Hancock Has a Debate Team

As part of Chicago Debates, Hancock College Prep participates in a citywide debate competition. On October 20, first-time debaters Julian Garcia (left) and Skyler Cepek (right) placed 7th in the Novice Team category.

Thirteen Hancock students competed in 21 debate rounds for the first time that day; they won nine. This year’s theme: immigration.

The debate team meets Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. in 201. Students can join any time.

Engineer Explains Efforts When Classrooms are Too Hot or Too Cold

By Kevin Vela

One of the many great aspects of John Hancock High School corresponds to the good teachers and well rounded academic studies. But when it comes to paying attention in class, it can be challenging. It’s not challenging in the way one would presume, but rather in the one way we can’t control: the A/C and heater.

I tried to get to the bottom of the problem involving our temperature situations, so I took the time to interview the school’s engineer, Thomas Gagen.

Mr. Gagen voiced his perspective about being the school’s engineer and shows his determination by saying he’ll always respond to the many situations called for, especially when weather changes. “It all depends on the season and the equipment. Sometimes I’ll get four to six situations in a day and sometimes we’ll go two to three weeks without a call.”

He added that he knows it will take time to fix each problem and says there’s no average time to fix the issue: “It all depends on the problem.

Continued on page 2
Cold Classrooms From page 1

that, but Mr. Gagen said heating and cooling depends on the outdoor temperature. “When it comes to the A/C, it needs the brain, (building automation system) which is a computer program that coincides with all the equipment which is software involved with the A/C in the newer wings.”

He then says when it comes to the heater, it’s a lot faster when it’s cold outside for some time and the heat is on. He could adjust it himself but it’s different on an unexpected cold day.

When most Hancock students think of Hancock, we hear how old it is, how broke we are. This leads many people thinking we can’t afford heat due to money issues. However, Mr. Gagen says it all comes down to him sending the quotes to his managers at Sodexo, the company that employs many of CPS’s engineers. Sodexo pays for some repairs and CPS pays for some. Mr. Gagen explains that it all depends on how major a repair is and if a contractor needs to be hired to fix something. CPS and Sodexo make the decisions about who pays for what.

He explains that the heaters and A/C break so much because they’re “univents: a poor design for heating and cooling.”

“Air Handling Units are the great vents such as those in the auditorium and gym that are being well kept. To summarize, old air vents are the main problem that occurs in these vents. The process to fixing the problem comes down to ‘troubleshooting.’

From getting here at 5:30 a.m. and ending his work day at 1:30 p.m., he only has an hour and a half to fix the first problems called in when he checks the spreadsheet where problems are reported and gets going.

He says that he hears every day how some classes are hotter than others. Mr. Gagen says the main priority of fixing the vents is always the classrooms first, except if parents will come into the gym or auditorium for an event.

Mr. Gagen ends the interview by connecting with us: “I have kids myself; I went to school. I don’t want anyone uncomfortable in this building. I wish it was the perfect environment for everyone. We are really limited to our restraints but I don’t want anyone to be uncomfortable. If no one was uncomfortable that would be awesome.”

Congratulations to the Hancock band members who auditioned and made the CPS All City Concert Band, a group of citywide musicians: Rita Hernandez, Emily Gamboa, Attzy Rodriguez, Martin Oliveros, and Giselle Hernandez. The Mr. Holland’s Opus Foundation also donated over $19,000 in instruments to our band students.

Photo by Mr. Catomer

Tell us whatchoo got to say!
Believe it or not—Hancock cares whatchoo think.
Email your response to any ideas in this issue to Mr. Salazar at rsalazar@cps.edu.
Your comments might be included in the next issue.
Our Building Is Too High
Maintenance
By Ivana Lopez and Andrea Irineo

It’s no secret—Hancock is cold. For the past month, the school has felt like a freezer. It’s a problem to anyone who steps foot in the building. “It’s physically painful. I stopped being able to feel my toes, and my hands are too cold to be able to write. It’s hard to grade my students’ work when my fingers are too numb to feel the pen,” says Ms. Baranoff, the Drama teacher. She currently teaches her Drama I, II, and III students in the auditorium every day for 90 minutes. “It takes a lot of energy to keep the body warm, so when I have students in the morning, coming inside from walking in the cold, then ask them to come into the cold auditorium and sit for 90 minutes-- it’s exhausting.”

I, Ivana Lopez, have been coming to Hancock for four years and there’s always an annoying maintenance issue such as it’s too hot or cold in the building because the heaters or A/C aren’t working properly or the A/C or heat is not turned on. Currently, I have to wear both a sweater and a jacket inside the school because it’s unnecessarily cold in most of the classes/areas in the building.

