

# The Mustang

Leading the stampede with award-winning coverage

Vol. 65 Issue 4

Mundelein High School, 1350 W. Hawley St., Mundelein, IL 60060

February Issue

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## Limited languages at MHS: Hola, Bonjour, how about more?

Hannah Roberts  
News/Features Editor

There exist nearly 7,000 languages spoken around the world today, each unique to its people and their culture.

Language is a tool to communicate with others and learning foreign languages can help create a more open mind towards other cultures, improve international travel experiences, and more.

For all these 7,000 languages (other than English) spoken today, Mundelein High School only offers two of them.

Spanish and French are the only two languages a student can choose between if they want to take a language at MHS.

At Libertyville High School, students can choose between four languages; that number increases to six at Stevenson and New Trier. These schools all offer Spanish

and French but also offer other languages including German, Hebrew, Latin, Mandarin Chinese, and Japanese.

However, MHS hasn't always offered fewer languages than other schools.

In the past Mundelein has offered languages such as German, Mandarin Chinese, and American Sign Language, and while they aren't currently offered it doesn't have to stay that way.

According to World Language Department Chair Christopher Lagioia, "I would always listen to what students are interested in that we don't offer...but you don't want to start something and then not sustain it for a while."

For example, as mentioned previously, MHS used to offer Mandarin (one of the most spoken languages in the world) because a large group of students requested it. However, after just a few years the

number of students interested in Mandarin dwindled.

What languages are offered depends greatly on the amount of student interest in a specific language. For many students Spanish is what they are interested in.

Lagioia stated that one reason more languages aren't offered at MHS is because Spanish is the only language offered in all the middle schools that feed into MHS. Since the middle schoolers aren't getting exposed to anything other than Spanish before high school, they are likely to continue their studies in that subject. Some may choose to take French instead, but that isn't all that students are interested in.

Senior, Wiston Petri said, "I think Mundelein should teach Chinese to students again because if they go to Asia for business or vacation they can communicate or close deals in an effective and efficient

manner."

According to Lagioia, it can take as little as 30 to 45 students to prompt a new language to be offered at MHS.

Learning foreign languages can have many benefits to students.

According to an article written by the University of North Georgia, "The study of foreign languages teaches and encourages respect for other peoples: it fosters an understanding of the interrelation of language and human nature."

Spanish and French are just two of the thousands of languages spoken today (and two of the most spoken at that), but that doesn't mean that's all MHS can offer. All it takes is a group of people to request something like Japanese or Russian and the school might just be able to make it happen.

## Polished pros: MHS students nail the art of business

Darby Schwerman  
Staff Reporter

Bright fluorescent lights, mystery fees, added taxes, harsh handling. Getting your nails done can be an awkward and expensive affair, but what if you could get a quality set from a fellow student? Easy contacting, casual conversation, and flexible scheduling are just a few of the perks that student run nail businesses have to offer.

For Junior Londyn Norman, talking with clients is her favorite part. These nail artists are driven by their customers' satisfaction, something that can't always be found at a commercial salon.

"My favorite part of doing nails is getting to see the look on my clients faces when I do their nails, and they're satisfied with what I've done, and I'm proud of myself, and the compliments that my clients and I get," said Junior Kelly McQuillan, who has been doing nails since October.

McQuillan started doing nails to earn and save money, learn how to talk to new people, and explore a new branch of her artistic abilities.

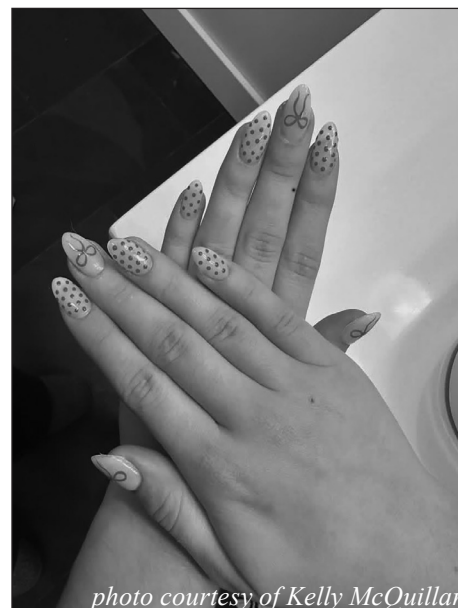
Not only are nail businesses beneficial for those who receive the service, they provide numerous opportunities for the artists to grow as well. Londyn currently has around ten consistent customers and has had to learn to manage her time, sup-



*Classic polka dot design with bows is the perfect set for Valentine's Day. Be sure to book an appointment with @londyns\_nailz*

plies, and funds.

"It's about budgeting," said Norman, "I need to make sure I can get new polish, new charms. I had to save up for a while to get a dust collector, but I needed other tools so I had to set it aside." Norman has a designated station in her house equipped



*A beautiful manicure of pink nail polish with a swirly design. To get an appointment with Kelly, DM her Instagram @nails\_by\_kelly.*

with all the necessary equipment maintained for her clients.

Staying organized is crucial for business affairs, a lifelong skill these students are mastering early. "I think that having my own business helps me manage my time so that I can fit in people's appointments,"

said Junior Amelia Snarski. Scheduling appointments to fit around their own commitments along with convenience for clients gets these students used to the flow of future business affairs.

Each student has a different takeaway. McQuillan has learned a plethora of skills through doing nails that set her up for success, "My business has taught me how to learn how to be more professional, learn how to talk to customers, and it's giving me a new area to be creative in."

Pricing is another factor that differentiates MHS nail artists from other salons. All three artists start with a base price and differ based on time, intricacy, and supplies needed for the requested design.

"I determine pricing by the difficulty of the design that a client sends me, and I start with a base price for the products that I use and the time that I'm giving up, and then I add on based on the difficulty of the design," said McQuillan.

With these nail artists, it's clear where each charge comes from.

Whether it's for a special event, for your routine touch up, or for trying out a new look, there are plenty of students to go to for a fresh set at MHS.

The nail artists featured in this piece can be found on Instagram: @ameliasnarksinails, @londyns\_nailz, and @nails\_by\_kelly.

### Gen Z are the new millennials - Generation Beta beginning this year

Darby Schwerman  
Staff Reporter

“Raise your ya ya ya”, “Ningning is the maknae”, “that’s Mrs. Tohler” “she hurt me with my Ariana Grande shirt on”, “is that hyperpigmentation”, “hello dubai”, the list goes on.

If you’re a high schooler and these sentences make no sense to you, you’re not alone. The birth of new phrases like these stemming from social media platforms is rapid, and unless you’re chronically online, keeping up probably makes you feel old. Well that’s because you are.

The newest generation, “Gen Beta,” following the generation below the current Gen Z MHS students (gen alpha) has officially begun. According to ABC News article Gen Beta Kicks off in 2025: Your guide to all the generation names and years written by Shafiq Nabib, Gen Beta consists of those born between 2025 and 2039 and is anticipated to be characterized by “significant technological integration.”

This means that we’re now shifting to the age range that most millennials were in when we started making fun of them. They mocked us for not truly experiencing life with the Vine app, now we’ll be doing the same to our successors when they grow up



*Pictured above is a baby using a computer to represent how younger generations are using technology earlier in their lives.*

without TikTok.

Gen Z is the first generation to have experienced a majority of our childhoods with generally widespread access to social media, even deemed “digital natives” according to McKinsey Company. We’re the first to have never known a world without the internet.

This being said, our expansive use of social media and the internet has paved the way for countless trends and increasingly

untraditional outlooks on life, especially regarding our sense of humor. Even being off of social media for as little as a week can leave you falling behind on references, like being left out of an inside joke spanning millions of people.

A majority of these quotes spawn from TikTok, and for those without TikTok, they eventually make it to Instagram Reels.

Although some Gen Zers are beginning to feel out of touch with the constantly evolv-

ing trends of our own generation and those below us, more and more are choosing to. Multiple sources report Gen Z as having the highest screen time out of all generations, and while many are perfectly content, others are feeling the effects.

Dr. Benjamin Druss, professor and Rosalynn Carter Chair in Mental Health stated in Gen Z, Social Media, and Mental Health that social media usage is correlated with depressive symptoms and rising rates of diagnosed anxiety and depression.

We know it’s a problem, and some of us are actually changing our ways. Making the shift to spending less time online can be a gamble, but is oftentimes rewarding. According to Dr. Dean M. Daniele Fallin in Gen Z, Social Media, and Mental Health, a lot of youth realize that social media is overbearing, but only once they’ve had a negative experience, which is oftentimes quite harmful.

