



## Black History Month Film Festival Returned—With a Twist

By Benjamin LeBlanc

The PVCA Black History Month Film Festival made a return on February 10th, this time supplemented by six mini-lessons that take a more expansive look at Black history. Like last year, students chose their preferred movie in advance. They spent the morning watching the movie and discussing it in groups.

Middle school science teacher, Mrs. Callender, who helped organize the event, said the festival and the mini-lessons are only the first step toward creating a more integrated curriculum that will be taught year-round starting from the elementary school level. “If we begin in earlier grades, then maybe these discussions would be easier... and not breed discord,” she said.

The mini-lessons are wide-ranging and are being taught to middle and high schoolers in subjects such as Bible, history, science and English. The mini-lessons relate to “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”, a poem Langston Hughes wrote when he was 17 that uses



ivers to symbolize different parts of African American history.

“The poem begins with the Euphrates, a well-known river in the Bible, and ends with the Mississippi river. The journey from each river in time will hopefully give a much larger context to the journey of Black people,” said Mrs. Callender.

The movies and lessons will serve to fill in the gaps in the narrative of Black history, as well as explore the idea that human beings, in all their variety, are a part of the same human race, according to high school English teacher Mrs. Witherow.

“We didn’t want to focus exclusively on the Civil Rights Movement or the Civil War or things that were particularly difficult in African American history,” she said. “Instead, we wanted to emphasize the long, rich history of African Americans and think about the experiences that all people share as

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## Seniors Explore Career Opportunities Through Capstone Projects

By Alexa Walker

The Senior Class of 2022 had the opportunity to be a part of a new course: the Senior Capstone. The majority of the students chose to take part in the internship option of the class, where they would become involved in the field of their choice and cultivate a better understanding of their future careers.

“Even though it’s gross sometimes, it’s a lot of fun because the animals are super cute and I’ve learned things that I wouldn’t have known otherwise”

*Emma Carlson ('22), on the benefits of the Capstone*

Participating students may also complete a business venture or an artistic project, which they will present to a review committee at the end of the year at a Capstone Fair.

Benjamin LeBlanc ('22) is shadowing the editor of the Westfield News and Agawam Reminder. “While I wasn’t super excited at first to be shadowing someone doing desk work, it proved vital to me as editor of my school newspaper,” he said. “I definitely have better organization skills now when it comes to assigning stuff to reporters and digital format-

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## PVCA Reacts to the Duffs’ Retirement

By Benjamin LeBlanc



On December 9th, PVCA families received an unusual letter from school headmaster Mr. Duff. The first line read: “I have mixed emotions as I write this letter to formally announce my retirement as headmaster of Pioneer Valley Christian Academy by June 30, 2023.”

A source of stability and strength at the school for nearly 45 years, the announcement of Mr. Duff’s retirement was met with both sadness and acceptance. “It comes to a point where you have to be done and it’s sad,” said 4th grade teacher Mrs. Weferling, another longtime fixture of the school.

Mr. Duff initially planned to retire at



the end of the 2021-2022 school year, but was asked to stay another year in order to give the board of directors enough time to find a replacement—9 months, to be exact. According to Mr. Duff, the school hired a search firm to select a group of candidates based on a profile they will construct of the school. The candidates will be assessed by an interview committee composed of parents and teachers, who will make recommendations to the school board. Only then will the board of directors vote on the new headmaster.

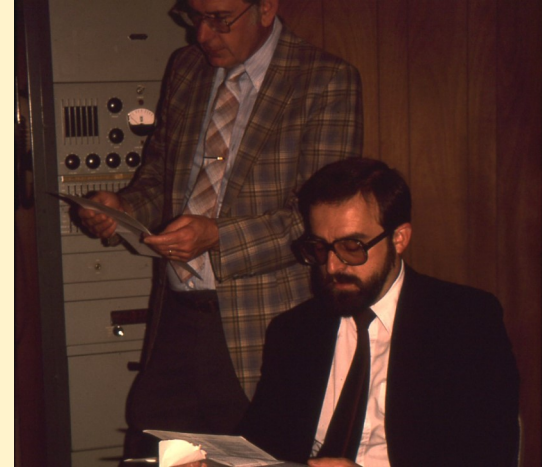
Even though the new headmaster is

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Mr. Duff (far left) unveils Plumtree location in 1981



Mr. Duff (right) in 1981

## RETIREMENT, Continued from page 1

expected to be hired by this time next year, Mr. Duff will complete his term both to allow the new headmaster to acclimate to PVCA and finish his headmastership at his own school, making for a smooth transition all around.

