

The Official Student Newspaper
of the
Abraham Joshua Heschel
High School



"We stand for what we utter..."

- Rabbi Heschel

Heschel Student Body Welcomes New Student Government Executive Board

By Olivia Levine '25, Editor-in-Chief

On Wednesday, Jan. 29, newly-elected Student Government President Pierce Malter officially announced the new Student Government Executive Board. The new executives of each council come with many new promising initiatives.

"Our exec board's size is matched only by its massive ambition. I want to facilitate opportunities for students to take risks," Malter said. "Students' involvement with student government isn't, and shouldn't be, limited to voting. The more everyone is in contact with the execs, as well as their friends on council, the more effective we'll be."

Hesed and *Tzedek* co-Vice Presidents Haym Suissa and Hannah Goldman plan on introducing unique programs to the student body to increase student engagement and cultivate community. One key initiative Goldman plans to implement is a *Bikur Cholim* program. When students miss multiple days of school for a sickness, they will receive a message from a classmate offering their help and support." Suissa hopes "to plan a talent show alongside the Programming Council to close the first semester and fundraise for a

student body selected cause."

Student Affairs Vice President Liam Barlev wants to make the council even more accessible to the student body. His vision for the council is "one that listens to students, turning as many of their ideas into action that benefits the whole school." One of his first key initiatives



will be to "restructure the methods that Student Affairs engages with students, to maximize what the council

is able to accomplish each week."

Programming co-Vice Presidents Madeline Friedland and Liam Bahar have their sights set on creating a council that creates "meaningful programs that engage and inspire our school community." Bahar said, "Right away we will work with the other VPs to get "*Kol Heschel*,"

the talent show, off the ground as soon as possible." Friedland aims to launch a Jewish Leader Spotlight, stating, "It is a great way to showcase the achievements of influential Jewish leaders and a practical use of the bulletin board!"

Spirit Vice President Zack Levy said, "A successful Spirit Council comes from a sense of unity and excitement, bringing the entire school together through creative and inclusive events. By working with teams, clubs, and the administration, I hope to elevate school spirit and create lasting memories for everyone."

To achieve this, one key initiative Levy plans to take on this year is revamping senior nights. Levy explained, "To make them more exciting and memorable, I am going to do my best to make attendance as high as possible. On my first day as VP, around 40 students came to support the boys varsity basketball team for their senior night game versus MTA. It was a big hit, and the crowd loved the posters I made of the seniors' faces to wave around for support throughout the game."

Photography by Olivia Levine '25, Editor-in-Chief

Monologues "Bring Shakespeare to Life" at Heschel

By Yhonatan Yehudai '25, Editor-in-Chief

On Jan. 3, Heschel high school students packed into the Roanna Shorofsky Theater to watch members of the Shakespeare club compete in the annual monologue competition.

In the weeks leading up to the actual contest, students in the Shakespeare club rehearsed and memorized speeches from various plays, often utilizing the weekly clubs block and their lunch periods to practice. While middle school drama teachers Anna Savant and Nick Bombicino and English



Department Chair Penny Ratcliffe assisted, it was the students who were primarily responsible for perfecting their performance.

"I'd say [the monologue] seven times, always go to the same room, do the same routine in the mirror," said junior Dani Grinker, who won the competition for her performance as Katherine in *The Taming of the Shrew*.

Despite all of her preparation, Grinker described her anxiety before performing in front of such a large audience: "I was so nervous," she said. "I sort of black out when I'm [performing], I'm just in a different world."

Ratcliffe, who organized the event, commended all of the performers for their courage

to perform in front of the entire student body. "Once you've performed a monologue in front of 400 people, there's nothing much you can't do," she wrote via email.

Grinker emphasized the importance of keeping Shakespeare alive in the modern day because of how relevant the subject matter remains today.

"People have always been people with human wants and needs and Shakespeare just articulates that so beautifully, and I think it's really special for our community to look back in time and see human beings behaving like human beings," Grinker said.

Photography by Olivia Levine '25, Editor-in-Chief

Freshman and Senior Grades Take on Weekly Hesed Projects

By Maya Ortner '25, News Editor

Hesed days have long been a special part of the Heschel experience, offering students the opportunity to engage in both community service and grade bonding during dedicated days each semester. From park cleanups to packing or delivering food, these interspersed days enrich students' learning with kindness.

Beyond these days, the 9th and 12th grades further commit themselves to Hesed through weekly projects.

Every week, a 9th grade advisory travels to Manhattan Children's Center (MCC), a

non-profit dedicated to providing support and education for children with autism, in order to spend time conversing and interacting with students.

Speaking of his experience at MCC, freshman Hayden Ingberg said, "I really enjoyed going to the Manhattan Children's Center because I got to spend time with kids that I normally wouldn't. It was fantastic and my partner and I played Uno."

The seniors' project has been cooking and delivering food to the Community Fridge on the Upper West Side, a fridge where anyone in need can pick up fresh meals. Each week, two

advisories leave class early to prepare quesadillas and salad, while one advisory goes to deliver the food to the fridge.

"I think it's really nice that Heschel builds in time for community service," said senior Mia Perry. "It's particularly meaningful that, as opposed to in previous years, we have a single yearlong Hesed project that our grade dedicates time to each week."

