The Catalyst

Leader in education, diversity & inclusion, and student life to lead the Upper School

For the Path Ahead

Mr. Youming Che's journey to Ransom Everglades took him through a labor camp and Tiananmen Square.

Lighting the Way

RE's tech theater program provides students the opportunity to learn skills for the stage and beyond.

Past the Rhetoric

Justin Lopez ’19 questions the tactics of gun control advocates and assembly speaker Mr. Fred Guttenberg.

The Evolving Classroom

As RE expands its curriculum, questions arise about the effectiveness of APs and other traditional models of education.

BY MARGARET DILL
CLASS OF 2021

The Ransom Everglades Course of Study begins with a mission statement: the school aims to "provide rigorous college preparation that promotes the students' sense of personal identity, community, personal integrity, and values for a productive and satisfying life, and prepares the student to lead and contribute to society." When asked whether the school was living up to this mission, Associate Head of School Dr. John King said, "We work hard to live it out — it's an ambitious statement. It has a lot of parts, and I think that we do aim to achieve them.

Over the past few years, RE has been taking a fresh look at its curriculum, from its course offerings to its academic calendar, in order to fully realize these values. But change is not easy, as RE has to balance the sometimes competing desire to innovate with providing a reliably excellent education. For example, over the past few years, several independent schools around the country have questioned how Advanced Placement (AP) classes fit into their curricula and mission, and RE has not escaped this debate.

When Ilija Wan-Simm ’19, who has taken a wide range of AP classes in his time at RE, was asked whether he enjoyed the AP curriculum, he answered, "Not really."

"I think that AP classes sometimes put too much restraint on the learning experience and almost hinder it," he said. "I prefer the class Linear Algebra, which is discussion-based. The focus of the class is just to learn math and analyze — versus having to stick to a standardized AP curriculum. "Having that type of class has been one of the coolest things of my life."

Wan-Simm added that "APs create college preparedness," but also suggested that "there are other ways, perhaps even more effective ways, that can be done." One of the examples he offered came from within an AP class itself: Dr. King's "Homework-ishe" in AP World History — analytical writing assignments which have due dates weeks after they are assigned.

"I have to manage my time wisely and pace out my essays in order to succeed," Wan-Simm said. "It's about inde- pendency and depth of content."

Wan-Simm said that he sees the importance of APs declining in the future, as an increasing number of universities have stopped accepting APs for college credit. "I didn't feel pressured to take APs".

"The cadence of service"

RE students seek to live up to Paul Ransom's mission, even as the pressures of modern academic life interve ne.

BY DIEGO DUCKENFIELD-LOPEZ
CLASS OF 2020

& BY KAREENA RUDDRA
CLASS OF 2020

All students who attend Ransom Everglades hear the words written in Paul Ransom's letter, describing three classes of people. They are told that, if they wish to attend Ransom Everglades, they should seek to be the third class of person who believes that "they are in the world not so much for what they can get out of it as for what they can put into it."

Many RE students strive to live up to this ideal by dedicating sig- nificant amounts of time to vol- unteer work and community out- reach. Some have raised questions, however, about whether students are doing as much as they could to serve the greater Miami commu- nity in meaningful ways.

For example, many RE students seek admission to the most presti- gious universities in the United States, and some students see vol- unteering primarily as a way to enhance their application, rather than as a way to give back to their community.

"I think a lot of people volun- teer because it will boost their col- lege resumes," said Anna Mistele '19, who volunteers at a program called Girls Who Code. She pointed out that some colleges expect students to fulfill a certain amount of community service hours, and even those that don't still expect students to do service that corresponds with their extra- curricular interests.

"I definitely didn't start Girls Who Code because I wanted to improve my resume," she said. "What's interesting is that my work teaching girls to code did become a big part of my college application. I felt bad about it using that volunteering for my own personal gain made me feel a little disingenuous."

Dylan Tie-Shue '20 agreed that this tension sometimes clouded the discussion around service. "There should be no such thing as a 'resume filler,'" said Tie-Shue, who volunteers at Breakthrough Miami. "Students should always pursue their own passionate in- terests, regardless of what they should get in return."

Ms. Jenny Carson, Assistant Dean for Student Activities, said that in regards to the pursuit of passion for the greater good.

"We have a lot of talented stu- dents here," she said. "We should be figuring out matches [between students and service] that can be a win-win and can be mutually bene- ficial."

The RE Volunteer Service Or- ganization, or VSO, helps con- nection and opportunities for young people who believe that "they are doing as much as they could to make a difference."

Ms. Patricia Sasser, center, participates in a panel discussion with faculty and student leaders at the school following the anti-religious freedom protests and violence that occurred in Charlottesville, Va., in 2017.

CHRISTINE COYLE / THE LOOMIS CHAFFEE SCHOOL

The RE Volunteer Service Organization, or VSO, helps connect young people who believe they are doing as much as they could to make a difference.
Through clubs and activities, students cultivate a wide variety of life skills.