It’s far too soon to know whether or not the upcoming Generation Beta will follow in the media driven footsteps of Gen Z, and the even more technology fluent Gen Alpha, but as we get older we’re slowly drifting further and further away from what’s “relevant” than we realize.

### The latest and final minimum wage increase in Illinois

Daniel Stricklin  
Staff Reporter

Minimum wage in Illinois has been increased in all categories. The minimum wage for workers 18 and over has increased to 15 dollars an hour. Workers younger than 18 now have a minimum wage of 13 dollars an hour. While workers in the service industry who receive tips now have a minimum wage of nine dollars an hour.

This is the seventh and final increase in the state’s minimum wage that was included in legislation signed by Governor Pritzker in 2019.

“Since day one of my administration, I’ve made it my mission to build an economy that works for everyone and raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour fulfills that promise to our working families,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “This increase honors the workers who power our state and ensures they can better support their families, bringing us closer to a stronger, more equitable economy for all.”

“As the cost of living has gone up, the wage increases enacted by the General Assembly and signed into law by Governor Pritzker have helped Illinois workers pay for their everyday expenses,” said Illinois Department of Labor Director Jane Flanagan. “As we welcome the new year, we can also celebrate that hourly workers will be

getting a bump in pay.”

ILEPI (Illinois Economic Policy Institute) stated that the most recent wage increase is set to take 100,000 people out of poverty, but still isn’t enough to make a living by yourself. In order to live on your own and make a living you would have to make 28.81 for an apartment in the Chicago land area. The average living cost is \$2,851.50, people making minimum wage are making 1,800 a month meaning they would be 1,000 dollars short of just affording an apartment. Also meaning people wouldn’t even be able to save any money in case of an emergency.

Junior Cole Vanderwal said “ working two shifts and minimum wage getting increased from \$12 to \$13 is nice.”

Since juniors and seniors get to go out for lunch it’s nice to be making more money to pay for food.

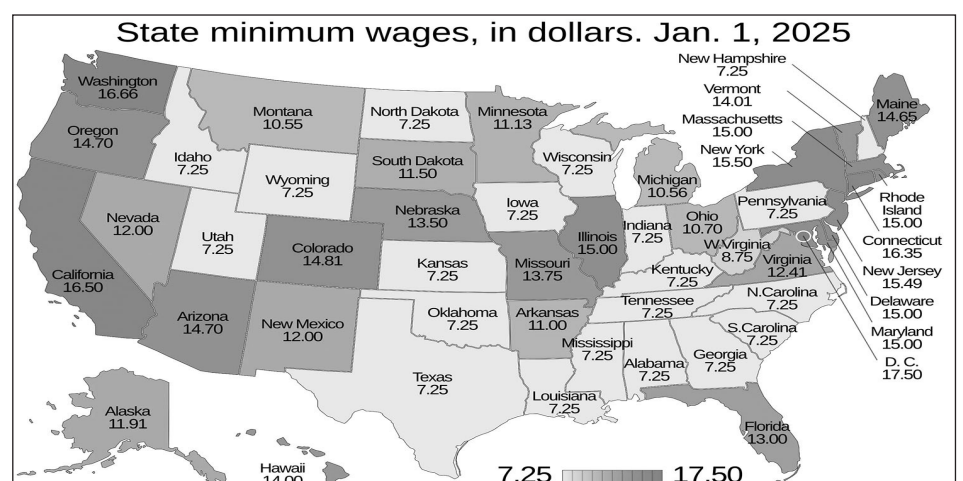
He also mentioned, “Saving money is getting a lot easier and work is more fun now.”

The minimum wage increase is beneficial to workers in Illinois, but many other states still have a \$7.25 minimum wage.

The chart to the right identifies the minimum wage currently in effect in all 50 states. Minimum wages in states on the east and west coast tend to be higher, but with the increase in the Illinois minimum wage, our state is now competitive with these other areas.

Illinois Minimum Wage Increase Schedule			
Year	Minimum Wage	Tipped	Youths (under 18) Working less than 650 hours per calendar year
January 1, 2020	\$9.25	\$5.55	\$8.00
July 1, 2020	\$10.00	\$6.00	\$8.00
January 1, 2021	\$11.00	\$6.60	\$8.50
January 1, 2022	\$12.00	\$7.20	\$9.25
January 1, 2023	\$13.00	\$7.80	\$10.50
January 1, 2024	\$14.00	\$8.40	\$12.00
January 1, 2025	\$15.00	\$9.00	\$13.00

*Illinois minimum wage increase over 5 years, last and final wage increase for Illinois. Photo courtesy of Eccezion.*



*Map of minimum wage in the United state. Illinois is one of the highest. Photo courtesy of Reddit.*



## Highlights of another incredible athletic year at MHS

Xavier Hilgart  
Staff Reporter

2024. Done now, lost to the past. But it should not just be forgotten. A year full of incredible moments that help define the rich athletic history of Mundelein High School. From big wins, individual records and team history, 2024 was a year to remember for Mundelein athletics.

Rewinding back to the beginning of the year, 2024 started off with a bang. Then freshman Jack Hansen qualified to the IHSA swimming and diving state meet for diving. The only person to qualify from boys swim and dive that season, Hansen represented the program well, showing signs helping lead them towards a promis-



photo courtesy of Mundelein Swimming and Diving facebook

Jack Hansen diving during a diving dual meet. Hansen was the only diver to qualify for the State IHSA state meet.

ing future. At the meet, he unfortunately fell short of finals, placing 29th overall of 48 qualifiers, but it was a great way to start off the year for the school.

In the spring MHS continued its athletic achievements with very strong seasons from boys water polo and girls softball.

Boys water polo rode a historic season for the program by then senior Alec Sethna all the way to the sectional finals match, which they had not been to in many years. Despite a hard fight in that game, they unfortunately fell to the likes of Stevenson, who made it all the way to the state finals after that victory.

Girls softball on the other hand pushed even further, riding an incredible season all the way to the state tournament. While there, they were unsurprisingly facing the best competition the state had to offer. While they battled in their semifinal game, they unfortunately lost, sending them to their last game with a little sting, echoing the shortcomings that their baseball counterpart has had at times. They ended up not mustering enough momentum to come back strong in that game, ending their season with an incredible 4th place at state. An unforgettable season for sure, all we can do is sit back and watch as they try to do even

better this upcoming spring.

After summer break, school resumed for a new year, opening up with all the fall sports. Generally when you think of fall sports, one phrase comes to mind: Friday Night Lights. This fall, despite ending with the same record as last year, the season held a different meaning than before. With new head coach John Cowhey at helm, the team brought new life to their games. Despite the unceremonious finish, hopefully this change can breathe in a new era for MHS Football.

Finally, the major highlight of the fall came not on land but in the pool, where the Girls side of the swim team had by far their best season in recent history. Highlighted by junior Amelia Willis' 6th place finish at state in the 100 backstroke and the teams qualification of not one but two relay teams, the team showed up well, ending with a third place finish at the sectional meet.

Mundelein has a lot of sports to offer, and every single one is incredible. Every year different ones show more success than others, and it is interesting to dive into which do it every year and why. So congratulations to the all athletes that saw success in 2024, and hopefully MHS will see even more success in 2025.



photo courtesy of MHS Girls Softball facebook

The MHS Softball team took 4th place at the State tournament this year.

## How Mundelein students are making (and breaking) their new year's promises

Sunday Daniels  
Staff Reporter

As 2025 began people everywhere set their New Year's resolutions aiming to make positive changes in their lives, although these resolutions don't always play out throughout the year. Mundelein High School students resolutions are no different.

Olivia Stasiak stated that her goal for the new year is to earn all A grades in her subjects. Her drive stems from the interest colleges have in GPAs and grades, naturally due to her being in her junior year. However, she is against the idea of New Year's resolutions.

"They focus too much on one thing, and then they start doing bad on other things...

sometimes, they don't even end up getting to their goal (because of this)" Stasiak stated.

Charlotte Crank, a junior, made a new resolution to get fit and to stay on track with her objective. She relies on the positive impact of her friends who accompany her to the gym and advise her on what to eat

"(New Year's resolutions) are good at first but... I feel like you're putting too much pressure on yourself to do that thing and when you don't accomplish it.. it's like it doesn't end up well," Charlotte admitted.

Kyla Nsoga, a junior, made a simple resolution for the upcoming year to dive into many genres of music. Nsoga believes that by expanding her music taste and listening

to albums she will broaden but also, deepen her understanding and appreciation of sound.

"I think New Year's resolutions are attainable but if you do something really unattainable for yourself I don't think you'll make it through" she stated.

