THE HIGHLAND FLING

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Photo Courtesy of NH.

Picture of the Board and Education members and Dr. Barcadepone, the new superintendant.

THE DISTRICT'S NEXT CHAPTER

An inside look into our new superintendent

Spencer Dosik '28

After a months-long search for a new superintendent, the board of education approved, on August 31, the appointment of Dr. Michael J. Barcadepone as the district's new superintendent who will replace the retiring Dr. Scot Beckerman.

On January 2, 2027, Barcadepone will officially begin his tenure as the next superintendent of the district. As superintendent, Barcadepone will serve as the chief administrator of the district, overseeing finance, staffing, and the school's programs.

The role of the superintendent is not one that demands involvement with the day-to-day operations of the school as opposed to the principal, assistant principals, and other administrators.

Instead, the superintendent works closely with the board of education to plan years into the future, allocating resources holistically, and ensuring the sustainability of any of the school's goals.

This hiring will likely have little, if not zero, immediate impact on students, with Principal Joseph Occhino stating that someone entering a position like this "usually spend[s] six to eight months assessing and evaluating what's in place before making any changes."

The selection process formally began earlier this year, when, in March, a forum was held to gather input from students, staff, and members of the community about the qualities desired in a superintendent, and the general direction that they wanted the school to trend towards.

Nineteen candidates applied, with eight of them being interviewed by the Board of Education. Barcadepone's selection was announced in August, two months after the conclusion of the interview process.

Barcadepone was selected for this role because of many qualities, one of the most important of which is that he has been the superintendent of the Allendale Public Schools for fifteen years, overseeing Brookside and Hillside schools, in a role he will continue to occupy until the beginning of next year.

Assistant Principal Tony LaRocca believes that this relevant experience will make the transition smooth due to Barcadepone's "familiarity with the community," given that "if anyone is in the community for that long, you get a pulse of what life is like here."

Barcadepone, in addition to leading three different five-year plans, overseeing academic and capital improvements, and securing more than three million dollars in grant funding as superintendent of Allendale Public Schools, holds a Doctor of Educational Administration and Supervision as well as two master's degrees in education.

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GOING PAST THE SCREEN

What students and teachers really think about the Phone Ban

Madison Koenig '27

Just before leaving office this past winter, New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy signed off on a law that would affect students state-wide.

On Thursday, January 8, a bell-to-bell smartphone ban in all K-12 schools in NJ was officially introduced.

As outlined in the legislation, schools must "Prohibit non-academic use of an internet-enabled device on school grounds during the school day."

This means any personal devices belonging to students as young as five to as old as eighteen are required to be locked away while at their educational institutions.

The induction of this policy has sparked debates among both students and staff on the topics of generalization, convenience, communication, and even health concerns.

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LESS FOOTBALL, LESS SPIRIT?

Fewer games, but the same spirit

Nadine Mesropian ‘28

Football games at Highlands are a huge source of school spirit. Last year, there were five home football games, but this year, there’s only going to be three. This brings up the question: Will this affect school spirit?

Personally, I think that school football games are one of the few opportunities that give students a chance to express their spirit. For instance, if it’s a blackout, all the students wear black; if it’s a pink out, everyone wears pink.



Photo courtesy of northernhighlands.org

Image of the football field.

It’s not the same type of school spirit that you see during Spirit Week. Students do often dress up for spirit days, but it’s very uncommon that they will go all out like they do at football games.

When I first came to Highlands as a freshman, it was really cool to see people dressing up for the football games and going all out. It made the atmosphere at Highlands feel very unified. I felt like it was our one chance to come together as students.

That same type of school spirit doesn’t usually come out during regular spirit days. With the 90-minute lunches back, there is a small resurgence in school spirit, but will that last with only three home games?

At Highlands, sports are a huge part of the community–but why is it that only during sports do we feel so unified? With so many grades and tests to worry about during the year, events like the football games are a good way for students to unwind and just have fun with their friends.

Whether you want to watch the full game or you want to leave halfway through, you’re spending your free time coming to support your school instead of spending your Friday night doing other things. This makes it feel more committed, so can Highlands school spirit thrive with only three home games?

I think we definitely can. Despite there being only three home games, I think that the limited number will encourage students to come because there aren’t as many opportunities to see the football team play at Highlands this year.

“Football games are a great way to branch out and make friends.”

Also, football games are a great way to branch out and make friends. At football games, you’ll see people from your classes, which can encourage you to come more often and socialize with other students.

I think this brings up a different question: Why is school spirit solely dependent on football games? This might be because of student stress. If you already have a lot on your plate with classes and trying to keep up with your grades, the long weeks might be draining.

I think a lot of students at Highlands feel this way. I’ve even had my moments with certain classes where I feel drained.

I think another reason could be the 90-minute lunches. Even though the 90-minute lunches are back, there was a large gap of time when they were taken away. I think that this took away a lot of the fun that people saw at Highlands because it gave students fewer opportunities to connect and have fun. This made the students’ mindset more grade-focused rather than worrying about school spirit.

However, I don’t think that three home games necessarily means that our school spirit will disappear. If anything, the shortage of home games makes them that much more important for the student body.

Overall, whether it is 90-minute lunches, football games, or other sporting events, Highlands offers so much to keep the school spirit alive and our students happy.■

“If anything, the shortage of home games makes them that much more important for the student body.”

The Highland Fling

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From the Desk of the Editors-in-Chief

Happy end of September, Northern Highlands. We hope everyone had a great summer, filled with lots of adventures. We are so excited to start a new school year with the Fling.

Welcome to the first edition of the Fling. The start of a new school year is always very exciting; we hope everyone has had an easy September in terms of adjusting. Whether you are a freshman or an upperclassman, we encourage you to try your hardest in school and have fun this year. This year, get involved with our school’s athletics, clubs, and branch out. Northern Highlands has so many exciting extracurricular activities to offer. If you are a senior, whether you are mixed in the stress of applying to college or fully done applying, we encourage you to make the most of your last year here. It is going to be a great year.

This September, we had a lot happen: fall sports started up, freshmen had their orientation, Friday football games started, and more! Read more below to learn about what other exciting things happened at Highlands this month. With all the chaos going on, remember to hang in there, Highlanders. The Fling is always open to new writers, so if you are interested in writing, please email the-fling@northernhighlands.com.

-Editors-in-Chief: Catherine Main, Misha Chhada, Tess Han

If you are interested in joining *The Highland Fling* or have any questions, comments, or concerns, please contact fling.eic@gmail.com. If you are interested in placing an ad or subscribing, please contact the email listed above.

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THE HEROES BEHIND THE SCHEDULES

How guidance counselors support students beyond the classroom

Kaelyn Park ’28

Guidance counselors play a fundamental role in the lives of our students at highlands. They serve to help students navigate stressful environments and help them with their classes, as well as prepare them for their futures. Most students are truly unaware of all the work that counselors do for them behind the scenes.

Apart from meeting with students to pick their classes, counselors also work to balance over 1,200 schedules to make sure students are in their preferred classes. They spend months carefully coordinating schedules, and work at the beginning of the year to manage class changes as well.

Similar to most students, I have gone to see my guidance counselor a few times each year.

My counselor is Ms. Ferentz. In my freshman year I went to her multiple times to discuss my schedule, classes, and teachers.

She also worked with me to create a plan for high school that would allow me to achieve the goals I set for myself. She was an amazing resource and helped me to the best of her ability during my freshman year. Additionally, when picking classes for sophomore and junior year, she helped me formulate a schedule that challenged me academically while acknowledging my limits.

Even though we meet with our counselors infrequently, counselors have meeings talmost every day with multiple students.

Before the school year ends and in the summertime, counselors have to work to make sure students who do not get all the classes that they want are placed in one of the backup classes they requested.

It is really unfortunate when a situation like this occurs, but guidance counselors are always there to support these students. During the beginning of the year, they meet with many students requesting to move and drop classes. These requests take time and careful consideration, but counselors are always up for the challenge.

Another aspect of being a guidance counselor that gets overlooked is the emotional support side of their job. Many students rely on counselors for emotional support since high school can be a very challenging time.

Guidance counselors can help with any problems, whether they are academic or personal problems.

Finally, guidance counselors help students with college applications. The fall of senior year is one of the most stressful and important times for seniors.

Guidance counselors are extremely helpful as they help these students put their dreams on paper and guide many through the college application process.

Overall, guidance counselors serve as the backbone of Northern Highlands and make sure both students and staff are comfortable with their classes and workload for the year. They serve to help all of their students and are constantly helping, whether we see it or not.

The next time you see your guidance counselor, make sure to thank them for their help!■

“Most students are truly unaware of all the work that counselors do for them behind the scenes.”



Photo courtesy of @wearenhea on Instagram.

Image of part of the counselling department.

JUDGING A BOOK BY ITS COVER

A hallway stuck in time

Eva Lenhart ’28

Highlands is full of colorful decorations lining each hallway, ranging from beautiful paintings to smaller posters and displays.

Each piece represents a part of the school and/or the curriculum, showing new students and old a glimpse into the community.

The hallways are supposed to be representative of the students who walk through them each day.

An example of these decorations are the book canvas paintings in the English department. Large copies of the covers of classic novels are hung up on the walls, such as Romeo and Juliet and The Great Gatsby.

These are both tales that most students know well, especially freshmen–who are required to read Romeo and Juliet–and sophomores–who read The Great Gatsby. However, unless students have read the stories on their own or heard summaries, other books on display seem to have no connection to the English curriculum provided.

“The posters in the English hallway line up better with that time period than the current, so why haven’t changes been made?”



Courtesy of NH.

Picture of English hallway book!

English teacher Dr. Zucker said she has been working here for twenty years, yet the posters haven’t been changed once. A supervisor that worked over twenty years ago picked the posters, despite there being two supervisor changes since then.

The posters in the English hallway line up better with that time period than the current, so why haven’t changes been made?

English teacher Mrs. Walsh was able to say which of the paintings are still books that are actively being used, such as King Lear written by William Shakespeare which is being taught in Honors British Literature.

Other books, such as Brave New World written by Aldous Huxley are being used as choice novels rather than as a required text.

The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck however is no longer being used in any classes, with only a few copies left in the school.

Aside from this, the placement of the posters has little to no correlation with the classrooms they are near. Instead of the posters being displayed outside of a relevant literary classroom, they are scattered at random, making the highlighted book choices seem even more arbitrary.

“Outdated posters that no longer have much significance shouldn’t continue to be displayed.”

Highlands values its students and the pride they carry for their school, which is reflected all throughout the building. Various artwork has been created on and in these walls, students from each decade able to make their mark. This should be the case for every part of the school, which is why outdated posters that no longer have much significance shouldn’t continue to be displayed. Rather, we should as a collective student body and faculty consider more current and appropriate options to act as symbols of our Highlands pride.■

MILES, MEMORIES, & SUMMER DAYS

Students Look Back On Their Favorite Summer Adventures

Sadie Massaro '28

Welcome back Highlanders! As the school year begins, we cling to memories of the sun-soaked days of summer. Whether we enjoyed sleeping in late or taking in new sights, summer break provides a time of welcomed reprieve.

Junior Angelina Schulstad traveled to her grandparent's house in British Columbia, Canada. Over the course of nine days, she ventured into the city and mountainside of Vancouver Island. In the city, Angie walked along the seawall, explored the downtown area on foot, and did plenty of shopping.

On Vancouver Island, Angie appreciated serene water views and spending time with family members. She even rode a gondola up part of Whistler's Mountain and then hiked the rest of the way to the top.

She describes this tranquil experience by saying, "All you could really hear was the wind and occasionally the echoing voices of other walkers." Being in this environment allowed Angie to disconnect from the rigors of high school and connect with nature in a beautiful place, surrounded by family.

"All you could really hear was the wind and occasionally the echoing voices of other walkers."
- Angelina Schulstad '28

Going in a different direction (south of Highlands), Junior Emma Maltsen flew to the thirty-seven square mile island of St. Martin in the Caribbean. This island is dual-governed; French in the North and Dutch in the South.

Emma visited both sides of St. Martin, but stayed in the French section. Emma was quick to compliment its charming vibe: "It was honestly amazing…the food was a ten-out-of-ten and I had a fun time." She noted the abundance of restaurants, which commonly served seafood, Italian dishes, or a delicious steak.