Everyone “has a trusted assistant, but everyone has a trusted administrator,” Rosa-Paisley said. He believed he saw these qualities in Ms. Sasser, and noted that at her current job, she meets with every student she oversees at the beginning of the year, in order to make sure that “the first conversation she has with them is not the ‘bad one.’”

Head of School Mrs. Penny Townsend also noted that Ms. Sasser is “a trusted administrator” in the more traditional sense, and that she was particularly excited by Ms. Sasser’s unique background.

Prior to her work in education, Ms. Sasser was an Emmy award-winning associate producer for ESPN, and worked in both live and post production for a multitude of sports from 1999-2006. She was nominated twice for an Emmy Award, and she won in 2006 for Outstanding Live Event Turnaround, for her work on the Winter X Games production team.

The skills Ms. Sasser said she gained from that position include “thinking on your feet, being in tricky, fast-paced situations, and how to have a tough skin . . . but also how to take feedback to do better and grow.”

During one of her first hack-a-thons, in merely four hours, Yuhan Liu ’21 and other Programming Team members designed and created an app that connects lost pets to their owners. Alex Dray ’21 crafted a presentation on the healing power of sand for Speech and Debate. Karen Na Rudra ’20 and other Diversity Council members organized a “REAL Talks” open forum on Black Lives Matter.

These seemingly disconnect events are all examples of the numerous outside-the-classroom activities that enrich Ransom Everglades students’ lives on a daily basis. The list of student activities and organizations consists of a wide variety of affinity groups, extracurricular activities, service organizations, co-curricular teams, and publications.

Students who participate in these diverse activities report learning valuable skills with real-life applications. For members of the Robotics team, for example, this may be a set of various perspectives and skills to solve problems.

“Designing robots teaches you how to approach problems in different ways, and how to realize your mistakes and correct them in time,” Luisa Guarco ’19 said. “My highlight is simply getting a design that works well after an endless cycle of building, testing, changing, or rebuilding.”

In speech and debate, on the other hand, students gain valuable leadership and public speaking skills.

Bija Wan-Simm ’19 recounted three of his years on the speech and debate team. “I learned so many things: the ability to speak, to be comfortable with myself, to be a leader that I couldn’t have imagined myself becoming,” he said. “I am always in an advantage when speaking on the spot and I forever grateful for that.”

Aside from concrete learning experiences, students also improve upon soft skills that are important to the student experience. Ms. Sasser noted that this was a focus during her 10-year career at Ransom Everglades.

“Everyone has a story. You can learn a lot from it, and it can break barriers. I try to make a commitment to know everyone . . . and let them know that they are more than numbers on a transcript,” Ms. Patricia Sasser, Dean of Students Ms. Lindsay Danielson, said that this was an important part of her work as an incoming Upper School head. “She can think on her feet and make decisions quickly,” Danielson said.

In her current role at Loomis Chaffee, Ms. Sasser works closely with the Director of Diversity and Inclusion to facilitate diversity and inclusion work among the students and faculty. Prior to.

Mr. Mills lamented the fact that he will miss the students and the experience of working with them. He said that although she is not an artist, she recognized the important role of the arts in helping a community thrive.

Ms. Danielson, who said that she has worked with Ms. Sasser for more than a decade, said she was very “excited for her enthusiasm. . . . I think being an artist is a lot of positive energy and a very fresh perspective that I think will serve all of the members of our community well— not just the students but also the faculty and staff.”

Dr. Heller also praised Ms. Sasser, saying, “She brings a lot of positive energy. . . . She’s really caring but at the same time someone who can be strict when she needs to be.”

As for her personal life, Ms. Sasser loves to travel, watch movies with her son, and visit family. She also loves to read, and “tries to blog.” Service and giving back to her community is equal to and indispensable to her. She is currently part of a board that is not how I define them,” she added.

This background was part of what made her an especially appealing candidate for Dr. Heller. “There was one question we asked about diversity, equity, and inclusion — her response was the most thoughtful response I think she had the most experience there,” he said.

As part of her other responsibilities, Ms. Sasser is also part of the More than an Educator program, which helps students learn how to judge art and literature in an unbiased way, without becoming too familiar with the writer.

Clubs and activities also provide the opportunity for students to find new and exciting settings to explore, and new and exciting settings to explore further with their existing interests. “I started writing poetry at 10, but I didn’t start sharing until I joined Poetry Club,” she said. Rudra recently presented a new piece at the Poetry Week assembly in April. “My confidence grew so much that I didn’t just perform in school but also open mics outside of school. Poetry Club makes me the poet I am today.”

For others such as Alaya Holllub ’19, an editor of inklings, extra-curricular involvement didn’t just grow her passions, but helped to create those passions.

“I joined inklings as a simple hobby,” she said. “But as I got more and more involved, I realized that I discovered my life passion and I want to work for magazines in the future.”