Finally, Alessandra Trotz has made a New Year's goal to improve her style. The junior admits her obsession with fast fashion and aspires to make her dress palette "more unique."

"I'm going to shop at other places because I shop on Shein a lot," she stated. Trotz has the belief that resolutions are just okay and possesses the same opinion that "most people just set goals they're not even going to do."

## The Mustang Staff

The Mustang is a student-produced publication published in print about every six weeks and also online by the journalism students of Mundelein High School, 1350 W. Hawley St., Mundelein, IL, 60060, phone (847) 949-2200. The Mustang provides accurate and objective coverage of events and topics that are interesting and relevant to high school students. The staff welcomes signed letters from readers for possible publication. These letters can be submitted to the Journalism Room A101.

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# Get out and skate: ice skating in Lake County

Blake Guenther  
Staff Reporter

A fun winter activity is ice skating. All over Lake County and the surrounding areas there are plenty of places to go with your family or friends to skate, have a good time and hopefully not fall. In the area there are options for both indoor and outdoor skating fun. Four locations to ice skate near MHS are at Glacier Ice Arena, Centennial Ice Rinks, Lakewood Forest Preserve, and the Mundelein Park and Recreation District.

For an indoor option, visit Glacier Ice Arena located at 670 Lakeview Pkwy, Vernon Hills, IL 60061. Public skating is available on weekdays from 11:20 am. - 1:10 pm., Saturdays starting at 12:10 pm until 1:40 pm or 2:50 pm. and on Sundays from 12:30 pm to 2:00 pm or 5:00 pm. Since the end times vary, check their website for the most updated information. Another option is to book a freestyle skating time through their website. Freestyle skate time slots are 30 minutes long. If booked in advance, the cost is \$8 per 30 minutes. Glacier Ice Arena does permit walk-in scheduling for



*Mundelein Park and Recreation District ice skating rink under the lights.*

freestyle skating, but the price increases to \$10 per 30 minutes. Additional information about Glacier Ice Arena can be found at [glacierskate.com](http://glacierskate.com).

Another indoor option, but further away, is the Centennial Rinks located at 2300 Old Glenview Rd, Wilmette, IL 60091. The rink operates Tuesday through Sunday with public skate hours and hockey hours. On Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday public skating is available from 12:00 pm until 1:30 pm., and on Saturday and Sunday there is public skating from 1:00 pm until 2:30 pm. On Fridays open hockey is available from 12:00 pm until 1:30 pm. The fees

for public skating and open hockey are as follows: \$4 for children 5 and under, \$8 for children between 6-17, \$9 for adults. There is also an option to purchase an annual skate pass. An annual individual skate pass is \$100 for residents and \$133 for a non-resident. Annual family passes are also available and the price varies based upon family size. Pricing is available on their website. This location also offers skate rentals for \$5. More information can be found at [wilmettepark.org/ice-skating-and-hockey/public-skate-information](http://wilmettepark.org/ice-skating-and-hockey/public-skate-information).

There are also outdoor options for ice skating as well in Wauconda and Munde-

lein. The Lakewood Forest Preserve offers another free option for skating on a man-made skating pond. The main entrance for this rink is located on Route 176, just west of Fairfield Road. Head to the winter sports area. Lakewood is open daily until 9:00 pm. Before heading out to skate, check the pond conditions to verify the ice is thick enough to skate. For more information visit [lcpd.org/things-to-do/recreation/winter-sports/ice-skating/](http://lcpd.org/things-to-do/recreation/winter-sports/ice-skating/).

The closest rink to MHS is located at the Mundelein Park District at 1401 N. Midlothian Rd, Mundelein. This outdoor skating rink is free to the public. The ice skating rink schedule can be found on the park district website. This rink offers activities including family skate, open skate, and hockey for all age groups. On Monday through Thursday the rink closes at 8:00 pm but on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday the rink closes at 10:00 pm. To find more information visit: <https://www.mundelein-parks.org/parks-facilities-map/ice-rink-and-sled-hill/>.

So, lace up some skates this winter and have a great time skating with family or friends.

# Is choice reading best for students?

Lia Koski  
Editor-In-Chief

MHS is one of the high schools that adopted “choice reading,” a system where students read a book of their choice on their own or in small groups. The English curriculum switched from reading all class books to choice reading in 2014 and has continued since.

English and ELL Bilingual Department Chair Diane Covert said that the department made the switch to choice reading because “students weren’t reading books.” She added, “We were asking students to read classics that they just weren’t reading. We really wanted students to become more engaged and enjoy reading. We thought if they were able to choose the texts they read, they would be more likely to do so.”

The English teachers interviewed did find that the majority of their students appear to be engaged in their chosen books.

AP Literature and Composition and Sophomore English teacher Ernie Billittier said, “I do think there is something to be said for giving students choice. I never want to give that up, and I don’t think it would be smart for a teacher to give that up. Our job is to serve you, and hope that we can foster your curiosity.”

Additionally, AP Language and Composition and English 3 teacher Ryan Buck said, “Since reading has taken a side seat

to phones and everything else technology brings, the most important thing is reading. What [students] read is less important than just finding time and finding the impulse and the desire to read,” he said.

At first, the switch to choice reading was “drastic,” according to Buck.

Covert added, “When we first went to choice reading, we discouraged teachers from teaching full class novels. Many teachers went to book clubs and or all choice books. But as time went on, we decided that reading texts together is beneficial,” she said.

“There’s absolutely a way for class reading and choice reading to coexist,” said Billittier.

The more challenging part is finding the balance between choice and class reading. “I’m still in the process of finding the right balance between where we are reading together and where I want [students] to read individually,” Buck said.

Another challenge mentioned by several English teachers was the accountability aspect to choice reading.

“I don’t always necessarily have a great grasp on who’s pulling their weight and who’s not pulling their weight in a book club and how to assess them on their individual books,” said Billittier. “But I do feel more in the know when we’re reading a similar book, and how to guide them,” he added.

Another topic of discussion is what kinds of books the students read individually or in a group.

“I think within our school, we’ve done a good job of breaking down the canon to where we’re not just reading books written by dead white guys, and there is more diversity of author and voice. I think that is a byproduct of having transitioned to independent reading,” said Buck.

However, Buck did acknowledge that reading classic pieces of literature is still valid because they are “timeless,” he said. Buck mentioned how classics are often used as references in society and cultural conversations, but the definition of what books are a ‘classic’ is up to interpretation.

AP Language and Composition, Co-Taught English, and English 2 teacher Angela McLaughlin said how a class book can serve an important purpose. “We have collective knowledge [on a book], so we all have something to reference,” she said.

McLaughlin added, “When I first started teaching, 1984 was a class novel that sophomores read in this building. When I referenced 1984, everyone knew what the book was talking about. Now, I would say there’s a handful of students that understand the reference. Sometimes, when we cut out some of those classic novels, we don’t have those references that society still makes.”

Senior Michael Cory has experienced

both reading as a class and individually throughout his years at MHS.

Relating to choice reading, Cory said, “Although we do lose a little freedom in what we get to read, it’s more than made up for by how much more you’re able to get out of the experience. Not only are teachers way better at picking books that are thought provoking, but also at choosing books that push us out of our comfort zones, [enabling us to] experience new perspectives.”

“The other thing I like far better with class books is the emphasis on classic books that every high school student should read, whether it be a Shakespeare play (which I feel it’s necessary to read in a full class setting) or a classic piece of literature like *Moby Dick*,” Cory added.

Cory mentioned how he likes reading as a class more because of the class discussions that are able to take place. He said, “With a full class discussion, it allows everyone in class the opportunity to hear everyone’s ideas and even when there ends up being only a few people talking, those people can still help everyone else in the class which wouldn’t be possible in a book club setting.”

While there are benefits to choice reading, such as individual student engagement in reading, there are also benefits to reading whole class novels, such as gaining collective knowledge of classic literature.

## T-ball to Divison 1: Mundelein pitcher Joey Kafka's path to success

Xavier Hilgart  
Staff Reporter

For years, baseball has reigned as a top sport at Mundelein High School. Boasting multiple MLB draft picks and countless college commits ranging from junior college, all the way up to D1, the talent that has been produced has been high. This year is no different, with the first Mundelein baseball player to commit going straight to Division 1 play.

Joey Kafka, the 6'1, 200 lb pitcher committed to play college ball at Valparaiso University in 2025. A versatile player, he will likely log some innings at third base along with leading the pitching staff through another season.

