



# VOICE



Celebrating diversity, promoting unity

## Cultural Celebration: Inside PPAS' First Hispanic Heritage Month Celebration

By Rosabella Procario-Soler



Filled with mingling students, the courtyard is adorned with Latin American flags.

Latin music swelled throughout the courtyard as PPAS kicked off its first Hispanic Heritage Month Celebration. The COVID conscious affair honored and displayed the conglomerate of Latinx cultures around the world. With lively performances, presentations on different Spanish speaking countries, and even an interactive salsa class, the event was a success. Students danced, sang, and

learned more about Hispanic culture while having loads of fun. The festivities began fourth period, and continued into fifth period where even middle schoolers got a chance to experience the delights that the party offered. Enjoyed by all, the Hispanic Heritage Month Celebration gave our community a chance to commemorate and honor Latinx culture in our own PPAS style—but it hasn't always been this way.



In years prior, the month-long observance was not celebrated at school. But this year, PPAS is coming back stronger than ever before and finding more ways to incorporate many cultures into our everyday activities. Organized and facilitated by Hispanic students from our community and PPAS' own Spanish teachers, this year's festivities are only the beginning. Respecting and honoring culture is highly important, not only in school, but also in life. Choosing to learn about someone else's way of life not only allows them to share what they find important, but it exposes you to the myriad cultures, values, and histories around the world. PPAS does just that, by creating equitable spaces, events, and clubs for pupils of all groups.

**“This school has always made me feel included...the party was just another step in the right direction.”**

**- Niyireth Valdes**

For student Niyireth Valdes, this new celebration wasn't unexpected. “This school has always made me feel included [and] especially with my heritage, the party was just another step in the right direction.” Niyireth, along with Omeirys Romero performed a salsa piece, the style of dance originating in early 1900s Cuba. With wonderful moves and vivacious costumes, the pair truly wowed the crowd. Another portion of the event included a salsa class led by Jazlyn Carreras and Rubi Perez, leaders of the Latin Dance Fusion Club. Middle school students were able to get up and dance using Latinx and Hispanic movement, and learn more about Latin styles of dance.

Ultimately, the Hispanic Heritage Month Celebration cultivated a place of learning, enjoyment, and Hispanic expression for our PPAS community. In addition, the celebration provided more representation for the Latinx student body. Although this was the first Hispanic Heritage Month celebration here at PPAS, I foresee that it is the first of many to come.





Students strutting their costumes on the runway during the Fall Festival. *Photos courtesy of Anya Jiménez.*

## Biden Seeks to Stop Party Infighting Over Reconciliation Bill

By Ellis Rubin

The White House can't afford to lose a single vote. For President Biden's wide-ranging reconciliation bill to pass, all 50 Senate Democrats must vote for it, but two moderates remain noncommittal: Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Sen. Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona. When introduced, the bill offered an ambitious expansion of the social safety net, calling for \$3.5 trillion for proposals relating to climate change, child

care, health care, education, housing, and more. While the White House framed the price tag as an investment, Manchin and Sinema viewed it as a budgetary liability, demanding the number be cut down substantially.

With little room to negotiate, Biden has privately suggested

cutting the cost in half in recent weeks. That may make the bill more palatable for Manchin and Sinema. However, it would likely gut some progressive priorities, such as





two free years of community college, a 3-month paid leave period, and \$40 billion to repair public housing.

The part that Manchin and Sinema seem most focused on shrinking, however, is the section on combating climate change. Manchin, representing a state that's the second largest coal producer in the country, shut down a key initiative that would've incentivized utilities to switch from coal and gas to alternative energy sources. Sinema, too, has stipulated that at least \$100 billion in climate funding be cut before she'll vote for the bill.



At the same time, the White House can't blindly agree to whatever changes the two of them ask for. If the bill gets too small or one too many core provisions are thrown away, the progressive faction of the party may feel alienated. Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont, the chair of the Senate Budget Committee who originally advocated for a \$6 trillion package, has said the bill must retain its Medicare expansion, as the president and congressional leaders have weighed killing it.

