

Frisbee Teams Place Second and Fifth at Virginia State Championship



The Walls girls' ultimate team with their second place trophy / Credits: Rafi Fox

By Rookery Staff

The Walls ultimate frisbee team traveled to Fredericksburg, Virginia to compete in the Virginia High School State Championship on May 20 and 21. Out of nine teams, the Walls girls'/non-binary team placed second, falling to James Madison High School in the final, while the Walls boys' team placed fifth. This is their second state tournament in a month and the last of their season.

Virginia States caps off a relatively successful year for the frisbee team. The boys' team placed third in a New Jersey travel tournament earlier this year. Then on May 13, the mixed team came two points from winning the DCIAA tournament, falling to rival Jackson-Reed in a competitive final.

On Saturday, May 20 of the two-day tournament, the boys' team won three of four games in their pool, advancing to a quarterfinal in the bracket on Sunday, May 21, where they lost to HB Woodlawn by one point. The girls' team won two games and lost one on Saturday and advanced to the semi-final against Jack-

son-Reed, coming back on a four-point scoring streak to beat them by one point. In the final, the girls' team came in an extremely close second, losing 7-6.

Going into next season, the Walls team — after its string of victories and near-victories this year — is one of the top high school teams on the east coast. Although many leading players are graduating seniors, the team hopes to continue its success next year.

The boys team did not have the best showing, placing fifth despite being seeded second. “It was very much not ideal ... we lost to teams that we definitely should have beat,” said Travis Tiller ('24). “I think a lot of the players on the team were looking to go a little farther than we did.” Still, Tiller viewed the year in a positive light, saying “I would say it's been the most successful year that the team has ever had.”

Co-captain Amaia Noursi ('23) felt better about the team's performance at Virginia States. “I think we did much better than we thought we could,” Noursi said, though she re-

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Devan Tatlow's Internship: Fighting Cancer During a War

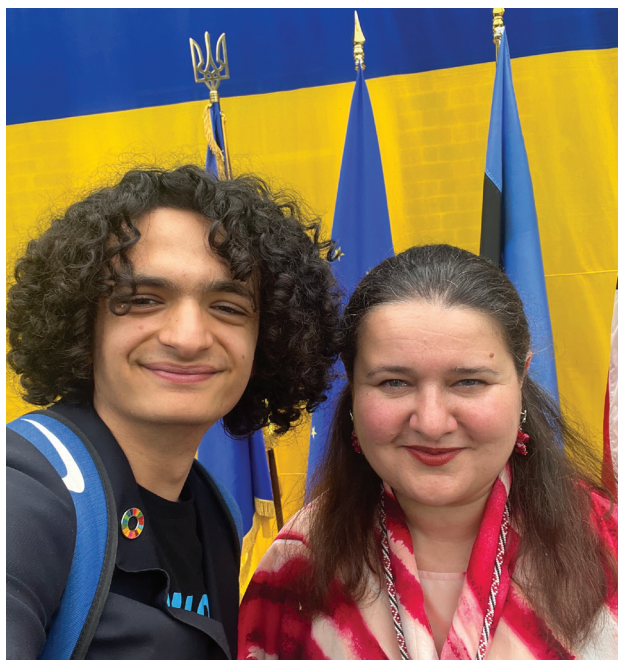
By Jessie Moss ('26)
Staff Writer

For the last eight months, Devan Tatlow ('24) has interned as the U.S. outreach coordinator for Ukraine's largest children's cancer charity, Tabletochki. The organization serves as the “backbone of childhood cancer care in Ukraine,” according to Tatlow.

“We fund the treatment of almost every childhood cancer patient in [Ukraine], we [build] hospitals, conduct professional development, pay the salaries for Ukrainian oncologists and more,” he said.

Tatlow assists the organization and works closely with its founder, Olya Kudinenko, to set up U.S. operations and maintain available healthcare during the war in Ukraine. Involving the U.S. in Tabletochki's mission means fundraising, helping Ukrainian patients in U.S.

