

# Bulldog Bulletin

NEWS FOR THE HALSEY HIGH SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Vol 5 Number 1

November 2022

## New School Year Brings Fresh Initiatives, New Teachers, and Focus on Post-Pandemic Plans

For the first time in over two years, there were no pandemic restrictions or flooded streets and classrooms to complicate the reopening of school in September. Students and staff felt like school was finally getting back to normal. New teachers have been hired, bathrooms have been updated, and attendance and graduation rates show signs of improvement. We talked to students, staff, and administrators about Halsey's achievements and some challenges that need to be addressed this year.

### Halsey Student is First Representative to Present at School Board Meeting

*By Erika Martinez*

In front of an overflow crowd, Halsey Senior Maria Garcia Cabana became the first student representative to present the views and concerns of students at the monthly board of education meetings.



In the October 20th meeting, Cabana told board members, faculty, parents, and students about a new student outreach initiative. Each month, a student representative from one of the seven district high schools will attend the Elizabeth Board of Education meeting and express their ideas and concerns. Student representatives like Cabana who are chosen by the board need to meet certain criteria including being part of the student government, a senior, and having a certain GPA.

**"As a student, there are certain limits to what you can do, what power you have. But having a seat at the table, it's a whole new thing," said Cabana.**

The noise of the crowd and the stress of presenting in front of hundreds of people was a new challenge for Cabana. But she said her leadership experience in ROTC helped her stay focused on communicating her message as a student representative. **"ROTC prepared me so much for that moment. When people started getting anxious or disrespectful, it wasn't something that provoked a reaction out of me. I think I was well prepared for that in general."** Halsey Principal Christopher Van Vliet introduced Cabana to the school community. Halsey ROTC Master Sergeant Robert Geraldts was also there to provide support.



Student representatives like Cabana will meet regularly with other representatives from the district's high schools to discuss their concerns and ideas to improve their schools. They'll present their findings at the monthly school board meetings. **For the past two years, pandemic restrictions have either shut down or limited many student activities. Now, students like Cabana want to take steps to change this.**

Right now, the big issues being discussed by student representatives include ways to improve student morale, organize more after-school programs and field trips, bring back Junior Prom, provide more academic assistance for students, and organize more community service opportunities.

# News From the Principal

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## Van Vliet on Getting Past the Pandemic, Tackling Tardiness, School Successes

The pandemic may seem like a distant memory, but for **Halsey Principal Christopher Van Vliet** its effects are still with us. He discusses his goals for the school this year, the push to raise state test scores, and the focus on students' post-pandemic wellness. He talks about addressing student tardiness, vaping, and cell phone usage in class. He says there's a lot to be excited about; attendance and graduation rates are up, the school has a new crop of teachers, and student bathrooms and lockers have been upgraded.

### Is Halsey back to normal after the pandemic, or are we experiencing a "new normal?"

I think it's a combination of both. There is definitely a feeling of normalcy once again at Halsey, and it is great to see everyone returning to our pre-pandemic lives. That being said, the past two and a half years have impacted us all in some way. So while it's nice to be back, we realize some adjustments have been made to our lives but that they are hopefully beneficial to all of us moving forward.



**What goals do you have for the school this year?** We have seen real growth in our most concentrated areas of improvement: graduation rate, attendance, and benchmarks. Our suspension rate has decreased once again along with our chronic absentee percentage.

While we are very pleased with the results over the past 4 years, we see room for improvement in our state test scores (NJSLA Math and English) and our Freshman retention rate percentage. We will be working hard to improve our state test scores this spring as well as increase the number of Freshmen who advance to Sophomore year in healthy standing (30 credits or more). We also are focusing on our post-pandemic wellness with our Social Emotional Learning (SEL). We hope to see improvements in our student Panorama surveys as we look to provide a safe and caring environment for all Halsey students.



**What's new at Halsey that you're excited about?** We have a number of terrific new teachers that we are happy to have at Halsey this year! We are also getting new student lockers and our bathrooms are being renovated (2<sup>nd</sup> floor bathrooms are already done). Our gym is being renovated as well. We are very proud of how our building is being beautified for future Halsey generations! Additionally, we have four new clubs at Halsey this year! A dance club, performing arts, visual arts, and Stem club. We hope our students enjoy all the wonderful new things at Halsey!

