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“Shoot for the moon. Even if
you miss, you’ll land among the
stars”

- Norman Vincent Peale

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Best Countries to Experience Amidst the Changing World in 2026

Everette Deng ('28)

As global travel continues to recover and change in 2026, the new year is marked by sustainability, cultural reconnection, and the gained attention of new destinations.

Many newly spotted places have appeared around the world since the pandemic and are growing rapidly, competing with traditional tourist spots that once drew millions of visitors.

Countries are investing in eco-friendly travel, and regions are attracting renewed interest. These destinations reflect the changing priorities of today's travelers.

The recommended travel spots in this article consider factors like ease of access, entry requirements, cultural significance, affordability, and safety.

First, there's Oman. It is often unnoticed compared to its wealthier Middle Eastern neighbors like the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. Oman offers a quieter and more authentic Middle Eastern travel experience.

The country invests in tourism while preserving its natural landscapes, including deserts, mountains, and coastlines; so modern infrastructure does not overshadow its natural beauty unlike its neighbors. With easier visa policies and improved facilities, Oman appeals to travelers seeking cultural depth, historic architecture, and traditional markets without large crowds.

Next, Paraguay is becoming one of South America's

most overlooked countries, but it has promising spots.

With low travel costs, a growing cultural scene, and better infrastructure, Paraguay attracts travelers looking for a less commercialized experience.

Its mix of indigenous heritage and colonial history, along with urban growth in cities like Asunción positions Paraguay as a strong competitor among other South American destinations.



Botswana represents another travel trend focused on sustainability and conservation.

Known for its commitment to environmental protection, Botswana offers wildlife experiences that prioritize responsible, quality tourism over mass, quantified tourism.

Major attractions like the Okavango Delta and national parks draw visitors interested in ethical travel, while the country's social, political, and economic stability makes it particularly appealing in 2026.

The Balkans have also gained considerable global interest recently.

Countries such as Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and North Macedonia are becoming popular for their rich history, beautiful landscapes, and lower travel costs compared to Western Europe.

The unique blend of Eastern and Western traditions paired with improving tourism facilities makes the region an attractive alternative to crowded Western European cities.

Finally, China stands out as one of the top travel destinations in 2026.

As the world's second largest economy, China has always found itself overshadowed by its democratic neighbors like Japan or South Korea due to their highly controlled environment, strict governance, and western perceptions.

With international tourism increasing again, lengthened visa-free travel options for foreigners, and expanding domestic travel infrastructure, China offers a mix of culture, history, geography, and modernization. These elements often merge in major cities like Beijing, Xian, Shanghai, and Guangzhou. Beyond the cities, there are many small ancient towns and natural spots, including deserts, mountains, forests, and fields.

Higher quality transportation systems and affordability further strengthen China's position as a leading destination in the changing global travel scene.

Altogether, all these destinations show how travel in 2026 is moving away from traditional hotspots and hubs and toward places that prioritize sustainability, cultural authenticity, and meaningful experiences. As you plan your vacations for 2026 in the coming months and want to visit interesting locations away from the usual tourist traps, consider exploring one of these highlighted destinations!



MLK Day, Revisited

Julia Stewart ('28)

96 years ago, on January 15th, 1929, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was born.

One year ago, on January 19th, 2025, President Donald Trump was inaugurated into his second term. It is then that I faced an intense irony: Trump received a standing ovation for mentioning Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech only moments before the presidency we know today began. A year later, this irony washes over me now, even clearer than before.

What is MLK Day when it is reduced to reposting quotes on Instagram stories?

What is MLK Day when it is narrowed into an opportunity for people to sloppily engage with surface-level dialogue about his legacy? And how can this legacy be understood when it is weaponized against the same community it fought to protect? I view these conversations around Dr. King not as ones of contained history, conveniently trapped in the 1960s, but as urgently current, evoking change and understanding in the modern day.

The current sanitized perception of Dr. King includes an agenda for protesting itself. The very causes he stood for are killed in the streets, and his advocacy for non-violence is now equated with enforced silence, all while cherry-picking quotes from the man himself.

As powerful leadership praises Dr. King's resistance, reducing him into passivity, resistance itself is neutralized; society is left with only undemanding sentiments to lionize, not the complex, revolutionary ideas of Dr. King. He described the three evils of society as "the sickness of racism, excessive materialism, and militarism." These evils have come to a head in our country, so I have been brought back to a place where I connect most with understanding Dr. King's legacy: a march.

Under the thawing sun of a January Monday afternoon, thousands of protesters gathered at Garfield High School to celebrate the legacy of Dr. King.