Mr. Duff's journey as headmaster began when his father, who founded the first Christian schools in Maine and New Hampshire in the 50s, was asked to start what would become the first PVCA high school wing in 1977. The school, founded in 1972, was then a small elementary wing that operated out of the basement of First Baptist Church in East Longmeadow. Mr. Duff was teaching in Maine when his father asked him if he would be willing to take his place as headmaster of PVCA once the high school was established. So, during 1979 and 1980, Mr. Duff worked as assistant headmaster before taking over in the 1980-1981 school year.

Since then, Mr. Duff has led the school through multiple relocations and expansions, from an elementary wing with less than 100 students to the 25 acre k-12 campus of today. But Mr. Duff hopes his legacy is measured in the strength of the school's core values: "my hope is that the school will remain faithful to the scriptures and not become an institution that forsakes God," he said. Because otherwise, "we might as well shut our doors for good."

Though Mr. Duff's retirement was forthcoming, teachers said the stability his decades of service provided will be deeply missed, especially when considering that the average term of a headmaster of a Christian school is three years.

"I will miss his wise, steady counsel," said Mrs. Weferling, a longtime friend of the Duffs who has taught at PVCA since its founding. "He doesn't let anything rile him up. He says, 'OK, this is what we're facing. Let's find a solution to this. And it's always based on what God would want us to do.'"

Furthermore, "[Mr. Duff] is a serv-

ant. And I think that's one of the keys of why he is so effective, because he may be headmaster and in charge of big things, but he'll put his work clothes on and come over here and work, pick up garbage, do whatever he needs to do to make things work," she said.

Above all, teachers noted his commitment to maintaining the core values of the school.

"He's been true to the mission. He's emphasized that we all stay true to this mission and that we fully understand exactly what a Christian worldview means to a teacher in a classroom with students," said Spanish teacher Mrs. Mozdzanowski.

**"The wisdom he imparts is  
valuable to any  
teenager going into the world"**

*Ian Feragne (22'), on Mr. Duff's Sociology class*

Similarly, Mr. David said, "The number one thing that's always impressed me about [Mr. Duff] and how he led the school was his fierce determination to be Christ-centered. He's always kept that number one."

Even students, who have a comparatively narrower view of Mr. Duff's impact on the school, acknowledged the unfillable hole his absence will leave.

"Mr. Duff is possibly the single most important, central and hardworking person in this school, and frankly I don't think we'll ever have a better headmaster," said Ian Feragne ('22). He added that Mr. Duff always engaged students with discussions on complex topics in his chapels and sociology class.

"The wisdom he imparts is valuable to any teenager going into the world," he said.

Other students noted the challenges his retirement presented for the school.

"You can't just say, 'another person is gonna come in and pretend he's been here for 50 years.' It's just not gonna happen..."

said John Russel ('22). "But change is inevitable at this point. [What matters] is how the school will adapt to it."

Administration assistant Mrs. Duff, who is approaching her 31st year at the school, said in an email that she would be retiring at the same time as Mr. Duff. Beyond her administrative work, Mrs. Duff had doubled as a school nurse before one was hired this year.

Speaking of her retirement, Mrs. Duff said, "I love the students with all my heart and will miss them greatly," adding, "My greatest joy has been getting to know the students, watch them grow, graduate, get married and sometimes enroll their own children. I have been blessed beyond words."

For teachers who are close to retirement themselves after serving alongside Mr. and Mrs. Duff for decades, their retirement marked a watershed moment in the history of the school. The realization held sadness for what once was, and promise for the future as the old guard of the school handed the reins over to a new generation of leaders and educators.

"[The Duffs] will still be my friends. We'll still be doing things together, but it won't be in the same context, which will be really hard" said Mrs. Weferling. "Coming to the end of your ministry, you look back and see that God's provision and his faithfulness is so clearly evident in everything that's taken place."

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descendants of Adam and Eve."

As an example of how the Film Festival in particular focused on African culture as a whole, students had the opportunity to watch *The Queen of Katwe*, the Disney biopic about Ugandan chess champion Phiona Mutesi.

"Ultimately, the goal is to highlight that God is the Creator," said Mrs. Callender. "[To have a] sin-nature is to believe that individuals are 'beneath', 'inferior', or 'less-than'. In fact, it is the antithesis of God's command to 'let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor' (Romans 12: 9-10)."





