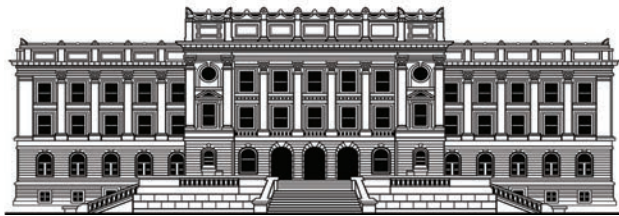


The Register



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ONE SOCIAL WORKER, 2,500 STUDENTS, MYRIAD RESPONSIBILITIES

Arisa Lattison
arts & culture editor

Students going through a rough patch may not be aware that there's a resource available to them at the school. On the second side of the first floor, there is a door that leads to the office of Central's one and only social worker, Dawnna Hill.

When consulting the National Association of Social Workers – an association of 120,000 professional social workers – standards, there should be one social worker for every 250 students, according to Hill.

"That would mean about 10 social workers would be groovy and gravy," she said. "Even if we could get another person to help support the students, that would bring me relief just because I know I can't catch and see and help and serve all the people."

According to a study led by the John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, it was found that overall, 21.8% of children aged 3-17 have one or more mental, emotional or behavioral conditions assessed. When the amount or severity of risk factors increased, the study showed a correlation in the rise of rates of mental health conditions for children.

Hill takes on the responsibility of those 10 people to the best of her ability. Hill has been a social worker at Central since the fall of 2010. Prior to her time at the school, she did some work out in the field beginning in 2003. She's had experience as a project director for a substance abuse coalition, where she did grant writing and personnel development, and before that, she worked as a mental health practitioner at the Nebraska Correctional Youth Facility, where she did individual and group therapy.

Hill considers her experience in these various roles helpful to how she handles situations at Central.

"So, something here at this school that we have to be mindful of is ... how we can navigate and communicate with each of these systems so that people's needs are met," Hill said.

Now, at Central, her role is more about response. This ranges from tangible support to safety issues such as mental health or family issues like homelessness or domestic violence.

Although she is a licensed therapist, most of her position revolves around "assess and refer and connect," the procedure of ensuring students get connected to long-term resources. Her role isn't only individual assistance, though.

Hill supports the teen parent program, making sure anyone who is pregnant or parenting has everything they or their baby needs. She is also the sponsor of the Nest. In 2013,



Hill takes on the responsibility of 10 social workers to the best of her ability. She has been a social worker at Central since the Fall of 2010. "I obviously know that I am one person and I'm just going to do the best that I can and try to do all the things within my power."

CRIS BATAILLON | The Register

a student had the idea to create a closet where students could access basic needs and resources. One was built in the Central basement and since then, Hill has overseen it. It provides clothes, winter wear, shoes, toiletries and school supplies. The Nest provides students with anything they need, allowing them to focus on their learning while at school.

Hill's favorite part about her role is the students.

"I love working with young people; [they] just keep me young, make me laugh," she said. "It's joyful for me to be able to connect to young people who have great spirits and really are incredibly resilient."

Being the only social worker in the school means more responsibility for Hill while she takes on a job meant for multiple people.

"I do feel the weight and the burden of that responsibility,"

she said, "[but] I obviously also know that I am one person, and I'm just going to do the best that I can and try to do all the things within my power."

For now, she believes the best they can do is see how to respond to the needs of the community. Things like making the Nest more sustainable long-term and bringing in practicum students to help with the workload are some of her current goals. Hill plans to retire in 10-12 years, and by then she hopes to have solid things in place for someone else to pick up then.

"I'm here to serve, I'm here to help people, I'm here to try to bring relief and make things better," she said. "That does require a greater community, and Central has been really wonderful from the parents to the community members [and] I look forward to continuing to partner with them."

Why your voice matters, and how you can share it this spring

Fiona Bryant
opinion editor

The 2023 Legislative session for Nebraska's Unicameral, or state government, produced many bills affecting young people and students. Among the most controversial were LB574, which limits gender-affirming care for transgender youth and bans abortions after 12 weeks, and LB753, which allows donations to private schools to be written off one's income tax. Advocates for public schools say LB753 gives private schools more funding by taking from the income tax revenue going to public schools. The passing of LB77 also allows Nebraskans to carry a firearm without a permit.

The next session of Nebraska's Unicameral begins Jan. 3 and will last until April 18. During this time, state senators from the 49 legislative districts in Nebraska meet at the State Capitol in Lincoln to propose, debate and potentially pass bills. Legislative experts predict that the upcoming session will bring

up bills that were not passed this year, such as LB575, which would limit transgender youth's participation in sports and use of bathrooms. Nebraska's Unicameral is a biennium, meaning that proposed bills are debated across two years; this year is the second year of the biennium.

Information about bills being proposed can be found on the Nebraska Unicameral website <https://nebraskalegislature.gov/> or through organizations involved in state politics. Central has a Student Progressives club, previously had a Young Republicans club and often hosts politicians such as U.S. Representative Don Bacon to talk with students. News stations and The Register will also cover important bills and their progression through the state government.

One way for students to have their voices heard in the 2024 Legislative session is to find and connect with their state senator. State senators are elected to represent a district's Nebraskans and their views in the Unicam-

eral; each state senator's job is to listen to their constituents' views. Students can find their state senator by visiting the Unicameral website and entering their address. Central is in District 7 and is represented by Tony Vargas, so students can also contact Vargas as he represents where Central students attend school. Students can email, call or send a letter to their state senator expressing their views on certain bills or topics. For instance, a student could email their senator explaining that they are a constituent and why they support a certain bill. This contact information is on the Nebraska Unicameral's website.

Students can also ensure that their opinion on a bill is heard by all senators by testifying on a bill. When a bill is ready to hear public input, Nebraskans can travel to the State Capitol to give an in-person testimony on why they support or oppose a bill. Testifying in-person requires traveling to Lincoln at the time of the hearing, but it shows senators a visual representation of how Nebraskans

feel about a bill. Even if someone does not testify, being at the Capitol to visibly support a cause and those fighting for it still creates an impact. Students can also submit an online comment for the record by visiting the bill's page on the Unicameral website.

Additionally, students also have a say in who their state senator is. State senators not only vote on bills but also introduce bills and run their campaigns on the values they will support at the Capitol. State senators are elected every four years by the voters in their district. Students who are 18 can vote for their state senator in elections. Otherwise, students can encourage their families to vote, or they can support a state senator candidate in their campaign.

State politics may not seem as influential or important as national politics, but students can have a say in the decision-making directly affecting Nebraska, its schools and its people.

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Immigrants face many issues in America, however an often-overlooked aspect is driving.

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Having these animals present at schools has socio-emotional and cognitive benefits.

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'Holdovers' is Christmas classic p. 9

The all-new film from Omaha-born director Alexander Payne is an absolute joy.

Sports

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Fate of LB753 to lie with voters

Will Harbour
contributing writer

The Nebraska State Education Association has been skirmishing with various lawmakers and policymakers for almost a year on the topic of LB753, and the fate of this bill is now on the line as a chance to repeal it will be on the November 2024 ballot.

LB753, also called the Opportunity Scholarships Act, has received major backlash since its introduction, and that backlash was only heightened when the law passed. The bill was introduced by Sen. Lou Ann Linehan of Elkhorn and passed in May 2023. The bill was meant to provide state tax credits for donations to organizations that grant scholarships to students who attend a private school.

After the bill was signed by Gov. Jim Pillen, it was met with immediate pushback and protest. This pushback mainly took on the form of a petition to repeal LB753 on the 2024 ballot. The petition needed 60,000 signatures in its 90-day petition drive and, in August, leaders of Support Our Schools turned in 117,175 signatures.

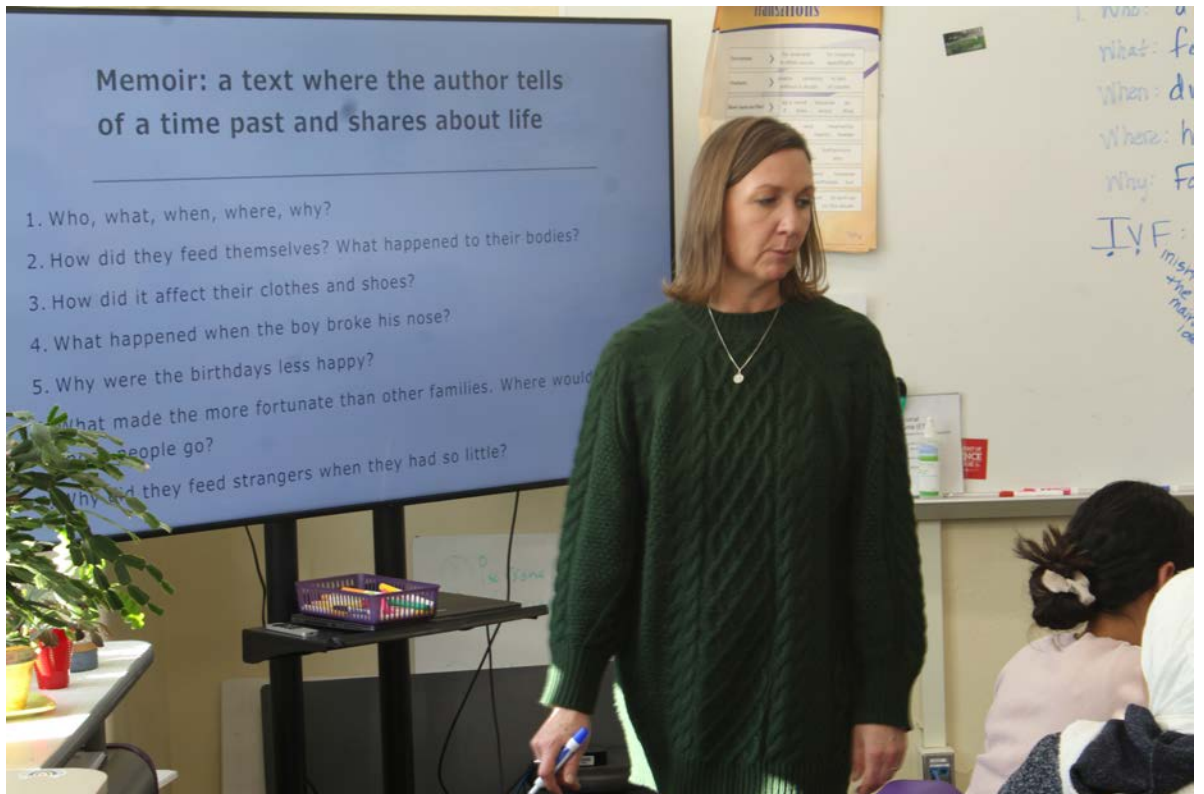
"The sheer number of signatures this coalition gathered in less than 90 days sends a powerful message to elected officials, and they need to listen," Support Our Schools leader Jenni Benson said in August.

Supporters of the bill say that this will give low-income families better options for their child's education. Supporters label bills such as LB753 as "school choice bills," but those in opposition argue that many school choice bills don't actually expand opportunity. Opposers of the bill also say that this will neglect public schools, where the majority of kids are taught in Nebraska.

The cause for support of LB753 is backed by Pillen and Linehan and passed with votes from 32 other state senators. The opposition is led by the NSEA and Support Our Schools, a group of public-school supporters.

"Our public schools educate nine out of 10 kids in Nebraska," Benson said.

Under LB753, the tax credit maximum starts at \$25 million for the first three years but could grow over time to a maximum of \$100 million. That \$100 million maximum is worrying many Nebraskans as that value is approximately one-tenth of the state's general fund spending in the state. Supporters of public schools claim that these tax credits



Molly Davies teaches in her classroom Dec. 11.