**There's a lot to be excited about at Halsey. What trends are you seeing over the past few years at the school concerning graduation rates, absenteeism, college acceptance and test scores?** There sure

is a lot to be excited about! We want our students to succeed and in order to do that we need our students to be present in school each day. Our average daily attendance rate was our highest ever last year (92.4%)! We also continue to send our students to some of the finest colleges in the country, or to the workforce where they are prepared to succeed. Our Nursing and ROTC programs prepare our students for their careers in Health Occupations or the Military, and our Public Safety and Criminal Justice courses help to ready our future police and fire workers. Our graduation rate for the Class of '22 was over 79%, which exceeded our State target! We had 2 years during the pandemic without state test scores so last year's NJSLA left some room for improvement for sure, as expected. We hope to really improve our NJSLA state test scores this Spring. Overall, Halsey has shown steady improvement in many areas and we are very proud of our students and Staff!



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# News From the Principal

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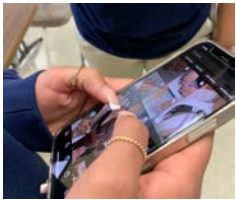
## Van Vliet on Getting Past the Pandemic, Tackling Tardiness, School Successes

*Our conversation with Mr. Van Vliet continues.*



**What do you attribute the improving statistics to at Halsey?** I think it has been a true team effort. We have a caring and passionate staff who devote so much time and energy to their student's success. Our students have overcome challenges related to the pandemic and have been resilient. We are very proud of our entire school community! Together with our staff, our students, and our parents, we have created a triangle of success and I am excited for continued future success at Halsey!

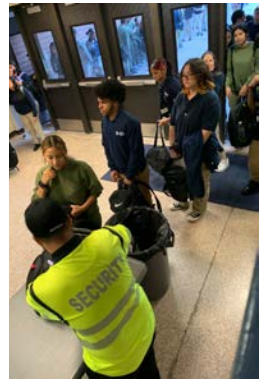
**What challenges do you need to address this year?** We have been very clear with our students that vaping in school or on school grounds will not be tolerated. Nor will fighting of any kind. These are non-negotiables and will result in a lengthy suspension and mandatory Saturday Counseling sessions for vaping. Our students deserve a lot of credit for being so respectful not only with their compliance with our uniform policy but also keeping cell phones away during class. We also are working hard to help eliminate any learning loss which may have occurred during the pandemic. We hope to see much improved results in this spring's NJSLA test in Math and English.



**How are teachers and administrators addressing the issue of student cell phone usage in class?** We have been clear with our students that these devices are not permitted in school. Teachers have taken ownership of their classrooms and managed them according to policy. Students have been respectful of the policy as well. We do not want to reprimand students for breaking this rule, but we have done it when needed. Together, we can all enjoy a school that is respectful of our district's cell phone policy.



**Getting to school on time for many students is a challenge. How are you addressing the issue of first period tardiness?** Students need to understand that school begins at 7:45 AM. This means they must be here before then to ensure they have enough time to have bags checked, get through the metal detector and ensure their uniforms are proper. If you have a sports game at 7 PM, you don't show up for the game at 7 PM right? You need preparation and planning time ahead of your start time. We understand some of these steps are an inconvenience and take extra time, but it is for all of our safety. We appreciate students planning ahead so that they can be in school by 7:45 AM.



**What's your advice for students as they start a brand new year?** Whether you are the current Valedictorian, or you have struggled so far in your high school years, this is a new year for everyone. This means that those who have succeeded so far should continue doing what has worked and those who haven't now have the opportunity to make positive changes which will impact their future. We want to see all of our students succeed and graduate on time. We have the support and resources at Halsey which can help every student to achieve their goals and dreams. Make the most of your high school years and do your best to put yourself in a position to graduate on time so that you can move on to college, the work force, the military, or whatever it is you want to do with your life. But remember this: Whatever it is you want to do with your life, you need a high school diploma. You can do it and we are here to support you!



# Halsey Happenings

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## New Beds For Our School Garden



Union County Commissioner Sergio Granados and Groundworks, a non-profit group that promotes environmental initiatives in Union County, visited the Halsey garden in September. They

were here to update old rotting wooden garden beds with metal ones. They also provided new soil, seedlings and plants. Halsey ESL teacher Joanna Miles and her students were there to help with the gardening project.

## Donations for Hurricane Relief

Puerto Rico and Florida were hit hard by storms this season. Hurricane Fiona dropped 25 inches of rain in some places of Puerto Rico. Hurricane Ian lashed the Florida coast with historic storm surges and Category 4 winds. Juniors worked with Halsey School Climate and Culture Coach Norma Cardona and English teacher Brandi Donnelly to collect canned food and hygiene items to send as hurricane relief to residents affected by the storms in Puerto Rico and Florida. "I love seeing the Elizabeth community of students coming together to help bring people some relief from tragedy," said Donnelly.



