



# Dance Arts

## Now!

*The official Junior/Secondary NHSDA Newsletter*

*Spring 2026*

*Special "Dance Health & Mindfulness" Issue*



*PC Nancy and Allegra Romita*



*PC Nancy and Allegra Romita*



***Welcome to our "Special Dance Health & Mindfulness" edition, where our NHSDA members explore maintaining a healthy lifestyle, overcoming physical and mental challenges, and inspiring others through positive mentorship. Reflect on "Golden" composer EJAE's mantra: "Rejection is redirection...Shine like you were born to be."***



*Reflecting a dance*

*By: Catherine Chan*

*Sponsor/Advisor: Rachel Miranda  
Ridge High School*

*All PC Catherine Chan*

*What does it mean to be a dancer?  
Going on pointe,  
Starring in the Nutcracker,  
Beautiful pink tutus.  
Right.*

*Can you do a split?  
Dancing is not a sport.  
Dancers aren't strong.  
You know dancers make no money,  
Right?*

*Well, have you tried ballet?  
Can you do a hundred "spins"?  
Lift your leg 180 degrees?  
Stand on the points of your feet?  
Right.*

*Stress fractures,  
Hyperextended knees,  
Back problems,  
Body dysmorphia,  
Unhealthy comparisons.  
Surrounded by mirrors:*



*Reflecting your technique,  
Exacerbating your failures.  
Seeing how high your leg will go,  
How high their leg will go.  
Physical injuries,  
Mental health challenges,  
Performance anxiety,  
Creative blocks,  
Perfectionism.*

*I am a dancer.  
So I am perfectionism,  
Creative blocks,  
Performance anxiety,  
Back problems,  
And unhealthy comparisons.  
The mirrors reflect me,  
They reflect my technique,  
They reflect my failures,  
They reflect dancing,  
And I am a dancer.*

*So to answer some questions:  
Yes, I have done ballet,  
Yes, I can do a split,  
Yes, I have watched Dance Moms,  
But no, I cannot do a hundred turns.  
Dancers are the most resilient people I know:  
They are physically strong,  
Mentally strong,  
Able to bend like a rubber band,  
But never ever snap.*

*So when people ask me if I am a dancer,  
I think about how strong they are,  
How inspiring and creative,  
How you never stop learning and growing.*





PC Idaho Fine Arts Academy

### Free Verse

Day In the Life of A 13-Year-Old  
Pre-Professional Dancer

Nutrition + Dance = Good Health

By: Peyton Heffernan

Sponsor/Advisor: Rachel Swenson

Idaho Fine Arts Academy



I start my day by waking up at 5:30 am to go downstairs and have breakfast, which usually consists of cereal, toast, fruit, and yogurt, or any nutritional food. I go back upstairs to slick back my hair into a ponytail for school. I put on my outfit and, Then, head to my arts school.

I have an academic class for first period, and then I go to my dance class for second period. We start with conditioning and then go into choreographing our dances for our concert. Each class lasts about an hour and a half. Afterward, I have lunch, where I usually have a sandwich and some fruit.

After lunch, I have two more academic classes. After school, I go home and get ready to dance at my studio for around 3 hours after school every day. When dance ends, I come home and finish some homework, eat a nutritional dinner, get ready for and, finally, go to bed.



*Free Verse*  
*A Voice ~ A Fresh Awakening*  
*By: Katelyn Lu*  
*NHSDA Award, Honorable Mention*  
*Sponsor/Advisor: Yun Cheng*  
*Shanghai American School Pudon*

*When choreographing about Spring,  
I took inspiration from birds to  
Portray a playful yet powerful side  
of this enlightening season.  
I also fused contemporary  
With Chinese dance  
to add an element  
of culture and elegance.*





PC Noah Gelfman

## **Viewpoint**

### ***NHSDA Students Reach Out, Mentoring for Dance Health & Mindfulness!***



#### **Camila Isabela Pérez Rodríguez, New World School of the Arts**

*A valuable experience has been working with the community through Miami Dance Project's outreach programs for children with disabilities. This opportunity has been incredibly rewarding. Dance offers these kids a chance to connect mind and body, improving not just their physical skills but also their overall quality of life.*

*The kinesthetic connection between movement and music is especially impactful, as it stimulates brain function, helping the children process and learn in unique ways. All in all, I've learned that dance is both an artistic expression and a way to create meaningful connections that positively affect the lives of the people around us.*

