



# The Hellgate Lance

## Hellgate Senior Sues Trump: Judge ‘Reluctantly’ Dismisses

**Will Hansen**  
Editor

**As one of 22 youth plaintiffs, Isaiah Hudson is taking legal action against the government in *Lighthiser v. Trump* for executive orders that harm the climate.**

In the summer of 2022, now-17-year-old Isaiah Hudson delivered a powerful speech at a climate change awareness rally in Helena, Montana. The speech served as his introduction to the local climate activism community, but since then, his career has been relatively uneventful.

“I’ve been feeling guilty since the Helena rally that I hadn’t been taking some of the opportunities that I could have been,” Hudson, a Hellgate senior, said. That was until he received an email from Our Children’s Trust, a public interest nonprofit law firm based in Oregon. The firm was putting together a “historic” case, *Lighthiser v. Trump*, and was interested in his and his brother’s participation as plaintiffs.

“I was pretty sure when I read the email that I was going to do it,” Hudson said. “There was no doubt in my mind. I was almost obligated to take the opportunity for myself and my friends and family, and really my entire community.”

His parents were less certain. Hudson said that while they were extremely proud and excited about the opportunity for their son, they were still apprehensive and even scared, given “all the things happening in our government right

now.” However, after much consideration, he and his brother Jasper, 12, accepted positions in *Lighthiser v. Trump*.

Hudson is one of 22 plaintiffs between the ages of eight and 25 suing President Donald Trump and his administration, along with several other governmental defendants, based on three executive orders which the case argues violate citizens’ constitutional rights to a healthy climate.

These orders include “Executive

Order 14154: Unleashing American Energy,” which eliminates previous climate-focused energy programs and shifts the countries focus to coal and fossil fuels; “Executive Order 14156: Declaring a National Energy Emergency,” which utilizes emergency powers to expedite crude oil, gas and coal production; and “Executive Order 14261: Reinvigorating America’s Beautiful Clean Coal Industry,” which designates coal as a “mineral” giving it priority for extraction and development on public lands. The minds behind the case, including Hudson, view these orders as unconstitutional.

Additionally, according to the Our Children’s Trust website, the Trump administration has “systematically removed critical climate science information from federal websites, including those of the EPA, NOAA, and FEMA, erasing or obscuring data on climate risks, environmental justice, and public health impacts,” which the case describes as censorship.

“We’re suing based on the fact that these three executive orders do not

(Continued on page 2.)



Isaiah Hudson, a Hellgate senior with a strong connection to nature and a conviction towards activism, is suing the United States Government. Photo by Will Hansen.



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uphold our constitutional rights to life and liberty,” Hudson said. He said he truly feels strongly about this case – a reason for this is the role nature played in his childhood.

“I’ve been going outside and engaging in nature since I was really little,” Hudson said.

“My parents are both really into nature, and they’ve been taking me outside for as long as I can remember. I fell in love with the outdoors, specifically the climate of Montana.”

Hudson said his parents were also partially responsible for his journey into activism. He said his dad has been involved with a Missoula climate nonprofit, Families for a Liveable Climate.

“He’s always given me opportunities, but I’ve never felt any kind of pressure from them,” Hudson said. These opportunities are what put him on the radar of Our Children’s Trust.

“So far [the case] has been overwhelmingly positive,” Hudson said. “The thing I’ve appreciated most is that obviously they’re a team of extremely talented legal professionals, but they’re doing this case for us.”

Our Children’s Trust is structuring *Lighthiser v. Trump* as intentionally youth-led, which Hudson said is what makes it so special. The plaintiffs are all children and young adults from Montana, Oregon, Hawaii, California and Florida.

“There hasn’t been a case where the kids, the people who are going to have to live with this future and these experiences, are at the center,” he said. “I think that’s super powerful and pretty unprecedented.”

While the case is certainly un-

precedented on a national scale, Montana saw a similar suit in 2023 in *Held v. Montana*, where a group of youth plaintiffs sued the state for policies harming the environment. *Held* argued that the policies violated the Montana State Constitution, which a judge agreed with, whereas *Lighthiser* is using the United States Constitution in their suit. Hudson said that *Held* sets a valuable precedent for the current case.

The first hearing of *Lighthiser v. Trump* took place in Missoula on Sept. 16 and 17. Hudson, the last of five plaintiffs to testify during this first stage of the case, shared the stand with environmental economics experts, public health specialists, and big names in renewable energy. According to a press release, he discussed the growing prevalence of wildfires during Montana summers and told the court about having to evacuate his home due to severe smoke.

“I said this in my testimony, but a 17-year-old shouldn’t be having to be a part of this case, and miss lots of parts of his life because of it,” Hudson said. “But again, I do feel obligated.”

“[Hudson] is very calm and collected, and so his testimony at the hearing was very powerful,” said Grace Gibson-Snyder, 21, another plaintiff in the case and a Hellgate alum.

In her closing statements, lead attorney for the case Julia Olson compared *Lighthiser v. Trump* to the famous civil rights lawsuit *Brown v. Board of Education*. According to a press release, Olson told the court they had an opportunity to do something unprecedented, even despite the “broad implications” of a verdict in favor

of the plaintiffs, by weighing the Trump administration’s policies against the Constitution.

Hudson said two contending motions were addressed in the Sept. 16 and 17 hearings: a motion to dismiss by the defense and intervenors (which include the state of Montana, 18 other states and Guam), and a preliminary injunction by the plaintiffs. The preliminary injunction, if granted, would have halted the effects of Trump’s executive orders at a date specified by the judge.

On Oct. 15, almost a month after the case’s initial testimony, judge Dana Christensen dismissed *Lighthiser v. Trump*. Christensen justified his decision with the claim that the case lacked redressability, meaning that while the harm done to the plaintiffs can be traced to the executive orders and their damage to the climate, the court does not have the power to appease this harm.

According to a press release, Our Children’s Trust announced their decision to appeal Christensen’s ruling the same day it was released.

“We will appeal, because courts cannot offer more protection to fossil fuel companies seeking to preserve their profits than to young Americans seeking to preserve their rights,” Olson said in a press release.

This appeal will go to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, the judicial body in charge of hearing appeals from Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon and Washington, as well as Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands.

“Judge Christensen said he reached his decision reluctantly

and invited the Ninth Circuit [Court] to correct him so these young Americans can have their case heard,” Olson said in a press release. “The Ninth Circuit should do just that.”

Hudson noted that the fact that Christensen encouraged an appeal is rare. He said he was saddened by the decision, but still feels positive about the case.

“I have no idea where it’s all going to go from here, but it’s definitely still alive,” Hudson said.

Hudson said so far, the case has been an exciting opportunity, but crazy nonetheless.

“It’s super cool to see how the process works, but it’s also wild to be a part of it as a 17-year-old,” he said. “Everything I say is on record, I’m going under oath, and it’s a lot of things that are very exciting.”

Hudson said one of the things that puts weight behind the case is its bipartisan make-up. He said he is fairly politically moderate, and so is the case. A lawsuit addressing climate-related issues with a right-wing administration as its defendant might at first glance be perceived as liberal, left-leaning and democratic, but *Lighthiser v. Trump* is unaffected in its argument by political parties.

“Montana is a red state, and Missoula is a pretty liberal town, but we’re not fighting based on any political opinion. We’re fighting to protect the outdoors,” said Hudson. “This isn’t intended to be a political case. I couldn’t care less who we’re suing against. It’s just the facts of these executive orders and the damages that they objectively will cause that we’re worried about. We’re just doing our best to fight for that.”

# Hellgate Career Fair Highlights Post-Graduate Opportunities

Quinn Stromberg  
Editor

There is a common misconception among high school students that attending a four-year college is the only responsible path for them to take after high school, but that is far from accurate. Students may not have the ability to attend a four-college for a large variety of reasons, whether these be financial, medical, or otherwise. In other cases, students may not be interested in or require a degree, at least right away, to obtain the job or post-high school position they wish to pursue.

In most cases, students simply don't know what these alternatives are. "I worry that students are under the impression that if they don't have the aspirations or the ability to obtain a four-year college degree right away, that they are doomed to work a terrible job and it's simply not true," said Britt Hanford, one of Hellgate's assistant principals, who was at the front of creating the Hellgate Career Fair. This is the first year the fair has been at Hellgate, and was inspired by Chip Reinhart's Women in Construction event from last year, as well as the presence of college fairs at both Sentinel and Big Sky this year.

"I think [the career fair] is a really good idea because of how expensive college is; it's really opening up more opportunities for students who can't afford college or aren't sure what their direction in life is," said senior Lucia Johnson.

The fair consisted of around 25 tables and had a wide variety of job types and options available. There were construction companies such as Martel Construction and Dick Anderson Construction; contractor groups such as the Jackson Contractor Group and the Rocky Mountain Contractors; first responder jobs

such as the Missoula Fire Department and the Missoula Police Department; a beauty school option; and much more.

"We wanted to shine a light on the many alternatives," said Hanford. "Exposure to the options right here in Missoula hopefully offers some hope and excitement about what comes after high school."

There has been an increasing shift away from four-year colleges in recent years, as more and more high school graduates are choosing to attend trade schools, vocational schools or shorter-term programs. This is

due to the continually rising tuition costs and resulting student debt that comes out of four-year colleges; these alternatives often offer a better financial security and a more direct route to a well-paying job.

