

the Talon

TOP 5 GIFTS STUDENTS WANT FOR CHRISTMAS

From money to clothes and even pets, students have described a wide variety of interests for the holidays. What are you wishing for this year, and is it the same as many other students?

MORE ON PAGE 9

STARBUCKS HOLIDAY MENU

Peppermint mochas and gingerbread chais are starting to appear- have you been wondering if Starbucks holiday menu is worth your time this year?

MORE ON PAGE 15

BASKETBALL 2025-26 SEASON

Hopes are high for the upcoming basketball season, but the teams will look very different this year. Who are the new, promising stars and who will be missing in the lineup?

MORE ON PAGE 16

Severna Park High School students celebrate the upcoming holidays with festive decorations, activities, drinks, food, crafts, outfits, lights, elves, snow and more. Photos taken by the Talon staff.

December 15, 2025

NEWS IN BRIEF

What to Know About Nov. Elections

Artin Tarpinian | Staff Writer

The midterm elections were held on Nov. 4, which became rather publicized. Elections were held this year in states such as New Jersey, Virginia, California and New York. In New York city there was a tight mayoral race, however, Democrat Zohran Mamdani ended up winning the election, becoming the first Muslim mayor of New York City. In Virginia there was a tight race, but Democrat Abigail Spanberger edged out Republican Winsome Earl-Sears, the. In New Jersey, Democrat Mikie Sherrill beat Republican Jack Ciattarelli.



Poster of Zohran Mamdani calling on his fellow New Yorkers to pledge their vote to him. Mamdani's use of social media helped to boost him past his rival candidates. Photo by Zohran Mamdani Election Committee.

Ocean City Lights

Angelina Callaham | Staff Writer

Every winter, Ocean City, Maryland transforms from a quiet beach town into a sparkling wonderland thanks to its annual Winterfest of Lights. As soon as it opens, the entrance of Northside Park is greeted by millions of glittering lights that stretch across more than 58 acres of walking paths, trees and waterfront views according to oceano.com. The festival runs each year from Nov. 20 through Dec. 31, lighting up the town with color and



Junior Angelina Callaham and her sister, Kailah, at Ocean City, Northside Park recreation complex. Photo by Angie Callaham.

joy from 5:30-9:30 p.m. Unlike traditional drive-through light shows, Ocean City's Winterfest is a walk-through experience, allowing guests to slow down and take in the magic.

Length of Winter Break

Jay Cameron | Staff Writer

School breaks are nice ways to give students some relaxation time away from school to spend with family or friends. With one of the most memorable and awaited breaks being the hiatus of the winter holiday season. But do students feel that they have enough time to enjoy winter festivities? This school year, AACPS schools have a winter break of 10 school days. But to some students, this isn't nearly enough. Junior Sheehan Jeffers said "Winter break should be at least a month. Having only ten days off doesn't allow you to have time for a family vacation



This AACPS school year winter break is a total of 10 school days spanning between December 22nd and January 2nd. Graphic by Jay Cameron.

and to spend time with your friends, and we shouldn't have to choose."

TABLE OF CONTENTS

News In Brief	2
Always Ice Cream Ad	3
Holiday Concerts in Severna Park	4-5
Federal Government Shutdown	6-7
Naughty or Nice	8
Gift Giving on a Small Budget	8-9
Top Five Gifts	9
A Festive "Die Hard" Dilemma	10-11
Teachers Going Above and Beyond	12
Severna Park Students 2026 New Year's Resolution	13
2025 AP Student Goals	14
Starbucks Holiday Menu	15
Basketball 2025-2026 Season	16

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WHO WE ARE The Talon is the principle news publication and public forum of Severna Park High School, which is located on 60 Robinson Road, Severna Park, Maryland 21146. Phone: 410-544-0900
WEBSITE sptalon.com

SCHOOL POPULATION Students: 1854. Staff: 163.

ASSOCIATIONS The Talon is a member of the Columbia Scholastic Press Association and Quill & Scroll International Journalism Association. It has won Gold and Silver Medals from CSPA.

DISTRIBUTION Staff members typically distribute 200 papers to the student body. Magazines are available to pick up in the hallways, the main office and throughout the English department. Subscribers may pay \$50 to have the publication mailed to their home. PDF copies of The Talon are found under Past Print at www.sptalon.com.

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HOLIDAY CONCERTS IN SEVERNA PARK

SPHS is hosting the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra

Anya Diggs | Lifestyle Editor

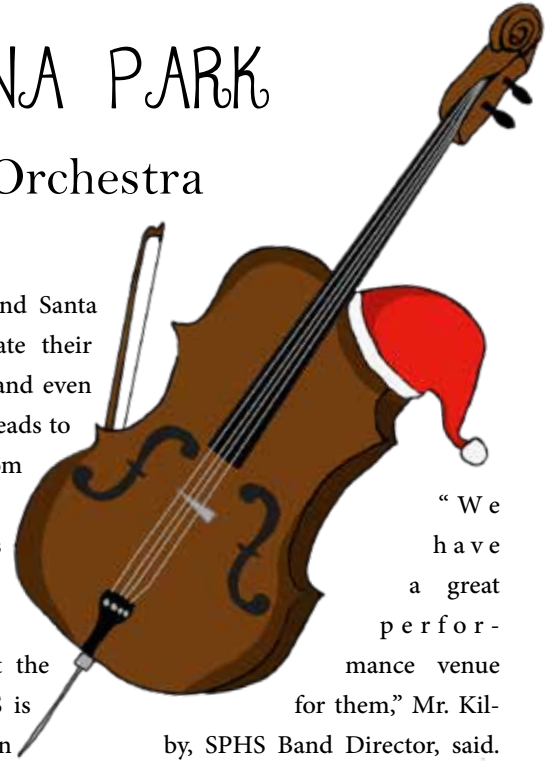
As the holiday season reaches its height, more and more opportunities to celebrate are arriving. Coming to Severna Park High School, The Annapolis Symphony Orchestra (ASO) will perform its annual Holiday Pops concert on Saturday, Dec. 20 at 3:00 pm. Seventy world-class musicians will be playing holiday classics such as "Joy to the World," "Hansel and Gretel," and "The Parade of the Tin Soldiers." All students are encouraged to attend, and

students involved in the music program can buy tickets at a reduced price.

With their Holiday Pops concert, the ASO aims to bring the joy, beauty and warmth of the holidays to life with a combination of classic holiday tunes and carols. To engage the audience even further, they include a group singalong at the end with the Bowie State Choir. The musicians will be participating in the festive cheer by wearing

holiday sweaters and Santa hats. Some decorate their harps with tinsel, and even putting on horse heads to get a chuckle from the audience.