#### **Saliah Hartmann, Ridge High School**

*In ninth grade, I became an InTurn at my dance studio, assisting a ballet class for six-year-olds. Throughout the year, I mentored the younger dancers, helping them learn ballet, how to tie their shoes, and smooth their hair into a bun. I watched them learn new steps and form friendships. I also recognized that I was someone whom they admired. Being an InTurn allowed me to explore another dimension of*

*myself ~ fully stepping into my position as a role model to the young dancers looking up to me. Finding a passion for working with children has helped me decide to become a pediatric clinical psychologist. In this field, I will draw on my dance background to explore how physical activity and artistic expression support child development and well-being.*

#### **Alyssa Gonzales, San Marino Dance Academy**

*Rhythmic Resilience is a program I founded to help young people, especially those from difficult backgrounds, to process their emotions through movement. I must share the healing power of dance with others who have faced trauma, teaching them how to turn pain into self-expression.*

*By choreographing pieces that reflect themes of struggle, perseverance, and empowerment, dancers shape their bodies to tell their stories, find confidence, and heal. Through this program, I've witnessed firsthand how dance*

*fosters self-worth, community, and emotional recovery.*

*As a future psychologist, I aim to integrate movement therapy into my practice, enabling individuals to process trauma through movement when words fail them. I will expand Rhythmic Resilience to reach more communities in need of healing through dance. My goal is to bridge the gap between mental health and the arts, proving that movement is not just about performance but about transformation.*



**Jordynn Barret, North Fort Henry High School**

*The first aspect dance has positively influenced my life is by providing me with an amazing way to stay active and improve my physical health. I train in ballet, acro, lyrical, jazz, tap, contemporary, pointe, and hip hop, and each of these styles offers me different ways to engage and use my body.*

*Dance has increased my strength, flexibility, and coordination. My posture and stamina have also improved from all the rigorous hours of training ...Whenever I step into the studio or onto the dance floor, all my anxieties, stress, and worries melt away.*



**Katelyn Lu, Shanghai American School Pudong**

*Dance gives me peace of mind. I was once a self-conscious ball of anxiety. At my worst, I remember having mental breakdowns in my room multiple times a week. Even the slightest setback shattered me like glass. I was fragile. However, like the law of conservation of energy, which states, “energy cannot be created or destroyed, only transformed,” I found*

*dance as an outlet to channel my emotions and stress. Although anxiety is still part of my life, I no longer feel hopeless and bound by it. I am now fascinated by the interplay between improvisation and psychology. I plan to study psychology and dance therapy so that I can help more people prioritize and improve their mental health.*

**Read more inspiring stories within this newsletter of our NHSDA members promoting health and mindfulness through community service and high-quality dance education!**



PC Noah Gulfman



PC Marilyn Chen

**Viewpoint**

**Aspire to Be... A Dance Therapist,  
Choreographer,  
& Cultural Ambassador**

**By: Marilyn Chen**

**NHSDA Award, Honorable Mention**

**Sponsor/Advisor: Ann Robideaux**

**Princeton Day School Dances**

*To be an artist is to be  
a servant of humanity.*

**The** most meaningful gift I have received from dance is my sense of identity. I now cherish being of both American and Chinese heritage, and a contemporary dancer and choreographer with classical training in these two traditions. Just as I believe it is my duty to serve as a cultural ambassador, I understand my responsibility to become an intersectional, interculturally skilled dance therapist.

When I competed on the U.S. National Dance Team, I did not perform my solo with a specifically “Western” or “Eastern” body style. Throughout, I was one, whole ~ a symbol of diplomacy and celebration, against Eurocentric standards of performance and arbitrary cultural divisions.

As the premier dancer for the Princeton Day School Asian Pacific Islander Desi American Affinity Group, Chinese Club, and LGBTQ+ Affinity Group, I blend my love of dance and advocacy by creating original solos in my self-developed fusion of contemporary and Classical Chinese styles to bring awareness to the unique identity of our Asian American community.

It is also my dream to become an internationally recognized choreographer. I am inspired by the Chinese American modern and contemporary dance artists such as Yin Yue and Shen Wei, who have created their own brilliant contemporary Chinese intercultural dance techniques.

I especially aspire to become a dance therapist in order to share the peace I have found through dance. Societally, there is an increasing disconnect between the mind, the body, and identity. Amidst a world of algorithms and artificial humanity, the body is ignored, the mind numbed, and identities erased in the process ~ regrettable, but not irreversible.

There are certainly therapists specializing in supporting Asian Americans, as well as dance therapists. Therefore, I aspire to merge these fields to become an Asian American dance therapist ~ the first of my kind.