## Lopez Gives Birth to Second Son



Congratulations to Halsey English teacher Marisa Lopez. She gave birth to her second son Maverick Anthony Lopez on September 9th at 3:19 am. Lopez is out on maternity leave taking care of her new bundle of joy. She'll be returning to Halsey early next year.



## Got Talent?

Do you play an instrument, or want to learn how? Check out Halsey's Music Club. Halsey music teacher Nick



Afflitto kicked off the club's first meeting on November 3rd. He wants musicians to learn songs and make music together. And if you don't know how to play an instrument, he'll help you get started. The club meets Mondays in Rm 326.

## Students Join Teachers In Show of Support for Contract Negotiations

Halsey students joined teachers in October to show support for union contract negotiations with the Elizabeth Board of Education. Teachers and other EPS staff are asking for a pay increase to keep up with the rising cost of living. "We are out here to support the teachers," said Halsey senior Victoria Reyes who was holding a sign in a before-school meeting. "We want them to have a contract and to make sure that they get a fair wage," she said.



# Halsey Happenings

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## Vega Becomes New Halsey VP

Halsey's administrative team just added another member to the team. Veronica Vega started her new role as vice principal earlier this month. She'll be working alongside Halsey's other vice principal Mike Robel in the main office.

**"I am very happy and excited to be here, especially since I'm seeing all my former students," said Vega.**

Before coming to the main building Vega worked for five years as guidance counselor at the Halsey Annex. As VP, she'll be interacting with many of these students as they work towards graduation. Vega also has 12 years of teaching experience.

She taught 6th grade language arts at Joseph Battin School. She sees her experience as counselor and teacher as an asset in her new leadership role.

"I'm hopeful this will help me a lot because I know what students need in order to graduate. I have a rapport with them and their families. There's a community that works together at Halsey, which helps a lot."



## Marine Corps Birthday Celebration

Halsey celebrated the Marine Corps 247<sup>th</sup> birthday in the auditorium. November 10th marks the day when the Continental Marines were established in Philadelphia. Staff Sergeants Gerald and Ramirez, as well as Gunnery Sergeant Jefferson were there to honor the day, along with the entire ROTC class. After the ceremony, cake was served and photos were taken.







## Big Crowds Show For Haunted Hallways Fun at Halsey Annex

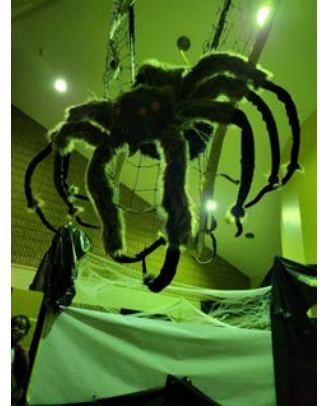
Hundreds of parents and students came for a scare at this year's Haunted Hallways event.

The two-day Halloween celebration on October 27th and 28th took place at the Halsey Annex where the doors and halls of the freshman building were decorated with spooky ghosts, skeletons, and spiders. Chilling sounds, music, and dramatic lights added to the Halloween mood.

According to Halsey Guidance Counselor Yasmin Maher who organized the event, over 300 people were in attendance. "It was a big hit," she said. In fact, they had to turn away 200 people because there wasn't enough room in the building. The event was a fundraiser for the Senior Class of 2023.

"We had multiple people going into the event 2 to 3 times," she said. "Parents and families had a scary good time. We hope to have more events like this for the community. All the volunteers were very professional and had a great time."

Maher wanted to thank Halsey security guards and custodial staff for helping to keep everything running smoothly. She also wanted to thank Halsey Climate and Culture Coach Norma Cardona and Halsey math teacher Deborah Ferrao for volunteering their time.