This marks the second year the ASO will be performing at the high school. SPHS is centrally located in the county, making it an ideal scene for attracting as many people as possible.



"We have a great performance venue for them," Mr. Kilby, SPHS Band Director, said. "They get booked up a lot and they want to play someplace else in the county other than

The Baltimore Symphony Orchestra and the SPHS Orchestra are starting off this holiday season with the beautiful sound of music. Although this concert will not be a direct collab, Severna Park High School is honored to host the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra once again this holiday season. "They're offering the concert at a reduced cost to our students who are in Band and Orchestra" orchestra director Eric Kilby said. Graphics by Angie Callahan

Tafon Dec. 15, 2025

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just [Maryland Hall].”

However, the ASO usually performs at Maryland Hall and they are doing so again this year on Dec. 19 while accompanied by the Bowie State University Choir. Both the ASO and the Bowie State University (BSU) Choir will have a third concert at the Dionne Warwick Theater on Dec. 21.

For the students that

are unable to attend the ASO performance, there are other opportunities to get into the December spirit, like the holiday concert performed by the SPSHS students.

“The band and orchestra play on Wednesday night, [the week of Dec. 20]... and the following night, the jazz band, the percussion ensemble, and Sol, the acapella group, per-

form.” Mr. Kilby said. All of these performers will be a part of the final holiday concert during school the last Friday before break, which all students will attend.

Whether it is catching a holiday concert, making cookies or having a movie marathon, everyone should get the chance to take a break and enjoy the heartwarming feel-

ings of the holidays as the year comes to an end. The Holiday Pops concert is one way to celebrate the season.

“They’re just playing holiday tunes to get folks in the holiday spirit,” Kilby said.



AJ Scott Q&A

The student sound director.

Anya Diggs | Lifestyle Editor

Q: What does your job typically entail working on a production?

A: During an actual show on a production my job is primarily mixing audio. Which encompasses a lot of different things such as ensuring levels of the vocals or the band aren’t too high or too low, making sure the band is well mixed and no instrument is too overpowering, eliminating feedback, and ensuring the sound of the show is reflective of the directors vision.

Q: Have there been any other outside entities besides the Annapolis Symphony Orchestra you’ve worked on?

A: Unknown to most people, the auditorium at our school is available to be rented out for outside performances at our school. I have worked with a band called The Eastport Oyster Boys, various solo artists, as well as dance companies performing seasonal performances or shows such as the Nutcracker.

Q: As the sound director, many other people are usually working with you and what do you each

do?

A: For large productions such as Rock ‘n Roll Revival or the fall musical, we all will set up the mics for the band and all of their individual headphone channels then wire them all back to the auditorium’s sound system as well as a board backstage. That board we use to control the each band member’s individual headphones, what instruments they’re hearing and how loud each instrument is. We will also test and troubleshoot all of those microphones and headphones prior to the show.

During the show itself there will be three people at the sound board in the auditorium, two mixing the vocals and band for the house—or the audience—and one controlling the sound effects within the show. There is two people at the board backstage to monitor the levels of the band and ensure each instrument’s microphone is working properly. And there is three people in the recording studio: two mixing the band and vocals and the AV director, Payton Gerwig.

Q: Have you always been part of

sound or do you have experience working other other in tech crew?

A: Since I’ve been in stage crew I’ve always been interested in sound for productions and during the show itself but before those shows there is lots to be done. Stage crew builds all of the sets for our shows so I have helped with the structural aspect of building sets as well as the artistic aspect such as painting the set itself or making decorations for the lobby.

Q: Is tech/sound crew doing anything to prepare for the SPSHS winter concert coming up?

A: Stage crew will be assisting with the SPSHS winter dance concert.

The sound team will be controlling the songs for each of the dances and the lighting team will be bringing the essence of the dances to life with lights and colors on stage and making sure all of the phenomenal dancers can

be seen by the whole auditorium.

Q: Are you planning on working the ASO concert on Dec. 20 and what will that entail?

A: I would love to work with the ASO on Dec. 20. For sound, I am unsure what it will entail because the ASO may have their own way of setting up certain sound aspects or have their own sound engineer. Also, since they are such a large group they may not require any sound assistance and rely on the acoustics of the space for their sound.

AJ Scott is the Student Sound Director for Severna Park High School’s tech crew. SPSHS tech crew will be assisting in this years wibter concert, where the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra will be making an appearance. This holiday season will be off to a great start all thanks to the sound of music. Photo by AJ Scott



FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SHUT DOWN

This year's government shutdown was the longest in American history, surpassing the previous record of 35 days in 2018-2019.

Elsa Webster | Editor-in-Chief

The federal government set the record for the longest government shutdown lasting 43 days, surpassing the previous record for a government shutdown of 35 days lasting from Dec 22, 2018 through Jan 25, 2019 during President Trump's last term. The recent government shutdown went into effect on Oct 1, 2025 after Congress failed to pass a bill funding federal services.

dential term, including the now second longest shutdown.

In the United States, the government shuts down when Congress fails to reach an agreement on federal spending. This leaves hundreds of thousands of employees, approximately 750,000 federal employees, furloughed.

Why did the government shut down?

The Oct 1 shutdown occurred after both Democrats and Republicans failed to pass a bill funding government services. Since the 2024 election, the Republican party holds the majority in Congress in both chambers, making it easier to pass legislation in both the House and Senate. A proposed

stopgap bill had been passed in the house but neglected to get the 60 votes needed in the Senate, since the Republican party only holds 53 representatives, this resulted in the longest government shutdown since 2018.

During the shutdown, representatives from the Republican party were calling for a "clean resolution" to this problem, as the President blamed Democrats for the shutdown -- further stating that the shutdown played a role in the outcome of the election on Nov. 4. The Democratic party, however, withheld votes over their concerns about government healthcare programs for citizens. Their hope was for negotiation with the Republican party and the inclusion of an extension to expiring tax credits that will help make healthcare more affordable amid President Trump's cuts to Medicaid.

Since the Republicans needed an additional seven votes from the democrats, the democratic party attempted to leverage negotiations between the two parties to find a compromise in Congress that the President would sign. There had been several votes in Congress working to end the shutdown; however, all attempts

have failed until its end on Nov. 12.

How did the shutdown affect people?