Overall, these projects have been a great success and a fantastic way to involve students in volunteer work beyond the occasional Hesed day.

Excitement Builds as Student Body Elects New Executive Board

By Mia Biloon, '28, Staff Writer

On Tuesday, January 28, after a three day campaign period, during which candidates put up posters and shared their qualifications and proposals, the student body voted on the next Student Government Executive Board. Jewish and Student Life Educator, Julia Bernstein, said that the campaign is “an opportunity to build excitement around the candidates, for them to start sharing their ideas, and hopefully that will help inform the students of their plans and the policies and initiatives they want to work on.”

This year, there were two different programs due to a record number of students run-

ning for executive positions. All of the speeches could not fit into one program. Candidates had two minutes to present their speeches to the student body. During the first program, the Spirit, Programming, and Student Affairs candidates delivered their speeches and new initiatives.

Sophomore Tamar Schwarz agreed with many of the Student Affairs candidates when she said, “the lunch line is always really chaotic and making a change to that would be beneficial.” Later in the day, during the second program, the *Hesed* and *Tzedek* as well as Presidential candidates spoke. After each category of candidate, students received a google form, ranking the candidates for each position from

first to last.

After an exciting campaign period, the results of the election are in. The VPs elected are Zack Levy for Spirit Council and Liam Barlev for Student Affairs Council. Unexpectedly, there were two ties this year, resulting in Hannah Goldman and Haym Suissa becoming co-VPs of the *Hesed* and *Tzedek* Council, and Liam Bahar and Maddie Friedland becoming co-VPs of the Programming Council.

Lastly, the President of Student Government, Pierce Malter, was elected. Congratulations to all of the executives, and stay tuned for the amazing initiatives each executive will put into place!

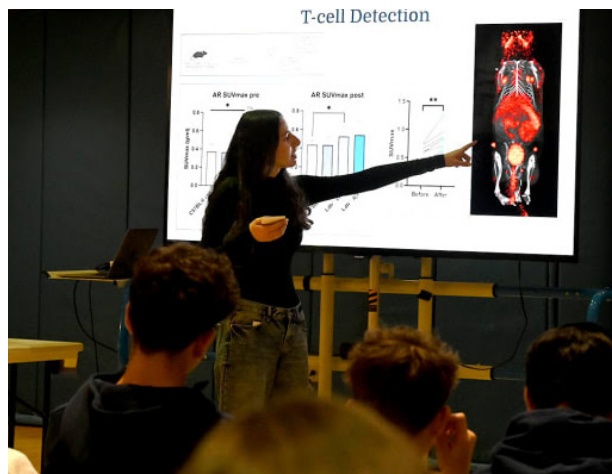
Heschel Students Inspire Classmates With Summer Research Projects

By Yalei Ravin '26, Layout Editor

On Tuesday, Dec. 10, Science Research Initiative (SRI) students presented a summer's worth of research to an awed student body. The students were placed in groups of three, with each student delivering a 10-15 minute presentation to an audience of over 50 students and faculty members.

SRI is an elective that students take in the fall of their sophomore year. A key requirement of this course is that students spend six to seven weeks in a lab during the summer between their sophomore and junior year, though some participate between their junior and senior year. During this time, students work under the guidance of qualified professionals in a specific field, assisting them with various laboratory experiments and research. This year's

group researched a wide range of topics, from neurological diseases such as Alzheimer's to me-



chanical engineering applications like lab robot procedures.

SRI organizer and biology teacher Nao-

mi Bergman worked tirelessly to match each student in the elective with a professor and a lab. From Peru to Mount Sinai, professors and their assistants trained Heschel students in various scientific methods and procedures.

Students and teachers alike gained a wealth of knowledge from the presenters, who spent months preparing. In an email to all SRI presenters, Bergman wrote, “You were all so poised and spoke so clearly and passionately about your summer research, and it was apparent to your audience.”

Junior Simon Arenson, one of the participants, reflected on his lab experience saying, “It was extremely educational. Presenting in front of other people helped me learn how to communicate my research in the future.”

Photography by Gabe Godin

Heschel Mock Trial Team Welcomes New Coach

By Lev Dubler-Furman '26, Contributing Writer

Early this school year, Assistant United States Attorney Adam Gitlin, a Heschel High School alum and member of the school's board of directors, became the newest coach of the Mock Trial team. As a lawyer with trial experience, Gitlin is a welcome addition to the team. Since becoming an AUSA, Gitlin works mainly on civil litigation including the defense of federal agencies and employees in federal court, as well as affirmative cases where the government brings a case to enforce the law.

When I asked him about his motivation

for becoming a lawyer, he mentioned his own experience on the Heschel Mock Trial team in high school. “It contributed to my interest in pursuing a career in law,” Gitlin said. “It exposed me to the work of a trial lawyer and the experience provided me with the opportunity to strengthen my public speaking, advocacy, and analytical skills.”

As a coach, Gitlin tries to emulate his father, who was the coach of the team while Gitlin was at high school. “He set an example for wanting to give back to the school and help students learn.” Like his dad, Gitlin tries to teach the skills he has learned in the legal practice while also allowing students to craft their own

approach.

For high school students interested in a law career, Gitlin suggested pursuing internships and any other opportunities in the law field. He advised, “engaging in different legal experiences can help confirm students' interest in pursuing a legal career and refine what area of the law they might be interested in.”