There is also a rising concern around the value of college degrees as AI becomes more prominent in society, as well as an increased emphasis on experience and skills over degrees. It is becoming more culturally acceptable to go straight into the workforce or to trade school directly after high school, contributing to the decreasing enrollment in postsecondary education.

According to CollegeBoard, between 2019 (pre-COVID-19) and 2022, postsecondary education declined 5%, from 19.5 million to 18.5 million; total undergraduate enrollment declined by 7%.

Regardless of statistics, it is important that high school students understand the full scope of their options post-graduation, which is why the Hellgate Career Fair is so vital in an environment that tends to prioritize and assume a four-year college as the end-goal for all students, which isn't always the case.

"We are thrilled about this year's fair and how well it seemed to go, and we plan to organize another one next year," Hanford said.



The Hellgate Career Fair 2025 was held in the Hellgate Lower Gym on Oct. 8.  
Photo by Quinn Stromberg.

## Bridge Pizza Renovates Restaurant on Higgins

Ellie Lopuch  
Reporter

Missoula's local Bridge Pizza restaurant on Higgins Ave went under renovation this last summer. Bridge Pizza has been a family-owned restaurant since 1995, with the Higgins building being their first ever location.

Annie Hickok, The Front of House Supervisor who has worked at Bridge for three years now, said that the main reason for the renovation was simply because the building "needed new bones" and it had been "many years without a remodel." They closed in March of 2025 and reopened in September of 2025.

The majority of the renovation was in the kitchen. According to Hickok, the renovation brought a new and improved pizza oven for "more efficient" pizza production, as well as a new till for pickup orders. The new till is specifically for customers who have already submitted their order, whether online or by call, so they can skip the ordering line and pay quicker. This has helped the lines move faster and helps avoid congestion by the doors.

This renovation inspired changes to the menu as well. Bridge brought back their popular Whitaker pizza with pesto cream, garlic confit, cauliflower, and goat cheese. They also added a fried cauliflower appetizer. They removed all pastas and sandwiches from this location's menu, but the Brooks St. Bridge Pizza location still has both available on their menu.

Hickok said business has been just as busy as before the renovation. From their delivery system to the newly improved drive through



Bridge Pizza's newly renovated building on Higgins Ave.  
Photo by Ellie Lopuch.

to easy carryout to dine-in, Bridge has many ordering options for their customers, making it a hotspot during all hours of the day.

Even with all of these options for ordering, dine-in still seems to be their most popular ordering system. "43% of sales were dine-in" on Friday, Oct. 17, according to Hickok, and most nights there is "a lot of foot traffic" with this location being directly on the Hip Strip of Missoula.

Many customers are enjoying Bridge's new look as well. "I really like the new entry," said Andi Price, a Bridge Pizza regular. "The vestibule area makes it nice" with a "space to wait if it's very busy inside." Price also enjoys the "new counter area for ordering and

paying," the drink station that's in a "better location" and the nice look of the building from the outside.

Another Bridge customer, Bella St. John, said she really likes "the new drive through" as it is "very efficient." She also loves how they have "kept the building's original atmosphere" but added "a modernized look to it."

This renovation has really brought the long-awaited update to Bridge while still keeping the original building's charm. Bridge Pizza is glad they could get this renovation done and are happy with how it has turned out. Many customers are very happy with the changes as well and are enjoying the enhanced efficiency.

## Two Years Since October 7: Antisemitism On The Rise

Anais Currie Inglizian  
Reporter

October 7 marked two years since Hamas' horrific attack on Israel, which is the largest massacre of Jews since the Holocaust. The Hamas terrorists sexually assaulted young girls and women. 1200 people were killed, and 254 hostages were taken back to Gaza. This event was the catalyst that led to horrendous years of war.

Hamas, which controls the Gaza strip, is recognized as a terrorist organization by many countries. They use tunnels under Gaza to hide weapons and protect themselves while using civilian shields. Many innocent Palestinians have suffered immensely because of this war through casualties, displacement, and destruction of their cities.

Now, two years later, Hamas and Israel have signed a ceasefire deal that stated the rest of the hostages will be released and Israel will pull their military from the Gaza

Strip. Both sides of the conflict celebrated this moment of peace, but uncertainty remains. What will the future look like and how will peace be maintained?

As soon as the ceasefire came into effect, a video of Hamas officials publicly executing several civilians began to circulate. It is concerning that most pro-Palestine supporters have stayed silent about this, when they were very outspoken during Israel's military actions. If their goal is to advocate for human rights, they should not be selective in who they condemn.

Throughout the war, the United States and President Trump have been active supporters of Israel. It is important for anyone, no matter their political view, to support this peace. Even though the majority of Trump's ideals do not line up with mine, I can celebrate this victory and acknowledge Trump's part in it.

Throughout the past two years, Israel has faced a lot of backlash for its actions and by proxy Israelis and Jews. This has led to a disturbing amount antisemitic acts in

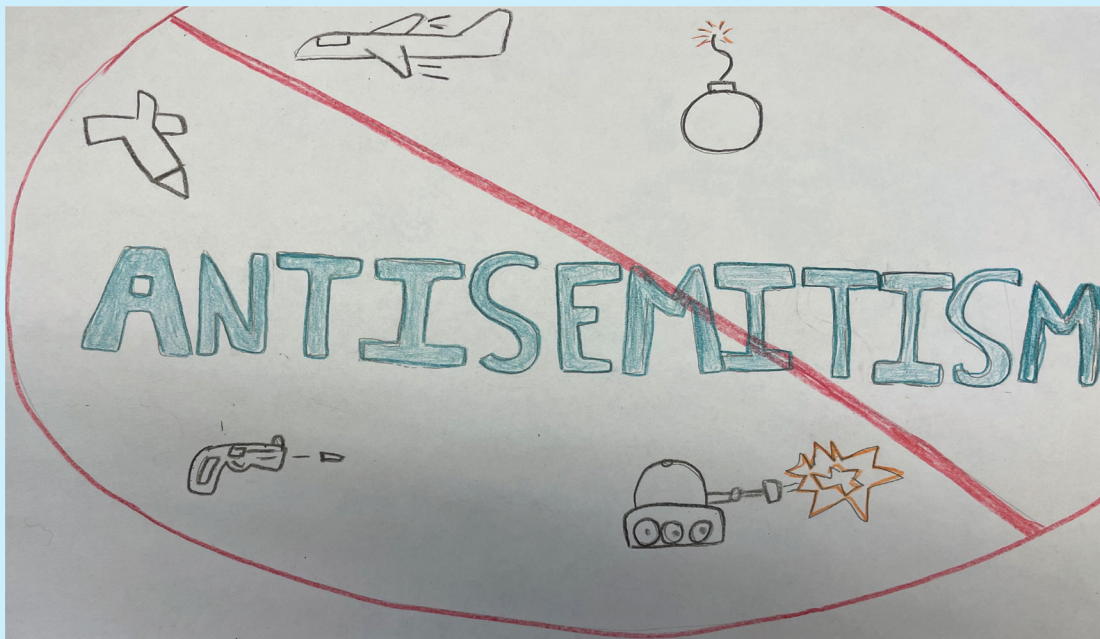
the United States and all over the world.

One of the most concerning places that has had a surge of antisemitism is colleges. Many students hold Free Palestine rallies, but unfortunately some of them have become violent or hateful towards Jewish people. It is unacceptable that the line between peaceful protest and violence has been crossed.

According to the American Jewish Committee, 63% of Jewish students feel like their campuses promote antisemitism and 43% of Jewish students feel like they cannot express views on Israel. This is troubling because college should be a place where everyone is included and feels their voices are heard. College is the time students discover themselves, but the rapid rise of antisemitism is prohibiting Jewish students from feeling safe and growing. In a time of rapidly advancing technology, social media has also become hateful towards Jewish and Israeli people.

Throughout social media, the idea is spread that Zionism is inherently bad and is often used as a slur or bad word. Many people don't know the textbook definition of Zionism. It is simply defined as the political movement that started during the 19th century. The idea is that Jewish people want a homeland and a nation that is safe for them to express their religious beliefs freely. It is true many movements can have groups within them that go too far, and is the same with Zionism. But people should not be afraid to call themselves Zionists because the majority believe it is inherently bad. The spread of misinformation on the movement has caused a lot of hate online towards people who use the term to show their support.

While there isn't peace in the Middle East and probably won't be for a while, I believe that there should be more celebration of the success they have reached now. Understanding that conflicts are multi-faced is important to help not make overarching assumptions about groups and their beliefs. It is important for people to remember to understand the true depth of extensive topics, such as war, and to call out hate. We should all respond to heavy topics with open-mind because in the end, we are all human with our own opinions and feelings.



Antisemitism has surged since Hamas' attack on Israel on Oct 7, 2023. Graphic by Anais Currie Inglizian

# Music Criticism Has Become Character Criticism

Zach Baldwin  
Reporter

In today's online culture, the authentic enjoyment of art has taken a backseat to views, likes, and viral sounds. This shift is clear in the Billboard music charts full of songs frequently used as TikTok sounds, as well as in conversations around pop music.

Many big moments in pop music and culture have been shaped by critics. But, it seems that in the digital age, music criticism is being replaced with tired, repetitive conversations. It feels less like insightful thought and more and more like character criticism.