Within this gallery of protest signs, colorful Sharpie and cardboard filling the air with a familiar scent, I made conversation with many other protesters, connecting most with a group of elderly climate advocates.

In this vibrant backdrop of the high school parking lot, the sounds of Stevie Wonder and energetic conversation bouncing through the clusters of mittened people, I began talking with two of the women. Kathy, wearing a hot-pink pussyhat beanie (of the 2016 Women's Marches), shared the motto she has held for many decades of protesting: Resist, Persist, Repeat.



I carried their gigantic "Together We Rise" sign with a man named Frank to City Hall (one of their friends offered me the honor of carrying the gorgeous sign!).

I thought about these words, and they radiate in my mind still. I often feel a sense of doom at the repeating destruction of a swinging, crashing political pendulum; I equate repetition with meaningless insanity.

But this sunny day brought forth a new optimism that the cyclical nature of systemic issues, repeating often enough for Kathy to collect appropriate headwear and stickers pertinent to decades of protest, should fuel resistance, not deprive it of hope.

Making new friends at this joyful march, full of music and dogs, cemented in my mind a new, hopeful fact: resistance has and will always exist, especially in the face of systemic, repeating oppression.

Whichever way people celebrate MLK Day, preserving his legacy means placing him and his values in the current day, not leaving them in the past.

His words are as dynamic as ever, but their significance today will always be tied to resistance, not to the convenience of institutional power.

The tumultuous times of the present have changed what activism is; action can mean anything to anyone, from marching on Madison St. to reposting Instagram posts.

Even so, it always means something and demands work. The work of Dr. King was never easy, nor largely accepted.

People often leave behind the reality that our nation broadly hated his work and ultimately assassinated him. Future decades of work will face this pushback too, and, as the last 10 years have proven, the work will never be easy.

This MLK Day, I find that, now more than ever, we must remember the work of Dr. King, not contain it. Now more than ever, we must act upon it: Resist, Persist, Repeat.



Art Mediums Rankings

Audrey Zhang ('29)

Calling all artists! Today is the day you can rant about art to your friends with a valid excuse: reading this Eagle Eye article and discussing its amazing insights. Here, I'll rank some major art mediums and cover some general and personal opinions on them.

First of all, there's acrylic. It was created in the mid-20th century, and is a fast-drying, water-based medium that can be used on multiple surfaces while providing vibrant, solid colors. I've practiced using acrylic paint many times, so my opinion may be biased: since acrylic paint can easily be layered and the paint dries relatively fast, it's a very efficient art medium that presents you with eye-catching colors and dynamic shapes and details in your art.

There are some minor drawbacks, including the long periods of time needed to become skilled in acrylic painting, the fact that the paint gets everywhere, no matter what you try, and how hard it can be to control color shift.

Therefore, I would give acrylic paint a 9/10, with 10 being the best medium of all time, and 0 being a medium you shouldn't even try.



Second, we'll venture into the disputed watercolor territory. Watercolor is a transparent, fluid pigment that

is mixed with water to be applied to paper. It is often considered a practical and excellent art medium for beginners, helping them learn layering, color theory, etc. I found it quite enjoyable to use when I was younger but now see it as more of a nuisance. The color always dried differently, with far too much texture for my liking, and so much water that I would inevitably make a mess. I asked a few other high schoolers about their opinions on watercolor, and they all felt that watercolor was a difficult medium to handle.

Despite all this, there are many artists who have mastered the use of watercolor, and their paintings are just as marvelous as any other medium. From my point of view, I'd give watercolor a 7/10.



Third, we have colored pencils: a detailed, easy to access, and mess free (unless you're dealing with small children who draw on the walls) art medium, favored by many traditional artists.

Often, colored pencils provide a wide spectrum of colors to use and are easy to sharpen, meaning drawings are detailed and colorful. The setup for drawing with colored pencils is simple and efficient, unlike other mediums that may include fetching water and paper towels, mixing paints, preparing brushes, etc.

For me, the feeling of the pencil on the paper is very soothing, and the slow-and-steady pace of working on a color pencil artwork always relaxes me. My only complaint is that it takes an extensive amount of time to finish one piece, which I often appreciate, though it can start to feel repetitive after a while. Solid 9/10.

Similar to colored pencils, another art medium that you often see in the art community and out, are the markers. Lots of children love using washable markers, and those children who grow up to become professional artists may love alcohol markers just as much. These markers use alcohol-based ink, which allows for smooth blending, seamless layering, and permanent, vibrant color.