And of course, Gitlin highly recommends that students join the Mock Trial team. “Students learn a lot,” he said. “Students will develop skills that can help them throughout their careers.”

Upper West Side Gem Promptly Closes, Causing Neighborhood Outrage

By Tessa Mank '25, Online Editor

The Upper West Side was shaken by the sudden closing of Absolute Bagels, a community favorite, on Dec. 13.

Absolute Bagels, formerly located on Broadway and 107th, has been a star in the New York bagel industry for years. Featured at the

top of many food reviews, the family-owned business earned its clout with perfect bagels and spreads.

“The bagels were absolutely amazing,” said freshman Olive Mank.

However, after a health inspection on Dec. 11, the shop quickly lost its credibility. Within 24 hours of the health department

finding rats, cockroaches and dead rodents, the beloved bagel shop promptly announced it was going out of business.

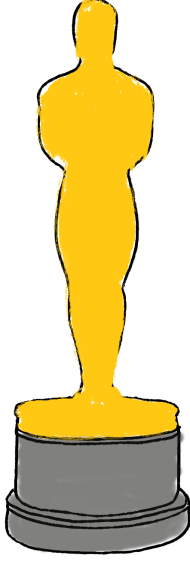
“The value Absolute Bagels adds to the Upper West Side and the world far outweighs any laws or regulations they've allegedly violated,” said Upper West Side resident Eli Goldman.

Oscar Predictions 2025: Who Will Take Home the Gold?

By Charlie Shiff '26, Staff Writer

On March 2, comedian Conan O'Brien will host the 96th Academy Awards to honor the best in film from 2024; from large scale blockbusters to indie gems, 2024's cinematic landscape has pushed boundaries and captivated audiences.

Unlike 2023, when most viewers knew that "Oppenheimer" and "Poor Things" would dominate the awards, the upcoming Oscars offers a more unpredictable race with an even more diverse slate of contenders. Critics and fans alike both have vastly different opinions on who will take home the coveted awards. Two such fans are Junior Noah Barnett who said, "The Brutalist is the clear choice for best picture." College Counselor Alex Faye agreed, "I think it's got to be *The Brutalist*." While many agree with Barnett and Faye about Brady Corbet's three and



a half hour drama, there are just as many people who think the award could go to films like Sean Baker's *Anora* or Edward Berger's *Conclave*. To help with the confusion going into Oscar season, here are my thoughts on who could take home awards in all of the major categories:

- Best Picture: *The Brutalist* (A24)
- Best Actress: Demi Moore (*The Substance*)
- Best Actor: Adrien Brody (*The Brutalist*)
- Best Supporting Actress: Zoe Saldana (*Emilia Pérez*)
- Best Supporting Actor: Kieran Culkin (*A Real Pain*)
- Best Animated Feature Film: *The Wild Robot* (DreamWorks Animation) OR *Flow* (Side-show/Janus Films)
- Best International Feature Film: *Emilia Pérez* (Netflix)
- Best Director: Brady Corbet (*The Brutalist*)

- Best Original Screenplay: Sean Baker (*Anora*)
- Best Adapted Screenplay: Peter Straughan (*Conclave*)
- Best Original Song: El Mal (Jacques Audiard, Camille, Clément Ducol)
- Best Original Score: *The Brutalist* (Daniel Blumberg)
- Best Cinematography: *The Brutalist* (Lol Crawley)
- Best Production Design: *Wicked* (Nathan Crowley)
- Best Costume Design: *Wicked* (Paul Tazewell)
- Best Makeup & Hairstyling: *The Substance* (Pierre Olivier Persin)
- Best Visual Effects: *Dune: Part Two* (Paul Lambert)

Art by Olivia Levine '25, Editor-in-Chief

How to Make the Coziest Bed this Winter

By Gila Lehon '26, Staff Writer

If you look forward to returning to bed the second after you wake up, you are not alone. High school is exhausting, and catching up on one's beauty sleep is often challenging. However, creating a comfortable and cozy sleeping environment can help optimize sleeping time and make everyone's bed feel like a sanctuary. So, if your bed is simply not good enough, look no further. These are the must-haves for an exceptionally comfy bed.

Many Blankets. Often overlooked in bed-making is layering many different types of blankets. This helps to trap heat, which is imperative during NYC winters. It can also help you develop a unique and personalized feel for your

bed. For the first layer, a decently thin and soft throw blanket is preferable to create a warm feel throughout the bed. The second layer should be a heavy comforter. I recommend using a cotton duvet cover, which is both comfortable and cool.



Finding the Right Pillows. Finding the perfect pillow, essential for a good night's rest, can be a struggle. In order to determine how big, fluffy, or

flat of a pillow you need, take the time to think about the position in which you sleep, particularly your head placement.

A Sleep Mask. A sleep mask can be the difference between waking up in the middle of the night and sleeping for ten straight hours. Particularly in the bright city, a sleep mask can prevent pesky lights from interfering with your beauty sleep. They are also a good signal for your brain that it is time for bed. Silk masks are best, as they are very comfortable.

You now possess the knowledge required to get the best sleep possible. Use it wisely!