After a strong junior season where he showcased his pitching talents, Kafka entered his senior year with four D1 offers on his plate. After much deliberation, he settled on Valparaiso. "One of the biggest reasons that I chose Valpo out of these four was because of the conference that Valpo is in, which is the Missouri Valley Conference (MVC)" he said. The MVC is a very competitive midwestern conference, which is important for garnering even more attention from the MLB. While not the cream of the crop such as the SEC or ACC, if he can continue to perform at a high level in a still very competitive conference, it will massively help grow his draft stock in the future.

Another major draw of Valparaiso for him was the more personal connections he has with the area. From family members that live just near it and current teammates

that also got recruited with him, Valparaiso will be more than just baseball for him.

He also added his excitement for their business program, which he will also be a part of when he is there.

A lifelong baseball player, starting around the age of three, it has been his goal to

make the MLB for quite a long time. His passion for the sport is undeniable and that is shown by the way he thinks about it. He stated, "People always say that it is more mental than physical and I could not agree more." His mentality and baseball IQ is a trait that is both natural and learned.

Especially through the lens of a pitcher, a high understanding of the game and enjoying the mental battle it brings is especially important. As a starting pitcher he has to go out and have individual battles with every batter on the other team. It is the outlier position in baseball, as instead of being the batter and just worrying about what the pitcher will do, as the pitcher you have to think about every single batter. From the first hitter to the ninth, all have one shared goal, beat you. Not beat the first baseman, not beat the centerfielder, but beat you, the pitcher trying to get them out. This is a very tedious task, and one that requires a strong mind as complement to talent and hard work to be successful at.

Kafka stated, "If you can get into someone's head even just a little bit, it gives you so much of an advantage to put yourself in the best position to win the game, at bat, pitch, or play." This is a testament to that pitcher's mentality, and is a perfect example of what separates Kafka from his competition.

As for his upcoming senior season, his goal is simple. Mundelein baseball has had many close calls with a state championship, and he wants to help finally make that dream a reality. Leading a strong pitching staff and a lineup that will battle for every run, he believes that this could be the year. If they can embrace the grit and toughness needed to go all the way, hopefully Kafka's dream will become a reality and Mundelein Baseball will bring home a state championship to finish off his impressive high school career and send him off to the college baseball gauntlet in style.



Joey Kafka signed to play for Valparaiso University on November 14, 2024. He is a pitcher, and aims to help lead the MHS baseball team to state during the playoffs this spring.

## Expectations: How do they affect students?

Shrushti Shah  
Staff Reporter

Students take ownership of their learning, however, expectations from parents and themselves can have effects on their learning.

Beth Willis, an English teacher at MHS and parent of an MHS student explained her expectations to be that her children are responsible for their own learning, give their best effort and if they did not do something well, they understand how they can do better.

"I do not know what her grades are until they come home to me," Beth Willis mentioned.

On the other hand, her daughter, Amelia Willis explained her perspective of her parents' expectations: "My parents expect me to get good grades and to be a good person. They expect me to balance my schedule and stay on top of things and in return they let me manage my own life and make all my own choices,"

While Amelia Willis thought that her parents wanted her to get good grades, her mother was more concerned about the amount of effort her daughter put into her work than the outcomes.

"While Amelia Willis thought that her parents wanted her to get good grades, her mother was more concerned about the amount of effort her daughter put into her work than the outcomes."

An MHS junior, Mercury Rosales said, "My parent's expectations for me are to try my best."

She explained that her parents' expectations have changed throughout the years as she has communicated with her parents about the pressure she felt because of their expectations.

"All they ask from me now is to make sure I do my best and to get a good enough career that will support me in the future," she added.

According to Melissa Buenik, an MHS social worker, "Communicating expectations is essential because it helps provide mutual understanding and accountability."

As a result of lack of "mutual understanding" of expectations, students can possibly misunderstand the actual expectations that their parents have.

It is not just the parents, "Students in fact also have high expectations," Buenik added.

She explained that a lot of times students are unaware of the expectations they set for themselves; as she talks to them, they understand that the real expectations they try to meet are their own.

While Amelia Willis has the expectation from herself to be a good person rather than a perfectionist, Buenik mentioned that there are students who are stressed out by their high performance expectations.

High expectations can be positive if there is some flexibility for failure and learning within the high standards, Beth Willis explained.

Beth Willis has noticed that pressure makes students become more concerned about grades and less about learning which leads to them having less confidence in themselves. Students under pressure are likely to not be lifelong learners.

Mercury Rosales agreed that if parents lowered their expectations, students would be less pressured and still motivated to do well.

Beth Willis, Buenik and Rosales agreed that communication and flexibility in expectations from parents and students is most effective for learning.



# Review: Restaurant to avoid on Valentine's Day

Lia Koski

*Editor-in-Chief*

Is The Melting Pot the right place to take your date on Valentine's Day? Yes, but only if you want them to break up with you afterwards.

The Melting Pot, located in Schaumburg, is a chain restaurant for fondue. When I pictured a perfect Valentine's Day evening, fondue came to mind. Now, I am grateful that I can hopefully prevent you from having not only your date ruined but your evening ruined as well if you go to this restaurant.

As soon as I arrived, I noticed that I couldn't see through the windows, and when I stepped inside I knew why. The name "The Melting Pot" couldn't have been more perfect because as soon as I walked inside, I felt like I was melting. The whole restaurant was steamy. I immediately noticed the condensation on the windows—making it easy to reenact the scene from the Titanic where Rose swipes her hand across the foggy window—if that's the kind of stuff you and your date are into... It wasn't just the humidity that struck me upon arrival, the smell of the restaurant was more than potent: something resembling a seared Salmon that was drenched in nacho cheese (it took multiple showers afterwards to clean my pores of the awful scent).

I had a reservation for 7:30 pm on a Saturday night. When I approached the host, he informed me that it was going to be a 25-30 minute wait. My date and I patiently sat, hoping the food would make up for the inconvenience. As for the restaurant, the decor was rustic-chic (more like rustic-cheap). A black and white painting of a ferris wheel hung above the bar and resembled something from a hotel lobby.

The management appeared to be in a state of confusion all night. There were two hosts who were sweating as people kept approaching them about their late reservations. Another younger couple came in and



*photo courtesy of Eric Beauchamp*

*The Melting Pot is located at 255 W Golf Rd, Schaumburg, IL.*

asked about their reservation. The staff was so disoriented that they started talking to someone else mid conversation and when they looked back at the couple they had to say, "I'm sorry what?"

The people who arrived after my date and I were seated before us. When this happened to another couple, the wife of the family told the host that the people behind them were seated before them and he responded with 'your table is next ma'am.' That almost changed her mind but then her husband yelled 'yeah, we've been told that we were next for an hour now' and then stormed out.

All in all the customer service was awful; the place smelled; I was broiling hot. I stayed because I thought the food would make up for the experience...I thought wrong.

When we were finally seated, our waiter introduced himself. He seemed sweaty and stressed. The sweat trickling down his forehead reminded me of the condensation that was on all of the windows, floors, and ceiling. At points throughout the night, I felt drops of water on my head. It must have been from the ceiling.

When we began ordering, our waiter asked us to wait a moment when he discovered a hole in his apron and his pen was gone. When we asked about an item on the menu that involved the cast iron cooking method, he told us that it hadn't been offered for the past 4 months. He said that it had to do with "an incident" involving a fire.

I asked our waiter if he recommended couples choose The Melting Pot on Valentine's Day. He said, "If you come here on Valentine's Day you are doing yourself a disservice because it is extra chaotic on that day." He also added that he once witnessed a fight break out between a couple on Valentine's Day.

Now for the food. For two people we got the four course menu option that is \$108. With this you get cheese fondue, a salad of your choice, an entree fondue of your choice, and chocolate fondue. Starting with the cheese fondue, we got the Wisconsin Cheddar. Our waiter made it right in front of us which was a cool experience, but I was nervous the sweat from his forehead would drop into the bowl. The cheese fondue was very garlicky, so do not plan

on eating it if you want to hang out with your date after dinner. It came with bread and veggies. I ended up just eating a lot of the sides on their own as well. The salads that came next were very standard, nothing special. Mine had pecans, blue cheese, tomatoes, and lettuce on it.

As we ate, I noticed the other waitresses around us. The table next to us had to be cleaned, and when a waitress approached it she sighed, saying "oh no," burying her head in her hands. She then proceeded to get on her hands and knees of the booth of the table to clean it. I had never seen that technique for cleaning tables before but it was certainly creative. When they weren't cleaning tables, the waiters were running at full blast. I thought that was odd.

