The Hawkeye

Spring 2023

The Recent PCS Construction Project: An Interview with Mr. Patton

By Simon Santamaria

When PCS finally received permission in 2018 to increase our student population from about 360 to its current enrollment of just over 430, it was clear that new classroom and lunch spaces were needed. Planning for new construction soon began during the pandemic and has only recently been concluded. The Hawkeye interviewed our head of school, Mr. Patton, to get some details about the construction project.

HAWKEYE: How was the money raised for the construction?

MR. PATTON: Fifty thousand dollars came from donations from parents while the rest was from a loan.

What was the need for the new buildings?

We needed the fourth grade rooms as we had more kids and the fourth grade was in the trailer. But the fifth grade, why did we need those? We added them to add extra rooms so we have more options when it comes to scheduling classes. It also helped because the fifth grade rooms were small and didn't get light.

Why exactly did the construction take so long?

It didn't start right away, which partly had to do with making sure that we had a plan that was affordable and one of the original plans that we had went out to bid on because we, as a public school, have to follow a public bidding process. We can't just pick anybody; we have to actually take the lowest bid. You put a proposal out and say you need four classrooms, a cafeteria, etc., and then bids [from construction contractors] come in. Then you choose which one is the lowest. You don't get to say, I like this guy better than that guy, even though he's a little bit more expensive; it's the lowest public bid. When we went out for the lowest public bid, it came in really high, and we couldn't afford it. We redesigned the buildings. That was how we were able to afford it. That slowed things down significantly. Once they started construction they moved really quickly. Then one of the reasons why the construction lingered late was we replaced our boiler in the 5/8 building. They wanted to do it last December, but they would mean that there would have been no heat. I said, if you can't guarantee that this will be done by January when we return you've got to wait, and they waited. They just pushed it back because they could not guarantee that they would do it by January. We waited till April when there was no more need for heat. But the last pieces were supply issues. During COVID, for example, they upgraded the air handler in the new cafeteria so that there would be safe air filtration. That took about 12 weeks. Things like that held us up.

We wanted to know who designed the building.

An architect named Micheal Farwell.

Why exactly are the buildings where they are?

There are two reasons: one, connecting them the way we did saved money. Reason two, it really bridged 4th grade. It made it easier to bridge 4th graders as they are symbolically moving into the 5/8 building to be physically closer. The 5th graders were kept a bit outside of the 5-8 building because they're not there yet. It cost less and it had that sort of symbolic quality of joining them that way.

Why did you get rid of the middle entrance lane in the parking lot?

We had a lot of congestion right at that one spot where people were coming in, although it was useful at times, but we thought it was a little bit dangerous. And then one of the big problems with our drop off and pickup is we don't have *(continued on page 2)*

Hawk drawing by Madeleine Tsai

PSC Alum and NY City Ballet Principal Dancer Unity Phelan is profiled on page 7

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PCS Construction *(continued from page 1)* enough space to operate, and that allows us a little more room in there for a couple of extra parking spots. That was the main reason. We also use a school bus lane down below in the middle area.

Exactly what role did you play in the construction?

The construction year was a really hard year of school. It was our first year back after being away, and by all reports it was the hardest year of teaching in 50 years. It was a really hard year for teachers, for students, for administrators, for schools. The board and I wanted to make sure that I wasn't getting pulled into construction issues too much. We had a committee, which was led by the board president, and they really did a good job of managing all that. What I ended up having to do was keep people out of the construction area. So that kind of managing was what I ended up doing. And remember we had the tents outside last year; we had all this stuff to deal with COVID. I was just managing the facilities around COVID and construction. That was the main part. And now and then they would give me updates like when we needed to shut the cafeteria down because we needed to open up that wall, and I would say when can you do it?

Why did you choose to replace the fence with a different fence?

The newer one looks better. That's the main reason. Now we're supposed to put some plantings around it to keep making it look even nicer and give it more of a buffer.

That means there's gonna be greenery.