Emma's favorite part of the trip was going on a private boat tour traveling to two small islands that were surrounded by crystalline, teal water. On this tour, Emma swam with turtles and went snorkeling.

She also noticed intimate details of St. Martin, such as the countless number of pina coladas served from many street windows, and the numerous stray cats that wandered onto the beaches. Her trip to the islands provided Emma with much needed rest and relaxation.

Visiting an island on a different continent, Junior Ava Makris travelled to Karpathos Island in Greece. Ava's vacation spanned from the end of July into August. She spent her time indulging in delicious Greek cuisine, attending beach parties with her friends, and bonding with family.

Ava shared a memorable excursion: "A little highlight of my trip was spending random afternoons shopping around and finding souvenirs and things I wouldn't normally see at home." She commented that the souvenir shops were filled with evil-eye decorated merchandise and many types of jewelry.

She also fondly recalled starting her summer vacation by jumping into the clear, bright blue sea with friends. After a stressful but successful sophomore year at Northern Highlands, this vacation provided the perfect summer retreat.

It is nice to see the various ways in which Highlanders utilized their summer break. So whether you chose to just decompress, partake in summer work, or go on a treasured vaction, I hope that you all have returned to school rested and ready to tackle the exciting year ahead! ■



Photo Courtesy of Emma Maltsen '28

Emma Maltsen '28 on her boat tour

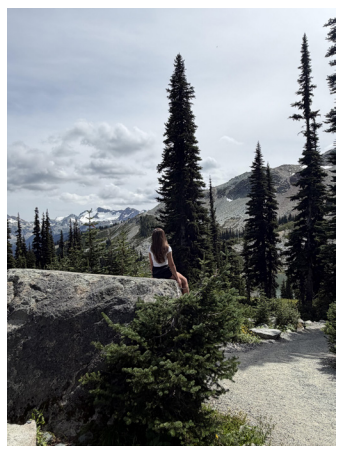


Photo Courtesy of Angelina Schulstad

Angelina Schulstad '28 while hiking

TRADING SUMMER FOR THE SEASON

Fall Atheletes Explain Why Summer Camp Is Worthwhile

Sophia Madasseri '28

While most students spend their summers sleeping in, vacationing, or relaxing, many fall athletes spend part of their time on the court, field, or track, training and preparing for the upcoming season. But are the summer camps they go on actually helpful, or do they just add more stress onto a student-athlete's already busy schedule?

To find out, I interviewed athletes across multiple Highlands sports about their experiences with fall sports camps, including whether they enjoyed them, what they learned, and if they felt the experience was worth their time.

Although fall sports camps require athletes to give up part of their summer, many athletes find that they actually enjoy preparing for the season. Athletes shared that one of the main reasons they enjoyed preseason is because it allows them to spend time with their teammates.

"Camp gives everyone a chance to warm up to each other and warm up their skills for the season."
- Coco Cassese '28

"I enjoy cheer camp because it gives me the opportunity to collaborate with my teammates and learn how to work with everyone before the games start," said Francesca Bellapianta, a junior on the varsity cheer team.

Getting to know your teammates and building trust makes it easier for players to communicate and work together once games begin. For athletes like Francesca, camp provides her with the opportunity to connect with her teammates, have fun, and become more comfortable before the season starts.

One of the biggest benefits students described when interviewed was how sports camps gave them more time to focus on specific skills before the season begins. According to Coco Cassese, a junior on the varsity field hockey team, the summer camp "give[s] everyone a chance to warm up to each other and warm up their skills for the season."

Additional time practicing in the summer allows athletes to focus on skills that they may not have the time to work on during the regular season. This gives them a chance to feel more comfortable, confident, and prepared in their ability to perform well.

Summer sports camps can also help athletes strengthen their mindset and ability to work as part of a team. Coco explained that camp taught her that "your effort really goes a long way," showing that the lessons athletes learn to value hard work and diligence.

Similarly, Maddy Kavanaugh, a junior on the varsity volleyball team, said summer camps have taught her "how important team chemistry and good mentality is to create a winning team." These lessons can help athletes understand the importance of effort, communication, having a positive mindset, and help them become better players overall.

Ultimately, summer sports camps give athletes a chance to connect with their teammates, strengthen their skills, and develop habits that help them feel more prepared for the new season.

While giving up part of the summer is not the most exciting, the experiences athletes gain from camp can make the time and effort worthwhile. ■



Photo courtesy of the NH Cheer Instagram

NH Varsity Cheer at summer camp.

DISCONNECTED: "BELL-TO-BELL" HITS HIGHLANDS

Highlanders are forced to navigate high school life with digital consequences

Lorelai Wiederholz '27

Family emergency? You won't find out until after school anyways. Thanks to the new New Jersey Department of Education and P.L. 2025, c. 195, New Jersey schools are now required by law to adopt a "bell-to-bell" phone ban. This also applies to other personal internet-enabled devices like Airpods, and Apple Watches. Rather than the previous class only-phone limitations, this law takes it to the next level by restricting access from 7:45 AM to 2:36 PM.

Schools across New Jersey are allowed to implement this law differently. The Ramsey school district has decided on Yondr Pouches. These fabric pouches use a magnetic locking mechanism to keep students from using their phones throughout the entire school day. While Northern Highlands has chosen to not use Yondr Pouches to enforce this new policy, they are requiring students to turn off their phones and put them away throughout the entirety of the school day. However, enforcement varies from classroom to classroom. Some teachers still require phones to be placed in the phone holders while others prefer them in a backpack.

Although students might've heard it or not, Northern Highlands has increased consequences for phone related issues. The first offense is confiscation and retrieval at the end of the school day. Dr. LaRocca explained confiscation occurs whenever a student is found using a phone during an instructional period. The second offense is confiscation and a parent must pick up the phone after the conclusion of the school day. The third offense mirrors the second with the inclusion of Saturday detentions increasing in 2 hour increments. Aside from the new phone laws, student IDs are back with stricter implementation. New to this school year, students are expected to swipe into classes and homeroom for attendance.

Do students really care about these new laws and policies? Yes, very much so. As Emma Buckley '27 puts it, "this new phone policy is unfair to students, especially when we're using our phones to know where to go next, text our families or just pass the time." During previous years, students relied heavily on the Saturn app to tell them what class is next. With the new phone ban, students have to figure it out on their own without digital help. Another argument against the phone ban is regarding lunch periods. Sofia Lalime '27, agrees; "Some students use lunchtime to unwind, watch videos or text others. With the new limitations, this is entirely cut off, including for students who sit alone." Many students agree with the notion that "New Jersey schools have much to fix before they start trying to fix phone related issues" a common sentiment through New Jersey social media.



Photo courtesy of nj.com.

Gov. Phil Murphy signs "Bell-to-Bell" law into place.

Though there is nothing we as students can do to change this law, the verdict is clear. The student body does not approve of the new "bell-to-bell" phone ban. Whether students adapt or continue to debate this new law, one thing is certain: high school just got a lot more disconnected.■

SATURN'S NEW UPDATE: SAFER OR STRESSFUL?

In its recent update, Saturn sacrifices utility for privacy

Aubrey Caroll '27

For many students at Highlands, the beginning of a new school year means figuring out your new classes and checking their schedules, wondering who they could possibly be sitting next to for the next nine months. Saturn has always made this process stress-free for many, by allowing students to see who were in their classes, added as a friend or not. Despite this being a big factor as to why people loved adding their classes into Saturn, the app has made recent changes for safety reasons, which have made things much more complicated for its users.



Photo courtesy of Google.

Saturn's interface, where students can see their classmates.

Previously, students could click on a class in Saturn and see the other students that were enrolled in it, even if they were not friends on the app. Now, students can only see the classmates in their classes if they have them added as a friend. The app still does show how many classmates you have in a specific class, but it does not show who they are unless you are friends with them. This can induce stress for students who may have anxiety that don't know what to anticipate. Our brains treat what is unknown as information gaps, which triggers a mild sense of discomfort, sometimes even more discomfort than you'd like, depending on the person.

I think this change has made Saturn worse, and practically defeated one of the main purposes of the app. It was known for its most useful aspect being that you could see who was in your classes before they even began. It could be helpful for finding friends, recognizing familiar names or even simply seeing if you knew anyone in your classes.

However, I am very understanding as to why they had to change this for safety reasons. But, I think they could've gone about it a different way. While writing this article, I realized that to let other verified students see your schedule and classes on Saturn, you must verify your identity as an official student at your school. When people go on Saturn, they should immediately be notified to verify themselves as a student, and can deny this if they'd like to. So, if everyone knew about this when they first opened the app, it would be more effective, especially since only verified students can see other verified students in their classes if they are not added as a friend.

This change is also confusing because it defeats the purpose of adding classmates. If you do not know who's in your class because you don't have them as a friend, how are you supposed to add anyone as a friend? How are you supposed to know who to add? You could add a large number of people from your school as a friend, but generally that is unrealistic at a larger public school like Highlands. Students should not have to add hundreds of random people just to figure out who they share a class with.

I think the new privacy update takes away more than it adds from Saturn. Privacy is important for users, but so is choice. There should be a balance between protecting students' information and keeping the features that made the app useful in the first place. For students trying to figure out their new schedules, finding out who they will be sharing a classroom with shouldn't feel like a guessing game.■

MEET THE SCHOOL BEHIND THE STUDENTS

Parents step into the classroom to see school through their students' eyes

Paula Manrique '28

Many people wonder if Back to School night truly has a point, and if the parents actually find it useful. A highlight that many parents can reflect on what all they got out of the experience.

For example, many parents can agree that they did gain insight on the teacher and even might have gotten the change to have a purposeful conversation.

Junior Danica Rubinstein states, "When my parents get home, they always give me a recap about the night and what they thought about the school." She also adds, "My parents also appreciate the transparency the school provides about the teachers and a rundown on the curriculum."

"When my parents get home, they always give me a recap about the night and what they thought about the school."
-Danica Rubinstein '28

Many parents continue to attend the event, finding a space in their busy schedules to find a way to support their children.

After all, this event is one that gives parents an idea of what their children's day-to-day life will be like for the rest of their school year.

For many parents, the opportunity to meet the teachers who will be teaching their kids is very important.

To compare the high school back to night experience with his own hiexperience, Dr. LaRooca explais his young daughters' schools.

Dr. LaRocca states, "I expect to walk into the classroom, to see where my daughter exists for most of the day, and other aspects."

He also adds, "I honestly just want to make sure that she is a comfortable environment that can foster he growth and academics."

This illustrates how the formatting of most back to school nights, no matter the level of education, will mostly remain the same. This format has always remained pretty similar. The main goal is just to provide parents with a concise glimpse of what the school year will look like for their childrens' forseeable future.

So, for the foreseeable future, Back to School night will be in-person. Many parents continue to attend the event, finding a space in their busy schedules to find a way to support their children.

Fortunately, most parents do see a point in going, and find that it was useful to understand a little more about their student's lives.■



Courtesy of NH Website.

Parents in classroom during Back to School Night.

STATE-WIDE PHONE BAN: A BLESSING OR A CURSE?

A required to ban phones sparks debates among both students and staff

Continued from page 1

Madison Koenig '27

While Murphy believes that this legislation is crucial in teaching students how to "focus on academics and meaningful peer interaction," some students and Highlands disagree with his decision.

"I think that as a senior, it's unfair to switch the precedent that we were used to," 12th grader Syra MacLaren expresses. "I don't have a car, so I don't have a way to communicate with my parents about arranging a ride home; sometimes I'm stuck at the school till 8PM."

Rides home haven't been the only topic of discussion. A first year at Highlands is struggling remembering his schedule, and the phone ban is making it worse.

"I downloaded an app where I can put in the classes I have, when I have them, and what room they're in, but now I'm not even allowed to use it." He went on to state that other new students have had the same issue: "I know a lot of other freshmen got a scheduling app, so they're just as frustrated."

Fortunately, not having phones is something that ninth graders have grown accustomed to throughout middle school, which this student has expressed as the "only upside" to the ban.

Districts across the state are taking different approaches to complying with the phone ban; some schools simply ask the students to power off their devices and keep them out of sight for the day, allowing them to be placed in backpacks or lockers. Other districts, however, are taking the ban more seriously; some schools have invested in new technology that collects students' phones and locks them away until dismissal.



Photo Courtesy of ArshSingh.