# Teachers in the Spotlight

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## A Big Welcome to our New Teachers at Halsey

Photos by Victoria Reyes



Alexandra Pais  
Art / Photography



MSgt. Joel Ramirez  
ROTC



Celeste Layton  
English



Lillian Melendez  
English



Damon White  
English



Celena Spencer  
ESL



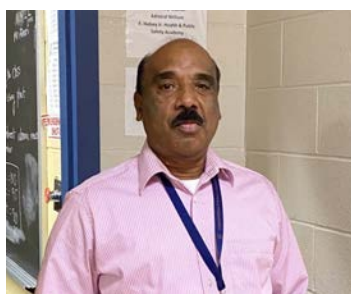
Carol Ramirez  
ESL



Anthony Pires  
PE



Jason George  
Social Studies



Munirathnam Aineri  
Science



Rosemary Garcia  
Science (Annex)



Katherine Thomas  
English (Annex)



Yuriko Hiromitsu-Medina  
Math



Patricia Mureu  
Math



Jason Van Woeart  
English (Annex)



Jenise Tapia  
English

# ROTC UPDATE

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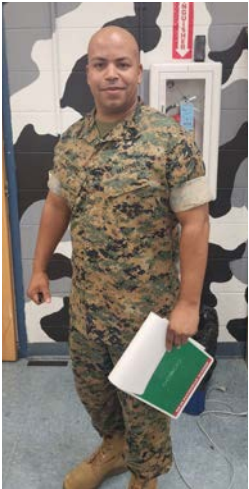
## ROTC Builds on Last Year's Success as New Instructor Joins Leadership Team



It's not just about wearing a uniform and doing drills, it's also about responsibility, accountability, and opportunity. These core values have helped Halsey's ROTC program win respect and competitions on the state and national level. Despite having to rebuild their ranks after the pandemic, last year ROTC ended up stronger than ever. The Rifle, PT and Drill teams all scored major wins in regional and national competitions.

This year the program's instructors want to build on these past successes as they plan ahead for the 196 students now enrolled. We spoke to *Master Sergeant Robert Gerald*s about his continued leadership and *Master Sergeant Joel Ramirez* about starting fresh at Halsey as the newest member of the ROTC team.

**MSgt Gerald, you've been part of the ROTC program at Halsey since 2006. Before that, you served 22 years in the Marine Corps. What are your goals for this year?** The time and dedication of the instructors and their hands-on guidance have made our program so successful. We've always been a frontrunner in extracurricular activities. Last year, I took the girl's PT Team to the next level. They won 2nd place out of 265 ROTC programs nationwide. Fabiana Fazio won 1st place in the nation. This year, I want to sustain this momentum. During the pandemic, senior and junior enrollment dropped. Last year we had to do a lot of rebuilding. This year we're seeing the rewards of this work, with a lot of returning freshmen rejoining the program.



**MSgt Ramirez, how do you feel about joining Halsey's ROTC program as a new instructor?** I'm glad to be here and glad to be part of the team. I'm looking forward to getting integrated into the program and getting to know all the students.

**You served in the Marines for 22 years. How do you think your military experience will help in the classroom?** When my career in the Marine Corps ended I wanted to pass along my leadership experience. I saw the ROTC program as a way to continue to serve. My goal is to learn from Master Sergeant Gerald and Gunnery Sergeant Jefferson and all their experience, incorporate that with my time in the Marine Corps, and make this the best program that I can.

**Last year, Colonel Robert Golden coached the Rifle Team to win some key competitions. As their new manager, what are your plans for the Rifle Team?** My goal coming in is to sustain what they've done, absorb their experience, and then try to take it to the next level. I'm not in a rush to make any changes.

**And finally, what does the ROTC program bring to the Halsey community?**

*MSgt Gerald:* The program stresses the importance of discipline and following rules. I'm going to hold them accountable for every action. That's very hard for even grownups to do. We require them to wear a uniform, get good grades, and be respectful. We're setting them up for being successful in life and successful at Halsey.

*MSgt Ramirez:* Another trait we emphasize is leadership. We expect a lot from the students and we push them at every opportunity that we get. Whenever there's a need for an adjustment, it's provided in a way that they can understand so they can make a correction.



If you're interested in joining the ROTC contact your guidance counselor for more information.



# YES PROGRAM UPDATE

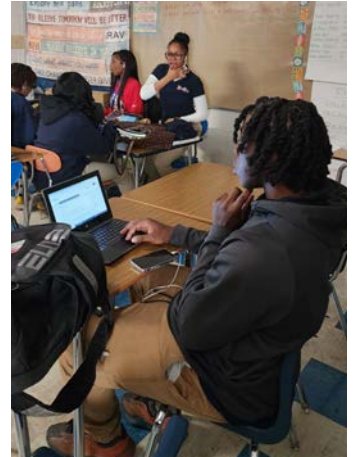
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## “YES” Helps Students Navigate Challenges, Find Support, Apply to College

Applying to college can be a confusing process filled with paperwork, websites, applications, and decisions. To help students and their parents understand it all Halsey’s YES program is offering a support group called **College Bound**.