*Every time I dance, I approach my  
mission mindfully.*



PC Amber Myers

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**Viewpoint**  
**Responsible Decision-Making ~**  
**Taking Care**  
**Physically & Mentally**  
**By: Aubrey Myers**  
**Sponsor/Advisor: Rachel Swenson**  
**Idaho Fine Arts Academy**

*If you give up on most of your ideas, then your dance will not evolve as magnificently as it should. Responsible decision-making is a vital skill, which greatly improves your choreography.*

**This** past year at Idaho Fine Arts Academy, I experienced many moments of responsible decision-making. During the residency of Marla Hansen, Yurek Hansen, and Dante Puleio, I observed all these choreographers making informed decisions to enhance their choreography and personal experience. When Marla Hansen choreographed one of her concert pieces with us, she observed and highlighted each dancer's talents and strengths. This enhanced the choreographic process because she had all the students showing their best skills. An example of this was when she knew one dancer could masterfully perform the Italian fouetté, so she showcased that student executing the move.

At the beginning of the year, Yurek Hansen choreographed a piece for us, and one of his most responsible decisions was taking care of himself. Often, dancers keep dancing even if they are hurt. When Yurek injured himself, he refrained from exaggerating large movements so he could recover quickly. This skill is crucial because if we don't stop

ourselves, we risk further injury, which would hinder our ability to perform important moves full-out and potentially shorten our dance career.

From the Limon Dance Company, Dante Puleio served as a key source for informed decision-making. In our dance, we had a step that was both simple and complex, which took a long time to figure out as we tried to create the mental image he wanted on stage. Instead of giving up, Dante kept working on it until he was finally rewarded with a beautiful, swaying motion that resembled a wave. His ability to pursue and realize the goal was impressive.

Whether, like Marla Hansen, we observe and highlight our dancers' qualities, take care of our health like Yurek Hansen, or push toward that mental image in our heads like Dante Puleio, making sensible, intelligent choices in our choreography is crucial. Responsible decision-making is a vital skill that greatly improves our choreography.



*PC Lincoln Park Performing Arts Charter School*

## ***Viewpoint***

### ***Social-Emotional Skills Developed Through DANCE***

***By: NDEO Staff***

***Adapted from SCASEL.ORG***

*Understanding Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) within Dance Education helps us develop our craft and acts as an important advocacy tool.*

**DANCE CAN  
TEACH STUDENTS**

- SELF-AWARENESS
- SELF-MANAGEMENT
- SOCIAL AWARENESS
- RELATIONSHIP SKILLS
- RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING

[ndeo.org/OPDI-M38](https://ndeo.org/OPDI-M38)

*Social Emotional Skills learned through Dance, align Pedagogy and Curriculum to achieve Positive Student Outcomes.*

### ***Self-Awareness***

Recognize emotions, thoughts, and values, and understand their impact on behavior. Confidently identify strengths and limitations with purpose.

### ***Self-Management***

Manage emotions, thoughts, and behaviors across situations to reach goals. This includes delaying gratification, managing stress, and feeling motivated and empowered to achieve personal and collective goals.

### ***Social Awareness***

Empathize with others from diverse backgrounds, feeling compassion, understanding social norms, and recognizing family, school, and community resources.

### ***Relationship Skills***

Build supportive relationships in diverse environments to foster effective communication, active listening, cooperation, teamwork, problem-solving, and conflict resolution. This process involves navigating social and cultural norms within leadership and camaraderie.

### ***Responsible Decision-Making***

Make caring, constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions, considering ethics, safety, and weighing the benefits and risks to promote well-being.

*Are you ready to enhance your students' social-emotional learning  
through your dance curriculum?*

*PC Ridge High School*





All PC Nicole Becker Katz

***Good News!***  
***Be Inspired: Blending Dance Science with***  
***Athlete Medical Care***  
***Adapted from "Skidmore Scope"***

**D**r. Nicole Becker Katz has loved dance and medicine since childhood, so when she entered college, she and her advisors combined these interests into a Dance Science major. The strong interdisciplinary curriculum gave her a competitive edge when applying to medical school.

As an undergraduate, Dr. Katz researched dancers' injuries, publishing a peer-reviewed paper and presenting at the IADMS Conference. She also earned a SEE-Beyond Award for an internship at Mount Sinai, where she examined tendon biomechanics and repair.

Dr. Katz, now a PM&R resident at Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital (Harvard Medical School), provides hospital and outpatient care for musculoskeletal and neurological injuries, including those affecting the brain and spinal cord, as well as for amputations and critical illnesses. She especially aims to serve athletes and dancers.