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Tatlow, left, with Tabletochki's Ukrainian ambassador to the U.S., Oksana Markarova
Credits: Devan Tatlow

DCPS Puts Narcan in Schools to Combat Opioid Crisis

By Georgia Murphy ('26)
Staff Writer

At the start of the 2022-2023 school year, DCPS required Walls and other schools to have the emergency overdose medication Narcan on-premises in an effort to combat the growing opioid crisis.

“Having [Narcan] in our school health suites speaks to our readiness to support and administer treatment to our students who are experiencing a suspected opioid overdose,” said DCPS press secretary Enrique Gutierrez.

Narcan is the brand-name form of naloxone, a medication that reverses the fatal effects of an opioid overdose. It's a pocket-sized nasal spray that can be simply administered to an overdosing patient while they are unconscious. Narcan only postpones the adverse effects of an overdose, meaning the patient will need additional professional medical care following administration.

Though Narcan is now available, Mr. Gutierrez said that there have been no reported incidents at any D.C. public school that required the administration of Narcan since the DCPS health initiative was introduced.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the District of Columbia has the second-highest rate of opioid overdose deaths in the country. In the past four years, 90 percent of adolescent overdose deaths have been the result of opioid overdose, as opposed to other kinds of drug overdoses.

Young people in particular are at high risk. “Some of the youth are being targeted by the producers of these illegal and synthetic drugs,” said Demetrius Jones, a Harm Reduction Specialist Trainer who works specifically to educate Washingtonians on the opioid crisis. Now, drug traffickers are “using social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram to solicit teens,” he said.

This trend of targeting youth with opioids was part of the rationale behind putting Narcan in schools. “It was critical for DCPS to be realistic about our young people being included in the [the opioid epidemic],” Mr. Gutierrez said.

The lingering impacts of the pandemic may also be relevant to the rise of opioid usage. “[Young people have] been affected by the global health emergency in ways we can't begin to fathom,” Mr. Gutierrez added.

SWW students represent a varied range of Narcan and opioid crisis knowledge. Awnya Gallagher ('26) said she doesn't “know a lot about the opioid crisis.”

Others, such as Tara Roberts ('25), said they learned about it online and from friends. “I think that [education about Narcan] is especially important in high school where so many people are experimenting with everything and anything. Some might not know their limits,” she said.

This gap in education is something Comfort Laosebikan, the SWW nurse, would like to close: “We have so many [classes] that have

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Walls Debate Team Competes in National Tournament in Louisville

By Naia Albert ('25)
Staff Writer

Walls debate teams have been very successful this year, both at the local level and the national level.

Several Walls debaters competed at nationwide tournaments. This year, two Walls teams qualified in Public Forum (PF) debate, one student qualified in Lincoln-Douglas (LD) debate and one student qualified in extemporaneous speaking (Extemp).

