drink on the menu is an Iced Cherry Chai, based on creativity, cold foam, and the overall taste of the drink.

This drink is a very appealing one to rate because of its flavor combination. When you hear that popular establishment is mixing fruity flavors with chai, its easy to assume that the profiles don't mix. However this drink defies those thoughts. Starbucks could've gone with basic, safer, and more appealing flavors, but they chose to put themselves out there and trust their creative team. The creative team knew what they were doing when they were conceptualizing this year's spring drinks.

The cold foam is the bold part of this drink; it is very easy to mess up a cherry flavor, especially when mixed with a comforting drink, like chai. Artificial cherry often tastes like medicine. Starbucks made the smart choice of using a black cherry syrup instead of the artificial cherry used in most candy. The cold foam is strong in cherry fla-

vor, which makes the drink more exiting; it also makes it very sweet. The sweetness is overpowering when just eating the cold foam plain, but I couldn't recycle the cup until licking up every bit off the top.

The overall flavor of drink is shocking, the classic chai flavor remains, but the cherry enhanced it and made it a whole new drink. I was worried that the drink wouldn't be that different, that the chai would overpower the cherry and the "special" drink would be the same as the classic. I was completely wrong. You can clearly taste the cherry in the chai and it brings it to a whole new level.

I wouldn't say that the drink is very "springy". In my opinion chai is a winter favorite; the sweet and spiced profile with cinnamon and nutmeg makes you want to cuddle in a blanket and watch the snow fall, not spending time in the sun preparing for summer. Starbucks wanted the cherry flavor to make it more suitable for spring, but it was a difficult task that they didn't manage to succeed at. The Iced Cherry Chai is a four out of five. I would recommend trying it to see how you like the flavors, but the opinions on it could vary based on taste buds and preferences.



A tall Iced Cherry Chai with cherry cold Foam is the most intriguing new spring drink at Starbucks. Photo by June Wiltse.

The Pitt Impresses with Realistic View of ER

Maeve Faherty
J1 Reporter

The Pitt is a brand new show that just finished airing on Max and is by far one of the best ones I've seen all year. The moment I started watching The Pitt in my living room I knew I wanted to write this review.

Ofentimes medical dramas are critiqued for having too much drama and not enough medical for most actual healthcare workers' taste, in turn setting up a jaded view on what hospital worklife is actually like. The Pitt did not do this at all, having a total of seven residency trained, and board-certified emergency physicians involved in the making of the show.

With an impressive cast, including Noah Wyle, Katherine LaNasa, Fiona Douriff, and many many more talented

actors, the acting was truly beautiful. Every single character from lead role to background was extremely well built up and flushed out, every character was important and every actor put their absolute best work in.

Although the cast and performances were spectacular and the actual emergency physicians helping out was extremely cool. What stuck out to me the most was the show's structure. Each episode is an hour long and one hour of the workers' shift. I think this was an extremely creative approach to take and really sets the show out from many others. It was so fascinating to realistically see just how much goes on in an ER each day.

All in all I think The Pitt was an absolutely spectacular show and I would strongly recommended it to anyone who is a fan of medical dramas, unique shows, or who is just looking for a good next watch on their couch!



Hellgate Band and Orchestra Face Continued Concerns After Arts Education Director Cut

Noah Morss
J1 Reporter

The band and orchestra programs in Missoula high schools have been running into problems and concerns this year after the arts education director was let go due to district budget cuts.

Last February, it was proposed that multiple positions be cut due to financial issues, including the Arts Education Director, a position that was held by Dr. Monte Gris .

Gris  was very influential to the programs around the district, helping with setting up festivals, funding, and other events. Without this support, the Hellgate band and orchestra have been running into problems, and concerns have been raised.

Big Sky High School's choir teacher of 30 years has been cut to part time and Lowell Elementary's general music program was without a teacher, which brought concerns for Hellgate's band director Jesse Dochnahl.

Despite concerns, Dochnahl's third year at Hellgate is ending, and he is happy with how the program has been looking this year. Dochnahl believes that as long as the program's numbers stay relatively similar to how they are now, the band should be good.

However, future budget cuts are possible. Dochnahl and orchestra teacher Ryan Davis both shared concerns with this, saying more band and orchestra cuts will truly impact the future high school generations.

These cuts at lower grades aren't just a concern for the directors, but also current students in the program. For example, clarinet player Kate Banville, is uncharacteristically the only freshman in Hellgate's top wind ensemble. While this was due to COVID-19 halting her 5th grade band, it shows us the impact 5th grade band can have.

Banville has expressed her concern for her younger sister, a 7th grade trombone player, saying how her sister already feels that they don't sound good and aren't going to get any better.

General music in elementary schools is another possible cut that could be seen in the future, Dochnahl pointed out. Dochnahl explained the importance of general music in elementary school, saying that it is more likely for a student to be inspired to pick up an instrument at a young age. Banville, who didn't have 5th grade band due to the COVID-19 pandemic, backed this up, saying how general music really helped influence her to start clarinet in 6th grade.