## CAPSTONE PROJECTS, Continued from page 1

ting—as well as some practical wisdom for reporting.” Ben is currently the editor-in-chief of the PVCA Talon and is using the skills he acquired from his internship to create a more structured and smooth-running team of reporters.

“[The internship] definitely gave me the preparation I needed for working in that field that I wouldn’t have been able to get on my own,” said Ben, who hopes to begin to do his own reporting in his internship and continue his work with journalism.

Jillian Roberts (‘22) works at the Boys and Girls Club in Springfield. “I watch kids basically,” she said. “I feel that it’s really fun to play with them and to just be around them. The 10-13 [year-olds] are so goofy.”

She notes that the kids have difficulty getting to know her and trust her enough to be around her. “I basically just talk to the kids about their day or tell them where to go,” said Roberts. She expects her experience with children will help prepare her for a life in social work.

Jacob Brosseau (‘22) is focusing on different forms of construction in his internship. “I like the job, it’s fun and keeps me constantly active,” said Brosseau. Through his work, he has successfully completed multiple porches and is in the process of flipping two houses.

Joshua Shumskiy (‘22) has been working with Mrs. Funchion on the school’s marketing and newspaper. “I like my internship because of how creative designing advertisements allows me to be,” said Shumskiy. He hopes his work with technology and crea-



Entrepreneurship students will create a website for their businesses. Mrs. Funchion has agreed to assist students in designing websites that will meet the needs of their businesses.



Students who are completing the entrepreneurship option will complete a business plan and website in lieu of the research paper. The business plan must include a mission statement, goals, a marketing plan, pricing strategy, SWOT analysis, and competition analysis.



Each student will participate in a mock interview that will be scheduled by PVCA. The interviewer will provide each student with feedback.

Source: PVCA Capstone Guide

tive direction will bring him success in his later career.

Emma Carlson (‘22) is doing her internship at the Lupa Zoo. She feeds the animals and cleans the cages, giving her hands-on experience that she hopes will help her run her own zoo in the future. “Even though it’s gross sometimes, it’s a lot of fun because the animals are super cute and I’ve learned things that I wouldn’t have known otherwise,” she said.

Alexa Walker (‘22) is shadowing a lawyer from McLane and McLane Law Firm. She has been to court, read case transcripts, and listened in on several online hearings. “While I’m not sure I want to become a lawyer, the experience has given me a greater appreciation for those working hard in such a difficult field,” said Walker. She believes what she has learned will be useful to whatever she decides to do in the future.

Alison Witherow (‘22) has been monitoring a social skills group for teens with special needs and a group for younger girls with anxiety. “The capstone has been an excellent opportunity for me to gain experience and learn more about my future career. I have loved my internship and am so glad to have this experience,” she said.

The Capstone handbook the seniors were given, written by Mrs. Lindsay Witherow, states that “The capstone is open to seniors who are in good academic standing and have proven themselves to be self-motivated, independent learners.” Along with their internship, the seniors will continue to create a major research paper or business website that will be presented at a Capstone Fair at the end of the year.

## Students Face College Application Process

By Alison Witherow

Most high school students begin the college application process at the start of senior year. However, because it is a long, stressful process to apply to colleges and then wait for the results, many seniors put it off for as long as possible.

“I would have to agree with the normal consensus: college applications are extremely stressful,” said Alexa Walker (‘22). “However, when everything is all over and done with, the next few decisions are more clear.” Most of PVCA’s class of 2021 agreed that applying for college is a stressful yet fruitful step toward independence that should be taken sooner rather than later.

“My application process was by no means easy... I learned the hard way that applying last minute is not the way to go. Each college requires different essays and information about you,” said Marcos Aikman (‘22).

Because many students got a late start to the application process, they had little time to complete the application before it was due. They found it challenging to decide where to apply and were driven to internet research to ensure that their preferred schools were achievable.

“At first it was hard to get into [the application process] because I didn’t really have a good idea of what to look for, but after a

few hours of research, I was able to get the framework for what I wanted, mainly a college that was affordable and had good programs for my major,” said Joshua Shumsky. “I applied to the best schools that matched my criteria, and it was exciting once I got some of my first responses.”

A majority of the senior class is currently in the process of waiting for acceptances from colleges they applied to, but may believe the worst part of the college application process is over.

“Applying to colleges can seem like one of the scariest things that you have to do in life,” said Kayla Calendar (‘22). “There is always

pressure to apply to the best schools and to keep your fingers crossed to be accepted, but the truth is, the fear of actually getting to the point of applying had to be the hardest part for me since the application itself [was the] the easiest step. But once I applied, all my anxiety was silenced by the peaceful part of just waiting.”