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Check out the NDEO National College Dance Directory:

<https://www.ndeo.org/Connect/College-Dance-Directory>





PC The Change Dance Stu

**Good News! (cont.)**  
**The Change ~**  
**to a Healthy, Creative Environment!**

**T**he Change Dance Studio staff focuses on emotional and physical wellness, fostering a supportive, body-positive environment for self-expression and communication. They encourage dancers to safely discover their limits while listening to their needs, and to prevent injuries through these methods:



**Schedule**

The studio has a less demanding schedule than most pre-professional studios, allowing time for healing, other activities, and maintaining a passion for art, which is essential for a well-rounded student.



**Fuel Breaks**

Dancers and staff take time to refuel, which is crucial for good performance and to focus on each dancer's success.



**Attendance List**

Instructors note any aches, injuries, or illnesses during class, to avoid giving corrections that could hinder healing.



**Personalized Prevention Programs**

Students perform monthly check-ins using a massage ball, with strengthening and stretching exercises. Workshops cover injury prevention, body positivity, and emotional wellness. A referral list by “sports medicine-qualified” professionals is provided.

The ASAO Community Performance Troupe travels locally, sharing their love of dance, developing caring leadership skills, participating in reading programs, and engaging in safe “warm-up-to-action” dances.

## Good News! (cont.)

### Mark Your Calendar!



- ✓ Dance A Difference Week, March 1-7
- ✓ Thank-a-Dance-Teacher Day, May 7
- ✓ Senior Day of Recognition & Slideshow. June TBD

More info:  
<https://www.ndeo.org/nhsda/Events>

*Pictured: Idaho Fine Arts Academy students celebrate Eric Franklin, author, master teacher & lecturer on health, based on movement and mental imagery.*

### Somerset County Vocational & Technical Schools

The SCVTHS Dance Department is committed to supporting the community, including these programs:

✓ **Little Steps** - A free program offering introductory classes for young dancers

✓ **Tap Company** - Offers free holiday performances for local senior centers and daycare centers

✓ **Repertory Company** - Offers students more performance opportunities throughout the community and beyond

✓ **Service** ~ NHSDA members work together supporting local charities and organizations throughout the school year

**Little Steps**  
Creative Movement Classes  
for Young Dancers  
Ages 3-5 years  
FREE CLASSES



PC Gideon Stanton

## Feature

### "This Is Who I Am Now"

By: Gideon Stanton

Sponsor/Advisor: Sarah Strong

The Dance Jun

**D**ance is currently a huge portion of my life, but it hasn't always been that way. When I was younger, my parents never knew which extracurricular activities to sign me up for. I tried all the classic sports you might put a young boy in: basketball, flag football, soccer, and even karate. Each year, I dropped one after the other.

When I was in sixth grade, my parents heard from a friend about a modern dance class and suggested I try that. I was fairly against the idea. For starters, everything else I tried I ended up disliking; why would dance be any different? Secondly, dance did not seem very interesting to a sixth-grade boy. Despite my attitude, my parents still signed me up, and I'm so glad they chose to do so. Coming home after the first class, I remember being surprised at how much I enjoyed myself. Since then, I have taken more dance classes each year than the year before, despite having a class at a studio with a community that was a poor fit and another studio that permanently closed mid-year. Fast forward to me now, a sophomore in high school, in a pre-professional dance company, taking 12+ hours of dance every week. I love it.

I do sometimes feel at a level behind my peers because I did not start dancing as young. However, one of the biggest mindset changes that has helped me is trying not to compare myself to others. Instead, I see more skilled people as motivation to improve myself and reach a

level I will be prouder of. For instance, about a year ago, I noticed I was struggling with flexibility compared to other people in my classes. I felt upset, but I used those feelings as motivation to stretch at home consistently over the summer. My flexibility did improve, and while I am still definitely not the most flexible, I now feel better about my flexibility as a dancer than I did before.

There are also times when I wonder why I want to dance. A mistake on stage, or a poor performance when a teacher is watching me, can really make my day feel miserable. However, dance is not about the mistakes I make; it is about how I can move past them, improve from them, and become a better dancer over time. It can feel discouraging to make mistakes, but no one is perfect. After a rough class or performance, one thing that helps me reorient my feelings is to think about just one positive thing that happened. I try not to focus solely on mistakes because that will not help me move past them.