In the warm months, it’s so muggy, hot, and sticky inside due to the lack of A/C. Sure, a window or two can be opened, but what happens when it’s muggy, hot, and sticky outside as well?

The heating and cooling isn’t the only problem here at Hancock. There are more problems within the building: I trip over the severely damaged floors. Let’s not forget to mention how certain parts of the building are an eyesore to look at, such as a hole in the wall or an unusable toilet that’s been covered up with a plastic sheet for years.

It’s been noticed how many problem areas there are around the school. This all started when I, Andrea Irineo, was walking down the third floor hallway on my way to class. I almost tripped over pieces of tile sticking up from the floor. While someone attempted to cover these pieces with a rug, it wasn’t enough to prevent other students from tripping over the tile on the floor. Hancock’s staff and students have more than likely noticed or encountered some of these problems.

Many of these issues are related to the fact that the school was founded in 1936, nearly 83 years ago. Hancock was formerly an all girls Catholic school, known as Lourdes High School, which closed down back in 2002. Hancock was remodeled when

Continued on page 4
the school became Selective Enrollment and received 10 million dollars from the state for remodeling.

Penn. State identified four important components that create a positive learning environment based on their study “Environmental Conditions and Their Influence on Academic Advising Offices.” They found that the physical, aggregate (something formed by the combination of many separate items total,) constructed, and organization within a school impacts how students learn.

In the study, Penn. State also found that “the influences are obvious in nature and comprise such things as the lighting, flooring, furniture, and architecture and can also encompass layout and spaces, accessibility and cleanliness, as well as interior color schemes”. Essentially any small detail can impact the way a student learns.

Conversations about our new building began with Alderman Marty Quinn. Last month, our principal, assistant principals, two parents, two students, and four teachers (seven of these people live in our 13th Ward) met with the alderman. They’re scheduled to meet this month with CPS and the Public Building Commission, the organization overseeing the new-building construction, as well. The group agreed to fight for a building that allows us to add more programs and not take any away. They also want to keep our small-community feel and provide adequate space for athletics. The building, which will be located at an empty lot on 64th and Long (by Central) will probably be ready in 2020.

For now, students can report building issues using a link that our assistant principal will post on the Website or Google Classroom.

Students will be able to report heating problems and any other maintenance issues because students and staff shouldn’t have to deal with these issues until Hancock gets the new building.

Even if there is going to be a new building in the near future, we shouldn’t ignore our problems as a Hancock community right now. We owe it to ourselves to make sure our school is in more than just a tolerable condition.

We need to work together to make these next couple of years equally acceptable and safe.
Getting to Know the New Dean and Her Focus on Students’ Mental Health  By Yessenia Garcia

During high school, students tend to question their mental health. They start wondering if what they’re feeling is normal or something more serious. Mental health is very important and students might be wondering who they can talk to about it. Students can talk to their counselor, teacher, and as well as the new dean, Mildred Garcia. Ms. Garcia grew up in Humboldt Park, is the youngest in her family, and comes from a hard-working family. She lived in a small bedroom apartment. There were a total of eight people living with her. Ms. Garcia states, “Life was hard. There was a lot of violence. There was a lot of trauma but there was a lot of resilience, strength, culture, and a family.” Something to keep in mind is that the environment can affect our mental health. Some people can cope with things while others can’t.

Ms. Garcia received her bachelor’s in social work and minor in ethnic studies from California State University. She received her master’s in social work from Loyola University Chicago. At some point she felt like dropping out, but she describes herself as a very determined woman. She wasn’t going to let anything get in the way of accomplishing her goal. Ms. Garcia is not only the new dean but also a social worker. She believes social work is connected to her values and perspective on people. “What makes me a social worker is the ability to humanize people and to understand people realistically --to understand that people have a story, experiences, and struggles.” She sees people as who they are, who they want to be, and how they will accomplish that.

“My approach to be the dean of students is not the stereotypical approach of when you walk into that office you’re about to get in trouble.” Ms. Garcia refuses to base her perspective solely based on what other people have to say about the behavior of certain students. She sees students as humans and wants to help students by talking about the problem, how the student reacted, and taking accountability. Ms. Garcia feels it’s important to talk about mental health right now because she sees a rise in mental health issues. “I think a lot of people are dealing with just survival,” states Ms. Garcia. Some teens that deal with mental health issues see their life as a survival challenge. They start thinking if they’ll be able to make it through the day. It also doesn’t help if they keep what they feel bottled up. Additionally, in many Southwest side families, it’s hard to make everyone understand why we feel the way we do.