While the estimated 750,000 employees remained furloughed, some federal workers were deemed essential, leaving them working without pay. Per the Government Employee Fair Treatment Act of 2019, furloughed employees have to receive retroactive pay, extra payment given to employees to compensate for previous underpayment, once the government reopens and normal operations are resumed. While shutdown, this caused significant problems for employees who rely on a paycheck for basic essentials such as food or medicine. Many workers chose to not work without pay. As a result, staffing shortages became more frequent in agencies such as the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), casting a pall over many American's holiday plans for the week of Thanksgiving as they feared their flights would get canceled.

Another significant issue Americans were facing amid the shutdown was the suspension of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

What is a government shutdown?

According to CNN research, the first government shutdown occurred in 1976. Since 1990, there have been six government shutdowns, with the last two positioned during President Trump's last presi-

The Capitol Building on the National Mall in Washington D.C. Since the government shutdown, operations in the Capitol Building have been halted as both Democrats and Republicans have yet to find a compromise on federal spending for the fiscal year. Photo by Elsa Webster.



(SNAP) benefits, which affect over 47 million Americans. The Department of Agriculture issued revised guidance to states on Nov. 5 that included larger partial benefits for those dependent on SNAP benefits, though the date that people were to receive these increased benefits were set to vary between states. However, President Trump made threats to the program by stating that food stamp benefits will begin only

after the government shutdown ceases, causing worry for many Americans. Since the shutdown has ended, SNAP benefits have been reinstated, although they remain uncertain coming into 2026.

Where are we now?

The government shutdown's historic 43 days have caused discourse throughout the United States, leaving many citizens frustrated with how it ended. In the end, eight mod-

erate democrats decided to make a deal with Republicans to end the government shutdown, without the healthcare extensions they were previously fighting for. This left many citizens, particularly those registered with the Democratic party feeling betrayed as they relied on those potential benefits.

The bill passed by Congress and signed by President Trump included "carve-

outs for SNAP, benefits targeted at women, infants and children, or WIC, the Department of Veterans Affairs and Congress." according to NPR. All of these programs and benefits will be funded through Sept. 2026.

By the Numbers

Representatives

8

Democrats caucus members voted for the bill (3 senators, 5 representatives)

1

Republican voted against (sen. Rand Paul Ky)

Workers

Estimated **1.4 million** employees furloughed or working without pay

730,000 federal workers worked without pay

Compensation was approx. **\$400 million** per day

How Long?

Lasted **43** days, longest in history, second longest was **35** days during Trump's first presidency

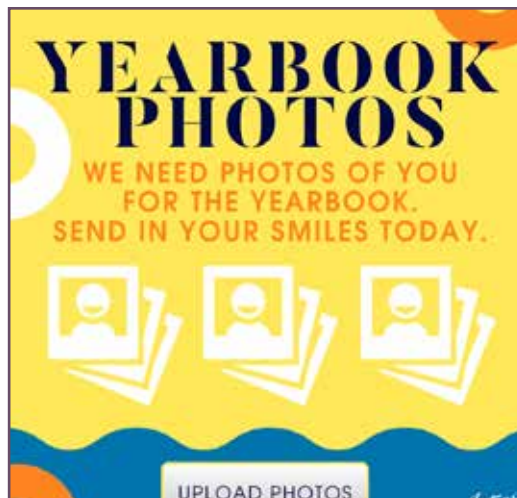
Government funded through **Jan 30**

Food Stamps

42 million; the people who stood to be cut off from full food stamp benefits on Nov 1

Cost of funding Nov food stamps was **\$92 billion**

Sources: CBS News, JP Morgan



NAUGHTY OR NICE

Which one of Santa's lists do students think their teachers belong on in 2025

Rionnah O'Connor | Features & Online Editor

Winter is a magical time for people of all ages, especially for children. Ice skating, building snowmen, sledding, baking cookies, holiday movies, and more make the holidays a wonderful time of year. Yet, anyone who celebrates Christmas knows that this time of year also comes with a unique fear: the naughty list. So, this year we're putting a fun spin on this scary childhood staple, which list do students think their teachers belong on and why?

Nice List:

To begin on a fun note, which teachers have spread the holiday cheer so far this year?

Mrs. McIntyre: "She always offers good advice"- Junior Brennan Karney

Mrs. Hill: "She's a really great teacher and she makes me interested in AP Lit"- Senior Emerson Scott

Mr. Dunbar: "He always has a lot of fun stories"- junior Megan Guerette

Mrs. Earhart: "I love how energetic she is"- sophomore Halle Bierdeman

Mr. Bryden: "He's just a really good teacher"- junior Emily John

Mrs. Mermod: "She's just a sweetheart and I really like her"- senior Val Saenz

Mrs. Kletter: "She's very reasonable and understanding"- sophomore Halle Bierdeman

Mrs. Taylor: "She's a very understanding person and makes sure we have fun in class"- junior Megan Guerette

please note that students opted to remain anonymous for their responses, but students from all grade levels were surveyed. Now, please preface that no teacher at SPHS really deserves to be on the naughty list, but if students had to pick, this is what they'd say.

Mrs. Potter: "The homework packets she gives us are really long sometimes"

Mrs. Hill: "Her outfits are so good that it makes me jealous"

Mr. Gorrick: "He always eats his Chick-Fil-A in front of us"

Mrs. Earhart: "She doesn't bring more than one rosemary sea salt bagel for Idea Day" - senior Emerson Scott

Naughty List:

Starting off,



GIFT GIVING ON

Affordable gifts about g

Kasey Nguyen | Staff Writer

The gift-giving season is approaching quickly, and for students who are trying to balance generosity with a tight budget, 2025 is shaping up to be a year of creativity over cash.

Stores rolled out holiday items earlier than ever this year, many right after Halloween, signaling a growing focus on festive spending. According to NerdWallet, Americans plan to spend about \$1,107 on holiday gifts this year, nearly \$200 more than last year's average. Still, about 74% of shoppers say rising prices



Left: Santa Clause with his naughty and nice list
Middle: This year, gift giving has become less about loved ones. Graphic by Kasey Nguyen
Right: Many kids are drawn to the new technology to gain a spot in many Christmas lists. Graphic

Taylor Dec. 15, 2025

A SMALL BUDGET

generosity, not the price tag.

ng them to cut back
k their lists.

Due to this, a shift

erway; people are

g more thought-

personal with their

Handwritten letters,

baked goods and

ts are just as popu-

re-bought presents.

Housekeeping no-

t do-it-yourself and

gifts have become

once again, as peo-

for "more personal

celebrate without

ding."