ID scanner in library for study hall.

Even Highlands faculty members have contrasting opinions, both with the legislation and amongst themselves. Some teachers require all personal devices to be powered off and placed in holders, while others are more lenient with how students decide to manage their devices in their classrooms. All teachers and faculty have definitely agreed on one thing – devices must be completely stored away. That means not leaving phones, smart watches, personal computers, etc. on desks or in pockets. "I was a classroom teacher for a very long time," vice principal Dr. LaRocca says, "and it's very distracting to have your phone in your pocket."

Another strong opinion here at Highlands, expressed by principal Mr. Occhino, is that New Jersey should have taken diverse routes of limiting personal device usage for each district. "No one ever came and asked 'How are things working in your school?'" he explains, making evident his reluctance to accept the generalization of the law. "That's where I think it was short-sighted." In his opinion, the bill is too broad to be the right choice for all NJ schools, but still necessary in ensuring undivided attention throughout school hours: "While I don't agree with all aspects of the policy…one thing I can certainly agree with is there is a place for phones, and it's not in the classroom."

Students that require electronics for health reasons will have options available. New Jersey School Boards Association has recently reported that accommodations for health-related services typically provided by schools, such as 504 plans or individually-designed programs, must continue to be provided.



Photo Courtesy of Arsh Singh.

Phone holder in library for study hall.

In other words, the NJ Department of Education will make arrangements for students that need electronics for their safety. This exact criteria is outlined in the legislation as "[Schools must] be consistent with state and federal law, including accommodations provided in a student's individualized education program, section 504 educational plan, or student health plan."

Obviously, neither the lifespan of nor the long-term attitude toward this state-wide phone ban cannot be predicted. "We have been dealt a policy that not everyone agrees with," says Occhino; "but we understand that it exists and that we're required to have this policy at our school."

For now, young scholars across the state will have to abide by the prohibitions and keep their phones away while on school grounds.■

STEPPING INTO A NEW CHAPTER

Boomerang project ambassadors welcome the new freshman

Arsh Singh ‘28

For the latest graduating middle school class, the first day of high school can feel intense. A brand new building, unfamiliar learning environments, different teachers, the rotation of schedules, and hundreds of new faces from multiple towns can make the transition from middle school to high school seem overwhelming.



Courtesy of NH website.

Ambassadors welcoming freshman into the gym.

However, to help ease the worries as well as the shift, the schools held the annual Freshman Orientation a few days before the start of the official school year. This event gives incoming freshmen the opportunity to get familiar with the system, learn what to expect, and get more familiar with each other.

An important aspect of orientation is the involvement of the ambassadors from the school’s Boomerang Project. Multiple juniors and seniors volunteer their time and some of their summer to welcome the freshman, answer questions, and help them feel more accommodated in their new environment. Rather than having the new students walk into school on the first day without a clue of where to go and what to do, the ambassadors provide the chance to explain how life works in high school ahead of time.

Ambassadors helped freshmen find important locations throughout the school, including classrooms, cafeterias, gyms, offices, and other areas that they would need to know. This ensures that there is a prevention of getting worried about being lost between passing periods.

Freshman Avery Lanik adds, “It felt nice to be walked around the school and know where everything is before the first day of school. The orientation made me feel way more prepared.”

The orientation was also designed to help freshmen from all four towns and even those out of district meet one another and begin to form friendships outside of their original clique. Dr. LaRocca states, “The idea of freshman orientation is that you are no longer students from four separate towns, but you are now together as highlanders.”

Ambassadors played ice breaker games which encouraged teamwork, getting to know one another, and participation within a new group. While some students may have initially felt shy or nervous, the activities encouraged everyone to participate and help create a more relaxed atmosphere.

Another significant part of the orientation was the opportunity to ask the ambassadors questions. Due to the ambassadors being juniors and seniors, they had already experienced multiple years of their high school career. Therefore, the freshmen could ask about everything they were originally concerned about before entering high school. However, one of the most important lessons the ambassadors provided was to take the time to balance it all. Academics, sports, clubs, and friends can be a tedious task while adjusting, so it is important to be sure to plan, organize, and have fun.

By the end of orientation, many freshmen and ambassadors were exhausted. Junior ambassador Chloe Terrizzi states, “The experience was tiring, but it was rewarding and worth it at the end to make the freshmen feel more welcome and comfortable at Northern Highlands.”



Courtesy of NH website.

A staff member speaks to students during orientation.

Although a simple freshman orientation cannot answer every question or concern, it can make the first day of school seem a lot less scary and intimidating. Mr. Occhino states, “Connections and acclimation are really what it is all about.”

Rather than entering an unfamiliar school building filled with uncertainty, students can walk through the doors knowing where they are going and recognize a few friendly faces.■

BACK TO THE... PAST?

The return from computers to paper in the classroom

Abby Skripak ‘28

In Back to the Future, traveling to the past takes a flying car. At Highlands, all it takes is paper and pencil.

This year, many students are noticing a big change in the classroom—after years of schoolwork becoming increasingly digital, students are now noting a return to notebooks and worksheets.

This observation reflects a real pattern: with concerns about AI use and online distractions on the rise, many teachers have made the decision to return to handwritten notes and printed assignments.



Courtesy of Peacefield History.

An example of what paper schoolwork may look like.

For many students, this shift has caused a significant change to their school day. Students report that about five to six of their eight classes use paper most of the time. They contend that in past years, they were only required to use paper in two to three classes, and most teachers allowed them to make the decision—paper or digital notes/work—themselves.

This shift occurs as teachers face new challenges that came as a side effect of computers becoming so commonplace.

With generative AI, students can produce essays, assignments, and projects without ever having typed a single word. And with computers providing students access to the world that is the internet, students can shift their focus from an assignment to games, work from other classes, and social media at the click of a button.

Thus, many teachers are concerned that using computers in the classroom is creating a group of students who are neither attentive nor actually learning, since many students are distracted by their computers and/or generating their ideas and work using AI.

Moreover, the decision to shift back to paper wasn’t without precedent. In a research synthesis—published in the Journal of Research in Reading—based on 33 studies across 29 reports, some advantages were found for paper use, but there was no overarching conclusion stating that paper is better for every student and every assignment.

The analysis found that students generally performed better when they read on paper as opposed to on a screen—they understood and remembered the material slightly better—but they found no difference in the amount of time it took to read the text.

So, while these findings do offer some support to the argument that paper is better for reading, they don’t address the larger question: do paper assignments and notes work better for all students, or is there variance from student to student? Should students be able to make the decision for themselves?

Because for some students, the data doesn’t reflect their experience. “Personally, [using paper] hasn’t been more productive for me. I actually see better performance when I use my computer,” one junior expressed.

So, the return to paper raises a larger question about who should be deciding how students learn best.

Where should the line be drawn? If teachers think that using paper is in the best interest of students, should they be able to enforce paper use as a classwide rule? Or should it be left up to the students to decide what works best for them?

“I think there should always be a choice. It should be up to the students,” a junior maintained.

So, in the end, the question isn’t necessarily about whether paper or computers are better: it’s about whether there’s one overarching method that works better for all students (and should therefore be enforced upon all students), or if there’s instead a difference from one student to the next. Maybe moving forward doesn’t mean leaving paper behind completely, but knowing when—and how—to bring it back.■

“After years of schoolwork becoming increasingly digital, students are now noting a return to notebooks and worksheets.”

“Personally, [using paper] hasn’t been more productive for me. I actually see better performance when I use my computer.”

WELCOMING THE NEW SUPERINTENDENT

An inside look into our superintendent

Continued from page 1

Spencer Dosik ’28

This background should prove useful to him as a “conduit to the publicly elected Board of Education” as LaRocca put it.

The importance of having someone in this position with such a background is that the superintendent, unlike a principal, often communicates directly with the Board of Education, which does not inherently consist of education professionals.

Occhino described Barcadepone, saying that, from what he heard, “[Barcadepone] is an excellent collaborator… and an excellent communicator.”

These two traits reflect the role of a superintendent, who must be transparent and willing to both give and receive input from members of the community in order to ultimately guide the school in the right direction.

“Occhino described Barcadepone, saying that, from what heard, Barcadepone is an excellent collaborator... and an excellent communicator.”

“Barcadepone’s approach will be led by a philosophy that prioritizes the best interests of the students .”
-Christine Ferrarie

In a letter from Board of Education President Christine Ferrarie, it was expressed that Barcadepone’s approach will be led by a philosophy that prioritizes the best interests of the students, whether considering academics, programs, facilities, or district resources.



Courtesy of NH.

Picture of our new superintendent.

The same letter also detailed great optimism on the part of the Board of Education as a whole, an optimism shared by Occhino and LaRocca.

Ultimately, the long-term policies Barcadepone will pursue will depend largely on his assessment of the district’s priorities once he becomes acclimated to its culture and processes.

For students and families, this transition will likely be most noticeable through changes within the district. Barcadepone’s early focus appears to be on understanding the district before making major changes.

The views expressed by the administration suggest that the transition is not expected to disrupt the existing structure of the school, particularly during Barcadepone’s initial period of evaluation. ■

STATE-WIDE PHONE BAN: A BLESSING OR A CURSE?

A required to ban phones sparks debates among both students and staff

Continued from page 1

Madison Koenig ’27

While Murphy believes that this legislation is crucial in teaching students how to “focus on academics and meaningful peer interaction,” some students and Highlands disagree with his decision.

“I think that as a senior, it’s unfair to switch the precedent that we were used to,” 12th grader Syra MacLaren expresses. “I don’t have a car, so I don’t have a way to communicate with my parents about arranging a ride home; sometimes I’m stuck at the school till 8PM.”

Rides home haven’t been the only topic of discussion. A first year at Highlands is struggling remembering his schedule, and the phone ban is making it worse.

“I downloaded an app where I can put in the classes I have, when I have them, and what room they’re in, but now I’m not even allowed to use it.” He went on to state that other new students have had the same issue: “I know a lot of other freshmen got a scheduling app, so they’re just as frustrated.”

Fortunately, not having phones is something that ninth graders have grown accustomed to throughout middle school, which this student has expressed as the “only upside” to the ban.

Districts across the state are taking different approaches to complying with the phone ban; some schools simply ask the students to power off their devices and keep them out of sight for the day, allowing them to be placed in backpacks or lockers. Other districts, however, are taking the ban more seriously; some schools have invested in new technology that collects students’ phones and locks them away until dismissal.

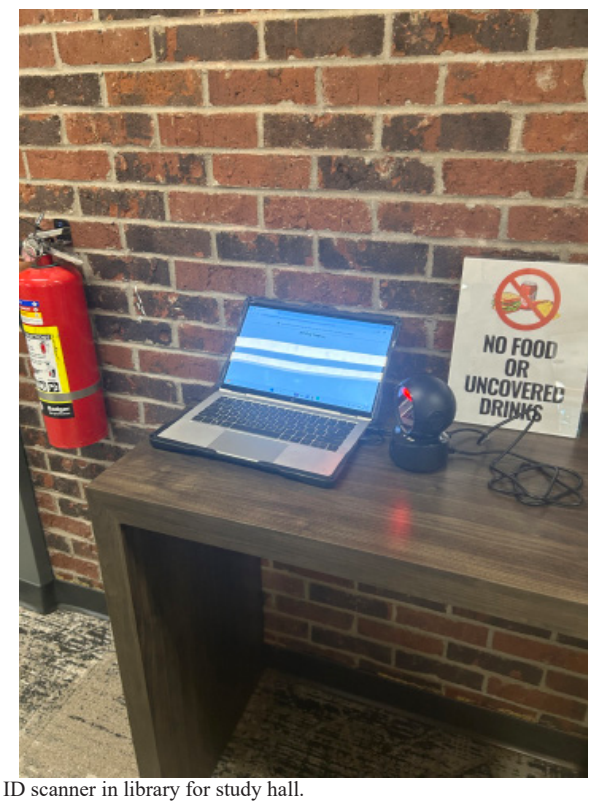


Photo courtesy of Arsh Singh.

ID scanner in library for study hall.

Even Highlands faculty members have contrasting opinions, both with the legislation and amongst themselves. Some teachers require all personal devices to be powered off and placed in holders, while others are more lenient with how students decide to manage their devices in their classrooms. All teachers and faculty have definitely agreed on one thing – devices must be completely stored away. That means not leaving phones, smart watches, personal computers, etc. on desks or in pockets. “I was a classroom teacher for a very long time,” vice principal Dr. LaRocca says, “and it’s very distracting to have your phone in your pocket.”