“We have a very robust group of approximately 40 seniors participating in **College Bound** to assist with the application process,” said YES Program Director Lisa Perry. “By January we will be offering this information to underclassmen.”



This is just one of many programs offered by YES (Youth Enrichment Services), an organization here at Halsey that supports students and the community with a broad range of activities and support groups.

“We have been happily swamped with students interested in our groups, trips and after school activities,” said Perry. “We currently have several groups running including **Strong Girls, Strong Women** and **Mamba Mentality**. These groups for young women and men respectively discuss gender related thoughts, issues, and concerns.”

Another YES group focusing on being and acting like an adult. “Everyone wants to be an adult, but few know what real adulting takes,” said Perry. “So we talk about it in our **Adulting 1.0** for freshmen and **2.0** for upperclassmen.”

“We also have our **Pride** group for our LGBTQ students and their allies. And last but not least, we have our **Helping Hands** group for community service opportunities and our **Recreation/Game Club**. For Halloween, students participated in a weekend community service activity. We helped organize a donation distribution site and an afterschool pumpkin painting activity,” said Perry.

YES also offers supportive counseling for students who need help with handling a crisis or just need advice on a problem or issue. To find out more about these groups, activities, and counseling services visit the YES office in Room 367.

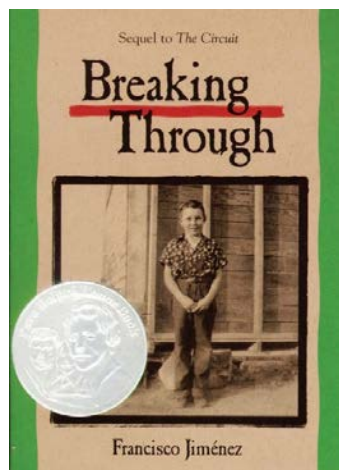


# Student Voices

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## Halsey Students Discuss Their Immigrant Stories and Challenges



This year, ESL juniors at Halsey are reading the novel, *Breaking Through* by Francisco Jiménez. The novel serves as a documentary of the life of the author as he travels to the United States as a pre-teenager with his older brother. The brothers are forced to leave their parents and younger siblings behind as they begin a life in California until they are able to reunite during the 1960's. The book explores

close to home topics and issues such as deportation and racism.

**“Leaving a home and family behind in search of a better life is a concept that hits home for many of our ESL students,”** said ESL Teacher Mandy Orrick. “You would be surprised to know how many of our ESL students had to travel from their home country to the United States alone at a young age, leaving their parents and siblings behind.”

In addition, coming to a foreign country as a young person without any knowledge of the language has pushed many students to find non-traditional ways to learn the language and survive in our culture.

In 2021, CNN produced an article entitled, [Why So Many Kids Cross the Border Alone](#). In the article it stated that migrant children have been crossing the border alone since 2003, and many have been as young as six and seven years old.

In a [recent survey](#), Orrick's juniors and seniors were asked about their experiences moving here from another country. Most said the adjustment has been somewhat challenging and that learning English has been the biggest obstacle. Here are their stories in their own words.

2. What was the biggest challenge you faced? (6 point)

More Details

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- Feeling accepted 11



My name is Waldy Maria and I am a junior at Halsey. I am an immigrant who had to go through many things as a young child in order to have a better life and future for myself. When I was eight years old, my parents sent me from the Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico to live with my uncle. **It was difficult to leave my entire family behind and be apart for three years.** After that time we were reunited and able to move to the United States together.



*“It was difficult to leave my entire family behind.”*

Waldy Maria  
Dominican Republic

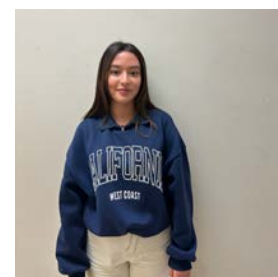
My name is Diego Ubaldo Burgos Almeida, and I am a junior at Hasley. I came to the United States in 2020 at the age of thirteen. When I arrived in the U.S. I was frustrated because I didn't know any English and communicating was impossible. I watched Youtube videos to teach myself English. **My desire to better myself pushed me to learn the language on my own.**



*“I watched Youtube videos to teach myself English.”*

Diego Ubaldo  
Ecuador

My name is Melany and I am a junior at Halsey. I came to the United States at age sixteen from Ecuador. **My biggest challenge as an immigrant was facing everyone alone.** My mother had to stay behind in Mexico after crossing the border, and my younger brother and I were on our own for over a month without any way to communicate with my mom. My brother was my strength and motivation through that difficult time. Since reuniting with my mom, things have been challenging but it has been easier to face them as a family.