Despite the long and arduous process, students are finally getting their results from their colleges and a majority of them have been accepted to most of the colleges they applied to. Now students are tasked with reviewing financial aid offers and making their final commitments.

“Once I applied, all my anxiety was silenced by the peaceful part of just waiting,”

Kayla Callender (‘22), on waiting for acceptances

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## CONTRIBUTORS

Benjamin LeBlanc

editor-in-chief

Alexa Walker

managing editor

Ian Feragne

formatter

Alison Witherow

staff writer





## PVCA Varsity Basketball Wins Back-to-Back Senior Night Games

By Marcos Aikman

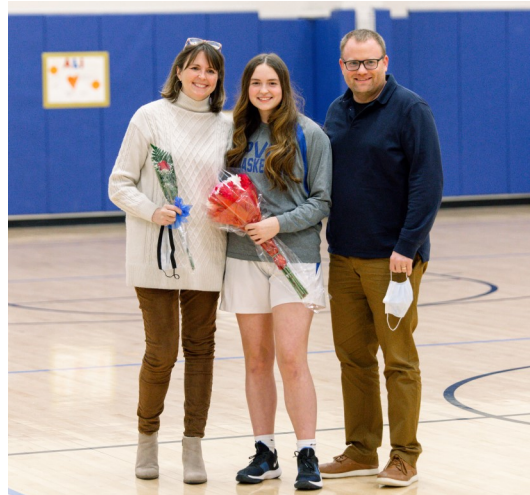
Last week, the PVCA Eagles hosted the Senior Night games for the boys and girls varsity basketball teams on Monday and Tuesday, respectively. The seniors on both teams include Max Johnson, Griffin Nicoll, Azarel Navarro, Alexa Walker, and Ali Witherow. In preparing to host the events, Mrs. Nicoll, the Booster Club, and various high school students volunteered their time to set up decorations and posters commemorating the seniors.

On Monday, the boys varsity team faced the Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School, a suspenseful game in which both teams chased each other's leads for all four quarters. In the final minute of the game, with the score tied at 38 apiece, Griffin Nicoll sealed the win for the Eagles with an emphatic block coupled with a put-back layup that came just

after he scored a free throw, handing the Eagles a 41-38 win.

The next day, the girls game ended in a similar fashion. Both the Eagles and Baystate Academy battled for a sizable lead in the fast-paced game to no avail. However, in the fourth quarter, the Eagles generated a slight lead and managed to pull a 37-33 victory against Baystate Academy.

Both the boys and the girls varsity teams put on a riveting show in their respective Senior Night games that fans are unlikely to soon forget. Indeed, the fans made the most of PVCA's home advantage: cheers were thunderous after successful plays, and shouts of "defense!" coupled with the stomping of feet rang out when the Eagles were forced to defend.



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## SAT Will Become Shorter, Easier Online Test

# POLITICS

By Benjamin LeBlanc

## Facebook Knows IG Harms Teen Mental Health

**What happened?** Beginning in 2024, the SAT will become significantly easier and more accessible, College Board said in a statement. Among the changes: reading passages will be shorter and have only one question; calculators will be allowed on all math questions, which will be “less wordy”; and the test will take two hours to complete instead of three. The most dramatic change, however, is that the test will be taken entirely online. In lieu of bringing a no. 2 pencil and making their mark heavy and dark, students will take the test on their own devices at testing sites, which will allow for a more flexible testing schedule and relieve educators from having to pack and ship testing materials.

**Why does it matter?** The change seems to be in response to the thousands of colleges that became test-optional at the start of the pandemic. Consequently, only 1.7 million students took the SAT in 2022, down from 2.2 million in 2020. This year, over 76 percent of colleges plan to drop SAT requirements, including Ivies such as Harvard and UCLA. While the lack of testing sites caused by COVID-19 drove many colleges to drop SAT requirements in 2020, the main reason for the recent developments has to do with questions over the utility of the test itself. Critics have said that the SAT is a flawed tool because it favors affluent students, even though 84% of students of all socioeconomic backgrounds prefer to include their scores in their college applications, according to College Board.

**What are they saying?** “It felt a lot less stressful, and a whole lot quicker than I thought it’d be... The shorter passages helped me concentrate more on what the question wanted me to do. Plus, you don’t have to remember to bring a calculator or a pencil.”