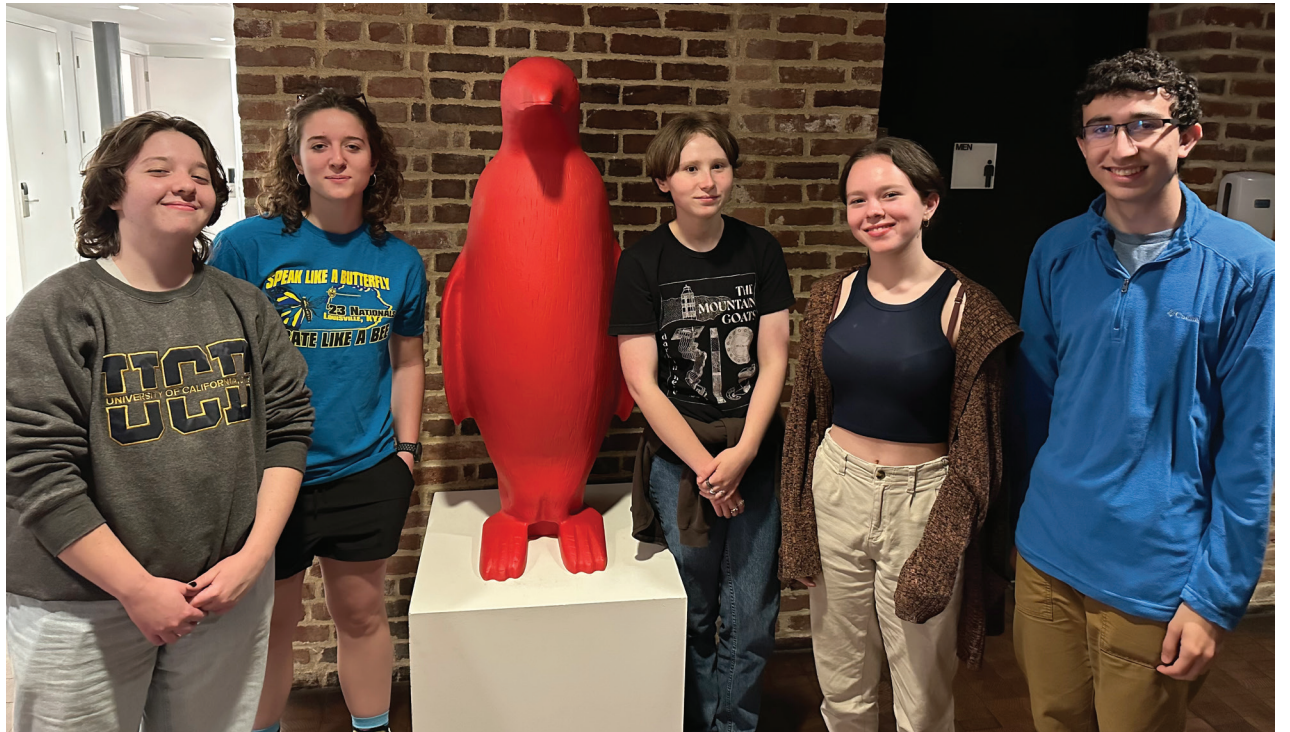
One debate team encompasses LD, PF and extemp. Debater Jessie Moss ('26) described the difference between LD and PF: "Lincoln-Douglas involves one v. one debate, while PF uses teams of two," which "alters both the round structure and the preparation required."

Additionally, "LD resolutions are more philosophical and ethical by nature," Moss said. This means that debaters call on a "framework" to support their arguments, which is the moral or philosophical basis on which a case rests. PF does not stress philosophical grounding but rather emphasizes practical considerations and tangible resolutions, like through public policy.

Extemp is an event in which participants give a speech about current events with limited preparation time.

A successful season in the local circuit — the Washington-Arlington Catholic Forensic League (WACFL) — allowed several Walls students to participate in the National Speech and Debate Association (NSDA) e-championship and the National Catholic Forensic League (NCFL) national tournament.

In the NSDA e-championship, which occurred online from May 6 to 8, Zoe Becker ('26) placed third in Varsity LD and Moss placed second in Varsity Extemp.



From left: Grayson Tess ('23), Kate O'Brien ('24), Savannah Wright ('23), Jessie Moss ('26) and Gabriel Kraemer ('23) in Louisville for NCFL nationals / Credits: Kate O'Brien

Over Memorial Day weekend, Walls debaters went to NCFL nationals in Louisville, Kentucky. Some debaters rode a charter bus provided by WACFL, while others flew. Becker and Moss competed in Extemp and LD, respectively. In PF, two pairs competed: Gabriel Kraemer ('23) and Savannah Wright ('23) and Grayson Tess ('23) and Kate O'Brien ('24). Tess and O'Brien made it to double octofinals, and Becker to quarterfinals.

To prepare for tournaments, the team practices every Tuesday morning before school. At these meetings, debaters "collaborate, discuss the topics and prepare their cases," according to debate coach Marielle Cornes.

Debaters also prepare and do research individually throughout the week.

While the HSA funds cover registration fees for the tournament, parents and student fundraisers pay for transportation, hotels, and food, Cornes said. "We hope to expand funding coverage by the HSA next year," she said.

Still, funds have fallen short at times this year, forcing the team to miss an earlier travel tournament.

Despite these challenges, the team has performed very well. "I'm very, very proud of these kids," Cornes said, "They have worked so hard to make our qualifications for this year possible." ●

TEACHER SPOTLIGHT

Farewell to Dr. Bright, Retiring After Five Years at Walls

By Carys Shepard ('23)
Senior Writer

Walls physics teacher Dr. Thomas Bright will retire at the end of this year. Students might be surprised to learn that he has only been at Walls for five years. During these five years, Dr. Thomas Bright has taught Physics, AP Physics I, and AP Physics C: Mechanics. In addition to his teaching responsibilities, Dr. Bright is one of the class sponsors for the graduating class of 2023.