Students, however, are not the only beneficiaries of this flurry of activities; faculty sponsors also expressed how much they benefit from their work with students.

“I learned so much from the students; I didn’t know anything about the LGBTQ communities in the world of supershoes before Megan Houchin’s presentation,” Ms. Ham said.

For Ms. Karen Key, being the Math Team sponsor satisfies her “inner math nerd” for challenging, out-of-the-box problems and allows her to work with students.

“Service and giving back to her community is equal to and indispensable to her.”

As Ms. Sasser takes over in July, the students and faculty at Ransom Everglades look forward to working with her.

“Ms. Sasser is ‘not an administrator’ but not everyone has a trust set of skills. . . . She oversees all aspects of the organization’s financials and keep the entity functioning. Without the exception of co-curricular teams, all clubs have to raise funds for their expenses. “This is part of the organization learning valuable skills with re various ways, and how to realize your mistakes and correct them in time.” — Luisa Guarco ’19
From Tiananmen to Miami
Through oppression and hardship, Mr. Youming Che persevered in his ongoing quest to build cross-cultural understanding

BY MILES SCHACHNIR
CLASS OF 2019

“While I first came here [in 2008], I had 5-6 students from the Middle School, and I started a Chinese 1 class with maybe 12 students. Today, we have a little bit over 100 students in the program.”

Since his beginnings in Beijing, China, Mr. Youming Che, who started the RE Chinese program, has fought to create a better future for himself and those around him. From the Cultural Revolution to Tiananmen Square to life in America, Mr. Che has never allowed challenges to halt his determined movement forward.

When he was young, Chairman Mao’s Cultural Revolution disrupted Mr. Che’s childhood. Mao’s anti-intellectual policies forced Mr. Che and his parents, whom were both professors, out of Beijing and into a labor camp in Jiangxi Province for four years.

“My whole family was sent to the labor camp . . . where I spent all of my teenage years,” he said. “It was a very different time.”

Despite his circumstances, Mr. Che found and capitalized on what he saw as his only glimmer of hope: learning the English language.

As a high school student, I spent most of my time totally devoted to my [English] studies, because I knew I could use it someday as a tool to leave,” he said.

Mr. Che then attended a prestigious university in Beijing before traveling to the United States for graduate school at East Tennessee State University. After earning his degree in the U.S., Mr. Che returned to China, where he hoped to begin his career in education, starting as a college professor. At this point, Mr. Che’s story took a darker turn.

As a college professor in Beijing in 1989, Mr. Che would soon be present at an event that became synonymous with a massacre — the Tiananmen Square incident of 1989, in which the Chinese government deployed its military to fire upon student protesters.

In 1989, Mr. Che became involved with student protests against the Chinese government. He continued to participate in protests in Beijing, and would soon be present at an event that became synonymous with a massacre — the Tiananmen Square incident of 1989, in which the Chinese government resulted in a belief that “our nation needed young people to be better prepared to handle the coming run of competition with China,” Mr. Che was hired at Ransom Everglades in 2008, where he built RE’s Upper School Chinese program from a handful of students into a thriving program today, in which over 100 students study Chinese and seniors take the AP exam every year.

Ms. Karen Thompson, a world languages teacher who was present during the introduction of the Chinese program, mentioned previous Head of School Ms. Ellen Moceri’s role in the creation of the program. Ms. Moceri, she said, “felt our students would be better served having Chinese available to them.”

RE then transitioned from a three-language curriculum of Spanish, French, and Latin to Spanish, French, and Chinese.” Ms. Thompson also praised Mr. Che’s success. “I think he did a great job getting the program going, and I hope that a lot of kids, once they meet the Spanish language requirement, will choose Chinese as their third language,” she said.

Now, Mr. Che has continuously sought ways to diversify and grow the program, saying he looks for new teaching material every year. Still, he credited the growth of the program to a “joint effort” between himself and the students, and praised his students’ dedication and drive to succeed.

In the classroom, Mr. Che ensues his students are challenged, designing countless interactive activities that force students to engage with the language.

Grant Dill ’19 noted Mr. Che’s focus on using culture as a tool to learn, saying that Mr. Che “also gives us insights into the culture and history of China, something that is crucial to being a well-rounded Chinese student.”

Harrison Denman ’19 added, “Mr. Che makes classes fun and interesting by incorporating activities like listening and writing down the answers to questions in Chinese.”

Mr. Che said he feels there is still a long way to go for students in the United States to fully understand China, and he dedicates himself to facilitating more of that understanding and fostering growth in his students.

“That’s my biggest dream, actually — that long after I’m gone, my students who started here can use their knowledge to pursue careers where they will become successful,” he said.

China’s meteoric rise during the 21st century has captured the attention of much of the international community. China’s GDP is projected to surpass that of the United States in 2023, and it has established spheres of influence across the globe. Mr. Che said he believes China will only become more important as time goes on and urgent students to continue to learn about China.