Art by Eliya Yehudai '27, Assistant Art Editor

World's Best Brownies

Eliya Yehudai '27, Assistant Art Editor

Why spend your weekend glued to your phone when you can spend it baking these delicious brownies?!

- Ingredients:
- ½ cup unsalted butter
 - 1 cup white sugar

- 2 eggs
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- ⅓ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- ¼ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp baking powder

Directions:
Preheat oven to 350°

Mix melted butter, sugar, vanilla, and eggs in a large mixing bowl. Set aside. In a separate bowl, mix flour, cocoa powder, baking powder, and salt. Combine dry and wet ingredients and mix well. Pour batter into a parchment-lined cake pan. Bake for 30 minutes. Let cool, serve, and enjoy!

Spotlight: Heschel's Law Review Club

By Aviva Guttman '25, Opinion Editor and Daphne Stifelman '25, News Editor

If you're looking for a place to dive into the drama of landmark Supreme Court decisions and discuss how the law shapes our world, the Heschel Law Review Club is where you should be. Each week, under the guidance of faculty advisor David Steinberg, the club



dissects key Supreme Court cases and dives into their historical context, legal arguments, and implications for our lives. The Law Review Club also holds debates, allowing members to sharpen their public speaking and critical thinking skills. The club is a part of a nationwide organization: High School Law Review, and gives members the exciting opportunity to publish a law journal at the end of the year, composed of essays written by Heschel students. The

review will be available on the High School Law Review website, and the club plans to nominate two of its best articles to be featured in the National Law Review, which is read by Supreme Court justices. Whether you're aiming for a career in law, interested in public speaking, love writing, or just curious about the law, Heschel's Law Review Club offers something for you.

Photography by Liam Barlev '26, Photography Editor

Recapping My Semester at Alexander Muss High School in Israel

By Georgia Bregman '26, Staff Writer

The first semester of my junior year was a whirlwind. I explored Israel, learned in-depth Israeli history, and made life-long friends.

From September to December, I attended the Alexander Muss High School in Israel. Muss is a 4 month study abroad program for American and Canadian Jewish highschoolers. During the program, students spend 50 days on trips and 50 days on campus.

Muss' High School's main location is in Hod Hasharon, a city in the Central District of Israel, about 30 minutes from Tel-Aviv and one hour from Jerusalem.

The school is located on a campus shared with an Israeli Boarding School, Mosenson. I chose to attend Muss to learn about Israeli and Jewish history, to explore college-like independence, and to experience the fun of living in Israel.

After Oct. 7, 2023, I felt very disconnected from Israel because of the myriad of anti-Israel sentiment in the media. I doubted my previous knowledge on Israel and sometimes wondered if I was really on the "right side." I also felt that I wasn't doing enough for Israel. As a Jew, watching the war play out from across the world didn't feel right. So I decided--despite my fears of not making friends, leaving my family, and missing so much school-- to leave Heschel and NYC for a once in a lifetime experience.

My main class, Israel Studies, covered all of Jewish and Israeli history from Avraham until today. We frequently spent "class" days travelling around Israel, going to the locations that corresponded with our unit in class. For example,

our first trip was to *Tel Azeka*, the remains of an ancient town dating back to the Cannanites. We learned about Jewish Kingdoms in Jerusalem, the destruction of the second temple at the top of Masada, and the birth of Zionism in one of



the first Israeli towns, *Mazkeret Batya*.

In November, we flew to Poland to learn about Jewish life in Eastern Europe and the Holocaust. The Poland trip was a week filled with tremendous ups and downs. We learned about the vast number of Eastern European Jewish towns and their traditions, thriving *Yeshivot* for Torah study, and the tightness of their communities. We also spent many days walking through concentration camps and death camps, learning about the heinous crimes the Nazis committed and hearing many peoples' stories from the *Shoah*.

In Israel, we also experienced Israeli nature, culture, and diversity. We rode camels in the desert, slept in Bedouin tents, hiked in the Golan Heights, swam in the Dead Sea, and bargained in the shuks of Tel Aviv, Jaffa, and Jerusalem. We learned about Druze culture and ate dinner at a Druze man's house, volunteered

making food for soldiers, picked strawberries and oranges, and almost finished a four day camping trip. Yam le Yam is usually a hike from the Mediterranean Sea to the Sea of Galilee (Kineret), but on the night before the last day, the Israeli Military took part in an operation where thousands of pagers and walkie-talkies exploded in the hands of Hezbollah operatives. Since we were very close to Lebanon, we had to evacuate immediately.

Though all the trips were very interesting and fun, my favorite part of Muss was Shabbat spent in different towns. On Shabbat, we were either on campus, having a free weekend off campus, or staying in a new town. Shabbats on campus were days of late night talks, catching up on sleep, reading books, and going on walks. Shabbats off campus gave us more freedom, as long as Muss knew where we

were staying. I spent my open Shabbats with family and friends in Haifa, Kibbutz Beit Alpha, and Tel Aviv. Lastly, some Shabbats away (with the Muss group but off campus) were spent in Akko (an ancient Crusader and Ottoman city), Kibbutz Ketura, Jerusalem, Ein Gedi, and Mitzpe Ramon, my personal favorite.

Going to Muss was one of the best decisions of my life. The school taught me, in detail, the history of the Jewish State, gave me best friends, and shaped me into a mature, independent young adult.

