

Artist Statement

This year, on the Dispatch staff, I went from being an artist on the paper, to an Arts/Graphics Editor. I was taking on the workload our previous Art/Graphics Editor had been bearing, and it proved a challenge. Generally, for every production period, I created 3-4 pieces of art at minimum. While producing before the deadline was part of the challenge, the most difficult area was correspondence and conception, prompted only with a short blurb about the subject matter of the story.

There were times in which I had an idea immediately, however a majority of the time, I spent a few days thumbnailing concepts and participating in back-and-forth with the various artists I was creating for. There was a challenge in both fulfilling authors who had a specific vision for their art, and creating for authors who were uncertain of the art direction. In either case, I'd provide mockups or thumbnails for them to approve before I started producing.

I was also personally obliged to be open to creating additional art at any moment, or assisting others with art. Oftentimes, I'd be creating art as page flair in a pinch, providing others with feedback on their art, or helping others use Adobe Illustrator.

ENTRY DESCRIPTIONS

SPED art:

Works like this one, depicting Special Education, require a lot of conversation. Primarily, there was discussion of how to represent the benefits of SPED funding—That’s where the space theming started, in portraying the ways Special Ed elevates students. However, there was the more detail-oriented side to things. Special Education is such a broad department—How can I represent that in just a few objects/indicators? I incorporated iconography representative of neurodivergency, and depicted a few objects representative of the different accommodations SPED provides. I could take from myself, who has accommodations, but I could also refer to my mom, who works in 504.

Sexism in slang:

In brainstorming art for this subject matter, ideas came to me quickly. I’m a girl, and have found myself in a situation like this many times: Some misogynistic rhetoric has reappeared in the form of slang, or a meme, and people just drop it in conversations like it’s nothing. It’s then left to girls/women who have no choice but to be conscious of harmful dialogue to contemplate this sort of conversation, rather than echoing it to others without thought. I think people don’t realize the thought put behind the reclaiming of slang. Typically, it comes from a place of peturbance.

AI Environmental Impact

This art, in ways, drew from recent artistic convention in digital spaces. A sort of minimalist style that vector art lends itself to—I think juxtaposed with art about AI and the environment, it creates an interesting combination. In the content of the art, nature is being polluted by modern technology, or in this case AI. Similarly, the art style is a sort of “pollution.” Nature is often portrayed in a more naturalistic way, so portraying the deer and environment in this abstracted style (which is incredibly easy to AI generate,) I think speaks for the ways AI is impacting our environment.

Ted Cruz v Alred

In creating effective art, and time-sensitive art, at that, I find it best to break the subject matter down to its most necessary components. This being: Ted Cruz, Colin Alred, and the prospect of a blue Texas. The composition aims to simply assert the perceived power difference at the time: Alred’s Democrat threat overshadowing Cruz’s campaign. This is further displayed in the way Ted Cruz is dominated by the shadow’s blue color—Which functions both as a way to optimize production time, and enhance the subject matter.

Elon Trump

This work is best characterized by its tone—Present, and imposing. I think that’s how a lot of people feel about our government, right now. In this way, it speaks both for supporters, who encourage this sort of presence, and those who fear our current administration.

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- The Dispatch is the official student newspaper of James Bowie High School. 3500 copies are published and distributed for free six times a year, generally once per six weeks for the school's students, staff and community.
- The Dispatch is an open forum for student expression. The Dispatch is not reviewed by school administration prior to distribution, and the advisor will not act as a censor. Content represents the views of the student staff and not school officials.
- The Dispatch works to avoid bias and/or favoritism. We strive to make our coverage and content meaningful, timely, and interesting to our readers. Our articles reflect our genuine objective of reporting news and will be held to a high standard of quality.
- We make every effort to avoid printing libel, obscenities, innuendo and material that threatens to disrupt the learning process or is an invasion of privacy. We avoid electronic manipulation that alters the truth of a photograph without indicating that the photograph is an illustration.
- Staff editorials represent the opinion of the editorial board arrived at by discussion and will not be bylined. Bylined articles are the opinion of the individual writer and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Dispatch staff or administration as a whole.
- The Dispatch welcomes reader input. Please send any letters, articles, comments or corrections to bowie.journalism@gmail.com, call (512) 841-4184, mail them to 4103 W. Slaughter Lane, Austin, TX 78749 or drop them off in room F-214 with advisor Michael Reeves or any editor. Letters must be signed, and emailed letters will require verification before publication. We will not necessarily publish all letters received and reserve the right to edit for length and clarity.

CURRENT STAFF AWARDS

- NSPA Print Pacemaker Winner, 2023-24
- NSPA Print All-American, 4 Marks/Distinction, 2023-24
- JEA/NSPA Print 2nd Place Best in Show, Fall National Convention Philadelphia, 2024-25
- CSPA Hybrid Silver Crown, 3/3 All-Columbian, 2021-22
- SNO Distinguished Website 2024-25
- SIPA Print All-Southern, 2023-24
- SIPA Online Scroggins Award Winner, 2023-24
- UIL/ILPC Print Gold Star, 2023-24
- UIL/ILPC Online Gold Star, 2023-24
- TAJE Fall Fiesta First Place Best in Show, 2022-23

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

AI software harms the planet

Modern technologies have damaging effects on the environment

EDITORIAL

Checking sentences for grammatical errors, compiling research for projects, or creating images that depict individuals as animated characters are just some of the ways artificial intelligence (AI) is used. With AI technologies capable of providing entertainment and making everyday tasks more efficient, why shouldn't people take advantage of this technology? However, what resources are required to make such functions possible?