“Only through comparison can we reach a better understanding,” he said. “This learning needs to be three-dimensional — students need to visit China, read about China, and more.”

After having overcome a significant number of challenges throughout his life, Mr. Che has his eyes set on addressing the challenge of U.S.-China relations specifically — a partnership in which, he says, mutual understanding and interdependence will be crucial.

“You do not need to like the subject, but you need to understand the subject,” he said. “When you start to understand the topic, making change becomes possible.”

RE welcomes Mr. Danny Barr to the College Counseling team

BY RICARDO ANDRADE
CLASS OF 2021

As RE’s rising seniors get ready to enter the long, grueling college application process, the college counseling team has welcomed a new member to help them plan for their futures. Mr. Danny Barr.

With 12 years of experience, Mr. Barr has worked for multiple schools, holding positions ranging from director of college counseling to college admissions officer. Most recently, working for the University of Delaware, Mr. Barr oversaw student recruitment, helping students to gain a deeper understanding of what colleges were looking for in prospective students.

Ms. Claudia Jolivert, Director of College Counseling, saw Mr. Barr’s skill set and knew that it would be a valuable asset for Ransom Everglades students. “We look for people who have had previous experience in either college admissions or college counseling,” she said. Ms. Jolivert added that she appreciated how Mr. Barr “does not care if he is the leader or the follower — he is just eager to share his opinions.”

According to Mr. Barr, the people who are what drew him to RE. “Both the students and the staff are very passionate about what they do,” he said. “It’s one thing to be a high-level intellect, but it’s another to be genuinely good people.”

Every student is so warm and friendly and eager to assist,” he said. “It has been great.”

Mr. Barr “tries to push every senior beginning the college application process, said that Mr. Barr has helped her with this challenging time by focusing on the individual as a whole, rather than just academics or test scores.

When a student may have had one bad day, Rudra said that Mr. Barr “tries to push everything out, not just scores, scores, scores.”

Diego Duckenfield-Lopez ’20 said that Mr. Barr has “shown me that I really should be looking for a college and how to do the right research and find what will tell me more about the school.”

Duckenfield-Lopez said that not only does this approach help a prospective school see all sides of a student, but it also gives the student the tools to see all sides of a school.

Mr. Barr said that his main goal is to find a college that the student is comfortable with, and to help them reach that school while preparing them for all the challenges — academic, financial, and others — that he lies ahead.
students with whom she works. "They're really incredible, and being able to just observe the way school work and general education is a really cool thing to experience.

Another example of RE students reaching out to the community is St. Alban’s Day, a tradition that has persisted for over 40 years. The event — a holiday themed carnival hosted by RE students — is a Head Start program with locations in South Miami and Coconut Grove. "It's a fantastic way to give back to the community," said Alex- ander. "We have gotten feedback from people in the face painting booth during this year's St. Alban’s Day. "I feel like St. Alban’s Day is so magical for so many children, especially for those who may not have the opportunity to experience events like this.

Ms. Carson, who is also the 10th-grade sponsor, said that the program is notable "for both making curriculum visible to our students within our community and also for maintaining longevity for our students. It’s something that is rooted in our institution."

She noted, however, that what service at RE has looked like has changed for a reason that there have been conversations about the school’s introduction of some classes geared toward more spe- cialized topics and skills, such as The Roots and Legacy of 9/11, United States Constitutional Systems, and Applied Data Science. Courses like these come into existence when administrators and teachers realize the potential around AP needs to come from the colleges in some official way. Because students' courses are often based on AP college credit, these courses can still be valuable, said Dr. Scholl, moving away from these courses would first require colleges to communic- ate that they are interested in courses that still provide a rigorous curriculum.

"Having taught mostly in college, I can say that APs, at least in the sciences, are neither in content nor in spirit equivalent. The AP curriculum can be arbitrary as to what is or is not included, and it is not as up-to-date as it could be. We want to foster a spirit of inquiry that allows us to go deeper on topics, especially for our most advanced students."

—from Dr. Doug Heller

The school has introduced some classes geared toward more specialized topics and skills, such as The Roots and Legacy of 9/11, United States Constitutional Systems, and Applied Data Science. Courses like these come into existence when administrators and teachers realize the potential around AP needs to come from the colleges in some official way. Because students' courses are often based on AP college credit, these courses can still be valuable, said Dr. Scholl, moving away from these courses would first require colleges to communicate that they are interested in courses that still provide a rigorous curriculum.

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| CURRICULUM, from page 1 simply because they’re APs," he said. "I felt pressured to take APs because they are branded as the most challenging courses available."

Ms. Calvina Jolivet, Direc- tor of Enrollment and Retention, said that "students should challenge themselves year after year, but rigor comes in many forms, from completing complex projects in language, to doubling-up in the Social Sciences, to enrolling in six core subjects while taking APs. The goal of an RE education is for students to find a way to take on rigor within a balanced curriculum."