Photography by Georgia Bregman '26, Staff Writer

Heschel Students Lean on Jewish Youth Groups Amid the War in Israel

By Miriam Gross '25, Opinion Editor

The horrific events of Oct. 7 have shaken the Jewish community globally, but for students at Heschel, the impact feels deeply personal. With many students tied to Israel through family, culture, and identity, the war has become more than just a distant geopolitical conflict; it has turned into a painful and intimate experience. In these challenging times, Jewish youth groups like Me'ever, BBYO, and the Israeli Scouts (*Tzofim*) provide critical spaces for students to process, connect, and take action.

Me'ever, known for its focus on advocacy and dialogue, has helped some Heschel students channel their feelings into meaningful action.

Senior Elie Douer, a Me'ever participant, shared how the movement reshaped his sense of purpose. "The movement taught me the skills I would need to be a leader in other communities important to my identity, like the Sephardic community, the clubs I lead, the Heschel community, or the Jewish community as a whole," he said. "Before the war, it felt like an extracurricu-

lar I had to do. Now, I feel a personal responsibility because I see the impact it has."

Douer described how Me'ever's philosophy emphasizes youth-driven change. "Throughout history, change has always been carried out through the youth," he said. "After the start of the war, Me'ever became especially important to me because of all the antisemitism and protests in the city. It gave me the opportunity to teach younger Jews how to lead, stand up for Israel, and feel confident in their Jewish identity."

For students like senior Aerin Levine, BBYO has been a source of collective healing and connection to Israel. "It shows me the power of communal healing and finding silver linings amidst traumatic times," said Levine. "It has also strengthened my desire to deepen my connection with my people."

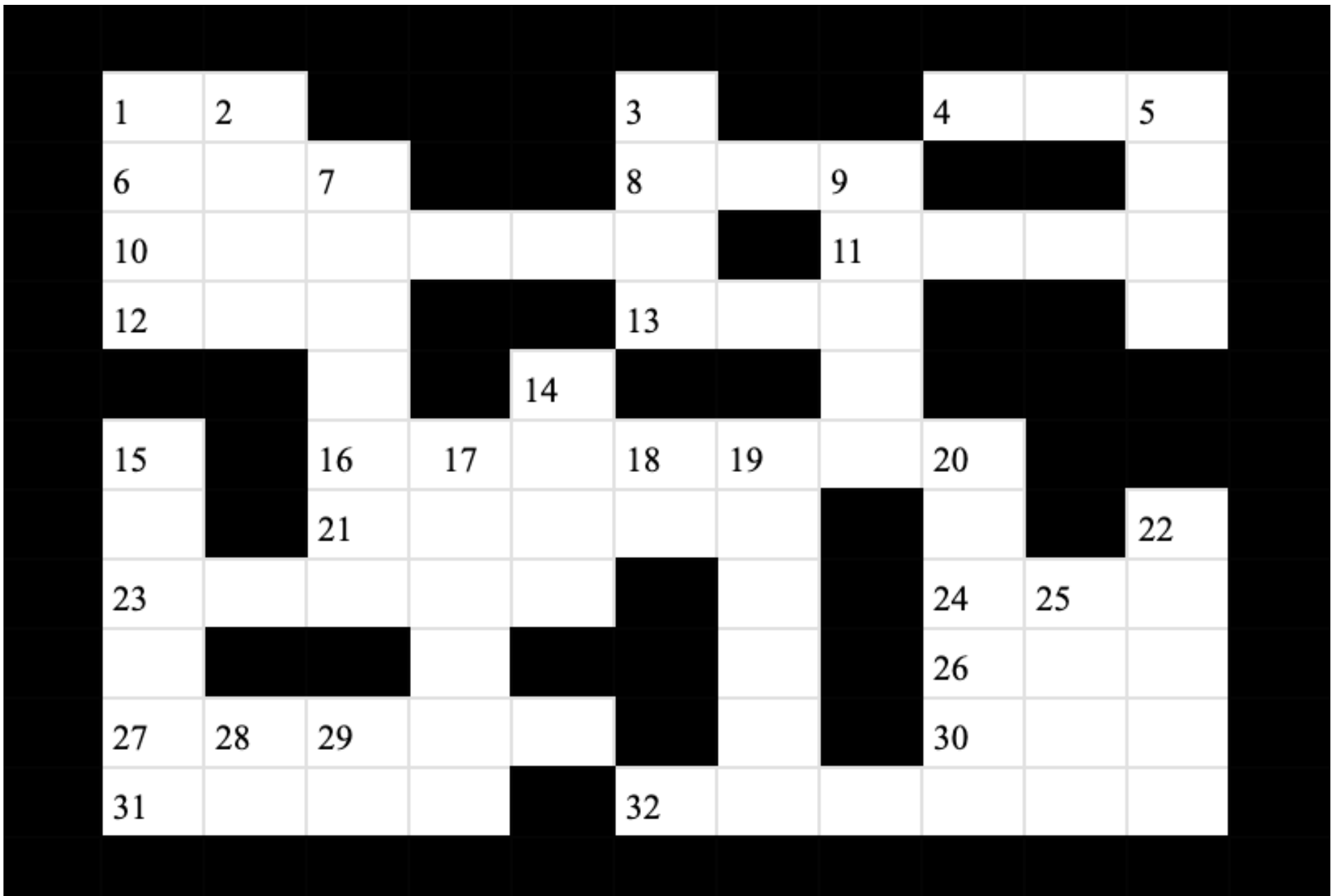
Aerin's BBYO chapter's initiatives have bridged the gap between local teens and those directly affected by the war. "We've buddied with Israeli chapters, held reflective programming, and organized fundraisers for Israel," she

said. For her and others, BBYO has turned grief into action, allowing students to feel part of a larger global effort.