When seeking a studio, I have specifically looked for places that do not focus on competitions or competition-style dancing. I feel as though this environment leads dancers to feel more discouraged because mistakes seem more costly. I understand that competitive dancing can be a good fit for some people. However, I personally dislike it because I feel that the mindset, the focus on, and the incorporation of tricks distract from what I believe should be the main motivation behind dance: *creating expression through movement and finding your own artistry.*

**During break weeks, I often lament to anyone who will listen that I wish I had class. Both my family and I have also noticed I have a slight mental health decline, especially depression, when I go for a few weeks without dance.**

**To incorporate more dance during break weeks, I have started experimenting with choreographing at home for fun, which has helped me develop stronger connections to my movements. Dance has become a creative and emotional outlet,**

**and I am incredibly grateful for how it helps me.**

**I hope my story will inspire others to take that first step and join their first class, and just see what follows. Dance should not feel unachievable or daunting; it is simply moving your body. Anybody can find joy in dance, no matter what age, gender, background, or even if you expect to hate it. Dance has changed my life, and it can change yours. I am proud to say that I am a dancer. At this point in my life, that is who I am.**





All PC Alexa Braun

## **Feature**

### **Speech Interprets Movement**

**By: Alexa Braun**

**Sponsor/Advisor: Rachel Swenson**

**Idaho Fine Arts Academy**

**Analyzing** how speech is interpreted into movement requires a deep understanding of how language and the human body work as an interconnected vehicle of self-expression. This process highlights the power of art, where the abstract nature of words can create their own linguistic tone to take physical form upon the human body. Speech carries meaning, rhythm, and emotional nuance, and dancers can translate these elements into movement, often prioritizing the tone or imagery context of the language over its literal interpretation. This process is not just technical but deeply creative, requiring artists to interpret meaning while connecting with their audience on a very human level. The act of transforming speech into dance reveals the human body's complex capacity to communicate universally, proving that movement can speak as powerfully as words.

The connection between speech and movement is more than just a physical transition, but a conversation between mind and body. Dancers often study the meaning of a sentence or the emotion behind a word before translating that into their movements. For instance, a soft and tender phrase might inspire slow, flowing movements, while an intense, passionate statement could prompt quick, sharp gestures. An example of this can be seen in a quote from the textbox, "Containing a movement related to framework within which you can improvise, as opposed to having the entire scope of human movement that is as openly creative as possible within the body" (Sandra Cerny Minton 20). This dynamic relationship reveals how every word carries its own energy, and how a dancer's interpretation of that energy

brings the words to life, making them feel tangible. It's not about mimicking speech or function, but rather about enhancing it through the body, using muscles to express feelings that words alone might not fully convey.

When speech is turned into movement, it often loses its direct and literal meaning, but this doesn't make it any less impactful. In fact, the abstraction that comes from expressing a sentence or idea through dance allows for a much deeper and broader interpretation. Instead of simply hearing the words, the feeling and experience, as well as the emotion or concept behind them. For example, a word like freedom might not just be spoken aloud but shown through a dancer's arm movements or through the image of someone breaking free from chains.

This transformation from verbal language to physical movement changes how the audience experiences the message, adding layers of emotion and meaning that words alone can't convey. Through dance, each movement becomes like its own word, and the entire performance tells a story that speaks directly to the audience's feelings. By translating language into the physical, dance creates a new form of communication that taps into emotions and ideas in ways that words sometimes cannot.

In this way, dance becomes more than just an art form; it becomes a universal language that connects people across cultures. The body, as a medium for expression, can transcend language barriers and communicate with anyone, regardless of

whether they speak the same tongue. The beauty of this process is that, just as speech can convey emotions or ideas that words alone sometimes cannot, movement has the power to distill the deepest, most complex meanings into what everyone can understand. Through this kind of artistry, the dancer

speaks a language that unites us all: movement, emotion, and human connection.

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**Work Cited:**  
Sandra Cerny Minton. *Choreography: A Basic Approach Using Improvisation*. Leeds, Human Kinetics, 2007



## **Feature**

### **"Wiseman"**

**By: Alyssa Gonzalez**

**NHSDA Award, Honorable Mention**

**Sponsor/Advisor: Myra Joy Veluz**

**San Marino Dance Academy**

**"Wiseman"** is my solo piece inspired by the resilience of women escaping human trafficking, engaging movement to tell a story of fear, entrapment, resistance, and liberation. Through contemporary and lyrical dance, I embodied the darkness of captivity and the hope of freedom, allowing the audience to witness the emotional and physical journey of survival.

One of the biggest challenges in choreographing was ensuring my composition conveyed the depth of the subject without being overly literal or triggering, while also maintaining the physical and emotional intensity necessary to tell such a powerful story.

As in life, I had to find a balance between vulnerability and strength in my choreography, using my body to express both the pain and triumph experienced by survivors. Another challenge was ensuring the storytelling felt authentic and honored the experiences of those who have endured this reality, while also leaving space for personal interpretation.