And yet, according to Dr. King, APs still play an important role in achieving rigorous, reliable preparation for a wide range of colleges. "AP is definitely a measure of academic excellence that is widely accepted," he said.

Without AP classes, said Mr. Gregory Cooper, who will be taking on the role of Upper School Dean next year, the school would have to consider other ways it could demonstrate to colleges that it still provides a rigorous curriculum.

"That’s why English teacher Dr. Gila Aloni said that she believes that with AP classes, "around APs needs to come from the colleges in some official way."

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Moving forward, Ms. Nero is hoping to see the department include more semester classes and move more "studies" classes based on geographical location. As academic departments at RE, the AP classes are made to ensure that students are challenged and that if Ransom Everglades is doing it, it is probably at a very high level.

Dr. Jonathan Scholl, also in the History and Social Sciences department, said that the elimi- nation of the Honors label in the department has opened up dis- cussion about other forms that classes could take.

"A seminar class is a possibility, with a certain level of rigor ex- pected and certain prerequisites to get in, and different expecta-

—from Dr. Doug Heller

There used to be a big group that would come because [Becca Hadwen ’18] was spearheading. After they graduated, we have heard people actively inquiring about Ransom from Ran- som — just two students," Ms. Oxenhorn said. "We would love to take them as students. The thought of volunteers that Ransom sends us have always been high quality."

Unfortunately, Ms. Oxenhorn said, "many of us already find our- selves stretching ourselves thin between keeping up with our ac- ademics, sports teams, and other extracurriculars."

Still, although long-term com- mitments to service can be diffi- cult for students, "there are crucial to the success of programs like Breakthrough Mi- ami, which has had its local head- quarters based in Coconut Grove," according to Mr. Webber Charles, Senior Site Di- rector, students that display strong commitment to the program are able to provide their talents in an innovative way that fosters change within the community.

"We have gotten feedback from the student body that [there is the impression that] sometimes clubs are not as well-supported as others. This year, we try to investigate which ones are actually do- ing things, and that is why we are asking for meeting times, photos, etc.," Ms. Carson said. "We are also examining the amount of commitments people are mak- ing. We want students to think about what they can commit to. A plethora of interests is good, but you only have so much time."

Ms. Carson said that she and Dr. Corinne Rhyner, the 10th-grade sponsor, are working on Student Activ- ities program at RE, exploring, among other things, ways of helping students think about how their extracurricular and academic studies complement each other.

Interested in writing for The Catalyst? Do you have thoughts to share about the articles in this issue? Please speak with an editor, or write to catalyst@ransomeverglades.org.
GUN VIOLENCE, from page 7
The original intent of the Second Amendment was not primarily to allow Americans to hunt, or even to allow for self-defense on a daily basis. The Founding Fathers, recently liberated from a repressive monarchy, feared the real threat of government tyranny and believed that once guns were confiscated from the people, they would be easily and inevitably dominated by an oppressive regime (as was later seen in the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, Venezuela, and Cuba, for example). Once Americans allow the government to truly and irrevocably interfere with one of our most important and sacrosanct rights to self-determination, the government. Today, the Second Amendment has been reinterpreted to allow the FBI to review gun purchases and determine, if they so choose, whether firearms purchased by a private citizen could be viewed by the FBI as a potential threat to the mental health standards of competency of the Founding Fathers, recently liberated from a repressive monarchy. At the very least, this evidences the Second Amendment's ability to regulate that disregards the real intent and unspecific language has been manipulated to allow for regulation that disregards the real intent of the Founding Fathers. At the very least, this entire debate over gun control is a complex one. Once the government can delve further into the mental health history of an individual — beyond the mental health standards of competency required by current gun laws — it is hard to draw the line according to which someone is unfit to own a firearm. Someone that is depressed at one point could be viewed by the FBI as a potential threat to the public for the rest of his or her life. It is of the utmost importance that the Second Amendment, and all other rights in this era of censorship, remain fully intact to prevent government tyranny from happening.

In an effort to understand other students' reactions to this assembly, I asked Abby Aldrich '20, President of Students Against Gun Violence, to offer her own views on Mr. Guttenberg's talk. "It was a very valuable experience," she said. "Mr. Guttenberg has gone through immense tragedy, and it's empowering to see that he is using his tragedy in order to better the United States and fight for gun reform. I admire his courage to fight for what he knows is right and not give up, no matter how much opposition he faces."

While Aldrich's opinion illustrates the views of many RE students and young Americans today, Tommy Graglia '19 held a very different perspective. "I firmly believe that this entire presentation completely misrepresented the arguments on both sides, and Mr. Guttenberg is part of the reason it's so hard to have a legitimate political discussion in 2019," he said.

"Possibly the worst part is the de facto silencing of opposing opinions to his presentation due to the sensitivity of the topic. While there was time during the assembly to ask him questions, there was no real way to dispute what he said without seeming insensitive to his daughter's death."