One of the biggest conversations in music this year surrounded Sabrina Carpenter's record *Man's Best Friend*, released this past August. However, critics didn't focus on the writing, performance, or production of the album, they commented on the controversy of the cover.

The album cover displayed Carpenter kneeling on the ground in a submissive position. For months before the album was released, people online jumped to conclusions about the anti-feminist nature of the cover. The *New York Times* review of the album was titled, "Will the Real Sabrina Carpenter Please Stand Up?" hinting at the online discourse of her position on the cover, rather than on the album as a body of work.

In the article, writer Jon Caramanica claims that Carpenter's "character is still in development — what felt like hard-earned idiosyncrasy on her last album feels calculatedly careless here." What seems like an offhand observation is something that, in the broader context of recent music criticism, is very worrying. Before commenting on the work, Caramanica observes Carpenter through how she comes across as a person, not the impact of her work.

Much of this is due to social media and streaming platforms. When everyone has a voice online, no single voice is as important. The music critic used to be a deciding factor in the success of an album, and for an artist, getting a positive review from an established organization was a high priority.

It's difficult to fault artists for their annoyance at this change in their industry. It might seem a step too far for singer-songwriter Halsey to tweet

that she wished Pitchfork, a premier publication for music criticism, would collapse. However, their criticisms about her would be enough to get a response from anyone. Pitchfork is one of the most influential publications in music criticism, but that doesn't save them from this collective turn to personality criticism.

In a review of Halsey's 2024 album *The Great Impersonator*, Pitchfork writer Shaad D'Souza said, "she writes about pain, adopting a martyr's pose, but because that martyrdom is self-ascribed, it also feels profoundly unrelatable." It's certainly harsh, but what makes it disgusting is that much of the pain Halsey writes about on this album is her chronic illness and various medical treatments she's gone through.

No reviewer is held to a certain standard of appreciation towards an album, however, they certainly need to be held to a standard of human decency. While there is a discussion to be had on the album's discussions of chronic illness, claiming that Halsey essentially has a victim complex does not critique her work. It critiques her as a human being.

Another issue reviews have recently developed is avoiding criticism and just complimenting. Some of the biggest pop artists, notably Taylor Swift, have experienced this. Despite mass public criticism of her recent albums, *Rolling Stone* has continued praising her.

In a five star review of Swift's recent album, *The Life Of A Showgirl*, *Rolling Stone* writer Maya Georgi claims it is Swift's artistic peak. This opinion seemingly exists in a vacuum. With a clear loss of editing and focus on storytelling, Swift's words are hollow than ever.

For *Rolling Stone*, this positivity towards Swift is nothing new. Writer Rob Sheffield has written many pieces for the publication about Swift, and he constantly avoids critique, even writing an extremely positive book about Swift's career in 2024. While many people and publications are busy talking about what Swift needs to improve, *Rolling Stone* continues to be out of touch with current pop culture, taking every chance to say a positive word about Swift.

Taylor Swift is widely recognized as one of the world's most beloved songwriters. When she has millions of fans ready to attack a bad critique, reviewers are forced to stay positive. After all, Swift is a successful and loved character of pop culture,

how could her music not be perfect?

Whether through forced positivity to appeal to a fanbase like Swift's, or an attack on someone's view of themselves as a victim, like Halsey, music criticism is no longer about music. When reading reviews of pop music in 2025, it feels more like reading the *Burn Book* from *Mean Girls*, full of quick, snappy remarks, not helpful and insightful thought about the work.

By victimizing true experiences and only studying the controversies and highlights of a project, we lose what makes these albums worth talking about: the music. Music criticism has become social media talking points, two minute TikTok videos, and viral clips of artists taken out of context.

When something as universally loved as music is boiled down to an online debate and character criticism, it makes us wonder if we can truly regain the cultural appreciation for art we used to have.



*Man's Best Friend* and *The Great Impersonator* were subjects of recent conversations in music criticism.

# Hellgate's Financial Decisions Reflect Skewed Priorities

Jules Giarraputo  
Reporter

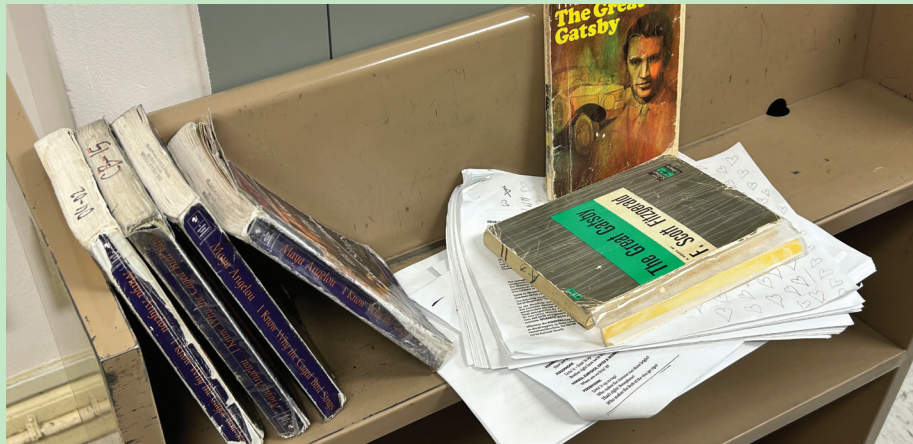
The new school year has begun and the freshman class president and vice president have recently been elected. Students at Hellgate must consider the impacts of decisions made by both the student government and the adults in charge at our school. A key concept within the education system, not only here, but all over the world, is finances. A school cannot function without proper funding. We, as a public school, are using our citizens' tax dollars and thus we must be pensive and communicate thoroughly about where our funding would be most valuably spent.

The 2026 homecoming dance organized by Hellgate parents and hosted at the UC Ballroom was a success all around. Many people showed up and the student government earned a large sum of money. In the past, the student government has used this money on frivolous things such as banners and confetti for assemblies and sporting events. This only leaves a mess to clean up, and if the sporting event is outdoors, it pollutes the environment. With this new sum of money I believe we as students should get a vote on how to spend it. Hellgate High School is much too small to be considered a democracy, so why do we put our funds in the hands of students who have little credibility and are elected largely based on popularity? For larger decisions, especially those surrounding finances, I believe it would be best if we had the entire student body vote independent from the student government.

On a larger scale, our school as a whole lacks proper funding. We are a public school relying on state/federal subsidies and private donations. As of late, the school has financed a project to renovate the girls locker room, formed a flag football team, and spent money on new buses. This all seems well and good, but we must consider where this money is coming from. Last year, the fine arts director position for MCPS was eliminated and

funding to the arts such as orchestra, band, choir, and theater were cut despite protest from the general public. This has forced music and art teachers to work overtime. Many of these educators have over the legal limit of kids in their classes and are involved with programs outside of MCPS. This proves how credible and valued our arts programs and teachers are.

Transport for sporting events is provided by the school, but when students in the music program need transport for their well-earned participation in the All-State band, orchestra, and choir festival there are "too few kids" to rent a bus, despite the fact the MCPS often has more musicians participating than any other county, usually around 30 kids. This year's All-State festival is



A number of Hellgate's English department books remain in poor condition, with many students forced to use printer-paper copies. Photo by Will Hansen.

being held in Great Falls. Renting a bus for a one time event this year would be much cheaper and easier in comparison to driving sports teams all over the state every week. Why, then, does our school assist in athletic extracurriculars but not with the arts? What is happening to Hellgate's reputation of being the most welcoming to self expression and the arts?

After talking with English teachers at Hellgate I have learned that we are missing a great deal of books for English classes, one prominent example being *The Little Prince*, which IB English students are now reading on printed out paper. Our photo copying machines and printers are incredibly limited. Graphs printed for math classes are illegible and words are cut off from important packet readings. Many students want printed out

paper forms of homework, but ink is too expensive to buy so assignments must be done online despite certain difficulties related to technology. These difficulties include the inability for refugees to use their phones to access specific translating apps. The ESL students now use unreliable translators on the computer which creates a divide between the abilities of native English speakers and refugees to study properly in class.

This year there were not enough Chromebooks to give out, and a percentage of students had to bring their own device. The Chromebooks that are given to students are very old and slow, making it difficult to efficiently get work done. A solution to this would be giving students easier access to better printers and also

allowing for colored printing. The climate effects of the overuse of paper is a factor to account for, and buying new Chromebooks would be better for the environment. Which solution is cost effective, better for the Earth, and more productive? It is simply a discussion of how to spend our money so that students have a thorough and instructional school experience.

This is not to say that all our funding is misplaced and our higher-ups are inconsiderate of educational needs, but on the contrary, I believe that with proper persuasion and evidence it may become apparent to administrators and to our student representatives that in order to thrive as an

educational establishment we must spend our funds on scholastic needs—not only on sports or "school spirit". Sporting events provide money for the school, but most of this money goes back into new sporting events. At a certain point, sports seem to be a separate organization entirely and funding we receive from the government shouldn't be used for this.

The shortcomings of our school district are minimal in comparison to other counties, but it is still valuable to address public concerns and the specific needs of teachers and students. It is important that this year we learn how to manage our funds both within the student government at Hellgate and as administrators to create the best possible academic environment.