According to the National Public Radio (NPR), around 40% of U.S. citizens between the ages of 18 to 64 have utilized generative artificial intelligence technologies, with a significant number of people using it frequently. As more and more people have started using AI, studies have begun revealing the shocking environmental impacts of this software.

Developing AI can have wide-ranging and destructive environmental impacts from greenhouse gas emissions to significant water usage. Therefore, the Dispatch Editorial Board believes that artificial intelligence poses a serious threat to the environment which should be addressed through the regulation of the corporations developing these technologies.

AI software requires a staggering amount of water to function. The data centers used to train artificial intelligence and develop algorithms create heat, and large volumes of water are consumed to cool these servers down.

Water usage for AI technologies is expected to increase to 6.6 billion cubic meters of water by the year 2027, according to a report by Forbes. The consumption of water to advance AI technologies only contributes to the depletion of this resource which will have serious detrimental



ART BY Sophia Sepulveda

impacts such as worsening drought conditions and increasing the risk of wildfires.

Furthermore, tech companies have reported skyrocketing greenhouse gas emissions while further developing AI software. Google has reported a 48% increase in greenhouse gas emissions since 2019, and Microsoft has disclosed a 29% increase in emissions since 2020, as stated in an article by NPR.

These emissions have undeniable effects including their contribution to steadily warming temperatures. The soaring greenhouse gas emissions associated with progressing AI take an irreversible toll on our planet from impacting the global climate to the air we breathe.

Finally, according to the United Nations Environment

Program, the materials used to manufacture AI technologies are often mined in ways that cause harm to the environment. Additionally, data centers produce toxic waste, including materials such as lead and mercury which can pollute nearby water sources with the potential to harm both humans and aquatic life.

Although some argue that AI can play a role in environmental conservation by assisting in the development of clean energy, or monitoring waste and greenhouse gas emissions, it is impossible for this software to be considered a driver for sustainability while its advancement causes environmental damage.

To combat these detrimental effects, tech corporations must be held accountable. The federal government should impose

strict regulations requiring companies to research and implement strategies that reduce the environmental footprint of AI if they wish to continue developing such software. Individuals can help to curb the consequences of this technology by considering how often they rely on AI.

The environmental toll of artificial intelligence must be addressed to preserve the earth which our very existence depends on. So, the next time you find yourself turning to ChatGPT to compose an email or are wondering how you might look as an animated character from a favorite movie or show, consider the consequential impact of your actions on the only planet we have to call home. ■

INFRASTRUCTURE

Widening Slaughter Lane will be of benefit



Capri Wyatt
Dispatch Reporter

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With crawling traffic and drivers growing increasingly frustrated, roads in South Austin have become a daily headache. However, a new solution on the horizon could alleviate some of this congestion.

The City of Austin will be starting road work on Slaughter Lane in spring of 2025. One lane will be added to both sides of the road from either direction making the already four lane road into a six lane road. Changes will also be made to sidewalks and bike lanes. These lanes will be added to the section of Slaughter in between MoPac and Brodie Lane. Construction is predicted to be finished by summer of 2026 costing about \$22.9 million according to city documents.

These changes to Slaughter will help to reduce congestion and crashes as well as make the road more accessible to cyclists

and pedestrians. This is an important and beneficial addition that will help to keep the many people who frequently drive on Slaughter Lane safe.

According to KXAN, there have been well over 400 car accidents on Slaughter just from MoPac to Brodie in the span of five years. Due to Slaughter being a highly frequented roadway in Austin with many neighborhoods and stores along it, a high concentration of traffic is seen daily, especially around times when school and work get out. Adding two more lanes may not seem like much, but it will help to clear up traffic quicker, and make crashes less likely. According to Wired, the expansion of State Highway 161 in Dallas cut the time of rush hour in half.

The addition of these lanes will also bring a more accessible walkway at intersections such as Brodie Lane and Bowie High School. A continuous ADA-compliant sidewalk will be added to areas of Slaughter where there isn't already. Since many students at Bowie walk to and from school,

safety improvements can help to prevent accidents or dangerous pathways.