"I saw a lot of you guys grow up when you were freshmen, right, and watched you progress through senior year ... I'm going out with you as a sponsor. So that's a good way to close it out," he said.

Prior to being a physics teacher, Dr. Bright was initially a practicing physicist who conducted research in Europe. After his wife landed a job as a professor in Charlotte, North Carolina, he moved with her back to the U.S.

"I didn't initially want to be a physics teacher in high school, I wanted to be a college professor," he said. However, he was unable to find a job as a physics professor and so reverted to his "second choice" of teaching high schoolers.

His time as a researcher helped him as a teacher. "Teaching is actually not all that much different than the research that you do. Because in research very often you engage in discussions where you're trying to educate your competition. ... To some extent that's the same as what I do with you all as students," he said.

After that initial job in Charlotte, Dr. Bright taught in Fairfax prior to moving to D.C.



Dr. Bright with students during spirit week / Credit: Carys Shepard

Dr. Bright decided to come to Walls because he wanted to move to a city. Although he described D.C. as "different," he also said that "students are the same everywhere, for the most part." Wherever he is, he "concentrate[s] on trying to get the best out of [his] students."

Seniors may know that Dr. Bright typically takes a sick day on a long weekend in the year to spend extra time at his beach house. In retirement, he hopes to spend more time there. "[I'm] looking forward to being able to sit on the beach in the fall and the spring, which is the best time to be at the beach, as opposed to the summer."

He cited this as a reason for his retire-

ment. "I can't [go to the beach] if I'm teaching in D.C. in the fall and the spring," he said.

Dr. Bright does not seek for students to necessarily remember him as a person but rather to remember the best way to do physics. "Physics itself is not hard. That, I think, has come across to most of my students ... There's a certain methodology that you use to break the problem down and make it understandable."

To quote two of Dr. Bright's favorite phrases that will hopefully help future Walls students that never have the opportunity to take his class: "It's not the physics that's hard, it's the math" and "Always follow the procedure." ●

PERSPECTIVE

Do Students Feel Too Much Pressure to Go to Certain Colleges?

By Anna Mayer ('25)
Staff Writer

As the school year comes to an end, many seniors are preparing to take their next big step into adulthood: college. The decision of where to attend college has been the culmination of years of stress, pressure, and anxiety relating to their careers and futures. While many students are thrilled by the prospect of deciding their future, the pressure to attend prestigious colleges — and attend college at all — continues to be an overwhelming burden for many seniors.

As a self-described “college preparatory school,” the general expectation is that Walls graduates will attend college, ideally a prestigious one. With the website boasting a 100 percent graduation and college acceptance rate, as well as the school’s emphasis on “college readiness,” much of the pressure falls on students to maintain the school’s reputation.

“The moment I entered this building as a freshman, everything was adding up for me to go to a good college,” said Charlotte Harkrader ('23), “It’s still a lot of pressure from the get-go.”

Jordyn Hurry ('23) shared a similar perspective, citing the intensity of Walls classwork and the effort that students put into doing well as reasons why many students feel pressure to attend good colleges.

“A lot of people have a mindset of ‘why’d you work so hard in high school if you’re not gonna go to a fancy college?’” she said. “It makes it feel like no matter how much you try, it’s not even worth it.”

Though the Walls environment generates much external pressure, students are also combating their internal expectations for themselves. “A lot of students have rewarded themselves . . . by comparing themselves to others,” said Maddie Salunga ('23). “That leads to a lot of toxic habits that we see at Walls, like comparing SAT scores, or posting all your colleges on your [Instagram] story so you can fill that need for appreciation.”

Social media has been yet another factor impacting students’ self-esteem in terms of college decisions. An unofficial Instagram page where seniors post their college decisions, @sw2023decisions, has over 460 followers and over 100 posts. Salunga, who runs the page, fears that the influence of social media has begun to harm the self-esteem of many Walls seniors. “People felt inadequate because their schools aren’t as prestigious,” she said. “A lot of people have been like, ‘I don’t want to submit my decision [to the account]’ after seeing other students’ schools on the page. Students compare themselves to others who got into more prestigious schools, a comparison which the Instagram page facilitates by putting college decisions side by side.”