Another strong opinion here at Highlands, expressed by principal Mr. Occhino, is that New Jersey should have taken diverse routes of limiting personal device usage for each district. “No one ever came and asked ‘How are things working in your school?’” he explains, making evident his reluctance to accept the generalization of the law. “That’s where I think it was short-sighted.” In his opinion, the bill is too broad to be the right choice for all NJ schools, but still necessary in ensuring undivided attention throughout school hours: “While I don’t agree with all aspects of the policy…one thing I can certainly agree with is there is a place for phones, and it’s not in the classroom.”

Students that require electronics for health reasons will have options available. New Jersey School Boards Association has recently reported that accommodations for health-related services typically provided by schools, such as 504 plans or individually-designed programs, must continue to be provided.



Photo Courtesy of Arsh Singh.

Phone holder in library for study hall.

In other words, the NJ Department of Education will make arrangements for students that need electronics for their safety. This exact criteria is outlined in the legislation as “[Schools must] be consistent with state and federal law, including accommodations provided in a student’s individualized education program, section 504 educational plan, or student health plan.”

Obviously, neither the lifespan of nor the long-term attitude toward this state-wide phone ban cannot be predicted. “We have been dealt a policy that not everyone agrees with,” says Occhino; “but we understand that it exists and that we’re required to have this policy at our school.”

For now, young scholars across the state will have to abide by the prohibitions and keep their phones away while on school grounds.■

WHAT'S UP WITH ALL THE POLKA DOTS?

How social media is impacting students' clothing choices

Dylan Fink '28

As the school year comes to a start, students direct their focus to their fashion choices, in hopes of starting the year off strong. They want to be both organized and put together as part of starting new habits for the new year.

People also want to make a good first impression on their peers, teachers, teammates, coaches, and administrators.

However, in this desire to appear put together and on trend, many people turn to social media platforms for guidance and inspiration. Why is it that high school students look to social media for outfit inspiration?

One student, Ava Ritz, junior, class of 2028, thinks that "social media is a great way to get outfit and fashion inspiration because it lets me know what is trendy and gives me new outfit ideas," especially in the fall months "when people tend to dress nicer in jeans and jean skirts."

An old trend that has made a resurgence is baggy denim (for both boys and girls).

Another student, Ava Decilveo, junior, class of 2028, believes that her peers turn to social media "because they like to replicate what they see their favorite influencers doing online, and it is very easy to mimic outfits on social media."

This helps students lessen the burden of having to choose an outfit every day by having social media help them instead. This allows them to focus on schoolwork and extracurricular activities, including sports, clubs, and community service.

Junior Sydney Rossi, class of 2028, agrees with this, stating that "we can buy almost exactly what they're wearing in their videos because they collab with other companies", allowing students to purchase clothing items directly from the influencer's account.

This means that almost everyone shops at the few stores because "people repeatedly see the same clothing styles and patterns like stripes and polka dots, motivating them to make a purchase," notes Junior Rielyn Zerrener, class of 2028. As a result, many students often end up wearing the exact same outfit, even if they didn't intend to twin.

As for clothing trends based on what students (especially female students see online, they typically wear "sweat sets from places like Alo, Aritzia, Edikted, and Garage" in the colder winter months "because they are easy, comfortable, simple and make me feel put together," says Ava Decilveo.

In addition, Rielyn Zerrenner notes that an old trend that has made a resurgence is baggy denim (for both boys and girls). She has seen a lot of people "wearing low-rise, wide-legged jeans with either tank tops or baby t- shirts in the fall and spring."

However, students don't just follow every trend they see online. There are many trends that students do not buy into. Sydney Rossi dislikes "the trend where people wear oversized T-shirts and jeans together because I feel like they don't go together and it dresses it down." Ava Ritz dislikes the trend of "wearing jean shorts in gen- eral because they aren't comfortable", although she does think they look good on other people. ■



Photo courtesy of NRHS Instagram.

Students Emma Doris and Abby Skripak wearing sweat sets.



Photo courtesy of NHRHS Instagram.

Students wearing trendy clothing.

STUDENTS SECURE SUMMER JOBS

Are summer jobs more than just a paycheck?

Pragnya Raj '28

The one thing any student looks forward to as the school year is coming to an end is summer. Summer is every student's way of getting a break and gaining freedom from months of doing homework and studying for tests, finals, and more. It's a time that gives students a break before the school year starts again. For many students, this break is not just about relaxing, but also about finding ways to make the most of their time away from school.

For most people, summer is a time to hang out with friends, sleep in late, and simply relax. However, summer is also seen as a way to get a head start in making some cash for themselves: working at a restaurant, summer camp, or as a lifeguard are all options for students. This keeps students busy but is also a way to socialize, learn financial responsibility, and gain real-world experience.

For Jessica, the job was more than making money: it helped her grow as a person.



Photo courtesy of Coco Cassese.

Students Coco Cassese and Rielyn Zerrenner working at Beets.

For some students, summer jobs have become a big part of how they spend their break. Some jobs are meant to be a new experience, helping students make new friends while learning to become more confident. Junior Jessica Levinson, class of 2028, describes her job as a student camp counselor as enjoyable and said it allowed her to be with her camp friends, as she used to go to the same summer camp when she was younger.

As a counselor, her day would consist of assisting with camp activities and taking care of the younger kids. Through this experience, she has developed "patience when it came to being with kids", but she has also learned to become "more independent and confident.' Jessica also emphasizes how this job really changed her as a person, making her more focused. This is important because "they are all so young and little" and need to be watched very carefully.

Moreover, it was also a way for her to be with her camp friends. After working there, she felt more confident and believed she had gained important leadership skills. For Jessica, the job was more than just making money; it helped her grow as a person.

As seen through Jessica, summer jobs can allow you to develop leadership skills while working with kids. For some, summer jobs are about gaining work experience and learning to interact with customers.

Another student, Rhiane Mamagon, junior, class of 2028, expresses how working at Sweetbeanz, a new coffee and gelato shop in Allendale, allowed her to stay busy during the summer instead of "bumming around and not being productive." Her typical day involves serving customers, scooping gelato, and making coffees.

Similar to Jessica Rhaine says, working at Sweetbeanz has helped her become more patient with others and improve her communication skills: "I learned that communication skills are really important, especially when it comes to talking with customers who are rude, and you still have to be kind and understanding" (Rhaine). She emphasized how patience is an important skill in general because without it, it is hard to move forward in life and achieve your goals.

Summer jobs are like little stepping stones leading up to the jobs high schoolers will have in the future. In any field or business, confidence, leadership, and communication are all necessary skills that can help students as they enter the real world. ■

MEET THE NEW BAND DIRECTOR

What Does New Leadership Mean for the Marching Band?

Olivia Benyola ‘28

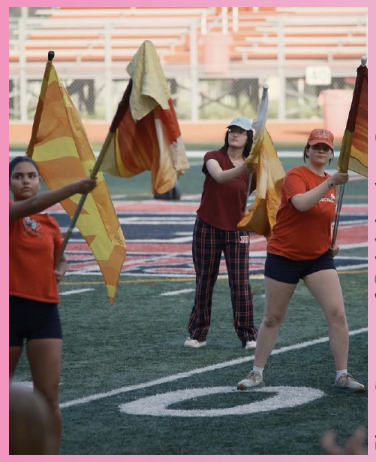


Photo Courtesy of @nhrhsbands on Instagram

Color Guard Performance

This fall Highlands welcomes a brand new addition to the musical community. Mr. Schaarschmidt is the new teacher of AP Music Theory and band, as well as the director of the marching band. He and the marching band have already completed a successful preseason and halftime show of the Highlands versus Wayne Valley football game, and they are looking forward to a thriving continuation of the season. Additionally on September 19, the marching band attended a competition at Edison High School and won first place in their category. This was after they experienced a slight drop in participation after last year’s seniors graduated. Overall, with a new teacher’s guidance, the marching band’s season is already looking promising, and the concert band and jazz band’s contributions to the art community of Highlands are eagerly anticipated.



Photo Courtesy of Pompton Lakes High

Mr. Schaarschmidt

Mr. Schaarschmidt is going into his sixth year as an educator. Describing his prior experience in musical education, he said, “In my past, I’ve worked at West Essex Middle School for a couple years, and the past two years I’ve been at Pompton Lakes High School, doing everything I plan to do here, including marching band, jazz band, pit orchestra. So [I’ve] been teaching for a couple years, but this is just the next step of my career.” He explained, when asked how he felt about the new role, his excitement to be in a different environment, as students have been very welcoming and the chaos of starting a new school year has started to settle.

He detailed his goals and vision for the coming year, stating, “My stance as a band director is it needs to be a very student centered program where the students have to feel comfortable, they have to feel safe. And it just has to be a positive community to be a part of. So, I’m really big on community building, making sure it’s a positive place, and overall, we’re having fun, and through that, we’ll grow a bit… and kind of get better along the way.” So, while most of the performances, experiences, and ensembles are being kept relatively the same, Mr. Schaarschmidt hopes to strive for an accepting, supportive community.



Photo Courtesy of @nhrhsbands on Instagram

Award from September 19 Competition

With the introduction of a new teacher, student culture and mindset in these spaces has shifted. Detailing how this season of marching band differs from last, junior Gabriel Benyola stated, “Mr. Schaarschmidt has a much more community focused approach to marching band. He wants us to have fun and be friends, because it contributes to a winning mindset. We have a lot more fun… compared to last year. In band classes, he’s very focused on improving musical concepts like tuning by ear and phrasing.” When asked about how he felt about the upcoming season and how it’s been going so far, he explained, “I’m excited for the new season, as I think our show has a lot more potential to be liked by judges for musical/visual effects. “Effect” in marching band judging is the efficacy of a show to tell a story. I think we’ll be able to do more because our band is willing to put in more hours and just put our noses to the grindstone until the show looks and sounds good.”

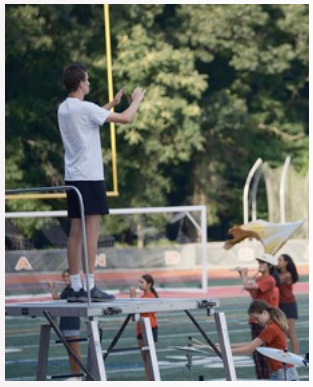


Photo Courtesy of @nhrhsbands on Instagram

Conducting During Preseason Practice

Overall, both Mr. Schaarschmidt and his students are committed to making this a memorable season of marching band, as well as making meaningful contributions to the larger art community at Highlands through performances by the concert and jazz bands. ■

BUILDING LEADERS: THE AMBASSADORS' RETREAT

Students come together to build leadership skills and strenghten connections

Cameron Taylor '28

Northern Highlands has a wonderful group of upperclassmen who dedicate themselves to helping out the incoming freshman every year.

This group of people are called the Northern Highlands Ambassadors, and their purpose at this school is very important to the community.

Starting at a new school can be a daunting and confusing time, and the ambassadors of Northern Highlands are here to make the transition as easy as possible.

As Ambassadors, their purposes range from being role models to just a friendly face for the freshmen to talk to and ask questions.

With every school year, new ambassadors apply to get chosen for the program, and only a select amount of people make it in. But with these new members, comes the need to teach them what their job as an ambassador is really about, and how to best execute it.

"We learned different techniques and ways to best help us connect to the upcoming freshmen."
- Silvia Di Martino '28

But where do they learn how to do this?

One of the places where these upperclassmen get taught how to be an ambassador is a retreat over the summer that takes place right before the school year starts.

This retreat is a very important factor in how the ambassadors learn to do their job for the school.

During this overnight retreat all of the students that are part of the program arrive by bus to a location far removed from the school atmosphere.

Katarina Noye Lozada, a Junior here at Highlands, said that the retreat took place at the "YMCA at Fairview Lake."

There, the students slept over in cabins, did team building activities in order to get to know each other, while the whole time they were also learning what being an ambassador entails.

When asked about the activities that these students participated in, Silvia Di Martino, a junior at Northern Highlands, stated "We participated in team building activities where we not only spent time getting to know each other, but also learned different techniques and ways to best help us connect to the upcoming freshmen."