Coming soon, we want more greenery. We have some trees, but we definitely want more. We also need a fence to keep the balls from running out to the street and also to keep kids from going into the street. Trees will help with that and maintain that green sense. If you look at the fence, it goes like this [Mr. Patton makes a curving motion] because there was an old stump there. There's no way to get through that, but it's fine. The next big issue we have is there's a lot of dead trees that we've gotta get rid of.

We use the parking lot for student breaks. Is it staying like that after we get the equipment or are we moving?

Mr. Patton: I think we're gonna use it, especially in winter, when the campus might be frozen tundra and wet and slick. I think we're gonna use it less though. The other big thing is that the basketball court area is nice. That's been a good improvement (except for the drainage issues).

There's a giant puddle going on to the basketball court.

There is! And we pumped it out. We bought a little pump and we're now using that to pump out the water because that drain is something we're wrangling with the construction company about [to try to get them to fix]. We spent $1,000,000 on drainage.

Why are the concrete benches between the two buildings there?

Mr. Patton: There was going to be a gap in between those two buildings, and we thought, "Let's just make some benches so that students can sit there if they want. If teams want to talk to their kids, they can talk to them there." That's the idea. It's a useful, nice spot. It's a nice place and there are four trees there. When those trees are more mature, they'll provide a shady area.

New Teacher Interviews:

Mrs. Robinson

By Eowyn Deess and Alexander Gu

One teacher who has joined the PCS community this year is Ms. Amanda Robinson, who sat down with us to share her background and time at PCS.

Ms. Robinson from Long Island, New York, wanted to be a nursing major but realized that it wasn't her true passion. She took a break and went back to school to receive her bachelor's degree in English and then proceeded to get a master's degree in teaching secondary education from New York University.

Her educational career began when she taught 12th grade ELA virtually in Brooklyn, New York. She also tutored youth and adult learners to help them improve literacy and reading comprehension skills. However, this is her first time teaching in person.

When we asked what inspired Ms. Robinson to become a teacher, she said she was motivated *(continued on page 3)*

New Teacher Interviews:

Ms. Testa

By Eowyn Deess

HAWKEYE: What do you teach?

MS. TESTA: I teach computer science, one class in math, and all 5th-8th grade computer science.

Have you had previous experience teaching? Where? How much?

I've taught for over 20 years. My last school was Country Day School where I did math, computers, and I ran their Makerspace [a place to meet and work on projects]. Before that, I taught computer science and mathematics at the American School in London. Earlier, I taught math, physics, and computer science in Pennsylvania.

What is your academic background?

Ms. Testa: I have a teaching degree in mathematics and physics. I got into computer science because a guidance counselor in my first teaching job said: *(continued on page 3)*

Robinson *(continued from page 2)* by the beauty in the English language, so she wants to share her passion for reading with her students and encourage them to love English too. As she puts it, "It broadens our perspective, our worldviews. We learn more about each other, and we learn more about ourselves."

Ms. Robinson believes that the core and foundation of education is reading and hopes that we can all start to appreciate words and language at a young age. She says, "You can't be a good scientist or a good engineer. I don't think you can be good at anything without being good at reading or at least having some kind of appreciation for reading."

"(English) broadens our perspective, our worldviews. We learn more about each other, and we learn more about ourselves."

Ms. Robinson's favorite part of teaching is how everyone can be reading one thing, but they can all have different interpretations, opinions, and understandings of it. She tends to lean toward discussion-based lessons as she loves to hear how her students think. She believes that everyone learns from each other through interpretation, conversation, and discussion. She strongly believes that we also even learn about ourselves, how we think, how we react, and how we respond to certain things.

Asked what she thought was her greatest strength as a teacher, she said that she balances having fun and being serious. She tries to make learning a fun experience, but there's a thin line between being too loose or too strict. She wants to make her lessons as fun and engaging as possible. Ms.Robinson doesn't want students to simply absorb her knowledge or opinions. Rather, she likes the students to share their opinions and thoughts.

Her experience at Princeton Charter School has been great so far. She loves the friendly staff, faculty, and students, and she is grateful that everyone has been willing to guide and help her throughout her first few months and smooth out her transition.