*“My biggest challenge as an immigrant was when I had to face everyone alone.”*

Melany Chalco  
Ecuador



# Teachers in the Spotlight

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## Veteran Math Teacher Retiring After 20 Years at Halsey



After teaching students about the beauty and logic of numbers for more than two decades, veteran Halsey math teacher Khalid Mujib is planning to retire in February.

Majib has taught all levels of math including AP Statistics for 20 years at Halsey and six additional years in other schools in the district.

**"I'm happy and sad," said Mujib about his retirement. "Happy that I'm going to explore a different way of living. But I'm sad because I'm not going to be with my students. I'm going to miss that everyday routine of being in school."**

Even though he has mixed emotions about leaving the classroom, he is looking forward to the next chapter in his life. **"Traveling is the main reason I would like to retire now,"** he said. "I want to travel all around the world and go to Europe, especially England, back home to Pakistan, United Arab Emirates, and other countries."

Originally from Pakistan, with family roots in India, Mujib went to college in Pakistan and Canada. He also studied math and education administration in the United States after he and his family emigrated

here in the 1980s. He then started his teaching career in Elizabeth in 1996.

Mujib has seen a lot of changes at Halsey. "When I started, there was not much technology. Everything was manual." He has also witnessed a big shift in the student population. When he first started teaching many of his students were from Eastern Europe. Today, most of his students are from Latin America.

One of the most challenging times to teach for Mujib was during the pandemic. He said virtual school made learning math especially challenging for students. **"Math is a hands-on subject. It's tough to be hand-on when you're all online.** I was very happy when I was able to come back to school and meet my students in person and talk to them one-on-one. We can now differentiate according to the student's level. That part was missing a lot during the pandemic."

When Mujib looks back on his career, his proudest moments have been to see his students use their math skills to start successful careers. "I see that they learned a lot with every subject that I was teaching," he said.

Some may question the value of taking math in high school. But for Mujib, the answer is simple. "With math, students can enter a career like computer science, engineering, and data analysis. Math provides an opportunity for better positions and more money."



# **HALSEY ATHLETES IN THE SPOTLIGHT**

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## **Elizabeth Minutemen from Halsey Reflect on Season's Ups and Downs**

They're fast, they're strong, they're part of the Minutemen Football team and... they're Halsey students. The Elizabeth Minutemen Football team ended the season with a 2-7 record. We asked our Halsey players to reflect on the team's performance on the field and how the coaching staff helped them through the wins and losses.

### **Gerald Baker**

Defensive Tackle and Nose Tackle  
*Senior*

"We had some ups and downs. We could have done a lot better. We weren't able to capitalize on certain opportunities in the game. It costs us. I feel like our defense was as physical as it gets. There were games where people were in the red zone and we shut them down. Coach Klein did a good job. He gets everybody involved including sophomores."



### **Quajir Burch**

Nose Guard  
*Senior*

"The season didn't go as planned. As much as I wanted my senior year to go well for me and my teammates, but you know everything happens for a reason. Everyone has something to work on. But I did learn a lot with the new coaches. They said to always think positive, move positive, even if you get negative results. I'm excited for their next season."



### **Canye Anderson**

Defensive Tackle  
*Senior*

"I felt like we could have done a lot better. We had a lot of good players on the team, but everybody didn't believe in themselves. So everything kind of fell apart. **The good news is that there are a lot of young players coming up. Next season should be a lot better.**"



### **Nireese McDougald**

Running Back and Safety  
*Junior*

"We had a good start to the season and then things started going downhill. We couldn't really get our offense moving but our defense held it down. Our strength is definitely our defense. **We have a great defensive line that can rush the quarterback very well, and have a great defensive core at the DB position.** We just need to work on being together more and playing as a team."



### **Joseph Mendoza**

Offensive Lineman/Defensive Lineman  
*Junior*

"Our strengths this year definitely came from our captains and our coaches. They helped us improve. They were always looking out for us."



### **Marcellus Millington**

Offensive Tackle  
*Junior*

"We have the makings of a team, but I feel like not all of us gave 100% effort when they should have. The coaches helped a lot through the season, even through our losses. They helped us in a positive way without bringing us down. Hopefully this will help us be stronger next year. **Don't give up on Elizabeth Minutemen just yet.** The freshman are set up to win the state title in a couple of years."