More specifically though, she said that the retreat was very good at connecting the students with each other with "fun activities, such as tennis, boat riding, volleyball, archery, axe throwing, or even taking a walk."

This emphasizes that while it's extremely important that the ambassadors know how to conduct their responsibilities once they get back to school, it's just as important that the ambassadors act as a team, rely on & help each other out throughout the whole process.

As Ambassadors, their roles range from being role models to simply being a friendly face for freshmen to talk to and ask questions.

Overall, the summer retreat definitely did its job well. It was a great experience, and one that is imperative to the success of the ambassador program every year.

Unaninmously, when asked if the summer retreat sufficiently prepared them for their jobs during the school year, current ambassadors always responded with yes.

Silvia Di Martino stated that the success of the retreat was heavily influenced by the "wonderful staff and what they taught us, and the great students we got to spend the two days with." ■

RESOLUTION: SURVIVE ANOTHER SCHOOL YEAR

From better grades to better time management, students are setting their goals

Berin Erim '28

September has a funny way of convincing us that we are going to become completely different people.

Every school year starts with big plans: less procrastination, better grades, and staying organized.

However, that all only lasts till the first major assignment. All of a sudden, "I'll just do it tomorrow before school" becomes the plan.

This school year, many students are hoping that their resolutions will last a little longer than just the first week.

For some students, these goals are focused on academics, while others are hoping to become more involved in school or simply find a better balance between school and their personal lives.

For Shyna Rao, Class of 2028, one of her biggest goals this year is to achieve good grades while meeting the personal standards that she has set for herself.

She also plans to get more involved outside of classes by joining DECA and Model UN.

Shyna hopes to stay motivated and remember to prioritize her mental health.

With new activities and responsibilities, staying organized will be important for Shyna as she works toward her goals throughout the year.

While Shyna is focusing on both academics and getting involved, Ilya Maltsev's, Class of 2028, resolution is about staying on top of everything as classes only get more challenging.

"My biggest goal is to get better grades, stay on task with my classes because I'm taking more serious classes and do all my homework on time" Ilya said.

As students move into more difficult classes, keeping up with assignments can become harder, making time management an important part of reaching their goals.

Ilya also has some advice for freshmen: stay organized and get things done on time. "Doing everything on time is beneficial, and have a planner because you don't want to be the person who comes to class and doesn't have homework to submit" Ilya said.

Although using a planner may seem like a small change, staying organized can help students keep track of assignments and avoid falling behind.

For many students, resolutions are not necessarily about making huge changes. Instead, they can be about creating small habits that make everyday school life easier.

Whether that means starting homework earlier, keeping track of assignments, studying more consistently, or making time for activities outside of school, these habits can add up over time.



Photo Courtesy of Google

Photo of a goals list for the new academic year

Getting involved is another goal that students may have at the beginning of the school year.

Clubs and activities give students the opportunity to meet new people, explore their interests, and become more connected to the school community.

For students like Shyna, joining DECA and Model UN can be a way to step outside of the classroom while still developing new skills.

Although the first few weeks of school may be when motivation is at its highest, keeping your resolutions throughout the year is challenging.

It is easy to set goals when the school year is just beginning, but the real challenge is continuing to work toward them when things get busy.

Whatever your goals may be, the small changes you stick to throughout the year can make a big difference.

A resolution does not have to be perfect, and students do not have to accomplish everything at once.

What matters is continuing to make an effort, even after the excitement of a new school year wears off.

After all, the goal isn't to become a completely different person by September, it's to make it to June knowing you actually stuck with the goals you set. ■

A COLORFUL TRADITION

Seniors turn their cars into unique displays of creativity, personality, and school tradition

Evelyn Ha '27

For seniors, the start of the school year comes with plenty of traditions, but one of the most colorful can be found right in the parking lot. Each year, seniors transform their everyday cars into moving celebrations of their final year of high school.



Photo Courtesy of Evelyn Ha, '27.

The back window of Bailey Gornell's car.

From bright drawings covering windows to references to favorite movies and inside jokes, the senior parking lot becomes a display of creativity and personality. This year, we decided to document the decorated cars and learn more about the process, inspiration, and experiences behind them.

There is no single way to decorate a senior car. Some students cover nearly every available window with colorful designs, while others choose just a few drawings or phrases.

The variety is part of what makes the tradition interesting. Walking through the parking lot, no two cars look exactly alike. Designs can reflect a student's hobbies, favorite characters, sense of humor, or simply an aesthetic they like.

Although the cars share the same purpose of celebrating senior year, each one tells a different story about the person behind the wheel.

For many students, decorating their cars is an opportunity to express themselves in a way that is both creative and personal. A car that might otherwise blend into the parking lot becomes something recognizable and unique.

Whether a student chooses bright colors, elaborate illustrations, or a more minimal design, the finished product offers a small glimpse into their personality. Even students who are not particularly interested in art can participate, since the tradition does not require any specific artistic ability or style.

For senior Bailey Gornell, finding inspiration was easy thanks to social media. She looked through Pinterest, TikTok, and Instagram, as well as photos of senior cars that other students had decorated.

These platforms offered a variety of ideas, allowing her to explore different styles before deciding what she wanted to include on her own car.

"I got a lot of inspiration from Pinterest and photos that I had seen of other people who had decorated their cars," Gornell said. "I used a couple ideas that my friends had given me."

Social media has made it easier than ever to find inspiration for creative projects like this one. A quick search can reveal countless examples of decorated cars, ranging from simple lettering to detailed illustrations.

Rather than starting with a completely blank slate, students can combine elements from several designs to create something that feels more personal. Friends can also play an important role in the creative process, suggesting ideas or helping decide which designs would look best together.

Gornell also wanted to include something that reflected her own interests. Among the decorations was a reference to Spider-Man, one of her favorite movies. While some of her ideas came from designs she had seen elsewhere, this detail added a personal touch that made the car feel more distinctly hers.

"I also included a reference to Spider-Man, which is one of my favorite movies," Gornell said.

Including favorite movies, characters, and other personal references allows students to turn their cars into more than just colorful decorations. These details can represent interests that have been important to them throughout high school or simply things they enjoy at the moment. A design does not need to have a complicated meaning to be significant. Sometimes, including a favorite character is enough to make the finished car feel special.

Once students have gathered their inspiration, the next step is bringing their ideas to life. Although the finished designs can look elaborate, the decorating process does not necessarily require a large amount of time or expensive materials. Much of the work can be completed with a few supplies, a little planning, and help from friends.

For Gornell, the process was relatively quick. Rather than decorating the entire car, she and her friends focused mainly on the windows, which gave them enough room to include their designs without making the project overly complicated.

"Decorating didn't take that long because we mainly only did the windows of my car," she explained. "It probably only took like an hour or two."

Having several people involved also helped speed up the process. Gornell worked with four other people, allowing them to divide the decorating and complete the project together. What might have taken much longer for one person became a manageable activity for a group.

The process of decorating a car can vary depending on how much detail students want to include. Simple lettering and small illustrations might only take a short amount of time, while larger designs require more planning and patience. Students also have to consider how much space is available and where different decorations will fit. Unlike a poster or canvas, a car has windows of different shapes and sizes, which can influence how a design is arranged.

The group purchased chalk markers from Amazon, choosing a variety of colors and thicknesses. Having different marker sizes allowed them to create a range of designs, from larger lettering to smaller details. According to Gornell, the brightest colors worked particularly well, giving the finished decorations a more noticeable appearance.

One advantage of using chalk markers was that mistakes were easy to correct. Decorating a car is not necessarily a precise process, especially when several people are working on different sections at the same time. A drawing might not turn out as expected, or a phrase might need to be repositioned. Fortunately, the materials allowed Gornell and her friends to make changes without starting over.

"Anytime we messed up we could just use a paper towel or with water or with Windex to get it off and redo it," Gornell explained.

This flexibility makes the activity more approachable for students who might feel intimidated by drawing or painting. Since mistakes are not permanent, there is less pressure to get everything right on the first attempt. Students can experiment with different ideas, change their minds, and adjust their designs as they go.

Beyond the decorations themselves, the experience of creating them can be just as memorable as the finished product. For Gornell, the project was not simply about making her car look different. It was also an opportunity to spend time with friends and enjoy a creative activity together.

"It was a fun activity for me and my friends," she said. "We got to listen to music and just get crafty."

Working together can turn a relatively simple decorating project into a shared memory. Friends can exchange ideas, help one another with drawings, and laugh when something does not turn out as planned. Even the process of correcting mistakes becomes part of the experience rather than something that takes away from it.

For seniors, these moments can feel especially meaningful. The beginning of senior year marks the start of a period filled with both excitement and anticipation. Students are preparing for college applications, graduation, and the changes that will come after high school.

In the middle of these responsibilities, traditions like car decorating offer an opportunity to enjoy the present and celebrate reaching their final year together.

Once the decorating is finished, the cars become part of the everyday school environment. Students see them when arriving in the morning, walking through the parking lot, or leaving after a long day of classes and activities. What began as a temporary creative project becomes a visible reminder of senior year.

Although the decorations will eventually be washed away, the experiences behind them can last much longer. The time spent gathering inspiration, choosing materials, drawing with friends, and admiring the finished designs becomes part of the collection of memories students take with them after graduation.

Senior car decorating may seem like a small tradition compared with major milestones such as prom or graduation, but it captures something important about the final year of high school.

Each decorated car represents a different combination of inspiration, effort, and personality. Together, they transform the parking lot into a colorful reflection of the senior class, creating memories that will remain long after the chalk marker designs have disappeared. ■



Photo Courtesy of Evelyn Ha, '27.

Bailey Gornell and Weronika Dobias in front of Dobias' car.

FINDING FOSSE

Students got an early taste of Chicago during a summer movement workshop

Addison Menzella, ‘28

On Friday, August 28, Northern Highlands Theatre Company hosted a Summer Movement Workshop to give students an early introduction to the upcoming musical, Chicago. Planned by Mrs. Strang-Wolf and led by choreographer Ava Rakowski, the approximately two-hour workshop focused on movement, choreography and the unique dance style students will encounter during the show.

The workshop gave students the opportunity to begin exploring the musical months before auditions and rehearsals officially begin. For many, it was also a chance to reconnect with friends and get back into the rhythm of theater after summer break. Students who attended were able to learn more about the production while getting a preview of the type of movement and choreography they can expect during the Chicago season.

“I decided to attend the Summer Movement Workshop to start to get a grasp for the kind of dancing that we are planning to do during the musical, Chicago!” said Lucy Roberts, a senior. “I was really excited to learn some of the material that we will be performing in the show while also having a fun day in the summer to dance with my friends.”

A major focus of the workshop was the choreography style of Bob Fosse, known for its controlled, angular and highly intentional movements. Rather than relying on large or exaggerated movements, Fosse’s style often emphasizes precision, sharp shapes and small, deliberate motions. Students practiced Fosse-inspired walks and other exercises designed to help them understand the style and begin becoming comfortable with its distinctive movement. For students accustomed to more traditional or energetic forms of dance, the style presented a new challenge. “I learned a lot of new things at this workshop,” Roberts said. “Specifically, I learned a lot about the dance style of Fosse. I learned a lot about controlled and purposeful movement.” Abby Acer, a junior, also found the style different from the high-energy choreography she experienced while performing in last year’s Little Shop of Horrors. After spending the previous production performing a role that required energetic and constantly moving choreography, Acer said learning Fosse’s more controlled style required her to approach movement differently.



Photo Courtesy of NHTC Instagram.

Highlanders at the Summer Movement Workshop

“Fosse is not like that,” Acer said, describing the difference between the two styles. “It’s a small step under yourself and take another small step. It was just a challenge to still have that same focus into my fingertips or the way that I was moving my arm.”

Although the choreography was challenging, students also found ways to make the workshop enjoyable. The workshop wasn’t all about technical training; students also had the opportunity to learn choreography from “All That Jazz,” one of Chicago’s most recognizable songs. Learning an actual piece from the musical allowed students to put the techniques they had practiced into action.

Roberts said learning and performing the choreography with her friends was one of her favorite parts of the day. “I loved learning the Broadway choreography to ‘All That Jazz’ and performing it in small groups with the people that I love,” she said.

The workshop also brought together students with different levels of theater and dance experience. For some, it was an opportunity to prepare for another season of NHTC productions, while for others, it was a first step into the theater community.