However, that's all fine and dandy until you talk about the page bleeding, the smearing, and the drying out. I've heard many people complain about how alcohol marker ink always bleeds through paper, but what I dislike the most is how it is permanent, bright, and transparent, all at the same time. Mistakes cannot be erased, so it takes quite some time to master the texture and motion of alcohol markers, which I never had enough patience to practice. Even so, the art pieces people create with alcohol markers are definitely still beautiful, and just because it's not someone else's cup of tea, doesn't mean you shouldn't try it out. Alcohol markers get a 6/10.

At this point, if you're thinking, "why is she always talking about the art mediums' color? Can't there be something more monotone and calming?" then you're in luck. Let's talk about graphite sketching. Sketch artworks use graphite pencils, sometimes even multiple different softness/hardness levels to illustrate black and white drawings. Graphite pencils help you focus on the light and shadows in your drawing. Meanwhile, there's no need to stress about hues and saturation, providing you with a relaxing break from all the world's color (unless you're color blind, I guess). 9.5/10!



Something that has caused some conflict in the art community is digital vs. traditional art. Some people believe that digital art is too easy, or that it's just finding shortcuts, while others think digital art is a valid experience that still requires skills. Personally, I agree that digital art is real art. Art is something that expresses human creativity, imagination, and emotions. Digital art can be used to express those themes, even if the digital tools they use seem to make it easier. No matter how different a type of art is from your preferred medium, they are all classified as art, as long as creativity, effort, and human emotions were used to make it. I'd give digital art a 9/10, since it's easy to access and fun to experiment with the digital tools, though drawing on a computer screen with a stylus feels like wrestling a slippery fish.

Although the art community is somewhat split about digital art, there is something many agree on. AI "art" is not real art. As I stated above, art is something created with deep thought, effort, emotions, and creativity. Writing a prompt into a machine for it to spit out an image does not use any of that effort and creativity. Sure, you can use AI to generate ideas for your art, and it's a great resource in many aspects of our lives, but I reject the claim that AI art is equal to human-made art, and we must respect artists for the hard work they put into their artwork. When a machine does the creative labor for you, it is not art, and therefore, it does not get a ranking.



I hope this article has been fun and/or insightful to read, whether you learned new opinions or just enjoyed hearing more about the art community. Every art medium is valid so long as it incorporates human emotions and effort, so go support your fellow artists, try out some art mediums, and have a great day!

January Hit Fast

Molly Copeland ('26)

January usually feels like it lasts forever. This year, it didn't. It kind of sprinted.

One minute everyone was complaining about the cold and MA/QA's, and the next there were pep rally chants in the gym and posters taped everywhere.

Between Spirit Week, the winter pep rally, Hoopfest, and Voices in Action Day right after, EPS packed a lot into a short stretch of time. It was busy.

Loud. And somehow, it made January feel less like something to get through and more like a month people actually showed up for.

Spirit Week ran from January 19th to 23rd, which meant themed outfits and the same question every morning: what day is it again?

The themes gave people an excuse to wear something other than the same sweatpants rotation. Tuesday was Pattern Day, Wednesday was UGG and Ugly Sweater Day, Thursday was Blue and Gold Day, and Friday finished things off with Blizzard Day. Some people (Profe Botero) planned their outfits days in advance. Others definitely threw something on five minutes before leaving the house. Either way, the halls looked way less bleak than they usually do in January. Thursday's winter pep rally was definitely the highlight.

SLC had been hyping it up with emails asking for volunteers and advertising the three minute to win it games, and for once the gym actually delivered. It was the kind of event where you tell yourself you'll stay for a minute and then suddenly you're yelling at people to stack boxes faster.

The performances carried most of the energy. The boys basketball group had one of the most talked about moments of the day, mostly because of Dane Youngquist ('26).

At one point, the lights went down, phone flashlights

came on and he lip synced "Love" by Keyshia Cole while sliding across the floor.

The group followed it up with multiple songs, including "Teach Me How to Dougie" by Cali Swag District, which pulled the crowd in even more. "It was electric," Finn Bryar ('26) said. Yisu Ni ('26) summed it up with "Dane carries," and Arnav Garg ('26) rated the performance a solid "10/10."



Other groups brought their own kind of energy. Girls basketball danced to "Hips Don't Lie" by Shakira, which got a huge reaction from the crowd. Robotics surprised people with a dance to "Lush Life" by Zara Larsson. Science Olympiad also performed, which made the rally feel less like it was centered on just one team.



Rythmix, a professional dance group, performed three routines even though they weren't competing. Their K-pop choreography was insanely polished, and thankfully for all the student teams, they weren't part of the competition. Watching them made the difference between student performances and professional ones very obvious.

Then came the games, which were chaotic in the exact way pep rally games are supposed to be. The basketball shootout had a lot of good moments, but the one everyone kept talking about was when Alex Peng ('27) hit a half court shot, pushing the juniors to a win with 67 points. Kai Ghorai ('27) helped seal it, and even the ninth grade round had its moment with Grace Miller ('29) and Nicole Lent ('29) scoring 30 points.