# Seniors Tackle College Applications and Overwork

**Will Hansen**  
Editor

Junior year is often cited as the hardest year of high school. Standardized tests, increased academic pressure and course load, and the looming responsibility of maxing out a college resumé give this third year of high school a never-ending and frantic feel. For many, the only thing getting them through is the assumption that things will get easier with the inception of senior year, but Hellgate seniors are discovering that the worst was really yet to come.

“Senior year’s workload is harder, especially with college applications,” said senior Ella Stone. “Calc took up so much time last year, but that’s typically a senior class.” Stone said she is applying to around 15 colleges, so apps take up a lot of her time.

“College apps are definitely an added pressure on top of life,” said senior Will Ries, who is applying to around five schools. “A lot of late night studying.”

In addition to workload-related stress, many seniors struggle to balance college apps with non-academic responsibilities. Ries, who plays soccer, said keeping up with sports, school, and college apps has been a struggle.

“I love soccer, it’s one of my biggest passions, but it definitely can be challenging having practice two hours a day every day after school,” he said. Many athletes have to miss significant amounts of school for away games, which puts them behind on school work, and Ries said that handling this on top of college apps is very challenging.

“Missing classes and being expected to not drop the ball can be hard and exhausting,” he said. “It is entirely possible to do but it involves sacrifice such as time away from family and friends.”

Ries isn’t alone in his difficulty balancing obligations.

“I’ve just been trying to balance my social life and it being my last year of high school with staying on top of assignments and college apps,” said senior Ryan Meservy, who is applying to around 20 schools. She said that “prioritizing her time” has been key in staying on top of work while still having time to go to school events, like football and volleyball games.

College application season often has serious implications for teens’ mental health.

“In my experience with teenagers, I’ve witnessed that the college application process can often be grueling and stressful,” said Sophia Jensen, a local therapist who often works with high schoolers. “The difficulty of the process dovetailed with high expectations can be tough on mental health.” Jensen said these impacts are expedited by social media.

“I do see, on a daily basis, how addictive and detrimental phone use and social media are on people of all ages, especially teenagers,” she said. “There is the illusion of the perfect life or perfect college that most teens compare themselves to and it often increases depression and anxiety.”

Jensen said it is important to remember that this illusion is not reality. She said she encourages seniors to not let their entire self esteem be dependent on which schools they get accepted into.

Regardless, this worry is sometimes unavoidable for some seniors.

“I’d say the most stressful part is second guessing yourself and worrying about where you’re going to end up,” Meservy said.

Hellgate is lucky to have such a talented team of counselors to assist seniors with the college application process. Meservy said she is glad the counselors are so willing to help, as that isn’t the case everywhere.

“Teachers are also understanding and know we have a lot going on



Senior Kaisey Magill hard at work in the library during a free period. Photo by Will Hansen.

which can take some stress off sometimes,” she said.

However, the school’s resources aren’t applicable for all seniors.

“I don’t think the school can help to a high degree,” Ries said. “The counselors have been great but ultimately college apps are extracurricular so I try and just approach them as such.”

Jensen said there are a number of coping strategies for seniors during this stressful time. The first is limiting social media usage.

“I know most teenagers want to push against limits and boundaries but more phone use, especially social media, will not help with overwhelm,” she said. Furthermore, Jensen recommended talking to fellow seniors with similar stress and current college students who have already gone through the process.

Ries said that spending time with friends and family when he can helps distract him from some of the stress of college apps. He also said that staying focused is important.

“Currently I’m trying to limit my procrastination to no avail as I’m answering your questions at 11:05 p.m. instead of doing AP Physics,”

Ries said.

“I try to fill out the applications whenever I have dead time in class,” Meservy said. “I also tried to get a head start during summer so I got a few knocked out then which has helped with a bunch of stress.”

Ries agreed: “Starting early is key. Sleep is also super important,” he said.

“My best hack if I have a lot of work is to bake cookies cause there’s a lot of time to do homework and write essays when they’re cooking,” Meservy said. “Then I can bring them to school which I know a lot of my friends love.”

“Overall I feel pretty good about it,” Ries said. “I’ve worked on my essays and almost everything is ready to go.”

The class of 2026 would do well to live by this sentiment: be proud of the work completed, and know it’s all going to turn out how it’s supposed to. The process of college applications is well on its way to completion, and many seniors are already looking forward to wearing their college’s name in the halls.

“I’m just excited to be excited about a school,” Meservy said.

## Orchestra Seniors Ponder Futures With Music After Fall Concert

Hadley Sharp  
Reporter

Hellgate's Advanced orchestra just had their fall concert along with both of Sentinel's orchestras. The group played two pieces, October by Eric Whitacre arranged by Paul Lavender, and Symphony No. 25 arranged by LaJoie. While this was a normal concert for the freshmen, sophomores, and juniors, it was a sort of milestone for seniors, being their last fall concert before graduation, and the beginning of the end of playing for a high school orchestra.

Despite the year just getting started, many seniors have already begun making decisions regarding their futures, such as applying for colleges, scholarships, and for this specific group of students, dividing what role music will play in their futures.

Senior Caroline Chitty has been playing the cello for seven years, since the fifth grade. When asked what influenced her to pick the instrument, she said, "It sounded pretty, and I was too short to play the bass." Since then, she has grown to love the cello, as well as the class.

Chitty has many fond memories from the orchestra, noting that the highlight of the class for her is "Mr. Davis' dad jokes, but going to New York and seeing some amazing live performances was also super cool." The music itself also played a role for Chitty, as she mentioned the piece October from the latest concert. "I really loved how all the different instruments worked together and built off of each other's sound."

Malakai Murphy, who is first chair bass in Hellgate's advanced orchestra, has been playing bass since the fifth grade, but he also knows how to play violin, viola, cello, and piano. "I

chose my instrument (the bass) in fifth grade because my sister had played it, and my friends chose bass in my orchestra so I followed," Murphy said.

Lenora Sackey, who is principal bass in MYS, or Missoula Youth Symphony, shared the story of how they ended up playing the bass. "My brother played violin, so of course I had to pick something different. I ended up with the bass after an instrument introduction night. I considered playing the oboe, I was the only kid who could get it to make a sound, but in the end I knew I wanted to be a part of the orchestra," Sackey said.

"I think my favorite part of orchestra has been the community," Sackey said. "You meet some talented people who are really passionate about their craft, and the music just brings people together. I also really like hearing our music come together over time with practice. Overall being surrounded by others with the same passion as you is a very cool feeling."

All three of them know that they want music to be a part of their life's past high school, but of course each person had a different vision on what that may look like for them. Both Sackey and Murphy plan to play in college, despite neither of them aspiring for musical careers, while Chitty just hopes to be able to continue the hobby in her free time.

"I don't think I will pursue a career in music



Lenora Sackey tunes their bass before class.  
Photo by Hadley Sharp

though because I aim to major in political science, but if I can fit it into a minor that would be great! Overall I hope I'm able to keep my skill even if I don't go into music," Murphy said.

Regardless of each student's future plans, one thing was certain, that music would always have a part in their lives, even if they weren't meeting in the same room for an hour of scheduled practice each day.

# Knights Have All Eyes On Zoo Crew

Piper Wells  
Reporter

Photo courtesy of Kate Hansen and Slade Jones

"I think ultimately having a group of upperclassmen that lead chants at games, and organize the student section is beneficial for all students," said Student Body President Leo Westenfelder.

"I think it's way too big this year," said senior Vince Paffhausen. "It's cool, but when there's 13 different people trying to do 13 different things, it's hard to come together."

Hellgate High School has had the tradition of a group of seniors, known as Zoo Crew, leading all student sections with school spirit and respect for years. Zoo Crew shows up to all sporting events wearing animal onesies. Each member of Zoo Crew has the privilege to stand in the very front row of the bleachers leading the entire student section in cheers, and providing energy as well as encouraging participation from all people in the stands.

Every year, new incoming freshmen are excited to show up and show out to Hellgate sporting events, but they haven't

been taught the student section etiquette. On TikTok, the 13 members of the '25/'26 Zoo Crew posted a student section etiquette video explaining the rules and expectations for students at games. Unlike previous videos, the crew went into detail about students who start chants that don't align with the values of a student section. In those instances the entire row would be asked to leave by either the School Resource Officer or an assistant principal.

Westenfelder said this addition was for good reason. "We want our student section to be positive," he said.

After the video was posted, students sparked up interest in others being kicked out of games and non-Zoo Crew seniors being in the front row when it wasn't allowed. One of these seniors, Paffhausen, plays football and basketball for Hellgate, and said his only chance to show up to fall sports are the volleyball games.

"That was kinda... crazy to me," Paffhausen said. "I'm a senior, I play sports, but I was not happy when I was told I needed to be booted to a back row as a senior." Although Paffhausen was not directly told to move in the farthest row up with the freshman, he disagreed with what they had told him and stayed in the front row with Zoo Crew.



From left to right, Gia Petrini, Mallory Newbold, Raini Wutschke, Lucia Rosas-Olson, Gus Darty, Brooks Wachtel, Kellan Dick, Hendrik Oberg, Intza Aguirre-Trina, Sadie Seaman, Brooklen Kopp, and Kaylie Moe.

One issue Zoo Crew is tasked with is the encouragement of underclassmen at the back of student sections. This year, Zoo Crew members at volleyball and football games have gone up to the freshman row, or have directly yelled at them to provide more energy in the cheers they were leading, which some freshmen disliked and others appreciated.