The pressure to

nd is palpable; ac-

to NBC News, 70%

ericans feel stressed

king about holiday

g. Experts suggest

a spending plan be-

ing the stores and

to a small budget

onsistent for each

Group gift exchange-

Secret Santa swaps

becoming popular

ways to keep things festive
without draining your sav-
ings.

Even high school
students are catching onto
this mindset. Junior Me-
gan Doan said regarding
thoughtful giving "You
don't have to spend a lot
to make a gift special. It's
more about showing effort,
like making something
yourself or finding a small
gift that actually means
something."

What does this
mean to you? It says that
the Holiday 2025 season
is all about personaliza-
tion, not price tags. It can
be something handmade,
a small token of a gift that
will bring a smile to some-
one's face, or a card that
says, "I appreciate you."
And the trend goes to show
that one does not need to
spend big to give big.

t preparing to bring gifts. Graphic by Angie Callaham
out spending and more about finding meaningful gifts for

ogy that releases every year in time for Christmas, leading it
by Angie Callaham

TOP FIVE GIFTS

These are the results for the top five Christmas gifts.

Ella Stoudt | Social Media Manager

During the winter
season, most people look
forward to the holidays that
surround December. Christ-
mas, a Christian holiday,
celebrates the birth of Jesus
and has become commer-
cialized more and more be-
cause of the gifts that come
with the holiday. Imagine
you wake up on Christmas
morning, just knowing that
your gift you've been want-
ing all year is beneath the
christmas tree waiting for
you. As you tear away the
wrapping paper, what gift
comes to mind? Here are
five of the gifts that come to
mind for some of the stu-
dents of Severna Park High
School when interviewed.

1. Gaming Console.

The console is the number
one gift people ask for for
Christmas. This can include
X-Box, Playstation, Virtual
Reality Set, PC and Ninten-
do. "Some games prove to be
educational and entertain-
ing," sophomore Evan Seay
said. This gift is perfect be-
cause it is long lasting. Also,
for another gift, you can add
games for the console.

2. Money

Money can make a great
gift for people, especially
if you're not sure what gift

they want. It's a good gift for
people "so that I can shop
for myself and get the things
that I didn't ask for," junior
Reese Roberts said. It's a
classic go-to gift for every-
one you don't know too well.

3. Electronics

Electronics are an amazing
gift because of the fact that
it can have many uses and
almost every teenager has
some sort of electronics. "I
like playing mobile games
like Clash Royale, and con-
necting with my peers on
social media on my phone,"
freshman Alec Braughton
said. Electronics can include
a phone, a computer, a tab-
let, an IPAD, a smart watch
and more.

4. Clothes

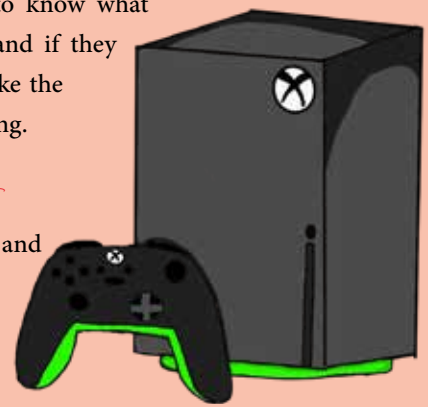
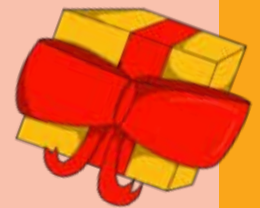
Clothes can be sentimental
to the person you are giv-
ing it to because it can "be
a good form of self expres-
sion and you also can think
about the person who gave
it to you while wearing it"
junior Charlotte Triplett
said. If you are planning on
giving someone clothes, it
is important to know what
their style is and if they
are going to like the
piece of clothing.

5. A Pet

Lastly, a cute and

furry friend can be an amaz-
ing gift this Christmas. "I
think a pet would be nice,"
junior Meave Tressler said.
There are so many kinds of
furry companions that can
be a good fit for different
people.

Getting presents for your
closest friends and fami-
ly can be rewarding to the
person you're giving it to,
but also can be rewarding to
the gifter. Giving your gift to
your friend and seeing them
smile on christmas day, is
the best gift a person can ask
for. It's important to know
what gifts to get your friends
for Christmas, use this list
for ideas.



A FESTIVE DIE HARD DILEMMA

Is Die Hard a Christmas movie, not one, or something in between?

Hal Cosler | Staff Writer

Long debated since its release, “Die Hard” has had many considerable arguments put up for it being versus not being a Christmas movie. “Die Hard” is a film set around a New York City police detective, John McClane, who travels to Los Angeles to visit his estranged wife during a Christmas Eve company’s skyscraper. In a turn of events, McClane, ends up having to battle off a terrorist takeover. Heads up for spoilers. From the beginning, it becomes easy to root for Bruce Willis’s John McClane when he is kept as the main underdog of the movie. Tasked with fighting multiple armed terrorists alone, he also has an underlying emotional conflict with his wife and their growing separation, whose relationship he is desperate to rekindle. When the ending comes around, McClane has managed to triumph over what seems like insurmountable odds, and it makes for a very cathartic ending and an overall pleasant experience of the movie. The film itself has received consistently strong reviews, with it sitting at a 94% on Rotten Tomatoes, across generations of audiences. As the movie wraps, it falls upon the audience to decide if they choose to take this movie as a well-made action film or as a Christmas classic.