Snowman stacking, also known as box stacking, was stressful to watch. Seniors Sam Ryan ('26) and Tegan Hogg ('26) were so close, then it collapsed at the last second. Sophomores ended up winning, with Aryaman Sinha ('28) and Srika Sriperumbudur ('28) pulling it off. Hungry Hippo was another crowd favorite, mostly because it was pure chaos. Strategy didn't really matter. Seniors won that one, with Celine Chan ('26) and Sydney Belfiore ('26) taking the victory.



The week already felt intense because Monday the 19th was MLK Day, so coming back after a long weekend made everything feel like it started at full speed. Spirit Week kind of fixed that. It gave people something fun to focus on besides the fact that they had three tests and suddenly couldn't remember how to do math.

Friday, January 23rd brought Hoopfest and the Winter Carnival, which felt like the grand finale. Since it was a home game, the gym was loud and packed with EPS students/supporters. Hoopfest included boys JV, boys varsity, and girls varsity games in that order. Boys JV lost 50-14 against Cedar Park Christian, but the student section stayed engaged. Boys varsity followed and got the win, which kept the energy up. Girls varsity closed out the night with a loss, but the crowd stayed loud through the end, which said a lot

about the mood.

After the games, the Winter Carnival started at 8:30 PM and completely changed the feel of campus. The LPC turned into a roller rink.

There were snacks, fire pits for s'mores, hot cocoa, and apple cider to keep people warm. There was even a shaved ice truck, which felt kind of ridiculous in January, but no one complained. Music Bingo kept things moving, and people either skated or just hung out by the fire pits talking. It was an easy way to end a long week.

Even smaller things helped build the energy. Poster making for Hoopfest happened on January 12th during middle band and lunch in Building 12. It was open to everyone, low pressure, and you could stay as long or as little as you wanted. Even showing up briefly made it feel like the week was about more than just sports.

And January didn't stop there. Voices in Action Day followed on Monday, January 26th, organized by Ms. Dandino, Counselor Foote, and the EICL team.

It was an all day experience focused on identity, advocacy, and community, with a keynote, advisory check-ins and three workshop rotations. The sessions went beyond just sitting and listening. Living Voices performed La Causa, which followed the farm workers movement through the story of a young woman joining a nonviolent protest. Other workshops covered everything from social media influence through a card game called "The Feed" to letter writing, body image, poetry, restorative justice, climate change and zine making. No matter what you were interested in, there was probably something that stuck.

January could have been miserable. It was dark early, cold, and everyone was tired (speaking for the seniors). Instead, it ended up being messy and surprisingly full of life.

People dressed up, performed, competed, made posters, showed up to games and showed up for each other. It wasn't perfect.

But it made the second half of the year feel like it actually had momentum!

Pagliacci Takes Over Redmond

Charlie Murray ('29)

Daily over 60 million slices of pizza are eaten in America alone. Annually, the average American consumes ~46 slices of Pizza.

The dish is the most popular dish in the world, 21% of Americans call it their favorite.

On Saturday the 10th Pagliacci's, a local Seattle pizza chain opened another store in Redmond. Eli Briggs, the Co-Editor in Chief of the Eagle Eye, and I with some EPS peers visited the Grand Opening of the store. To promote the new location, and to celebrate the Opening, customers were given two free slices of delicious pizza.



We arrived in downtown Redmond to see the line wrapping round the block.

We soon joined the hundreds of customers, hungry for their pizza. After waiting for more than thirty minutes in line, we finally made it into the store and got our pizza.

The whole store was decorated with balloons, banners, and confetti. There was a DJ at the back and free ice cream being served. In the kitchen, employees rushed to accommodate the hundreds that were expecting a

meal.

The room was filled with the sound of happy customers enjoying their complementary pizza. Reviews of the new restaurant were very complimentary saying that Pagliacci was “the best pizza chain around hands down” and that the pizza “was perfect!”

The new Redmond addition is now the 26th Pagliacci's restaurant in King County, but how did they get to this point? Back in 1979, the chain was founded by Dorene Centioli-McTigue with her brother and cousin. The first location was on University Way in the U-District. Soon the quickly growing chain began delivering pizzas, which helped rapidly increase its expansion.

Over the next few decades, the Pagliacci family continued to expand, crossing the lake to Bellevue and Sammamish to now Redmond following their original mission to deliver the best-tasting, highest quality pizza possible across the greater Seattle area.

Pagliacci Pizza has used quality local ingredients for their pizza and continues to make their dough the traditional way, creating a fresh batch every morning and using live yeast.