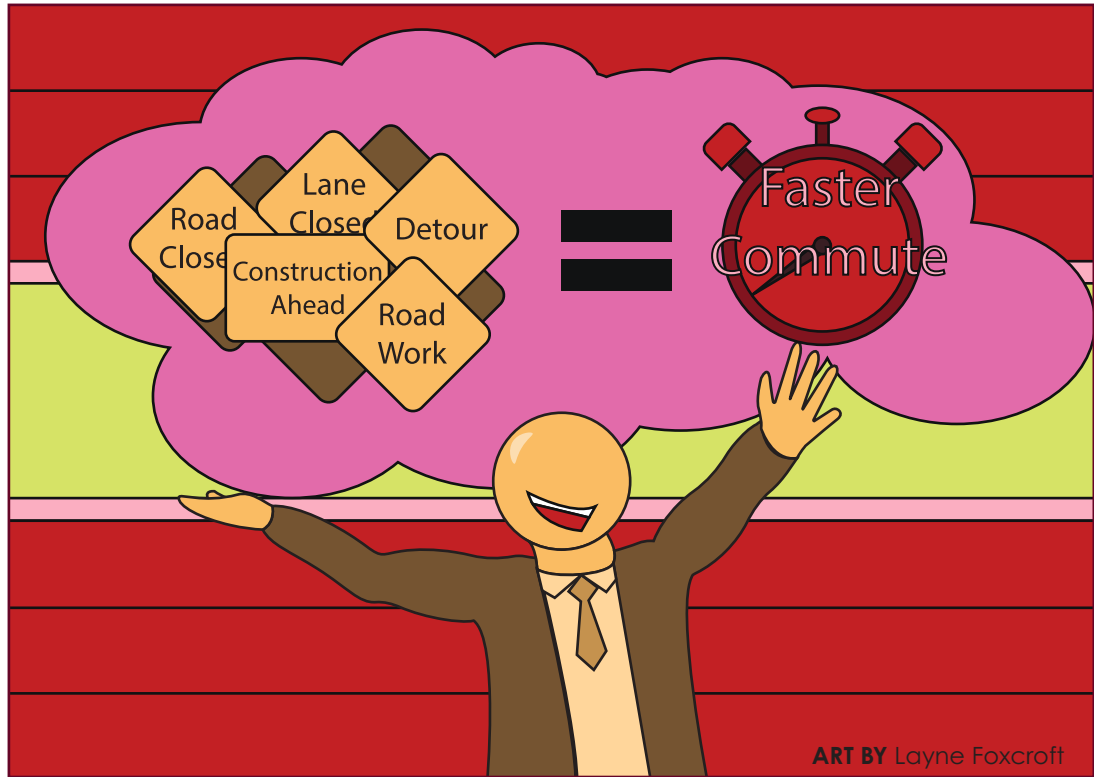
With a more accessible way to get to school, this could even lead more students to choose alternative forms of transportation, especially walking if they live nearby. This will help to protect the young citizens of Austin and work to prevent pedestrian related accidents.

In addition to the extra lanes and improved sidewalks, continuous bike lanes will be added to Slaughter Lane. Austin sees a large number of bicycle riders daily, so the addition of continuous bike lanes will ensure the safety of cyclists in Austin. Not only will this help to protect cyclists on such a busy road, but it could even influence more people to use a bike as a mode of transportation, lessening traffic. This will ensure that there are fewer bike related accidents along Slaughter and could help clear up some of the traffic.

Some citizens are concerned that there will be additional traffic due to construction, making congestion worse than it already is. While this issue is a common problem when it comes to road work, the end result will be a roadway that is even quicker and safer than before, benefitting all drivers. These changes will take time but they will contribute to the overall betterment of our roads.

Changes to improve roads in Austin should be continued throughout the city in order to maximize safety for both motorists and pedestrians. More projects such as improvements to I-35 and roads downtown should be prioritized especially since these areas experience a large amount of accidents. Citizens of Austin deserve to be protected and should not feel unsafe on the roads of their own city.

In order to promote safety among the citizens of Austin, these changes to Slaughter are important and vital for the betterment of our community. Additions such as extra lanes, continuous sidewalks, continuous bike lanes, and improved intersections will reduce injuries and accidents, improve traffic flow, and overall boost safety within Austin. ■



ART BY Layne Foxcroft

LANGUAGE

Women claim and modify hurtful slang

Weaponized language against girls is rightfully being altered to be uplifting and positive



Sam Bode
Commentary Editor
Questions? Concerns? Email: bowie.journalism@gmail.com

Popular music artist Chappell Roans' fame skyrocketed in 2024, landing her the Best New Artist award at the Grammys this year. She became so popular because of her unique style, lyrics, and use of controversial slang on stage. Her use of slang helped to shed light on a relatively recent movement against sexist slang.

Women have faced sexism in slang for years. It isn't uncommon to hear a woman being called a derogatory term just for being assertive or unwavering in her opinion. There is a wide ranging vocabulary of sexist words, and it doesn't seem like these words are going to disappear any time soon. Because of this, women are taking initiative and changing the connotation of the words that were previously used against them.

This, for now, is the best case scenario. Asking everyone to stop using a large range of words is an unrealistic goal, but changing the connotation and the situations the words are used in is achievable and should be done.

Throughout history, women have been put down and made to feel small by being compared to animals. The technical definition of a b*tch is a female dog. In the past, women have been called this when they are acting anything other than compliant because they are "b*tching like a dog".

Women are also compared to pussycats. When a woman is referred in some similar way, she's being compared to a scaredy cat; it's to make her feel weak and nervous.

When these terms are used against men, often by other men, it's to insult them and question their strength by comparing them to women. It's sad that one of the worst insults a man can face is that they are acting like a woman.

Women are taking initiative and changing the connotation of the words that were previously used against them. This, for now, this is the best case scenario.

Women are slowly but surely changing the way these words are used. B*tch is becoming a word with a non-specific connotation. It is now being used in a more casual or witty way rather than in an insulting one.

The "C-word" is another word that has undergone massive changes. It's historically been taboo. It was an offensive slang word to refer to a vagina or a woman. But it has changed a lot recently due to a new phrase: "serving c***". This short but powerful phrase was popularized by Roan when she started using it on stage. It means that a woman is showing strength and attitude and doesn't feel bad about it. It's a term of endearment. Women have successfully taken something that was previously tasteless and changed it into something powerful and uplifting.

While sexist slang words are often vulgar, some sexist terms are more subtle.

The word bachelor is used to describe an unmarried man. When thinking of someone as a bachelor, you probably think of a handsome and successful man. The equivalent of the term bachelor for women is spinster. Spinster is used to describe a woman as unmarried, unwanted, and an

old maid. This is another example where women are punished for being independent, while men are celebrated. According to Smithsonian Magazine, it wasn't until 2005 that the terms spinster and bachelor were removed from official documents in England and Wales.