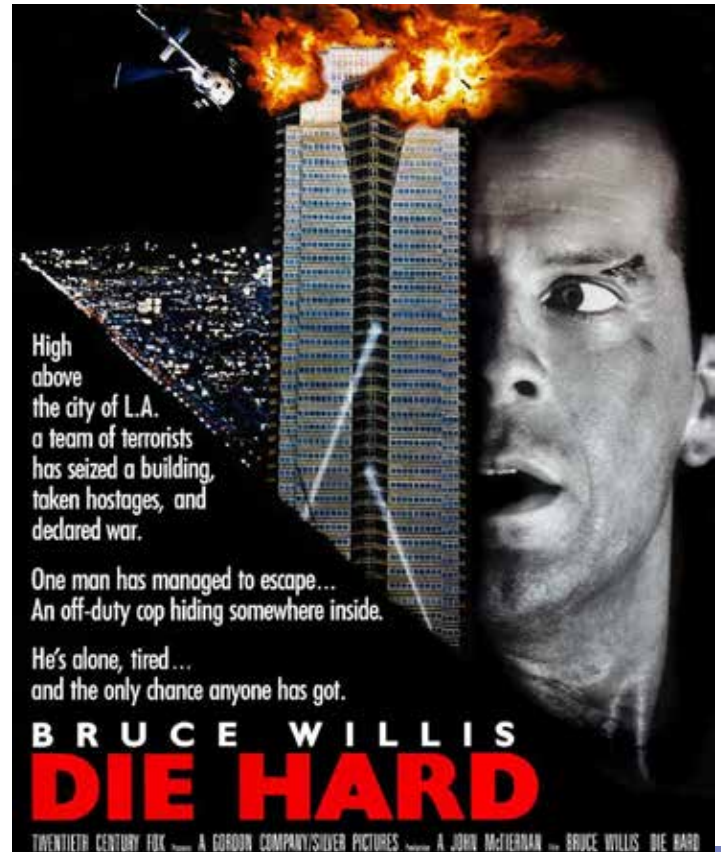
Multiple reasons have

formed over the years for both sides of the spectrum of whether “Die Hard” exists as a Christmas movie or not. One idea for it being one is the role the Christmas Eve setting plays in the film.

“It is a Christmas movie because it’s set during Christmas time. The movie wouldn’t have happened if it weren’t Christmas time,” senior Greyson DeVille said. “Bruce Willis wouldn’t have been in town.” The plot does have it as integral that the Christmas timing is what leads to McClane visit his wife to hopefully strengthen their relationship. It is also the reason why the terrorist decided to target the skyscraper, Nakatomi Plaza, assuming a more lax security and fewer people in the building because of the holiday party, leaving it more open to robbery.

This same setting is also used by people who doubt it being considered a Christmas movie.

“It does not play on any of the ideals of the Christmas movie or any of the general themes, it is an action movie that happens to be set at Christmas time,” senior Rhys Garrahy said. Here, the timing of the film is seen as purely irrelevant in its relation to it being a Christmas film, as it could be as well set during Thanksgiving



A movie that focuses on an off-duty cop fighting off a group of terrorists in a skyscraper isn't the first thing that comes to mind for a Christmas movie, yet “Die Hard” finds itself a peculiar exception to many. “A Christmas movie is one that plays with the ideals of Christmas, that being the gift of giving family and is set in a Christmas time,” senior Rhys Garrahy said. In many ways “Die Hard” does and doesn't fit into this template, leaving it up to the public to decide. Movie poster made by art director John R. Jensen.

and still serve the same purpose.

Each side takes the Christmas setting as proof of their argument, causing a further rift in the debate.

There is also the overall view of the movie that the violence, action and terrorism make it seem more like a base action thriller than anything else. However, others have taken a closer look at how the themes and characters tend to lean more towards the Christmas side of the argument, not-

ing that the heart of the story lies with McClane's inner struggles as a husband and a father, so the redemption he finds in saving his wife fits that of a Christmas story themes of love, family, and hope.

Another interesting piece to consider in this debate, is the material the movie was based on. “Nothing Lasts Forever” by Roderick Thorp is a 1979 novel that also has an off-duty cop, Joe Leland, fight off terrorists single-handedly, but focuses on darker themes

and a more corrupt world. Some differences are that the terrorists crash the Christmas Eve party of Leland's daughter's work, and the villain Anton Gruber, rather than Hans, is much more sadistic and politically motivated compared to his film counterpart. The book ends on a much darker note with Leland's daughter dying, along with the idea that Leland would likely die of his injuries soon after.

The movie essentially took the action elements of the novel and rephrased much of the emotional story, making the protagonist a younger, more likable character, adding more charm to the villain

with his simple goal of robbing the company and ending on a much more positive note. These changes do indicate the end goal of the film was to appeal to a more emotionally revealing story that people find akin to movies that focus on Christmas stories, but even that is debatable.

Bruce Willis himself, the star of the movie, said, "Die Hard is not a Christmas movie," and for some, that is enough. The more interesting take on it, though, comes from the director, John McTiernan.

"We hadn't intended it to be a Christmas movie, but the joy that came from it is what turned it into a Christmas mov-

ie," McTiernan said.

The definitive answer is that there is no definitive answer, and that public opinion will always have the final say over an interpretation of a work, not the artist.

Photo Credits:

CHRIS STORY: Clark B, (1983).

(Movie Poster) Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

ELF: Favereau J, (2003). (Movie Poster) New Line Cinema.

HOME ALONE: Columbus C, (1990). (Movie Poster) 20th Century Studios.

KLAUS: Pablos S, (2019). (Movie Poster) SPA Studios.

NATIONAL LAMPPOONS: Chechik J, (1989). (Movie Poster)

Hughes Entertainment Warner Bros.

WONDERFUL: Capra Frank, (1946). (Movie Poster) RKO Pictures and Liberty Films.

HOW THE GRINCH: Jones C, (1966). (Movie Poster) The Cat in the Hat Productions and Chuck Jones Enterprises.

GREMLINS: Dante J, (1984). (Movie Poster) Warner Bros.

POLAR EXP: Zemeckis R, (2004). (Movie Poster) ImageMovers and Warner Bros.

RUDOLPH: Roemer L and Nagashima K, (1968). (Movie Poster) Rankin/Bass Productions.

Taylor Dec. 15, 2025

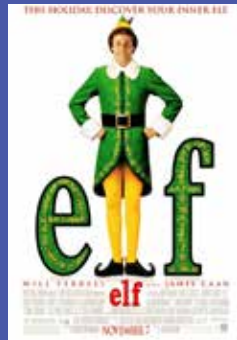
Top 10 Christmas Movies

Rankings are based on a combination of personal choice and embodiment of festive themes/ atmosphere. Extra points for nostalgic preference too.

Hal Cosler | Staff Writer



1: A Christmas Story (1983)



2: Elf (2003)



3: Home Alone (1990)



4: Klaus (2019)



5: National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation (1989)



6: It's a Wonderful Life (1946)



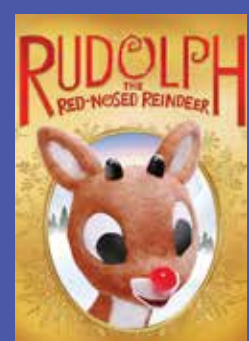
7: How the Grinch Stole Christmas (1966)



8: Gremlins (1984)



9: Polar Express (2004)



10: Rudolph the Red-Nose Reindeer (1964)

Teachers Going Above and Beyond

Mrs. Fornadel's story.