WHITMAN RUTLEDGE|The Register

will hurt public school funding and only worsen the problems of the education system.

The OpenSky Policy Institute concludes these tax credits provide incentive to donate to private schools over other programs such as cancer research, food banks, churches and public schools. Additionally, they claim these tax credits will benefit the wealthy. According to data from OpenSky, in states such as Arizona, Louisiana and Virginia with similar privatization measures, more than 60% of the tax credits are going to families with annual incomes over \$200,000. According to a phone survey in July by OpenSky, 55% of Nebraska voters oppose LB753, which includes 47% that "strongly support" a repeal.

Molly Davies, an ESL teacher at Omaha Central High,

was a petitioner for the repeal of the bill. She said that it is important to consider the context of how we fund public education on a state and national level.

"Prior to the current legislative session, our state was at the bottom for state funding, for public education. We have consistently underfunded education at the state level," Davies said.

She went on, saying that she comes from a background in private education, and she's not anti-private education, but believes this bill will harm public education.

"In Nebraska, we don't have public charter schools, and this bill is not that. It is funding a school system that discriminates, that competes. And it's also too loose around the edges for the funding can be used for," Davies said.

Central ACT results show slight increase in Science, ELA scores

Ethan Hughes
staff writer

Omaha Central's most recent ACT scores from the 2022-23 school year show that the English Language Arts (ELA) average scale score rose from 15.4 to 15.6, the math score fell from 16.0 to 15.9, and science rose from 16.3 to 16.8. The amount of students at least meeting state expectations for ELA fell from 40% to 35%, math fell from 27% to 25%, and science held steady at 34%.

The ACT is a college entrance standardized test. It was made Nebraska's state standard test for juniors in the 2016-17 school year, going into effect in the 2017-18 school year.

But shortly after was COVID-19.

Since students were unable to arrive for the test itself for the 2019-20 school year, the state did not perform a state-wide ACT, and OPS was in "hybrid learning" in the 2020-21 year. The results for 20-21 were not applied as part of any given school's performance due to continuing difficulties from COVID-19. It was fully reintroduced in the 2021-22 school year.

And after two years of chaotic schooling, ACT scores plummeted nationally. The number of Central students who were meeting expectations in math fell from 40% in 2018-19 (pre-COVID) to only 27% in 2022-23.

Overall, science has held steadier than the others. The prior 43% of people meeting expectations dropped to 34% post-COVID, but it stayed steady last year. In fact, the average scale score for the 2022-23 school year for science rose from 16.3 to 16.8, the highest of all three.

When asked why she thought this was, Tracy Rumbaugh, the science department head at Central, said, "I don't think that we necessary do anything different as far as ACT ... but all the teachers have agreed to make students read data as part of every unit, and I think the ACT science section uses that same system." According to her, they are incorporating ACT prep into lesson plans and just not announcing it.

Overall, though, according to Dr. Christy Flaherty-Colling, who coordinates the ACT at Central, while "...It's a good chunk of growth we're seeing right there," at this level, the numbers are too small for them to be significant. A real problem, according to her, is retakes. "On retests, the majority of students score higher, and we have fewer students who are re-testing," she said.

"Nationally, ACT scores are falling," she said. "The best preparation for the ACT is engaging in a challenging environment - that really gets people engaged and participating."



Science teacher Noah Vasa teaches Biology in Room 340.

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Grace Sunseri
Iyanna Wise

ATTN: the REGISTER
124 N. 20th Street
Omaha, Neb. 68102
Phone: 531-299-5611
central.register@ops.org
omahacentralregister.com

It is the goal of the Central High Register to represent the student body in issues affecting their lives as young people and students. If you feel that we are not covering an issue that is important to you, we welcome contributing writers who bring fresh ideas to the issues. If you would like to write a story for your student newspaper, please contact Broderick Hilgenkamp at broderick.hilgenkamp@ops.org or come to room 029 to discuss your idea.

Nebraska advocacy group petitions for right to abortion

Charlie Yale
co-editor-in-chief

Following a successful year for ballot initiatives supporting abortion nationwide, a Nebraska group decided to launch a petition to get the issue in front of voters. Protect Our Rights, the latest of at least nine campaigns across the country, launched and began gathering signatures last month.

The ballot initiative aims to amend Nebraska's state constitution – much like a similar initiative in Ohio – to protect the right to abortion until “fetal viability.” LB574, a bill passed by the Nebraska Legislature in May of 2023, banned abortion after 12 weeks. Sponsored by Kathleen Kauth, the bill also regulated gender affirming care for minors. The ballot initiative was proposed in response to LB574.

Ashlei Spivey, the executive director of I Be Black Girl, a partner organization of Protect Our Rights, emphasized the importance of the initiative. “We’re really excited,” Spivey said. “I think Ohio’s win showed that when abortion is on the ballot, voters will vote to protect their rights.”

In 2023, voters in Ohio voted to enshrine the right to abortion in its constitution. In 2022, California, Michigan and Vermont voted for the same thing. Voters in Kansas rejected a ballot initiative aiming to prevent petitioners from enshrining reproductive rights.

Spivey explained that Protect Our Rights and its partner organizations are attempting to harness the energy behind the other ballot initiatives to capitalize in Nebraska. “We need about 125,000 signatures to be able to put it on the ballot. Once it is on the ballot, then it’s just a 50% majority to enact it.”

According to the Nebraska Secretary of State, 10% of registered voters must sign an initia-

tive to add a constitutional amendment, which is what Protect Our Rights aims to do. In addition, signatures must be collected from 5% of the registered voters in 38 of the 93 Nebraska counties.

So far, organized opposition to the initiative has come from three groups that don’t support the right to abortion. Nebraska Right to Life, the Nebraska Catholic Conference, and the Nebraska Family Alliance released a joint statement condemning Protect Our Rights last month. The statement painted the language of the initiative as “extreme.”

Spivey said that initiatives across the country have been driven by youth involvement and that Protect Our Rights hopes to get young people involved as a large part of the initiative. “I think, now more than ever, we need young people,” Spivey said. “Young people’s leadership around protecting our civil liberties and rights and abortion access is no different.”

She said that the ballot initiative was a “key opportunity” for young people to get involved in their first general election and to participate in democracy at large.

“Young people have a lot of important perspective. I think to not only just participating in this democratic process, but to say, ‘Here’s my point of view, and let’s talk about it,’” Spivey said. “Let’s talk about abortion access and what does this mean for our community and the things that are in front of us. To me, that’s really important.”

Spivey emphasized that the road to pass the initiative would not be an easy one. “It was a hard mountain to climb. There were roadblocks that opposition put in [through] litigation.” Spivey said that it is imperative that people get their voices heard. “For us, again, it goes back to voters are going to always vote in their best interest. I think it just reminds us that no matter how bumpy this road gets, let’s keep our eye on the prize and what’s really important around people having access to the healthcare they need.”

Richards stars in the Rose’s ‘Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer’

Iyanna Wise
staff writer

Central junior DeVon Richards II has been involved in theater for over seven years and has been a part of 13 productions so far. But for the first time ever, he has taken on his first community theater performance as the lead role in “Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer” at the Rose Theater.

He got his start in theater at Alice Buffett Magnet Middle School in a production of “The Enchanted Bookstore” as Tom Sawyer during his fifth-grade year. Richards explained the silly story of how he got involved. “I had a crush on a girl, and so, in order to get to know her better, I tried out for the play because that was stuff she did,” he said. He also said that he stuck with theater because he loves making people laugh, giving him the perfect opportunity to showcase his humor to peers.

Richards said that joining drama allowed him to connect and meet many different people, inside and outside of school. He also said that making the bonds were worthwhile. “Some of these people that I consider my best friends I probably wouldn’t have met if I wasn’t in drama. It’s a second family, as corny as it sounds,” he said.

Richards always wanted to do community theater productions. So, when he received an email about the audition from the Rose, he decided to take the risk. “You know what? Let’s just see what happens,” he said.

He also said that the audition process for Rudolph was much like the ones he experienced at school. There were cuts online, and he finished the rest of the audition at the Rose. “It was relatively easy, actually,” he said.

Richards was changing at the end of his weight training class when he saw the audition results. “First, I thought they had mistyped. I was very relieved,” he said. He was very excited about the news and immediately called his mom.

Richards said the thing he was most nervous about was shaving his face. He had grown to like the beard he was growing and said it was the most nerve-racking thing about the production. It was something he didn’t enjoy doing.

As an honors and Advanced Placement student, Richards had some difficulty balancing his schoolwork, struggling to keep



Richards (right) had always wanted to do community theater productions. When he received an email about the audition, he decided to take the risk. “You know what? Let’s just see what happens,” Richards thought.

MAURO GUTIERREZ | The Register

up at the start of the show. But he had a support system from his friends, teachers and mostly from his mom. Richards said that she understood the pressure he was under and would help him make up assignments.

“I really appreciate it. Shout out to my mom, Brianna Richards,” he said. Richards said that there are definitely hard times, but it’s worth it and that balancing will help him prepare for heavier workloads next school year.

Richards said he had to miss a couple of choir events, and he couldn’t join the Central step team or the fall theater production, “The Play That Goes Wrong.”

Richards said that Rudolph is his third favorite role that he’s played. Right after Patrick Star in the Omaha Public Schools summer musical from a couple of years ago, “SpongeBob the Musical,” and Jesus in the Central production of “The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee.”

Rudolph is his third favorite character he has played because of his constant curiosity and goofiness. But he also explained that Patrick was first because he was Richards’ favorite character from the original show, and doing the voice was fun. Jesus was second because it was a funny role and simply because it’s Jesus.

You can still catch Richards in action and a showing of “Rudolph” until Dec. 23. The musical is 90 minutes in length and has ASL and sensory friendly shows, as well as audio description services. Ticket prices for the main floor are \$37, and balcony seats are \$32. Members receive discounted tickets.

Central JROTC cadet earns Bronze Cross

Chloe Schwartz
contributing writer

The Legion of Valor Bronze Cross for Achievement is an award that recognizes JROTC cadets who demonstrate excellence in military, scholastic and civic affairs.

Central Senior Alex Krasnoslobodtsev won the award, and he remembers the moment he found out. “I was sitting in class, and my teacher told me, and I was like, ‘Wow, this is great.’ But I didn’t realize how important it really is, especially for college applications,” Krasnoslobodtsev said.

JROTC is about teaching kids manners and respect, Krasnoslobodtsev said. “The mission is to motivate young people

to be better citizens. You learn how to fold a flag, eat properly, organization skills, and more. There [are] a lot of indirect things like, with the uniform, you learn how to pay attention to detail.”

Krasnoslobodtsev mentioned how JROTC has affected his life in ways both big and small. “At work, I have a lint roller that I use to clean my uniform,” he said.

Krasnoslobodtsev recommends others to join JROTC. “I would encourage others to join, especially if you don’t do any other electives,” he said. “I have gained a lot of friends from

this. I really don’t know what I would do without JROTC.”

Originally, he didn’t know what JROTC was. “As a freshman, I always thought that gym was a little too easy, and I thought JROTC was an honors/AP gym; it’s not an AP gym,” he said.

“I’m glad I joined JROTC. One of the main reasons is for college,” Krasnoslobodtsev said.

Absenteeism increases at Central

Jane McGill
staff writer

Many Central students are consistently missing school more often than they did before the pandemic, according to the latest data from Omaha Public Schools.

Over 80% of Central students were absent for more than 5% of the 2022-2023 school year – and 56% of students were chronically absent, missing more than 10% of the school year. The average Central student missed 21% of the last school year, marking the third consecutive year of rising absenteeism. That includes both excused and unexcused absences, including days students missed because of sickness, sports or suspension. OPS' district attendance goal is for every student to miss less than 5% of the school year, the focus of its "Strive for 95" campaign.

