The Choate News

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SNOW DAY AND POWER OUTAGE ON CAMPUS

By **Sabrina Liu '28**
Associate Editor

Snow days are rare at Choate, but last week's winter storm surged enough snowfall to cancel classes on Monday, January 26. While the snow day felt like a gift to many students, it was followed by a power outage on Wednesday that left boarding students s scrambling to find a place to sleep.

Though the week was marked with uncertainty and logistical challenges, Dean of Students Mr. Will Gilyard '98 said the events revealed "a culture of care and shared responsibility" at Choate, noting that "students leaned into community, staff went above and beyond to keep campus safe and functional, and families responded with trust and partnership."

According to Mr. Gilyard, the decision to cancel classes on Monday was for multiple safety considerations, one being pathways and roads being covered in too much snow. He added that "the amount of snow was a significant factor," and that "the governor calling a state of emergency was also important."

Snow days are uncommon at Choate, even during New England winters. Third-form Dean and U.S. Government and Politics II (Gov II) teacher Mr. Jonas Akins pointed out that the amount of snowfall made reopening campus especially difficult. "I grew up in New England, [and] I think it was the right call," he said. "I think we would have really struggled to open on Monday, just because of the sheer amount of snow and the lack of places to put it."

Mr. Akins also highlighted the Facilities Department's efforts in restoring campus operations. "The work of the facilities crew to have us looking as good as we did for Tuesday morning was really impressive," he said.

While many students welcomed an unexpected break, the storm disrupted academic programming planned long in advance, including the Gov II class trip to Washington, D.C., a cornerstone of the course. Mr. Akins noted that the possibility of canceling the trip had been discussed throughout the week leading up to the storm. "In the week leading up to the DC trip, we had been tracking the storm system quite closely," he explained. He explained that travel along Interstate 95 would have been difficult, and federal government closures were likely.

The final factor came when Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont announced a ban on commercial travel for Sunday, January 25. "What made it easy for us to cancel was when Governor Lamont announced a ban on commercial travel for Sunday," Mr. Akins said. "There was no way for us to get down as the buses couldn't go on the Sunday."

For students, the trip cancellation was deeply disappointing. Vlada Letti '27 described the trip as the most anticipated part of Gov II. "The trip is pretty much the most exciting part of this class," she said. "I feel like everyone was waiting for it."

Students in Gov II had planned the trip not only to be for academic programming, but also for time together outside the classroom. "We've been planning to room with each other, and planning to see the alumni," Letti said.

In response to the cancellation, Mr. Akins sought to preserve a sense of community and continuity. On the day students would have been in Washington, he instead hosted a Gov II book club gathering with hot chocolate in Logan Munroe House.

Just as the campus was beginning to return to normal operations after Monday, a sudden power outage on Wednesday created new challenges. Mr. Gilyard explained that the outage was caused by an infrastructure failure that wiped heat and electricity from multiple buildings and dorms on campus. "We eventually found out that there was a transformer near Steele Hall that blew," he said.

As the outage continued throughout the afternoon, uncertainty became the primary concern. "The biggest challenge is uncertainty," Mr. Gilyard said. "Because our facilities team is learning new information in real time, restoration timelines shift, which requires us to reassess plans."

Once it became clear that heat and power could not be reliably restored in several residential spaces, the School decided to ask boarding students living in unheated dorms to leave campus. "We cannot have [students] living in spaces overnight without heat," Mr. Gilyard said. "So, asking students to relocate to team, safe environments was the most responsible option."

The response required coordination across multiple departments. "Highly coordinated effort across many departments from Heads of House to the Dean's Office to the Dean of Faculty office to facilities and community safety gave us the ability to keep track of students, provide supervision, so facilities could focus on fixing the issue," Mr. Gilyard said.



Photo courtesy of @gochoate on Instagram

Choate's Facilities team in the equipment room.

The power outage was especially stressful for international boarding students, some of who are not used to New England snowstorms. Prudence Chen '28, who is from Taiwan, had never experienced a snowstorm before coming to Choate. "I'm from Taiwan, [so] we don't get snow at all," Chen said.

While the snow day itself felt manageable, the power outage was far more unsettling for Chen. "I was honestly scared and confused," she said. "I'm a kid living pretty much 8,000 miles away from home." Chen explained that she struggled to reach her parents due to time zone differences. "I just wanted reassurance," she said. "And I couldn't reach them."

Eventually, Chen stayed with a friend's family, where she felt safe, but she explained that the experience highlighted how emergencies can affect students differently. "For some people, it was fun," Chen said. "For international students, it was a lot more stressful."

Throughout both disruptions, however, food service operations continued with minimal interruption. SAGE Director Mr. Paul Kikosicki noted the preparations for the storm began early in the week. "We probably started to think about it on Monday and Tuesday of the week of the storm," he said.

Because food vendors had warned that deliveries would not be possible during the snowstorm, the SAGE team brought in extra supplies ahead of time. "We had to bring in enough food on Friday to really feed the campus for the weekend, Monday, and possibly Tuesday," Mr. Kikosicki said.

Staffing proved to be the greatest challenge. Mr. Kikosicki explained that "17 [employees] called out on Monday morning from the regular shift" due to road conditions. "Managers went around picking people up at their house," he said. "Myself and a few others stayed here and slept on campus from Sunday until Monday."

During the power outage, Hill House operated on a separate generator, though not all equipment functioned. "Our dishwasher did not work. The pizza oven did not work. The grill did not work," Mr. Kikosicki said.

Despite these challenges, Mr. Kikosick emphasized the dedication of the SAGE team. "We're considered essential employees," he said. "The community's well-being is in our hands every day, and we take a lot of pride in the fact that."

Looking back on the week, Mr. Gilyard said the events underscored the strength of the Choate community. "The way people chose connection, patience, and mutual support—even in uncomfortable or uncertain moments—speaks to the strength and resilience of the Choate community," he said.

From snow-covered paths to darkened dorms, the week challenged campus systems in unexpected ways. Yet, it also demonstrated how the Choate community responds when faced with uncertainty: prioritizing safety, adaptability, and one another.

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From Bunnies to Clue to Slime at All School Wellness

By **Harry Kim '28**
Associate Editor

After hearing from Stanford Social Neuroscience Lab Director Dr. Jamil Zaki on building empathy in a fractured world on January 23, the School hosted over 20 wellness activities as part of All School Wellness. The afternoon gave students time to unwind from their busy academic schedules through events such as slime-making, bunny snuggles, and a game of Clue in the Andrew Mellon Library.

The activities lasted around 90 minutes and encouraged students to get cozy, move, be creative, and connect through optional events designed to release "happy hormones" and boost winter mood. "The idea behind All School Wellness was just to let students and faculty unwind," Director of Student Activities Ms. Alexandra Long said. "Everybody is very busy here on campus, and this gives everyone a moment to recharge and reset from their busy schedules."

In the Student Activities Center (SAC), students participated in events such as relaxing by the fireplace, building paper stars, and playing board games and ping-pong, while SAGE Dining provided an assortment of refreshments. Brea Kim '29 said, "I got hot chocolate, and then went to bunny snuggles ... It was fun, and overall, it was a good experience."



Photo courtesy of @gochoate on Instagram

Students in Bay Room with wellness bunnies.

Among the events hosted in the SAC, Ms. Long believes the bunny snuggle received the most positive feedback from the student body. "I think the best one we did this time was the bunny snuggle," she said. "[Health and Wellness Educator] Ms. Leah Dullea found a farm that brings bunnies to campus, so we had them in the Bay Room. They were so cute and snuggly, which made it a very popular event." Participant Kazuma Iwata '28 echoed this sentiment: "I really enjoyed it, and it was nice to interact with [bunnies]. I think the focus on academics makes us feel a lot of pressure daily, but having this time to take our minds off our work was really beneficial."

Alongside these faculty-initiated events, the Peer Educators also helped organize a slime-making event in the SAC. "The Peer Educators reached out wanting to have a slime-making event because students tend to do that for relaxation," Ms. Long explained. "We offered them to host it during the Wellness block, and they did that in the Project Room." Titled "Slime Making – For a burst of novelty and creativity," the activity brought many students together. Participant Will Swan '28 said, "We made slime with blue containers, shaving cream, glitter, and activator. I accidentally added too much activator, and my slime fell apart. But it was [still] really fun."

Additional wellness events took place in the Library, Larry Hart Pool, Worthington Johnson Athletic Center (WJAC), and the Humanities building rotunda. Popular options included free skate, free swim, and reading for pleasure.

Although it was the first of this academic year, All School Wellness has been a school tradition for several years. "Each year, we tend to just think about what the weather is like, which locations are available, and what students like," Ms. Long explained. "We really try to think of options that students can enjoy and relax. This year, we have All School Wellness both in January and April."

From bunnies and board games to free skate and slime-making, All School Wellness offered students a chance to pause and recharge amid Choate's hectic schedule. As an integral part of the Choate community, wellness initiatives continue to promote balance and encourage students to adopt healthy practices in their everyday lives.

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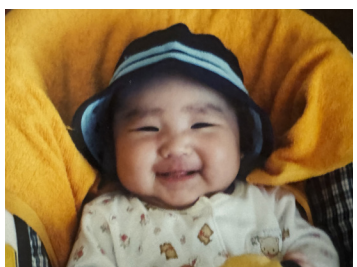



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Read it, then recycle it.

Visuals by @gochoate, Ann Ma , Ethan Zhang , David Ionescu, and Choate Flickr.



SCHOOL NEWS

Demolishing the Scoville Scale: Annual Spicy Ramen Eating Competition



Graphic by Xyla Kiang '26 /The Choate News

By **Drew Wolfson '27**
Staff Contributor

With red faces, burning tongues, and loud laughter, Choate students scarfed down bowls of spicy ramen at the annual Spicy Ramen Eating Competition held in the Student Activities Center (SAC). The event, sponsored by the Asian Student Association (ASA), provides an opportunity for students to test their spice tolerance while racing to finish the most bowls of ramen.

The competition, which took place on January 17, was well attended, with more student participants than ever before. To crown a champion, there were three rounds of competition. The first round was who could finish a bowl the quickest; the second was how many bowls of ramen one could eat in one minute 30 seconds; and the third round, which was a repeat of the second round, crowned the fastest ramen eater as champion since there was a three-way tie in the second round.

At the end of the three rounds, Wisdom Humalie '27 ultimately came out on top, as he was able to eat two bowls of ramen before any other competitors. Humalie prepared for the competition by eating breakfast but skipping lunch and dinner to make sure his appetite was ready. "Whoever prepares the most has a good chance to win, and I did a lot of preparation," Humalie noted. He enjoyed the competition, especially with student enthusiasm surrounding it. "I had a great experience. A lot of people came to watch, and it was so fun. Every round, you could feel the fans cheering at you," Humalie said, reflecting on his victory. "It felt so good. I was not expecting to win ... I just tried to finish as quickly as I could."

Last year, the competition was taken to a new level when the ASA cabinet decided to use not just regular spicy ramen, but ramen with three times the regular spice level. This year, the ASA cabinet decided that, to boost participation in the event, they needed to reduce the amount of spice to open up the competition to more people. On the day of the competition, the ASA cabinet completed significant preparation. "We had to cook the ramen, and it took an hour and a half," ASA cabinet member Ben Lee '27 said.

This year, ASA advertised the competition across multiple platforms. Lee worked with fellow ASA members to market the competition to Choate students, including playing a video during School Meeting to encourage students to participate. According to Lee, the video shown was "a great success."