When it comes to mental health issues among communities of color, there is a lot of stigma. Ms. Garcia states, “I think it’s all about listening. Our parents and those older generations lived a different experience.” Not only do parents have to listen but so does the individual. Many people lived different experiences and struggles, but at the end of the day students can reach out within the community for support or to help educate others on how to show support.

Ms. Garcia is someone students can reach out to. She believes in restorative justice and now calls room 119 “The Nest.” She wants it to be an environment where students can reach out for help and get support. The mission statement is: “The Nest is a space that takes a restorative approach when dealing with conflict. It provides a safe space to reflect on mistakes, take accountability, and restore. The space sets the standard for how we operate as a community.”

Murals in Back of the Yards

Photos by Andrea Irineo
Maria Alvarez, a Hancock senior, born into a life of medical struggles, always found hope and passion. She was born with renal hypoplasia in Mexico; doctors didn’t see her living a normal life. Then her mother made the decision to search for the hope of a better life for her daughter. “In 2007, I was sent to Children’s Memorial Hospital of Chicago, where I completely fell in love with the environment that Children’s Memorial had to offer. I had surgery the following year and words can’t describe how thankful I am for their service.”

Growing up with this medical condition, she began to grow a passion for medicine itself and became interested in helping other kids growing up with medical conditions. Then in her junior year of high school, she saw a poster announcing an internship at Ann Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago, the same hospital where she had been given the opportunity for a better life.

Discovering Healthcare Careers is a program meant to provide the opportunity for students of color to be in a medical setting and help them pursue their dreams of working in medicine.

The internship consisted of six weeks and each week, teens worked in a new department, which meant getting to see the many different careers in healthcare. She was able to shadow in Children Services her first week and discover the beauty behind social services like these. Every day, volunteers would go up to the floors and look for patients, kids, who were able to play.

Not many kids were able to get out of bed, but those that were, Alvarez was able to play with them and help them forget the reason they were there in the first place. She saw how just playing with a toy car brightened up their mood and put a smile on their face. “It only took 30 minutes to make this little boy’s day, but his bubbly laugh will forever leave an imprint in my heart.”

Some teens nowadays are not getting themselves involved when it comes to taking advantage of opportunities that can help them get some exposure from certain workplaces. Teenagers are mostly in the mindset of putting their education first, especially since some people can barely get a job nowadays with only a high school diploma. But what the teens are unaware of is that high school is actually the perfect time to join a program like an internship. According to Teen Life Blog, there’s various reasons why teens should get an internship, from not having to worry about that much financial responsibility to actually getting over being anxious about getting some experience—but perhaps they might be too hesitant or not know about any opportunities.

According to a study by Child Trends.Org, “The percentage of youth who are employed has been increasing since the Great Recession, although employment rates are still not has high as they were in 2006 for youth both in and out school.” The website adds, “Youth enrolled in high school had an employment rate of 20 percent, while the rate was 47 percent for those in colleges, either full-time or part-time.” This means that overall, when it comes to student jobs and/or internships, the stats are somewhat at a all time low—showing the advantages of gaining internship experience.

Elizabeth Romo, who is a junior in our Hancock Community, actually joined the internship Chicago Police & Firefighter Training Academy (CPFDA). “We basically train there for our career purposes and it’s a commitment of two years. Right now I’m training at the Chicago Police Academy and next semester I’ll be at the Fire Department Academy,” Romo states. At the academy, they basically teach the students the mindset of a police officer where the lessons can be values of building up the character to knowing when somebody lies. During the interview, Romo really expressed her appreciation of having to join an internship like CPFDA. She said that on a daily basis, after doing the internship for the day, she would always

Continued on page 7
Internships
From page 6

feel “good about [herself] and “refreshed” since she’s always learning something, rather than going through the same, bland old process with no lively action involved. Romo also mentioned that their 4:30-7:30 schedule started with extreme workouts from being dreadfully exhausted from burpee exercises to cooling down with jumping jacks. In addition, Romo also believes that the opportunity of getting an internship as a teen should widely be taken advantage of. “[You would] know the background of the field you want to go into. So that would give an insight on how your career starts.” Romo also believes internships can provide productivity and exposure to a career—especially one someone is most interested in and would like to feel more in touch with.

When looking into an internship, the individual must be aware that not only it can take a lot of one’s schedule, but there may be some unlikeable factors that must be dealt with while taking part in the internship.