When asked about how he deals with opposition, Mr. Guttenberg said that "if he was treated with respect, he would return the courtesy. However, if not treated properly, "that's another story." In a democratic republic built on political discourse, it is irresponsible and even somewhat anarchic for an individual to assume, as his sole discourse, it is irresponsible and even somewhat anarchic for an individual to assume, as his sole prerogative, the ability to determine what is or is not respectful — which conversations can be had and which cannot.

Respect is important in political discourse, but so, too, is objectivity. In this era of subjective reality, the quality of argument and debate has been severely degraded. We must all remain aware of the importance of objective facts in political debate, and not submit to our emotions, stooping down to the level of unruly opponents.

"You're getting electrical knowledge, carpentry knowledge, programming knowledge, and architecture and drafting knowledge. It's really a great place to get some amazing skills that you can take out of here and use for almost anything."

— Mr. Quincy Knowles

The data above come from a larger survey of musical tastes and habits among RE students conducted by Alex Otero '19. The survey also revealed that 66 percent of student respondents prefer live music experiences to recorded music, and 65 percent of the student body said they attend a live show at least once a year. About 30 percent said they attended a live event every few months.

The foundation and walls of the STEM building begin to rise from the ground, between Cameron Hall and the Rehearsal Hall. Construction will continue through the summer and fall, with the building scheduled to open in 2020. The STEM building is the beginning of the ReInventing Excellence project, and current plans call for a new building to replace Ludington Hall, a new student center on the La Brisa property, and the renovation of the La Brisa house to be the new home of the Head of School's office, the Advancement Office, and the Admissions Office.

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Rising Up

RE Technical Theater lights the way to performing arts success

The tech program is strongly connected to the tech class and club, and is always expanding to include more students with interest. For this year’s spring play, “Murder’s in the Heir,” Jamie Lockhart ‘21 organized a costume crew to work alongside tech to design and collect costumes, fit cast members, and do makeup during tech week and show days.

“I’ve always been interested in costumes,” Lockhart said. “I had this idea already, and I wanted to integrate it into our school’s system... Even if you don’t want to be onstage, there are loads of opportunities to get involved.”

RE tech’s main challenge has always been in its lack of personnel. This can be especially challenging during tech weeks, the days before a large show when all aspects of the show — the cast, band, and tech — come together to make it into a complete and presentable work.

“It is so much work, and every second you think you’ve completed something, there’s 50 other things you’re supposed to do,” Mr. Knowles said.

“There are some people who want to help,” Shelby Sanders ‘21, incoming Vice President of Tech Club, said. “But since they haven’t taken the class, they don’t have the tools to.”

In an effort to combat this lack of experience, Tech Club has organized workshops to teach students outside of the elective how to work with light boards, power tools, the fly system, and a variety of other key components.

Mr. Knowles emphasized that students have a “tremendous amount of influence. . . . The shows would not happen if the students were not involved.”

Still, he added, “We’re building something here... I see a lot more student involvement — we just have to keep pushing.”

Shelby Sanders ‘21, Felipe Clavijo ‘21, and Mr. Quincy Knowles work the sound board during the fall musical production.

BY MADELINE BAGNALL
CLASS OF 2023

Take a walk through the Ransom Everglades Upper School campus and you’re bound to experience a variety of artwork in different media: ceramics projects in the library, drama posters on the walls, Rock 4 Relief open mics in the quad, and photographs in the cafeteria and Ludington.

However, RE’s technical theater program often falls under the radar. Whether running assemblies, mixing sounds at Rock 4 Relief concerts, or building sets for upcoming musicals, members feel a certain way.”
Criminal competition

In the wake of Operation Varsity Blues, a scandal in which parents bought undergrad-uate admission to the nation’s most prestigious universities, RE students have fervently begun to question the validity of a college admissions process that has become easily exploitable. The idea that four years of academic excellence, extracurricular involvement, and personal growth may have gone to waste on account of dishonest, criminal actors is frustrating, to say the least. However, while the participants of Operation Varsity Blues were undoubtedly unjustified in their abuse of the system, the system is equally to blame. The college process is complex and daunting. Guidance and direction play vital roles in navigating each of its components—resume design, extracurricular involvement, academic course selection, and even choosing which college has the highest probability of acceptance. Unfortunately, the more competitive the process becomes, the easier it is for us to forget the importance of personal growth. Across the nation, students compete to select the hardest classes for superficial reasons, develop techniques to produce the highest test scores, and choose activities simply because they have a higher chance of being recognized by colleges.

While the criminal behavior of those in the Varsity Blues scandal is a far cry from the efforts of even the most competitive RE students, issues symptomatic of a greater problem with college admissions are still prevalent here. For most students, course selection at RE is simple: one chooses the ‘best’ possible classes one can take. On the surface, this selection process is logical — even obvious — but the dilemma arises when deciphering what the definition of ‘best’ really means. To the majority of students, the ‘best’ classes are those that will impress colleges. They are the classes that stand out on an application, provide proof of academic rigor, and potentially even earn college credit. Thus, for plenty of RE students, this means packing their schedule with Advanced Placement (AP) courses. At a school dedicated to in-depth learning, creative thinking, skill-building, and substantive character growth, the idea of spending an entire school year devoted to the preparation of a single exam seems out of place. Luckily, as a private school with dedicated faculty, intellectual stimulation and AP preparation are often able to coexist at RE. But not always.