With a new champion and record-breaking participation, the Spicy Ramen Eating Competition highlighted the enthusiasm of the Choate community. ASA hopes to continue growing the event as a campus tradition that celebrates Asian culture in a fun and engaging way.

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Choate's Student DJs Mix at the Neon Dance

By **Eliza O'Neill '27**
Staff Contributor

As Wallingford prepared for a Nor'easter on January 25, students at Choate prepared for the Neon Dance held at the Student Activities Center (SAC). Instead of a traditional "snow dance," the aim was to uplift students with music, color, and lights. While the snowflakes quietly fell outside the window, the scene inside was anything but tranquil, as the Student Committee on Programming and Engagement (SCOPE) delivered a night of vibrant energy with the Neon Dance.

The dance was led by a student DJ lineup featuring a collaboration between Dana Chung '26 and Tanner Ruxin '27. They split the performance with 45-minute sets each, keeping the music rotation fresh and vibrant. For Chung, who "just got into DJing this year," the event was both thrilling and stressful. "It was really nerve-wracking. My hands were shaking the entire time," Chung reflected. However, she shared that the crowd's support "definitely helped ease [her] mood."

The event required thorough preparation from both DJs to ensure that everything ran smoothly. "I needed a set list, so my friends and I made up transitions and just listened to them," Chung said, reflecting on her preparation process. She explained that some song transitions were particularly tricky because she aimed to avoid repeating songs or genres. "Some dances ... they just play the same songs over and over again, and it gets really repetitive," she said, considering her previous experiences. "I wanted to mix it up."

Similar to Chung, Ruxin organized his playlists beforehand, but, unlike Chung, also improvised in real time. Ruxin began by playing more niche house music, but many students requested more well-known songs. After he shifted to more familiar crowd-pleasers, he started gauging students' energy and requests to shape his set. His motivation to DJ for the Neon Dance stemmed from his passion for music and his desire to connect with the Choate community. "I wanted to be part of the community, and I wanted to bring joy while sharing my love of music with people," Ruxin said.

Behind the scenes, Director of Student Activities Ms. Alex Long and Assistant Director of Student Activities Ms. Colleen Kazar worked to ensure the dance ran smoothly. Aware of the demands of the winter term, they deliberately scheduled the dance during a winter weekend to give students a chance to have fun during their downtime. They worked closely with SCOPE, which helped brainstorm, promote, and build student excitement for the dance. SCOPE was also responsible for picking the neon theme. "SCOPE members were eager to introduce more themed dances this term and landed on neon because it was fun, visually engaging, and easy for students to participate in," Ms. Kazar explained.

Reflecting on the night, Ms. Kazar said, "The event was a huge success," attributing it to students' energy and music. "It was one of the most fun dances we have seen in a while," she added. "Students seemed to love the theme, the energy was high, and there was strong support for their peers as DJs."

In addition, Ms. Kazar noted that having Chung and Ruxin behind the DJ turntable "added a great student-driven element to the night," highlighting the many ways in which Choate students contribute to the School's community.

While bitterly cold conditions persisted outside, the Neon Dance served as a reminder that the warmth of the Choate community radiates regardless of the weather.

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Photo courtesy of Dana Chung '26

Students dancing to music around the DJ booth.

Skills Alignment Committee Steps In

By **Oola Breen-Ryan '29**
Reporter

Course outlines for the English Department often vary from teacher to teacher, which can create learning gaps between grades and sections. To combat these gaps the School brings in an external group for every department every few years that surveys students and faculty on their course experience. "The internal and external review process is a regular thing that the Department does. What we saw in that there was some room for improvement, more so from teachers wanting collaboration from their peers," English Department Head Mr. Mark Gosztyla said. To foster grow the English Department, English teachers Dr. Shyla Saltzman, Ms. Cahaley Markman, and Mx. Kate Henricks formed the Skills Alignment Committee, along side Mr. Gosztyla, to more intently develop faculty relationships.

Additionally, the Skills Alignment Committee aims to improve communication across grade levels. While aligning curriculum can seem like a drastic change, Dr. Saltzman emphasizes that the committee aims to identify correlations among classes, not to take away individual teachers' authority or completely rewrite the curriculum.

Dr. Saltzman explained that within the English Department, teachers of different grades are "siloed," which can create discrepancies between English classes and cause foundational skills like essay writing, critical thinking, and analytical reading to be re-taught every fall.

Dr. Saltzman explained that she and fellow faculty are "looking at the kinds of things that teachers have been assigning for different grade levels" and connecting "common threads" between classes. She emphasized that the goal isn't "creating something out of thin air, but [asking], 'what are we already doing, and how can we create a document that explains the goals of each form?'"

In addition to enhancing communication between grade levels and class sections, the Skills Alignment Committee has sought to incorporate AI usage into its conversations. Gosztyla spoke about the committee's goal: "[We are trying to] adapt for what we're seeing in our classrooms," he explained. According to Mr. Gosztyla, the committee often tackles questions such as, "What are we asking our students to do if we are asking them to use AI? How does that then impact other skills that we were spending more time on?"

Mr. Gosztyla is hopeful about enhancing communication between English teachers and aligning skills taught throughout the curriculum. "The pros of [the Skills Alignment Committee] are relational in a lot of ways ... it's a deliberate measure to have our teachers connect with each other," he said. "We're pushing towards a path of developing relationships and getting to know each other as teachers more."

For Mr. Gosztyla, the Skills Alignment Committee is also a step towards helping teachers learn from each other, through both assignments and classroom activities that went well and those that didn't. "There's an element of community building that's at the center of this ... sharing out and people learning from each other's experiences," he explained. HPRSS Department Head Ms. Kyra Jenney agrees with Dr. Saltzman that enhancing communication is preferable to completely standardizing the curriculum. "I think that retaining that type of variation is ... really valuable for students. It exposes you to different materials, different learning styles, [and] different approaches," she explained.

Gopika Sheth '27 said that approaches to learning vary from "teacher to teacher," but she believes standardizing the curriculum will help. Sheth sees curriculum consistency as "definitely a positive change."

Curriculum consistency in the humanities has both benefits and drawbacks, but it is essential to ensure that all students can learn the basics of writing, reading, and critical thinking. "There's already a lot of diversity within the classes," Sheth noted, so "just making sure everyone ... starts off with the same kind of base level is really important."

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Digging Up Choate's Past

By **Saige Patel '29**
Reporter

Every January, the Andrew Mellon Library invites the Choate community to step back in time through its Annual Paleography Contest. This weeklong contest challenges participants to transcribe historical handwritten documents from the School's Archives and asks, "Can you decipher the past?" The event typically draws steady interest from students wanting to test out their transcription skills, but this year's contest unfolded under unusual circumstances.

Organized by Archivist and Special Collections Librarian Mrs. Stephanie Gold, with support from the Library team, the contest aims to spark curiosity about Choate's history. Each year, five manuscripts are selected from a wide range of archival materials — including letters, administrative notes, and even Head of School messages. According to Director of the Andrew Mellon Library Dr. Sherry Newman, the texts are chosen from "a variety of different things, topics, and letters that might be interesting for students to read," and they are arranged in order of increasing difficulty.

Last year's runner-up, Norah Wang '27, fondly remembers the experience: "Overall, the contest was pretty challenging, but it was a fun kind of challenge," she said.

This year's contest carries particular significance, as it coincides with the Library's 100th birthday. To honor the centennial, all manuscripts were selected from the early 1900s. As students deciphered the documents, Dr. Newman hoped they would not only consider what was written but also ask themselves, "What was going on 100 years ago?"

Despite extensive planning, participation this year has been unexpectedly low. Library foot traffic was much lower than usual, due to the snowstorm closing the Library during Sunday study hours, a subsequent snow day, and a mid-week power outage.

Third-former and day student Oola Breen-Ryan '29 didn't let the weather shy her away from participating in the contest. "It was a nice thing to do with the weather. I was doing it virtually so I wasn't going to the library. I liked doing it in the morning," she said.

Still, the Library's mission remains unchanged. "I think both Mrs. Gold and I hope that students will understand the incredibly rich history of the school," Dr. Newman reflected. With more than 100 years of Library history, this competition challenges the Choate community to reconnect with its past, one handwritten line at a time.

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A Fresh Blanket Over Wallingford



Ski and walk tracks observed on Choate's cross-country course.

A single line cuts through the snow on Choate's cross-country course, as members of the community gradually built a track step by step. The trail guides the eye through an untouched field of snow, and the trees surrounding form a border around the open landscape. The course is tranquil and serene, a contrast to the usual intense environment as runners pass through the track.

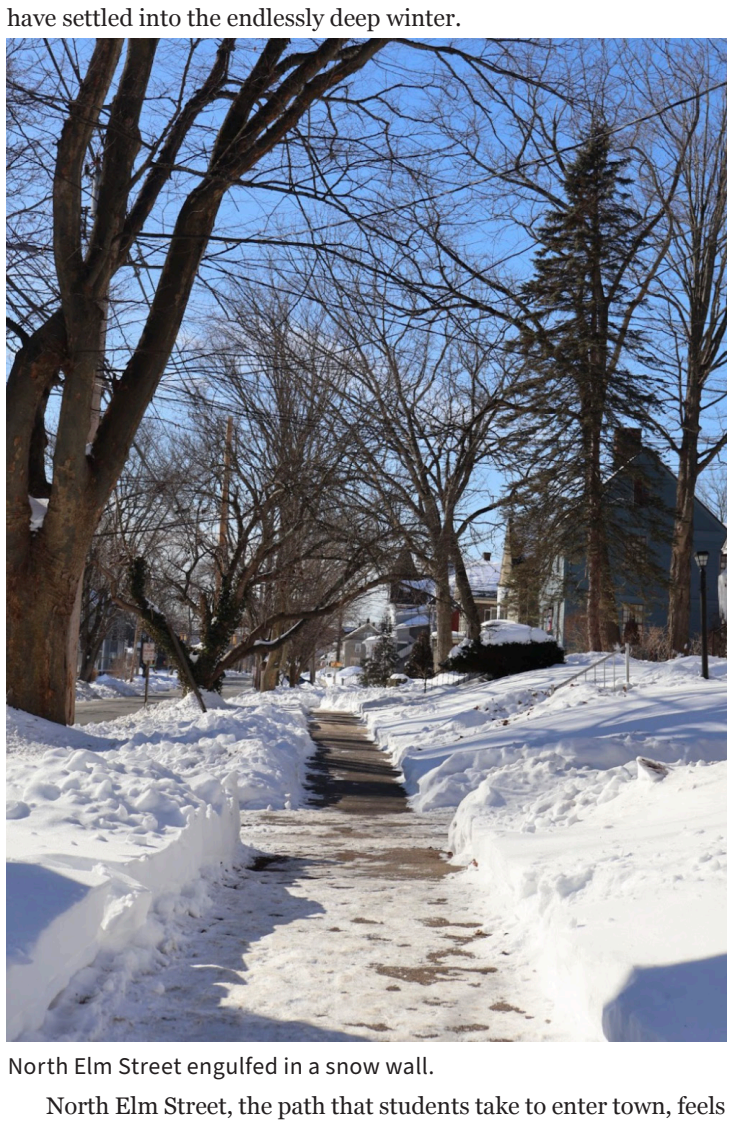


Light seeps into the Wallingford Garden Market.