Slang that isn't as "loud" as other vulgar terms can still be just as threatening. Because it initially sound less extreme, it is harder to catch when someone is using it. But just because the term isn't vulgar, it doesn't mean it isn't offensive.

Changing the meaning or the way we use these words is more important than ever. Some women have dedicated their lives to climbing through the ranks of their respective fields, and yet, are still attacked for being powerful. Though his campaign denied



ART BY Sophia Sepulveda

it, President Donald J. Trump was accused of calling then-Vice President Kamala Harris several of these derogatory terms.

Harris wouldn't have endured as much sexist shaming during her campaign if she weren't a woman. Trump and his campaign used sexist language against Harris because she is a woman, but for others, it was more complicated than that. When claims that she had affairs earlier in her career emerged, her political opponents latched

onto them and never let go. Some even discredited her career because of it, saying she slept her way to the top. Because of this, they thought that using sexist slang against her was justifiable.

Be a part of the change. If you use any famously sexist slang, don't use it for its original meaning or in a sexist manner. Women deserve to live their lives free of being put down by these overused and outdated terms. ■

FOOTBALL

Fantasy punishments; fun or useless?



Olivia Hunter
Dispatch Reporter
Questions? Concerns? Email: bowie.journalism@gmail.com

Fantasy Football has become a popular game for many, combining the thrill of sports and friendly competition.

As the stakes rise, so do the creative but controversial punishments for the league's losers. While these punishments can add a funny element, they can also be harmful. The real question is when do the players draw the line between fun and humiliating?

Participants love creating pranks, like making the loser wear a ridiculous outfit for the day or completing a public challenge to humiliate themselves. Many people encourage these light-hearted pranks, as an incentive to

keep players active within the game.

Engagement is the number one issue when it comes to players, as some lose interest and stop managing their teams, especially when there is little chance of winning. To prevent this, punishments are created, but in doing so, boundaries can be crossed.

Kids often take advantage of the pranks they force onto the last-place finishers. For example, viral videos have shown the losers having to commit embarrassing acts, like locking themselves into a cage and pouring an ingredient of the winner's choice over them or running a mile covered in mayonnaise. Most punishments are intended as good-natured fun and seen as hilarious, but the public tends to have mixed views.

Unintended effects on others and the environment from public challenges have occurred, which has caused

people to feel divided over the aspect of these punishments. Many people enjoy watching or participating in these punishments, as they create a funny scenario to look back on and laugh at.

On the other hand, public challenges have caused disruption within crowded areas and businesses. Overall, people are okay with these punishments continuing as long as they keep the game enjoyable without negatively affecting others, but some remain unsure because they worry these challenges may go too far and cross a line.

Teenagers seem to love the idea of fantasy football punishments, eagerly sharing videos and laughing at the consequences players go through. Whether it's spending 24 hours in a fast-food restaurant or performing karaoke, it all becomes entertainment.

More traditional adults view them as childish, disrespectful, and outright ridiculous. To them, the idea of grown men and women dressing up in silly costumes in public is immature and unnecessary, arguing that fantasy football is meant to be a fun game and if people were to take such things so seriously then they should focus on strategy and competition rather than turning the game into a spectacle.

Despite the differing opinions on fantasy football punishments, one thing remains clear: they have become a major part of the game. The game continues to evolve because of these punishments. For instance, the punishments bring awareness to the game itself, which attracts more participants, especially seen when there is a 16% percent increase in female fantasy football players and a record 13 million players within the game. As more people join, leagues strive to create entertaining and engaging experiences, often relying on these punishments as a way to maintain players.

In the end, with fantasy football's popularity continuing to grow, the role of punishments will likely remain an important topic of discussion. Will they continue to be the driving force behind the game's engagement, or will a new idea change what the game is now? Ultimately, the future of fantasy football punishments will depend on whether they continue to enhance the enjoyment of the game. ■

BULLDAWGS SPEAK!

What is your opinion on AI?

INTERVIEWS & PHOTOS BY Sam Bode



Lucy Bowie
Senior

AI can be helpful for certain things, like in healthcare, but it's just getting abused in today's society.

There are reasons AI could be useful, but the way we are currently using it is harmful.