Testa *(continued from page 2)* teach it?" I was like: "Give me a book, and yes." And that's how I started teaching computer science.

What's your favorite part of teaching, and what's your favorite thing to teach?

Computer science is definitely my favorite, obviously, which is why I took the job as a full-time middle school computer science teacher. I like the challenge that it provides kids. You can have everybody grapple with problems and learn how to problem solve. That's my favorite thing.

How do you like teaching at Charter so far?

I love teaching at Charter. The goal of Charter is academics, and everybody wants to learn and is willing to learn. Everybody is willing to try difficult things and likes to problem solve. So I love giving people challenging problems to try to learn how to do.

What do you think is your greatest strength as a teacher?

My loud voice! You know what? I think my greatest strength as a teacher is that I don't like to give the answer. I know, most of the time, when students are struggling with a computer science problem, where they're going wrong, and I give hints and I ask questions. I always answer back with a question, which I know can drive students crazy. But I think that's one of my actual strengths: I don't just give the answer. I lead people to the answer and have them try to use their brains to figure it out.

What would you say is your favorite method/s of teaching?

Inquiry-based, inquiry-based, inquiry-based. Give problems, grapple with them, talk about them. Group work, problem-solving together, talking everything out. That is my favorite way. Hands-on learning. You know, computer science is a lot like math and a lot like science. You can't really learn it unless you do it. You can't watch someone do math and say: "Oh, I know math." You actually have to do it and practice it. It's the same with computer science.

What are some hobbies and interests you pursue outside of school?

I like to garden. I like to cook. I'm a big baker in my family. And thanks to my daughter, who's 12, I picked up crocheting again during Covid. She wanted to learn it some more, so we started to crochet.

What is your goal for your first year here, and what are some goals you have for the future?

My goal is to get students not necessarily fluent with computer science but comfortable with problem-solving. And comfortable with not knowing answers yet and having the flexible thinking of: "Ok, I don't know how to do this, but I know that I have resources around me to figure it out." And that's really my ultimate goal: to build a computer science program that helps kids learn how to problem-solve and read.

"You can have everybody grapple with problems and learn how to problem solve. That's my favorite thing."

Reading comments and information about the program is important in order to solve the problems. So my ultimate goal is to learn to teach students how to lead through inquiry-based learning, and if we learn a little bit of computer science along the way, then woohoo! We, should, right? You know, most kids will come out learning a good chunk of Python and should be able to put together a nice portfolio to go off into the high school world with a good knowledge and be ahead of others in their freshman year.

This picture of the PCS faculty was taken in 2004. Who can you recognize?

Interview with a Veteran Teacher:

Mrs. Khachatrian

By Gabriella Poynter and Kaianne Mark

The Hawkeye decided to interview a veteran teacher to find out about their long experience at PCS. Here's our interview with Ms. Khachatrian.

HAWKEYE: How many years have you been here?

MRS. K: I started teaching in 1988 in Armenia and joined Princeton Charter school in 2003. (She has been teaching here for about 19-20 years.)

Do you have any children? If so, who are they?

I have two children, a girl, Anna, and a boy, Gary. Anna is an amazing journalist and Gary is a wonderful surgeon. I love them both a lot.

What relationship do you have with your students?

I love my students. I always try to find something special in each of them. (She also says she is a strict teacher but it's only to make sure her students understand the subject.)

What are your favorite hobbies?

I love to paint. (Unfortunately she doesn't have much time to do it. She likes to read too. One of her favorite books is Harry Potter by J.K Rowling.)

Are you planning on retiring?

Not yet. The thought of leaving Charter makes me sad. If I do though, it will be in about seven or eight years.

When did you start teaching?

I started teaching when I was 27 years old.

What was your dream before you started teaching?

My profession was engineering. The U.S.S.R was requiring me to work in a military factory but I did not want to. (She added that her mother's side was teachers, and her mom encouraged her to become a teacher.)