"I can for sure hear them in the front row when they're starting chants," said freshman Grant Liphardt. "When they yell at our row, they're usually kind about it so it's fine."

All Zoo Crew groups in the past have always yelled and encouraged the quieter students to get loud and more rowdy, but due to the large size of the group this year the crew struggles with kind energy being reciprocated while leading the student section.

"I get it you're in Zoo Crew, but I don't think it's the end of the world if someone else wants to start a cheer that's reasonable," Paffhausen said.

"Some people don't like us, which is hard to battle," said senior Sadie Seaman, a member of Zoo Crew. "There's a lot of grey area and genuine commitment that comes along with being in Zoo Crew and a lot of people don't understand that."

Zoo Crew's goal is for the student sections to be respectful while also showing their school spirit. The group has had meetings initiated by Westenfelder, and the Senior Class Vice-President Will Ries, to talk about how to make Zoo Crew the best it can be. There have been no meetings initiated by the student government advisor Ms. Rholl about anything negative so far.

Zoo Crew isn't something that will be removed from Hellgate. The crew guides underclassmen to show up for their peers respectfully, and provides energy that is needed to organize the student sections efficiently. Without Zoo Crew leading and teaching chants to students, every sporting event would turn into chaos.



# The Best of Both Worlds: Hellgate's Special Ed Department

Mai McKelvey-Pham  
Reporter

Her door is propped open, welcoming. She sits at her desk as a student finishes a test in one of the many seats around the classroom. The lights are off, late afternoon sun streams in from the windows.

It's one of Laurie Mitzalis' prep periods, and today she's decided to take it during 7th. As one of four special education teachers at Hellgate, Mitzalis is able to take her prep whenever it works for her—a benefit of Hellgate's progressive special education model.

Special education is a type of education that works with students with disabilities to support them in the school system. Most students who receive support from special education have what is called an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), which is acquired by evaluation with the school psychologist. Different schools have different models for their special education departments, though all are based on IDEA—the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

IDEA has been in effect since 2005, stating that its purpose is “to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education ... designed to meet their unique needs....” One of the six pillars of IDEA is a non-restrictive environment for students with disabilities, emphasizing the importance of educating those with disabilities alongside those without.

Hellgate is the first high school in Missoula to make a shift to be more in line with IDEA's mandates, mainly due to the influence of principals Judson Miller and Susan Bageant. Miller was hired as Hellgate's principal in 2016 and began, among other things, working towards changing the special education department's system. Bageant—arriving at Hellgate in 2019 as the assistant principal—was also instrumental in the change. Being from out of state, Miller and Bageant were familiar with more inclusive special education models, and were able to begin leading Hellgate towards that goal.

Before 2019, Hellgate's special education curriculum was a “pullout” model. “Students ... will be removed from a general education class, like a [Biology] class, and they'll be offered an opportunity to take that class from a special education teacher,” said Aaron Fessler, one of Hellgate's special education department's new hires. He emphasized the issue in this model: special education teachers aren't experts in science, math, or whatever else it may be. They're experts in special education.

In 2019, Hellgate began to test out a special edu-

cation model called the “co-teach” model in science classes, the first step towards the goal of the least restrictive environment. The school ended up switching to this model completely in 2020. The co-teach model, as the name suggests, had special education and general education teachers working in tandem. “We were going into mainstream classes and supporting students in the mainstream classes rather than providing separate instruction,” said Mitzalis.

Co-teach was slightly better than the pullout model, though it also had its issues. Maureen Ojala—who spent six years at Hellgate as a special education teacher and is now in her first year at CS Porter middle school—explained that she and the other special education teachers were assigned and confined to the same classroom every day, helping the special education students who would come in and out of that class. While this allowed for students to be included in general education classrooms, it was restrictive for the teachers and didn't let them get to know any group of students very well.

Hellgate's newest model, the consult model, removed that constraint.

Hellgate moved to the consult model in 2024, and it has been widely appreciated by the special education teachers. “I think it's a really well thought out and effective way of working with kids who need learning supports,” said Fessler.

The consult model works like this: Each special education teacher is the case manager of around 25 students with IEPs, though they will work with many more students than that. “I write their IEP, I monitor their grades, I help them advocate for themselves,” said Mitzalis. She went on to explain that, in addition to her case management group, she has “consult students.” At Hellgate, each special education teacher specializes in a core subject—English, math, science, or social studies—and works with students in those classes. Mitzalis explained: “[Consult students] are not necessarily my [IEP] kids, they could be some of the other special ed teachers' ... but everyone's in English, so I work with any IEP kid in grade 11 and 12 English.”

Furthermore, instead of only teaching resource classes or being restricted to one classroom all day, the special education teachers are able to pop in and out of mainstream classrooms or study halls where their students may need them. They also teach some replacement classes for students who need extra help. That part hasn't completely gone away as it is necessary for some students.

There are many pros to the consult model. One of the biggest is the effects for the teachers. Ojala ex-

plained that the consult model “gives teachers more autonomy.” It allows for teachers to choose where they go and what they do each day. The beginning of this article is a perfect example: Mitzalis was available for an interview during 7th period because she'd already checked in on her students in English classes and study halls and had determined that no one needed her help during that period that day.

Another huge benefit is that the shift in the system has destigmatized special education. “Some students just need that extra support,” said Ojala. Being a different type of learner isn't a bad thing, and the consult model knows that. By integrating students into general education, the consult model makes special education feel more acceptable.

The first of its kind in Missoula, the consult model wonderfully shows Hellgate's progressive way of thinking. For the last two years it has been working beautifully for the school, combining the expertise of general education teachers with the proficiency of teachers like Mitzalis and Fessler into a method that works for everyone.

As Fessler said, “it's the best of both worlds... and I see really positive effects.”



Special education teachers Aaron Fessler and Laurie Mitzalis in Fessler's room. Photo by Mai McKelvey-Pham.

## A Locals Guide To Thrifting In Missoula

### Kingston Kimpell Reporter

From curated vintage to donation centers, Missoula is becoming a great hub for thrifting. Whether it be furniture, clothing or appliances, there is something so rewarding about finding a grail from a small secondhand thrift store in Missoula.

My favorites to visit are the curated vintage shops such as Betty's Divine's Trash Vintage and Homeroom's vintage section.

Betty's Divine's Trash Vintage is far from trash, though there are items that may not suit everyone's fancy. I have always found at least one garment that I fell in love with. It's located in the back of Betty's Divine up a few stairs. The lighting is warm and inviting. You will find dresses, flannels, skirts, pants, shoes, hats and records. This is my go-to place when I'm looking for a mini slip dress or a funky sweater.

Homeroom is a small shop located on Broadway. With concrete floors contrasting the funky rugs, hair clips and clothing, this place always calls to me. Not everything in this store is vintage, there are modern lamps and soaps and even a small local clothing artist. Their vintage section can be on the pricier side but nevertheless, you are buying quality vintage clothing.

I always go here in search of Levis and baby tees and nine times

out of ten I will find what I am looking for. I do prefer the local artist's booth because I know that I am supporting someone with passion and dreams. The local artist goes by "bubblegum." Her clothing is vibrant and lacey and out of my comfort zone. Most items I have bought from Homeroom have inspired me to step out of my fashion comfort zone.

Gathered for Good is a small and humble shop located on south Higgins. From real silver jewelry to fake Christian Dior, there is something for everyone. Gathered for Good is another "curated" shop in Missoula and is definitely one of my favorites. With clothing restocks on Wednesdays there is always new stuff to browse. The staff is friendly and the furniture is my favorite part. I recommend following their Instagram to get sneak peaks on their new furniture, especially for those moving out soon. I like that this store has a men's section and a women's section that are equal to each other. I will say, they definitely prioritize jeans.

A global classic, Goodwill is forever a favorite. Goodwill is straying away from the "curated vintage" section of my compiling. Goodwill is good if you're looking for mystery. I have always managed to find a cutesy pair of shoes magically in my size when I visit. With over ten aisles of clothing you are bound to find something you can rock with. Though you will be scaling over some items that you couldn't imagine anyone

wearing, I always recommend to keep your mind open to the funkiness of your inner style. Goodwill is a staple for trinket hunting with many potential jewelry trays and shelves. I will always love wandering the dishes and angel figurines with my mother.

Missoula Thrift, a very straightforward name, is new to Missoula. It opened in the strip mall by China Buffet, CVS and what used to be Joane Fabrics. The first time I went there I found over five items that I took home. I highly recommend this thrift stop for its large building and variety of clothing. I will say if you are not in the market for clothing, this may not be the place to go, but clothing-wise it is spectacular. The staff is very welcoming and I love browsing their bags. The vibe is similar to Goodwill, it is a donation-based

organization out of Montana.

Upcycle has the most unique experience out of my top picks, similar to the Goodwill bins but more organized and accompanied by racks of clothing. Definitely come prepared with hand sanitizer because you will literally be digging through bins of clothes that may be unwashed. This place is definitely hit or miss for me. The bins are not size-oriented, so it is definitely a gamble on what you will find. This store's hours are ever changing and they are typically only open two days out of the week.

Each of these stores are good to go with friends or even alone with your headphones on depending on who you are. Buying secondhand helps clothing not go to waste, helping a shirt find a new home is an empowering thing.