The Wallingford Garden Market continued to operate on January 31, amid harsh conditions. The Wallingford community displayed their unwavering spirit as the market was packed with vendors and onlookers. Sunlight pours through the window into the Garden Market, shining on rows of jars beneath the sign reading "Auntie Arwen's Spices." It is a small scene that captures the charm of Wallingford's local shops.

By **Kaz Kousaka '27**
Associate Editor

After one of the largest snowfalls in recent years, Wallingford has been reshaped overnight. Snow has stacked up above sidewalks, familiar paths have disappeared, and open spaces feel wider and quieter. These winter photographs capture how our town and campus have settled into the endlessly deep winter.



North Elm Street engulfed in a snow wall.

North Elm Street, the path that students take to enter town, feels unusually quiet. Snow presses in along the narrow sidewalk while bare tree branches arch overhead, transforming this residential street into a winter wonderland. The serene scene is the result of the hard work of each resident on the street, who, as a collective, shoveled a path for others to use.

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The Inn surrounded by snowbanks on Curtis Avenue.

The Inn at Choate Rosemary Hall, where some Choate students found refuge during the recent power outage, stands around the corner of Curtis Avenue, its colourful exterior dusted in snow. The quiet street and cleared sidewalks depict a town still in motion, despite the storm.



A cleared bridge in the woods behind the Kohler Environmental Center.

A narrow bridge cuts through the snow-covered woods behind the Kohler Environmental Center, connecting two parts of the trail after the storm. The bridge appears well used, while the surrounding forest remains untouched: movement through the woods continues in winter.

Snow Storm Hits Town



Photo by Angel Soto '29/*The Choate News*
Choate's boar statue covered with snow after the storm.

By **Reid Bock '27**
Associate Editor

A powerful winter storm swept through Wallingford on January 25–26, dropping more than a foot of snow, temporarily closing businesses, and bringing daily life in town to a near standstill. As roads emptied and storefronts along Main Street went dark, town services mobilized to manage one of the most significant snowfalls of the season.

Forecasters had warned Wallingford residents to expect "a foot or more" of snow beginning Sunday and continuing into Monday, prompting the town to prepare for significant disruptions. Even before any snow had fallen, Governor of Connecticut Ned Lamont declared the impending storm a "state emergency," a step typically reserved for severe or dangerous weather events. The storm ultimately fit that description, with regional totals in the Northeast ranging from 12 to 18 inches and higher amounts in some local areas.

In advance of the weather, Wallingford issued town-wide parking restrictions and a storm alert, urging people to stay off the roads unless necessary. Unlike routine winter snowfalls, this storm combined heavy accumulation with sustained low temperatures, preventing snow from melting or compacting quickly. The parking restrictions required residents to move vehicles off the town streets so plows could clear roads more efficiently, a measure not always enforced during smaller winter storms. Unfortunately, even with added warnings, due to reduced visibility and heavy snowfall, Connecticut experienced 51 non-injury crashes and two injury crashes.

The combination of heavy, steady snowfall and low temperatures created light, powdery snow, which made roads and sidewalks dangerously slick. By the time the storm tapered off, many residents experienced buried driveways, narrowed roads, and snow-covered sidewalks.

Around Choate, small businesses, such as Green Kettle and Bee's Knees, felt the storm's effects in a few ways: fewer customers and difficult access due to snowbanks and narrowed streets. In the case of Green Kettle, Assistant Manager Ms. Haley Evans decided to limit hours, allowing customers to still get their coffee while prioritizing employee safety. For Bee's Knees, the decision was to close the restaurant for a day. For waitress Michele, the decision was a pretty easy one to make, as not much store preparation had been done ahead of the storm—shutting down would be the quickest and easiest option.

Despite the disruption, life in Wallingford slowly returned to a sense of normalcy as roads cleared, businesses reopened, and classes resumed at Choate. The storm's impact on local shops, schools, and residents highlighted the importance of early preparation and coordinated responses during severe weather, as well as the largely unprecedented severity of this winter's snowfall.

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WPL Appoints New Teen Librarian

By **Dylann Kong '29 and Gaby Yeung '29**
Reporters

Just a few minutes away from Choate lies an inviting brown-bricked building: the Wallingford Public Library. The library has a warmly lit interior with dedicated sections, including the Collaboratory, Children's Room, and Teens. This winter, the library welcomed a new Teen Librarian: Mr. James Morrison.

Administrative Director of the Wallingford Public Library Ms. Sunnie Scarpa explained that the position opened after former Teen Librarian Ms. Kayleigh Sprague moved into a new role as Head of Technology. The library then searched for someone who could continue and expand that work.

They ultimately found Mr. Morrison. "We were looking for someone who could provide our teens with outstanding customer service, who had a deep understanding of the needs of teens, as well as an extensive knowledge of young adult literature and other library resources and services for teens," Ms. Scarpa said. "We know that he will work hard to make sure the teens in our community can always count on him to provide excellent resources and programming in a safe and supportive environment."

Mr. Morrison, originally from Iowa, discovered the library while job-hunting near Hamden, where his wife and her parents live. After visiting the library, he decided to pursue a position there. He sought teen service because of the inspiration he found in young minds. "They have so much creativity," Mr. Morrison said. "By the time you hit adulthood, a lot of people try to tone themselves down and don't have fun with things like crafting."

Reflecting on his time working in the Collaboratory, the library's makerspace for hands-on creative and technology-based projects, he noted that the most enjoyable part of the job was working with teens.



Graphic by Sienna Kim '28/*The Choate News*

Ms. Scarpa emphasized that the library's mission is to "connect people with ideas, experiences, and with each other to inspire, enrich, and inform all age groups." Thus, having a dedicated teen librarian enables the mission to be achieved in a developmentally appropriate way that addresses the specific needs of this demographic.

The Wallingford Public Library often collaborates with high schools like Choate on projects, initiatives, and community service opportunities. Through these collaborations, Choate students and clubs gain access to space, materials, and special guidance that help transform ideas and foster meaningful connections with the broader Wallingford community.

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Your Next Meal Should Be An Adventure

By **Rachel Fan '27 and Maia Shah '27**
Local News Section Editors

With the perpetually forward-progressing life of a Choate boarding student, we often find ourselves trapped in a self-contained bubble. We rush between classes, practices, rehearsals, club meetings, and when we do find time to venture off-campus to grab a quick meal, we default to the same two familiar spots. Doing so, however, makes the rest of Wallingford a backdrop to our Choate experience; just beyond those familiar paths might lie family-owned restaurants rich with history, warm corner cafes, and cultural cuisines that would never be discovered if we continue to settle for the same few options. So, the next time you want to grab a bite with your friends, consider these options instead of the typical ones well-known and beloved to us.

If you happen to be dining at one of these places, feel free to snap a pic and upload it to the Google Drive linked as a QR code above. Doing so will submit one entry to the raffle. By the end of the two-week period (between this issue and the next), a winner will be selected at random and will receive a gift card.

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BRUGGER'S BAGELS
970 N. COLONY RD. - (203) 269-5666
CONNIE'S KITCHEN
71 N. TURNPIKE RD. - (203) 303-7244
COSITAS RICAS
62 CENTER ST. - (203) 265-4378
DIBELLA'S SUBS
1086 N. COLONY RD. - (203) 774-0042
DINER'S HAVEN
600 N. COLONY RD. - (203) 265-5100
DOUBLE PLAY CAFE
320 MAIN ST. - (203) 265-2599
HARD HAT CAFE II
181 N. COLONY RD. - (203) 626-5190
HENRY'S
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The Choate News

119th Masthead — VOL. CXIX

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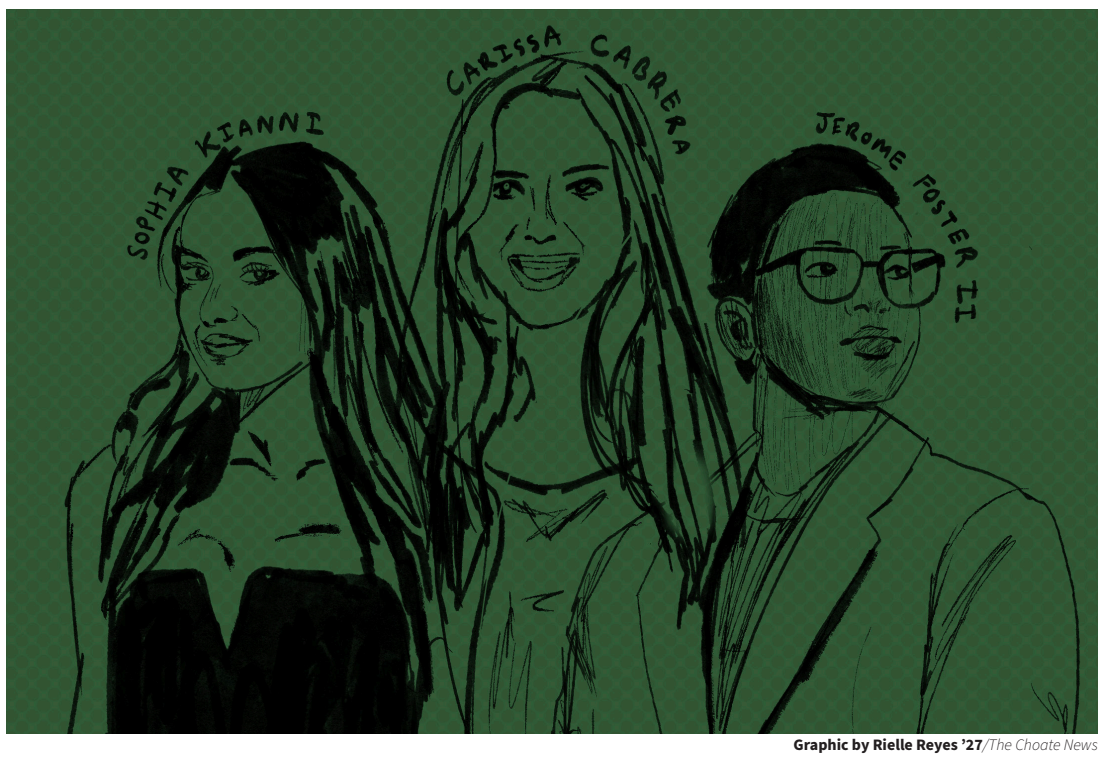
Did Diversity Day Hit The Mark?

By **Anna Park '29**
Opinions Writer



Graphic by Rielle Reyes '27/*The Choate News*

While Choate's Diversity Day is often associated with conversations about identity and equality, 2026's event expanded that definition. Featuring youth activists Carissa Cabrera, Jerome Foster II, and Sophia Kianni, the panel connected sustainability and climate action to broader questions of justice, power, and responsibility, sparking both engagement and debate among students. While some students may question the connection between what is traditionally perceived as "diversity" and the day's theme of youth activism and sustainability, the panel successfully demonstrated to the Choate community how youth activists can effect change in promoting social justice.

"Diversity Day is Choate's annual all-school event dedicated to reflection, education, and conversation around identity, equity, and justice — both within our campus and in the wider world," Dean of Equity and Inclusion Dr. Rachel Myers said. This year's selection of panelists was guided by the theme of youth activism and sustainability.

All three speakers are influential leaders under the age of 30 who have been directing groundbreaking advocacy in climate justice, policy, digital storytelling, and youth engagement. The theme of sustainability and youth activism was selected because "sustainability is not just an environmental issue — it's deeply linked to racial, economic, and generational justice," Dr. Myers said. "This year's theme asked students to explore: What does it look like when young people use entrepreneurship, activism, and innovation to fight for a more sustainable and just world?"