Personal Experience:

Moving from the K-4 to the 5-8 Building

By Olivia Poynter

Many fourth graders and younger students may be nervous about moving up to the 5-8 building. As a new fifth grader this year, I'll tell you what it's really like.

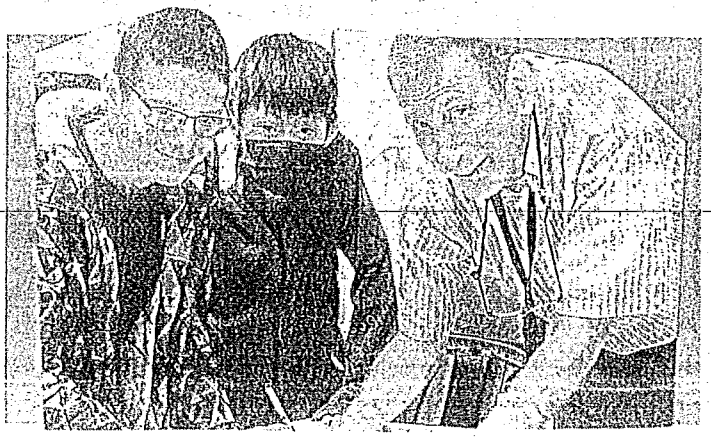
One difference between the K-4 building and the 5-8 building is that In K-4, the teachers come to your classroom with their materials, but in 5-8 you have to go to the teachers' classrooms, which can be a little chaotic with a lot of kids moving throughout the hallways. When I first came to the 5-8 I was so startled by all the people walking down the hallway that instead of going to break, I went to science class instead!

Another difference is that in K-4, you have a different special such as drama, music, gym and art every day, so it varies. But in 5-8 every trimester you have either art, music. or drama even though you always have physical education every week. I was very surprised, so it took me quite some time to adjust the schedule.

There is also the fact that in 6-8 students are responsible for their own Chromebook. They have to make sure it is charged and in good condition; however, in K-4 and even into fifth grade, teachers keep class Chromebooks in big carts that hold and charge 25 Chromebooks. Although the sixth through eighth graders don't have to borrow a computer from a cart and remember to put it back and plug it in, it can still be awkward walking around the school with Chromebooks. Of course, they can also be misplaced or students might fail to charge them.

Finally in 5-8, clubs such as Math Counts, Science Bowl and, of course, Newspaper Club and more are available, but in K-4, there are far fewer clubs available for the students to participate in. For example I was so excited to join the newspaper club because I had always read the newspapers last year's club handed out, but I could never join. Now I am part of it and having so much fun.

Maybe you should consider joining too. It's never too late! Just email Mr. Myers!



Mr. Myers works with reporters in the Newspaper club.

ALUMNI:

Where Are They Now?

The Hawkeye interviewed two alumni from Princeton Charter School: Yuval Wigderson and Keaton Chien

Yuval Wigderson

By Charis Chien

Mr. Myers described PCS class of 2009 graduate Yuval Wigderson as a "most helpful, inquisitive, and brilliant student." Wigderson spent part of his childhood in Israel then moved to America, where he attended PCS for almost six years. He moved back to Israel during his eighth grade year, and during his 6th year at PCS, he was learning at PCS for the first half of the year but then moved back to Israel.

Yuval In 2009

He then went on to Princeton High School, where he would continue his friendship with former PCS students. It was a huge step moving from a rather small school to a larger one, and it was a little overwhelming for him, but staying tight-knit with his old friends made the transition easier. He did make more friends at PHS over the years after adjusting to the differences.

He later attended Princeton University where he also reunited with old friends from PCS. His love for math and science sparked his decision to become a mathematician. He then moved to California for graduate school.

He recalls all his happy, memorable experiences at PCS, all thanks to teachers he holds in high reverence: Dr. English, Mr. Schlawin, and Mr. Myers. After coming back from California for graduate school, he visited PCS and noticed the long awaited and then finished gym. He remembers that when he was a student, students had gym class outside, or in the winter, they'd all go ice skating nearby one day a week six weeks during the winter.