Drawing of "Betty's Trash Vintage" by Kingston Kimpell

## ‘Life of a Showgirl’: A Review

Wesley Banziger  
Reporter

If you like Taylor Swift you probably already know that she had her 13th album release this past weekend. She also had a release party movie about the making of her music video that was playing in theaters at the same time. The movie, the album and her first single all hit number one immediately, making her the first artist since Prince in 1984 to hold the number one spot for a film, album, and song simultaneously in the U.S.

Swift is breaking record after record with her brand new album “The Life of a Showgirl”, and I couldn’t love the album more, starting off with her hit song “The Fate of Ophelia” (TFO). The song has broken many records, including the most streamed song in a single week and the fastest song to reach 100 million streams on Spotify ever.

TFO definitely makes sure the album starts off strong. You would think that a song that has blown up that fast might get overplayed and people would get tired of it, but the opposite has happened with TFO. I haven’t been able to get the song out of my head and I am not mad about it, in fact, I love it. With its extremely catchy beat and amazing lyrics, it has become one of my favorite songs on the entire album.

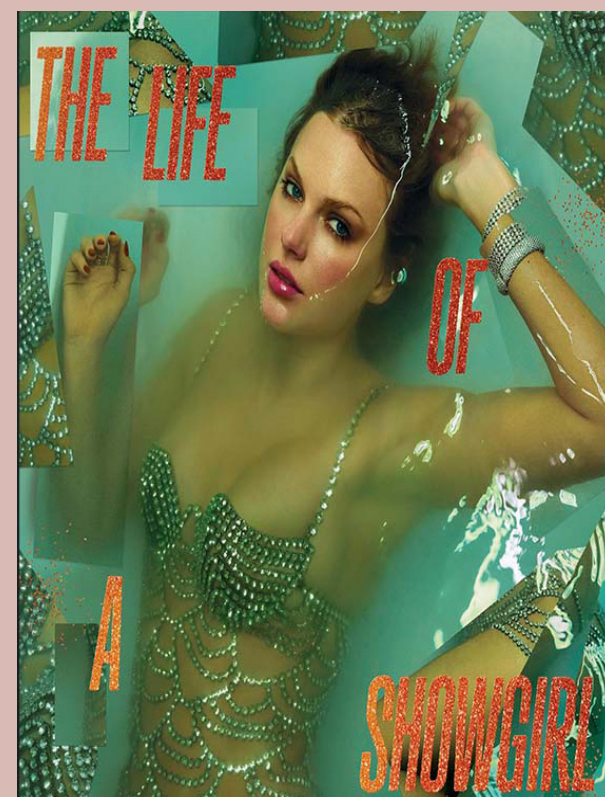
Throughout the album, there are tons of other catchy songs with equally amazing lyrics. Swift is a wonderful poet, and she uses many different literary works in Opalite and Elizabeth Taylor. Opalite is a

man made version of an opal which as Swift said can be a metaphor for her happiness being self made as she is comparing her happiness to a gem stone. Not only are the lyrics of these songs beautiful, they are also incredibly catchy and deep.

Swift references William Shakespeare multiple times throughout the album and she begins one of her songs (Wood) with a Jackson 5 introduction. She has a unique ability to connect the past and the present in a fun and relatable way. Most people who hear these songs (who are willing to give them a chance) fall in love with the amazing up beat vibe.

The last song on the album is Life of a Showgirl featuring Sabrina Carpenter. This song describes the life of a showgirl named Kitty and she tells Swift’s character about what it is really like to be a famous showgirl. Kitty describes the reality of show business life as much more difficult than it appears to be. The ending of the song is from Swift’s perspective, and although show business life is very hard, she says that “she wouldn’t have it any other way.” The outro of the song is from the final night of the Eras tour which has some personal significance to me as that was the show that I attended. Therefore, I’m pretty much featured in the song.

Not only did the final night of the Eras tour get to be a part of the album, but also Swift just announced that she will be releasing a six-episode documentary on the Eras Tour, including behind the scenes footage and the performance from her final night in Vancouver. I can’t wait to see her new documentary and listen to all of her future albums. In my opinion “The Life of a Showgirl” is the album of the year.



Taylor Swift’s stunning Life of a Showgirl album cover.



Zach Baldwin & Hadley Sharp  
Reporters

In our podcast reviewing the Life Of A Showgirl, we discuss the massive impact and success of Taylor Swift’s most recent album. We analyze the songs in depth, talking about what we liked and didn’t like throughout the album. Overall, we thought the album’s production and live instrumentals were a huge improvement from Swift’s recent work, while finding the lyrics and storytelling mediocre.

Several songs such as The Fate of Ophelia, Father Figure, Opalite, and Actually Romantic were highlights.

We also discuss the future of Swift’s career and where she might go after this album, as we both found this project generally mediocre.

Some of our criticisms include the lackluster songwriting on Eldest Daughter, the out of touch moments like Wish List, and the optics of releasing a song discussing cancellation in the current political climate.

From lyrics and production, to the album’s rollout and our first reactions, we talk all things Showgirl. We also briefly review the Official Release Part of a Showgirl. a movie theater event accompanying the album’s release.

Listen to our full thoughts about the new album on The Joust using the QR code or find us on hellgatelance.com or Spotify.

# Horror: Imagination or Reality?

Elliott Banziger  
Editor

Having just passed the “spooky” month, where horror movies are an almost nightly occurrence, it seems like a good time to talk about horror movies and how they are impactful on our society.

People seem to enjoy horror movies for a variety of reasons. It could be that it provides a safe adrenaline rush, because you aren't putting yourself in any actual danger but you still feel as though you are being chased. It could be the incredible cinematography and visuals that are often put into these movies. Or, in my opinion, it is heavily due to the fact that we can connect deeply with them, even when they are so far removed from our lives.

Horror movies are an incredible way to talk about the things that are hard to put into words, like grief, addiction, abuse, and so many more things.

A great example in my opinion is *Talk to Me*, which is a great story of a girl turning to addiction due to the grief of losing her mother. It tells her tragic story and shows how harmful it can be to allow someone access to something that can harm them with no repercussions.

Another great example of horror movies having hidden deep messages is *The Black Phone*, it is the story of a young boy who is kidnapped by a serial killer and kept in his basement. He uses the advice from “The Grabber's” past victims. This movie is a great representation of sexual assault and how it can happen to anyone. It also talks about parental abuse and how that can impact siblings' relationships, as seen through the main character and his younger sister.



Horror movies are incredible social commentaries and discuss difficult-to-talk-about topics. Graphic by Elliott Banziger

The sequel *The Black Phone 2* is a beautiful conclusion to the original's story of grief and how people deal with traumatic events. Even years after the original event occurred.

*I Know What You Did Last Summer* is a really great commentary on regret and power structures. The story follows teenagers who lie about something very big and how it impacted their lives in the following years. Their actions were covered up due to their relationships with powerful people in the town, allowing them to escape the consequences of their actions physically, but they were unable to escape mentally. Their actions still take a toll on them.

Finally *The Shining* is a classic example of horror movies showcasing repressed or shameful emotions. The entire plot centers around a man who is slowly going insane, he refuses

to seek help and continues to isolate himself from those around him, which causes him to spiral into insanity faster and faster. It shows how mental issues can affect both the person with the issues and those around them (as he attempts to kill both his wife and son). It also shows how our failure to speak about our issues doesn't just make them go away. It can actually make it worse.

Overall, horror movies can show, through blood, gore, and jump scares, deep human truths that are difficult to talk about. They allow people to express their darkest fears in a safe way. This makes those difficult topics so much easier to speak about. People love horror movies because they are easy to connect with, we are able to put ourselves in the arcs that the characters go through and it makes us feel comfortable.

## Hellgate Flag Football Finishes Second at State

Gus Darty  
Reporter

In the first year the sport was offered to athletes, Hellgate Girls Flag Football made a statement: it was not to be overlooked. Quickly, the team captured the attention of many students with their tenacious and unrelenting nature, overcoming barriers like years of experience leveraged on them by other teams across the state, until making it to the state finals.

As part of a statewide push, Hellgate and many other high schools introduced flag football teams for the first time this fall. Out of all of these fledgling teams, however, only one challenged Glacier, a school with years of flag football experience behind them, in the state finals. It all comes down to the community and passion behind Hellgate's team.

When the prospect of playing flag football was offered, many Knights jumped on the opportunity. Senior Gianna Passuccio, a receiver on the team, said, "It was a new sport for me, and it was a sport I was playing for fun. It was low stress, and I knew that going into it, so I was excited for that."

"Flag football was super exciting, because you don't usually get to start high school sports halfway through your high school career, and a bunch of new, cool people joined it, and I think it was just a great community to be a part of," junior Elan Toretti, a rusher, said.

"I think Hellgate has a really unique demographic of kids, where, looking at the prototype of a player that we'd need, I thought Hellgate would lend itself well to that, just in terms of hardworking kids," Maddie Keast, an assistant coach for the team, said.

However, there were some challenges getting the team started.

"I think we definitely found it challenging having enough people to play, and having a big enough team... so it was definitely hard to find people who were willing to put in the work, but we definitely did overcome it by the end of the season," Toretti said. "We had a lot of people

takes they made along the way. Passuccio highlighted a game against Sentinel that the team lost, using their failure as motivation to improve throughout the season, eventually coming back to play Sentinel in a game the Knights won.