Ultimately, **"Wiseman"** is a tribute to the strength of survivors and a call for awareness, applying dance to inspire empathy, action, and a deeper understanding of the resilience of those who fight for freedom.



*PC Alyssa Gomez*

Dance projects the power of storytelling, with the tools to make a difference in others' lives. And that is exactly what I will do.



*All PC Makena Elle*

## **Feature**

### **How Dance Soothes a Disease**

**By: Makena Elle**

**Sponsor/Advisor: Rachel Swenson  
Idaho Fine Arts Academy**

**F**or this article, I will be talking about how Celiac Disease has affected my life, including my dance career. You might ask, “What is Celiac Disease?” Well, it is a long-term autoimmune disorder to gluten, wheat, and barley, primarily affecting the small intestine. When I eat any combination of this food, I am constantly throwing up and in enormous stomach pain for several hours.

Luckily, I have never had any reaction during or at dance, but I can say every time I have one in other situations, it has a huge impact on my well-being. Usually, I must take one to two days off from dance, which can affect my spots in the repertoire. If the troupe is doing something important, as you may know, it is difficult to miss any class as a dancer.

When I was 5, I was diagnosed with Celiac Disease, and I do not remember a lot, except my doctor calling me Casper the Ghost because of how sick and pale I looked. My mom has told me numerous times that I could barely keep up with my sister while running and playing in the park because I was so sick, and that was when she decided to finally take me. She had said that I had to go to many doctors, but no one knew what was wrong with me, and I had to get many blood draws while still being in dance. Another memory was having to take iron every day to make me feel better, and it tasted disgusting, but I know it made me feel better. When I was first diagnosed, even though I was young, I remember it being very hard, and it still is

every single second of every day. Imagine going to school, and the class is throwing a party with a bunch of food you cannot have. You must sit with nothing on your plate or just fruit, which could still be risky due to cross-contamination. Imagine hearing everyone say how yummy something is, or dreading Halloween every year because you know you’ll have to dig through your candy to find one gluten-free piece.

This is how I feel, but dance has helped me a lot with the anxiety of going out to a restaurant and trust the chefs in the kitchen and not go home throwing up and in enormous pain.

Now that I am older, I fend for myself, and every time I go to a new restaurant, I ask the usual questions: “Do you have a separate area that you cook the gluten-free stuff in? Are you good at cross-contamination? And what gluten-free food do you have?” “Dance has affected my life positively with Celiac disease because dance is a place where I feel safe, and I do not have to worry about coming home sick. Thank you for reading my article.



**Feature**

***"Medicine" by Daughter***

**By: Ella Roberts**

**NHSDA Award, Honorable Mention**

**Sponsor/Advisor: Jean Woodward**

**Ursuline Academy**

**The intent of my original choreography, set to 'Medicine' by Daughter, was to tell a story about renewal, healing, and finding myself again. This piece was inspired by my experience switching dance studios after 12 years.**

**My old studio felt negative and draining, but my new studio has been a place where I feel free, happy, and supported. The lyrics, "Pick it up, pick it all up, and start again," really connected with how I felt about starting over. The line, "You've got a second chance," reminded me that change can be a new beginning, not a depressing failure.**

**Creating this piece was a challenge as I wanted to show emotions such as frustration, hope, and freedom in the movements. I used sharp, tense motions to represent the struggles at my old studio and soft, flowing ones to show the relief and joy of finding a new place.**

**This choreography is very special to me because it tells my story. It's about how I found the strength to move on and fall in love with dance again. I truly hope it inspires others to leave behind what holds them back and to help find a place where they can truly shine.**





PC Zoe Maxwell

## **Feature** **Body Inclusivity**

**By: Zoe Maxwell**

**NHSDA Award, Honorable Mention**

**Sponsor/Advisor: Natalie Uehara**

**McCallum High School Fine Arts Academy**

**D**ance has given me the confidence to advocate for body inclusivity both in and out of the studio. As a bigger dancer, I grew up with the looming belief that I didn't belong in the studio. As I got older, I found it harder to find appealing dance clothes that fit. I have now made it my goal to start a dancewear business with my mom that is accessible to all dancers, regardless of their body type. After participating in numerous humiliating costume parades while working on my school's musicals, I also ensured that all actors were properly measured and allowed to try on all costumes before showcasing them to the directors and peers.

I have been dancing well over half of my life, and through those years, I have learned so much about the art form and myself. Dance allows me to create, connect, and express who I truly am. It's how I communicate with the world, and it holds a kind, firm grip on my soul. Dance has impacted various areas of my life: my career choices, my goals, and my desire to better the communities I belong to.