Considering the intentions behind the panel's selection, Cabrera, Foster, and Kianni each shared their perspectives on marine sustainability, civic engagement, and climate advocacy with Choate students. Esther Schoenberger '28 reflected, "For Carissa Cabrera, she was coming from an intellectual standpoint as a scientist ... I know people were hesitant because [Kianni] talked about how she went to Stanford a lot, and that could have been a turnoff ... But I do think that her underlying message was that she wants to make climate change and social justice work part of mainstream culture."

As youth leaders making tangible impacts in their fields, the speakers resonated strongly with students. Mia Sankey '29 said, "I really appreciated them as speakers because I think oftentimes you see these advocates for the climate and different rights, but they're always a lot older." She added, "I think I found it really valuable that we had people really close to our age who are really successful in founding their own advocacy groups ... they had really good advice on how to follow your own passions and align what you do with your beliefs."

Schoenberger agreed: "I was really interested, especially in Jerome Foster's message, because he was talking a lot about getting down to humanity within the climate movement ... He really cares about people, I felt like it was reflected in him, and that every person can be involved [in] social justice work," she said.

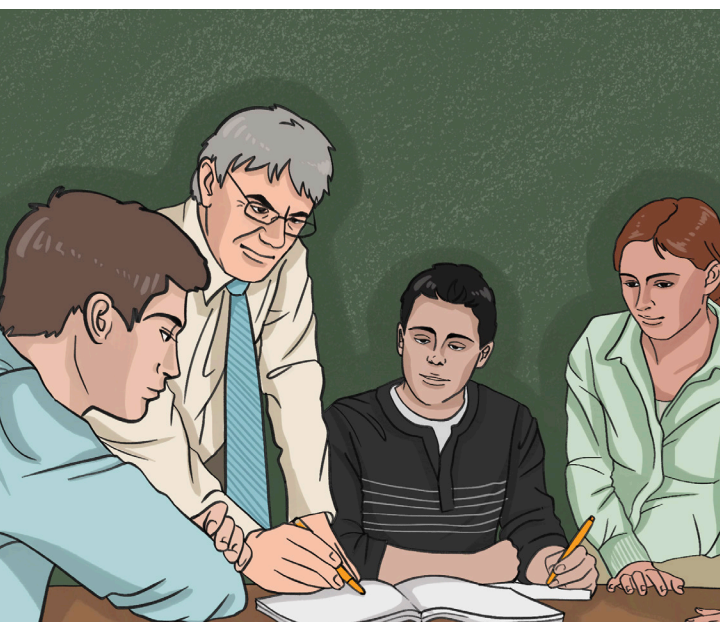
However, the question-and-answer session at the end of the panel took an interesting turn when Kianni was asked about the environmental impacts of her AI-based clothing resale platform, Phia. The question was raised whether the speakers were advancing aligned messages: Cabrera advocated ocean conservation, while Kianni promoted an AI-powered app.

AI technologies are known to contribute to water scarcity and cause environmental strain in communities near data centers. Kianni's response suggested that humanity has opened a "Pandora's Box" with AI. While I understand the perspective that technological advancements can be harnessed for humanitarian purposes, her answer could have benefited from a more direct explanation of why she chose AI for her advocacy work, including the personal motivations behind that decision.

Despite a few lingering questions, the 2026 Diversity Day speakers were informative and empowering experts in their fields. By sharing their personal motivations and the actions they took to create change, each speaker fostered a stronger connection with the Choate community as youth advocates, prompting students to reflect on their role in social justice. With the 2027 Diversity Day themes to be announced next fall, Choate can look forward to new, dynamic, and youth-centered speakers who are passionate about justice work.

Anna Park *is a third-former from Seoul, South Korea. She may be reached at apark29@choate.edu.*

Let Teachers Teach!



Graphic by Leah Han '27/*The Choate News*

By **Saige Patel '29**
Opinions Writer

The Choate English Department has embraced a flexible, teacher-driven approach to literature classes rather than enforcing a single standardized curriculum. This structure gives teachers the freedom to explore texts, themes, and assignments that resonate with them. At the same time, this means students may have different experiences depending on their teachers, raising concerns about gaps in foundational skills. However, I believe that Choate's flexible curriculum allows students to engage more passionately in English classes, explore a wider variety of texts, and spark curiosity or conversation.

While every third-form Introduction to Literature class begins with *The Odyssey*, what happens afterward can vary dramatically. Some teachers explore "Epic: The Musical," while others turn to the Bible or choose entirely different works. Students in the same form can end up reading completely different texts, yet, in many ways, that's part of the Choate experience. These differences reflect the individuality of each class and the passion that guides each teacher.

Choate should not adopt a fully standardized English curriculum. Instead, it should continue allowing teachers to design their own courses. One reason is engagement. When teachers choose material they genuinely care about, their enthusiasm becomes contagious. As Lupita Vele '29 explained, there's "more passion when they're teaching, and it helps you get excited." Whether teachers are working with poetry or creative writing, their interest can shape how students see literature, something a rigid curriculum often lacks.

Teachers' autonomy also helps students make more meaningful connections with literature by exposing them to a range of voices. The department's balance between classic and contemporary texts is intentional. English teacher Mr. Joseph Lampe noted that while *The Odyssey* holds an important place in the canon, he is "reluctant to say, in most cases, this one text is essential." His view reflects the department's belief that no single book should dominate the curriculum. Allowing teachers to choose creates a balanced literary landscape rather than elevating one "required" work above all the others.

Of course, a standardized curriculum also has advantages. It would ensure consistency across classes and guarantee that every student develops the same foundational skills. Some teachers might appreciate the clarity of a shared syllabus, and students could more easily discuss common texts with peers outside of their class. From that perspective, the desire for greater academic alignment at Choate is understandable.

Yet both teachers and students push back on this idea. Mr. Lampe emphasizes how professionally valuable it is to have the freedom to craft a course "that feels right to me." Vele agrees, mentioning that she enjoys asking her friends, "What are you reading in English?" because it gives her "a different sense" of what others are studying. Rather than creating confusion or division, these differences often spark curiosity and conversation.

Ultimately, Choate's approach reflects a belief that literature is not a one-size-fits-all experience. By trusting teachers to guide their classes, the School cultivates passion, individuality, and engagement. A standardized curriculum might create consistency, but a teacher-driven one creates classes that genuinely excite faculty and students.

Saige Patel *is a third-former from West Hartford, CT. She may be reached at spatel29@choate.edu.*

There's No Debate, Debate Should Be a Sport

By **Jai Midha '27**
Associate Editor

History has seen some great debates: capitalism vs. communism, Democrat vs. Republican, Biggie vs. Tupac. Although some are more consequential than others, debates of all proportions run rampant across our community. One notable debate is what really makes an activity a sport. The subject of this debate is speech and debate — more specifically, whether the Debate team should be an afternoon activity at Choate, therefore counting as a sport. The Debate team's demanding nature and sport-like structure should qualify it as an afternoon activity.

For debaters here at Choate, Sundays often consist of long bus rides to other schools, hours spent competing, and driving back only to be hungry and tired, then having to immediately face study hours.

Ironically, for something not considered a sport credit, this routine sounds awfully familiar to that of many members of athletic teams. Debaters spend hours practicing, competing, and traveling to and from tournaments. Despite this commitment, they are not given the opportunity to spend their afternoons refining their craft.

Even if one does not believe Debate qualifies as a sport, for the sake of competition alone, Choate should offer Debate as an afternoon activity for students who represent our school on Sundays. Most other schools offer debate as a full-fledged afternoon activity on weekdays.

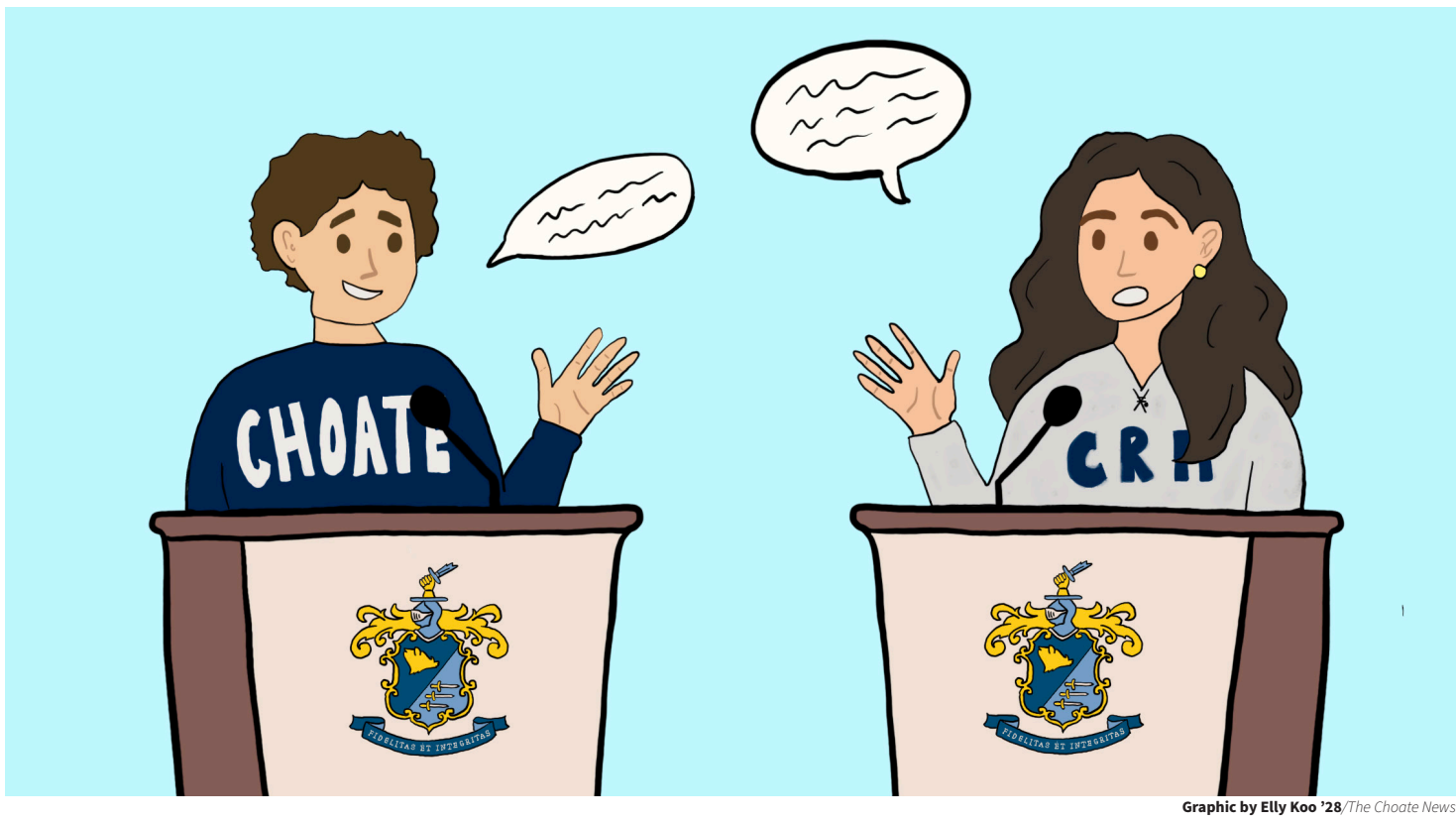
The question, then, is not whether Debate should be an afternoon activity, but whether Choate can compete with — and beat — its rivals in one of the most intellectually demanding activities. If the answer to that is "yes," then the way to make that true is to give the Debate team a chance to hone their skills as part of an afternoon activity.