For Lucy Sym, a freshman, the workshop offered an opportunity to get an early look at her first musical at Northern Highlands. Attending the workshop allowed her to learn about the movement style before auditions and get a better sense of what the production will be like.

“I thought it was very helpful because I now understand the style of dance we will be using for the show,” Sym said. “I think the workshop got me excited for the show and taught me a little about the style of the dance we will be using and the vibe of the show.”

For students preparing to audition, the workshop also provided a chance to become familiar with Rakowski’s choreography and expectations. Acer said working directly with the choreographer helped her better understand what she could expect during the audition process and gave her more confidence going into the upcoming season.

The workshop also provided an opportunity for students to hear more about the creative team’s vision for Chicago. Getting an early introduction to the movement style allowed students to begin thinking about how they might approach the production and what skills they could continue practicing before auditions.

Beyond the choreography itself, the workshop helped create a sense of community among returning theater students and those new to NHTC. Students encouraged one another throughout the workshop, particularly when practicing movements that initially felt uncomfortable or unfamiliar. For Acer, one of the most memorable parts of the day was the positive atmosphere among the students as they worked through the choreography together.

The workshop also gave students a chance to reconnect after spending much of the summer away from the theater environment. Between learning new choreography, practicing Fosse-style movement and working with friends, the event served as an early return to the collaborative atmosphere that comes with putting together a musical.

As the winter production approaches, students are already looking forward to returning to the stage. For Roberts, who will graduate this year, the upcoming production is especially meaningful. “I am excited to get to be back on stage with all of my friends while putting on a production that I know will be awesome,” Roberts said. “Especially being a senior, I am really looking forward to the little moments that go into this process.”

For Sym, the upcoming production will also mark an important milestone as she prepares to participate in her first musical at Northern Highlands.

With new choreography, a distinctive movement style and an enthusiastic group of students already preparing, the Summer Movement Workshop gave NHTC members an early glimpse into what the Chicago season has in store. While auditions and rehearsals are still ahead, students have already begun learning the style, building their confidence and getting excited about taking the stage. ■

FROM ITHACA TO QUEENS: THIS SUMMER’S BLOCKBUSTERS

Highlanders reflect on the films that defined their summer

Chloe Terrezi, ‘28

For many students at Highlands, summer meant spending more quality time with friends and family, sometimes including a trip to the movie theater. Summer 2026 brought highly anticipated films, including The Odyssey and Spider-Man: Brand New Day. Students’ reactions differed, sparking conversations about which was the better summer watch. Meanwhile, others skipped both blockbusters in favor of personal favorites.

Christopher Nolan’s The Odyssey, based on the ancient Greek epic poem attributed to Homer, follows Odysseus on his long journey home after the Trojan War. With its large-scale cinematography and historical setting, the film offered audiences an experience beyond a casual watch.

For junior Ayanna Granda, the movie lived up to expectations. She particularly enjoyed its symbolism: “I really liked when the woman turned Odysseus’ crew into pigs.” Beyond the story, Granda appreciated the music and Nolan’s choice to show the film in IMAX, a high-resolution projection system. “Seeing the movie in IMAX added to the experience. It made the audience feel like they were part of the film itself.” She enjoyed the movie enough to prefer it over Spider-Man.

Other students focused on different moments. Junior Danica Rubinstein noted that her favorite scene was when “Odysseus finally returned from his journey and disguised himself as a beggar.” These reactions demonstrate how the film gave audiences plenty to discuss after leaving the theater.

Spider-Man: Brand New Day, on the other hand, offered a different experience. Unlike the previous three films directed by Jon Watts, the newest installment was directed by Destin Daniel Cretton, known for Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings.

Junior Emi Granada enjoyed Spider-Man but felt it lacked the depth of previous Marvel movies, describing it as “less developmental to the plot and more like a filler in the series.” Despite these criticisms, she acknowledged its entertainment value. Junior Serena Wang had a more positive reaction, finding the balance between emotional and humorous moments refreshing and recommending the movie to others.

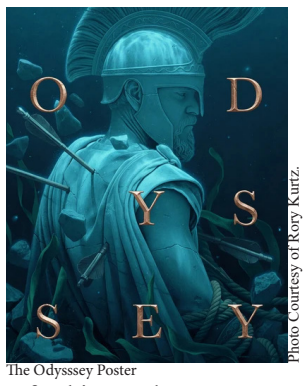


Photo Courtesy of Rory Kurtz.

The Odysssey Poster

The contrasting styles of these blockbusters created an unofficial debate among students: Spider-Man or The Odyssey? Based on student reactions, the answer depended largely on individual expectations. While Spider-Man offered lighthearted entertainment, The Odyssey provided a more emotionally intense experience.



Photo Courtesy of Marvel.

Spider-Man Brand New Day Poster

Of course, not every Highlander spent their summer watching blockbusters. Junior Abby Acer enthusiastically chose People We Meet on Vacation, a travel romance with plenty of summer appeal. Junior Suah Evanski preferred the comedy and musicality of Mamma Mia, stating that she “still replays the soundtrack at least twice every summer season.”

These personal favorites demonstrate that summer movie-watching extends beyond highly anticipated releases. For some students, returning to familiar films can be just as enjoyable as experiencing something new.

Ultimately, summer movies give people something to experience with those important to them. Whether Highlanders watched an ancient epic in IMAX, laughed through a Marvel movie, or revisited a comfort film, movies became another way to connect with one another. As the school year began, these films entered conversations and became another part of the 2026 Highlands experience. ■

BAND CAMP

Northern Highlands band camp kicks off a new marching season

Elizabeth Ha '27

As summer came to a close, Northern Highlands band students returned to school early for a week and a half of music, marching, and team building.

While most students were enjoying their final days of summer vacation, around 55 band members and five staff members gathered for band camp, preparing for the upcoming marching band season. With six days last



Photo Courtesy of NHRHS Band's Instagram.

Highlanders rehearsing during camp.

ing up to 12 hours each, camp required dedication, patience, and plenty of water. However, beyond the long rehearsals and demanding schedule, it offered students an opportunity to reconnect with friends, welcome new members, and strengthen the band community.

For many students, band camp marks the unofficial beginning of the school year. Before classrooms fill and regular schedules resume, band members spend their days learning music, practicing formations, and preparing for performances that will bring them together throughout the fall. Although the experience can be physically demanding, it also provides an opportunity for students to develop friendships and create memories before the busy academic year begins.

Band camp serves as an important foundation for the marching season, allowing students to become familiar with the music, choreography, and teamwork required for performances. Unlike a traditional music rehearsal, marching band requires students to coordinate their movements while maintaining musical accuracy. Each member must understand not only their individual responsibilities but also how their part contributes to the larger performance.

For returning members, camp is also a chance to experience how the band has changed since the previous year. Each season brings a different combination of students, staff, and musical selections, creating a new atmosphere even for those who have attended camp before. As graduating seniors leave and incoming students join, the band must establish a new sense of identity while continuing the traditions that make the program meaningful.

For band member Maura, one of the biggest surprises was how different this year's camp felt compared to previous experiences.

"Something that surprised me was how much it's different compared to last year," Maura said, pointing to changes in the people, staff, show, and overall community.

These differences can make the beginning of a new season both exciting and challenging. Returning students must adjust to new routines and expectations, while newer members learn how to navigate the demands of marching band. Students who may have been familiar with one another in the classroom are given the opportunity to connect in a different setting, where cooperation and communication are essential.

The arrival of new members also creates opportunities for returning students to take on greater responsibility. Whether helping someone learn a marching formation, answering questions about rehearsal routines, or simply making a younger student feel welcome, experienced band members play an important role in shaping the atmosphere of camp.

Over time, the shared experience of rehearsing and working toward a common goal helps students grow more comfortable with one another. What begins as a group of individuals learning their separate parts gradually develops into an ensemble that relies on every member to contribute.

Despite the excitement surrounding the new season, band camp was not without its difficulties. Spending long hours outside during the summer meant that students had to manage the heat while maintaining the energy needed for rehearsals. With some camp days lasting up to 12 hours, students had to balance the physical demands of marching with the concentration required to learn and improve their music.

For Maura, the weather was one of the most challenging aspects of camp. She emphasized the importance of eating a full breakfast and drinking plenty of water to get through the demanding day.

Preparing for camp meant more than bringing an instrument and learning the rehearsal schedule. Students also had to consider how to maintain their energy throughout the day, especially when transitioning between outdoor marching practice and musical rehearsals. Staying hydrated and taking care of themselves allowed students to remain focused and continue making progress as a group.



Photo Courtesy of NH Music.

Highland's Regiment Logo.

The heat also added another challenge to an already demanding learning process. Marching requires students to remain aware of their surroundings, maintain proper spacing, and coordinate movements with the music. Doing so for extended periods requires both physical stamina and mental concentration. Even when students became tired, they still had to pay attention to their individual responsibilities and the movements of those around them.

These challenges made the opportunity to take breaks and spend time with friends even more meaningful.

Fortunately, the camp schedule also included opportunities for students to relax and enjoy each other's company. For Maura, the most memorable moments were not necessarily the rehearsals or performances, but the time spent together during dinner.

"Being with people you love is like a brain break but also like a physical break," she said.

After hours of concentrating on music and marching, these meals gave students a chance to recharge, share stories, and connect outside of rehearsal. Rather than focusing on their next formation or musical entrance, band members could enjoy conversations with friends and spend time together without the pressure of performing.

Although dinner might seem like a small part of a camp centered around music, these moments can have a lasting impact on the overall experience. Spending so many hours together gives students the opportunity to develop relationships that might not have formed during a typical school day.

For newer members, these breaks can also make the band feel more welcoming. Getting to know fellow musicians outside of rehearsal allows students to become more comfortable with the people they will spend the season performing alongside. For returning members, the shared meals offer a chance to reconnect after summer vacation and continue friendships built during previous marching seasons.

The relationships formed during these moments can carry over into rehearsals. When students feel comfortable with one another, they may find it easier to communicate, ask for help, and work through challenges together. A supportive environment allows members to approach difficult rehearsals with the understanding that they are all working toward the same goal.

When asked whether there was a particular moment when the band began to come together, Maura explained that it was less about one specific rehearsal and more about the entire experience.

"Honestly, like the whole thing," she said, describing how members gradually became more comfortable with each other and learned to work together.

Her response reflects an important aspect of band camp: the sense of community does not necessarily develop through one major accomplishment. Instead, it grows through repeated interactions, shared challenges, and the everyday experiences of spending time together.

From learning new music to adjusting to unfamiliar routines, each day gives students another opportunity to strengthen their connections. Even the most demanding moments can become meaningful when students look back on what they accomplished together.



Photo Courtesy of NHRHS Band's Instagram.

Color Guard rehearsal on the field.

As rehearsals progress, students begin to recognize how their individual efforts contribute to the larger group. A successful marching band performance depends on every musician understanding their role, listening to others, and remaining aware of the ensemble as a whole. Camp gives students the time to develop these skills before the season officially begins.

The experience also reminds students that marching band involves more than what audiences see during a performance. Behind each halftime show are hours of preparation, repetition, and cooperation. While spectators may only see the final result, band members understand the work required to bring the performance together.

By the end of camp, students had gained more than preparation for the upcoming season. They had spent long days overcoming challenges, adjusting to new faces, and building relationships through a shared commitment to music.

For Maura, the memories of dinner with friends, the challenges of rehearsing in the heat, and the experience of watching the band come together all contributed to making camp memorable.

As the Northern Highlands band moves into the school year, the friendships and teamwork developed during camp will continue to shape its performances and community. Although the week and a half of preparation may have marked the end of summer vacation, it also marked the beginning of a new season filled with music, collaboration, and shared experiences.

For the students who spent their final summer days on the marching field, band camp was an opportunity to become part of a community beyond music itself. ■

AMERICAN MUSIC ABROAD

Students take their music across Europe

Addison Menzella ‘28



Photo Courtesy of Maura Hefferon, ‘28.

Highland’s musicians at one of AMA’s destinations.

This summer, seven students from Northern Highlands joined approximately 70 other student musicians from across the tri-state area for the American Music Abroad Program, an international experience that combines music, travel and cultural exploration. Over the course of about three weeks, students traveled through four European countries, performing concerts while experiencing new cities and cultures along the way.