There is contrasting evidence about the necessity, or lack thereof, of attending the most prestigious colleges. Some analyses, such as one by Lindsay Gellman of the Wall Street Journal, suggest that attending an elite school for an undergraduate degree leads to significantly more income once a student enters the job market. On average, the difference between the salary of a graduate school attendee who went to an elite college versus their lower-tier college counterpart is nearly \$34,000. The graduation rates of selective colleges are also higher than less prestigious ones, further dividing their reputations. And for students who desire a lucrative career requiring connections in elite circles, attending

College Pressure continued on page 11

Stage Band Performs at Kennedy Center



Guitarist Malcolm Douglas ('23) and the brass section performing at the Kennedy Center May 19
Credits: @volleydc via Instagram

By Gabriella Goldberg ('25)
Staff Writer

The School Without Walls stage band had a special performance at the Kennedy Center on May 19. This comes just before the last show of the year, the Spring Concert. It was also the last performance before auditions for next year’s stage band, which took place on May 24.

Usually, the stage band splits its stage time with the orchestra. However, this performance gave the band the stage all to themselves. They had a full hour to show off their setlist, where they performed thirteen songs, the most they have ever performed in one concert.

This performance marked the end of an era of Kennedy Center performances for Jordyn Hurry ('23), a percussionist who specializes in vibraphones and who will be graduating this year. She described the excitement of playing at such a prestigious concert hall: “The Kennedy Center is definitely an experience [because] you are playing in such a grand facility.”

Located in the Kennedy Center’s Grand Foyer, The Millennium Stage is a unique venue in that it allows early-comers to evening shows to join the audience, along with the usual crowd of Walls students, parents and faculty. These

unaffiliated music lovers and theater-goers added to the excitement of the performance.

“Our section leader, Danielle, got asked by a random person if we perform in [professional] gigs,” Hurry said, reflecting the caliber of the band’s performance.

Hurry described the performance as “a complete success.”

She explained her philosophy as a long-time member of the stage band: “Go with the flow and try to have fun. If you aren’t having fun then the audience can tell you are not having fun and it will detract from the overall experience, both from performing and watching the performance.”

For Hurry, stage band is meant to be exciting for both the performers and the audience. As a senior, she just wanted to enjoy one of her last performances as a member of stage band.

For the spring concert, the stage band hopes to be able to perform without sheet music or microphone stands. This will allow for a more visually appealing show, as well as give the singers more flexibility on the stage. It also takes things up a notch, as all members would need to memorize their pieces. After the large crowd that attended this performance, the stage band hopes that the Walls community will continue to be just as supportive. ●

DCPS Hopes Narcan in Schools Will Counter Growing Crisis

Narcan continued from page 1

these seminars about just sexual behaviors ... we can do [this] with drugs, too.”

As of 2023, the Department of Behavioral Health provides access to Narcan and Naloxone training in every ward. Ms. Laosebikan said students and staff can access information and free medication at dbh.dc.gov/page/where-can-i-get-naloxone-dc.

“We should make sure that ... students [are] being responsible,” she said.

Joey Trail ('25) said they understand the risks of Narcan access. “I think it has the potential to make some people feel at ease while doing drugs.”

Roberts agreed, but added, “I feel like people are going to do [drugs] anyway. Access is a preventative measure for an already existing

problem.”

Education is another such preventative measure. “Everyone has friends outside of school that could be affected. It’s important out-and-about to know what to do if you see someone overdosing,” Trail said.

Mr. Gutierrez agreed that the best way for schools to combat the opioid epidemic is Narcan and overdose education. “The goal is to empower students to become health-literate individuals who have the capacity to obtain, interpret, understand, and apply that information to do what’s best for their health.” ●



Credits: Georgia Murphy

CLUB SPOTLIGHT

Walls Students Find Community on Newly-Formed Mock Trial Team

By Tillie Freed ('24)
Staff Writer

Since the Walls mock trial club was founded last year, it has developed into a competitive and close-knit team, while serving a unique purpose by giving trial experience to its members.