So what has prevented Debate from becoming an afternoon activity? The issue lies in how Choate's afternoon activity requirement is structured. Traditionally, it requires some form of physical activity, which Debate does not fulfill. While there are exemptions for Signature Programs, such as Advanced Robotics Concentration (ARC) and Arts Concentration (Arts Con), there is currently no Debate concentration comparable to the ARC or Arts Con, and as a result, no exemption for debate.

However, even without a concentration, Debate is strikingly similar to that of a traditional sport. Debate Coach Dr. Amber Hodge highlighted how the team-based nature of Debate supports this comparison: "It is a team, because you guys win awards as teams. You compete like it is. It's very much ... like a sport, in the sense that your individual performance matters, and your individual performance is tracked like athletes."

For the sake of fairness to students who participate in Debate while also juggling another activity, for the team's competitiveness, and to reflect the breadth of opportunities Choate offers, I urge the Athletics Department and the Administration to seriously consider recognizing debate as an afternoon activity. Debate should be recognized for what it is, a demanding, competitive, team-oriented pursuit, and Choate should make space for it as such.

Jai Midha *is a fifth-former from Singapore. He may be reached at jmidha27@choate.edu.*



Graphic by Elly Koo '28/*The Choate News*

ICE Crosses a Moral Line

By **Leela Curry '29**
Opinions Writer

Anti-ICE protests are not an overreaction. They are a response to an immigration enforcement system that many Americans believe has crossed a moral line — not just in policy, but in how power and force are used against people. What's being challenged isn't the existence of laws. It's the growing sense that enforcement has become needlessly harsh, intimidating, and profoundly disconnected from basic human dignity.

Anti-ICE protests are not promoting chaos or "open borders," despite what critics claim. They are about drawing a line and saying that power must have limits, that force must have justification, and that laws must be enforced in ways that respect human dignity. The message from the streets is simple: a system that relies on fear and aggressive tactics to manage immigration is not strong; it's failing morally.

At the heart of the anti-ICE movement is a straightforward belief: enforcing immigration law should never come at the cost of humanity. Stories of parents being separated from their children, workers taken during job site raids, and people held in detention centers for long periods of time without clear outcomes have already shaken public trust. But beyond detention itself, many protestors are alarmed by how enforcement plays out on the ground: sudden home and workplace sweeps, transfers that cut people off from lawyers and family, and detention conditions where medical crises can spiral without timely care. As of January 2026, at least eight people have died this year either in ICE custody or in encounters with federal agents, and that reality has sharpened public anger. Heavily armed raids, officers in tactical gear, and the use of extreme violence during arrests make what is technically a civil issue feel like a criminal-style crackdown. To many Americans, this level of intensity sends a disturbing message: control matters more than humanity.

Critics contend that ICE is just "doing its job" and that protests undermine the rule of law. However, that argument assumes the system itself is automatically fair. History shows that laws and institutions can be legal yet wrong in practice. Protest has always been a tool of correcting that imbalance. Questioning the way ICE operates, especially when enforcement includes aggressive tactics against nonviolent people, is not lawlessness. It is a demand for accountability. It is a democratic process at work.

Another common claim is that aggressive ICE enforcement keeps communities safe, but fear-based enforcement can actually have the opposite effect. When people worry that any interaction with authorities could lead to detention, they are less likely to report crimes, cooperate with police, or seek help in emergencies. Add visible raids and intimidating operations, and that trust erodes even further. A system that relies on shock and intimidation may look tough, but it weakens the relationship between communities and the institutions meant to protect them.



Graphic by Ann Ma '28/*The Choate News*

The protests are also pushing back on the normalization of force in situations that don't involve immediate danger. Immigration violations are civil matters, yet the response can resemble high-risk criminal enforcement. That disconnect is precisely what many demonstrators find morally unacceptable. Many see a system that treats ordinary people, parents, workers, and students as threats to be subdued rather than human beings to be processed fairly.

So what is the alternative? Protest alone isn't the end goal — reform is. Enforcement should focus on genuine public safety threats, not people who have built lives and families. Clear limits on force should restrict physical restraint, weapons display, and tactical-style raids to situations involving real safety risks, not routine civil immigration arrests. Transparency must replace secrecy. Requiring body cameras, documenting all use-of-force incidents, and enforcing strict proportional-force standards would help restore trust. Independent civilian oversight boards should review ICE operations, detention conditions, and use-of-force reports, with unannounced inspections and public accountability measures. Most importantly, long-term immigration reform should include a pathway to legal status for nonviolent undocumented residents with strong community ties, expanded legal work visa programs, faster asylum processing, and protections that reduce family separations. When legal options exist, enforcement becomes more focused and less reliant on aggressive tactics.

In the end, these protests represent something deeply American: the belief that when institutions harm people, citizens have the right and responsibility to demand better. Ignoring that message won't make it disappear. Responding to it honestly can lead to an immigration system that is not only lawful, but just.

Leela Curry *is a third-former from Darien, CT. She may be reached at lcurry29@choate.edu.*

A Nation Built to Be Challenged


Graphic by Callie Crowell '28/*The Choate News*

By **Olivia Mancha '28**
Opinions Writer

Whether or not the United States is the greatest country in the world depends entirely on how "greatness" is defined. As the country nears its 250th year, that debate feels especially present. If greatness is measured by perfection, equality, or quality of life, the U.S. clearly falls short. However, if greatness is determined by freedom, opportunity, and the capacity for self-correction, then America stands apart in a way few other nations do. America's greatness does not lie in what it has achieved, but in the ideals it was founded upon and its unique ability to challenge and reshape itself over time.

One of the most significant factors that distinguishes the United States is its commitment to individual freedom, particularly of speech, religion, and protest. The First Amendment protects the right to criticize the government openly, practice or reject religion, and express opinions without fear of legal punishment. This protection is not universal, even among democratic nations. In America, disagreement is not a threat to the system; it is a part of how the system works. Major reforms, such as civil rights and women's suffrage, emerged because people questioned authority rather than accepting it. The fact that the country continues to function despite constant criticism suggests a strength that runs deeper than surface level stability.

Another defining feature of America is its emphasis on opportunity and reinvention. While opportunity is undeniably unequal, the United States still offers a level of social mobility that attracts people from around the world. Immigrants built America, and its national identity is rooted not in ethnicity or religion, but in shared ideals. Unlike societies where social class or background can permanently determine one's future, America culturally celebrates reinvention. Failure is often treated as a step toward growth rather than a permanent label. This belief in possibility, even when it does not always work out in practice, is central to the country's appeal and influence.

Perhaps the most compelling argument for America's greatness is its ability to self-correct. The nation was founded on ideals it initially failed to uphold. The declaration that "all men are created equal" excluded women, enslaved people, Native Americans, and poor white men. Yet those exact words later became tools used to demand justice and reform. America's laws and founding documents are aspirational rather than descriptive, meaning they describe what the country strives to be rather than what it already is. Progress in the United States has historically come through conflict, protest, and debate — not silence. This constant tension is not a flaw, but evidence of a system designed to evolve.

Critics often point out that other countries surpass the United States in healthcare, education, safety, and overall well-being. These criticisms are valid and should not be dismissed. However, they rely on a different definition of greatness, one based on outcomes and efficiency rather than freedom and influence. While these measures matter deeply, they do not fully capture what makes America distinct. America's impact on global culture, politics, and technology is immense, and its internal debates often shape conversations far beyond its borders.

America is not the greatest country because it is the most moral, equal, or successful in every measurable way. It is great because it is built on freedom, driven by ideals, and structured to be challenged. Its willingness to confront its own failures, however slowly or imperfectly, is what gives it lasting significance. Greatness does not require flawlessness, but the courage to change.

Olivia Mancha *is a fourth-former from Gainesville, VA. She may be reached at omancha28@choate.edu.*

Canada's Risky Tradeoff

By **Shaleen Sheth '27**
Staff Contributor


Graphic by Ann Ma '28/*The Choate News*

On January 16, Canada and China reached what Ottawa called a preliminary but "strategic partnership" trade agreement: Canada will allow up to 49,000 Chinese-made electric vehicles into its market each year at a low tariff, around 6.1 percent instead of the 100 percent border tax it imposed on Chinese EVs in 2024. China, for its part, will significantly reduce retaliatory tariffs on Canadian agricultural products that had been choking Canadian exports. Prime Minister Mark Carney framed the agreement as a necessary adaptation to a "rupturing global trading system," going so far as to say that Canada's longstanding economic relationship with the United States is effectively over. In response to those remarks, U.S. trade officials warned that the agreement could prove problematic and risk undermining North American trade integration. They have a point: once tariff-discounted Chinese EVs are flowing into Canada, it becomes harder to keep North American supply chains and industrial policy aligned.

While this may seem like a step forward for climate change activists around the world, it is significantly more troubling than it appears at first glance. Cheap Chinese electric vehicles will be funneled into Canada, marketed as a win for emissions reduction and green technology adoption. However, China's EV push is not purely altruistic. Like any major industrial power, Beijing uses export policy to secure market share, shape technical standards, and strengthen its position in the EV supply chain.

China has already demonstrated this playbook in many other nations. Across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, Beijing has used infrastructure projects and technology exports to embed itself into the economies of countless countries. Through the Belt and Road Initiative, China has poured money into ports, highways, rail lines, and power grids worldwide. These projects are marketed as a "win-win" cooperation, but in practice leave recipient countries economically and politically dependent on China. In Sri Lanka, the Chinese financing Hambantota Port became a cautionary tale: in 2017, the Sri Lankan government agreed to a 99-year lease of the port to a Chinese state-owned firm. Critics point to that outcome as evidence that infrastructure finance can translate into long-term strategic leverage, even when the deal is marketed as simple economic development.

The same pattern has repeated itself in another continent: in parts of Africa, Chinese financing of infrastructure projects has tied governments to long term repayment plans that give Beijing influence over domestic policy decisions. In Kenya, what began as a harmless infrastructure deal, the Chinese-financed Standard Gauge Railway, became a debt burden so immense that the Kenyan government had to use revenue from its main port as collateral, thereby giving Beijing influence over critical Kenyan national assets.

Canada's EV deal is worryingly aligned with this pattern. The quota of 49,000 vehicles seems modest at first, but China's strategy has never relied on overwhelming force at the outset. Instead, it starts with market entry, then normalization, expansion, and eventually dependence. Once Chinese firms gain a foothold in the nation's economy, disentanglement becomes economically painful and politically risky, exactly the position China has successfully engineered in other nations.

More concerning, however, is what this agreement reveals about Canada's relationship with the United States. For the past 20 years, Canada has benefitted from unparalleled access to the American market, alongside deeply integrated supply chains and strategic interests with the U.S. Even during periods of trade disputes or tariff negotiations, it's felt like the foundation of the relationship has stayed intact. Carney's public declaration that the status quo is "over," while also deepening ties with one of America's primary geopolitical rivals, proves that Canada is willing to risk undermining its long-term alliance stability for some short-term economic relief.

This should not only concern Canada, but the United States as well. China has moved beyond expanding its influence in distant regions and is now in bed with America's closest partner. When a strategic competitor begins building economic ties with America's ally, its expanding influence moves from a distant geopolitical issue to a regional security concern. The notion that China is positioning itself as a "reliable alternative" to the U.S. that will support other nations better than America has exactly the narrative that Beijing wants to advance, and Canada's deal is reinforcing it.