Across all OPS schools, 67% of students missed more than 5% of the school year, while 40% were chronically absent.

Absenteeism increased across the United States at the onset of the pandemic, but chronic, widespread absenteeism is most severe in districts like OPS, where a high proportion of students are experiencing poverty.

But while chronic absenteeism is now slowly improving across OPS, Nebraska, and the U.S., the percentage of students frequently missing school at Central has worsened, with the chronic absenteeism rate increasing 30% over the past three years.

Black and Latino students at Central were more likely to be chronically absent than their white peers. Around 20% of Black and Latino students missed less than 5% of the 2022-2023 school year, while around 30% of white students hit the same attendance milestone.

"Due to boundary changes, a lot of students lost their transportation," said School Support Liaison Justina Tibbs, who attributed Central's rising absenteeism to poor mental

health among students and OPS cutting transportation routes. "If Central is not in their boundary or one of their partner schools, they will not receive transportation."

Tibbs also cited the ongoing staffing shortage as another issue, saying that the lack of teachers makes it harder to make connections that motivate students to attend school regularly.

Tibbs said that administrators are mailing attendance reminders with report cards, sending attendance reminders to chronically absent students, and making more home visits.

Tibbs said that students often do not realize that every minute they miss class counts towards their absences. "Secondary school has 415 minutes a day," Tibbs said. "Each minute students are late to school, tardy for class and for every class they skip, adds those minutes up and counts towards those absences."

DECA heads to national Power Trip conference in Texas

Haylon Sipe
staff writer

Omaha Central's DECA club went on a sponsored trip and took part in the Ultimate DECA Power Trip Conference Nov. 16 through 19.

DECA visited Oklahoma City for one day to focus on sports marketing activities on Nov. 16, where they toured the Oklahoma City Thunder professional basketball team's stadium, Paycom Arena, before moving on to the conference held in Austin, Texas.

Three days were spent in Austin partaking in business conferences, viewing public speakers in session and networking with like-minded students and businesspeople.

The Ultimate DECA Power Trip was not entirely based on competition. DECA describes itself as an organization to promote a future of entrepreneurship and business skills for students. The venue was split into three parts, one side for competition, one for meeting leaders and one for networking.

Business teachers Taylor Grennan and Michaela Kavanagh are Central's DECA advisors.

"This conference was not a lot of compe-

tion; it was a small element of it. The majority of it was networking and getting the kids exposed to how what they're learning in the classroom and through DECA relates to businesses and organizations that we are partnered with and giving them college exposure," Kavanagh said.

Thirty-six states and the countries Germany and Trinidad and Tobago were in attendance at the conference.

The competitive aspect of the competitions was taking a 100 question test in an hour, focused on marketing, hospitality, finance or management, followed up by a presentation called a role play or business scenario, in which participants are given a hypothetical business scenario and given 10 minutes to come up with a plan and present to a judge that gives the grade for their performance.

Senior student Isabelle Johnson stood out among those who participated in the competitions. She was the only student from Nebraska to earn any honors from the competitions. She was placed in the top 10% of the nearly 2,000 students who attended the conference.



Photo Courtesy of Sheri Harrach.

How to help out during the holiday season

Adeline Samson
staff writer

The holidays are about more than gifts, as people celebrate friendship, love, kindness, and Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus, there's a way people can incorporate these aspects into gifts this year.

These are six gifts you can give to the world:

1. Volunteer at a local shelter or food bank:

During Christmas season prices rise and temperature falls which makes it that much harder for so many people. These people rely on shelters and food banks for a meal every day and place to sleep. Shelters and food banks are always accepting donations and volunteers to give to the people in need and be a motivating factor in the lives of many. Some places you can donate to or volunteer

are Open door mission, Salvation army, Siena Francis house and so many more.

2. Donate to Charitable Organizations:

There are nearly 1.5 million different organizations people can donate to and these are all different things that people find important. Finding a charity that you truly care about and feel a change is needed is just a simple Google search away. A single dollar or just a word about the charity can make all the difference. Some popular charities are Save The Children, Samaritan's purse, and Feeding America.

3. Share Christmas joy with elderly people:

Christmas is usually a bright time, but it can be sad for older adults who don't have much family or friends. To share the spirit of

the season visiting a senior home or nursing center can bring light to someone's day. Organizing an event for the people there or just coming in to talk, read, or hang out with a member of one of these places is a way you can make a difference. A few places you can visit or organize an event for are Brookestone village, Rose Blumkin Jewish home, or Newport house.

4. Support Local Businesses:

Holiday season can be a hard time on small businesses, so supporting local can help these entrepreneurs out and even you. You might be able to find cool gifts for others or yourself that you can't find in many other places. This will help you discover new things and businesses get the help they need to stay on their feet or expand to become more

successful. Local businesses are a big part of many communities and with the holiday season, the more the merrier!

5. Adopt a child or family for the holidays:

A movement that has been going around for a while is when you 'adopt' a child or a family and you sponsor a family that might not have much money to get gifts for each other or their children for Christmas. These families will have a description of themselves such as age, size, hobbies, gender and things that might indicate what gift they would like. You can send in Christmas gifts for the family or child to make their days brighter. A few ways to 'adopt' is contacting Catholic Charities, Lutheran Family services, Salvation Army, or visit volunteermatch.org

Ten ways to prepare for finals week

Katie Besancon
staff writer

Finals week for many students is an extremely stressful time, as they try to ensure they are prepared for upcoming exams by studying for hours and try to manage their mental health while still trying to get enough sleep. It all becomes a lot to manage. With finals and the end of the first semester approaching, here are some tips to ensure finals week goes as smoothly and with as minimal stress as possible.

1. Try to get a good and restful sleep. Letting your body and mind rest is the key to having a successful finals week.

2. Eat a nutritious breakfast. Food is fuel, and fueling your body with the proper nutrition at the beginning of the day is

the key to having long-lasting energy.

3. Study. Studying can be stressful, but breaking up your studying enables you to feel a little less stress while still ensuring you understand the content that you will be tested on.

4. Stay organized. Know what finals you have when and adjust your schedule accordingly to ensure proper studying.

5. Get fresh air and sunlight. Exposing yourself to sunlight and fresh air is a great way to have a positive impact on your mental health and body and is a great way to increase energy levels.

6. Get some physical activity. Physical activity is a great way to stimulate your brain and energy levels to ensure that you are as successful as possible during your exams.

7. Find a study buddy. If independent studying comes hard, find a study buddy or friend to study with to help with productivity and completing your study tasks.

8. Talk to someone. If you are feeling extremely overwhelmed and stressed about finals week, talk to someone. You are most likely not alone, and it is important to let your feelings known to other people who can help.

9. Create a to-do list. This will help you know what you need to accomplish in a certain period of time and when it needs to be completed.

10. Focus on your goals. This will help you look to the finish line and create motivation to stay locked in on your academics.

Transportation difficulties put students ‘in a tough spot’

Steven Dickerson
staff writer

Banita Gurung still remembers the day her father was pulled over. Despite the Nepali immigrant grant complying fully, it was a scary moment, as he couldn't understand anything the officer was saying. "The officer was asking some questions, and my father, not knowing English, had no clue," said Gurung, a member of Central's Asian Cultural Club.

The language barrier is just one of the many transportation-related issues for immigrants, including youth who are juggling school, work and other responsibilities. Financial burdens, time, lack of public transportation and more can all be a cause for concern amongst students from immigrant households at Central.

Betsy Tenorio Hernandez, an officer of Central's THRIVE Leadership Club, which works to promote leadership and community involvement for immigrants, summed it up as "immigrants being put in a tough spot."

Many students, including those who entered the country illegally, have school, activities, errands, entertainment and work to support themselves and their families. And because some students risk being deported by admitting their immigration status when trying to obtain licenses or permits, they are often left with the only option being to drive illegally.

Tenorio Hernandez, Gurung and Emma Miranda, the president of Central's Latino Leaders Club, all said that it is common for students to drive illegally as an immigrant. "Most of the time, it's because they notice that their parents need someone else in the household to help with transportation or for the children as a way or passage of freedom," Miranda said.

Securing lawful immigration status, which can be proven by documents like birth certificates, valid passports and citizenship forms, is a major challenge. But even with lawful status, Tenorio Hernandez said many issues can be at play when an immigrant is trying to obtain their license.

"[Immigrants are] treated as second-class citizens regardless of status; the lack of support from the government is what causes immigrants to take more risks like driving illegally," Tenorio Hernandez said.

Miranda explained that the financial burden is enormous. Insurance rates, licensing fees, maintenance and repair costs, driver's education courses, and the potential cost of getting in a car accident all add up quickly and are too expensive for some households.

A lack of public transportation also contributes to the issue. According to the Omaha Community Foundation, those who used Omaha's public transportation as their sole mode of transit to and from work had commutes over 45 minutes 33% of the time. Long commutes and unreliable timing and routes make it harder for people to get to places on time.

Unreliable school busing is another issue immigrant students face. Beginning this year, Omaha Public Schools reduced the number of student bus routes from 228 to about 175, according to the Omaha World-Herald. The district also increased the eligible distance for busing from one and a half miles to two miles for high school. These changes were an attempt at improving bus reliability and helping to solve the bus driver shortage. However, they may be leaving students who desperately need transportation unable to receive it.

Access to proper driving education and training is also limited because of costs, availability, and legal status, meaning more jump right into driving with no previous experience. It doesn't mean they are bad drivers, though, Miranda said. "It's not like non-licensed immigrants don't know how to drive. Some who do drive are very good drivers; it's the consequences and worry of getting caught that usually causes issues," she said.

The consequences of getting caught doing so are high. For those who aren't in lawful immigration status, Tenorio Hernandez said there is always a fear of being deported. For those with lawful status, she said there is a risk of expensive legal costs that many cannot afford. Gurung echoed that point, explaining that finding adequate legal representation is very difficult.

States like New York and Colorado have stepped in to help alleviate driving issues for immigrants. New York's "Driver's License Access and Privacy Act," commonly known as the "Green Light" law, passed in 2019. The New York Department of Motor Vehicles said the bill "Allows all New Yorkers age 16 and older to apply for a standard, not for federal purpose, non-commercial driver license or learner permit regardless of their citizenship or lawful status in the United States." It requires the same tests as normal permits and licenses, but it allows for anyone who can provide documents like proof of name, date of birth, or New York state residency. Colorado's law, called the "Road and Community Safety Act," passed in 2013 and is identical to New York's law.

Tenorio Hernandez said Nebraska has a lot of catching up to do when it comes to laws like that. "A lot of laws in Nebraska are very anti-immigrant, which are often not backed by facts but instead by stigma for immigrants," she said.

She also touched on the fact that Nebraska doesn't have backbones of support for immigrants, which only makes the issue of driving even tougher. They are often profiled, Tenorio Hernandez said. Miranda believes Nebraska should increase the number of bilingual employees at all agencies and businesses in the state to help alleviate some issues, such as the language barrier.

The city of Fremont, Nebraska, could be a prime example of anti-immigrant laws in this state. It has been involved in a controversy surrounding immigration since 2010. The conflict surrounds a city ordinance that would prevent people without lawful immigration status from renting property or getting jobs.

Tenorio Hernandez believes transportation is related to lots of other issues immigrants face and mentioned how school attendance dips when students cannot obtain reliable, steady transportation to school each day.

The topic of mental health was also brought up, citing the correlation between immigration status and poor mental health. "The stigmatization of immigrants causes immigrant mental health to go down because the stigmatization is not just in people's minds, but in Nebraskan laws," Tenorio Hernandez said.