As a freshman in college, he brought his passion for science back to Charter by helping Mr. Schlawin to organize Science Bowl here at PCS. He would come once a week to coach the students.

Wigderson really feels that his future started to form at PCS due to the "fantastic teachers and classes." Further reflecting on PCS, he thinks that an important value of being in a tightly-knitted and rather small community like PCS is that even a small group of friends can be very valuable.

Currently, he lives in Israel with his family and has a Ph.D. in math. He is a Post Doc, doing research in math.

Mr. Myers recalls that one day in Yuval's sixth-grade year, Yuval came to him and said, "We say 'he's not' and 'he isn't,' which mean the same thing. I suggest a new contraction for them: 'he'sn't.'" After laughing at the strangeness of the sound, Mr. Myers said, "Why don't you write a letter to the Modern Language Association, a group of English professors and graduate students, and suggest that?" Yuval followed up with this letter, which Mr. Myers has always admired:

Dear MLA Administrator:

I would like to share with you an interesting point about contractions that I noticed a while ago. I noticed that the phrase he is not can be contracted in two distinct ways: he's not and he isn't, both of which are commonly used. There is a way to stop this inefficiency, namely through the use of what I call "a double contraction." The double contraction for "he is not" would be "he'sn't." This double contraction, as you can see, employs a double apostrophe and is really just one word. It not only stops ambiguity, but also shortens the phrase much more. After I noticed this case, I found this type of ambiguity cropping up everywhere. Here are a few examples of such phrases and their respective double contractions:

She is not becomes She'sn't.
I have not becomes I'ven't.
They are not becomes They'ren't.
We have not becomes We'ven't.
I would not becomes I'dn't.
We will not becomes We'lln't.

Obviously, these are only a few examples and one can come up with many more easily. I have also succeeded *(continued on page 6)*

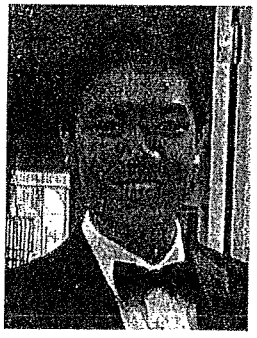
Yuval in Tel Aviv

Yuval *(continued from page 5)*
in finding a "triple contraction:" The phrase I would not have contracts into I'dn't've, but this contraction and similar ones starting with different pronouns would not be used very often, as it is hard to insert them into casual conversation. I hope I'ven't bored you with this note, but I very much wanted to tell someone.

Yours efficiently,
Yuval Wigderson

Keaton Chien
By Charis Chien

Graduate of the class of '21 and currently studying at the Peddie High School, Keaton Chien describes his life in high school and reminiscences on his journey through PCS.



Keaton Chien

Keaton's memorable experiences here at Charter include playing quadrant ball and running the mile during PE. He also enjoyed writing about the school lunch with his classmate Matthew Luo, who is also currently at Peddie, in Newspaper Club a few years back.

At Peddie, he seems to spend more time at school than at his house; he goes to school everyday until six because of his extra-curricular activities: rowing and basketball. At PCS, he was on the varsity basketball team for a while before COVID hit, and he continues his passion at Peddie. However, throughout the years, he feels that he has drifted away from his fiery passion in basketball to developing a new dedication for rowing. He reflects that he has had "more strength, endurance, mental toughness, and discipline". He is the stroke of the boat, meaning the leader, and has on-water and on-land training everyday. Furthermore, at home, he goes on the ERG every day to train and holds a record of 7:10 for a 2k. Another extra-curricular Keaton has continued is playing the viola. He's been the principal violist of the CJMEA All-States and Regionals orchestras and is a member of the non-profit organization called Helping Harmony where he teaches poor students how to play instruments such as the violin or viola.

Keaton has visited PCS once and for the first time since learning virtually online, he has seen the new renovations at Princeton Charter. He jokes that he "can't see the front side of the 5-8 building anymore". Remembering the old basketball courts, swings, and wood-chips at the playground, he was a little shocked to see it all gone with some replacements.