Shivani Dilip Latha
Junior



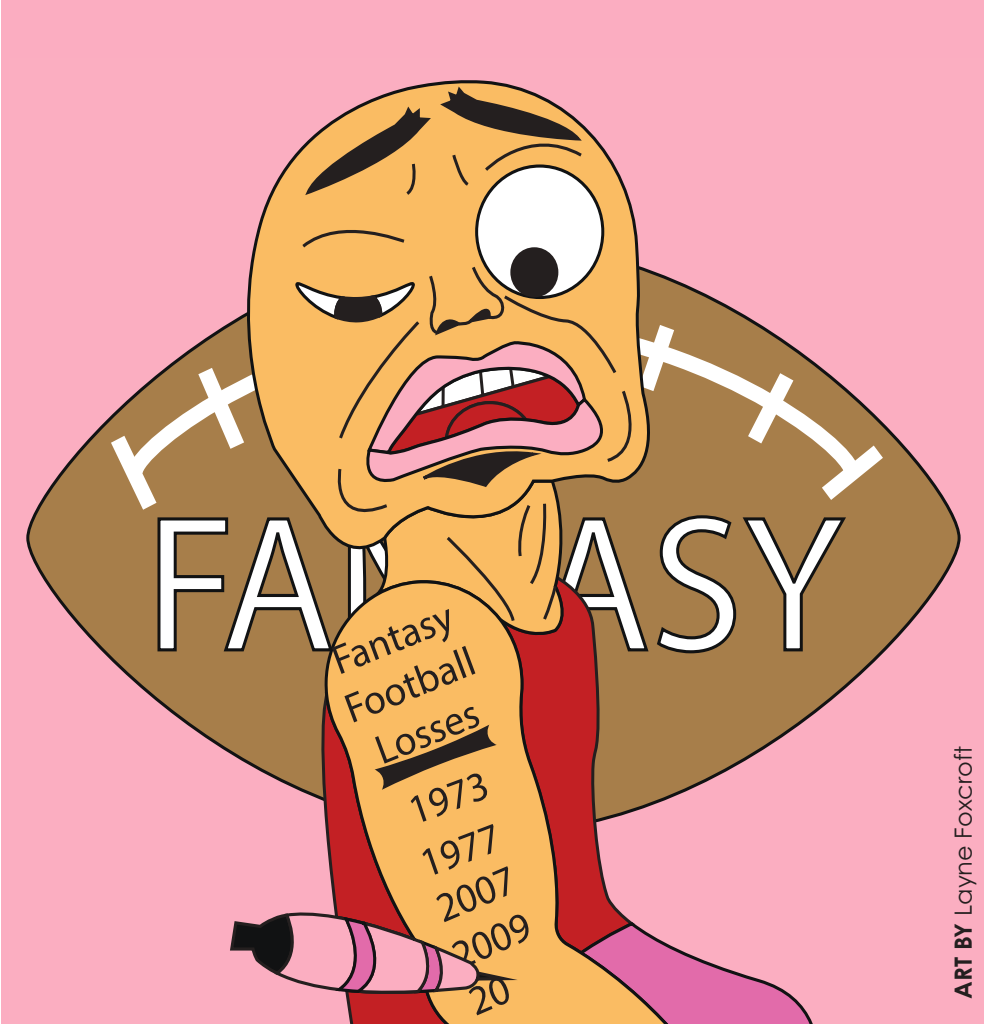
Brock Anderson
Sophomore

It is very useful, and I use it to help me with all of my math homework.

It is good, but can be bad when it is used in unsafe ways. It is an easy way to get information and is usually correct.



Noah Verette
Freshman



ART BY Layne Foxcroft

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

New federal bureau prioritizes budget

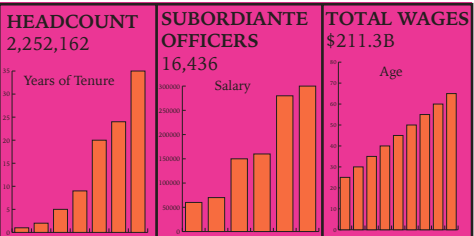
How the Department of Government efficiency is cutting costs and taking new steps

Department	Rank	Agency Spending 2024
 Department of Health and Human Services	001	\$1720.6 billion
 Department of Education	002	\$268.4 billion
 General Services Administration	003	\$-0.2 billion

SOURCE doge.gov



ART BY Sophia Sepulveda



Savannah Riggins
Politics Editor

The Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) is a new department within the federal government. It was established by an executive order on January 20, 2025, by President Donald J. Trump.

"From what I have heard about the Department of Government Efficiency it is taking a lot of funding away," counseling and mental health teacher Justine Lashley said. "DOGE is getting rid of a lot of important programs."

According to npr.org there has been some confusion surrounding who runs DOGE. President Trump pointed to Elon Musk as the head of DOGE in his joint address to congress on March 4, of this year. However, Musk is not an actual DOGE employee.

"I think Trump is referring to Musk as the head because Elon has a lot of influence in the economy," sophomore Gavin Coppedge said. "He is a billionaire, so he knows how finance works. He seems like the right choice, because he can make big changes and affect the U.S. easily."

Although Musk is not a DOGE employee, he does still play a role in the government as a senior advisor to the president. Senior advisors do not have formal government authority, but Musk's role allows him to voice his opinions and provide advice to the president.

"I think that Trump and Elon have a strange relationship," junior Masha Warnken said. "Trump definitely has Musk in his pocket and Elon is using Trump in the same way. They feed off of each other in terms of economic and political gain. They are both just trying to further their agendas."

Initially government officials declined to publicly say who the chairperson of DOGE was. However, according to MSNBC the official head of DOGE is Amy Gleason. According to White House Press Secretary, Gleason is the acting administrator of the new department.

"I think they didn't announce Amy as the head because no one knows who she is," junior Paul Commeau said. "Obviously Elon Musk is a very big figure, so Trump addressing him as the executive of DOGE is most likely only for social media. It was also a way to market Trump, especially during his election campaign."

The main purpose of DOGE is to regulate the government's resources, time, money, and workers. According to AP News, the department is doing this by laying off employees as well as cutting federal funding to divisions.

"I think that DOGE is improving government efficiency," Coppedge said. "The United States is not very good at managing finances, so having a department just for improving the countries budget will be helpful. The U.S. is one of the countries with the most debt, and we really need to fix it by getting rid of unnecessary things."

One Federal agency that has been a main target of budget cuts is the Department of Education (DOE). According to the official DOGE website as of April 1, the DOE is classified as the second highest on the departments official agency efficiency leader board,

"I think that DOGE really shouldn't be involved with education to begin with," Warnken said. "I believe that education is one of the most important things in this country. By withholding funding DOGE is enabling Trump to be able to cut the program completely and give education rights back to the states. If that happens it is going to be horrible for a lot of people, especially in Texas where they want to integrate religion into class time."