Nicol Chovanec | Online Sports Editor



Severna Park High School teacher Mrs. Fornadel was nominated for the 2025 Teacher of the Year award for Anne Arundel County. Mrs. Fornadel specializes in teaching art. She has recently taken on the role of leading the new Unified Art program.

Unified Art has been taught at the high school for three years and has been in Anne Arundel County for five years. Mrs. Fornadel assisted in writing the pilot for the Unified Art curriculum in 2018, and it was approved during the 2019-20 school year. With that, Unified Art made its debut at Severna Park High School the following school year.

Mrs. Fornadel found that there was an issue with the way Anne Arundel County organized art classes for Accommodated Core Curriculum, or ACC, students back when she was teaching at Old Mill High School.

"It was really, really, *really* challenging," Fornadel said. "Each ACC student needed individual attention and lessons but there was no time or support for it. Additionally, general [general education] students were often distracted and did not want to help with the ACC students. It was truly a disservice to everyone."

Fornadel came up with the idea that ACC stu-

dents could learn alongside the other students, but it had to be a group of students who genuinely had an interest in helping ACC kids learn.

With that being said, Unified Art is a course that falls under the Art umbrella, but it is really about practicing leadership skills along with including everyone in a safe space.

The outline for the curriculum involves, as Fornadel said, "Student leaders are paired up 1:1 with a buddy. They are the 'student teacher' for that lesson. They must take the lesson that I introduce and modify to meet the needs of each student for that lesson. This includes differentiation, modes of communication, teamwork, etc."

Unified Art is more than just a class where students sign up and help ACC students learn about art. It has a defined purpose for both sides. ACC students are exposed to the art education everyone should be getting, and they can learn with a purpose with the help of other student leaders. These student leaders learn how to work with others, are exposed to a potential career path and learn to reflect on the positives and negatives of each class.

Fornadel shares that this course is something she wished was an option back when she was in high school.

With there being no partial schedule option at her high school, Fornadel used her free periods to volunteer her time in the life skills classroom. Her passion for everyone feeling a sense of belonging has become a catalyst for her recently accomplished curriculum design.

Her time teaching at High Point Elementary also contributed towards her successful Unified Art course. "I think my experience there helped me with lesson planning and understanding appropriate things to teach," Fornadel said.

Throughout this journey of creating this Unified Art program, Fornadel and Ms. Hendler have collaborated to plan the first Unified Dance class at the high school. This dance class was held last school year; it was an opportunity for ACC students to have a great time with trusted student leaders.

In addition to her other work, Fornadel planned a field trip last school year with her Unified Art class to go to the Pic 'n' Paint Pottery Studio. And this year, a visit was made on Nov. 7 to the Baltimore Zoo.

There has been a distinct change in the way the high school takes on unified learning courses. Mrs. Fornadel has been extremely involved in the process. Her efforts and

Continued on page 13

Unified Art took their field trip to the Baltimore Zoo on Friday Nov. 7. A group of student leaders joined ACC kids to go and see art in real life. Pictured is Mrs. Fornadel with the students who participated in the field trip. "I love seeing the relationship develop between these groups and giving everyone a sense of belonging," Fornadel said. Photo by Mrs. Fornadel. Graphics by Angie Callahan.



Severna Park Students' 2026 New Year's Resolutions

Looking ahead to 2026, students share their goals.

Taylor Jackson | Staff Writer

With the holiday season in full swing and the new year right around the corner, many Severna Park students are taking time to reflect on the past year and consider what they'd like to change. The start of a new year offers a clean slate, a chance for students to set meaningful goals that will guide them through the months ahead. Whether it's about personal health, academic success or financial responsibility, the Falcons are entering the new year with motivation and purpose.

For senior Ava Scott, health and fitness are at the top of her list. After trying to give up sugar last year and finding it harder than expected, Scott plans to take a more realistic approach this time around. Instead of cutting it out completely and "starting cold turkey," she's easing into it by reducing sugar intake gradually each

week. Along with improving her diet, she's also planning to stay active and build muscle through regular workouts.

"I'm going to tell all my friends so they're able to hold me accountable," Scott said. "That way, I don't slip up because if I do, I'll be embarrassed." Her strategy highlights a key part of successful goal setting: accountability and support from peers.

Another senior, Parren Smith, is entering the new year with a different focus: financial responsibility. With college right around the corner, Smith wants to learn how to save more and spend less before stepping into adult life. She plans to cut back on eating out and avoid unnecessary purchases, saving money for when she's living on her own.

"My New Year's resolution is to spend less money," Smith said. "I think it's very im-
made and recognized. Unified Art will continue to grow and will be introduced into other AACPS schools very soon. As this program grows, so will the sense of belonging in each school.

portant to save enough money for when I'm on my own spending." Smith's resolution builds on lessons learned from past goals. She admitted that last year's caffeine-free challenge only lasted until March when a McDonald's Dr. Pepper temptation got the best of her.

For junior Laurel Coard, 2026 is all about academic growth and preparation for college. With junior year often considered one of the most important for transcripts, she's determined to pass every test she takes. To make that happen, Coard plans to take advantage of Falcon Block for extra help, review notes consistently, and even make her own Kahoots to quiz herself. Her approach reflects the strong academic drive many Severna Park students share as they look toward their futures.

These students' resolutions develop individual determination and can lead to

collective inspiration within the Falcon community. Each student's goals, whether it's eating healthier, saving money or studying harder, represent a personal step toward growth, but also contribute to the motivated culture that defines SPHS.

As the calendar turns towards 2026, Falcons are proving that resolutions aren't just empty promises, they're opportunities. And whether the goals last all year or just a few months, each effort brings them closer to becoming the best version of themselves. As Scott said, "The importance of New Year's resolutions is for everyone to be able to have a fresh start, and know that a new year means new goals, and that you're able to achieve them if you work hard. And also, it's a fun challenge to do for yourself, just to see if you can better yourself for the new year."

Graphics by Angie Callaham

Continued from page 12
collaborations have created a sense of belonging everywhere. SPHS students respect everyone.
"I obviously see inclusion in the classroom, but I truly see it in the halls, the cafe, and sporting events. I love seeing the relationship develop between these groups and giving everyone a sense of belonging," Fornadel said.
A difference is being



2025 AP STUDENTS' GOALS

Students share their goals and advice for AP classes.

Elizabeth St. Andrie | Copy and Managing Editor

With 29 AP classes to sign up for at the high school, “AP” is a ubiquitous term. So why do students choose to take these college-level classes?