Keaton also states that "thanks to the vigorous training from Mrs. Khachatrian, Mr. Myers, Ms. Celik, Mr. Schlawin, and other teachers, I have a strong foundational knowledge and work ethic. The amount of homework prepared me well for high school". Moreover, he can find a balance between playing and working hard whether it be on water and courts or desks and classrooms.

Unfortunately, towards the end of 7th grade for Keaton, COVID caused the whole school to go online. In total, he had a year and a half online. Two big events he regrets missing due to COVID are the Washington, D.C., trip and the student-faculty basketball game. Due to "technical difficulties" for online learning, he remembers there were many class interruptions during Zoom calls. Ultimately, he lost physical fitness during this pandemic but worked hard at high school to develop new strength.

After being at PCS for six years, he feels that his close friendships and knowledge of everyone was a beneficial and valuable result of the small community in PCS.

Keaton Chien and his mom at PCS.

A PCS Alum Profile:

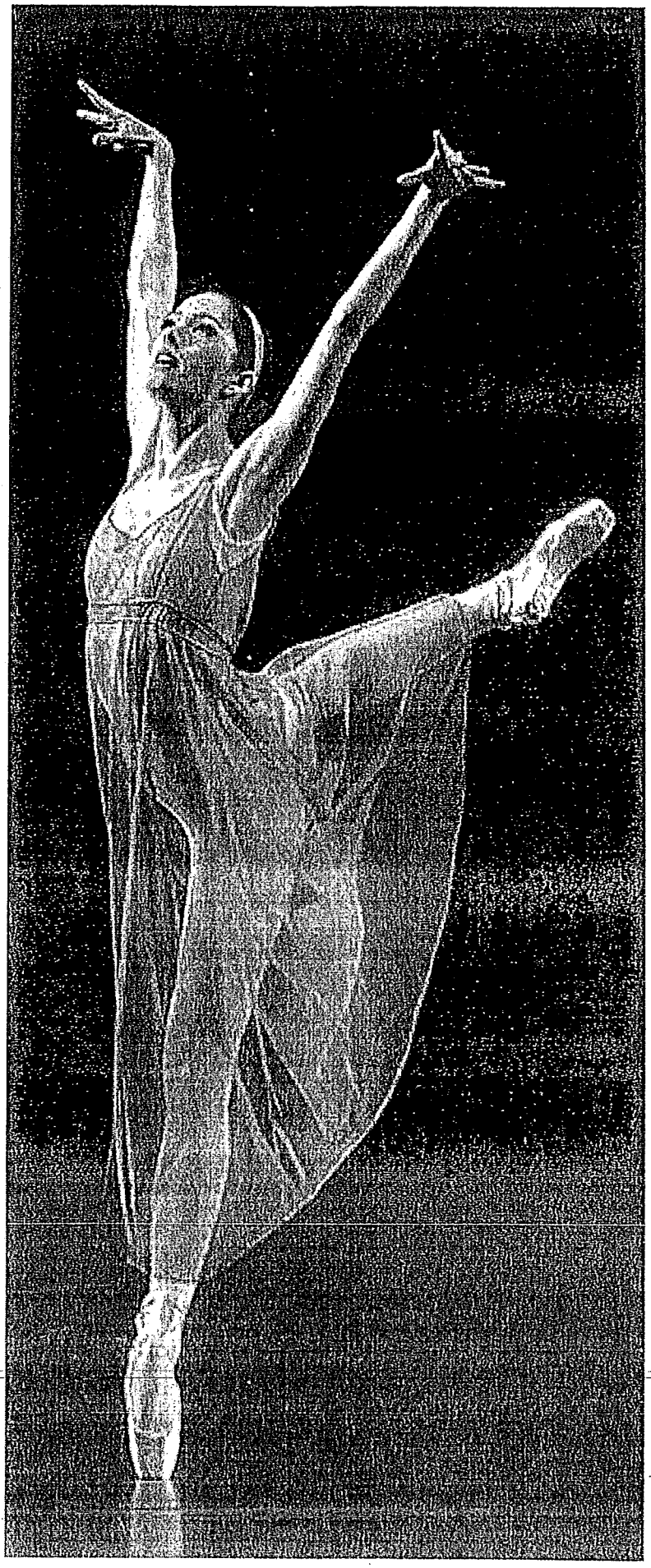
Unity Phelan

By Madeleine Tsai

Many of Princeton Charter School's former students (alumni) have moved on to incredible careers. The Hawkeye decided to highlight one of them, Unity Phelan, in the hope that it will inspire you. Unfortunately, The Hawkeye didn't have the opportunity to speak with Unity in person, but Gia Kourlas, a New York Times journalist, wrote an article on Unity, who is now a principal dancer at the NYC Ballet. Here are some of the things The Hawkeye learned.

Phelan, currently 27, who graduated from PCS in 2010, was born in Princeton, N.J., and trained at Princeton Ballet School from an early age into her early teens. Phelan is described by Kourlas as "incandescent with a beauty that seems not of this era." Phelan's dance can demonstrate a subtle drama or be playful but is always genuine in that she "brings herself to the stage." Phelan told The New York Times, "I want to be the best possible product on the stage, and I want to be the most genuine. Phelan doesn't just love performing, but she also loves working hard and rehearsing. Her repertoire is "remarkable for its range." Her education includes attending the City Ballet-affiliated School of American Ballet at age 15. She also has a degree from Fordham University in economics.