She said, "Overall, these policies backed by stigma cause anxiety, depression and higher levels of stress due to isolation and lack of support, paired with often being alone without your family."



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FIGHTING THROUGH FINALS

Central needs therapy dogs

Grace Sunseri
staff writer

The use of therapy animals has been on the rise in recent years, especially in schools. The benefits have proven to be very positive, so why don't we see them at Central?

A therapy dog is different from emotional support animals. Therapy animals are specifically trained to provide comfort or affection to many people. Emotional support animals provide the same services but for one specific person. Service animals are completely different. These dogs do work or perform tasks for someone with a disability.

According to the Alliance of Therapy Dogs, having these animals present at schools has socio-emotional and cognitive benefits.

Socio-emotionally, dogs are "good listeners and offer great companionship and an audience to children without making any judgments." The Alliance further states that these interactions help reduce negative behaviors and overall improve well-being.

Finals week is one of the most stressful times for a high school student. With all the upcoming exams, therapy animals can be an even more valuable tool. Interaction with these dogs can produce serotonin, the happy chemical. It can also be a welcome distraction and momentary break from the stressful week.

Cognitively, three key benefits of the dogs for children and adolescents are "improved reading skills, enhanced executive-functioning skills, and stimulating memory and problem-solving skills." Just the dogs being present in the classroom can reduce stress levels.

According to Central staff, there has not been a therapy animal at Central in recent history.

These animals have been used in other districts around the metro area and across the state for years. In all these circumstances, the schools reported positive outcomes from students.

Ackerman Elementary in Millard Public Schools has two therapy dogs, George and Bryzzo. Multiple dogs can be seen around the high schools and elementary schools in Papillion-La Vista Community Schools. Westside Middle School has Gretel, the Bernese Mountain dog, in the counselor's office three times a week. Watson Elementary in Hastings has Ralph, the boxer/basset, every day.

The most notable example of therapy dogs in Nebraska's schools is in Lincoln Public Schools. Across their 74 schools, there are 44 therapy dogs in use and even more in training. This program was started in 1998 at Mickle Middle School, and it now encompasses the entire district.

Omaha Public Schools' policy states the rules for therapy animals in the district. According to the policy, the animal has to belong to a staff member. This staff member has to submit a written request to their principal or district official to get allowance. The animal also always has to be under the control of their owner. While this policy is in place, schools can contact therapy dog organizations and get groups of animals through them.

Therapy animals are trained with one specific handler. This handler is the only one who can accompany the dog while they are working. This is why I believe Central has never had one. If the handler must be a staff member, and if that person must be with the dog at all times, it makes getting one incredibly difficult.

A staff member, usually a counselor, has to be willing to train an animal and be with them at all times at school. If this would not be possible, I think Central should at least contract these dogs out during highly stressful times for students. There are many of these organizations around the metro area that are available and willing to come to schools and provide support to students and staff.

Energy drink consumption harms students, must be regulated

Charlie Yale
co-editor-in-chief

For most of human history, it was incredibly common to see minors ingest profuse amounts of alcohol. Even in the modern day, countries in Europe, Asia and Africa take a lenient approach to minors who want to drink. But, starting in the 20th century, the United States took a strong approach – not without opposition – to raising the drinking age. Through federal trickery, the government was able to coerce every single state in the U.S. to raise the drinking age to 21. And, because of the horrible physical and mental health effects of energy drinks, it is time that the U.S. took a similar approach to the federal regulation of caffeine.

It's important to inspect the physical effects caffeine has on the body of a young person before making a judgment of legality. Energy drinks, as defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), contain caffeine, and other legal stimulants like guanidine, taurine, and L-carnitine. These stimulants activate hormone sites in the brain to produce cortisol, which, among other things, is the hormone known to cause anxiety.

Stimulants have been known to cause problems for young adults and teens for decades. Only recently, though, has the U.S. seen an uptick in bad outcomes. According to the CDC, nearly 1,500 teens were sent to the emergency room for energy drink-related illnesses in 2011. Chapman University in Orange, California, found in 2020 that 40% of teens who consumed energy drinks daily, aged 13-19, suffered from side effects like insomnia, increased heart rate, vomiting, jitters, headache and abdominal pain. Unfortunately, this massive upshoot in side effects is no coincidence.

As many as 12% of secondary public schools nationwide sell energy drinks, and more caffeine than ever is in the drinks that these schools are selling. The most jarring fact, though, is that the American Beverage Association – which lobbies on behalf of the soft drink industry – recommends that energy drink manufacturers not market their drinks to those aged 12 and under, even though 13-19-year-old teens are feeling the worst side effects from these fruity, sugary and gilded concoctions.

Energy drinks also take a massive toll on the mental health of teenagers. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) reported that high amounts of energy drink consumption can lead to disrupted sleep patterns and a higher likelihood of trying illicit drugs. The additives in energy drinks, like taurine, serve to intensify the effect of caffeine and can even lead to addiction. Considering that the Mayo Clinic reported that energy drinks are the second most popular dietary substance among teens, it's obvious that the drink industry is working on getting a new generation of young Americans hooked on its products, just like the tobacco industry with vape pens. And the numbers back this fact up; global energy drink sales totaled \$60 billion in 2020 and have been on the rise since.

To be fair, an outright ban of energy drinks would be sure to cause a massive backlash. Many teens explain that they rely on energy drinks to wake up and go to school. But this way of thinking only reinforces the need to dial back our youth's intake of caffeine. A starting step would be pressuring Congress to disallow energy drink companies to market to client bases under the age of majority (age of adulthood). That way, young people

wouldn't have advertising directed at them, meaning that the rate of young people drinking energy drinks would shrink over time. Then, Congress would be able to institute caffeine content restrictions on beverages sold to minors. But, one thing that the statistics make abundantly clear is that the status quo is not good enough for our most vulnerable populations.

Just weeks ago, a student at the University of Pennsylvania named Sarah Katz died after drinking a charged lemonade from Panera – a drink with unfathomable amounts of caffeine (one 30oz charged lemonade contains upwards of 390mg) that fits the CDC's definition of an energy drink. For comparison, the FDA recommends that people don't drink more than 400mg of caffeine daily because of the safety risk that it creates. Just because these beverages are available to children now does not mean that they should be in the future. A Florida man with a heart condition died after drinking three charged lemonades in a day earlier this November.

While the jury is still out on how exactly caffeine affects the brains of adults, it's clear that adverse effects of caffeine consumption are concentrated amongst younger age groups. It's not necessarily true that these numbers correlate to the percentage of people within each age group who drink energy drinks, either. For instance, younger people may be drinking them in larger amounts than older people. But, in the same way adults get to make their own choices about alcohol, they should be able to do the same with energy drinks. The adverse effects and side effects that the drinks cause for children and teens make it important that the government establish some sort of regulation.

After the federal government unilaterally raised the drinking age to 21, the amount of 17-, 18- and 19-year-olds who died because of car crashes or other alcohol related injuries plummeted. Science shows that caffeine sends nearly 1,500 teens to the E.R. every year and has extremely negative consequences for their mental health. Barring minors from drinking alcohol was painful and unpopular. Attempts to do the same for caffeine will probably be similar. But, for the sake of our children, elected officials must realize that companies exploiting and injuring youth for profit is ridiculous. It's about time they take a stand on behalf of their constituents to make the world a safer place for teens.



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Daylight savings time wreaks havoc

Arisa Lattison
arts & culture editor

I've never really liked the end of daylight saving time. Yes, it's great during the summer when we have longer days, and I can stay out late without the discomfort of the dark. But what gets me is when the clocks are turned back. We gain an extra hour of sleep, yet it's in exchange for our happiness for the next four months.

Over time, I've come to notice how this cycle has affected me, and this year might be the worst of them all. When November struck and 3 p.m. started looking like 6 p.m., I started getting drowsy right after school, falling asleep hours before my usual bedtime, and struggling to get my schoolwork done because of exhaustion. All I'd wanted to do was lay in bed until morning came again.

Somewhere along the lines, I'd realized that the weather played a huge role in my mood—and this wasn't just for me.

People most commonly experience seasonal depression, also known as seasonal affective disorder, during the fall and winter months, and a big reason for this is the shift in time. According to the San Francisco Chronicle, doctors who specialize in mood disorders and sleep medicine state that this time change coincides with the time SAD symptoms are felt more acutely, and those who aren't diagnosed with this disorder also report feeling "a little more blue." As clocks are turned back an hour again, our days become shorter and the amount of sunlight we're exposed to plummets. A decline in exposure to the sun not only reduces vitamin D levels, but also serotonin levels. This hormone is responsible for mediating satisfaction, happiness, and optimism. Additionally, sleep and digestion are affected by serotonin. For this reason, when people don't spend enough time in the sun, it can leave them vulnerable to seasonal affective disorder.

Another reason we should permanently stay in DST lies in factors beyond winter depression such as having shorter days and its effect on sleep schedules. The darker evenings not only bother people psychologically, but also on an emotional level. One of the benefits of summer was being able to stay out longer and more safely.

As for our sleep cycles, despite the last day of DST always falling on a Sunday, I find it difficult to adjust every year. According to the Sleep Foundation, the human body never fully adapts to DST. Instead, the circadian misalignment may actually become chronic or permanent. A study by the National Library of Medicine found the average person gets 40 fewer minutes of sleep on the Monday after DST compared to other days of the year. Having to revert annually is like a constant jet lag, and it is not good for our health.

The end of DST brings traffic accidents as we lose an hour of sunlight, meaning we spend



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more time on the road while it's dark. It causes a 16% increase in deer and vehicle collisions as well. When clocks spring forward again, the risk of being in a fatal traffic accident is increased by 6% in America. However, while in daylight saving time, there were fewer fatal crashes overall. Staying in DST permanently would accentuate the benefits even more. According to BMJ Open, in one study it was estimated that 13% fewer pedestrian fatalities and 3% fewer vehicle occupant fatalities would occur upon retaining DST. Scientists believe staying in DST year-round would prevent 33 human deaths and 2,054 human injuries, on top of 36,550 deer deaths per year.

A lot of people either like or dislike DST, but the switch between the two affects a vast majority. The solution? By going into DST in March without reverting back in November, it decreases the likelihood of seasonal depression, we get more sunlight, and it makes our roads safer not only for us, but other animals as well. To maintain DST permanently these issues are resolved.

The gift guide you've been waiting for

Ella Levy
co-editor-in-chief

The holidays are coming up, which means gifts are right around the corner. Everybody loves to give and receive the perfect gift, but sometimes, the giving part is much harder. Here are gift ideas for each member of your family.

Your mom does everything and deserves some self-care. If you're on a budget, comfy socks, bath bombs and candles are never a bad idea. For the mom who loves luxury, a new pajama set, or satin sheets would be perfect. For the mom who loves to do things herself, a manicure kit will allow her to do just that with her nails. For the workout mom, a running belt to hold her phone would bring some convenience to her life. And for the mom that fits into none of these categories, an electric candle lighter so she can light her candles proficiently.

Dads can be difficult to shop for, especially when they say they don't want anything. For the dad who likes to be stylish, a wool scarf is perfect for the winter cold. For the practical dad: a car vacuum. Give your dad something to help his game on the court, field or green, such as a new golf glove or running shoes. There are many gifts out there related to their favorite sports team, such as coasters, cups and even candles. For the dad who loves his lazy days, get him some slippers. For the dad who has a lot of early mornings, get him a mug warmer so he can have his coffee anytime. And if you want to make your dad extremely happy, get him tickets to a sporting event or a concert, though this may be something you and another member chip in on.