For the entree, I got the "steak lovers" option which came with four different kinds of steak that you had to cook yourself in the fondue pot. Each piece of steak took three to four minutes to cook, so you had to keep a mental timer on what was cooking. Overall, the experience of cooking your own food was fun and entertaining. The steak itself was clearly cheap and had a mushy taste to it. My date got the seafood entree and said that he would not recommend it.

Finally, the dessert came. We got the turtle chocolate fondue which was dark melted chocolate with marshmallow creme and pecans. The fondue came with an assortment of fruits and different sweet treats like brownie and cookie pieces. The dessert was the best part. I suggest couples eat dinner at another restaurant beforehand and then only go here only for dessert.

If I had to describe The Melting Pot in one word, it would be moist. Overall, I give the food and service 2/10 stars, but the experience was memorable for my date and me. Now we'll be able to look back on the three-hour long experience and laugh about it. However, for Valentine's Day, my recommendation is: buy your own fondue pot from amazon for half the price.

## Valentine's Day 2025: possible gifts for your significant other

Shrushti Shah

*Staff Reporter*

Valentine's Day is not only meant to appreciate your loved ones, but also those who make your days easier and smoother; whether it be a therapist, a cashier at a grocery store, a server at a diner, school lunch lady or security guard. Take a moment to be grateful for those who have seen you for five minutes, but still have worked to make your day go smoother.

Here are some possible gifts for Valentine's Day 2025:

**Flowers.** Different flowers of different colors can convey many emotions. An MHS junior, Khloe Heerdegen agreed, "I would really love to get my favorite flowers on Valentine's Day!" Gift your loved ones red roses to express love, white daffodils to symbolize purity, yellow lilies to appreciate friendships and green orchids to wish good luck.

**Customized Presents.** What really matters in a gift is the thought behind it. Hannah Roberts, an MHS senior, showed interest in customized gifts. When presents are customized, they indicate how well the

giver knows the receiver and personalizes the gift and the moment so personalize this Valentine's day with anything from a photo blanket or a necklace with their initials. Amazon has options for customized presents ranging from a two dollars worth necklace with an initial to a forty dollars worth custom photo blanket.

**Soft toys.** Juniors, Mercury Rosales and Ein French agreed that soft toys are great presents for Valentine's Day. Target has reasonably priced soft toys ranging from \$4.99 to \$25. Buy a cute soft toy to surprise your loved one.

**Chocolates.** Easy finds on Valentine's Day can make sweet memories. Gift your people their favorite box of chocolates or some Valentine's Day special balloons to make them feel valued in your life. Amazon, Walmart and Dollar Tree have some reasonably priced heart balloons and chocolates.

**Handmade Cards.** Make a sweet handmade card to thank anyone around you for what they do. Get an A4 size paper, fold it in half, with a cute stick figure and a personalized message on it, you could please so many hearts.



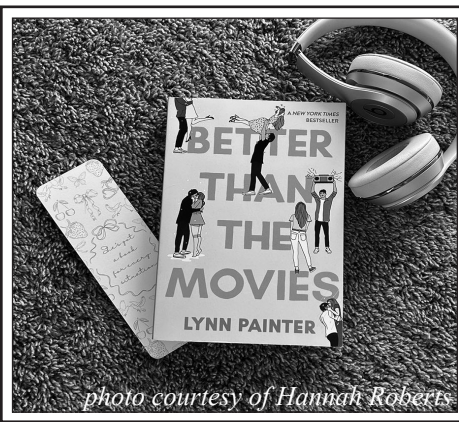
# Hearts on sleeves: romantic book recommendations

Hannah Roberts  
News/Features Editor



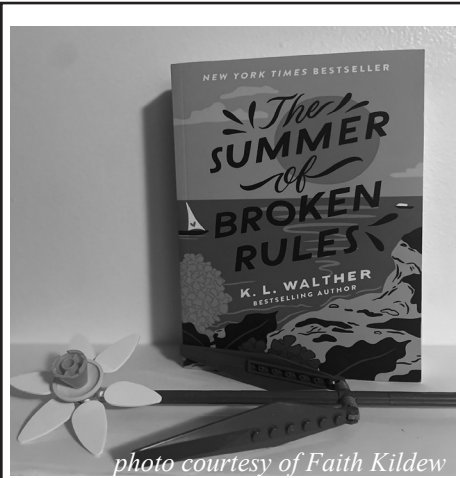
***The Do-Over* by Lynn Painter:**

Groundhogs Day meets Valentine’s Day in this funny, engaging, romance. Follow Emilie as she repeats Valentine’s Day time and time again, each with a different bad thing happening, and watch as a new romance blooms between her and Nick, the boy she keeps running into, literally.



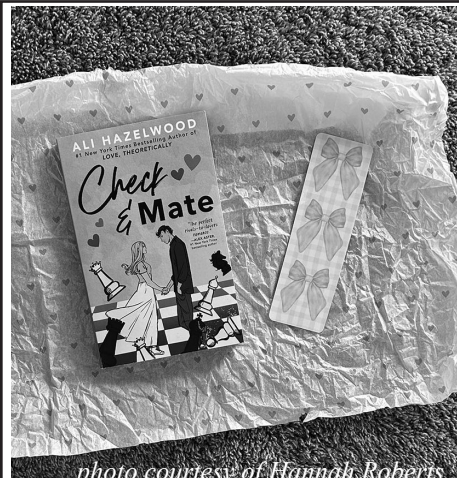
***Better than the Movies* by Lynn Painter:**

Liz Buxbaum dreams of being in a relationship with Michael, her childhood crush that never went away, even when he moved. But now, Michael is back and Liz is determined to date him even if it means accepting the help of her annoying neighbor, Wes Bennet. However, as Liz spends time plotting with Wes, she begins to realize he might not be as bad as he seems.



***The Summer of Broken Rules* by K.L. Walther:**

A family game of Assassin taking place on Martha’s Vineyard centered around a wedding taking place at the end of summer. Everyone in Meredith Fox’s family is there, except her sister after she died. Just before the trip, Meredith’s longtime boyfriend broke up with her, leaving the wedding as a perfect distraction with no boys...until her assassin target turns out to be a very cute groomsman. Meredith is determined to not get distracted, but this groomsman might make that goal an impossibility.



***Check and Mate* by Ali Hazelwood:**

Mallory Greenleaf has no interest in touching a chess board after the game led to familial destruction four years ago. However, when her best friend thrusts her into one last charity tournament she once again takes on the chess board...and crushes the notorious ‘Kingkiller’ Nolan Sawyer (who just so happens to be the current world champion). Mallory wants to be done after the tournament, but Nolan has other plans, one’s that will lead Mallory’s head and heart to places she’s never known before.



***Caraval* by Stephanie Garber:**

Seeing Caraval has been Scarlett Dragna’s dream for years but her strict father won’t let her leave her home island to see it, and there’s no chance of it coming to her, because it already did years ago, and Caraval never goes to the same place twice. Scarlett takes matters into her own hands and for years writes letters to the Caraval Master. It takes many years but eventually, her invitation comes and Scarlett (and her sister Tella) seize the opportunity before it’s too late. The two girls will go on an adventure filled with danger, magic, and most of all, love.



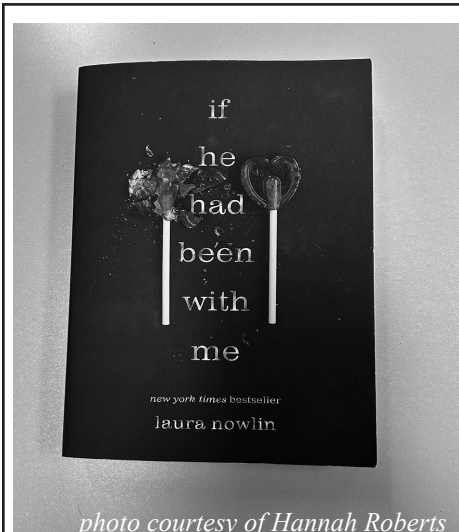
***You’ve Reached Sam* by Dustin Thao:**

You’ve Reached Sam is not a typical love story. There’s no falling in love and not much happiness because Julie Clarke isn’t falling in love with someone, she’s grieving the boy she already fell in love with. When her boyfriend, Sam, dies Julie must go on a path of grieving him with a bit of a magical twist. When she calls Sam, just to hear his voicemail, he picks up. It’s a temporary connection forged between worlds, but it won’t last forever, and as Julie talks to Sam more and more, it gets harder to let go.