Sustainability is a commitment of Pagliacci, and they hope to reduce their carbon footprint through purchasing green power and seeking LEED certification.

People around the Seattle area continue to love Pagliacci Pizza which keeps on growing, attaining Seattle legendary status just like the sasquatch on their boxes.



All About Our Town: The Upper School Play

Makayla Hogg ('29), Aksel Wagner ('29)

Our Town written by Thornton Wilder is a classic Pulitzer Prize winning 1938 American play. It focuses on small town life in the fictional town Grover's Corners, New Hampshire. The play explores the themes of life, love, and death; each highlighted in the three different acts. Mr. Duncan chose this play to pose the question of what the American dream truly is and who it leaves behind, additionally it questions today's political and cultural landscape and begs the question was the past actually better in early America.



We watch the characters live their lives with the same everyday emotions and sense of wonder that we have or once had which begs the question, what does it mean to live a full life? At EPS, we are shown one version of success within our highly competitive academic environment, where the expectation is that attending EPS means striving for high-level achievements and the academics is our only option. In this mindset, we often overlook other paths in life. The idea of small-town living, not going to college, or becoming a farmer is frequently looked down upon and

feels distant from the EPS bubble. Our Town pushes us to reflect on what we truly want to do with the short time we have on Earth, and to reconsider what fulfillment, success, and joy really mean to us.

The play follows two neighbor families: the Webbs and the Gibbs as they navigate the struggle of life but also the pleasures, we watch the intelligent Emily Webb (Clara Rogers) and the sincere George Gibbs (Ben Burnside) fall in love and experience the joys and hardships of life together. The play is narrated by an observer of this world: the Stage Manager (Piper Belfiore) who is from our time but lives in the world of the play, she often breaks the fourth wall and speaks directly to the audience. She acts as a guide for the viewers, to help them navigate the nuances and details that may be missed. The show hosts a large cast of complicated and deep characters made up of family members and towns people including Frank Gibbs (Sasha Brassell), Julia Gibbs (Lily Mack), Rebecca Gibbs (Makayla Hogg), Charles Webb (Wyatt Greenawalt), Myrtle Webb (Marisa Woo), Wally Webb (Derek Yan), and Simon Stimson (Ari Yamashita). The production also includes the wonderful ensemble, the work of the talented stage crew, and the leadership of the incredible faculty involved including the director Mr. Duncan and the producer Ms. Frystak.

Famously Our Town includes no set and no props, this mostly holds true for this EPS production as well. Actors will be pantomiming most of their items and actions. The curtains of the theater will be pulled up to expose the backstage, meaning actors and stage crew members will continue to be visible to the audience even if they are not acting. This show also includes a sound table, which produces the show's sound effects and some of its music using a variety of instruments and objects, this table will also be seen by the audience throughout the play. This striped back storytelling style allows the full exposure of the process, which was revolutionary at the time it was created, and remains a unique aspect of the show today.

Come see the play with friends and family, it runs Thursday, February 5th through Saturday, February 7th at 7pm each day with an additional 2pm matinee on Saturday.

Hope to see you there!

The Biggest Meme Trends of 2025

Emily Wang (‘29)

As you walk through the blue and gold painted halls of our school, you might hear a shout from up the staircase, “6, 7!” or maybe you see someone across TALI yelling Italian brainrot. Whether it’s triple T or iShowSpeed, memes have taken over Gen Z culture, and have become deeply integrated in our daily communication. Let’s dive in to the biggest meme trends of 2025!



Ask anyone if they know of the meme “six seven” and I guarantee they’ll understand. Six seven is one of the biggest meme trends of the year, so much so that generations young and old have all picked up on it. Although it seems silly, such a widely understood meme connects people, giving communities a way to bond and understand each other. These connections form through a look exchanged when a teacher accidentally says six seven, or an eruption of laughter from a funny TikTok video, but in any form, these two numbers have taken our world by a storm.



At the age of artificial intelligence, AI generated memes, like the popular Italian brainrot, also surfaced this year. AI became popular in creating many different forms of online content, such as the Italian brainrot memes which are funny-looking Italian animated characters. Using AI, media platforms expanded a whole lineage of Italian brainrot and a new, high-tech era of meme culture. AI generated memes continued to grow throughout the year and quickly became another popularized 2025 trend.

TikTok, although highly controversial, with a shut-down scare in mid-April, is formative to the memes of 2025. With the introduction of image comments in TikTok, reaction photo memes became widespread in comments sections all around. From reacting to a funny short or a cringe reel, these memes give media consumers more leeway and creativity in saying more with less. These reaction memes, passed down from TikTok to text, are quickly becoming more well-known and have been rooted into our online communication in the past year.