Brothers are tricky to shop for because they will never tell you what they want. For the brother who likes simple things, a fleece sweatshirt is perfect. For the indie brother: his favorite record. For the brother who won't admit he is a gym bro, a new gym bag would be perfect. For the brother who loves food, a hot sauce gift set. And for the brother that is none of these, a portable speaker.

Now, even though sisters are easy to please, they are not pleased very often. For your younger sister just getting into makeup: a makeup brush

set. For your sister who loves skincare, get her wrist towels to catch the water when she is washing her face. For your sister who loves the winter aesthetic, a holiday-scented Philosophy body wash. For your sister who just moved into her new apartment, glassware from Anthropology. And for your sister who is just too complicated to figure out, a candle paired with a journal will make her happy.

Happy holidays to everyone.

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Magic of real Christmas trees unmatched by artificial

Millie Jackson
staff writer

Growing up, my family has always preferred real Christmas trees. Every year on the day after Thanksgiving, we head to Cirian's Farmers Drive-In Market to choose a tree. We observe all the trees and their slight differences until we decide on the perfect one. I look forward to this day year after year. This experience is just one reason that real Christmas trees are better than artificial ones.

Choosing to get a real Christmas tree gives variety and excitement to the holiday season, as opposed to taking the same perfectly symmetrical tree out of its box every year. When shopping for a real tree, there is always an opportunity for change. One year, you may want an aromatic Balsam Fir, but the next year, you are able to switch it up a bit and maybe get a Fraser fir with sturdier branches.

The wide variety of tree types can also make shopping for a real tree more affordable than expected. While trees like the Douglas and Fraser Fir are on the more expensive end, those like the Balsam Fir can be much more affordable.

Some may pose the argument that with artificial trees, you can get things like added fake snow or colorful flocking. However, there are many sellers of real trees that offer flocking of all kinds.

The environmental advantage of choosing a real tree is remarkable. Though artificial trees can be reused for years, they will inevitably end up in a landfill. Real trees can be broken down and composted after use. According to the National Christmas Tree Association, there are more than 4,000 local Christmas tree recycling programs in the United States. In Omaha, Boy Scouts Troop 570 can pick up your tree from your house as soon as the weekend after Christmas. There are also numerous collection sites during the first few weeks following Christmas.

Artificial trees' plastic is not biodegradable, and they include possible metal toxins such as lead. Eighty percent of artificial trees are manufactured in China, contributing to substantial carbon emissions during their transportation.

The farming of Christmas trees has exceptional hidden environmental benefits. There are about 350,000 acres reserved for growing Christmas trees, and for each tree cut down, one to three seedlings are planted in its place.

Some people may always prefer the convenience of an artificial Christmas tree, but to me, the astounding variety, inviting experience and impeccable environmental benefits of choosing a real tree will always prevail.



Photo Courtesy of Gretchen Jackson

Growing up, trying to feel accomplished

Becca Rock
copy editor

Junior year is finally settling in for me; I now feel the age of high school students in movies where the students are living independently and adventurously and are preparing for the second phase of their lives.

I began driving this past summer, which opened a new world of adventure for me. A newfound independence was released, and I felt free to explore the world. Sitting in my next-door neighbor's basement changed to driving around, exploring different parts of Omaha. We began to break free from the jurisdiction of our parents; we are now living with more freedom.

This idea of getting older is scary, but, in a way, it is exciting.

As I was growing up, I slowly saw all my siblings move out and saw our warm house turn into empty rooms and expectations that I had to live up to.

When I was in elementary school, I would come home to a busy house of my four older siblings roaming around, talking about their day and then doing their after-school activities. As each of them explored new parts of their lives, the next sibling's standard would be set. This standard was never stated or clarified, but was almost expected.

This expectation was an invisible push to try to accomplish the most "success" one could obtain. I don't think this was from the way my parents parented, but more the way I interpret-

ed my family's dynamic growing up.

Growing up with accomplished siblings who played varsity sports, were in honor societies for music and were reaching their dreams persuaded me to do all the same things while never truly finding my passion. I pushed myself to love the same things my siblings did, whether that was music or little hobbies like crafting. I don't think I know what my passion is versus what I just inherited from living with my siblings.

Each of my siblings had their passions and are now living those out, but I don't know what I will do. I have no set passion that has sparked within me like theirs, leaving me lost and scared about my future.

I think this is what getting older truly represents: a point in time where you have no idea what you will do and who you will be. I've grown to see that this is what feeling the age of high school is: a middle ground of working towards an unknown future.

This idea that I will never experience living with my siblings in a permanent setting ever again is also a way of growing up. As a family, we are slowly breaking apart, creating new branches and reaching different goals.

For me, this means discovering new colleges and slowly making decisions. Maybe one day my passion will be set like my siblings. Maybe one day I will live up to the invisible expectations.

Why you should take a foreign language

Fiona Bryant
opinion editor

Central offers French, German and Spanish as electives, with Spanish being offered to both beginners and native speakers. Yet, because language classes are electives, many students do not enroll in these classes and, therefore, miss out on the benefits of learning a new language.

I anticipated the relatively extensive language offerings coming into Central, especially with how Latin and Chinese were still offered when I started my freshman year in 2021. I enrolled in Spanish and German my freshman year, and while I have not continued with Spanish, I will be taking all four years of German offered at Central.

The American school system does not prioritize foreign or second language learning at all, which makes Central's numerous language offerings even more impressive. Given the opportunities for language learning at Central, students should take advantage of these classes at the first chance they get.

Taking a language all four years of high school opens post-secondary opportunities for students, but even just one year of trying out a language introduces students to another language structure and culture.

Language classes are also just intriguing and fun! Many language classes have food days, so students learn about another culture's cuisine. I already have my required elective credits, but I anticipate my AP German class next year.

Despite having studied my second language for almost a decade at this point, Central's language classes solidified my language nerdiness. High school is an optimal point to participate in language learning because starting that learning now fits the language into your life path.

Bilingualism and multilingualism are invaluable skills that follow individuals throughout life. Knowing another language allows you to communicate with all that language's speakers, which helps interpersonally and in job opportunities. Future employers value proficiency in another language for interacting with customers or international branches of a company.

Students with proficient language skills could go into linguistics for the military or at least display the academic rigor associated with taking another language. In college, taking a language in high school may be required; the University of Nebraska system requires two years of the same foreign language. The awards and distinctions available to high schoolers proficient in their language also aid entry into college; the Nebraska Seal of Biliteracy and World Language Distinguished Honor Award are honors awarded to students who excel at studying their target language.

Even though foreign language education is not required or emphasized in the American school system, knowledge of a language other than English is essential for global thinking and empathy in a world rapidly becoming more globalized. Within the United States, knowledge of Spanish especially allows for more communication with people in your community.

All too often, American exceptionalism undermines the value in looking outside of American culture. This prioritization of American culture undoubtedly extends to language; only 20% of school-age Americans take a foreign language, compared to a reported 92% of Europeans, according to the Pew Research Center. Language education also often starts too late (such as in high school) to foster a new language during the optimal learning period. Americans expect everyone to speak English, both abroad and for immigrants coming into the US. Taking a foreign language is a great start towards reaching outside of the culture you may have grown up in.

Ultimately, there is no harm in trying out a new language. The grammar and whole new language structure may seem intimidating, but first year classes focus on the basics. Plus, understanding another language's grammar creates a more well-rounded understanding of your own. Language is one of the most entertaining subjects to study, because consuming any type of media in that language strengthens your understanding. Watching a movie or listening to music in another language, for instance, counts as studying.

A new language can become part of your life if you let it.

arts & culture

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Payne's 'The Holdovers' is sure to be a Christmas classic



Photos courtesy of Miramax

Brayden Simpson
staff writer

I knew as I was walking out of the theater that Omaha native Alexander Payne's latest work, "The Holdovers" was an instant Christmas classic. The film is a genre blend of holiday comedy, drama and coming-of-age that had me oscillating between amusement and sadness for its entire runtime. Not only is it one of the coziest movies I've ever had the pleasure of seeing, but it is also one of the best to come out this year.

Essential to this "warm-and-fuzzy" tone is its period and aesthetic. The film is set in 1970, and Payne works hard to sell this. The movie meets all standard measures for being set in the past – the costumes and on-set vehicles and props are all period-accurate, and the needle drops fit the year – but the presentation of the film itself is reminiscent of the 1970s.

Before it even officially begins, the screen lights up with a retro warning that this is an R-rated movie. Not only that, but while "The Holdovers" was shot on an Alexa Mini camera (a very up-to-date piece of equipment) Payne and cinematographer Eigel Bryld were able to mimic a 70s style by equipping Panavision H Series lenses and working the color in post-production. They also added film grain for a nice final touch. It altogether creates a

very charming vintage effect.

The set also helped to establish a relaxing feeling. The film takes place at the fictional Catholic high school Barton Academy, a sprawling campus dotted with several brick buildings. The interiors of these structures are largely yellow and brown in color, a stark contrast to the white landscape outside.

Following cold exterior establishing shots with warm interior shots creates a sense of comfort for the audience when we are alone with the main characters.



And of course, the story is wonderful. The film follows a small group of people left behind at a New England boarding school over the Christmas break. Paul Hunham (Paul Giamatti), a grumpy history teacher, has been selected to watch over five students whose parents were unable to have them home for the holidays, along with the school chef, Mary Lamb (Da'Vine Joy Randolph).

When a surprise visit from one of the boys' parents leaves just one angsty and seemingly obnoxious straggler, Angus Tully (Dominic Sessa), alone with the two staff members, they discover much more about each other and their shared humanity. The performances of the three main characters are electric. Giamatti and Randolph shine, but the breakout star is Sessa in his first on-screen role. Sessa's Tully is a delightfully awful, entitled teen who you can't help but pity in spite of his snide remarks and antics.

It is only when he is left with Hunham and Lamb that the film really takes off. With the removal of any side characters from the campus, the story quickly gets into the relationships developing between the holdovers. The interactions these people have are both hilarious and deeply emotional, as the three begin to realize that behind their anger and apathy on the outside, they share a common sense of grief and depression.

It is for this reason that Payne is confused at the "cozy" label his film has been receiving. "I thought I was just making a decent movie about people," he said in an interview with Vanity Fair. He cites the spiked suicide rate around the holidays for his take on the film, saying that the idea of it being comforting "nauseates" him.

It's true that much of the film is pre-

sented without hope: Mary is grieving the death of her son in Vietnam, some characters struggle with depression and mental illness, and many don't have a home to go to during the holidays. But to me, this is what makes the movie feel so good, because despite all this, the characters do their best to get along and have a good holiday.

It's the fact that these people who are struggling so much have each other on Christmas even if they don't have anyone else that makes this film so refreshing in the face of all the grief in the world.

So, is this a Christmas movie? Well, maybe not so much as the broken bauble on the poster suggests, but I think so. While no one looks into the camera to tell the audience about Christmas spirit, the holiday is more than just a backdrop.

"The Holdovers" shows us how important friends and family are at this time of year, and how those people can be anybody if you find the humanity you share with them.

Payne was looking to make a movie about people, and he succeeded. But he made a movie about people so good and so easy to connect to, that this will be both our generation's "Dead Poets Society" and "It's a Wonderful Life."

Sorry, Mr. Payne. You've made a nauseatingly cozy movie, and I loved it.

Specific Reads For Particular People

Arisa Lattison
arts & culture editor

Are you someone who'd like to start reading but are unsure of where to begin? We've all been there before. This list consists of books in very specific genres for those looking for their next (or first!) read.