Filling in for the lost positions is the new director of ac-

ademic and community services- a position that has been taken up by former Washington Middle School principal Kacie Laslovich. Dochnahl has praised her work so far, saying she has "been doing an extraordinary job", and mentioning how she "doesn't pretend like she knows everything about the arts".

This new position covers more than just the arts though, leaving a lot of work- such as funding and setting up festivals, still up to the directors. Dochnahl, along with the Sentinel High School and Big Sky High School band directors Lewis Nelson and Willi Prince were given the task to bring in judges and guest directors for the AA band festival and district music festival back in March.

Funding is very low as well, with most of the little money already going into the All-State band, orchestra, and choir festival in Billings. Due to this, other events such as the All-Northwest festival in Spokane, that a handful of Hellgate students had participated in, had to be paid mostly from students' pockets. Dochnahl, Davis and Banville all pointed out the problem with that, saying that students with less money should not be held back because of their economic status.

Teachers were told to "not change the way they teach", which Dochnahl expressed confusion with. "That's like if someone took away your shoelaces and told you to run a marathon the same way".

Students have also expressed confusion about these losses, with many students dubbing it "unfair." In February 2024, shortly after learning about the cuts, a small protest took place outside of an MCPS board meeting which was addressing the situation. Students also showed confusion with the addition of the baseball teams.

The addition of the baseball team in MCPS schools was not initially related to the cutting of any of the directors; however, continued funding issues for sports and activities is an ongoing budgeting issue.

The Hellgate band and orchestra are both award winning programs, with many believing they are the best in the state. Other schools in the state have smaller groups, and are not quite to the Hellgate level. This shows in All-State band, orchestra, and jazz rosters, with a large number of the groups being MCPS, specifically Hellgate students. In the band's recent New

Orleans tour, they were awarded multiple awards, including "best jazz band", "best symphonic band", two outstanding musician awards, along with other awards.

Dochnahl explained his time in Ennis, where he grew up, saying how he wished he could play at Hellgate's level. Dochnahl, quoting MSU Billings jazz director Scott Jepperson, said, "Your worst day in Wind Ensemble would be the best day for other kids in the state".

The University of Montana may see some struggles in the music program as well, with Dochnahl exclaiming that going into music may not look super appealing to young students, who may have originally planned on going into music, which could lead to a possible decline at the School of Music. Banville also said that she feels it may get to a point where educators at the university will spend more time trying to recruit students than actually teach.

While the year has been going pretty smoothly, concerns are still raised for the future of band and orchestra in Missoula schools. Many are still optimistic about the future though, with Dochnahl believing that we can prove that the arts are important and successful in Missoula, and that if the band can keep their numbers up, it can still thrive the way it does. Banville has expressed optimism as well, believing that with the amazing middle school directors and educators, the bands can still stay strong far into the future.



Orchestra, taught by Ryan Davis, is one of the music programs concerned about district cuts.

Photo by Noah Morss.

Hellgate Girls Tennis look for a 3-Peat

Wesley Banziger
J1 Reporter

As spring sports are starting, the Hellgate girls tennis team is preparing for the state tournament as they go for their third consecutive state title.

There are two captains this year: Elliott Banziger, a junior, and Shae Tolleson Knee who is a senior. Banziger plays number 1 singles for the Knights, and she is also the defending state champion for girls AA high schools.

Banziger won the state title her freshman year when she defeated Qayl Kujala 6-0, 6-1. She won again her sophomore year when she beat Kujala again with a similar score to the previous year, 6-1, 6-1.

Not only did Hellgate win the singles titles in '23 and '24, they also won the doubles titles. Brooke Best and Laine Banziger teamed up to win 6-3, 6-0 in their junior year in their final match and then 6-1, 7-5 their senior year. Their graduation means that the number one doubles spot is up for grabs this season.

Senior Kendall Adler, who has been playing on varsity for four years, is hoping to team up with freshman Wesley Banziger to try and defend Hellgate's AA doubles title in 2025. So far in the 2025 season the duo has not lost more than three games in any one set. Adler has a natural propensity for tennis, she didn't start playing till her freshman year and by the time she was a junior, she placed fifth at state in singles. Adler said she plans to prepare for the state tournament this year by "working hard and practicing everyday so that I can focus on improving my doubles skills."

Captain Shae Tolleson-Knee alternates between singles and doubles this year. She plays at the number 2 spot in singles when Adler and the

younger Banziger are playing doubles. However, sometimes coach Brian Hanford has Adler and Banziger play singles, and then Tolleson-Knee teams up with Moana Massey, who is also a senior, and fills the number 1 doubles spot.

Massey has been playing doubles for Hellgate all four years of her high school tennis career, while Tolleson-Knee has alternated between singles and doubles.