Canada's EV agreement with China should serve as a warning to the U.S. It mirrors a strategy Beijing has successfully used around the globe: start small, and end with an entrenched influence in whichever nation it has partnered with. Both Canada and the United States should see this as a test of how resilient Western alliances based on common security interests will remain in the face of a rising China. If we turn a blind eye to a strategic competitor's courting of our closest ally, American influence in the world risks being weakened.

Shaleen Sheth *is a fifth-former from Madrid, Spain. She may be reached at ssheth27@choate.edu.*

FEATURES

The Lonely Hearts Club

This Valentine's Day, the 119th Masthead is looking for love. When they no longer have layout nights and editing sessions to fill their lonely hearts, maybe you can.



Reinah Lee '26 – Editor-in-Chief:
If crushing 40 minutes on the stairmaster and then protecting garlic knots with your life doesn't sound like a perfect first date, then you might as well give up on swooning this relentless leader of *The Choate News*. An ex-softball (basically pro-level) star, the key to her heart is unabashed whimsicality and forging relationships with community safety officers — bonus points if your biceps rival Chris Evans'.



Ethan Zhang '26 – Managing Editor:
Don't be fooled by his nonchalance; this Managing Editor will keep you on your toes. Behind the dual varsity athlete and D1 spikeballer, this smart cookie has Frank Ocean x Love is War edits in his reposts. Looking for his court-side baddie (with eyes keen on Jessica Alba look-alikes), this mushroom will cheer you up with takeout and tunes.



Eliana Li '26 – School News Editor:
For a Valentine's full of surprises and Texan excitement, look no further than this 5'3 ex-varsity volleyball concussion survivor. The qualifications are demanding: be a rock-climbing enthusiast just as smart as her (SRP bio certified). Otherwise, good luck — because her schedule is packed, her wit sharp, and she will absolutely out-debate you every time.



Bella Welch '26 – School News Editor:
Do you have a sweet tooth? 'Cause this girl's got a treat for you. From tiramisu to apple crumble, this School News Editor can bake it all. Our preppy queen isn't only a killa in the kitchen, but a killa on the tennis courts too. If you want to win her heart, perhaps a love sonnet or confessional ballad would suffice. So, if you've got a sweet tooth for our beloved Bells, lace up those Golden Gooses and try to keep up.



Rachel Fan '27 – Local News Editor:
This Local News Editor is looking for a headline-worthy companion. To get the scoop, take her out for hot pot, but keep the chili oil far, far away; her spice tolerance is about as low as her double bass notes. Win her over by reciting original poetry at 3:00 a.m.; she'll be awake, and she'll definitely fall in love before she ever falls asleep. Just be prepared to lug her bass around Colony Hall — it's the only thing heavier than her sleep deprivation.



Maia Shah '27 – Local News Editor:
An LA native who's always down for a matcha date, this Local News Editor is looking for her doubles partner on and off the court. To find the key to her heart, come prepared with some delicious mango sticky rice or mochi. You can find this trendsetter at countless debate competitions across New England, so be sure to cheer her on! Bonus points if you share her love for Fleetwood Mac.



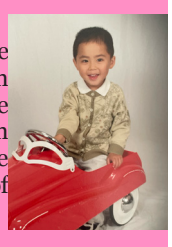
Steven Kee '27 – Ops Campus Editor:
Looking for the ultimate First Hurrah date? Try this self-proclaimed golf recruit (proudly made in Hong Kong), and he'll teach you his groovy Arabic dabke moves for the dance floor. When you're caught in a rough mahjong match, don't fret — with him by your side, things stay (st)even, and the table never feels tilted. Treat him to a fresh Mitsubishi Jetstream pen, and he'll make sure your dates are anything but 'stationery.'



Eshana Hora '27 – Ops Campus Editor:
With a sweet tooth stronger than her hatred of coffee, look no further than this quadrilingual pilot-to-be. When she's not baking or impressing on the tennis court, Eshana can be found editing Choate's many campus publications (though *The News* remains superior). Prospective suitors should come bearing dessert, respecting a tight deadline, and appreciating her unparalleled ability to cook fragrant food.



Zaki Shamsi '26 – Ops N/W Editor:
This Batman-loving Chipotle addict can't stop talking. If you don't see him at School Meeting, he's probably humming Radiohead while jumping at the trampoline park. You can find Zaki eating a cinnamon raisin bagel or crunching on a honeycrisp apple in his morning classes, and don't get annoyed when he quotes "The Office."



Deyi Meng '26 – Features Editor:
Looking for your match? This Features editor has the literal brain chemistry to sweep you off your feet. When he isn't exploring neuroscience or serenading with flute melodies, catch him devouring sponge cake. Want to win Deyi over? Lace up your Hokas for a run, queue up some SZA, and prove you can appreciate both the intricacies of the brain and Harvey Specter's courtroom drama.



Elizabeth Burgstahler '26 – Arts & Leisure Editor:
Looking for the key to your heart? Elizabeth definitely knows the pitch-perfect way to send you some love. When she's not playing piano on stage or singing a beautiful ballad, you'll find her on the golf course hitting shots that fly faster than Cupid's arrows. Wow this Arts & Leisure Editor with a midnight serenade from her basement-floor window at Nichols House or shower her with chocolatey gifts all year round.



Kaitlyn Yu '27 – Sports Editor:
This sporty queen will win you over with her angelic soprano melodies. But don't be fooled — this Sports Editor needs someone to keep up with her humanities grind as well. Win over this AmStuds sweat's heart by showing up to her dorm (Hall) with Taste of China noodles and dim sum in hand!



Ian Wu '26 – Layout Editor:
This gadget-building, film-camera-carrying heartthrob might just develop feelings for you faster than he can develop his own photos. When Ian isn't busy creating film photography, he's probably strumming one of his three guitars or sweeping his opponents at Mahjong with a winning hand. Bring a savory plate of tomato-egg rice and prepare to be charmed by this Layout Editor's musical tunes.



Leah Han '27 – Graphics Editor:
Tall, smart, and talented, our Graphics Editor will steal your heart and probably use it in one of her orgo experiments. Her nonchalant aura might intimidate you, but all you need for the key to her heart is a perfect scoop of rainbow sherbet. But while this archery master may hold Cupid's arrows, don't let her Lea(h)d you on! Her love is steadfast and belongs only to a certain Photography Editor...



Finn Wikstrom '26 — Photo Editor:
If you don't want to be serenaded by this infamous amateur singer-songwriter's voice, then, ladies, you are missing out on your very own Photography Editor. This bachelor will cherish you as much as he loves his collection of old magazines — he'll want you for LIFE. As a Sudoku connoisseur, he's mastered every puzzle except one, and your heart might just be the final piece.



Scarlett Park '27 – Photo Editor:
If you ever spot this academic weapon on campus, (Scar)lett her charm you with a sweet hand kiss and a wink — you will immediately feel the spark in your heart coming back. Looking for her favorite love language? Feed her three plates of peas, and she's all yours. But you certainly won't be able to snatch her heart from a certain Graphics Editor...

Meet the Artists Behind The Choate News



Photo by Finn Wikstrom '26/*The Choate News*

Graphics Editor Leah Han '27 and Photo Editors Finn Wikstrom '26 and Scarlett Park '27 pose for a picture in the newsroom.

By **Anna Park '29**
Reporter

Every other week, *The Choate News* is distributed throughout the School, featuring engaging student-produced drawings and photos from the most memorable moments. All published articles are enhanced by flashy media, such as graphics, illustrations, or photographs. But who exactly are the visual masterminds behind *The Choate News*' graphics?

Leah Han '27: The Graphics Editor

After section editors submit their graphics requests, Leah Han '27 reviews each one, sketches ideas, and assigns illustrations to members of the graphics team. As Graphics Editor, Han designs many of the visuals herself while coordinating a group of around 30 student artists to ensure each article has a graphic that fits its story.

According to Han, creating graphics for each article is not a complicated process once you have the right resources. "I use Procreate for my graphics and I recommend that other artists use it as well because I think it's the easiest app to use for drawing," Han said. "Thinking of what to draw is pretty straightforward because the section editors usually put down the graphics request and specify what they want on it." Moreover, Han adapts her artistic style for different sections within *The Choate News* when planning graphics. "For Opinions Nation World, I tend to use a more dramatic style with vivid colors because the graphics are focused on more serious themes like protests, whereas for Arts and Features, I try to use a more aesthetic and straightforward approach," Han said.

When asked what her favorite graphic she's drawn so far for *The Choate News* is, Han said, "I really enjoy drawing the Year in Review graphics because they have a lot of cute ideas, like the best Tuck Shop menu item or best dancer." She also enjoyed drawing the Spotify Wrapped graphic for the Masthead. Although it required 15 different album covers, Han was able to listen to the albums and explore the music tastes of the other editors while drawing.

Becoming Graphics Editor has helped Han grow creatively and professionally by allowing her to experiment with techniques, textures, and messages. "One thing that I've improved throughout my graphics career at *The Choate News* is learning how to use different colors and brushes to add more texture and life into my graphics," Han said. "Sometimes I go back to my freshman year graphics, and I can really see how much I've improved [since] then."

Finn Wikstrom '26 and Scarlett Park '27: The Photography Editors

Following the biweekly Sunday editors' meeting, Finn Wikstrom '26 and Scarlett Park '27 divvy up photography assignments, assigning photos to staff and choosing which photos the pair will take. Park starts the news cycle by compiling all requested photos into a single document and organizing assignments for the staff photographers. "A lot of our job is just compiling the photos and getting them into the right places," Park said.

The photography team does not have a specific criteria for their photos, though they sometimes get involved in cropping and fitting the photos into the layout. "Strong news photography is clear and it should be easy to see how the picture is conveying something that relates to the article," Park said.

Using his own Sony camera and Adobe editing software, Wikstrom focuses on taking photos based on editors' requests, cropping or editing as needed, and improving photo quality. "In a strong news photograph, I think it's important that information is presented clearly, and nothing essential is cropped or cut off out of frame," he said. "You should also never expect to get a perfect photo right off the bat. I always ask staff photographers to get as many photos as possible because, as a teacher of mine always said, it takes 100 photos just to get one good one."

Although staff photos are mostly clear, Wikstrom and Park spend ample time behind the scenes ensuring that each photo presents well in print. "I think the biggest challenge is that sometimes the requests we get from the section [editors] are a bit ambiguous, and there's a little bit of miscommunication on each side," Wikstrom said.

From John Green's visit during School Meeting this past October to photographing arts events, Wikstrom and Park have also gotten to showcase their own creativity while on the masthead. Wikstrom especially enjoyed photographing this Winterlude's cabaret fundraiser, *Miscast*, and the Fall Dance Showcase. "It was very fun in both instances because the lighting was great, and with *Miscast*, it was challenging as well and good practice for adjusting my camera settings efficiently," Wikstrom said.

The two editors always encourage new students to partake in photography for *The Choate News*. Wikstrom said, "There is no such thing as taking too many pictures; the more the better — and *The Choate News* is the perfect opportunity to practice." Park also encouraged students to partake in the many opportunities the School offers to grow through photography, whether they be through classes offered by the Arts Department, photography competitions, or artistic clubs around campus.

Han, Wikstrom, and Park work tirelessly alongside their dedicated team of student artists and photographers to bring the color into every issue of T*he Choate News*. As readers skim through the pages of this issue, remember to appreciate all of the hard work these three put into making our paper shine!