Reimagining the Classics

"Across a Star-Swept Sea" by Diana Peterfreund

Based on "The Scarlet Pimpernel," this sci-fi dystopian follows characters Persis Blake and Justen Helo from Albion and Galatea, rival countries. Due to a drug development that recreates the effects of a brain disorder that used to affect the lower class, Galatean authorities have been using it against Albion aristocrats. In the midst of these times, a man known as "The Wild Poppy" rescues these officials and works to end the revolution, but that "man" is none other than Blake. With a strong, empowering female lead, I recommend this novel to those who like a romantic subplot and can follow along with thought-provoking concepts.

"Olivia Twist" by Lorie Langdon

Langdon's book is based on "Oliver Twist." Similar to the previous novel, this one also features a female protagonist instead of the typical male. Olivia was raised as a boy until she was rescued off the streets when she was younger. When she meets Jack McCarron, someone she knew back then as "the artful Dodger," she has to confront her past again as they work through a plethora of other problems. I would classify this as a romance fantasy, as it has action elements along with tension between Olivia Twist and the male lead. This has to be one of my favorites, and it's suitable for most reading levels.

"Heartless" by Marissa Meyer

This book was the first and only book capable of making me cry. The writing style is set in older times, reminding me of dark academia. "Heartless" follows a less discussed character from "Alice in Wonderland," providing readers with a new experience from a side character's point of view. This book can be more emotional than the other ones listed in this category, so go into it expecting tears!

The Real and Relatable

"Paper Things" by Sarah Richard Jacobson

"Paper Things" is about Ari, a girl who lost her parents and has to choose between combating homelessness with her brother Gage and honoring a promise she made to her mother to "always stick together" or to stay with her guardian in a stable home during her most important years of education. I found Jacobson's novel to be raw and emotional, giving readers a look at the realities of homelessness. Jacobson, who is also a teacher who works in impoverished

schools, based the experiences of Ari and her brother on her own students' experiences.

"Towers Falling" by Jewell Parker Rhodes

The events that occurred on 9/11 are still taught every year in school because of how significant they are. Deja Barnes is a fifth grader who is unaware of the implications that it had on her family, and the book follows her through her education of the attack on the World Trade Center and its ties to her personal life and community. "Towers Falling" is good for any reader looking to learn about history from the multiple perspectives of the characters in this realistic yet fictional manner.

"Pillow Thoughts" by Courtney Peppernell

If you can appreciate some poetry, Peppernell's collection might just be for you. This book is divided into sections as it follows through the basic human processes of love, heartbreak, grief, acceptance and other stages. Because of this, anyone can relate to at least one of the topics presented.

A Walk Back in Time

"The Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle Treasury" by Betty Macdonald

When I think about my childhood, I think about Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle. The treasury is an assortment of stories about a neighborhood's go-to woman for fixing bad habits. She's known to have cures for everything, and the kids on the block turn to her to resolve their issues. It's a heartwarming yet funny read, and it's set at an elementary reading level. I think Macdonald's stories are a hidden gem, one I believe I was lucky to stumble across to this day.

"Bacon Me Crazy" by Suzanne Nelson

Nelson's books were all I read back in middle school. It's a series of books that focus on light romances that start from foods. In "Bacon Me Crazy," Tessa works at her aunt Cleo's food truck, and she regards it as one of her escapes until Asher Rivers, a popular boy from her grade, begins working there. Their personalities clash, and they're forced to get along, although the reluctance soon turns into something else. A very fluffy (and fast) read, Nelson's novel is a great starter for beginners or for those who just want something light-hearted to pick up for a week.

"I am Princess X" by Cherie Priest

If you are an avid comic reader or enjoyed doing so back when you were younger, Priest's "I am Princess X" is a combination of graphic novel panels and traditional writing. This is an action mystery that explores the death of May's best friend, Libby. When they were younger, the two of them created a character named Princess X, something that stayed between the two of them and died along with Libby. One day, May starts seeing their made-up character everywhere in public, which leads her to believe that Libby is still alive and the source of Princess X's appearance.

'The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes': A compelling must-watch prequel

Lily Hartley
staff writer

In a mesmerizing return to the dystopian world of Panem, director Francis Lawrence delivers a captivating cinematic experience with "The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes". Set 64 years before the events of the original Hunger Games series, the movie serves as a prelude, bringing audiences back to where they left off.

Not having read the book since it had come out in 2020, I was hoping that the movie could take me back into the world and see if it could fulfill and captivate the greatness that is the book.

Set against the backdrop of the 10th annual Hunger Games, the film explores the origin of the Hunger Games, and delves into the life of young Coriolanus Snow (Tom Blyth). He is tasked with mentoring a flamboyant District 12 tribute Lucy Gray Baird (Rachel Zegler), as she navigates the challenges and dangers of being in the games.

Snow, the son of a revered general who perished in the first Rebellion, is approaching his final year at the Capitol's elitist academy. Despite his family's financial struggles to make ends meet, Snow pins his hopes on securing the Plinth Prize, a monetary scholarship reserved for the academy's top student.

However, two obstacles stand in his way. Dean Casca Highbottom (Peter Dinklage), the dean of students at the academy, harbors a grudge towards Snow. Dr. Volumnia Gaul (Viola Davis), the Department of War leader and Head Game Maker, introduces a rule change for the Plinth Prize.

In a groundbreaking move to boost the Hunger Games' dwindling ratings, 24 Capitol students will now be paired with the 24 selected tributes from the 12 districts. The

key to winning the prize lies in being the best mentor, with Dr. Gaul emphasizing the importance of creating "spectacles, not survivors."

When Snow finds himself paired with Lucy, a rebellious singer from District 12 who defies the Capitol during the Reaping ceremony, Snow sees a strategic opportunity. Convinced that Lucy's vibrant personality, colorful attire and outspoken nature will lead him to victory and the prize, Snow embarks on this uncharted path.

However, the narrative takes an unexpected turn as love complicates Snow's journey. His deep-rooted love for his country, instilled by his patriotic grandmother and cousin Tigris (Hunter Schafer), who expect him to follow in his father's footsteps, clashes with his affection for his classmate Sejanus Plinth (Josh Andres Rivera), who openly opposes the capitol.

Sejanus's family, coming from District 2, amassed wealth from manufacturing weapons for the first Rebellion. He stands as Snow's only ally in challenging the existence of the Hunger Games.

As the film unfolds, it becomes evident that it's all becoming too hard for Snow to not love Lucy, who the film presents as a charismatic popstar on the rise, challenging his convictions, and pulling him in conflicting directions.

The film, however, struggles with repetition and missed character development opportunities. It feels that the script lacks chunks of dialogue that could better explain Snow's internal tensions and conflicting motivations his character expresses in the book.

A notable flaw lies in the repetitive use of familiar Hunger Games elements for emotional manipulation. The recurrence of "The Hanging Tree" song, mirroring past tributes' deaths, creates an uncom-

fortable familiarity.

With some slick visuals and macabre details in the production design, "The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes" feels worthy of the original "The Hunger

Games" name, especially in moments that highlight the nightmarish compliance required in the world, provoking subsequent fear and rebellion.

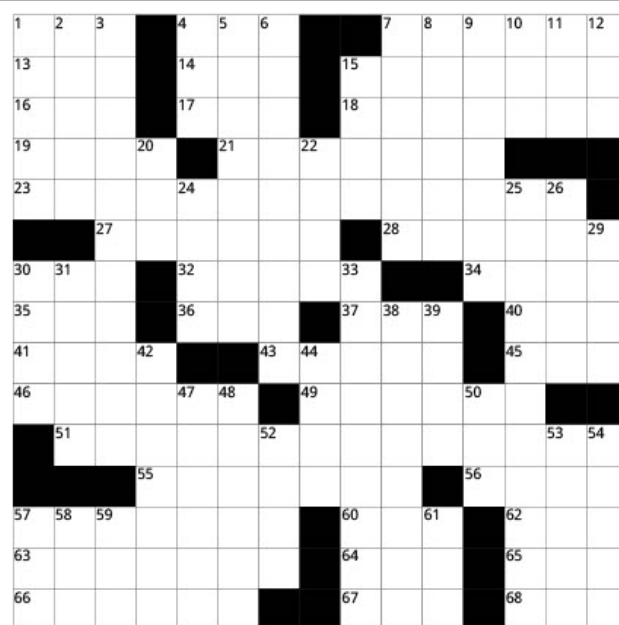
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- 58 When doubled, whip's counterpart
- 59 "Atlas Shrugged" author Rand
- 61 Nurse

Music makes 'White Christmas' the best Christmas movie

Isabel Hoiberg
staff writer

The most raved about Christmas movie is the comedy "Elf," where Will Ferrell's character Buddy the elf goes to New York to find his dad, according to Digital Trends. He finds himself in multiple hilarious situations, and while I understand the comedic relief Elf brings to audiences; it should not be given the title of "Best Christmas Movie."

Instead, the 1954 musical, *White Christmas* should take the number one title. It mixes romance and comedy while celebrating everyone's favorite holiday.

Irving Berlin wrote the song "White Christmas" for the 1942 movie "Holiday Inn," which won him an Academy Award. But writers thought it be a perfect song to describe the Christmas for soldiers after the second World War. "Dreaming of a white Christmas, just like the ones I used to know". A symbol of what their lives were like before fighting in the war.

Though the cinematography of the movie is not the best because of the time it was made, it reminds me of sitting in my childhood living room on Christmas Day with my family opening presents and watching Bing Crosby and Vera-Ellen dance around the screen.

The plot of the movie is a famous song-and-dance act, Wallace and Davis, becoming romantically involved with a sister act, The Haynes Sisters, teaming up to save the failing Vermont Inn of their former commanding general during the war, but that barely goes towards the greatness of the movie.

The original music sung throughout the movie helps provide gaps between the long talking scenes and the vocals are so beautiful you are just waiting for the next songs to start.

My favorite songs include "Sisters" by Peggy Lee, which describes the ups and downs of a sister relationship, which I relate to as someone who grew up with two older sisters. But the scene when the song is performed also provides comedic relief. After the Haynes sisters perform, Wallace and Davis dress up as the girls and perform the act instead.



Photo Courtesy of TIME LIFE PICTURES

I also love the song "Snow" by Bing Crosby, Peggy Lee, and Danny Kaye. The lyrics are beautiful and describe the acts of playing in snow like you would as a child, along with the excitement of arriving in the snow filled wonderland, Vermont.

When they arrive green grass surrounds them, which is when they show up at an almost deserted inn owned by a

friend from the army. Wallace and Davis take up the responsibility of bringing visitors back to Vermont with a big winter performance including the Haynes Sisters.

To find out if the Inn is saved and if *White Christmas* really is the best Christmas movie, you can watch it on Netflix, Sling TV, Amazon Prime Video, Apple TV and Redbox.



Photo Courtesy of LEE MENDELSON PRODUCTIONS

'A Charlie Brown Christmas': The most touching Christmas movie of all time

Brayden Simpson
staff writer

Ever since its release in 1965, "A Charlie Brown Christmas" has been the best Christmas movie on air. There's just so much to love about the special. Everything in it, from its familiar characters to its uplifting story and message, serves to put you in the spirit and make you feel good.

Let's start with the plot. For the 1960s, the film's view on commercialism is downright prophetic. Charlie Brown is fed up with his friends and their selfishness: 12-year-old Lucy wants expensive real estate, his little sister Sally's Christmas list is exceedingly long and materialistic, and even his dog Snoopy is entering a decorating competition with a cash prize. Everywhere he looks, he sees aluminum Christmas trees and advertisements for flashy gifts. (If you didn't think it could get any worse, remember that Apple

bought the rights to this special and pulled it off public television to get more people to subscribe to their streaming service, Apple TV+. The audacity!)