The group traveled from June 30 to July 19. Before leaving the United States, students spent their first three days at Hofstra University in New York, where they rehearsed with other musicians participating in the program. The students were divided into several ensembles, including concert band, choir, jazz band and orchestra.

After three days of preparation, the groups performed a farewell concert for their families ticipated in the program. “The first three days were spent in Hofstra University in New York. After the third day, we had a farewell concert which our families came to. Then we flew to Europe!”

Once in Europe, the students traveled by bus between cities and towns, stopping in Germany, where they visited places including Dinkelsbühl and Rothenburg. From there, they continued to Austria, visiting Salzburg, Vienna and Bad Reichenhall.

The group then traveled to Hungary, stopping in Budapest and Győr, before continuing to Slovenia, where they visited



Photo Courtesy of Maura Hefferon, ‘28.

A gorgeous view from one of AMA’s destinations.

before flying to Europe. “We were away for 20 or 21 days,” said Maura Hefferon, a junior who par Austria, Hungary and Slovenia. Their first destination was Germany, Radenci and Ljubljana. After Slovenia, the students returned to Austria and visited Westendorf before eventually traveling to Munich, Germany, where their trip came to an end.

While the students spent much of their time traveling and sightseeing, music remained at the center of the experience. The groups performed approximately every other night, giving students the opportunity to share their music with audiences throughout Europe.

Maddie Nisch, a junior who participated in the program, explained that the trip was more than simply a European vacation. “Students are selected from high schools across the tri-state area,” Nisch said. “There’s a concert band, choir, jazz band and orchestra. We go to Hofstra University for three days to rehearse music, then fly to Europe and travel around different cities and towns. About every other night, we play a concert for the European people.”

When they weren’t performing, students had the opportunity to experience the places they were visiting. Each day included different activities, such as guided tours, group excursions and free time to explore. “Each day there was something new to do,” Hefferon said. “Whether it was a guided tour, exploring as a group or having a couple hours of free time to explore the cities for ourselves.”

Traveling through several different countries also exposed students to cultures and languages that were different from what they were accustomed to at home. Hefferon said that navigating language barriers and experiencing moments of culture shock became part of the adventure.

“There were definitely moments of culture shock and language barriers, but they make great stories,” Hefferon said. She also joked that students were able to learn some German along the way, which she described as a useful skill.

The program also gave students the chance to meet other musicians from throughout the region. With approximately 70 students participating overall, the group included students from both New Jersey and upstate New York.

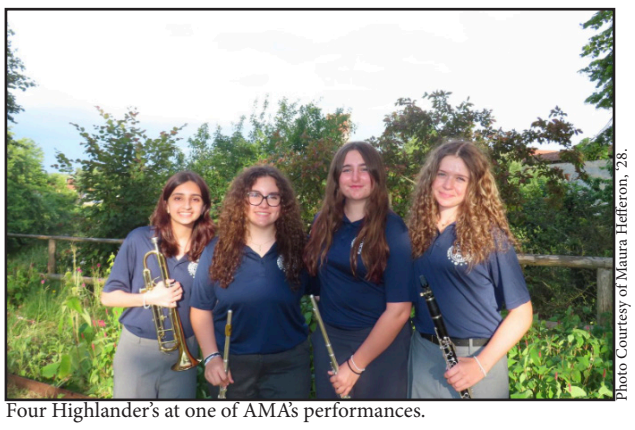


Photo Courtesy of Maura Hefferon, ‘28.

Four Highlander’s at one of AMA’s performances.

For Hefferon, making new friendships was one of the most memorable parts of the experience. “I think I can speak for everyone when I say that it was the most amazing experience of my life,” Hefferon said. “I have met so many people who I still talk to. They were all so kind and amazing, and all the staff who watched us were so nice.”

The combination of performing, traveling and meeting other students made the trip a unique experience for those involved. Instead of simply visiting European cities as tourists, students were able to interact with local communities through their performances while also experiencing the culture around them.

For the Northern Highlands students who participated, the American Music Abroad Program provided an opportunity to take their passion for music beyond the classroom and onto an international stage. Between concerts, sightseeing, new friendships and unfamiliar surroundings, the three week trip created memories that students will carry with them long after returning home.

With four countries, numerous performances and countless new experiences packed into just three weeks, the program showed students that music can be more than something performed on a stage, it can also be a way to connect people across cultures and thousands of miles. ■

ROLLING INTO SENIOR YEAR

What traditions do seniors practice?

Ava Decilveo ’28

Bright colors, personal designs, and creative messages adorn the cars of seniors as they fill school parking lots for their last first day of high school.

It has become tradition for seniors to decorate their cars at the beginning of senior year to celebrate the memories they have made throughout high school and mark the start of all the lasts senior year is filled with.

Many of these decorations include personalization like names or future college plans, class pride like “CLASS OF 2027,” or even interactive elements like farewell addresses or signatures.

Additionally, quotes from movies like “Get in loser, we’re graduating” are used, as well as trendy messages like “Bearly survived” or “One last rodeo.”

Despite this being a cute and memorable activity, senior Dara Kotz notes this was a very time consuming process that required lots of preparation so their cars wouldn’t get damaged. She explains how they bought washable window markers and specialized chalk to avoid stains and marks.

Next, they prepped the surface by thoroughly cleaning and drying the surface so the heat doesn’t cause the paint to bubble or smudge.

Lastly, they began the lengthy artistic process, taking over two hours to complete. So, although Dara and her friends were pleased with the final product, the process was filled with nothing but concentration.

Senior Phoebe Kastin explained the car painting is much more than the painting itself. She explained how “just being with your friends, playing music, and just living in the moment, and not really going on your phone” is what makes the experience so memorable.

Phoebe believes this tradition is important because it’s the first thing you do senior year with your friends and it’s meaningful to spend quality time with those you cherish before it’s time to leave for college.

Phoebe reassured that this is a lighthearted, fun activity and not meant to be stressful.

On the process itself, Phoebe added that filling space on their car with designs wasn’t a problem for her and her friends, as they used designs they found on social media, as well as took some of their childhood inside jokes and spun it to be a senior saying, demonstrating how seniors blend personal symbols with pop culture references. isn’t universal.

Car decorating isn’t the only senior tradition at Highlands; senior girls wear sundresses on the first day. While most students at Highlands wear denim skirts, shorts, and summer tops, seniors girls have a longheld tradition of dressing up for their last first day.

Many like to wear pastel, soft colors like light pink, yellow, or white to maintain the summer feel and lighthearted mood of starting their last year in high school.



Photo courtesy of Tess Han

Example of a decorated car of a senior

Lucy Chung says she “can’t remember why [they] do this, but ever since [she] was a freshman [she] saw the seniors dressing up and it only gave [her] more of a reason to look forward to senior year.” Lucy talked about how bittersweet the last first day of school truly is, explaining it just feels right to dress up for the occasion.

Ultimately, all the traditions have been passed down for years and were made to make senior year feel special. As they embark on this new journey, these memories give them something to hold on to and look back on after graduation. ■

WHAT'S IN ATHLETES' BAGS?

Exploring What Students Need to be Game-Ready

Vallerie Kalekar 28'

Back to school season means it's the official beginning of fall sports. Student athletes are extremely busy—between juggling practices, game-days, homework, and tests, their days seem to never end.

Athletes have to be ready for anything, and from uniforms to makeup, each athlete has their own sports essentials.

From the soccer team, junior player Fiona Manfre comes prepared for all sorts of situations. Inside of her bag, she keeps shin guards, two pairs of cleats, a warm-up jersey, Liquid I.V. for electrolytes, and Biofreeze. Biofreeze creates a cooling sensation in the body that numbs any pain signals. Manfre wears her actual jersey to school on days she has games to proudly represent her team and to not have to change later for convenience's sake.

After-school games can get super hectic, especially with after-school traffic—players and coaches do everything that they can. "My bag is a little different because I'm the soccer team's goalie," Ariana Siddiqui shared.

She primarily carries her goalie gloves, but also has the basic necessities of food, cleats, shin-guards, an extra shirt, and hair ties.

Manfre and Siddiqui both use pre-wrap to keep their hair back.

Cheerleader Serena Wang brings pom-poms, cheer shoes, her uniform, makeup, water, snacks, and a fan. Alex Schwab keeps his bag simple, with pom-poms, cheer shoes, and a calf brace.

The field hockey team members also keep various items in their game-day bags. Grace Schaub brings her shin guards, a mouth guard, a pinnie, shoes, both regular socks and hot socks.

For many athletes, these bags also reflect their individual routines and preferences. Whether it is a favorite hair product, a specific type of sock, or something that helps with soreness, these personal items can become part of an athlete's routine and give them an extra sense of comfort and preparation before competing.

Volleyball player Ava Quevado's collection includes high socks, Nike Pros, perfume, deodorant, knee pads, shoes, ankle braces, hair ties, and Biofreeze. The attire of volleyball tends to differ more from other sports, and each one of her items hold a specific purpose.

For many athletes, these bags reflect their routines and preferences. Whether it's a favorite hair product, specific socks, or something for soreness, these items help athletes feel comfortable and prepared.

From the wrestling team, Sanaeya Nalladaru's bag includes her headgear, spray-on deodorant, hair ties, extra socks, and, of course, her wrestling shoes. One additional item she likes to keep in her bag is hair oil.

"During the season, every day becomes wash day, so I like to put some castor oil in my hair to help avoid damage and dryness from washing it so often," she explains.

She also likes to bring a small blanket to tournaments, as they require early wake-up times and a lot of downtime while waiting for matches.

For athletes, what's inside of their bags is just as important as any other aspect of their sports lives. Their special items help them feel ready and prepared to play at a high-stakes game.

What may look like just another sports backpack is filled with things that allow student athletes to feel confident. Although every athlete's bag looks different, each one shows their endless passion for their sport.

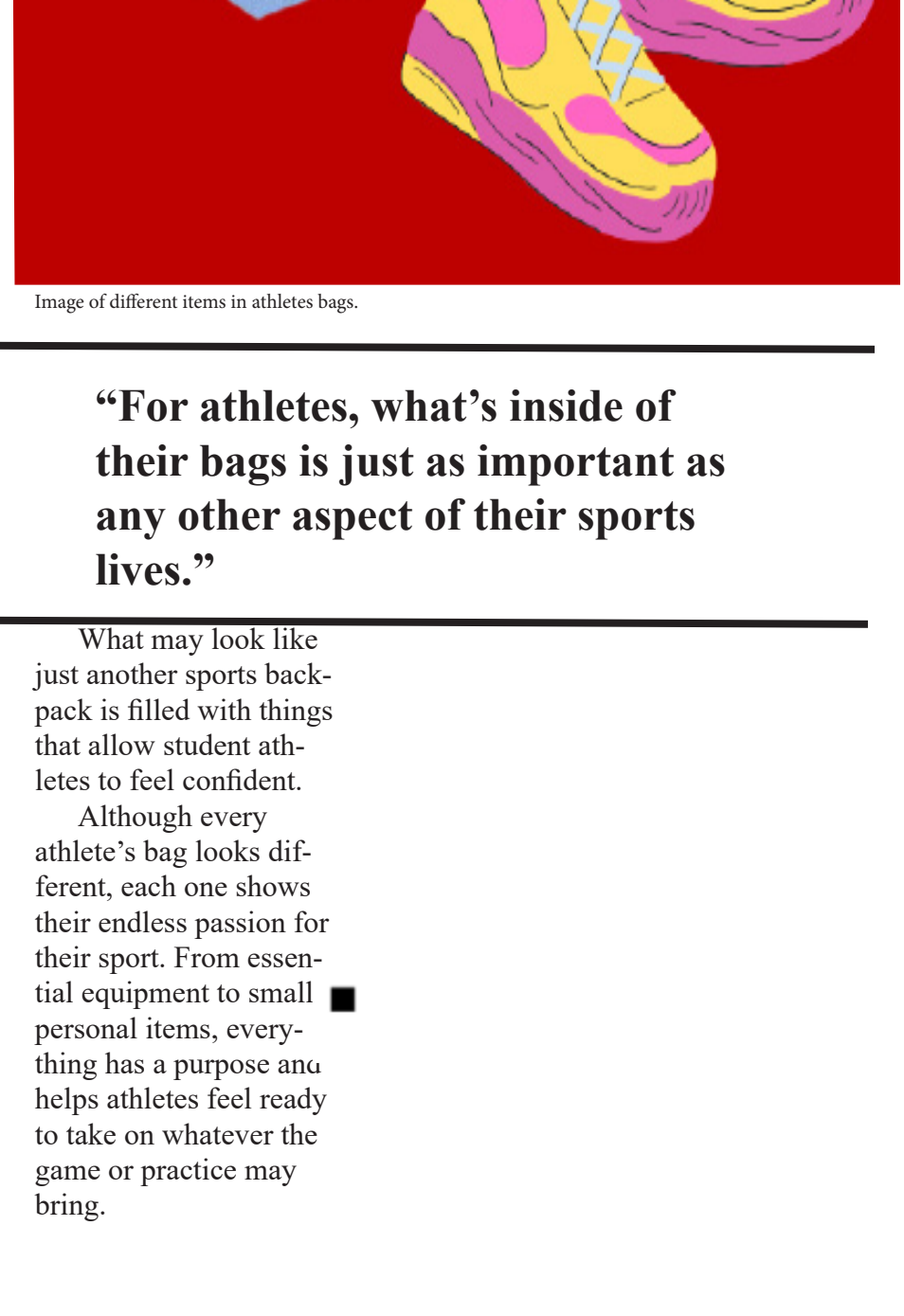


Image of different items in athletes bags.