For junior Khalil Baber, it was the grade boost. He said that his main reason was that “getting good grades with a lot of APs helps,” in that, he wants to get into medical school.

Junior Brighid Barry had a different reason. “I took [environmental science] because I’m really passionate about environmental science and wanted a better experience learning about that,” she said, “but then I also find that a lot of AP classes go at the kind of pace that works best for me, and that I sometimes find them easier than the [other classes] in that aspect.”

She also said she took AP classes because she can use

the college credit they offer to reduce how much she’ll spend on college.

However, the college credit that these classes offer is only available with a score of three or above on the AP exams’ five-point scale for most colleges, while other colleges only offer credit for a score of four or higher. Preparing for the AP test is therefore highly emphasized. It is always part of the curriculum, students are also advised to study on their own.

In regards to studying, Barry said to “find systems that work best for you.” She uses YouTube videos to study, and studies questions she thinks would be “really hard” on the test so that she’s prepared for every topic.

As for junior Caroline Cress, she prefers using flashcards to study. She likes to study

with someone else in the class, as well. “If there’s something that you don’t understand, you have somebody there to help you, and flashcards are really good for memory,” Cress said.

Baber said to “make sure you take notes all year long” and to divide them into subsections. He said that with one section for each unit, it’s easy to review them, and recommended that students only write “the basics” of each topic.

Junior Maggie Balderston said that practice tests were a helpful resource. “There’s normally a good amount online [and] it can... get you familiar with the structure of the AP tests, and you know exactly what you’re getting into,” she said.

Knowing what you’re getting into is a point that Baber also brought up.

“I think you should only take the ones that you think you’re capable of, so some you probably don’t need,” he said. “Just do it if you think it’s genuinely gonna help you. If not, then it’s not worth it, so just do your research about which ones you really need to do.”

Balderston also said to “take classes that interest you” because “the work can feel like a lot more if you’re not actually interested in it.”

The workload may have a reputation for difficul-

ty, but students have their own opinions on the merits of the classes.

Cress said she thought students “should try and take at least one, because it’s a good experience,” and also that the “rapid pace” of the classes was good exposure.

Balderston said “I think it’s also important that you don’t get too much on your plate. Like, maybe do one thing outside of school... but just make sure you’re going to have time for all of it.”

Barry also said it was important to consider what activities would be “too much” to have in a schedule. “I’m not doing sailing this year because I wanted to make sure I have enough time to do all the homework and workload for these classes,” she said.

Baber said that “the number one thing” for him was prioritizing, and that he would tell other AP students that it was important to “learn how to prioritize every single class.”

Cress summed it up when she said that “some of the classes are really hard, but it’s important to push through, because you learn a lot, not even [just] about the subject, but it also teaches you how to be a better student.”



This stylized acorn, College Board’s logo, appears on all of its services, from AP Classroom to Bluebook. “You have to be ready for APs,” junior Brighid Barry said. “If that’s what you want to do, you have to be ready to really try and pay attention and work hard to get the grade.” Graphic by Sheehan Jeffers



STARBUCKS HOLIDAY MENU



The Starbucks holiday menu arrived on Nov. 6, featuring returning favorites and new loves; but how do each of the items taste?

Jolene Robertson | Opinions Editor

The Starbucks holiday menu this year includes returning items in addition to new ones, including the polar bear cake pop and returning the snowman cookie. All of the drinks come in festive cups with bows which helps create more anticipation for the holidays. The menu usually lasts from early Nov until mid Jan.

Drinks

The Peppermint Mocha is traditionally a fan favorite off the holiday menu. In spite of that, when tried, the mocha tasted nothing like peppermint and more like warm water. The hot and short peppermint mocha costs \$5.56. Due to the disappointing factors of the peppermint mocha, it falls short to the other drinks on the list. The Mocha has a final rating of 2/10.

The Tall Iced Gingerbread Latte costs \$5.59. It pleasantly tastes exactly like the name with strong hints of gingerbread. Including the whipped cream and pumpkin spice on top, this latte is not too sweet, but a decent option with a final rating of 6/10.

The Tall Iced Sugar Cookie Latte is very sweet but does not taste much like a sugar

cookie. This drink has more of a vanilla taste than anything. It is a fun holiday drink that costs \$5.95 and includes red and green sprinkles on top. The sprinkles assisted the drink to achieve a rating of 7/10.

The Tall Iced Caramel Brulee Latte comes with caramel toppings and whipped cream. It costs \$5.95 and includes the perfect amount of caramel. This drink tastes just like the transition from the fall to winter season. In the drinks category, the caramel brulee latte comes in first with a rating of 8.5/10.

Food

The Snowman Cookie costs \$3.45. It is an appealing cookie of a snowman with blue earmuffs and a blue scarf. With white chocolate flavored icing and crystal sprinkles on the top, the presentation for this cookie is outstanding. It is a delicious vanilla sugar cookie with a rating of 7.5/10.