The DOE coordinates federal assistance to education and establishes policy for administrators. The department also ensures that programs are providing fair access to all people by enforcing laws that prohibit discrimination in programs that receive federal funding. These policies include the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 and The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. In addition to federal policies the DOE identifies problems in American education by collecting data and overseeing research. Once these issues are identified the DOE draws national attention to them to promote reform.

"I think the way the government sees it is that there is a bunch of spending on things that are not actually beneficial to education," Commeau said. "In that case I would agree. The Department of Education's job is to provide aid to educational programs, and if it is not doing that then it is just spending wastefully."

ment of Education's job is to provide aid to educational programs, and if it is not doing that then it is just spending wastefully."

To encourage the resignation of DOE employees, DOGE offered the employees up to \$25,000 to leave the department before firings occur. This buyout is called the Voluntary Separation Incentive Payment. According to The New York Post out of the 4,000 staff 137 workers have taken the offer.

"Compared to just firing them I think that \$25,000 is a good offer," Commeau said. "I'm not exactly sure how big the DOE is but if they have excess staff then cutting down would be beneficial in terms of government efficiency. By offering them this option it gives the workers a choice."

According to the DOGE X (formerly known as Twitter) account the department is working with the administrator of the United States Environmental Protection Agency, Lee Zeldin.

They are working to cancel Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) programs and Environmental Justice grants in order to save money.

"Unfortunately I believe the removal of DEI will affect students a lot," Lashley said. "I think they are going to take a lot of resources away. The Black Student Alliance (BSA) might not even be allowed to be a club next year. I think that this is a way to silence minorities and make sure our opportunities are limited"

Cutting DEI grants has impacted other departments in the federal government. According to Fox News the elimination of these DEI programs have caused the loss of funding for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). The IMLS is in charge of managing the grants to Museums and Libraries around the country.

"The slashing of this funding is not good," Warnken said. "With no funding important libraries and museums could close down. That means we would lose access to resources that teach us about history. Without learning about the goods and the bads of history we are at risk of repeating precious deadly mistakes."

Masha Warnken

"Trump definitely has Musk in his pocket and Elon is using Trump in the same way."

junior

BUDGET

Senate Bill 2 will potentially change Texas education

Sara Fowler
Dispatch Reporter

On February 5, 2025, Senate Bill 2 (SB2), which would create an Education Savings Account (ESA) program in Texas, advanced through the Texas senate. Following suit, House Bill 3 (HB3), another ESA program proposal, was filed in the House of Representatives.

ESAs are a voucher-like program which would establish bank accounts, funded from state taxpayer money. This money would go to the families in the voucher program who choose not to educate their K-12 students through public school. Additionally, the bank accounts will be used to pay for educational expenses, such as private school tuition. Currently, two different bills which would establish ESAs are being considered in Texas's 89th legislative session.

"The state already gives money for public expenses which benefit everyone, which is the point of public education," junior Annaliese Evans said. "Money going into private education doesn't benefit everyone, like it should. If that money were to go into public schools it could cover a wider variety of students and their education."

Currently, representatives supporting vouchers hold the majority in both chambers. 19 of the 31 members of the Senate already voted to advance SB2, and 75 of the 150 House members who signed on as co-sponsors of HB3, plus the bill's author, would be enough to pass the bill in the House. While the bills from both chambers would establish ESAs, HB3 addresses more than SB2, and there are differences in spending priorities and amounts between the bills. Further, both bills are currently in the House's Public Education Committee, leaving potential for continuous changes and amendments. "If it comes out of the committee, where we can make changes, then

it goes to the floor, and on the floor we can do floor amendments," Rep. James Talarico said. "Our two options to combat the bill are either to make amendments or vote it down."

While both bills propose using \$1 billion per year to fund ESAs, under SB2, ESAs would have a per-student allotment of \$10,000, whereas under HB3, the per-student allotment would be 85% of what public schools get through state and federal funding, with the minimum allotment being \$10,000. State budget analysis of HB3 projected the costs of the program rising from \$1 billion to almost \$5 billion per year by 2030.

"The budget of the program increases over time because the voucher becomes an entitlement and it has to create slots in the coming year," Rep. Sarah Eckhardt said. "The students who are in the program will be holding down that voucher however long they are in K-12, and then there will be others coming in behind them, so it has a compounding effect."

Neither bill contains an income cap for families participating in the program. Under SB2, when demand for ESAs exceeds funding, students whose household income falls below 500% of the federal poverty level, which is \$156,000 or less for a four person household, would be prioritized. Under HB3, students would be categorized into four tiers of priority. The highest priority tier would be disabled students at or below 500% of the federal poverty level, then students at or below 200% of the federal poverty level, then students between 200% and 500% of the federal poverty level, and finally students above 500% of the federal poverty level.

"High income families already

have the money and means to go to private school, and not everyone can do that," Evans said. "Even if regular families got a voucher, they still may not be able to afford private school."

Under SB3, students with disabilities would receive \$1,500 on top of the baseline \$10,000 allotment. Under HB3, students would receive the allotment amount plus an additional amount calculated based on what the state spends on special education per student in public schools, potentially up to \$30,000 total per year. Additionally, under HB3, private school parents would be able to request that a public school evaluate their student for a disability, which is already mandated in some cases under federal

law, and the public school would have to evaluate that student within 45 days.