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SNOW MUCH FUN: CHOATE STUDENTS ENJOY SNOW DAY

By **Mary Higashi '29**
Reporter

Phones buzzed and dorm doors flew open across campus on Sunday afternoon as students were notified that classes were canceled for Monday, January 26. Once the initial excitement had settled, plans took shape: some pulled on their boots to head outside, while others settled back in bed.

For some, the snowstorm offered a completely new experience. Emma Demopoulos '29 said, "I'm not really used to seeing so much snow, so it was a really nice experience to see it for the first time with my friends." She spent time playing around in Memorial Circle, where students were "building snowmen and having snowball fights," which created "a really nice atmosphere."

Others chose to stay inside and participate in indoor activities instead. Sora Miyahara '28 attended a free skate at Remsen Arena. "It was freezing outside, and I had nothing to do. I saw the email that a free skate was open," Miyahara said. "Though I'm not really good at skating, I was able to enjoy it a lot." Miyahara noted that the event ended up being the highlight of her weekend.

Not everyone chose to spend the snow day outside their dorm. Some used the extended break to take a quiet pause from school or catch up on work while escaping the harsh weather. Prudence Chen '28 explained that while winter initially felt exciting, she "underestimated how challenging the term was going to be." She added that "the constant cold and the dreariness of winter" made the term more demanding than expected. Additionally, being in the dorm, both hanging out with friends and taking time alone to recharge and rejuvenate, helped her make the most of the unexpected break.

For seniors, the snow day marked a special tradition: senior sledding. Though initially scheduled on the evening of the snow day, the event was pushed back one day due to hazardous outdoor conditions. Sledding took place behind the Worthington Johnson Athletic Center (WJAC) and the Remsen Arena, drawing a large turnout as members of the senior class took advantage of these rare conditions. "It was really fun to hang out with friends in the snow and enjoy an evening with them," Austin Zhuo '26 said. "But, it was bittersweet: seeing people sled down the hill, I came to realize how this was the beginning of our final events together at Choate."



Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Burgstahler '26

Nichols House dormmates enjoying the snow day.

Whether students spent time sledding, skating, or resting, the unanticipated three-day weekend was a surprising break from routine and a special chance for the Choate community to pause before continuing through the rest of the winter term.

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WHO BELONGS ON THE BIGGEST STAGE?

By **Jai Midha '27**
Associate Editor



Graphic by David Ionescu '27/*The Choate News*

To those who indulge in Latin reggae or even those who have watched *Happy Gilmore Two*, you may recognize the name Bad Bunny. With 10 Grammy nominations and two wins, Bad Bunny has been rightfully crowned the "King of Latin Trap," and now, he will be performing at the upcoming Super Bowl LX. Recently, Bad Bunny has been using his platform to be vocal against President Donald Trump P'00's deportation policies, sparking controversy among the public over whether Bad Bunny, who almost strictly performs in Spanish, should perform at Super Bowl LX.

Bad Bunny has been anything but quiet about Trump's crackdown on immigration. Most notably, he has skipped many tour spots due to ICE raids. Now, by being selected for the halftime show, Bad Bunny has enraged Trump, who, in an interview with Newsmax, called the NFL's decision "absolutely ridiculous." Trump plans on boycotting this year's Super Bowl for this reason. Others have been unsettled by Bad Bunny's lack of English discography. Many conservative commentators have said Bad Bunny's Spanish-language music and pro-immigrant views are "un-American," even though he is a U.S. citizen from Puerto Rico. They argue that, for how mainstream the Super Bowl is, it should be catered to the broadest audience. Bad Bunny's criticisms of the U.S. don't stop there. His most recent album, DeBÍ TiRAR MáS FOToS, which has received six Grammy nominations, calls out the damage of U.S. colonialism and excessive tourism to Puerto Rico. The controversy stems from some Americans being unsettled by a Spanish singing artist performing at a traditionally English-speaking event.

However, at Choate, students have generally expressed support for Bad Bunny. Liam Etienne '26 has appreciated the selection from the National Football League (NFL). "It shows that the NFL is standing in the face of this anti-Hispanic, anti-immigrant wave," Etienne said.

Even though Bad Bunny is not an immigrant himself, being from Puerto Rico, Etienne said, "even having a Spanish or Latin American singer at the Super Bowl shows that the NFL is expressing its solidarity with the Latino people who are being persecuted in America."

For other students, even as a political statement, having Bad Bunny as a performer shouldn't be an issue. Liam Smith '27, speaking on Bad Bunny's critique of Trump, pointed towards past precedent: "There have been many celebrities celebrit[ies] in the past that have opposed either Democratic or a Republican executive branch. That's fine with me. I don't think it's very controversial at all," he said. Celebrities, just like many of us, hold their own opinions, removing their chance to speak up about issues or causes they care about would be unfair. "Our founding fathers gave us the right of free speech," Smith said.

Amidst a political landscape of potential bigotry and xenophobia, having Bad Bunny as a performer shows the NFL's intolerance of such. But then again, should the Super Bowl, an event to determine the league's champion, really be a stage for political commentary?

Putting the politics aside, isn't it disengaging to have a Spanish-speaking artist perform at a predominantly English-speaking event? Smith doesn't think so: "We had Shakira, who's also a Hispanic singer, and that was the best Super Bowl halftime show I've ever seen," he said.

However, some students, Smith included, still aren't thrilled with the halftime show, though not for the reasons it has most commonly brought controversy. "I wouldn't say that I'm happy, because I don't particularly enjoy his discography, but I think that a lot of others will enjoy it. I think it's a good thing in general," Smith said. From Nina Simone to Public Enemy, the Harlem Renaissance to Marvin Gaye, music has always been a stage for America's cultural debates. In a time of such uncertainty, Bad Bunny's performance is no different. Whether you love or hate Bad Bunny, this will be a once-in-a-lifetime halftime show to watch.

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Sustainability Meets Lasting Creativity on Diversity Day

By **Oola Breen-Ryan '29**
Reporter



Photo by Ashley Wu '28/*The Choate News*

One of the vision boards inspired by "Generation Greta."

How do sustainability and art intersect? Can creative expression be used to educate others about climate justice? These questions guided several Diversity Day workshops that explored the relationship between art, activism, and environmental responsibility.

In the workshop "Film Screening & Discussion: Generation Greta," participants examined climate change through both discussion and creative response. After watching the documentary, the group split into three sections: an art project breakout room, a journaling section, and a political discussion on related topics.

In the art project breakout room, participants reused old National Geographic magazines, fabric, and other materials to create multimedia pieces that are being showcased at the Paul Mellon Arts Center (PMAC) for the remainder of the winter term. Workshop participant Sienna Kim '28 left the project feeling inspired and empowered. "I felt like art was something I could use to channel advocacy and, in my own way, fight against climate change," she said.

Several faculty members, including Senior Associate Communications Director Mr. Todd Meagher and DEC committee member Mrs. Leela Woody, had an active role in organizing movie screenings and connected workshops. Both Mr. Meagher and Mrs. Woody thought carefully about how to give students a variety of ways to actively engage with the topics of sustainability and youth empowerment. "The idea was to give students a chance to visually express their reaction, their thoughts after screening the [documentary]," Mr. Meagher said.

Mrs. Woody also reflected on the importance of the topics shown throughout Generation Greta. "One of the reasons we wanted to create a way to visually respond is that these topics can be so intense and heavy, and it can be really challenging to confront this serious conversation about how you are affected," she said. In order to help students process their emotions, she wanted to give them the opportunity "to create some representation of [their] feelings."

In "Plastic to Purpose: Fiber Arts as Youth Activism," participants used upcycled plastic rice bags to knit, crochet, and make craft flowers. The event, which was organized by yarn@Choate, the crochet and knitting club on campus, aimed to introduce more members of the Choate community to the fiber arts and upcycling. "The main idea of our workshop, specifically, was ... being able to upcycle things that you would think are just trash," yarn@Choate cabinet member Bruce van Wingerden '28 explained. Participant Ava Cadett '29 was inspired by the materials she used, specifically the rice bags and their transformation from "something that can [potentially] cause so much harm" into something beautiful.

Another workshop, "Visual Ethnography in Extractive Landscapes," explored visual ethnography, which is "a method of anthropology that uses creative [mediums] to document the community that you're studying," according to the organizer, Rella Wang '26. She gave a presentation on the subject, then facilitated a "mini research activity" on some of the different artistic forms visual ethnography can take. "I wanted to ... share my own research and introduce [visual ethnography] to community members. Choate has a really strong art program, and a lot of us can think [of] art as a better way of advocacy," Wang said.

Other creative workshops included "Ecopoetry & Cli-Fi: Writing as Activism," a creative writing session; "Sustainability Signs and Sticker Studio," which allowed students to design inspiring posters and stickers; and "Upcycled Design Challenge: Transforming Trash into Treasure," an innovation challenge led by the C-Proctor Leadership Program. Echoing this intersection, Kaya Weerasuriya '26, who led the Plastics for Purpose workshop, emphasized that in every workshop, "there were so many different [artistic] avenues to take and so many ways to use art as a form of advocacy."

Together, the workshops demonstrated how creative practices, from writing and design to upcycling and transforming waste, can offer accessible ways for students to engage with sustainability and climate justice.

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Choate Connects with Connecticut Musicians at CMEA

By **Prudence Chen '28**
Reporter





Photo courtesy of Mrs. Ashlee Hyatt

Choate students perform with the Southern High School Orchestra.

The Connecticut Music Educators Association Conference (CMEA) invites selected teachers, students, and education partners to an annual multi-day professional development and music education event each year. From January 16-17, Choate students joined peers from across the state, united by a shared musical language.

CMEA felt especially rigorous to French horn player Aiden Cho '28, who participated in the CMEA orchestra. According to him, tackling triplets in a piece from John Williams' *Harry Potter* and a passage in Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake were particularly tricky. "We have to look at the conductor, and we have to finish [playing] simultaneously ... It didn't work out pretty well during the rehearsals, but it did work out in the performance," Cho said.

Olivia Wang '28's talent for viola secured her entry this year. It was especially memorable because her close friend from her previous school performed in the same section. Wang noted that, because the conductor was a horn player, he was "more concerned with how the winds in brass were articulating than the strings' [performance]." This made the conducting feel more "abstract," and she admitted that there were moments where the ensemble could get lost. "A skill that I learned was listening to new people in your section," she said.

Choate Chorale and Symphony Orchestra member Brianna Hekle '26 has attended the festival since her freshman year, and this year, she is singing in the treble choir. For Hekle, CMEA is consistently educational and enjoyable. "It's getting to see how many other talented musicians there are, and how when there [are] so many people passionate about music, how much can come together in such a short time," she said. "It really made me recognize how important listening is as a part of music."

Arts, Music, Ensembles, & Private Lessons Director Mrs. Ashlee Hyatt and CMEA Coordinator Ms. Julie Levene supported Choate students throughout the process, overseeing administrative tasks such as registering the selected musicians and distributing their sheet music.

Mrs. Hyatt explained that "exposure to different rehearsal approaches and musical expectations helps students become more versatile musicians." Ms. Levene agreed, claiming, "I have always felt that there isn't a 'right' way to learn a piece of music." She also mentioned that the students "benefit greatly from hearing a new perspective from the guest conductors at the Festival," and that the guest conductors have influenced them to learn new techniques along the way.

Beyond performance, CMEA pushed students to develop essential ensemble skills, from adaptability and active listening to collaboration under pressure. Those lessons, students explained, were among the most valuable takeaways from the two-day experience.