A victory on the reconciliation bill may be a breath of fresh air for the president. After a summer largely defined by his controversial decision to pull out of Afghanistan and trouble containing the COVID-19 pandemic, passing his legislative priority could be a bounceback. In last year's election, Biden ran on his dealmaking prowess, presenting himself as the candidate who could get everyone to compromise. The fate of this bill is the first major test of whether that is true.

**“A victory on the reconciliation bill may be a breath of fresh air for the president.”**

## Broadway's Back. What Now?

By Anya Jiménez

Only weeks after Kenny Leon, the Tony-award winning director of *A Soldier's Play* made his rousing declaration that “the table's gotta get bigger,” Broadway theaters continue their march back to “normal.” As the novelty of reopened theaters wears off, we're reintroduced to the Broadway we once knew - the same seats, same playbills, and same overpriced drinks. And as wonderful as it is for arts





employees and eager audiences to return to live entertainment, we have to ask ourselves if we're also returning to the normalcy of the Not-So-Great White Way.

The feeling of love that theatergoers and theatermakers have for the stage isn't going anywhere - but that feeling of newness will fade. By next year, going to see a Broadway musical won't be as ceremonious as it is now. We won't have as many "what ifs" about the industry, because by then, we'll be right in the middle of "business as usual." From the time Broadway went dark in March 2020 to the first show reopening in September 2021, we've had lots of time to look critically at the entertainment industry. From concerns over accessibility for low-income theater lovers to outrage over workplace discrimination against BIPOC arts workers, the pandemic forced us to discover that "returning to normal" isn't what's truly needed.

With increased coverage of the demands from the 150,000+ members of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE), it's become clear that, from Broadway to Hollywood, arts employees have had enough. The social media presence of production companies and theater companies have all seemed to acknowledge this shift, but is it a step toward equality? Or is it simply virtue signaling to avoid the shame of "cancel culture"? Even the 2021 Tony Awards, previously covered in our October issue, delivered a passionate blend of theatrical sentimentality and poignant social commentary. It was beautiful to see such a deliberate emphasis on the need for equality, especially the memorable performance from Daniel J Watts and the Broadway Advocacy Coalition, an organization that fosters anti-racism in the entertainment industry. But putting these performances onstage, much like reposting self-proclaimed "anti-racist" infographics, does not solve any problems - it simply acknowledges them. As the city slowly begins to feel "normal" again, we must continue to look at Broadway with the same critical eye we had while it was shut down. As Daniel J Watts put it, we must continue to ask: "What does your silence sound like?"

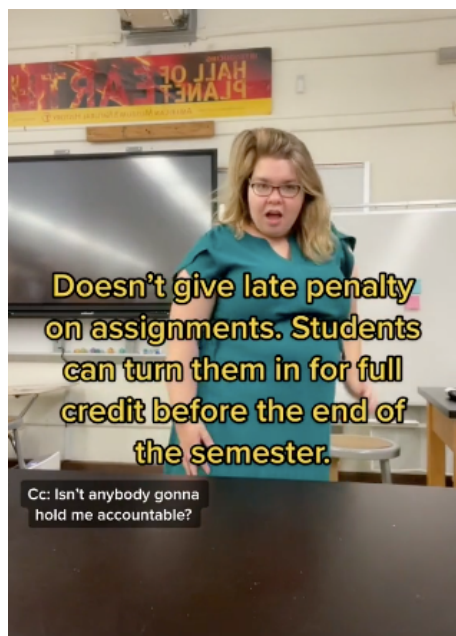


**"...the pandemic forced us to discover that 'returning to normal' isn't what's truly needed."**

## **Richley: Imposing Late-Work Penalties for Deadlines is "Not My Job"**

**By John Powers**

The bell rings—time for lunch. On the 4th floor, Ms. Richley's room is bustling with noisy students. Clustered in social cliques on lab tables, students, from freshman to seniors, are eating and conversing with one another. Sometimes you might even hear music playing on Spotify through the Promethean board. Lana Del Rey and Adele are top hits among students. Richley, who is in her fourth year at PPAS, has taught Earth



Ms. Richley's TikTok  
with over 103,000 views

Science for the past three years and Physics for two out of those three years. In addition to her post as Earth Science and Physics teacher, Richley took on the role of testing coordinator last year. She is responsible for seamlessly managing standardized testing, such as the SAT, PSAT, and AP exams, at PPAS, while accommodating students with learning disabilities in the process. Ms. Richley is well-liked by students at large and has communicated a strong sense of mutual respect as well as fierce academic challenge. Indeed, she has even labeled herself as “nice in person” but “the meanest grader in the school.”