The youth football programs that are being pushed for across the state are definitely making their mark on high school sports, cementing a future for flag football.

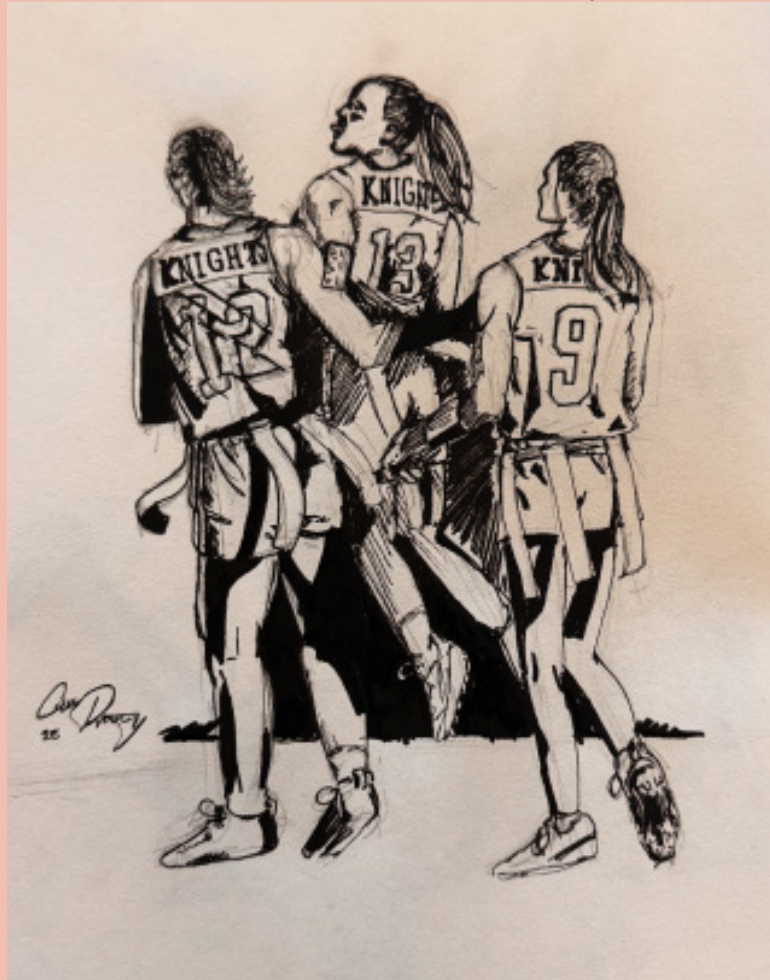
"I think there's a lot of interest in the younger grades, especially in elementary and middle school," Toretti said. "I think that the program is going to be great."

Keast said she plans on staying with the program in the future. "I'd love to be a part of it for as long as I'm able to," she said. "I think, obviously, the caliber of all of the teams around the state is going to continue to get better... with youth flag football programs being in effect in Montana, I think it'll inevitably translate to the high school level."

Keast went further, hypothesizing that the gap between male football players and female football players will continue to shrink. "I think kids will begin to define their role similar to male football players. They'll establish themselves as a defensive player, an offensive threat, or quarterback, and have kind of an idea of their role prior to entering a season," she said.

This fall was an exciting time for fall sports. While sports like football and volleyball took much of the spotlight, flag football was possibly the most exciting develop-

ment in the future of Hellgate athletics this year. With the trajectory, talent and energy on display this season, it is undeniably a sport to keep an eye on in the future.



Hellgate Flag Football is a new sport, but that is not stopping the Knights from outplaying the competition. Graphic by Gus Darty.

show up halfway through the season, and really put in the most effort they could."

As the team found its footing, though, they began excelling, and building off of the mis-

## Hellgate Cross Country Reflects on Legacy, Leadership, Love

Sabine Glaser  
Reporter

The Hellgate Knights cross country team, better known by its members as simply HKXC, has a long and enduring legacy of greatness. With glass cases full of trophies, a name known throughout the West, and an enduring culture of toughness, good humor, and excellency, the Knights just about have it all.

This season the prowess and unique strength of the program was put to the ultimate test, and with only a few weeks left of competition, the coaches and athletes are reflecting on the challenges that they have faced and overcome since the season's opening.

In June, it was announced that head coach Anders Brooker, along with his two long-time assistant coaches Erin Forde and Ike Wallace, was being let go from his position on the coaching staff. This change came as a great shock to the athletes and community of HKXC, as all three of the coaches had been instrumental in the development and success of the program.

The athletes were faced with a daunting question: what was HKXC without its beloved coaches? The family that was fostered for almost two decades had been irrevocably changed, and the traditions and culture of the team forged through the love, legacy, and leadership of runners past was at risk of being lost forever.

But, in this pivotal moment, the true strength and character of the athletes and community of Hellgate cross country prevailed.

Throughout the summer, athletes worked tirelessly not only to continue their training but to ensure the future success of their team. With the inspiration of alumni leaders, the new rising juniors and seniors took up the mantle of leadership. Passed down throughout the team, this initiative is one thing among many that makes the program so special.

During these summer months, the new team leaders had to very quickly adapt and assume leadership roles, while also struggling with the emotional impacts of the loss of last year's seniors.

Miles Miller, 16, a junior on the team, says that the toughest part of his season was "not having the seniors from last year."

It is a testament to the connection and love among the athletes of Hellgate XC that even amid such tumultuous times the biggest adjustment was losing their graduated teammates.

Miller later said that the coaching changes were also hard, and that "having new coaches, and not having Anders on the team" were also tough realities of the 2025 season.



Miles Miller, leads the fastest varsity boy's race at the Helena 7 of 7 meet, with the distinctive HKXC logo worn proudly across his chest. Photo by Sabine Glaser.

"It's just a different team," he said, "but it's something you have to get used to."

After the original firing of coaches Brooker, Forde, and Wallace, the search for new coaches began. During this process, Hellgate alumni filled in for the absence of coaches, volunteering their time to help support the program they were once a part of.

One such alum, Ian Curtis, continued his contribution not only past his time on the team and not just for the off-season summer training, but into the actual season, becoming a fulltime volunteer coach for Hellgate cross country.

Ironically, his rival from his days of running for Hellgate, Simon Hill, who ran for Glacier, also joined the new staff as a volunteer assistant coach. Hill, 24, who has run since sixth grade, narrowly beat Curtis in the 2019 AA State Championships to claim the title of victor.

The other new hires included D Cummins, a retired Olympic 800 runner for Canada, and Bill Ballenger, who had previously coached Hellgate XC before the time of Brooker. Additionally, after much advocacy from the community, Erin Forde was rehired as assistant coach. Ike Wallace rejoined the team as a volunteer coach along with Curtis and Hill.

The new coaches of Hellgate cross country had very little time to get to know each other, the athletes, and the team culture before the season began in earnest.

Cummins, 51, who has coached professionally for thirty years, says one of the hard aspects of being a part of such a robust coaching staff

has been, "finding cohesion of all the different philosophies that we have on how to coach."

With six different coaches, all with different backgrounds and experiences, Cummins says finding common ground has been a challenge. But, taking a page out of the athlete's books, the coaches have been able to work hard at communicating and coordinating their efforts to lead and support the team.

"Knowing that [the coaches] are all on the same page – that is really, really important. And it is a driving factor in team success," Hill said, reflecting that the biggest thing he has learned throughout the season has been the value of communication.

With this collection of new coaches also comes a collection of new ideologies and philosophies about how a team ought to function. However, the coaches very quickly realized that the magic of Hellgate cross country is not something to be changed, rather something to be fostered and grown.

"It was important for me to learn that some of these traditions are important to the happiness and sustainability of this program," and that it was key to help support such traditions, "instead of making changes," said Cummins.

And although the coaching staff did its best to limit the amount of change on the team, alterations to the program were inevitable, from both a coaching perspective of new coworkers and compromise and an athlete's perspective of new authority figures and different training plans.

"Change is difficult for everybody," Cummins said. But, through this change, the spirit of Hellgate Cross Country endured.

Odin Berryman, a senior on the team, says his favorite part of the season was "watching the team grow and develop and work together." And so, despite these challenges, leadership and community persisted.

Hill said that his favorite part of HKXC is "watching leaders on the team be leaders, watching the athletes themselves take care of each other and cheer each other on in a race and pull each other to success."

"I have seen it on other cross country teams, but the unique part of it in Hellgate is it is such an instilled value and virtue," Hill said. "The passing of the torch is just so obvious. It's so awesome to see kids step up and be leaders and contribute to their team in a way that's more than just going out there and running."

Cummins also said she noticed this unique strength on the team. "These athletes were able to step up and carry some of the really important traditions on the team, and speak up, and that takes a lot of maturity," she said.

And so, as the Hellgate cross country team nears the end of this unprecedented season, the compassion and strength of the team and its leaders has been shown in the continuation of its traditions and values.

Leaders like Miller have continued to work to preserve the family and culture of HKXC while adapting to the new coaches. The coaches themselves have learned from and worked to preserve the strength, resiliency and love that is a part of Hellgate cross country.

After making it to the other side of a decidedly dark and uncertain time, the future of HKXC is bright.