"Under the voucher program, while you may get a larger voucher if your child has some kind of disability, it's nowhere comparable to what public education must provide to a student with disabilities," Eckhardt said. "Up to one third of students in public education have some level of disability."

Under both bills, private schools would not have to fulfill any additional requirements to participate in the program. Private schools participating in the program would still be able to reject students, not provide learning accommodations or evaluations, and not administer standardized tests or publish testing results.

"I would like the legislature to reject the vouchers and increase the funding for public schools, that way we can get a better education," Evans said. ■



PEACEFUL PROTEST: Citizens gather to protest Senate Bill 2. They are attempting to keep the voucher program from being established. PHOTO BY Audrey Cullinane



GETTING INVOLVED: Children have joined the battle against the ESA programs. They are urging voters to take action against SB2. PHOTO BY Gabby Bochey

EDUCATION

Special education

State funding changes proposed for a program that benefits student learning, growth, and development

Liberty **Pittman**
Junior Editor-in-Chief

Smiling high schoolers line up by the track, ready to cheer on their classmates. Whether running, walking, or rolling down the track, special education students at Bowie were able to participate in the Bowie Buddies Olympics. Bowie Buddies president, junior Sofia Flores, helped to facilitate the event, supporting her fellow students. Many members of the Bowie Buddies club participated in the events with their buddies and routed on their team members throughout the day.

“It’s easy when you see kids with special needs to think ‘they think differently than me, or they can’t fully process what’s going on,’” Flores said. “It can be easy to think that because maybe they’re non-verbal, or don’t speak as much. They may have developmental delay, but in the end, out of every single kid I’ve met, especially through doing Bowie Buddies, none of them want to be treated like a baby. They’re still high school students and they have full consciousness, so they’re very aware of what’s going on around them and of how they’re being spoken to. It’s just that people don’t think they are.”

EXPLAINING SPECIAL EDUCATION

Across America, there are programs in place to help ensure that students get the support they need to learn. Special Education programs are unique to each individual to ensure that children get the specific care that they need. According to the U.S. Department of Education, the right to free special education is protected under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which was originally passed in 1975.

“The special education program is a way to bridge the gap in education,” Flores said. “Students with disabilities don’t always learn the same way we do, so special education allows these students to get what they need to be self-sufficient in life and still learn. Learning is important no matter what level you’re learning at, there’s a reason we go to school. Special education is just a way of making sure that learning is accessible to all.”

Some services that a student may receive to help fulfill their educational needs are a 504 plan or an Individualized Education Program (IEP). According to the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD), to receive an IEP students must have one of the 13 disabilities listed under IDEA, and require special education services to make progress in school. Some of the disability categories listed under IDEA include visual, hearing, speech, or language impairment, emotional disturbance, Autism, and specific learning disabilities (SLD). According to NCLD, section 504 has a broader definition of disability, which is why more people may qualify.

“If, for example, someone has ADHD, but accommodations alone are able to help them do the work that they need done in a general education classroom, then they’re serviced under 504 which is the big umbrella that’s for accommodations only,” Special Education teacher Jacqueline Hooks said. “If someone needs more than accommodations, more support than just accommodations, they come to the land of special education and they’re served by an individualized education plan.”

In order to officially receive accommodations or special education services, a student must be evaluated. While parents have the right to request special education evaluation at any time, there is a specific process to determine eligibility. According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA), the special education process has five steps: referral, consent to evaluate, evaluation, determine eligibility (ARD), and development of the IEP.

“The evaluation process is lengthy and it has a lot of components to it like parent feedback, teacher feedback, student feedback,” Hooks said. “There’s multiple areas of testing that are done, especially in the early childhood setting when kids are first becoming identified. It is lengthy, but it needs to be lengthy if someone is going to be receiving services, and if those services are accurate.”

PROGRAMS AND RELATIONS

Hooks was drawn to teach at Bowie because she saw the special education department was well-staffed, and helped students to receive their services. Bowie has many accommodations and programs available to students when needed, such as quiet spaces for students to work or take a break, study skills classes, a speech and language pathologist, and vocational classes.

“The fact that here at Bowie we are able to have smaller life skills classes because we are adequately staffed, that’s fantastic,” Hooks said. “There are typically multiple teachers and teaching assistants in those classrooms so that kids can get the one-on-one help that they need. These are things that are nuanced to Bowie. We also have a social behavior skills

classroom where kids can go take a break, and counseling as a related service, so that kids that need extra counseling can get it. This is phenomenal.”

Bowie Buddies is a specific program at Bowie that aims to create more interaction and connection with the special education population. The group meets Fridays during FIT to bond while playing games like Uno, Candy Land, and Just Dance. The club also goes bowling every other Friday, and holds holiday parties, as well as other fun events.

“To me, in Bowie Buddies we are family,” junior Noah Dougherty said. “There’s so many nice, kind people in Bowie Buddies, and as an organization we intend to help out in whatever way we can with the special education program. Recently we had our Bowie Buddies Olympics which was really fun. Everyone was smiling and everyone was happy. It’s something that kind of helps these students come to school, because sometimes they are discriminated against, and this is something that they can look forward to in school.”