Students are often placed in an overwhelming double-bind: choose the classes that truly interest them, or select what colleges expect them to. Over time, many colleges have begun to stop providing course credit for AP exams. But colleges still rely heavily on APs in their selection processes. For students, the choice between rigor and personal interest becomes a twisted dichotomy perpetuated by the same high schools and colleges that claim they are trying to develop their students’ character. While we’ve been told our whole academic lives that it’s important to chase our passions and explore our interests, this idea begins to disintegrate when college becomes a noticeable image on the horizon.

Students are driven, by both colleges and high schools, to maximize the ‘rigor’ of their classes, and in doing so, we lose some of the spirit of curiosity that should motivate us. Similar ideas apply to extracurricular activities. Too often do people participate in activities that they feel will draw colleges’ attention. With no volunteering requirement at RE, students often take on volunteer opportunities just to bolster their resumes. As each college’s incoming class becomes more impressive and demanding every year, students need to differentiate themselves outside the classroom, which becomes an in-timidating prospect for many. In this frenzy to gather meaningful extracurricular opportunities, moral and ethical lines are blurred by some, who use every opportunity they can to gain an advantage. For those involved in the scandal, money was the easiest way to accomplish these goals. The college admissions system is flawed. Whether it encourages students to stray away from their academic interests to superficially enhance them to undertake a dozen extracurricular activities, or gives rise to college schemes like Operation Varsity Blues, the admissions process invites the wrong ambitions within students.

A process that downplays the individualism of a candidate and instead relies on numbers and figures for the outcome of its momentous decisions not only fails to live up to its potential — to foster the best possible future generation of thinkers and leaders — but also allows people like those involved in the Varsity Blues scandal to exploit its failings. By over emphasizing the importance of scores and activities, the process creates a student body focused solely on performance rather than passion and personality.

— Alex Abinader, Viviana Freyer, Nathalie Han, Miles Schachner, Holly Steinberg, eds.

The Catalyst

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Catalyst logo by Sofi Andrade ’19

A Presidential Farewell

BY HENRY SCHERMERHORN
CLASS OF 2019

Hello, RE students! Or should I say goodbye? This is my farewell letter, but it’s more of a “see you later.” I already gave my speech in assembly, but I was asked to write a little more here. So I’ll take this opportunity to talk about the school I’m headed to and any more advice I could give.

I’ll be attending New York University (NYU) in the fall, which I’m really excited about. I spent the first 11 years of my life in New Jersey, so I know what cold is like, but I’m still a little worried about long-term exposure to that again. It has been a while. Both of my brothers live in New York City, something I’m excited about as well, and they tell me it’s not that bad. It even gets hotter than Miami during the summer there!

Speaking of college, I’ll take this opportunity to talk about my process and hopefully give some advice to rising juniors/seniors.

Juniors — where you are right now was probably my favorite part of the process-touring colleges, figuring out what kind of school you like. That was all very fun, especially since I took the school college tour trip. Not only was it more fun to do with friends, but hearing what they liked and didn’t like about each school gave me insight into what was more important to me in a campus.

However, if I could go back and give myself some advice early on, I would tell myself not to be so critical of some schools so early in the process. I wrote off a lot of schools for what now seem like minor reasons — small issues I had with the core curriculum, the campus being too big or small, people “didn’t seem nice.” It’s always nice to narrow down, but I forgot that I actually had to get into the schools to which I ended up applying. In other words, not every school on your list has to be a school that you love everything about.

Apply to schools you even “sorta like.” Applying to schools also becomes much less stressful when you’re applying to a lot. Believe it or not, NYU was far from my first choice early on in the process. But once I got in, and reexamined it compared to the other schools I got into, I was looking at it through a different lens, and I am totally stoked to go there. Your first impressions of a school aren’t always the most accurate.

In a way, it will be fun to start over and be new to a school again. I have to stick to my own advice, because you know, I said it, but I am looking forward to taking on new responsibilities. These responsibilities are good for our character, and the more we take them on, the more we grow. Of course, that isn’t anything new to our ears, but it’s something I feel I’ve witnessed firsthand in myself and other people during my time at Ransom Everglades.

Discipline isn’t a bad thing to gain either. I know that rowing at RE helped me with that, both in the nature of the sport and in the nature of a team experience. To close things out here, I want to emphasize one more thing in my speech that I fear wasn’t mentioned enough.

Trust your teachers!