It's well known that PPAS is a unique school because, as students, we not only have to balance a full academic workload, but also a heavy artistic repertoire. It's highly probable that our student body is more adept at time management than other schools in light of this fact, but we've all had to hand in an assignment late one time or another. If you've handed in assignments late, though, you may have experienced vastly different repercussions depending on the teacher. Since Ms. Richley is so busy between teaching a large group of students among two content areas and being the testing coordinator, one might think that she imposes rigid deadlines on her students, since she deals with deadlines everyday. That is precisely not the case. So, how does Richley face the issue of late work head on? The answer is simple: a fairly laissez-faire (hands-off) approach.

In a recent TikTok Richley made that garnered over 100,000 views, she stated that she accepts late submissions of assignments for full credit, so long as they are submitted before the end of the semester. For Richley, the reason for accepting late work is “because the only person it's hurting is them [the student].” Technically, students can hand in late work before the end of the semester, but the deadline is “really before the test” since Richley does not “push back” quizzes or tests. In our recorded interview, Richley asserted that “if you're not doing the homework, you're not studying for the test.” In this way, Richley has tacitly structured her classroom norms to push students to complete homework on time, without punitive measures. In fact, Ms. Richley believes that “not having something like a late policy gives students the opportunity to realize the differences and gain that intrinsic motivation to do stuff on time.” It makes sense. If you have not completed your homework, then, as Richley expressed, “you don't feel mentally prepared, you don't feel like you understood [the content] for the test.” She went on further to say

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**“It's more important that I build that intrinsic motivation... than work on employable skills”**

**- Ms. Richley**



that “I believe that those [consequences] build intrinsic motivation to help students later and I think just penalizing students doesn’t...let them understand what the rewards of doing it right the first time are.”

Ms. Richley, self-aware, does understand the potential problems with her argument. She acknowledges that since she teaches 9th grade, it is relatively easy to grade student work. Meanwhile, 12th grade work might be “harder to grade” and thus teachers may have stricter policies. In addition, teachers took the the comment section of her viral TikTok to challenge her views. One significant comment revolved around the fact that Richley’s late-work policy does not prepare students for deadlines in the real world. In a quick retort, Richley responded to that comment, remarking that “it’s not my job. I believe my job is to teach students about my content area and about life skills.” Regardless of the criticism of her late-work theory, Richley is an articulate, compelling voice on this topic. In sum, Richley is of the mindset that “It’s more important that I build that intrinsic motivation, those intrinsic skills than work on employable skills.” Her views are clearly rooted in her passion and effectiveness as a teacher, and her profound view in seeing the humanity of her students, knowing that life happens and sometimes deadlines cannot be immediately met. Concluding our interview, Ms. Richley closed out with the statement that “the time you have in school is meant to give you the knowledge you need for the future, and there are a lot of ways to get that.”

## Finding Purpose Apart from College Applications

By Emma Tom

“High school is merely a means to making it into a prestigious college” is often the general consensus in the minds of most students. Beginning in freshman year, students are taught to participate in as many clubs and extracurricular activities as possible, not necessarily to pursue their interests, but simply as a way for them to start stacking bullet points on their college resume. Standardized testing is often one of the most monumental roadblocks that students face during their high school years. Test prep sometimes starts as soon as students graduate from middle school and last up until their SATs in senior year. It then comes down to the question: what is my purpose apart from making it into college?”

The ages 14-18 are tender years for adolescents and they often have to find





footing on their own. Since society has emphasized the importance of being successful in high school to ensure an acceptance letter into a rigorous college, students begin placing their faith in such notions blindly. Lacking purpose and fulfilling a life with, what feels like, no meaning leads to major depression and other psychological detriments.