FUNDING AND POLITICS

The Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) has been making cuts to many federal agencies across the United states. One department that has faced significant cuts is the Department of Education (DoE), which the DOGE website lists as number three on the agency efficiency leader-board for most savings. According to Cal Matters, amidst funding cuts to the DoE, President Donald Trump has promised to keep special education intact, and his plan for doing so is moving it to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

“Automatically, whether we see the effects of it or not, it causes a shift in how we see special education,” Hooks said. “Pulling special education away and putting it under health and human services shifts people to a mindset that special education isn’t education. The things that are happening at the federal level will have a tremendous effect on special education. I think it causes prejudice toward people with disabilities, and I think that we will see the fallout in lack of funding and lack of teaching positions due to funding specifically in the area of special education, especially if it’s being taken away from the Department of Education.”

According to the Texas Tribune, there is a special education funding gap of about \$1.7 billion between what schools are actually spending on special education services, and what the state is funding. Texas also falls below many other states in general educational funding, according to Texas AFT, Texas is the 41st ranked state for per-student public education funding, and falls below the national average for teacher salary by over \$7,700.

“If students aren’t given the support they need, they can’t reach their full potential,” Texas Representative Gina Hinojosa said. “We all have a gift and potential to give, and our paths are different. It is the challenge of the public school system to provide what all our kids need. We could do it if we were fully funded, but when we’re not, kids fall through the cracks, and they have a much harder time.”

According to AP News, on Saturday May 3, Governor Greg Abbott signed off on a \$1 billion school voucher program. This program allows for students seeking private school options to receive government funded vouchers to help pay for their schooling. Private schools do not have to accept special education students, and can reject students for a variety of reasons as long as they are not deemed to be discriminatory based on protected characteristics like race.

“My understanding is that money will go towards those private schools when people use vouchers, which means less money, not just for special education, but for the public schools as a whole,” special education teacher Kristin Mijares-Levy said. “Also, private schools may not have special education programs, so special education students won’t get into those schools, but there’s gonna be less money at the public schools, and that’s where the special education students will be.”

According to KXAN, under the school voucher program students can be provided \$10,000 for tuition, and students with disabilities would receive a minimum of \$11,500 and could qualify for up to \$30,000 yearly for tuition. KXAN also reports that out of the 42 accredited private schools in Texas which specialize in serving students with disabilities and have their tuition prices posted, only three of those schools would be fully covered by a \$11,500 allotment, while 26 of the schools would be fully covered by the \$30,000 allotment.

“I know several kids who have done early childhood at a school for dyslexia, and I’m 100 percent behind that,” Hooks said. “However, the idea that under vouchers kids can go to schools that specialize in special education is like a separation of students with special needs from students that are typically abled, and I think that’s just never good. When we’re all

together and in the same classrooms it helps general education students and special education students. It’s such a beautiful thing when we can all get past our differences and be in the same room together.”

Starting in March of 2021, AISD was in a three year long legal battle due to delays in initial evaluations for an alleged 800 students, and late triennial evaluations for about twice as many students, according to Disability Rights Texas (DRTx). As a result AISD was required to create a \$4 million fund for students it failed to evaluate. Currently in Texas, House Bill 2 (HB2) is awaiting further senate consideration, following its passage from the house. According to the Texas Legislature Online the bill would establish the Special Education Full Individual and Initial Evaluation allotment which would give the district \$1,000 or more for every full individual and initial evaluation done.

“My son waited over a year to be evaluated for special education,” Hinojosa said. “His teacher was the first who came to me and said, ‘I think he needs to be evaluated’. She talked to the principal, and the principal agreed. We were all on the same page, but we couldn’t get the district to evaluate him. When I called the district office they said it was a statewide problem, there were not enough professionals working for our school districts to do these evaluations. So, I ended up having to spend about \$2,000 for outside, private evaluation to get my son evaluated.”

According to the Texas Legislature online, HB2 would also amend the Special Education allotment, creating weighted tiers of funding based on the intensity of service a student needs. The weight and definition for each tier would be decided by the Texas education commissioner Mike Morath.

“I think tier based funding is something that would be hard to organize and it’s important that the funding is used for each kid, and we’re not getting that extra funding for a kid with special needs, but then not putting it towards special education,” Flores said. “Those are just some concerns, but if it genuinely works out, it’s a really great idea because of equity. Tier based funding is not equal in a sense, because each kid is not getting an equal amount of funding for being here, but it’s equitable, because each kid is getting the amount that they need to be all on the same level. That’s something super great.”

Under HB2 there are also plans to generally increase funding for schools and special education. According to the Texas Tribune, the bill would increase the basic allotment of funding per student from \$6,160 to \$6,555, and additional sections of the bill would result in a statewide increase in the special education allotment funding from the 2024-25 school year by approximately \$615 million.

“I’ve only ever been a special educator, and the burnout in special education and education is typically pretty high, but I would never switch to general education,” Hooks said. “I love special education so much. I love all the children and the families that I’ve met, and when we are adequately staffed and adequately funded in special education lives can be changed. Families can be transformed, and kids can experience success that they wouldn’t have otherwise.” ■



ART BY Sophia Sepulveda

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

- A developmental disability caused by differences in the brain, People on the Autism spectrum often have different ways of learning and paying attention

Common characteristics

- problems with social communication and interaction
- repetitive behaviors or interest

Cerebral palsy (CP)

- A motor Disability caused by anomalies in brain development, which effects a persons muscle control

Types of CP and their characteristics

- Dyskinetic - uncontrollable movements
- Spastic - stiff muscles, often in the legs
- Ataxic - poor balance and coordination
- Mixed - combination of other types of CP

Down syndrome

- 95% of people with down syndrome have Trisomy 21 which means all the cells in the body have an extra copy of chromosome 21

Common characteristics

- flattened facial features
- small ears, hands, and feet
- a shorter neck