***Betting on You* by Lynn Painter:**

When Bailey first meets Charlie on a plane ride to Omaha, she cannot stand him. He is loud and talkative, the complete opposite of her. The flight was only ten hours, but Bailey never forgot about him, so it’s safe to say that when Charlie turns out to be her coworker years later, Bailey is pretty surprised. However, this time, they actually get along, despite Charlie thinking members of the opposite sex can’t be “just friends”. As time goes on, Charlie develops feelings for Bailey but refuses to tell her, but when a situation calls for fake dating between the two of them, his feelings get harder to deny.



***if he had been with me* by Laura Nowlin:**

Growing up as neighbors Autumn and Finn were inseparable. Then, they got to high school and things changed. Autumn has her boyfriend, Jamie, and her tight-knit group of friends. Finn is the most popular boy in school, a star soccer player. Despite all that, Autumn still feels a pull every time she crosses paths with Finn, she still feels like maybe things could be different...should be different. But as time goes on, Autumn might not get the chance at a happy ending with Finn as she would have liked.



# Toxicity in teen relationships

Lia Koski  
Editor-In-Chief

You go to a friend's house, but you can't partake in the conversation because all you can hear is your significant other's call ring again and again. "Where are you? Who are you with?" The questions from them persist...

While this scenario may not seem too out of the ordinary, it is a sign of a toxic relationship that many teenagers experience. According to Youth.Gov, "Studies have found that as many as 76 percent of teens report emotional and psychological abuse during relationships."

Carly Schwartz, MHS social worker, said how she sees students who are having relationship issues multiple times a day. She classified a toxic relationship as one where there's a level of control.

"I hear a lot of times a partner says things like, 'I don't want you to be friends with this person, I don't want you to go there, or I don't want you to talk to this person.' That's not always seen as toxic, but it is a controlling behavior," said Schwartz.

She also added that a toxic relationship

might include: "disrespect, name calling, needing to be in constant communication with someone, physical abuse or guiding someone into being physical, and any pressure to be sexually active with each other."

An MHS student shared, "I do believe my past relationship was toxic. There was a lot of gaslighting and manipulation- making remarks to go against my own parents. There were a lot of things that happened that I was not okay with and that made me feel uncomfortable. I was constantly guilty because I was being too "boring" or a bad partner," said anonymous.

Schwartz said how it may be hard for a teenager to realize their relationship is toxic because they often confuse controlling behaviors with caring behaviors.

The same student shared, "It was not until it got really so bad I felt some fear that I realized [my relationship] was toxic. I truly believed at the time that it was love because that's all I had known. I felt like I needed this person, and couldn't live without them," anonymous added.

A toxic relationship "...could impact someone's self esteem or self worth. Also, teenagers are at a very influential age, so you can be easily influenced to think that

something's okay when it's not or have your concept of yourself be influenced by the thoughts and feelings of others," said Schwartz.

The student mentioned some of the ways the relationship affected them. "It made me feel trapped, and I dealt with a lot of anxiety and often felt alone. I was too scared to say anything. Even after the relationship I had to learn that it was not love... It was just toxic. Something I struggled with for a long time."

The student said that they eventually went to a trusted adult for guidance about their relationship.

Schwartz is a trusted adult who many students turn to. "I ask a lot of probing questions to get the student to recognize if something is healthy or unhealthy. If there's physical assault or sexual assault, then that takes a different route in terms of who I need to get involved and connect the student to. Usually, I just ask questions to get the student to come up with their own solutions and their own realization of if the relationship is healthy or not," Schwartz said.

Additionally, she added that "if a student chooses to stay in a toxic relationship, then

we have conversations on how to take care of yourself and keep yourself safe."

The student mentioned how they got out of their toxic relationship, but it took time and wasn't so easy. "It's easier said than done, I'm not going to act like it's easy to just "get out" of a toxic relationship with someone because it's not. You may feel they are the only person that's ever going to love you because that is what they told you. Or them making threats to keep you around. The best thing you could do is not do it alone. To have family and friends by your side to remind you why you had left in the first place and tell a trusted adult."

Schwartz mentioned that February is Teen Dating Violence Awareness month, and that the Wellness Center will be hosting several booths and workshops during this month.

The student said, "One of the best things I have learned is that people have wounds so deep, they bleed onto others. But it's not your job to fix them or try to hurt them more. The best thing you can do is walk away because silence is much louder than you think."

## Slow and steady wins the race: how to invest as a teen

Darby Schwerman  
Staff Reporter

Chances are you've heard of the stock market. You probably know a few people who actively keep up with it, even high schoolers. For those who don't know exactly how it works, it's essentially "a place where you can purchase investments like stock, which is a share of ownership in various companies," explained Personal Finance teacher Rahul Sethna.

You put money in a stock, and you own a small portion of the company. The value of the company can go up or down and you sell accordingly.

The thrill of making thousands of dollars in a matter of weeks or even days through trading can be alluring, but for teens who have years of money making ahead, it may be better to use that to their advantage. Sethna explained that for anyone, "The biggest mistake is not having patience. The goal is you want to be a long-term investor."

Foods teacher John Stowers, who has been quite successful in the stock world, warned against the same thing, "In the personal finance class here they'll invest in a virtual stock market. The kids treat it like day trading because they only do it for a couple of weeks and they're just buying and selling, they don't think about taxes. If you make a profit, you pay taxes on that. In real life, long-term capital gains are taxed at a lower rate than short term. If you sell it in less



*Keeping up with the stock market is like riding the roller coaster of how a company performs. Watching numbers like those shown above jump from day to day can be a hassle. When investing in more reliable financial sources like index funds, you won't have to constantly monitor numbers.*

than a year, that's short-term capital gains."

Stowers found his success the same way Sethna explained, by playing the long game. He first started by putting his extra money from student loans into Apple stock. "In about three years that \$25,000 had quadrupled and I paid off my house. I sold that first house and put the money back in the market, and in a year or two, it doubled again," said Stowers.

Surprisingly, his gains didn't stop at Ap-

ple. "My actual biggest success was about \$5,000 worth of Netflix. Right when they started and you'd get a DVD in the mail. I sold it about three years ago for \$50,000. It went up 10 times," Stowers explained. For reference, Netflix was founded in 1997.

So we know investing can be rewarding, especially when you take the time to let them grow, but how can you get started? And as a teen, should you? The answer is yes, safely.

Sethna explained, "When you're investing in stocks, you're investing in companies. For example, like if you invest in Tesla, or NVIDIA, you ride the roller coaster of how the company is doing. But if you invest in an index fund, which basically tracks an index like the S&P 500 and other things like that, it's a safer investment. You may not make as high of a rate of return, but you're going to make a little more of a constant rate of return so you can increase your investment value." The roller coaster Sethna warned of is steeper than ever, NVIDIA plummeting nearly \$600 million in a matter of hours on January 27th.

Many worry about the economy affecting profits, but you don't need to. "Regardless of the economy, stocks over time go up. If the economy is bad and stocks go down some, it's also an opportunity for people to get into the market and buy at a lower price. If you're willing to hold on to it for a long period of time, that's going to go up," said Sethna.

The final takeaway: time is money. If you want to start investing at a young age, it's smartest to start small with index funds and make your way up over time. When you have enough money to comfortably trade (like Stowers did when he started), then consider taking more risks with the stock market.



# MHS Guidance Dept: supporting student decisions

Shrushti Shah  
Staff Reporter

The MHS Guidance Department is based on the three pillars of school guidance counseling: academics, college-career planning and social-emotional development.

James Ku, an AVID counselor at MHS, explained briefly what the calendar of the guidance counselor looks like. In the beginning of each semester, the counselors finalize schedules. At the beginning of the first semester, the goal of the department is to have post-high school plans for seniors so they connect them to resources and options. Freshmen are also the priority; getting to know the freshmen and informing them about MHS is a goal. They meet with all the grade levels for the rest of the year.

Ku said, "It is our goal to meet with the students at least once each semester."

Course selection is the department's focus in winter. Additionally, if any teachers are concerned about certain students, the counselors would meet with those students in the midst of everything else.

As per Ku, the Guidance Department works well together. They are available to meet with their students anytime something comes up regarding academics, post-high school planning and social and emotional needs.

"We do everything we can to support our



*The MHS Guidance Office where you can find all counselors and answers to any questions students or parents may have. It is located across from the attendance office in the B wing.*

students in any way possible," Ku mentioned.

An MHS senior, Damian Harrison agreed with Ku: "The guidance department is very successful at ensuring seniors know what they need to do to move on after high school."

An MHS senior, Lucas Morrow added to Harrison's point by mentioning that the guidance department always makes sure that they meet the needs of each student when they meet them.

However, Harrison shared, "I would say students probably don't feel very comfortable with their guidance counselors... They could improve at allowing students into harder classes if they have taken similarly difficult courses in the past."