For Maria Alvarez, another amazing part of this internship was seeing the diversity in job options in a hospital and realizing what career is right for her. Alvarez had her heart set on being a medical imaging tech. Soon in the hospital, she realized that it was not what was meant for her. She wanted more. She realized that the reality behind those careers was not having a bond with patients, but only seeing them once a day, and this wasn’t what she was looking for. “With every rainbow, there has to be thunder and my rainy days landed on my fourth week of the internship: Medical Imaging Techs. Ironically, this department was my least favorite because they rarely have interaction with patients-- something I learned I loved to do. I would’ve followed blindly without knowing it’s not for me.”

The Chase your dreams: Discovering Healthcare careers gave Alvarez the experience of a lifetime. She not only learned from shadowing in departments, but from everyone on the team who shared their knowledge with them. She got to meet amazing guest speakers who shared how their journey to their career was like.

After six short weeks, she had a completely new outlook on healthcare careers and what she wanted to become. “This is a place where not only have I learned so much about my future, but also learned so much about myself. I can really say I’ve met wonderful people, made amazing connections, and can call the whole Discovering Healthcare Careers team family.”

Queer-Straight Alliance Chalk Art Gets Vandalized
by Emily Silva

When I heard about one of the chalk drawings the Queer-Straight Alliance did in honor of National Coming Out Day getting vandalized when a student splashed water and stomped on it, I was disgusted. I never thought I’d get to experience such immature hatred. I may not be a lesbian nor a bisexual, but my caring participation for this club is not only for me but everybody else that wants to take part in the club. So not only did I feel a personal attack from this action, but I felt the communal pain as well—from the ones who care as much and from the ones who are true members of the LGBTQ+ community. I say personal attack because this is my club.

I joined the Gay-Straight Alliance Club (Now known as the Queer-Straight Alliance Club) because I felt like it was the only club I would be willing to pour all my energy into, as well as become devoted enough to expressing my interest towards a progressive community like the LGBTQ+ community. In addition, I was already somewhat passionate about the issues the LGBTQ+ community is involved in like the goal of gaining equality for all kinds of people. Society is evolving. I want to evolve with it to. This club holds a special place in my heart that makes me more than happy to be able to join such a progressive club like this at Hancock. So being part of QSA makes me feel like I’m actually part of a difference.

Continued on page 8
Queer-Straight Alliance Chalkart Gets Vandalized
From page 7

Due to all of this, QSA is motivating me to a part of their change of respect and acceptance since I am willing to fight back in any way. Kids in the LGBTQ+ community have been feeling constricted for too long about who they desire to be and be with for the sake of love and friendship.

QSA Moderator, Ms. Donalek, explained in an interview that she was filled with disappointment and fear once she heard about the chalk incident, but she realized there was an opportunity to take hold of. “I believe that this vandalism act was eye-opening enough for there to be an actual chance for conversation regarding issues within the LGBTQ+ community,” Donalek stated. Even the kids were as upset as their moderator. Many of the club members, like myself, were mostly worried of what was going to happen next and whether or not this was going to be disregarded. Luckily, Ms. Donalek made a diligent effort to quickly resolve the issue by reporting it to the dean and administration because she “didn’t want people to know that [vandalism] was an option.”

The LGBTQ+ community have been struggling for so long, overcoming such obstacles that range from plain disrespect to striking hate crimes. According to the website of the Federal Bureau Investigation (FBI), the number of reported hate crimes regarding anti sexual-orientation bias was 1,218 back in 2016—making it the third most reported hate crime. In addition, the total amount of reported hate crimes regarding gender-identity (another precious factor within the LGBTQ+ community) was 130 back in 2016 as well. It may seem low, but that doesn’t mean it shouldn’t matter.

These hate crimes, especially ones that are covered up with insensitive humor and/or ignorant personal beliefs, are affecting lives. According to Sexualdiversity.org, it is estimated that “1,500 Gay and Lesbian youth commit suicide every year.” Mostly because hate crimes, or even plain disrespect, can make these youth feel intoxicatingly constricted for who they are, for who they desire to be.

To prevent any more hostility towards a protected group like QSA from occurring, the club plans on promoting the value of community and conversation throughout the school by posters, education on the lively yet struggling LGBT+ community, and lecturing the teachers in our upcoming Teach The Teachers event to motivate teachers to have their classrooms become safe spots within the school. All of this can help our community become less restrictive, leading the voices of students to become transformative in this movement towards respectful pride. The only weapons we need are civil wisdom and togetherness.

Photos by Emily Silva

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*The Signature* is published every month October through June in print and online versions on our Website. Submit your art, photography, or writing. See Mr. Salazar in 201.

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**Hancock College Prep High School**
A Selective-Enrollment Chicago public school serving mostly Southwest side families that empowers students through academic and social engagement to create change in their personal lives and in their communities

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