As I have grown in my dance career, I have found a love for both the choreographic and The educational aspects of dance are why I am eager to pursue a degree in Dance Education. While pursuing this degree, I hope to gain the skills and knowledge needed to not only teach dance to students of all ages but also to foster an environment that encourages creativity, diversity, and self-expression. My ultimate goal is to become a dance educator

who makes a positive impact on students' lives by helping them build confidence and discover their potential through movement. In the future, I also aspire to open my own dance studio, creating a supportive and inclusive space for dancers to grow, explore their passion, and develop both technically and artistically.

These experiences shaped my career goals because I want all who are interested in dance to be free from judgment, welcomed, and comfortable. I have always wanted to make the world a better place, and I believe I can make a difference by teaching the next generation of dancers the importance of love and acceptance for themselves and others, as well as the art of movement. The beauty of dance lies in the way it makes the dancer feel. If the environment in which a person dances is unaccepting of them and their identity, their technique will suffer. I believe it's important to be open to learning from others, collaborating, and using my platform as an artist to amplify voices that may not otherwise be heard.

As an artist and educator, I have a responsibility to consider how my work and community are connected and understanding that my presence as an artist matters to the environment around me. By encouraging students to build confidence first, then their dance skills, I hope to shape future dancers into compassionate, hardworking, strong, and loving individuals.



## *Feature*

### *Mind and Body in Motion - the Healing Power of Movement*

*By: Natalie Wu*

*Sponsor/Advisor: Lauren Greeley*

*Research: Facility: Columbia University Irving Medical Center/New York State  
Psychiatric Institute*

*NHSDA Chapter: Riverdale Country School*

***D***uring school hours, I often arrive at dance class exhausted from a long day. After walking into the studio, I follow the afternoon plan, which consists of warm-ups, across-the-floor exercises, and choreography. As the class progresses, my fatigue fades and is replaced by bursting, unexpected energy. By the end, I feel energized to learn more dances. How can dance, a form of exercise, help me gain energy ~ a contradiction in itself?

#### ***Dancing Dreams***

I've not only noticed this in myself, but I've also seen this transformation in other young students. Every Monday, I volunteer at *Dancing Dreams*, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping students with medical and physical disabilities to dance. One day in particular, my student came in withdrawn,

her energy low. Thinking of my similar experience, I decided to let her class proceed, hoping that dance could replenish her energy, just like it did in me. Indeed, at the end of class, she was spinning, leaping, and laughing; her once-depleted energy being restored. Beyond mood, I've also seen improvements in her motor coordination, such as balancing longer on a relevé or finding stability when turning.

#### ***Curiosity: Mind-Body Process***

Combining all these experiences, I became curious about the underlying process connecting the mind and body. This curiosity motivated me to take action, which formed into a project during my internship. Guided by my mentor, I decided to write an article that combined my personal experience with

formal study. In doing so, I wondered about the perceived physical and emotional benefits of dance and how it could improve motor coordination, particularly in children with medical challenges.

### *Empirical Evidence*

I utilized online libraries and reviewed several studies related to my curiosity, and there is empirical evidence supporting my experience and observations. Research shows that students after a dance program gain noticeable health benefits, such as:

- 1) Being able to reduce mental tensions, improve emotional regulation, perception, memory, and
- 2) Communication (Grosu, et al., 2020, Machado, et al., 2025).

Specifically in children with disabilities, research notes that dance demonstrates higher muscular activation and improvement of communication, physical performance, increased well-being, and body-mind connection (Valentini et al., 2025).

### *Investigation Conclusion*

My investigation demonstrates that dance is not just a form of exercise, but a therapeutic practice. Seeing that research points to the benefits of dance for individuals, I must advocate for a lifestyle modification that integrates dance into daily life. Since mental health treatments today are too often costly and difficult to access, dance could be a form of healthy, safe practice that helps maintain mental health.

Promoting dance practice and implementing it in schools would benefit all students by fostering stronger body-mind connections and enhancing quality of life.





All PC Natalie Wu

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All PC Camila Alimonte

**Feature**  
**Dance as a Healing Pause**  
**By: Camila Alimonte**  
**Sponsor/Advisor: Darcy Marocki**  
**SONG AND DANCE JNE –**  
**Studio of the Arts**

**I**f you're human, you've felt anxious, tired, or scared before. It's part of our nature. We all experience these emotions at some point. Our lives are filled with everyday anxieties through schedules and keeping up with to-do lists. But what if I told you there was a way to pause it all?