As we move into 2026, new trends are already beginning to emerge. Maybe you’re buying 365 buttons or you’re reminiscing on 2016, but an underlying change in this year’s trends is the trend of “trends dying”. Emma Chamberlain mentions in her podcast episode, “my ins and outs of 2026”, that an emerging trend of mocking or even hating on meme culture could likely arise this year.

Not only that, but thanks to the shortened attention spans of today, as well as the smaller, “niche” trend communities, consumers of media will lose interest faster, making trends become more and more short-lived. Trends that once lived on for weeks on end, could become “cringe” in a matter of days.

All in all, no matter the length, the creator, or the platform, 2025’s meme trends held so much content, connecting people, sparking new ideas, and growing communities.

Looking forward to 2026, we expect a year for high-tech ideas, creativity, and maybe even fleeting, ephemeral memes.

LPC Territories

Olivia Keller ('29)

Lunch is one of the few parts of the school day that feels predictable.

Classes change, schedules shift, and stress levels rise, but most students know exactly where they are sitting when it's time for lunch.

Over time, cafeteria tables become unofficially claimed, and those routines rarely get challenged.

Recently, that changed when a group of freshmen began sitting at a table typically occupied by juniors. What followed was a two-day back-and-forth that drew attention from nearby tables.

Students could be seen speeding down the hallway to reach the cafeteria first, half-joking and half-serious about keeping their usual seats.

While it was mostly played for laughs, the situation showed how strongly people care about their lunch routine.

The standoff ended when the juniors asked if they could sit with the freshmen for a day. The freshmen agreed, and the groups shared the table for one lunch period. Although the conflict technically ended, some felt the outcome reflected poorly on the juniors.

“That’s embarrassing that the freshmen are asserting dominance over the junior boys,” said Sabina Ahmed, Class of ’27.

Despite the humor surrounding the situation, it points to a larger reason lunch seating matters. “Routine is important,” said Arya Rawat, Class of ’28. “Sitting at the same table every day helps you relax.”

For many students, lunch is the only time in the day when they are not being graded, tested, or rushed. Having a familiar place to sit makes that break feel more comfortable.

The type of table also plays a role. Booths often attract smaller, close-knit groups, while long tables tend to be louder and more social. Even teachers notice patterns in where students choose to sit and how rarely those choices change.

While the freshman-junior dispute lasted only two days, it reflects a larger reality of cafeteria culture. Lunch tables are not just furniture.

They represent familiarity, routine, and a sense of belonging, things students value more than they might realize during a regular school day.



AI in Education: An Interview w/ Mr. Briggs

Nima Rabbar ('26)

ChatGPT was a major shift in AI development. I remember when it came out, back during winter of ninth-grade. At the time, it was just fun to see if we could get it to say silly things. Three years later, we are already experiencing the long-term consequences of AI tools.

AI and large language models (LLMs) have potential for immense harm and benefit in education. You could use AI to shortcut your learning, hurting your own personal growth, but you can also use it to relieve stress, assist in learning, and understanding and reduce the workload on teachers. To better understand the benefits and downsides of AI in education at EPS, I sat down for lunch with Mr. Briggs to learn about his and the school's approach to AI.



I first asked Mr. Briggs for some clarity on his role in the EPS faculty: is he the tech tsar? Head of AI? The cool physics sub? He described four central priorities at EPS: tech infrastructure, tech curriculum, how teachers use technology, and making sure the school adapts to a changing world.

The fourth priority is key – he expanded on this describing his role as “ensuring that EPS students are prepared for what the world will look like 5, 10, or 20

years from now”. This is where AI comes into play, as Mr. Briggs researches new developments and considers how they affect students long term. Part of this work includes examining how accessible LLMs may weaken their students’ critical thinking, as well as how students can convince themselves they are learning when they are not.

To continue the conversation, I asked Mr. Briggs three questions:

“What is your biggest concern around AI’s impacts on EPS students?”

“What do you think will be the biggest positive impact of AI at EPS?”

“What is the biggest thing that EPS needs to focus on around AI?”

Mr. Briggs explained that one of the biggest challenges with AI at EPS is students’ ability to recognize when they are using it to learn versus when they are using it to cheat.

This is something I have experienced firsthand: being stuck on a homework problem, frustrated after trying several things, no friends who are able to help me, so I turn to AI to help me answer it. Consulting AI is not inherently bad. It can act like a teacher sitting on your computer, ready to answer questions. However, the problem is when it removes the difficult part of critical thinking.