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Stream Our Spotify Wrapped...

With Valentines Day around the corner, the 119th masthead wants to show gratitude to our lovely and loyal readers. Whether you are struggling to stay warm and locked in academically or simply skimming through *The Choate News* in the dining hall, we hope you will take some time to enjoy our playlist. Each song on this playlist was selected by a member of the masthead as our "song of 2025," to create a playlist that fully represents the vibes of our team. Read the full Spotify Wrapped Column on the *Arts and Leisure* page from Volume 119 Issue 10 to learn more about us and our favorite songs!

Lots of Love,
The 119th Masthead :)

THE CHOATE NEWS

SPORTS

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FIELD REPORT

Choate Fall Record

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Varsity Games

Girls' Squash (9-1)
vs. Sacred Heart, 6-1

Boys' Ice Hockey (7-7)
vs. Avon Old Farms, 4-3

Girls' Wrestling (3-0)
vs. Exeter, 48-18

Boys' Swimming (4-2)
vs. Deerfield, 104-82

Girls' Basketball (5-7)
vs. Suffield, 45-47

Boys' Squash (10-6)
vs. Andover, 0-8

Girls' Ice Hockey (7-7)
vs. Millbrook, 1-2

Boys' Wrestling (10-6)
vs. NMH, 6-65

J.V. Games

Girls' Ice Hockey (6-2)
vs. Pomfret, 9-1

Boys' Squash (10-1)
vs. Avon Old Farms, 9-0

Girls' Basketball (7-0)
vs. Taft, 49-27

Boys' Ice Hockey (1-6)
vs. Loomis Chaffee,1-4

Socialization, Smiles, and Shared Moments at Adaptive Skate



Graphic by Leah Han '27/*The Choate News*

By **Teya Tejavibulya '28**
Associate Editor

In mid-January, the Remsen Arena and Hemenway Rink is usually occupied by Choate's ice hockey teams. On Sunday afternoons, however, laughter and encouragement echo across the ice as families and children from across Connecticut are joined by Choate students and faculty taking on the role of skating buddies.

Since January 18, the Adaptive Skate program has operated as a community service initiative in partnership with Social Sabby, a Meriden-based nonprofit organization that provides recreational programming for neurodivergent children, bringing Choate students together with children for inclusive skating sessions. This ice skating initiative grew out of the success of the Adaptive Swim program held this fall. "It just seemed like a natural fit to … replicate that programming," Director of Community Service Ms. Melissa Koomson said.

Putting the program together meant thinking beyond logistics. "[During] sophomore year, Zaki Shamsi ['26] and I had the idea to bring something like [the] Special Olympics [to Choate]," Kate Totorella '26, the event initiator, said. "Social Sabby was really willing to help us achieve that goal."

Coordinators needed to consider the sensory and emotional impact on the children stepping on the ice, many of whom may be sensitive to noise, crowds, or unfamiliar environments. To keep the setting manageable, the program was capped at 40 children, allowing student volunteers to work closely one-on-one with participants. "Just seeing parents [being] really excited for their kids out there was really special," Ellie Silva '26, an event organizer, said. "Taking moments like this is really important for the community."

Another key factor that made the program possible was constant communication across campus, from rink scheduling to equipment management. While there were challenges, including attendance, timing, and uncertainty around how the first session would unfold, those concerns quickly faded once the program began. Plans were often adjusted in real time as the sessions progressed. Without coordination behind the scenes, moments of joy, confidence, and connection unfolding at the rink would not have been possible.

For Choate students, the experience on ice often became more personal than expected, with many learning additional skills other than instructing experience. Girls' Varsity Hockey player Karli Charron '28 found herself learning how to communicate effectively with different children, relying on hand signals and check-ins, while Boys' Junior Varsity Hockey player Elliot Sun '28 pushed children around in chairs and raced with other pairs. "Overall, this volunteering opportunity teaches us how to understand a person better," Sun said.

As the Adaptive Skate program settles into a rhythm, Charron described returning to the rink with greater awareness of how to read body language and adjust to each child's comfort level. Rather than treating the program as a one-time initiative, Ms. Koomson sees the sessions as an opportunity to refine and strengthen the effort by reaching out to more families in the future. "Students are getting that [the children's] families are getting a piece of joy and relief to see their kids welcomed and celebrated," she said. "And the kids obviously are having a blast. So it was a win all around."

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DEBATING THE ETHICS OF HONNOLD'S CLIMB

By **Norah Wang '27**
Staff Contributor

When professional climber Alex Honnold free-soloed Taipei 101, one of the world's tallest skyscrapers, live on Netflix on January 25, audiences around the globe watched with a mix of awe and unease. Known for his rope-free ascent of El Capitan, a vertical rock formation in California, Honnold's latest feat pushed the boundaries of what many consider sport, raising questions not only about physical ability but also about ethics, responsibility, and risk.

Reactions within the Choate community varied depending on how and when people watched the climb. Junior Varsity Squash Team Member Bella Hong '28 watched the climb live from her room, and the reality of what Honnold was attempting quickly set in. "I thought it was absolutely insane that he was climbing that tower," Hong said. Watching live heightened the tension, so she avoided focusing too closely on the most dangerous moments. "I didn't want to watch him fall," she explained, noting a section where Honnold relied almost entirely on arm strength stood out as especially nerve-wracking.

For others, watching after the fact softened the emotional impact but allowed for deeper reflection. Junior Varsity Diving Team Member Noe Shoemaker '28 compared Honnold's risk to her own sport. "I don't think it compares to any sport that's really available to watch," she said. As a relatively new diver, her sport carries some risk of injury, but she emphasized that it is "not comparable at all to putting your life on the line" in the way Honnold did.

Shoemaker believes climbing is undeniably a sport, but Honnold's climb blurred the line between athletic competition and performance. "He finds a way to intertwine the two," she said, pointing to the presence of a large audience and the documentary nature of the event. Still, she acknowledged Honnold's extensive preparation, explaining that he trained for months both mentally and physically to make the climb "as safe as it could possibly be." While she understands that climbing defines Honnold's career and lifelong aspirations, she argued that having dependents fundamentally changes the moral equation.

On one hand, Honnold's discipline and mastery of fear inspire respect, particularly among athletes who understand the dedication required to perform at such a level. Yet, the possibility of serious injury or death forces viewers to ask whether extreme risk-taking should be celebrated at the level it was for Honnold's climb.



Photo courtesy of capradio.org

Alex Honnold scales the side of Taipei 101 without harnesses.

Ultimately, many at Choate seem to view Honnold's climb as both impressive and troubling. It challenges audiences to consider where the line lies between bravery and recklessness, and whether personal freedom in extreme sports should be impacted by public influence and personal responsibility. Although Honnold may have completed the climb successfully, the ethical questions it raises remain unresolved.

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Choate Lacrosse League Builds Culture in the Off-Season

By **Elliot Sun '28**
Reporter

The Choate Lacrosse League (CLL) has brought high-energy competition and team bonding to the off-season, giving the Boys' Varsity Lacrosse team an opportunity to stay fit before the spring season begins. This intra-squad league features three teams: the Mighty Meatballs, the Mathletes, and Hot Honey. The games take place on the basketball courts inside the Worthington Johnson Athletic Center (WJAC), featuring multiple 10 to 15-minute intense matchups. With no formal captain's practices in the winter, the teams still meet every Sunday to compete with modified rules.

CLL aims to help players stay in shape during the off-season, host weekly gatherings, and build a team culture as they prepare for the spring season. The Mighty Meatballs have leaned into a physical, fast-paced style. "We play with grit and [speed]," Michael Bruketta '28 said. Drafted as a new player, Bruketta noted that the league helped him grow closer to his teammates.

The teams were assigned through a senior-led draft, with captains selecting the players. Hot Honey has also delivered exciting moments, including an overtime win against the Mighty Meatballs on the first day. Brad Mallory '27 and Jaxon Lin '27, who play on Hot Honey and the Mighty Meatballs, respectively, both recalled several close finishes. "Hot Honey beat Meatballs in overtime," Mallory said. "And also the game of four, we lost with five seconds left to the Mathletes." He added, "A lot of close games … get super intense right at the end."



Photo by Ben Lee '27/*The Choate News*

Hot Honey teammates pose for a photo during a CLL game.

For returning players, the CLL provides an opportunity to build chemistry ahead of the spring season. "It's a great initial bonding experience with the team," Lin said. "It's helping build the culture for the season." The smaller playing area also increases competitiveness, as players are forced to play faster with more physicality. "Overall, it's more competitive [among] the players … Just because it's a smaller playing field, everyone is a lot more physical," Lin said.

Success in the upcoming spring season goes beyond wins. Mallory noted that the Boys' Varsity Lacrosse team aims to build a "winning culture … As long as we have a good culture and we're playing as hard as we can, we're playing for each other." The team's motto, "BOOM: Brothers On One Mission," also captures this focus. Lin emphasized that winning isn't his only goal, but to "pave the way for the younger kids, making sure they feel included, and that they're ready to step up."

The CLL unites players around shared goals of building team culture and brotherhood, setting a strong foundation for the team's success. With the off-season league already producing thrillers and last-second drama, the real test arrives in the spring. Choate players are eager for the Founders League Championships and matchups against rivals like Deerfield Academy. As the Sunday games continue to sharpen skills, the intensity building on the courts is a preview of the bigger battles ahead.

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Playing Sports Outside of Choate

By **Adrienne Prater '28**
Reporter

Choate offers a wide range of athletic opportunities, but not every sport students pursue is available on campus. For athletes whose sports fall outside Choate's offerings, continuing to train is not a problem. Alexander Drury '27, Gunther Stewart '27, and Lily Safabakhsh '29 each compete in sports outside of the interscholastic list. Rather than abandoning their sport, they have found ways to continue practicing and competing off campus, balancing time and commitment to stay connected to the sports they love.

Safabakhsh began horseback riding six years ago, and it quickly became one of her favorite activities. When deciding whether to continue riding, she said, "I just knew that I would be super upset if I stopped." She leaves campus most weekends and drives two hours for practices and competitions. While she values the chance to see her family and continue riding, the commitment comes with challenges. "It definitely does take a lot of time. On the weekends, when my friends are getting their work done or hanging out, I have to leave campus and practice," Safabakhsh said.

Like Safabakhsh, Drury has played rugby since he was eight. "I wanted to be like [my dad]," Drury said. Growing up in Surrey, England, his father was a retired rugby player, and Drury was inspired to follow in his footsteps. "When I came over to the [United] States, I wanted to keep playing," he added. Drury has since found opportunities near Choate. He also uses Choate's afternoon athletic options, such as PEAK Performance and Boys' Varsity Football, to maintain and better his abilities.

Stewart has been rock climbing for nine years. When deciding whether to continue rock climbing at Choate, he recalled, "Continuing to compete at Choate felt natural to me because climbing is part of who I am." Like Safabakhsh and Drury, Stewart has faced challenges balancing school and sports. "I've had to miss time on campus for competitions, and traveling alone can sometimes feel isolating, especially since sports at Choate are typically such collective, team-oriented experiences," Stewart said.

What keeps these athletes and many others going is their love for their sport. "[At] Choate, [you will need] to find a way to make the most of everything with time management and social life," Safabakhsh said. To Stewart, his advice is to "lean into what sets you apart" and be proud of who you are. " Your sport doesn't separate you, but rather it's what makes you unique. That uniqueness is something to be proud of," Stewart said.

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