Being in the top four at divisionals has eluded Tolleson-Knee thus far, so her personal goal is to be in that top group of players who will travel to the state tournament in 2025. This year at Divisionals Tolleson-Knee hopes she can play aggressively and take some risks while at the same time playing smart and knowing when she should back off.

The Hellgate girls tennis team is a close knit group of girls. All of the players are practicing hard and getting ready for divisionals which will be on May 15 and 16. The team will compete to achieve both their own individual goals as well as the team goal of winning another state title. "I would like to win again ... I just want to play good tennis," said Elliott Banziger.

To make it to state players have to place in the top four out of players for four schools, which means you have to be in the top four of 16 singles players on and the top four teams of 16 teams in doubles. Because all of the players have high hopes for this year and are excited to be playing together, they plan to continue to practice and play hard for the rest of the season so that they can achieve their goals.

The AA State tournament will be held in Bozeman on May 22nd and 23rd. If you want to watch some good tennis come over and help cheer on our Knights.



Elliott Banziger (above) and Shae Tolleson-Knee (below) captain the Hellgate girls tennis team.
Photos by Wesley Banziger.

Hellgate Teachers' Favorite Music!

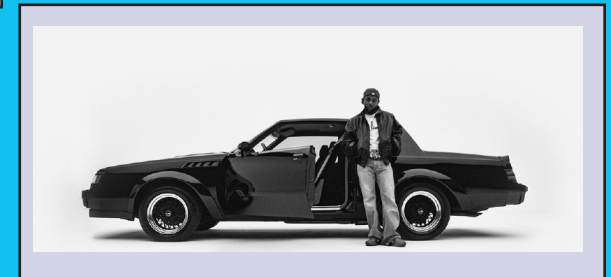
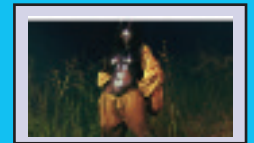
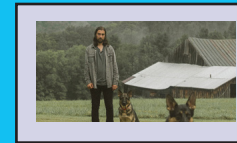
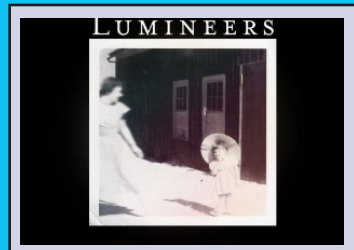
Eleanor Billingsley
Reporter

The love of music is a common theme among high school students at Hellgate, but what about teachers? Some teachers like Willow Affleck and Jeff Wanita will play music in their class during work time, while others simply prefer the quiet of their classrooms. But what do teachers listen to in their down time?

Here are five teachers at Hellgate and some of their favorite music to listen to outside of school.

"I'm definitely in the mom folk era of my music listening, so like Noah Kahn, Zach Brian, Lumineers, Mumford and Sons... I've gone to Shakey and Graves, and I'm going to see Alabama Shakes this summer and am super excited."

- Anna Bacon, English Teacher



"I'm Listening to a lot of Kendrick Lamar right now, and SZA, I think they're both pretty amazing... I've gone to see Kendrick a few times, and am actually going to his and SZA's concert."

- Britt Hanford, Asst. Principal



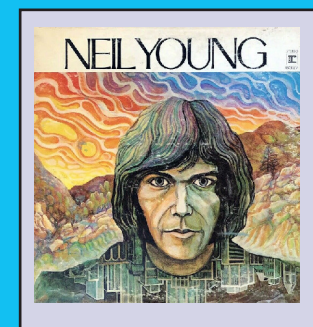
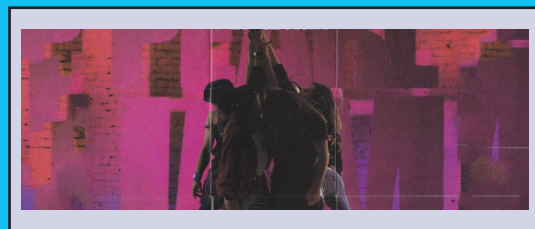
"I listen to a wide range of music. I listen to the Grateful Dead channel. I also listen to Outlaw Country... I think the live music I tend to listen to is jam band... I've seen Billy Strings a couple times, I also go to a bunch of KettleHouse shows... I feel pretty lucky to have seen David Bowie... I've gotten to see the Grateful Dead maybe eight, nine times."

- Johnny Ledyard



"I listen to a bit of everything. I listen to music when I'm cleaning, hiking, on the way to school, on the way home... My first concert ever was going to see the Rolling Stones in 7th grade with my dad, it was a great bonding moment."

- Jessica Hurd, Math Teacher



"I listen to a big variety. If I were to pick it would be a combo of '90s alternative, Dave Matthews, Jackson Brown, Neil Young. I really love music... My wife and I went to Jewel, which was a pretty amazing experience."

- Jeff Dohn, Math Teacher