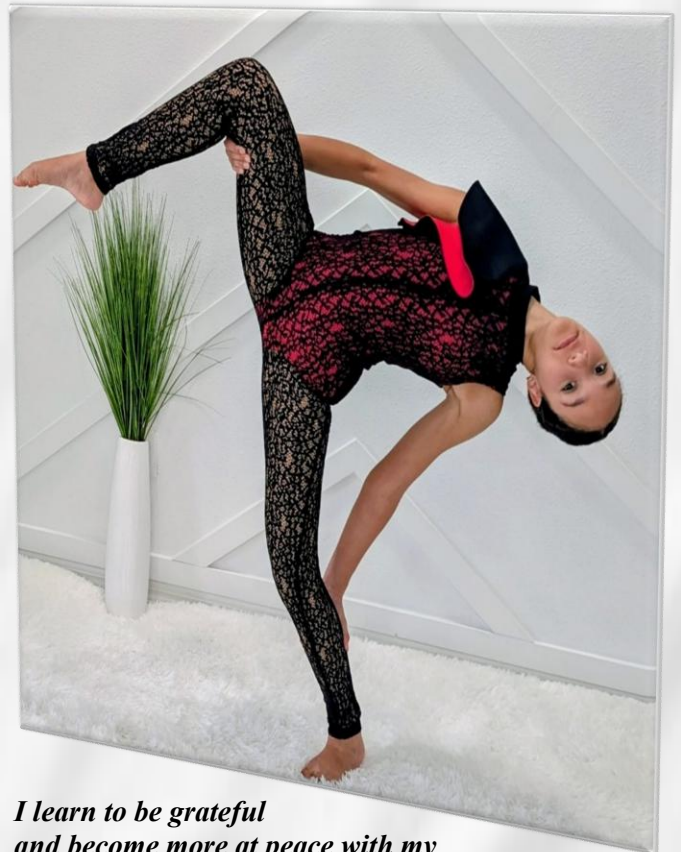
Picture your life being manipulated by a singular remote control. Your life is a television series, and each episode is a day. When you press the speed-up button, you become anxious. Life turns fast-paced and stressful. A storm brews inside your mind and grows until it reaches a breaking point. When it does, you need a break. So, you press the pause button~ and it brings you to a dance class. There, your daily life pauses, and you get a moment to enjoy and fully feel yourself. The anxiety halts, and your mind becomes a calm, clear, sunny day.

Dancing is a pause ~ a moment of realization and gratitude for where you are. Instead of simply being in the present, you can feel the present. You can feel your body, the way it moves, and its natural path and perception of its surroundings. Dance is a place where the goal isn't to score perfectly on a test by studying until you fall asleep. It's a place where the goal is to improve at your own rate ~ whatever that may be.

I get very anxious, especially with school and my overall daily routine. The world is becoming a rushed environment. We tend to prioritize tasks over joy or mental care. As a

society, we're beginning to worry more about what others think or do than about caring for ourselves. Sometimes, I'm so rushed that I forget to be grateful for what I have.

Dancing allows me to understand the emotions I feel, instead of overlooking them. It offers a break to be introspective ~ whether I'm reflecting on my day or my entire life.



*I learn to be grateful and become more at peace with my personal journey. Then, I can express these emotions and thoughts through movement. The movement is what it's all about.*

## **Feature**

### ***"Self-Control"***

**By: Ava Buckhalt**

***NHSDA Award, Honorable Mention***

***Sponsor/Advisor: Sara Crisera***

***Howard High School***

***My*** piece, *"Self-Control,"* is about the journey of mental health, specifically through troubles with anxiety and overthinking. My original intention for this solo was to showcase the negative aspects of mental health, but it evolved into highlighting a spectrum of emotions, including the positive. Everyone has different experiences with mental health and anxiety, as the journey contains both highs and lows.

In this piece, I wanted to portray the challenges of controlling your emotions and the struggles of overthinking situations beyond your control. To fulfill this goal, the emotional and dynamical journey throughout the piece evolves and changes with the music.

The music for my work was what mainly inspired me. Its uniqueness and utilization of a variety of sounds and dynamics helped me throughout the choreography process. The various movement qualities and dynamics are utilized to represent different emotions and feelings that are present when struggling with mental health.

Lastly, I encountered a few specific artistic challenges throughout the choreographic process. First, being able to effectively express emotions to the audience through movement. Secondly, it was challenging for me to spread my dance across the whole stage. In the beginning, my choreography kept me very centered on the stage. However, after some revisions, I expanded my piece to fill the entire stage.

Overall, my intention for this piece was to portray the struggles and triumphs of mental health and anxiety, and to take the audience along this tumultuous journey.

*PC Ava Buckhalt*