This commercialism, on top of his typical seasonal depression, leaves Charlie Brown questioning the Christmas season altogether. When he is assigned to direct the Christmas play and steps out to find a tree, he stumbles upon a sickly little sapling sitting among the glitzy metal giants in the lot. While the other kids are disappointed and ridicule him for his choice, a speech from his best friend Linus and a little care for the tree inspires him to look past the commercialism for the real spirit of the season: it's a time of love and hope, as evidenced in Linus' recitation of the Bible (Luke 2:8-14).

While not all who celebrate Christmas believe in the events of the Bible, Linus' message can still touch hearts. He offers

"great joy, which shall be to all people," and "peace, goodwill toward men." Regardless of the source of the quote, Linus spreads the message, not just to Charlie Brown but also to viewers at home, that Christmas is not about fancy trees or shiny presents. It's about joy, peace and goodwill toward men. This, in combination with the transformation of Charlie Brown's Christmas tree into a beautiful symbol of friendship, solidifies the message of the special. It makes "A Charlie Brown Christmas" the most touching, feel-good Christmas movie of all time.

Besides the story, the production of the piece makes it the most nostalgic and lighthearted Christmas film. The animation is simple and familiar, the colors are bright, and the movements are eye-catching and fun, such as the dance scene in the auditorium.

Not only that, but the music is perfect. The Vince Guaraldi Trio's simple combination

of string bass, drums and piano serves as a beautiful backdrop to the action of the special. The soft, jazzy tunes accompany every scene and put you in the holiday mood. The music is so good that "Linus and Lucy" gets airtime on Christmas radio stations, and it's not even a Christmas song! It serves as the Peanuts theme in most of their specials.

Another complement to the special is the voice acting. The "Peanuts" specials were notable for having children voice the characters at a time when it was rare to do so. The performances really sell the sometimes-bratty nature of real children and make the drama more profound. My heart aches for Charlie Brown when I hear a small boy complain about feeling depressed because no one likes him. The overall presentation put together under director Bill Melendez creates a definitive Christmas feeling that no other film can match.

Merkuris named December Poet of the Month

Kylee Fulkerson
contributing writer

My poet of the month for December is Allie Merkuris. She is a sophomore at Central High School. She is an incredibly talented poet; she speaks right from her heart and can make any emotion or anything she reads into great poetry. Those are all contributing factors to why I chose Merkuris for poet of the month. Here are some questions and answers that I asked during the interview with Merkuris.

Kylee Fulkerson: What inspired you to write poetry?

Allie Merkuris: One day, I was just reading poetry online, and I was feeling kind of sad that day, and I just started writing, and it turned into something great.

KF: What is your greatest inspiration?

AM: My greatest inspiration would probably be my dad or my grandpa because they always teach me [that] I can do whatever I put my mind to, and they teach me different life lessons every day, even if [they're] just small.

KF: How often do you write poetry?

AM: I write every day; whether it is late at night or if I am just lying in bed, I write poetry.

KF: What is your career choice?

AM: My career choice is to be a teacher.

KF: What type of teaching would you do?

AM: I would like to teach elementary school students or beginning high school students because I feel like those are the most important times in your life, and I can relate more to them.

KF: What would you like people to know about you?

AM: Well, I'm a sophomore, I'm 15, I like to play basketball for fun, I love to read, and I write a lot, even if it's not poetry.

KF: How do you want your poetry to impact the world?

AM: I just want to make people more aware of how people feel in certain situations.

KF: What are your goals in life?

AM: To become a teacher, have a family, go to college and get my master's in teaching.

KF: What are your strengths and weaknesses as a writer?

AM: One of my strengths is being able to turn in anything into poetry. My weakness is sometimes I don't feel inspired, and it's sometimes hard to decide what to write about.

KF: How did you feel when you wrote this poem?

AM: I wrote this poem when I was in a class, and we read this sad story about this boy when he was younger, and it inspired me to write this poem about some things that happened in my life with people I know and love.

KF: What is the message of your poem?

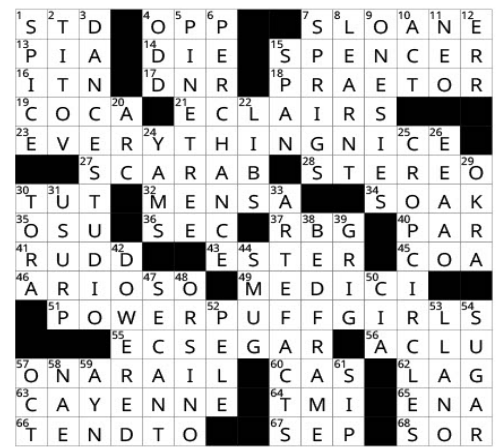
AM: To make people realize how hard it is to get through certain situations in life. And to recognize that you never know what people are going through, and you just know.

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THE REGISTER

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Basketball season is underway *High school sports reflecting college with use of transfer portal*

Isabel Hoiberg
staff writer

Throughout the past couple of years, high school basketball has started to look more and more like collegiate basketball. Players constantly working on their fast break dunks, the new addition of a shot clock, creating a faster pace game, sponsors sending money into certain programs and the creation of the high school transfer portal.

The high school transfer rules are similar to those of colleges. Your transfers must be in before May 1 to be eligible to play a varsity sport. If your papers are in any later, you must wait 90 days until you're eligible to play varsity. Unless a player's residency changes school boundaries, then they are eligible immediately.

Central High School is not unfamiliar with the transfer portal. With the addition of Head Coach Bruce Chubick last year, Central gained four Omaha South High transfers. This year, the team added six additional players.

Daleron Thomas is a 6-foot senior starter for the Eagles this season. He is a point guard/shooting guard, who transferred to Central from Omaha North for his final year of high school.

Thomas grew up in the Nest, as his father worked in the building. Anytime he wanted to get more work in, it was in the Central gym. It was originally the school he was supposed to attend, but he wanted to play with his brother as a Viking.

"We were supposed to have a good team my junior year, which really didn't happen, which is why I decided to make the change," Thomas said.

His transfer has not gone unnoticed by the Eagles, as he is already a starter on the team but also a player that the fans are invested in watching.

"He's very competitive, he's chirping all the time when you're against him, but when you're his teammate, he's encouraging you," Chubick said. "I think these guys sometimes take it too personally, but Dale is just trying to get that competitive edge."

Thomas is not the only senior addition to this team. The Eagles also welcomed 6-foot-2-inch power forward Kevon Newsome and 6-foot-1-inch point guard DJ Sterling from Benson, along with 6-foot-3-inch sophomore starting guard DaShawn Prince.

They all followed Coach Terrance Mackey for the 2023 football season, but happened to make an immediate impact on the basketball court.

Newsome plays alongside senior Devin Holmon and Thomas on their club team, Omaha Elite. Continuing to play alongside his teammates was an obvious choice once the football season was over.

Sterling on the other side played basketball for Benson his freshman and sophomore years but decided to stop his junior year.

"I did not really fit their scheme at Benson," Sterling said.

But he was convinced to make his return as the "true point guard" the Eagles missed out on last year.



Kevon Newsome goes for a shot while playing Linclon High on Dec. 9

Photo Courtesy Garrett Hawkins

Along with Prince, two other sophomores have made the earlier transition to Central. Amir Wise, a 5-foot-10-inch guard from Westview and Lenox Haynes, a 6-foot-1-inch guard from Class B Mount Michael.

Wise will not be able to play varsity until Jan. 20, 2024, because of transfer rules, but Haynes is eligible.

"I wanted a different atmosphere, like academics and athletics, like that environment. And then I thought Central could just develop me more as a player," Haynes said. "I'm just looking forward to that exposure that I'm going to get next year. A lot more people look at Class A than Class B because the level of skill that drops off at Class B."

Whatever the reason may be for coming to Central, Central gladly welcomes them as players and students.

"The atmosphere is amazing, win or lose you're still going to get support here," Sterling said.

Freshmen on varsity boys basketball ready to build for future

Steven Dickerson
staff writer

While they might not get much playing time, freshmen James Mullins, Evan Rodgers and AJ Nichols are preparing to lead Central's varsity boys' basketball team into the future.

As the lone freshmen on the squad, they are using this year to learn and understand the game well while testing their skills on and off the court.

"We are building the strength of the program for years to come," said Head Coach Bruce Chubick on the importance of having freshmen on varsity. He believes the team will thrive by getting younger guys experience and training them for their future years with the program.

Mullins, a shooting guard; Rodgers, a point guard; and Nichols, also a point guard, all believe that being on varsity this season will benefit their future.

Mullins said he has been able to keep up his strengths and improve on his weaknesses, thanks in part to the guidance from others on the team and the coaching staff. "It's helped me so much," he said.

Rodgers said it was helpful to be more experienced down the line in high school and handle tough situations. He has four assists so far this season, higher than some upperclassmen. He said he has had the opportunity to learn the "ins and outs of high school basketball," bettering him for the future.

He believes this year is his time to become a strong communicator and be effective on defense.

"This season is setting the bar higher and pushing me to keep going while never getting complacent," Nichols said.

All three, however, mentioned the team's strong bond and chemistry as the strongest benefit for the future. Mullins, Rodgers, and Nichols have known each other for a few years playing together on TNE, a club basketball team. The other guys on the team helped them.

"I can trust all my teammates and when I mess up, I know they got my back to help me out," Rodgers said. Mullins said everyone is nice and helpful. Nichols said he "already has a connection" to everyone on the team and that it has helped tremendously.

The freshmen also add to the chemistry of team, Chubick said. "They all bring a little something different to the table," he said, regarding both a social and a professional aspect. He explained that the diversity of abilities contributes to a robust team that can do lots of different things on the court, which is why he picked the three that he did.

This season does not come without challenges though. The freshmen have entered a new

environment, one unlike middle school or club basketball.

"At first it was noticeable how much quicker it was. I had to adjust," Mullins said.

"It was a big jump, but I've gotten used to it," Rodgers said.

Nichols said it was not a big adjustment for him personally. "I'm used to playing at a very high level."

Chubick believed each player's physical development can also be a significant challenge. "Some players are very physically mature at 14 or 15 years of age, while others may not be physically mature until late in high school or even early college years," he said. "Patience is important when adjusting."

No matter the challenges, Chubick and his coaching staff are always doing their best to help the freshmen and all players succeed. "I think the biggest help the coaches can provide is to be clear about things we are correcting and why we are doing so, as well as encouraging the good things that they are doing," he said. Chubick's goal is also to instill confidence in each player, which he said is critical to showing the freshmen that they are there for a reason.

As for personal goals, all three want to be a starter in at least one game this season.

Mullins said, "I want to play a part in the team's success." He described that he could do that by scoring in a game, putting in strong effort at practices, and improving his defense.

"I want to be a productive and effective player on the team, as well as make Central a top tier team again," Rodgers said. He wants to make Central's alumni proud, better handle the ball and play stronger defense.

Nichols just wants to be a starter in one game this year, as with Mullins and Nichols, but he said it would not be too bad if he could get 20 steals by the end of the season while he's at it. As of December 10, he is at one.

The track record of being a freshman on Central's varsity to have success in the future is strong. Tra-Deon Hollins, an NBA G League player; Treshawn Thurman, a professional player in Lithuania; and Akoy Agau, a former forward for the University of Louisville Cardinals, all played on varsity as freshmen.

Despite a good track record, Chubick urges caution. "I think the future for them all will be very bright, but it probably won't come overnight. It will be a process and they will need to be patient and be prepared to earn their opportunities and then take advantage of those opportunities when they're presented," he said.

Denton inducted into OPS athletic Hall of Fame

Ann Carlson
sports editor

Sociology teacher and assistant girls' soccer coach Casey Denton is the first Central soccer player to be inducted into the Omaha Public Schools Athletic Hall of Fame. The induction took place on Nov. 18 in a ballroom at the CHI Health Center where 10 athletes were honored.