—Natalia Cossio, an 11th grade student who took the new digital AP test



**What happened?** A recent Wall Street Journal investigation into Facebook revealed the company knows its photo sharing app, Instagram, badly harms teen girls’ mental health, among other things. The investigation, which is based on internal documents the Journal obtained from a former employee at the company, details how the tech giant consistently prioritizes profit over user safety in areas such as user data, election integrity and misinformation.

**Why does it matter?** According to internal research Facebook conducted into teen mental health, “social comparison” is worse on Instagram than on other social networks such as Snapchat or Tik Tok, as the app focuses heavily on body and lifestyle. The company found that Instagram worsens body image for one in three teen girls. Furthermore, 13% of U.K. teens and 6% of American teens say they became suicidal on the app, and one in five say it lowered their self-esteem, with U.K. girls most affected. Facebook identified the fear of missing out as a

### Facebook’s Findings:

- Instagram worsens body image for one in three teen girls.
- 13% of U.K. teens and 6% of American teens say they became suicidal on the app
- One in five teens say it lowered their self-esteem, with U.K. girls most affected.

main cause of the problem, stating that “young people are acutely aware that Instagram can be bad for their mental health, yet are compelled to spend time on the app for fear of missing out on cultural and social trends.” However, since adolescents comprise a large part of Instagram’s user base—nearly half of its users are between the ages of 13 and 22—Facebook has been slow to put safety measures in place or admit to wrongdoing that could hurt their profitability. Instead, even amid bipartisan criticism, including in several congressional hearings, the company started work on a version of Instagram tailor-made for children.

## Features

### MOVIE AND TV REVIEWS

## The Mask of Zorro By Ian Feragne

1998 • Adventure/Western • PG-13

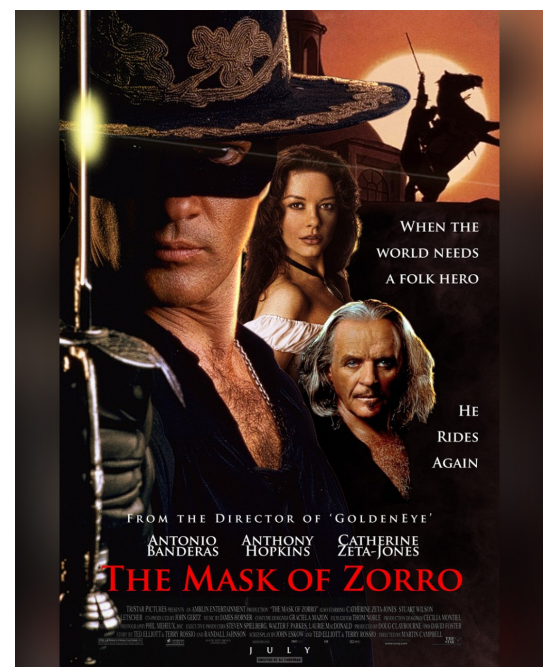
**T**he *Mask of Zorro* was made in 1998 and was quite successful, but when I tell people about it, they never seem to know what I’m talking about. It has a star studded cast of actors, with Antonio Banderas, Catherine Zeta-Jones, and Anthony Hopkins putting on serious and comedic performances in parallel to each other.

The movie is set in the area of what now encompasses Southern California and Northwest Mexico before the United States owned California and Mexico broke free from Spain. The visual style of the movie is vibrant: reds, greens, and whites are splashed atop a background of adobe buildings and sprawling marketplaces. It holds a sort of idyllic Mexican-Spanish charm that showcases the beauty of the region and the surrounding landscape, something that I think is lost on more modern movies that focus on the slums of modern Mexico instead of its natural beauty.

*The Mask of Zorro* is filled with action

scenes that are equal parts slapstick and intensity, which creates a nice balance of hilarity and melancholy that allows the movie to mean something while not becoming overly cynical. By toggling between these serious and silly moments like a bumpy car ride, the movie runs roughshod over the audience’s emotions. For instance, one minute the audience witnesses a man getting pantsed before becoming watery-eyed over the death of a character who was introduced just minutes earlier. In this way, “Zorro” captures the artistic balance between satire and emotional impact that many movies have failed to achieve in recent years.

Even though the movie juggles a variety of moods and themes, all loose ends are eventually tied in a believable and satisfying fashion. As a consequence, *The Mask of Zorro* is a good movie choice for anyone who enjoys a classic hero’s tale with a comedic twist.



*The Mask of Zorro* is a good movie choice for anyone who enjoys a classic hero’s journey with a comedic twist.