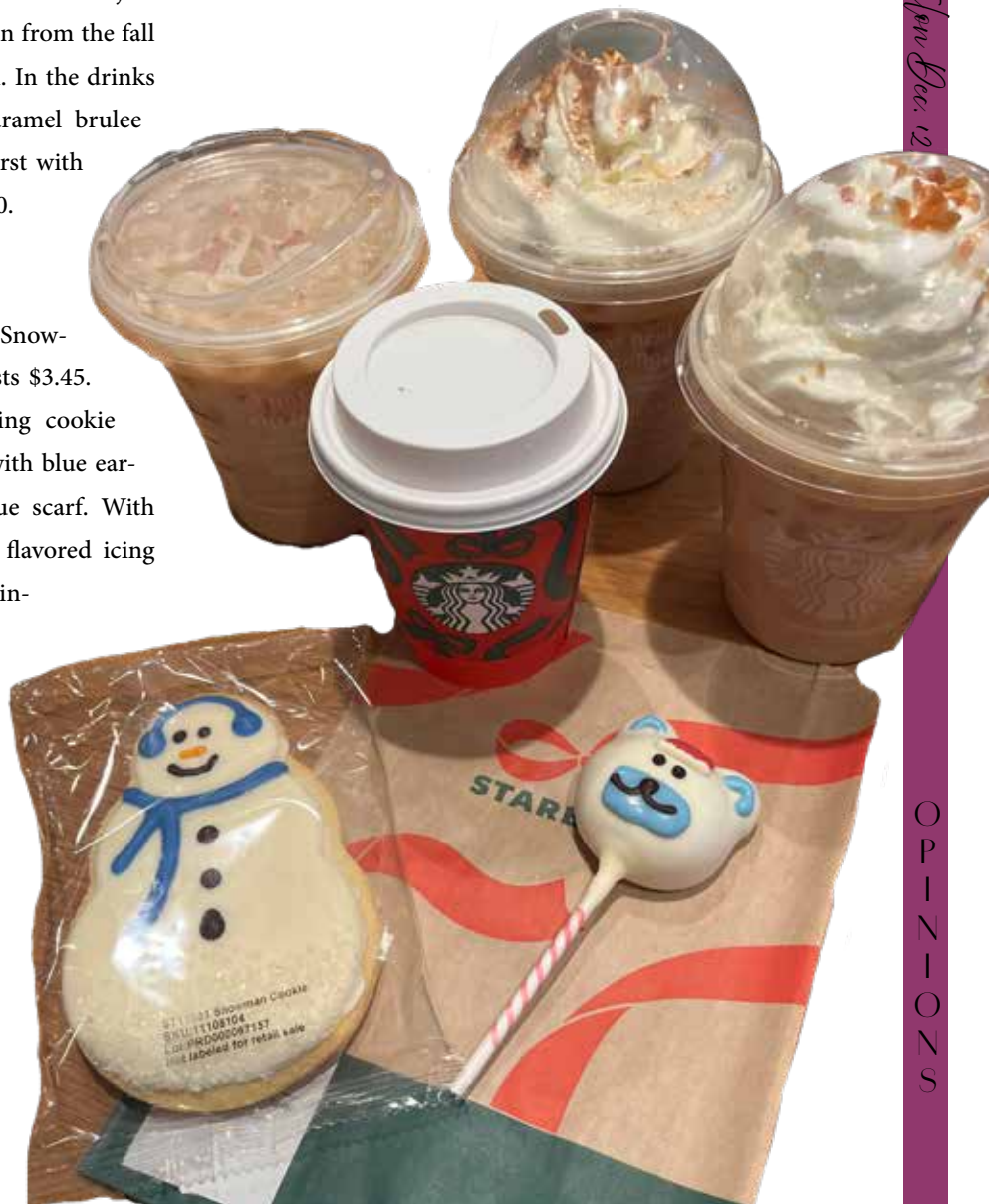
The

A presentation of all the drinks and foods that were tasted and rated out of 10. "The sugar cookie latte was delicious even though it didn't taste like a sugar cookie 100%. But, out of all the options that's the one I would pick again," Junior Regan Graves said. Photo by Regan Graves.

Polar Bear Cake Pop is \$3.65 and comes in first for both taste and display. This is a delicious vanilla cake pop that looks like a polar bear with a Santa hat. With its adorable accessories and flavorful taste, the polar bear cake pop has a

final rating of 9/10.

Ultimately, the Starbucks holiday menu this year is delicious along with its tasty holiday drinks that expands excitement for the holidays. The appearance of both the drinks and food items is fun and de-



Taste Dec. 12

OPINIONS

SPORTS HIGHLIGHTS

Boys Varsity Football

First Round: Severna Park vs. Crofton 21-16
Second Round: Severna park vs. Old Mill 6-27

Girls Varsity Field Hockey

Semi final: Severna Park vs. Churchill 2-1
Championship: Severna Park vs. Leonardtown 1-3

Boys Varsity Soccer

Regional semi final: Severna Park vs. Bennet 4-0
Reginal final: Severna Park vs. Decatur: loss in PK's

Girls Varsity Soccer

Semi final: Severna Park vs. Towson 1-0
Championship: Severna Park vs. Oakdale 4-3
-The 2025 win marks the third state championship win in a row for the team.

Girls Cross Country

Championship Race: Severna Park scored 35, making them the 2025 state champions
-This championship is the fourth consecutive win for the cross country team.

Basketball 2025-26 Season

Preview of the basketball season.

Addie Murphy | Staff Writer

The boys and girls varsity basketball teams are preparing for the 2025-26 season with focus, motivation and drive. Tryouts for both teams began on Saturday Nov. 15, which marked the first day of preparation for a positive season. Girls varsity coach Kristofer Dean and boys varsity coach Pete Young are both gearing up to have their respective teams compete in the 4A classification this season with a big goal of bringing success back home to Severna Park.

On the girls' side, the

team graduated influential seniors such as guards Erin Hussey, Charley Coward, Abby Cover and Payton Jeffers. But even though that may seem like a knockback, there are many promising returning players and up-and-coming ones as well who are sparking a great amount of hope for this season. One of those names includes senior guard Maria Bragg, who suffered an ankle injury last season, but this year is looking to provide the offensive force and defensive composure the team is looking for.

Also, post players senior Gabi Villegas and senior Naomi Batty return to bring their talent on the court to another level. Additionally, senior Brooke Barns is taking her basketball career to the collegiate stage at Washington College and is a prime example of the basketball talent the team harbors.

Last winter, the team lost to the South River Seahawks on March 3, which concluded their season with a score of 53-33. This year the girls and boys basketball teams are moving from 3A to 4A, which means facing new opponents in the playoffs.

Coach Dean said, "I've always known 4A and we are ready for the challenge and we are practicing hard to succeed this season."

In the offseason, both programs have been involved in a fall ball league along with hosting senior-led opportunities in order to prepare for the winter.

For the boys' team, they are adapting to fill the role of graduated players and captains Charlie Hartman and Keaghan Gorski. Although the two guards brought a lot of

energy to the team, the boys seek to fill that position with outstanding players such as senior Garret Moden, sophomore Blake Coard, junior John Batty and more. Last season, the team defeated the Arundel Wildcats 55 to 52, but then faced them again in the first round of playoffs and unfortunately saw the end of their season. But they are preparing hard and ready for this upcoming season and can hopefully go far in the 4A playoffs.

Sophomore guard Blake Coard said, "I think we'll do good. We just have to practice hard and stay true to the system. We do have a hard division this year, facing Meade and other teams, but we will do good and it should be fun."

The girls' and boys' basketball 2025 varsity basketball programs are ready for the 4A battle against new opponents and are confident in their teamwork and determination. The preparation that goes into the team is very important and will determine how well the team succeeds this season.

"Let's go, SP. Get ready for the battle of the century!" Coard said.



The girls varsity team huddles up during their senior night against Chesapeake girls basketball. The team will compete against new opponents this year, including more teams from the Baltimore and Howard County area. The outlook for this year is looking very positive and the teams are ready for the season. Photo by Quinlyn Bary