For Hill, when the season is over, the question of success is simple: "Are we lifting each other up and supporting each other when we win, when we have victories, when we have PRs, and also when we have the worst race of our entire life? Are we still a Hellgate knight family of constant love and support and discipline?" he said.

Such parameters for success are what make Hellgate so special, because without these, winning state is just another trophy in the trophy case. Without these, the graduated seniors are just names on a wall. Without these, there are no leaders willing to work harder than any leader before them to continue the legacy of the team. Without love and support and discipline, there would be no more Hellgate cross country. This season would have marked its end. But, the team survived. The team, with its leadership, courage, and love for the sport of running, made it.

## Hellgate Girls Soccer Battles Through Strong Season

Carsten Bowen  
Reporter

The Hellgate High School girls soccer team wrapped up a successful season this fall, finishing with a record of 7-5-2 and earning a spot in the Class AA playoffs. Despite being a young and newly formed squad, the Knights proved themselves as one of the most determined teams in the Western Conference.

“I think the season overall went good for it being a very new team,” said senior and team captain Amelia Kate Puryear. Under coach Chaucer Larson, the Knights showed steady growth throughout the season, adjusting quickly to new players and building skills both on and off the field. The roster featured a mix of experienced upperclassmen and promising underclassmen.

Arguably, the team’s biggest moments

came in two key rivalry matchups. “The biggest accomplishments were making it to the playoffs, and also beating Big Sky and tying Sentinel the first time,” Puryear said. The results showed that even in a rebuilding year, Hellgate could hold its own against some of the top programs in Missoula.

The season wasn’t without challenges, but the team’s resilience remained. “A moment that stood out to me was when we were kinda on a down streak and we found a way to fight in every game even if we didn’t get a win,” Puryear reflected. That fighting spirit showed in the way the Knights kept competing hard in every game, no matter the score.

As the season went on, Hellgate’s growth as a cohesive unit became clear. “I think the team improved on being a team, not just a single individual,” Puryear said. “I think that was key to our success early in the season.”

That teamwork paid off on both ends of the field, especially in their defense, which consistently frustrated opposing attacks and held strong in crucial moments.

“Our defense was the best in the conference before the playoffs, which was huge,”



Hellgate girls soccer team captain, Amelia Kate Puryear, warms up before big home game. Photo courtesy of Intza Trina.

Puryear said. Anchored by a disciplined back line and solid goalkeeping, the Knights earned a reputation as one of the toughest defenses in Class AA.

The Knights’ playoff run ended in a hard-fought 1-0 loss to crosstown rival Big Sky, a game that could have gone either way. Despite the tough result, Hellgate showed composure and effort throughout, keeping the match close and competitive until the final whistle.

With their solid record, playoff run, and newfound chemistry, the Knights capped off the year with plenty to be proud of, and even more to look forward to next season. The progress made by this young Hellgate squad hints at a bright future ahead, as returning players continue to build onto the team’s skill and teamwork.



Hellgate girls soccer team huddles before game to inspire another win. Photo courtesy of Intza Trina.

## Two Hellgate Seniors Commit to Griz Football

Gus Darty  
Reporter



Parker Link (left), and Evan Pyron playing in a football game against Billings West. Photo elements courtesy of Slade Jones. Graphic by Gus Darty.

Football has an interesting role in the conversations surrounding sports at Hellgate High school. On one hand, football games are a staple of any typical American high school experience: they dictate the Friday night plans for many students across the country, and Hellgate football consistently has more attendance than any other Fall sport. On the other hand, the football program at Hellgate is a punching bag, its losing record in recent seasons a perch to cast shade from.

One could make a plethora of false assumptions about the program from a quick glance at the scores of games, or decades of unfortunate season records. One of these false assumptions would be that the team lacks talent or work ethic. Two seniors, Parker Link and Evan Pyron, have proved this wrong after committing to the Griz this summer.

“My recruiting process really didn’t pick up until right after my junior year,” said Pyron, a tight end and defensive end on Hellgate’s football team. “That’s when I started getting interest from college coaches.”

Pyron received offers from a handful of universities, such as UC Davis and the University of North Dakota, but eventually decided on playing for the Griz.

Link, a wide receiver and safety, had a similar experience. “Last year, during the football season, was when I first got interest from a few colleges around the state,” he said. The recruiting process didn’t ramp up until this summer, though, when Link visited individual camps and junior days for colleges like Montana State and Idaho State. It was at one of these camps that Link seriously captured the attention of the Griz.

“I went to an individual camp, and was very successful there, and a few days later they offered me,” Link said. “I ended up taking that offer two days later.”

These Knights are not just individual stars, but also pillars of the Hellgate football program,

a community they deeply care about.

“I’ve been playing with a lot of my teammates since the third grade,” Pyron said. “We’ve been with each other for all of the highs and lows that have been brought along this journey... I think that Hellgate football has obviously been a little down. We came in trying to change that, and I think that’s what we’re doing my senior year.”

Link has a similar stance on the strength of the program.

“Being a teammate with everybody else is a big thing,” Link said. “I think it’s also just growing up as a person, and knowing how to fight through adversity. Hellgate hasn’t been the greatest of football teams as of late, but I think just knowing that there’s a bright side in our future, and just always having a positive mentality towards everything has helped me a lot.”

Pyron said he would like to thank his parents and his brother for their constant support and encouragement, as well as athletic trainers such as Steven Pitts and Steve Pfahler, and members of the Hellgate staff such as Joe Slemburger and Paul Capp. Pyron said he would also like to

thank his football coaches, Coach Chamberlain and Coach Nelson especially, for their influence and help.

Link said he would like to thank his parents for their commitment to helping him along his journey. He said his father had a persistent involvement in the process, and was with him at many different events, communicating with members of the Griz football community. His mother also provided constant emotional support, being a never ending voice of encouragement as the Hellgate football team weathered its dramatic ups and downs.

Link would also like to thank the coaches at the University of Montana for the standards they have held him to, and their commitment to making him the best player he can be.

Through players like Pyron and Link, and the many other committed members of their team, the spirit of the Hellgate football program shines through. As trying as the process can be at times, football players at Hellgate are relentless in their pursuit of improvement. Their efforts are on display this year, as the Knights head to the playoffs for the first time in recent years.

# The Affliction Of Skipping

Jayne E Jencso

Reporter

Truancy is defined as the unjustified, unauthorized, illegal absence from compulsory education. Missoula County Schools reached an alarming rate of absentee students in 2024. Sparked by the COVID-19 Pandemic and fueled by changing attitudes about education, remote learning, and teen mental health, chronic absenteeism (students who miss 10% or more of school per year) has dramatically increased. As the pandemic reshaped the ideology of attendance, student's candid comprehension of why they chose to skip school, what they do, and what teachers could do to win them back.

So what's the sudden reason for empty classrooms? School officials point fingers at a clear catalyst: Coronavirus. In its fatal wake, it didn't just shut school doors; it opened the door to a whole new type of absentee culture.

Before the pandemic, 60% of students had what is considered exemplary attendance. According to The Missoula County School District; That number has been violently slashed in half since 2019. In 2020, lockdowns made school unrecognizable. Classrooms were virtual, and hallways were eerily still; stair railings remained sanitized and untouched. Instead of waking up early and driving to school in the freezing Montana weather, students found themselves attending school from their cozy bedrooms—if at all.

Technology immediately took up residence. Platforms like Google Classroom and Clever remain the backbone of remote learning post-pandemic. This shift didn't just bring new tools; it created a whole new mindset. Students quickly eased into the flexibility of the isolated learning provided. They realized teaching could happen outside of school.

During all of this, screen time inevitably skyrocketed, and teen mental health was disintegrating. For families across the country, this meant rethinking what a "missed day" even meant. Most parents have become more lenient and understanding, slowly disconnecting from their children's academic routine.

Even though rules remain in place, truancy isn't what it used to be. In many school districts, it could be considered quietly tolerated.

Here are a few insights from the Hellgate Students

**Q- Why do you skip school?**

**A1- "I get homework done, or I get something to eat. Gotta satisfy that sweet tooth."**

**A2- "School is just so draining sometimes you need a break, sometimes you are just having one of THOSE days. "**

**Q- What is your favorite thing to do while skipping?**

**A1- "Probably go get coffee with my friends and car-rott."**

**A2- "Eat, do homework, chill with the home-girls."**

**Q- Do you ever regret skipping class?**

**A1- "Yes, post skip clarity is very real..."**

**A2- "YOLO!"**

**Q- How often do you skip classes?**

**A1- "Not gonna lie, my first period teacher probably doesn't even know what my face looks like."**

**A2- "As much as time allows. I am a busy bee after all, and even bees need a break sometimes."**

**Q- How much homework do you actually get done outside of class?**

**A1- "Lowkey I be locking in crazy style especially since it's fall now"**

**A2- "Typically a lot, normally all of it."**



**Q- What could teachers do that would make you stay in class?**

**A1- "Be more exciting and interactive. Sometimes I fall asleep in classes with a lot of independent learning."**

**A2- "have something for us to do every day."**

The pandemic didn't just cause a health crisis; it also disrupted the very idea of what school is. In 2025, Missoula County school districts face a chronic absenteeism problem that cannot be fixed by increasing consequences. Students crave relevance, engagement, and mutual respect. The question is, can schools adapt before attendance becomes optional in practice, if not in policy?