If I am given a math problem involving using the quadratic formula, and instead of learning how and why the quadratic formula works, I ask AI to answer the problem, then I am not learning. Even if I ask AI how to implement the quadratic formula, and then memorize, AI will not take the time to explain why the quadratic formula works, which will leave a hole of understanding in my learning.

Ultimately, the biggest challenge for students is to use AI in a way that does not remove our learning from us, but instead serves as an at-home tutor.

When asked about potential upsides, Mr. Briggs pointed to how AI could handle repetitive tasks that offer little educational value.

An example he provided was on the teaching side: the ability for AI to help transcribe a teacher's comments about a student into a form that the student can actually understand.

Imagine you are teaching someone about a topic you have mastered, and they are just uncovering it. You see a mistake they make on a test, and can immediately identify what went wrong and how to get the right answer.

However, explaining the issue in a way that a student can actually understand, when every student thinks and learns differently, is incredibly challenging. AI could streamline this process by translating teachers' original thoughts into explanations, analogies, and language that better reach individual students.

Looking ahead, Mr. Briggs believes one of the most important areas to focus on is the idea of "mental fitness."

Mr. Briggs mentioned that before food was so accessible, the idea of "physical fitness" was not a proper industry.

However, as food companies evolved and access to snacks became widespread, it became much easier to eat way too much. In response to this, however, a whole industry of "physical fitness" was formed, including widespread gyms, trainers, influencers, and products. Society began to value fitness more and more.

If EPS commits to this idea, it will help students become stronger lifelong learners who are better prepared for a changing world.

My interview with Mr. Briggs made clear one thing: AI and its role in education are incredibly nuanced. There will be positive effects, negative effects, and opportunity for growth. If we want to see the benefits of AI, we have to actively work toward them.

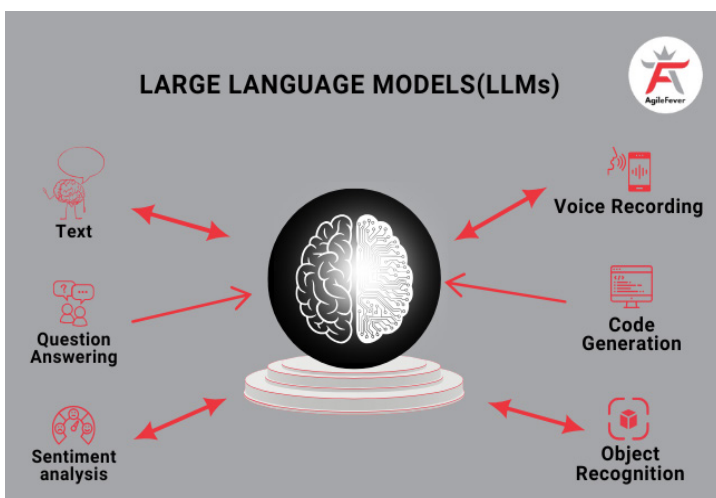
When you feel the urge to use AI as a shortcut, ask yourself:

"Am I using AI to learn or cheat?"

When a google summary answers your question, ask yourself:

"do I understand these answers, and can I see how someone else got here?"

If EPS students continue to use AI responsibly while prioritizing their own learning, our school will be well positioned for a future of academic prosperity.



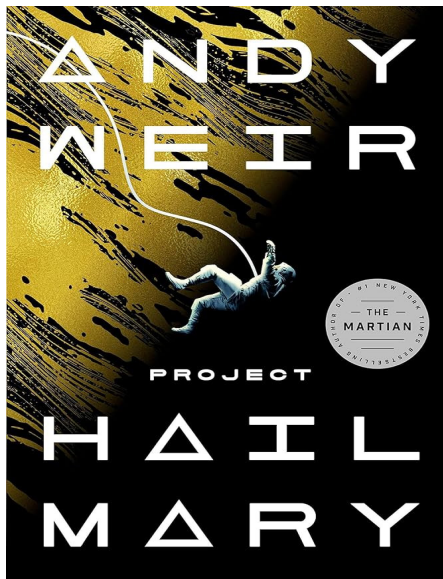
In response to AI, we may see a similar trend: people placing more and more emphasis on "mental fitness"

New Year, New Everything

Addie Briggs ('33)

Because New Year's just happened, many people are excited about what's to come. But what exactly? Well, overall, 2026 is a year when AI becomes the norm, people use AI to help with classwork, teachers allow AI much more, and maybe even have AI be part of an assignment. This may seem great to students, but teachers will be more chill about AI use and let students use it in the classroom. Of course, there will be rules, but less strict ones that make a lot more sense.