Harrison and Morrow agreed that students do not always have a connection with their counselors which does not make them feel comfortable when they see their counselors.

Ku agreed that the Guidance Department

could improve at getting to know their students better. Each counselor has about 300 students which makes it hard for the counselors to see students often. If there are more counselors, the department could do more for the students.

Harrison mentioned that when he was a freshman he wanted to take AP Chemistry his sophomore year, but he was required to take regular chemistry.

Harrison suggested that counselors could potentially explain to their students that they would need a note from the head of the department of the specific subject area to skip a prerequisite for higher level class if they are ready for a challenge.

Thomas Buenik, the Guidance Department Chair, shared that, "Those who want to do something that is not the norm, have to get the administrator's approval."

Buenik said that in rare circumstances, they would allow students to skip a prerequisite because they may struggle in the advanced class without taking the prerequisite. He added that the friends of Harrison who were allowed to take AP chemistry without taking regular chemistry need to be more advanced in math, demonstrate something outside of school or have experience from the Northwestern Talent and Development Center which provides accelerated academic programs to improve the academic strengths of high school students.

# Future business leaders unite: FBLA at MHS

Ashton Salski  
Staff Reporter

FBLA is a nationwide club offered at Mundelein High School for students who want to get involved in their future early on in high school, and want to grow as business leaders and get experience in the business world at a younger age.

Freshman Darren Azul enjoys FBLA and plans to continue to take part in the club throughout high school. Azul said, "I like FBLA because it allows me to compete against other ambitious people and because it expands my knowledge on certain topics."

Azul joined FBLA this year and competed in the area competition in late January where he qualified for state. Azul would like to pursue business in the future, which is why he decided to join this organization.

With all the volunteer work and competitions he is able to complete he will be able to add it onto his resume. Azul said "I decided to join FBLA because it is a good extracurricular for what I want to pursue further down the road in college and beyond. The volunteer work, competitions,

will look good on my resume and help get me into target schools."

Azul believes that FBLA has improved his presentation skills by teaching him how to present in a professional and organized manner.

Azul said, "FBLA has taught me the importance of ambition and hard work. It has exposed me to many opportunities that will make me better prepared for the future."

FBLA members compete in local area, state, and nationwide competitions.

FBLA is the largest business student organization in the world and is available at many colleges as well as high schools. Colleges such as Arizona State, Iowa State, University of Illinois all offer programs for collegiate FBLA.

Sixty four percent of FBLA members carry an "A" grade point average. This compares to the national average of around 47 percent according to FBLA.org.

FBLA members outrank the nation average of students in these high school courses such as Honors Programs and College Credit Courses. As many as 57 percent of FBLA members say that FBLA causes a boost in their academic performance.



*Mundelein High School FBLA students competing at the 2025 Northern Area Conference.*



## A new beginning: how Ben Johnson and the Bears can turn everything around

Xavier Hilgart  
*Staff Reporter*

“A perfect situation.”  
“Generational talent.”  
“Super bowl dark horse.”

Some of the many bold claims made about the Bears since they drafted Caleb Williams last April. Going into the season, it felt like the Bears were destined to be good again. It felt like a guarantee, a sure thing. They couldn’t possibly be bad again. Right?

Four months, two fired coaches and a hail mary(land) later and they end 5-12, with the 10th pick in the draft and a brand new head coach. With the ushering in of Ben Johnson on February 20th (exactly 43 years after storied head coach Mike Ditka), the Bears have yet again restored high hopes for what their next season could look like.

Tight end Cole Kmet has shared excitement over the hire, telling 670 the score, “It’s a sign that we’re trying to win and trying to win now. ... It’s very exciting. The bar here is going to be very high.”

The excitement mostly surrounds the upcoming NFL draft in April. Along with the 10th pick, the Bears also have the 39th,

41st, 72nd along with a 5th round, 6th round and two seventh round picks. With seven in total, they are set up to add even more to their team than in last year’s draft, where they only had four picks going into it.

With this increased draft capital, fans are buzzing over what they could do with these picks. A popular trend is to post “mock drafts,” where popular sports outlets like ESPN post what they think the team could do.

Since the season has ended, Bears mock drafts have been popular all over mainstream media.

Interestingly, almost no one can agree on what they should do. A loud group of fans call for the Bears to stay aggressive and draft Heisman finalist Ashton Jeanty of Boise State with their first pick. The 5’9, 215 lb running back is the clear RB1 in this draft class after his dominating Junior season. Falling just 27 yards short of the great Barry Sanders single season rushing record and helping Boise State earn a playoff spot in the first 12 team College Football Playoff.

He is a very intriguing option for the Bears, who ranked 25th in the NFL in rushing yards this past season. For a team with such high upside at QB and WR, a power-

ful RB1 would help solidify the Bears as possibly a top offense in the league in the future.

On the other end of the spectrum, a quieter yet large group is all in on protecting Caleb Williams. The rookie QB was sacked an astounding 68 times last season, which is a total only surpassed by David Carr (76/2002) and Randall Cunningham (72/1986). Though there were many flaws with this past Bears team, it is undeniable that Williams was certainly put under much more pressure in the pocket than is desirable for any QB, especially one adapting to the NFL on the fly.

That blame falls heavily on the Bears underdeveloped offensive line. Riddled with injuries and with a lack of NFL experience, the O-line collapsed under pressure, greatly limiting the talents of the No. 1 overall pick. It is arguably the most important thing for the Bears to focus on in order to turn their fortunes around in 2025.

Those fans are hoping and pushing for the Bears to select either the No.1 or No. 2 ranked offensive line prospects in the draft, Will Campbell of LSU or Kelvin Banks Jr. of Texas, respectively. Currently the 17th ranked offensive line in the NFL according to PFN, an addition of either one would help

Outside of their high value first round pick, the Bears other six picks will likely be used on other improvements for the offensive line and defensive line.

It is also very crucial to utilize the abundant free agent market this offseason. There are countless options at offensive line, such as Chiefs guard Trey Smith, and all around the defense, with Eagles edge rusher Haason Reddick being a top option. Who they end up signing will remain a complete mystery for now, but fans will continue to speculate the countless possibilities. Could we see a reunion with fan favorite Edge Rusher Khalil Mack? Only time will tell.

Despite the disappointing season, hopes remain high in Chicago. Will Ben Johnson lead this team back to contention? The Bears organization certainly hopes so. Will Caleb make the leap to superstar? The fans certainly hope so.

But there is one thing for certain, the Bears front office is going to be busy over the next few months. So Bears fans put your seatbelts on and grab your popcorn, the hot stove is about to get turned on and (hopefully) the Bears are running it.

## The 24-25 NFL season: surprises, payouts, and effects

Blake Guenther  
*Staff Reporter*

The NFL regular season has come to an end. With the conclusion has come a time to reflect on shocking team records, incentives paid to players and the effects of this past season on the 2025-2026 season.

Reflecting back on the season, there were three teams who were predicted to end the season on a low but instead found themselves on the side of a winning record. Prior to the season CBS sports predicted three teams would be the league’s biggest losers. The first team was the Minnesota Vikings. Pre-season they had a projected record of 6-11, but finished the season with a final record of 14-3. A reason that Minnesota was projected to do so poorly was because many people saw the Vikings in a rebuilding year. They proved everybody wrong and made the playoffs.

The next biggest surprise team was the Denver Broncos. They were projected to finish with a 7-10 record, but shocked many people by finishing the season with a 10-7 record whilst also making the playoffs. Many thought the Broncos would continue to struggle like previous seasons. The move to bring in a rookie quarterback proved to be beneficial and the Broncos made the playoffs in Bo Nix’s rookie season.

The final and biggest shock of this NFL season was the Washington Commanders. The Commanders brought in a new head coach and drafted a rookie quarterback in former Heisman winner and likely Rookie of the Year Award winner Jayden Daniels. The Commanders shocked everyone by finishing with a 12-5 record as they were projected to finish with a 7-10 record. They also took down the number one team, the Detroit Lions, in the playoffs.

The Commanders made it all the way to the NFC championship but lost to their divisional rival the Philadelphia Eagles who will play the Kansas City Chiefs in Super Bowl 59.

Not all fans were happily surprised by their team’s success this season. However, some of the teams with the worst records in the NFL may actually benefit from their struggles in future seasons. A poor season helps with draft picks for the next year.