For students closely tied to Israeli culture, *Tzofim* offered familiarity and solidarity throughout the war. "Now more than ever, it's brought us together and created a sense of family," said Sophomore Ben Gilad. "*Tzofim* has grown a lot in numbers since the war because it's a place where we can group together. It's affected my life so much, bringing me happiness and community amidst this tragedy."

However, not everyone has found solace. Senior Yotam Sabo, another participant in *Tzofim*, expressed a more conflicted view. "Being here in America, away from my family and people actually going through the war, I feel isolated," he shared. "*Tzofim* hasn't eased my anxiety. It's given me a community, but it hasn't made me feel less worried--it just makes me feel supported while I sit behind the glass, watching."

Crossword



Across

1. Florida, abbr.
4. Common file format
6. Lighter Macbook option
8. Your grandparents might use it for email
10. Most used scale in modern music
11. "Take A Chance On Me" band
12. "You're it"
13. Santa's assistant
16. Spanish or Portuguese
21. Tow truck in "Cars"
23. Genre of Verdi, Puccini, and Wagner
24. Timid
26. Nickname for your spouse
27. Senior
30. Writer of this crossword puzzle
31. What dreidels do
32. Sour

Down

1. Information proven true
2. Bean common in the South
3. Tortoise's competitor
5. Caramel custard dessert
7. Early 20th century piano music style
9. Pita alternative
14. Animal rights group
15. "Guys" in British slang
17. Empty, desolate, abandoned
18. Second note in a scale, after "do"
19. Sarcastic with some mettle in it
20. "Snacked" in Yiddish
22. Someone who has a pessimistic attitude
25. Hindu festival in March
28. One kind of vinyl record
29. Prefix meaning "two"

Latin American Culture Club Brings Students Together

By Claudia Messer '25, Online Editor

The Latin American Culture Club (LACC) has long been a prominent club at Heschel, inviting students from diverse backgrounds to join together and celebrate their cultures.

Club leaders come from various countries, such as Brazil, Argentina, and Cuba, enriching the club with many perspectives. The club's faculty advisor is Spanish teacher Ivania Marinero. Topics in LACC meetings range from

exploring traditional holidays such as Dia de Los Muertos to discussing Jewish communities in Latin American countries.

Students in LACC are also encouraged to share their interests and often propose topics inspired by their backgrounds. This past week, LACC invited students – members and non-members alike – to cook plantains, a popular Colombian dish. Working together in the kitchen while listening to Latin American music, participants bonded and learned more about each other's cultures.

In the future, LACC intends to organize similar events to further unite the student body.

Club leader and senior Elie Douer said, "The purpose of this club is to offer a space for students to interact with others who share their unique culture, as well as for non-Latin American students to learn more about a community that they may not know much about."

The 2024-25 College Football Season: A Season for the Future

By Zachary Levy '26, Sports Writer

The 2024-2025 college football season was a year of thrilling matchups, controversy, and dramatic storylines. With teams joining new conferences, a historic Heisman race, and a new playoff format, the college football season was one for the ages.

The most anticipated component of the 2024 season was the expansion of the College Football Playoff to 12 teams from four. Heschel students applauded this change.

"I am so happy that the College football playoffs finally expanded to 12 teams," said sophomore Josh Axel. "While my Michigan Wolverines did not make it this year, I was excited to be able to watch more college football than ever before."

Senior Abe Charkow, while excited for more football, said, "Look, the more the games the better, but why is the seeding like this? No Alabama? No Miami? I have no idea why SMU made the playoffs over them, they should have never had a shot!"

Another important change was the conference realignment. Many teams are moving to new conferences, which will change traditional

rivalries and playoff races. Most notably, USC and UCLA went to the Big Ten, and Texas and Oklahoma went to the SEC. This created new thrilling in-conference matchups and made the pathway to win a conference championship much different than it has been before.

In the SEC, for example, the changes led to Georgia vs. Texas in the title game. It was their second matchup of the year, and Georgia took the Horns down for the second time in one season. "I was there," said junior Jordan Nili. "It was heartbreaking, especially with all the hype going into it."

Of course, rivalry games did not disappoint, delivering some of the most intense and highly competitive matchups of the season. Although Ohio State was expected to beat defending champs Michigan, Michigan's powerhouse defense came through, leading the Wolverines to beat the Buckeyes 13-10. "I have no idea how we beat OSU but who cares?! Love to show them who's boss," said junior PJ Abramson.

Texas vs. Texas A&M had their first matchup in 13 years, and ticket prices averaged around \$1000. Current University of Texas, Austin student and Heschel Class of 2023's

Jared Levy said, "The last time we played Texas A&M, I was in first grade, and never expected to have any connection to this game, but when that game started, I felt like I'd been a part of the rivalry my whole life." Texas pulled through to defeat the Aggies 17-7 in a close game.