"I am grateful and humbled to have this award," Denton said. "This is such a great group of athletes, and I am honored to be inducted with all of them."

Denton participated in three sports at Central: soccer, cross country and basketball.

She was a four-time state qualifier for cross country and an all-state selection her senior year. That year, she was also captain of the soccer team and received All-State honors. During her senior season she led the team with 27 goals, helping them to qualify and be the first team to make it to the state tournament.

"All three sports helped me to become a leader," Denton said. "I learned mental toughness in cross country and the importance of being a good teammate in basketball."

After high school, Denton went to the University of Nebraska at Omaha where she played soccer. During her freshman year, they won the NCAA Division II national championship. She started 76 games and during her junior year, led

the team with the most goals. She was named the most competitive individual by the sports staff of the UNO newspaper, The Gateway. She was described by the staff as someone who "had a relentless drive for the ball and a passion that beamed on her face on game days."

"Going to UNO gave me the opportunity to play soccer while still being close to my parents," Denton said. "UNO also had a great teaching program which was important to me."

She now is one of the district leaders in academic coaching, a program that helps athletes reach their academic and athletic goals. In 2022 she was named Central's teacher of the year because of her dedication to the academic coaching program and her classes.

"With the academic coaching, she focuses on student athletes and works with them to help make sure they are ready for the next level," Athletic Director Rob Locken said. "She is a great teacher and coach and is well deserving of this award."

She has taught and coached at Central for 13 years and said she is glad she not only attended Central but works as a teacher and a coach.

"I am honored to be able to represent Central with this award," Denton said. "All of my teachers and coaches at Central had a positive impact on my life and I hope I can impact these kids the same way."



Photo Courtesy of CASEY DENTON

Casey Denton gives her speech at the Hall Of Fame ceremony.

Central boys' soccer team holds dodgeball tournament

Millie Jackson
staff writer

The Central boys' soccer team held a dodgeball tournament on Dec. 7 in the school gym to fundraise for the team. The winning team got a 50-piece wing dinner, paid for by Coach Nicholas Webster.

The team is expecting to get new jerseys this year, and Webster says that it's great to have some extra money set aside for those who may not be able to afford all the necessary gear for the season.

"I try to make up some money because not everybody can buy the team gear," Webster said.

Webster has been at Central for two years, but when coaching at King Science, he tried to do a fundraiser for the team every year. The team didn't do a big fundraiser last year, so Webster wanted to go all out.

The team's fundraising committee first brought up basketball when considering possible fundraisers, but chose dodgeball because it is simpler, and most everyone knows the rules. It was Webster's idea to pay for the wings.

"Who doesn't like wings? I've bought 50 pieces before so it's no sweat on my back," Webster said.

The tournament raised about \$400 with a total of eight teams competing. Each team paid a \$35 entry fee. The tournament lasted about two hours total.

The final round was between team Boys and Girls Club and team DEM BOYZ AND NIA. After intense competition, team Boys and Girls Club won the tournament. Sophomore Avery Harris was a part of the winning team. Harris said he expected his team to win from the start.

"I knew we had the athletes. I knew we were disciplined; we came out here and we did what we had to do," Harris said.

The environment in the gym was electric. Teams were competitive, confident, and supportive. Competition was intense.

"I was TURNT! The whole place was TURNT!" Webster said.

In upcoming years, Webster hopes to raise triple the amount they did this year. He would also like to have close to 16 teams and find a way to make it mandatory for signed up teams to show up and compete.

Anyone interested in making a donation to the team can send in cash or make a check out to Central Boys Soccer.



JOSEPHINE MCLAUGHLIN | The Register

Central students compete in the Wings on Web dodgeball tournament Dec. 7.

Central powerlifting shines at the state level

Becca Rock
staff writer

Central's powerlifting team is one of Central's most underappreciated teams; the girls' powerlifting team has been state champions for two years in a row, and the boys won in 2022 and were runner-up last season.

"I think our girls' team has a very good chance at repeating as state champions this year," Coach Dennis Baker said. This year, on the girls' team, there will be four returning state champions: Isabella Blazeovich, Brooklynne Costello, Seanelle Clark and Keke Hadley, all seniors.

Baker also said that the boys' team will be competitive this season with three returning state champions: Angel Aguirre, Ryan Adams and Jonah Koesters.

Costello said, "I want to make this season worthwhile for the new lifters in hopes that the program continues to grow."

Costello touched on the idea of growth only being possible with amazing coaches such as Baker. He helps to motivate and push the athletes to higher levels of competition.

"My job is easy when I have a group of hard-working individuals who love to compete and love the grind. Our lifters know what it takes to

be on top and are making sure we stay there," Baker said

Costello added, "It feels motivating. Powerlifting is an intense and difficult sport; you have to put yourself in uncomfortable situations. But remembering that we are number one encourages and pushes me to work harder to keep that spot."

Koesters said the team is connected. "Everyone [is] super kind and supportive, and I've noticed that stays consistent throughout the sport," he said.

"Encouraging" and "uplifting" was how Costello described the team—a backbone that constantly supports each other.

The powerlifting team has grown in the past few years with the addition of a junior varsity team. With this addition to the team, more student-athletes are able to participate, which makes people stronger in an environment where they can grow. "Everyone on our team are contributors to our success," Baker said.

"This season will be very exciting for Central's powerlifting team," Baker said. "They don't call us 'Champ High' for nothing! It is all because our kids buy in, trust each other and work hard for each other."



Photo Courtesy of Liam Gillispie

Senior Brooklynne Costello squats at Papillion La Vista South High School powerlifting meet. Costello placed second at the meet.

Central girls' basketball stronger with tenured teammates

Ann Carlson
sports editor

Led by a strong senior class, the girls' basketball team is off to one of the best starts in school history.

Paris Devers, Inia Jones, Kiara Baptist and Lilliana Peterson have all played varsity since their freshman year, and along with senior transfer Natasha Wilson, they have helped the Eagles to a great start to the season.

"It's a really good group of seniors," head coach Micheal Kroupa said. "They all have really strong leadership skills. This should be an exciting year."

All five seniors play club for Nebraska Hoops Elite, so they know each other's strengths.

"We've been training together all year," Devers said. "We know how to play together and lead the team together."

The seniors agreed their main goal of the season is to make it to the state tournament. They qualified freshman and sophomore year but missed out last year after a district loss to Millard North.

"They've had a lot of pressure on them the past few years," Kroupa said. "The pressure has allowed for them to learn from their mistakes and know what it takes to win and make this a special season."

Proof of this, Kroupa said, was the 47-35 win over the defending state champions, Millard South.

"This is the deepest team I've ever had," Kroupa said. "We have great senior leaders and good underclassmen that can lead the team as well and that win proved this."

Bradley University commit Inia Jones said they have a great shot at winning state because of how close the team is.

"I think our chemistry is unmatched," Jones said. "We are thankful for the time we've had with each other, not only the court but getting to know each other on a deeper level."

Kroupa agreed, saying they are great leaders on the court and around the school.

"They do a great job of promoting the team first," Kroupa said. "Leadership just comes natural to these girls."

Jones said the players will keep working hard to make this season special.

"We are more than teammates, we are sisters for life," Jones said. "That is why I think this season will be so memorable."



The five seniors pose for a picture clockwise from top left: Inia Jones, Kiara Baptiste, Lilliana Petersen, Natasha Wilson, Paris Devers
Photo Courtesy of Paris Devers

Senior girls' wrestler hopes to continue state streak

Grace Sunseri
staff writer

Senior Angie Rose has been the only girls' wrestler to make it to state the past two years and plans to do it again for her last season.

Rose started wrestling her freshman year after not making the basketball team. She had connections with a coach, and he encouraged her to join.

Her inaugural season didn't have much action. She was wrestling boys and only competed in two matches. But that would all change her sophomore year.

Rose felt like a leader for the other girls because she had experience. "I was like a leader to them because I had done it before," Rose said. She went on to districts where she placed first. At state she would go on to win the silver medal.

"My junior season was kinda rough," Rose said. A knee injury she got in middle school started acting up. Her kneecap would pop out of place many times that season. Still, she went on to districts and placed fourth, qualifying her for state. At state she was beat out, or lost twice, so she was eliminated.

The start to this season is similar to her last as she is still dealing with an injury. "It's always hard as an athlete to be injured," Rose said. "[The coaches] can't put me in."

The rocky start hasn't hindered any plans for state. Her original goal was to go undefeated, but she already lost in a match. Rose seems unshaken by this though. "I don't plan to lose anymore after this." She is also determined to get first at state: "I want that gold medal," she said.

In spite of the challenges she is facing, Rose wants to have a fun senior season. She is also eager to help the other girls on the team. "I don't want to be alone this time [at state]," she said. "I'd love to have them on my side at state."

Rose doesn't want her wrestling career to end next year. She is on college recruitment squads and has been talking to coaches.



Angie Rose prepares for a match last season
Photo Courtesy of Central Wrestling

Unified bowling wraps up season at districts

Hadley Forsen-Yepes
copy editor

Central's 2023 unified bowling season has come to an end, with Omaha South High School taking home the district trophy. Central's fourth-place finish did not qualify the team for the state competition, but despite this upset, the bowlers reflect on the season fondly and are already eager for next year's journey to state.

Unified bowling partners Alternative Curriculum Program (ACP) student athletes with general education mentors. The athletes became close with their mentors this year, which they believe contributed to their success in practices and competitions.

Junior Hattie Moeller, a mentor on the team, said that a highlight of the season was the first competition when Central beat South. "[The athletes] were all really excited about that because last year we lost a lot, and I think starting off with a win was really exciting for all [of] them," Moeller said.

Markell Buckley, a junior ACP bowler, benefitted from the enthusiasm surrounding the first win of the year. "The season was pretty good," Buckley remarked, but he feels that the team "fell off" as they began to feel the pressure of advancing to state.

Buckley and senior Mario Lopez were the only two ACP students on the team selected to compete at districts on Nov. 28. Additionally, three mentors attended the competition: Moeller, Ian Petrick and Valur Jaksha. Buckley and Lopez were humbly unsure why they were the only athletes selected to attend state, but Unified Bowling Coach Gerald Kreber intentionally chose the two athletes to represent Central at districts. "They, throughout the season, scored the

highest averages. ... they were the most consistent performers."

"District was awesome – if we only did half the tournament," Kreber said. "At the halfway point, we were only four pins off the lead." Ultimately, South and Burke gained momentum and surpassed Central. Kreber is proud of the fight that the Central athletes put up, even though the outcome was not what they had hoped for.

The bowlers have undoubtedly grown since the beginning of the season. Some, like Markell, have gained a determination to win that they will carry into next year's season. Others, like Lopez, simply had fun regardless of the outcome of their games. A few, like sophomore ACP student Zuhur Farah, found that the sport helped them develop emotional regulation skills. "It taught me to have fun, always controlling my anger and all," Farah said.

Moeller noticed that the athletes gained confidence in their bowling skills this year while simultaneously growing closer to their teammates. The team's tight-knit bond is perfectly illustrated by the fact that Farah's favorite moment of the season had nothing to do with her own success but with her teammate's. "I like the part where Zion got a strike," she said. "It was amazing."

Avery Gilbreath, who has been a mentor on the team for four years, encourages students to join. She mentioned that this season, there was a 2:1 mentor-to-athlete ratio. Gilbreath hopes this gap will be closed next year with more participation from ACP students. Many of these students intend to continue with the sport and hope that their peers choose to join them.

The unified bowling team had what they would view as a successful season overall, but the athletes are already eager for next year when they hope to redeem themselves by working even harder to send Central back to the state competition, which they last attended in 2022.