Photo Courtesy of Performance Health

Image of different Biofreeze products.

"For athletes, what's inside of their bags is just as important as any other aspect of their sports lives."

What may look like just another sports backpack is filled with things that allow student athletes to feel confident.

Although every athlete's bag looks different, each one shows their endless passion for their sport. From essential equipment to small personal items, everything has a purpose and helps athletes feel ready to take on whatever the game or practice may bring.

■

"Athletes have to be ready for anything, and from uniforms to makeup, each athlete has their own sports essentials."

THE FIRST FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS:

How the Student Section Pulls Up

Tess Han ‘27

After a fun summer filled with intense practice and commitment, the Highlands football team played an exciting match against Toms River North High School on August 28th. With the first game of the season being a home game, masses of students came to support the team, dressed in the theme of ‘black-out’.

With excitement in the air to see who would win the match, Highlands suffered a close loss with the score of 17-14 to Toms River. Although the score was not what had been hoped, the school spirit and the student section helped the team to boost its morale throughout the game.

With the theme of ‘black-out’, students packed the bleachers in black face paint, banners, and headbands. Senior Emily Meyer stated that, “The game was really fun to watch. I really enjoyed seeing the school spirit and seeing almost the whole school come together to support the team was pretty amazing. Highlands is filled with amazing students who are there to support the team, through thick and thin.”



Photo Courtesy of Northernhighlands_football on Instagram.

Photo of two of the 2026 football captains at the Grassco Classic.

It’s great to see the student body take so much pride in being Highlanders.

Especially since the first game happened to be the first home game of the season, the air was filled with enthusiasm and tension. That caused the Highland ers to bring out their all in terms of school school spirit.

The student section was packed with people of all grades who wanted to cheer on Highland’s football team. Senior Lilly Azarman explains that, “I was really excited to go to this game. It was really fun getting ready with my friends and seeing everyone cheer on the team. Although they lost, I still had a really good time.” Highland’s loss didn’t seem to diminish the school spirit as the student section rallied throughout the night.

For seniors like Lilly and Emily, this night was their ‘last-first--football game,’ making the night even more special. However, for others, like freshman Caleb Han, this was their first football game ever.

Caleb says that, “It was my first football game and it was really fun. I didn’t really know what to expect but it was pretty cool to see how the school came to support the them went all out on decorations and everything. It was super cool to see in person.”

For some people, these Friday night live games are the best part of their week. Senior Chehan Kaur prepped way ahead for this match, saying that, “I was really anticipating this game. These games are so fun to go to and I wanted to make sure that I dressed in full-on school spirit especially since it’s the first game”. She enjoyed watching the match, but says, “I think the majority of the fun of these games is seeing the people who show up. Some people went crazy with their school spirit with the horns and everything. It really made my my night.”

Overall, our student section really knows how to support each other and show school spirit at these events. It isn’t just about football, it’s about building a community of friends and people to encourage the school. ■



Photo Courtesy of Northernhighlands_football on Instagram.

Photo of the student section at the Grassco Classic.

> “I really enjoyed seeing the school spirit and seeing almost the whole school come together to support the team was pretty amazing.” Northern Highlands is filled with amazing students who are there to support the team, through thick and thin.”
>
> *-Emily Meyer*

> “I think the majority of the fun of these games is seeing the people who show up. Some people went crazy with their school spirit with the horns and everything. It really made my night.”
>
> *-Chehan Kaur*

THE RITUAL BEFORE THE GAME

How Pre-Game Routines Help Athletes Feel Focused, Confident, and Ready to Compete

Namira Hussain ‘28

When it comes to game day, skill is only part of what athletes need. For many athletes, what happens before the game can be just as important as what happens once they step onto the field or court. The hours leading up to a game can be filled with nerves, excitement, and anticipation, which is why having a routine can help athletes feel more comfortable and prepared.

Pre-game rituals can look different for everyone. Some athletes might have a certain meal they like to eat, listen to music with their teammates, stretch, or simply take some time to relax. While these routines might seem small, they can give athletes something familiar to focus on before competition. For Himika Siracus and Sadie Monsarao, their pre-game routines have become a regular part of how they prepare for their sports.



A few examples of pre-game rituals.

Photo Courtesy of M-A Chronicle.

“It helps to feel less nervous before the game and more comfortable. I’m not sure if they actually bring me luck, but they help when I need to be focused.”

- Himika Siracusa ‘28

Himika, a varsity soccer player, has a routine that helps her feel prepared before a game. One of the most important parts is making sure she eats a balanced meal while also having some of her favorite snacks. Having something she enjoys eating gives her something familiar before she has to focus on competing.

Food is only one part of Himika’s routine. Spending time with her teammates is also important. Before games, she and her friends listen to music together. The music helps them get excited and bring up their energy, but it also gives them a chance to take their minds off some of the pressure that comes with playing.

For Himika, being around her teammates before a game can make a difference in how she feels once the game starts. Instead of sitting alone and thinking about everything that could happen, she has her friends around her and something else to focus on. The combination of music, snacks, and spending time with her teammates helps her feel more comfortable.

“It helps to feel less nervous before the game and more comfortable. I’m not sure if it actually brings me luck, but it helps when I need to be focused,” Himika said.

Even though Himika is not sure whether her routine actually brings her luck, she knows that it helps her mentally. That may be one of the biggest reasons athletes develop rituals in the first place. A routine does not necessarily have to change what happens during a game to be useful. Sometimes, simply feeling more relaxed and prepared can make the experience of competing less stressful.

Sadie Monsarao, who plays tennis, also has several routines she follows before matches. One of the biggest things she focuses on is staying hydrated throughout the day. Making sure she drinks enough water is part of her preparation, especially before she has to spend a long period of time on the court.

Stretching is another important part of Sadie’s routine. Even when she does not have much time before playing, she makes sure to stretch. It is something she has made a habit of doing before matches, so it has become a regular part of getting ready to compete. Along with these practical parts of her routine, Sadie also has a superstition. She believes that she plays better when she wears her visor. It does not matter what the weather is like; for her, the visor has become part of feeling ready to play. While wearing a visor may not seem like something that would affect how someone plays, superstitions are common among athletes. Having a certain item, routine, or habit can give someone a sense of familiarity before they compete. For Sadie, her visor is one of those small things that helps her feel like she is ready to step onto the court.



Junior Himika Siracusa during a game.

Photo Courtesy of Connect Partner.

Her routine also goes beyond what she does individually. Her teammates play a big role in helping her feel prepared before matches. The team compliments each other, talks about weaknesses, and encourages one another before they play. These conversations can help the players understand what they need to work on while also reminding them that they have their teammates supporting them.

The team also has a way of celebrating together by tapping their rackets against each other. It is a small tradition, but it gives the players a chance to connect before they compete.

For Sadie, that connection is especially important because she sometimes plays doubles. In doubles, two players have to work together throughout the entire match. They need to understand each other’s playing styles and know how their partner might react during a point. Building that relationship before the match can make it easier to communicate once they are actually playing.

“I think these rituals definitely help us play better. I think it helps us feel less stressed but also motivated to help the team,” Sadie said. “It helps us bond, which when you’re playing doubles is very important. You need to really understand your partner so you know what to expect in a point.”

For both Himika and Sadie, their routines are not exactly the same, but they have a similar purpose. Their rituals help them feel less nervous and more comfortable before they compete. Whether that means listening to music with friends, eating a favorite snack, stretching, staying hydrated, or wearing a visor, each routine gives the athlete something familiar to rely on.

Game days can come with a lot of pressure. Athletes spend time practicing and preparing for their competitions, but that preparation does not stop once practice is over. What they do right before a game can also affect how they feel mentally. ■

MORE THAN JUST CHEER CAMP

Highlands Cheerleaders Prepare for the Season

Namira Hussain '28

As summer comes to an end, the Highlands cheer team is already preparing to bring their energy back to the sidelines. Before the season officially gets underway, the team spent time at cheer camp learning new skills, practicing routines, and, perhaps most importantly, getting closer as a team.

Cheer camp is more than just a place to learn new choreography. For the Highlands cheerleaders, it was also an opportunity to spend several days together and build relationships that will be important throughout the season. Cheerleader Clair Mario reflected on her experience at camp and how the time together helped the team grow.

For Clair, one of the best parts of camp was being able to spend so much time with her teammates. The team stayed together for four nights, which gave them much more time to get to know each other than they normally would during regular practices.

Being together for that amount of time allowed the cheerleaders to become more comfortable with one another. They were not just seeing each other during a practice and then going home. Instead, they were spending several days together, which gave them the chance to build friendships and become a closer group.

"Camp is the biggest part of the year, I would say, that allows us to bond as a team," Clair said.

That bonding is an important part of preparing for the season. Cheerleading requires a lot of trust between teammates, especially when performing routines that involve multiple people. Everyone has to know where they are supposed to be, when they are supposed to move, and how to work with the people around them.

Because of that, getting to know teammates outside of regular practices can be just as valuable as learning new skills. When the team is comfortable with each other, it can make communication easier during practices and performances.

However, camp was not all about hanging out and getting to know teammates. The cheerleaders also had long and demanding days. Their schedule started early, with the team waking up at 6 a.m. They then spent much of the day practicing and participating in different activities before finally ending their day around 11 p.m.

With such a long schedule, staying energized was one of the biggest challenges. Cheerleaders need to maintain their energy while performing, but doing that for an entire day of camp can be difficult. After hours of practices and activities, the team still had to stay focused and keep their energy up.

For Clair, maintaining that energy was one of the hardest parts of the experience. "The hardest part is just making sure you keep your spirit up," Mario said.

Keeping up their spirit was especially important because cheerleading depends so much on energy and enthusiasm. Even when the team was tired, they still had to focus on each other and help keep the energy going.



Photo Courtesy of @nh_cheer on Instagram.

Highlands Cheer at Football Game

"Camp is the biggest part of the year, I would say, that allows us to bond as a team."

- Clair Mario '28

"The hardest part is just making sure you keep your spirit up," Mario said.

Keeping up their spirit was especially



Photo Courtesy of @nh_cheer on Instagram.

Highlands Girls Cheer members.

The long days also showed the team how important it is to work together. When one person is tired, having teammates around can make it easier to stay motivated. Everyone is going through the same experience, so they can encourage each other and help keep the energy going.

Along with building their relationships, the cheerleaders also learned new routines that they will bring back to Highlands. One of the routines learned at camp is now performed during halftime at football games. This gives the team something new to bring to their performances and allows them to show off what they learned over the summer.

Learning new routines also gives the cheerleaders a chance to improve their skills. New choreography can be challenging at first because everyone has to learn the movements and make sure they are staying together. With practice, the team becomes more comfortable with the routine and can eventually perform it as a group.

For the cheerleaders, camp was a chance to prepare for more than just one performance. The skills and routines they learned will be used throughout the season, giving them a stronger foundation as they return to Highlands.

Another major part of cheer camp was building trust. Everyone has a role, and each person has to do their part for the routine to work. ■