The Heisman Trophy race was a major storyline throughout the season. Colorado's Travis Hunter, who plays both cornerback and wide receiver, walked away with the honor.

"He's just unreal," said junior Jack Steinberg.

Ohio State emerged victorious at the end of the season, beating Notre Dame 34-23 in the National Championship game. The Buckeyes, seeded 8th to start the playoffs, dominated the tournament by winning all four playoff games by at least two possessions, with a combined scoring margin of 145-85.

Junior Jonah Weiss said, "Although I never watch college football and don't really know anything about it, as an Ohio native, I am so excited to see that the Buckeyes won the national championship and know they will run it back."

2024-2025 was a college football season of firsts and pointed to a rapidly evolving college

Djokovic "Poisoning" Claim Adds Spice to Australian Open Drama

By Ariel Zeltzer '27, Sports Editor

As the Australian Open got under way, Novak Djokovic claimed he had been poisoned.

The Serbian tennis star, who is aiming for his 11th Australian Open title, stated in a press conference on Jan. 9 that he was poisoned during his COVID-19 detention and quarantine in Australia in 2022. Djokovic, who was deported from Australia in 2024 due to his vaccination status, stated he had experienced severe illness after eating food provided while he was in custody in Melbourne.

"Let's just say I felt very unwell for a long time afterwards," Djokovic said. "I had a very high level of lead and mercury."

Djokovic added that he has "proof," but declined to elaborate, stating that he wants to "focus on the tennis and why I'm here."

The revelation sent shockwaves through the tennis world and ignited a storm of speculation. Some fans and players have expressed sympathy and outrage on Djokovic's behalf, while others remain skeptical given the lack of concrete evidence.

Australian authorities have not responded to the allegations. However, some health experts have cast doubt on Djokovic's claims. Reports in *The Guardian* cited Damian Maganja, a researcher in food policy at the George Institute for Global Health, who said Djokovic's claim was a "wild accusation."

"It's possible, but very unlikely," Maganja said. "These meals were probably made in mass amounts, and there haven't been other reports as far as I know."

Superfan Junior Eli Senor lamented that drama surrounding his favorite player detracts from casual tennis observers' ability to fully appreciate Djokovic's greatness. "The unfortunate thing is that non-tennis fans will never really be able to see how great Novak is," Senor said. "I'm talking about at worst a top 3 athlete in history behind maybe MJ and LeBron. He is so solid all around. He crushes every opponent and beats them down over the course of the match."

Heschel Heat Begins to Heat it Up

By Sammy Fisher '25, Sports Editor

After a tough start to the season, the Heschel boys varsity basketball team has stormed back with authority, positioning itself in the middle of a playoff race.

Through the first five games of the season, the Heat won just one game, and the once optimistic team began to doubt themselves. However, they were not ready to quit.

They understood that three of the four losses came against the top-ranked teams in the

league, according to Yeshiva League Pass power rankings.

With a packed gym cheering them on, Heschel broke their losing streak by defeating the Kushner Cobras 56-47 in the homecoming game. After a restful Thanksgiving weekend, they returned to the court in Baltimore in the Weiner tournament, winning six of seven games and finishing in second place.

Now, having won seven of their last eight, the Heschel Heat were ready to face the Hillel Heat, a team that had narrowly defeated them earlier in the season. Late in the second quarter,

Heschel found themselves trailing by 17 points, but the team was not ready to give up. Senior Jordan Cohen-Mintz scored 22 points, leading the Heschel Heat to a 50-45 comeback victory.

After the game, senior Nati Eshaghoff said, "We could not have done it without the fans. We need you guys to keep bringing the energy for us. We would have lost without the fans."

After a big win against YDE and some hard fought losses to MTA, SAR, and North Shore, the Heat find themselves just one game behind Frisch for the final playoff spot with two games to play.

As the Heat push for a second consecutive playoff appearance, they'll need fans to keep matching the players' effort to reach their goal.

Photography by Liam Barlev '26, Photography Editor



Heschel Seniors Cultivate a Positive “College Culture”

By Parker Slarskey '25, Features Editor

As college decisions come out, the excitement about college among seniors increases. However, along with the excitement comes much anxiety, nervousness, and even disappointment.

As someone who did not apply early decision, I've excitedly watched my peers hear back from schools. With each acceptance, the entire grade celebrates and congratulates on social media posts. In the halls, I hear classmates either congratulating one another or sympathizing with each other when they don't hear the news they want.

Although it's difficult watching others get into college while I am still uncertain where I'm going, I believe the “college culture” at Heschel is extremely positive. I've never felt like a classmate gloated over an acceptance or put

someone down when rejected.

Some may argue that wearing college sweatshirts or posting acceptances on social media is boastful; for example, SAR waits until everyone is in before posting online. However, I think my classmates should be proud of their acceptances and recognize that we all hear back at different times.

Furthermore, Heschel's college culture is not competitive but rather supportive. Certain schools are popular among the student body, and students naturally hope to be accepted. Nonetheless, those accepted are respectful of their peers who were not, and those rejected are happy for their peers who were accepted.