As a person, she enjoys gardening, cooking, and spending time with family. In October, 2022, at the end of her remarkable fall season, Unity is married to former City Ballet dancer, Cameron Dieck. During quarantine, "she learned that ballet is not her entire identity."



Unity Phelan dances with the New York City Ballet.

Headline

With inspiration from Guillaume Apollinaire's poem Le Chat, the seventh grade French classes wrote poems on what they wished for in their lives. Like Le Chat, the poems are short yet meant to illustrate the personality of the authors.

LE CHAT
Je souhaite dans ma maison:
Une femme ayant sa raison,
Un chat passant parmi les livres,
Des amis en toute saison
Sans lesquels je ne peux pas vivre.
–Guillaume Apollinaire

THE CAT
I'd like in my house:
A sane woman,
A cat passing among the books,
Friends in every season
Without which I can not live.

LES JOLIES FLEURS
Je souhaite dans ma vie:
Mes livres favoris
Ma famille et mes amis
Ma musique sur mon portable
Un petit chien et un lit confortable
De jolies fleurs sur ma table
De longues promenades en ville
Et des vacances très tranquilles
Après ça, j'ai fini
–Abby Knowles

THE PRETTY FLOWERS
I'd like in my life:
My favorite books
My family and my friends
My music on my phone
A little dog and a comfortable bed
Pretty flowers on my table
Long walks in town
And some very relaxing vacations
After that, I have enough

Je souhaite dans ma cuisine:
Le parfum du fruit,
Une petite lampe pour la nuit,
Des livres autour de moi,
La grande fenêtre dans la pluie,
La musique de Hamilton,
Beaucoup de plantes aussi,
Alors, c'est fini
–Madeline Levine

I'd like in my kitchen:
The scent of fruit,
A small lamp for the night,
Books all around me,
A large window in the rain,
The music of Hamilton,
Lots of plants as well,
And that's enough

LES PROMENADES EN AUTOMNE
Je souhaite dans ma vie,
des amis avec qui je ris,
et je parle toute la nuit

Je souhaite du pain avec du beurre,
faire de la peinture à toute heure,
un chat de compagnie,
et un jardin joli.

Des promenades en automne,
une petite maison,
et de bonnes conversations.
–Leila Khabbaz

AUTUMN WALKS
I'd like in my life,
Friends to laugh with,
and to talk to all night

I'd like bread with butter,
to be able to paint anytime,
a cat for company,
and a pretty garden.

Autumn walks,
a little house,
and good conversation.