According to the CDC the statistic, “ ‘Ever having been diagnosed with either anxiety or depression’ among children aged 6–17 years increased from 5.4% in 2003 to 8% in 2007 and to 8.4% in 2011–2012.” The rates, in which students

continue to feel the pressure and expectations from either parents or schools, are ever growing. This feeling is not confined to American students, in fact, according to Agence France-Presse of the South China morning post, “Around 500 Japanese students below the age of 20 kill themselves each year. Every September 1, teen suicide rates tend to occur three times higher compared to any other day.” The numbers are appalling, yet not surprising given the fact that students are not given the proper environment to mature in. Stress tends to snowball out of control until it is too late. This issue is one of utmost significance, so how can we begin to change the system?

Let students know that they do not need all the answers right now. High school should be a time to expand students’ horizons and search for aspirations that truly make them happy. College is not the end goal; it is merely a dot in the infinite possibilities that this world has to offer.

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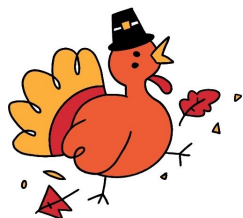
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## **Staying Safe While Being Entertained - Broadway’s Safety Protocols**

**By Joelle Leopold**

Broadway is back! The joy of live theatre, when the curtain rises and the spotlight illuminates the actor during their big note, has been missed by many during the pandemic. My first show back was *Waitress*. I was so excited because not only is *Waitress* my favorite musical, but I also got to see one of my favorite songwriters, Sara Bareilles. Hearing her sing the first notes of “What’s Inside” led to fifteen minutes of tears falling down my cheeks. I had to ask if it was alright that I was crying like a baby for the latter half of the show. I think *Waitress* was the perfect show to see for my first show back, as it was what got me into musical theatre to begin with. I am sure others are also very excited to go see their first show back.



As exciting as this is, many are still hesitant to go out and see a show. If you are sitting next to people you do not know, especially in a

full house, you would probably be scared about getting sick, right? No worries, The Broadway League has actually hired a team to make sure everyone is staying safe.

When you get to the theatre, you stand in a line as you normally would to show your ticket. However, along with your ticket, you need to show proof that you are vaccinated with photo identification. If you cannot get vaccinated for whatever reason, you have to show proof of a negative COVID test. Once you get in the theatre, you have to keep your mask on the entire time, unless you are eating and drinking. The ushers peruse the theatre throughout the show to make sure everyone has their masks on. If your mask is not covering your nose, the usher will call you out.



*Waitress at the Barrymore Theatre.*

At the end of September, however, there was a bit of a dilemma. *Aladdin* had to cancel performances for about ten days. There were breakthrough COVID cases that spread throughout the company. As per protocol, everyone got tested. This was bound to happen with Broadway reopening. If you are scared about COVID or a resurgence, you can buy tickets through the show. If there is an emergency, you can cancel your tickets within forty-eight to twenty-four hours before the show. All in all it's good that Broadway is back. Humans must create art to express the ideals of nature.



## The Woman at the Door

By Tanya Jaffe

It was a windy fall day. Sara was packing her bags when a knock on the door stopped her in her tracks. She threw her washcloth on the couch and ran downstairs, pushing over a basket of laundry as she went. The house was cluttered with paper plates, smeared with remnants of old meals and conversations, which she could barely piece together now. She grabbed the coat by the window and came to the door.

Through the peephole, she saw a woman standing there. She was maybe 35 or 40 with bright green eyes. She hadn't

seen this woman before, and this was a small town.

She opened the door hesitantly and smiled at the strange woman. When taking a second glance at her, she noticed she was dressed oddly. She seemed to be wearing a mish-mash of Halloween costumes, making quite the expressive outfit.

Atop her head was a witch's hat, sitting at an angle on her red hair. She wore a clown shirt and skeleton pants. Sara was taken aback. Who was this mysterious woman who had arrived at her door? She suddenly remembered that she had to say something.

"Hello?" she said, still staring at the woman's shirt. She noticed she wasn't wearing a coat.