“Although it wasn't the decision I wanted, the Heschel community has made it easier to move on,” an anonymous senior who was deferred from Cornell University said. “I've genuinely been so happy for everyone who has

gotten in, and I know it will happen for me eventually.”

Along with the support from peers, the college culture would not be what it is without our extraordinary college counselors David Steinberg, Dorothy Denburg, and Alex Faye.

“We try to create a positive culture around college by making our offices low-stress, fun places for students to talk about college, but also just hang out and relieve stress,” Steinberg said.

He also noted that although college is on the top of the seniors' mind, the counselors hope it is not always their topic of conversation outside the classroom. As stressful as the entire process is, I've felt more relaxed because of this kind and supportive college culture.

Creating a Positive Change in Heschel Academic Culture Requires Student Accountability

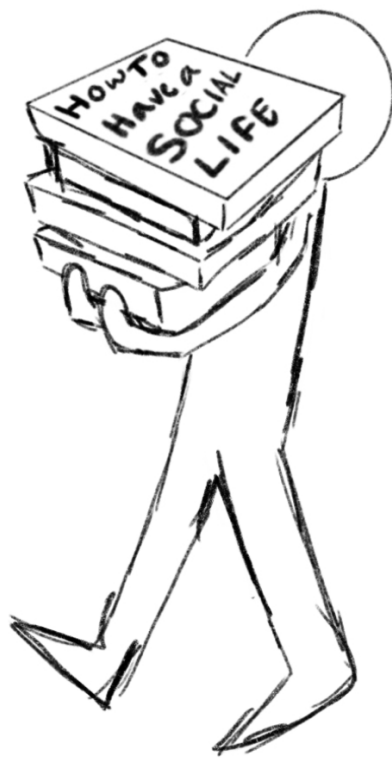
Helios Editorial Board

As juniors and seniors ourselves, we understand the inherent stress that comes with being an upperclassman in high school: balancing college applications, grades, extracurriculars, and a social life seems to be an insurmountable task. Because of this, it seems almost inevitable that there would be a culture of stress surrounding Heschel, especially as a private high school in New York City, a city where the college process is even more competitive.

Coming back from COVID, Heschel upperclassmen were put in an extremely difficult situation. In dealing with the return to normality, along with the uptick in work that comes with being juniors and seniors in high school, the stress became overwhelming. Therefore, the Heschel administration put guard rails in place for juniors and seniors in order to reduce the stress faced by previous graduates.

While there is still stress among upperclassmen, the administration has taken numerous steps to mitigate as much stress as possible.

Whether that's no homework nights offered to the juniors, the month of no tests and homework offered to seniors before the early decision deadline, or the removal of the finals period, the Heschel administration has done all it can to create an environment focused on alleviating



men face when applying to and thinking about college.

Therefore, where does the responsibility lie for Heschel's culture of stress? To us, it seems to lie in the hands of the students. The culture of stress created by the COVID era still lingers in the student body; test grades are viewed as permanent measures of intelligence and are often compared among students, creating a culture of competition and leaving some students to equate their self worth to a single test. This inherently creates a stressful environment among the members of the student body. However, if we change how we talk about tests, seeing them as opportunities to grow rather than numbers that define us, we can make a positive impact on the culture.

It is essential to realize, as students at this school, that we have the power to change the culture for the better. To create an environment where mental health is prioritized, we must focus on how we discuss academics within this school. Creating an environment where there is a balance between rigorous academics and a healthy social life is imperative.

Art by Eliya Yehudai '27, Assistan Art Editor

the mental health challenges that upperclass-

New Pop Quiz Policy: Hurting or Helping?

By Hannah Wurzbarger '26, Editor-in-Chief

This year, Heschel adopted a new policy stating pop quizzes cannot negatively impact students' grades. The 2024-2025 High School Student Manual states, “Pop quizzes are intended to give teachers and students timely feedback on student learning and understanding of the material. As such, they do not have a negative impact on students' grades.”

In past years, pop quizzes have had a notable effect on students' grades, for better and worse. On the one hand, the old policy established frequent and effective opportunities for students to raise their grades; a sloppy homework assignment or unfortunate test was not as detrimental when a high pop quiz grade could redeem one's average.

On the other hand, zoning out during a

single class period could hurt a student's overall grade if a pop quiz were given the next day. It seemed unfair that one off-day could have substantial repercussions.

Junior Pierce Malter said, “Pop quizzes should test for understanding of the material, and this policy makes it so you cannot be punished if you don't have an immediate understanding or perfect memory.” Malter continues, “The policy calls into question what teachers think the role of a pop quiz is.”

When standard tests are given, students have the opportunity to prepare, which facilitates the learning process and enables them to make up for anomalous lapses in attention. The new policy therefore strikes a perfect balance: it allows teachers to evaluate their students' understanding of material, without adding to students' stress or inadvertently punishing them

for small moments they may have missed or not yet processed fully.

Unfortunately, if an assessment is not graded, there are students who will not take it seriously and won't come prepared for class. Subsequently, these students miss opportunities for relevant feedback.

“It's a great policy because it still incentivizes students to actively participate without the added stress a pop quiz normally has,” junior Caleb Creizman said. He admits, however, that the stress of failing a pop quiz can act as motivation.

As the second semester begins, grades and report cards are on the forefront of most minds, and many students think that this policy relieves stress and improves grades.