Moving on to trends, probably a lot more laid-back, relaxed clothing; fewer schools are really enforcing strict dress codes, which leaves people in more comfortable, teenappropriate clothing. 2026 won't be a trend-heavy year, leaving people plenty of time to explore themselves and their interests. This leaves many more creative people, art, music, and other hobbies like theatre, and many more will become more popular and well known; people will be doing hobbies a lot more



Now, what about new movies, songs, etc? Many K-pop demon hunters fans are so excited about the rumors of a sequel, but, to much sadness, this sequel would not be ready until 2029.

A for sure movie coming out in 2026 is The Hail Mary. This book is so good, but you can't fully appreciate it unless you listen to it as an audio-book; that isn't just bias from an audiobook lover, it's the sound that Rocky the alien makes, it just warms your heart. Many Hail Mary fans are ecstatic about the movie's release on March 20th. Now, onto songs/albums. BTS is releasing a new album, "Arirang." On March 20th, too. Following the Kpop theme, BLACKPINK is releasing a new album too, DEADLINE. Coming out on February 27th. Also coming out on February 27th is Bruno Mars's new album, The Romantic, along with that is The Mountain by Gorillaz. Harry Styles will be releasing Kiss All the Time. Disco, Occasionally, on March 6th. A lot more pop artists will be releasing new albums this year, including Louis Tomlinson, Madison Beer, and many more.

Overall, 2026 will be a relaxed year, with new things opening every month. People will be themselves more, due to fewer trends, and clothing-wise, comfy will win over cute. People will have large playlists of new songs to listen to while ChatGPT helps them study for their test, and all of the above and more.

Winter in Korea

Katelyn Lee ('33)

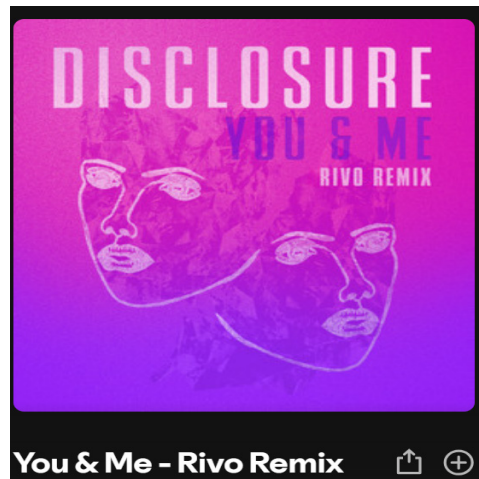
It takes roughly twelve hours by plane to get to South Korea, Incheon Airport. From there, it takes around an hour to ride to Seoul, capital of South Korea. It's cold and roughly 34 degrees and everyone's bundled in warm coats and jackets. It's not as cold as it could be and threw December 20 to 24 2025 no sight of snow though some light rain. From there it only gets colder and on Christmas day, people are walking outside on the streets with their heads ducked against the cold breeze.

Though outside may be cold, most homes are not. In Korea, it's most common for people to live in apartments, where the floors are heated and rooms are warm. Some people even lap up ice cream they bought from the nearest corner shop in their toasty homes. And on January 1, 2026, the sun shone brightly while the cold still stood proudly, as the new year began.

Music of the Month



Symphony No. 7 in A Major, (+)
Mr. Ho (teacher)



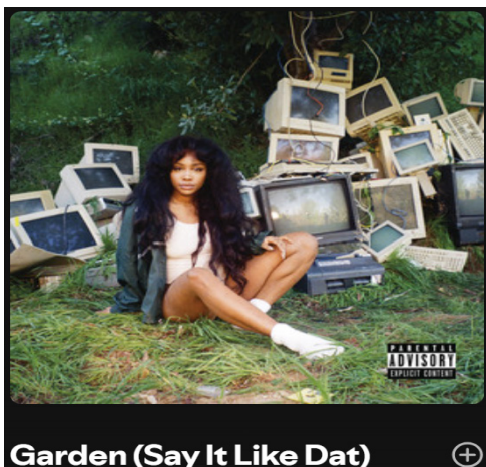
You & Me - Rivo Remix (+)
Amanda Cable ('26)



Make Way For The Sun (+)
Ellie Yan ('26)



Touch of Grey (+)
Roya Prow ('26)



Garden (Say It Like Dat) (+)
Celine Chan ('26)



Waterfalls (+)
Caden Nam ('26)

Mini Word Search: January Buzzwords

S P I R I T R W S C
J X V E H V R S F O
C L I Q U E S C E U
S I X T Y S E V E N
F B V J Y T V G N T
P A G L I A C C I R
Z Q V J E V F D E I
C C E Q W Y D K X E
S W K E T H I C S S
N H O O P F E S T Q

Sixtyseven
Spirit
Ethics

Pagliacci
Countries

Cliques
Hoopfest