They want the best for you, can see your best qualities, and only wish to let those shine. Let them work their magic. I know none of my teachers have ever given up on me, and that has made all the difference. They have been a highlight of my Ran-

som Everglades experience, among so many other things. Here’s to a great end of the school year, a great summer, and happy futures!
Respect is important in political discourse, but too, so, is objectivity. In this era of subjective reality, the quality of argument and debate has been severely degraded. We must all remain aware of the importance of objective facts in political debate, and not submit to our emotions, stooping down to the level of unruly opponents.

In today’s ‘cancel culture,’ how should we deal with the work of abusive artists?

Emotion replaced productive dialogue in February gun violence assembly

BY JUSTIN LOPEZ
CLASS OF 2019

Recently, the Ransom Everglades community commemorated the one-year anniversary of the Feb. 14, 2018 shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. As an active, we gathered the loss of 17 innocent lives that were taken from the world in the most brutal fashion.

RE Students Against Gun Violence arranged for an assembly speaker named Fred Guttenberg, the father of the late Jake Guttenberg, who was killed in the shooting. In addition to being the father of a Parkland victim, Mr. Guttenberg is an active gun control advocate. It seemed fitting Guttenberg quote any sort of statistics granted to all citizens.

The American public has a Sec- ond Amendment right to bear arms. How are the government and law enforcement supposed to decipher who wants to kill and who does not? If the nation follows this path of further government intervention, Americans will be thrust onto a slippery slope.

By Viviana Freyer
CLASS OF 2020

“Surviving R. Kelly,” a six-part documentary that aired this past January on Lifetime, chronicled the decades-old sexual abuse al- legations against American re- cording artist R. Kelly. Since then, Kelly’s record label ended their relationship with him entirely.

When a creator is revealed to be morally compromised person, it may feel only natural to avoid that creator’s work from then on. But perhaps, completely abandoning artists over their actions presents some moral appeal. Purchasing their art supports an artist financially, and continuing to support them may send the message that their behavior is negligible.

That being said, this approach to morally compromised artists presents some issues — not the least of which is that many artists are morally compromised. I think if we start pulling every artist who is anti-Semitic or sexist or racist, we’re going to have very few options left. — perhaps an even more perni- cious one: imperfection is a part of life, and so is wrestling with that reality. As Dr. Rhyner said, “There’s proba- bly something wonderful and beau- tiful, and also something terrible. What do we do with that?”

In today’s ‘cancel culture,’ how should we deal with the work of abusive artists?

BY ALEX PFIOUFOUZ
CLASS OF 2020

In the “Weekend Update” seg- ment on the March 9 episode of “Saturday Night Live,” cast mem- ber Pete Davidson commented on the story as well as whether or not Kelly and other famous abus- ers should be expelled from the public sphere. “ Pretending these people never existed is maybe not

BY DR. JASON RHIZER
CLASS OF 2020

“Emotion replaced productive dialogue in February gun violence assembly.”

Gun control advocate Fred Guttenberg, left, attempts to greet Justice Brett Kavanaugh, at Kavanaugh’s confirmation hearing in September.

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State Champions

After a 9-8 victory over 2018 state champs Hialeah, girls water polo dominated the state tournament, with decisive wins over Lake Nona and Winter Park.

RE’s girls water polo team has followed on the previous success of past years, boasting an impressive record of 18-4 throughout their regular season. On April 26, they defeated previously undefeated and defending state champion Hialeah High at the Ansin Aquatic Center, securing the regional title and booking a trip to states. In the state semi-finals against Lake Nona, a close 2-1 game after the first quarter turned into a 11-1 rout, and in the finals, the team dominated from the start against Winter Park, ultimately winning 11-6. The team is led by a large contingent of juniors and seniors, including Emanuelle Doordeck-Aloni ’20, Meredith Hutchinson ’20, Sarah Mesa ’20, Ana Sannia ’20, Grace Waibel ’19, and Claudia Pinilla ’20.

Spring sports teams end their seasons with a variety of district, regional, and conference titles

Girls lacrosse, top left (Calliste Skouras ’19 featured in the air), continued to dominate in their district this season, winning the district championship for a fifth year in a row. “This season has easily been my favorite,” said Skouras. “Every year our team seems to get closer together, and our connection off the field reflects in our style of play on the field.” The baseball team, top right (Lucas Fernandez ’19 sliding into home), also had a successful season this year, finishing with the first conference championship in RE history. The team also played well against regional powerhouse Florida Christian in a regular season game. “Playing a close game with Florida Christian for the first time in my career,” said Alex Boehm ’19, “showed how good we could be if we put everything together.” The girls track & field team, bottom left (Daniela Zaidenberg ’19, featured in the long jump), captured their 14th consecutive district title. And boys volleyball, bottom-right (Ryan Peluso ’22, pictured in the air) beat the defending state champions in a regular season game and defeated Columbus in the district semi-finals, before falling in the district final. Boys tennis, not pictured, ended the season with an 11-2 record, making it all the way to the state semi-finals.