As the Commanders have shown, a lot of great things can happen in a rookie season. Throughout the playoffs the NFL website has been updating draft order for the 2025 NFL draft. This year’s NFL draft class has a lot to offer for every team, but the top five teams get the cream of the crop in whatever their team desperately needs to compete next season. With the conclusion of the first round of the playoffs, the top 28 picks for the NFL draft are set. The top

five teams consist of the Tennessee Titans who are drafting first overall, the Cleveland Browns who are drafting second overall, the New York Giants who are drafting third overall, the New England Patriots who are drafting fourth overall, and lastly the Jacksonville Jaguars who are drafting fifth overall. Good luck to these teams in drafting the right player for their organization that will hopefully help them turn their team struggles around.

While teams made a run towards the playoffs, players were also focused on contract incentives. The 2024-2025 season contract incentives that follow were published in an article by The Sporting News during the final week of the NFL regular season. During Week 18 this season, there were 30 players who had large sums of money on the line in their contract if they were able to achieve certain milestones.

Of those 30 players, nine players reached their contract incentives. One of these players was Kyle Van Noy who needed 0.5 a sack to get a \$250,000 incentive which he reached by collecting a sack against the Browns. Also, Mike Gescki who needed three receiving yards to earn a \$125,000 incentive which he earned by catching a 12-yard pass. Von Miller, who needed to record one sack against the Patriots to earn a 1.5 million dollar incentive, recorded a sack in the first quarter.

A big incentive on the line was Mike Evans’ as if he recorded 85 receiving yards and five receptions he would earn an additional three million dollars. He achieved both incentives on the final play of the game. The 89 total receiving yards he tallied in Week 18 also tied him for the record of the most consecutive NFL seasons with 1,000 receiving at 11 straight seasons which is tied with NFL all time leading receiver Jerry Rice.

The other five players who received bonus incentives were Courtland Sutton (\$500,000), J.K. Dobbins (\$150,000), Geno Smith (\$2,000,000), Calais Campbell (\$300,000), and lastly Zaven Collins (\$300,000). For these players there was much more at stake in week 18 than teams crawling and scratching their way to the playoffs.

Between the wild dash of week 18 with so many players working to earn a little extra cash, to some teams shocking all the experts and the whole league by performing way better than their expectations, or to the worst teams in the league getting some high draft picks to help their team succeed, there is no doubt that this NFL season was a fun one to watch.

If the 2025-2026 NFL season is anything like this one, fans are in for another amazing football season with even more surprises.



# The twist and turns of college basketball so far

Blake Guenther  
Staff Reporter

The 2024-2025 Men's college basketball season is in full swing. So far there have been some disappointments and surprise standouts. As 2025 begins, this may be the wildest season yet.

An article written by Last Word on Sports, called out multiple teams who have been disappointing so far this season. Two teams mentioned in this article were the Rutgers Scarlet Knights and the Indiana Hoosiers. When discussing the Scarlet Knights, Last Word on Sports points out they have Ace Bailey and Dylan Harper, who were two of the top three recruits in the country heading into the season. These players have played well so far. Unfortunately, the rest of the team, which includes transfers Jordan Derkack and Zach Martini, are not supporting their stars. With lack of depth on the team, the Scarlet Knights are not winning enough games overall.

Another team mentioned by Last Word on Sports for not living up to pre-season hype is the Indiana Hoosiers. Last Word on Sports notes Indiana is not playing close games. Their four losses have been by an average of 21.5 points. Another fault of Indiana as pointed out by Last Word on Sports is both their offense and defense are outside of the top 100. This has left Head Coach Mike Woodson, on the hot seat and he may be fired after this season. In the end, Rutgers and Indiana are going to have a tough time competing if they keep playing like they have been playing so far.



*Top player from this season, Cooper Flag, slams down a two hand dunk at a game against Boston College.*

On a brighter note, there have been some surprise standouts this college basketball season. Both the Oregon Ducks and Drake Bulldogs have seen early season wins and success. In a Bleacher Report article, the Drake Bulldogs were complimented because they play a very physical, slow-paced breed of basketball. The article called them Virginia-like due to their obsession with draining clock on offense, but pointed out the Bulldogs unique ability to both draw and commit fouls. This is an unusual combination and this brand of basketball has

helped the Bulldogs blitz through competition such as Miami, Florida Atlantic and Kansas State. Plus an impressive win against Vanderbilt, who they beat by a double-digit margin to win the Charleston Classic. The Bulldogs seem poised to take the MVC with ease. With such success early in the season there is no doubt that we will be seeing the Drake Bulldogs make it to March Madness, and maybe even go deep into the tournament.

The second team of note so far is the Oregon Ducks. As Bleacher Report de-

scribes, the Oregon Ducks were the surprise winners of the Players Era Festival, after consecutively defeating Texas A&M, San Diego State and Alabama. The Ducks will enter the new year as the team to beat in their new conference, the BIG10. With such success early on this season the Ducks are looking like a contender nationally and in the BIG10 after just joining the conference this year. As Bleacher Report describes, experts have spent much of the season (and preseason) talking about the lack of a legitimate Final Four threat from the Big Ten, but Oregon might be that team. Only time will tell if the Ducks can live up to expectations and make a run in March Madness this year.

With the season in full swing, there have been some top teams established. Various sports sources, such as ESPN, have started to make their predictions for the March Madness seeding this season. In a recent ESPN Bracketology report, they predicted the #1 seeds for the March Madness tournament in the four regions. In the South region, ESPN has projected the Auburn Tigers to be the one seed. In the East region, the prediction is for the Duke Blue Devils to be the one seed. In the West region, the Tennessee Volunteers, and lastly in the Midwest region, the prediction is for the Iowa State Cyclones to be the one seed. All these teams were ranked at the top at the beginning of the season but have since leapfrogged other top teams at the top to be projected as the top teams for March Madness.

## Muscle, endurance, performance: why strength classes are necessary for athletic performance

Ashton Salski  
Staff Reporter

Walking is a core part of most teens daily routine, but fitness goes beyond just walking from class to class. Mundelein offers strength classes that provide opportunities for teens to grow physically.

Physical Wellness Department Chair Justin Hart expressed how much he believes strength classes mean to Mundelein high school students. The basic importance of a strength class, Hart shared, is "to learn the proper form, technique, safety and weight room etiquette and apply it on their own at community fitness centers."

Fitness can go beyond just a strength class on a school day but strength classes are the best way to start. Over the last five years the numbers of students wanting to take a strength class have increased from 600 to 750 students according to Hart.

Strength classes are for everyone and are not just for athletes. Hart said, "Strength training is arguably the best way to stay fit throughout a person's life. Overall strength



*Alma College weight room, filled with equipment for strength training.*

is the best way to prevent injuries."

Freshman Ryker Abdai shared his opinion on the importance of strength classes at Mundelein high school. Abdai said strength classes prioritize form which help at the start, then it eventually helps build the muscles. Abdai believes that strength classes have truly helped him gain some

strength, keep good form and prevent injuries.

Abdai shared, "Strength class is worth taking because if you're an athlete in high school you need to get stronger if you want to play your sport at the next level."

According to the University Hospitals website, Strength training not only increas-

es muscle mass, but it also increases endurance and overall performance. Strength training also reduces injuries.

The advantage of strength classes is that there is a teacher to correct bad habits. Having someone watch over a younger lifter is especially important to make sure the workout is productive for gaining as much muscle as possible. Improved blood sugar has been found with strength training and increased bone density also is related to it according to University Hospitals.

MHS students aren't just limited to one strength class all four years; students can make improvements and move all the way up to strength four. Strength one is focused on proper form and becoming comfortable in the weight room. Moving up to two and three, classes focus on improving the amount of weight one can lift for a certain exercise. In strength four the workouts focus on learning different exercises to meet individual students goals.



# Mundelein Connections

Eric Beauchamp and Dan Stricklin  
Reporters

*Play Mundelein Connections!*

There are four categories and you need to match four of the words with each one! Scan the QR code on the right to play! *created on connections.swellgarfo.com*



ANGELOU	X	WASHINGTON	DINNER
KING	FACEBOOK	CHOCOLATE	45
MOVIE	TEDDY BEAR	TIKTOK	LEADER
REDDIT	PARKS	INSTAGRAM	MONDAY

## Mundelein Strands: Valentine's Day

Dan Stricklin  
Staff Reporter

Use every letter on the board exactly once to discover words related to the theme!

S	V	A	R	A	E
E	L	N	T	Y	B
T	E	N	I	D	D
A	L	E	T	E	C
O	H	S	S	P	U
C	O	C	D	T	I
D	E	R	A	F	D
I	N	N	Y	I	G



Scan  
the QR  
code to  
play!

*created on customstrandsnyt.com*

## Valentine's Day Maze

Eric Beauchamp  
Online Editor