"Hi there!" she said cheerfully. "I'm looking to borrow some sugar! I need some for a cake I'm making," she said, taking a step towards the door.

"Oh, I haven't seen you around here before, did you just move around here?" asked Sara. The woman chuckled to herself and rubbed her arms, taking another step forward. She seemed eager to get inside. That made sense; she was probably cold.

"Something like that," the woman chirped, "I'm Grace. Grace Armstrong. I know these parts well."

"Would you like to come in? You look cold." Sara gestured to the door, and Grace frantically pushed past her. She walked straight towards the kitchen looking around at the cabinets. Sara moved past the couch and opened the right drawer.

"The sugar should be in here," Sara said, bending down to grab the rotating shelf, when she got to the place where the sugar usually was, it was gone. That's odd, she thought. She turned around to see Grace staring at a family photo, her face close to the frame.

"These are very nice," she said, now tracing the people. Sara stood beside her. "That's my mother, I'm going to stay with her this weekend actually," Sara said, while Grace's finger landed on a woman with curly hair and dark eyes. Grace moved her finger to Sara and then to the man in the photo.

Sara chuckled. That'd been the only photo her parents had agreed to take together. She knew she had no reason to trust this strange woman in her house, but something about her was comforting. She knew she was much more interested in the house than with her, and although she was bizarre, she was wistful.

"I think I have some more sugar in the basement," Sara said, starting towards the stairs. "There are more photos if you'd like to see."

So the two women found themselves in the dusty basement, cluttered with school reports and letters from years ago. It had been some time since she'd been down here; she hadn't thought it was this messy.

Grace didn't seem to mind, she circled around the room, staring at artifacts.

"You know," she started, "this is all really great."





"I suppose." Sarah shrugged while she moved boxes to get to the cupboard. Grace walked to a corner and observed as a spider slowly spun another loop on its web.

"Someday, years from now, someone might find these. They'll put them in a museum and then you'll be famous!" she remarked, as the spider crawled another inch or so.

"Oh... well I'm not sure about that!" Sara laughed. She brought the sugar over to Grace and watched the spider finally repeat its round.

"Oh! Thank you so much!" Grace said, checking the date on the back of the sugar. The two stood there for a moment and then walked back up to the foyer.

As Grace slipped on her boots, which had points that curled upward into a swirl, Sara still wondered if she might be cold.

"Would you like a coat along with the sugar?" Sara asked.

Grace looked down and grinned. "That won't be necessary."

Sara opened the door and led Grace out onto the stoop. She started down the first step, but then turned around.

"You do really have a nice house, she said.

Sara smiled, "I don't know, it's very messy."

"I think it's got character," Grace said, and then abruptly hurried down the street, walking into the fog. As Sara watched her go, she was in awe. *What a strange and wonderful woman*, she thought to herself.

It was not until she got to her mother's house that she learned that Grace Armstrong was long dead, and that she hadn't lived in this town for nearly 100 years.

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## COMMENDED STUDENTS IN THE 2022 NATIONAL MERIT SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM



Principal Keith Ryan of PPAS announced today that **Ellis Rubin** has been named a Commended Student in the 2022 National Merit Scholarship Program. A Letter of Commendation from the school and National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC), which conducts the program, will be presented by the principal to this scholastically talented senior.

About 34,000 Commended Students throughout the nation are being recognized for their exceptional academic promise. Although they will not continue in the 2022 competition for National Merit Scholarship awards, Commended Students placed among the top 50,000 students who entered the 2022 competition by taking the 2020 Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT).

“Those being named Commended Students have demonstrated outstanding potential for academic success,” commented a spokesperson for NMSC. “These students represent a valuable national resource; recognizing their accomplishments, as well as the key role their schools play in their academic development, is vital to the advancement of educational excellence in our nation. We hope that this recognition will help broaden their educational opportunities and encourage them as they continue their pursuit of academic success.”

## Call for Contributors!

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## Photographers! Political Junkies!

If you would like to contribute an article, a work of art, a story—please  
contact [theppasvoice@ppasshare.org](mailto:theppasvoice@ppasshare.org)

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