Interest in the competition sprouted after several students competed in a mock trial last year as a part of their Street Law class. Ryanne Barstow ('23) and Amira Schroeder ('24) took a special interest, forming the club and becoming co-captains. Many other Street Law students joined, and were followed by other recruits.

"The kids were really excited about it and wanted to keep doing it," said their coach, Georgetown Law student Tera Wendell.

Each mock trial competition consists of one case which varies from year to year. This year, it was the criminal case *State of Maryland v. Ryan Grimes*. The case focused on whether or not Grimes was involved in illegal drug dealings on a college campus. The mock trial team competed in a Maryland circuit of 30 teams and placed second at circuit championships.

Mock trial helps its members develop a range of skills. Mira Hsu ('26) noted how mock trial helps members learn to "articulate [themselves] under pressure."

Schroeder believes mock trial also offers "a range of opportunity," because it consists of two distinct roles: attorneys and witnesses.

Both the prosecution and the defense have three attorneys who give the opening and closing statements and question witnesses. Witnesses, on the other hand, are responsible for memorizing their testimony and staying in character throughout the trial. The skills needed for each of these roles differ and can appeal to students with varying interests.

Team members are assigned to play witness roles based on personality. Zach Tulley ('23'), a prominent prosecution witness, believes he is good at his role because he's "really good at lying." Witnesses are important in mock trials because they "really bring it to life," accord-



Mock trial team members in a courtroom / Credits: Devan Tatlow

ing to Barstow.

However, attorneys might have a more challenging role, as they have to "think on the spot and argue," Barstow said.

Over the course of the season, the group has formed a tight bond that extends beyond the courtroom. Schroeder believes this is in part because of what she called the "witness-lawyer partner dynamic," where each member pairs up with another member and works together for the majority of practice time.

Their connection can also be attributed to the large amount of time the team spends together outside of practice, doing a range of activities from ice skating and dinners to games of human versus the undead, a game which appears in the case *State of Maryland v. Ryan Grimes*. The game starts with one undead player who is trying to tag the rest of the members. This entails staking out members' houses, playing between classes and the use of paper balls to stun the undead.

Forming this bond is crucial to their success as a team. "Half the job is to look natural ... during trial and ... the only way you get that is by liking each other," Coach Wendell explained.

Going forward, the mock trial faces several hurdles as a club, as six of the members are seniors. Their coach is also leaving following her graduation from law school this year.

"The future is bleak," Tulley said. However, Schroeder thinks the club will continue if they're able to "get more underclassmen involved."

Coach Wendell believes the best years of mock trial are yet to come. "When I competed in high school we had people who had competed for four years by senior year and so we had a bunch of mini-coaches running around ... I'm really excited as they grow to have that mentorship ability and the ability to get so much more done in a couple hours will really take them to an even higher level." ●

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Sustainability and Advocacy: Sarah Rice's Beeware Apparel

By Darya Filippova ('24)
Staff Writer

Walls has a student body of passionate individuals who find opportunities outside of school to support their inspirations. Sarah Rice ('24) has started her own business: Beeware Apparel, an online clothing and accessories store with in-person events. Rice has used her business to creatively advocate solutions to pressing global issues, specifically climate change.

She is passionate about climate change and has placed it at the heart of her business. Beeware Apparel produces eco-friendly material that is ethically sourced. She hopes to educate individuals about environmental awareness through the fashion industry.

Rice first began developing the idea for her business while in a social and emotional learning program called Tumaini D.C. The program challenged Rice to create a business plan, and she "[decided] to focus on something [she] would be passionate about." Though it started out as a small project, at the end Rice was surprised to learn that she had "actually created a company."



Sarah Rice ('24), left, and her mom at the Beeware Apparel launch day / Credits: Sarah Rice

The entire process from start to finish took six months. Rice started working in July 2022 by drafting ideas for a possible business, and in December, launched her business. For many entrepreneurs, six months from conception to launch is not the typical timeline. Rice received financial support from her mother and the program itself to "expedite the process." But it wasn't until August that her plans turned into reality. Rice was given an opportunity to pitch her idea during a competition within the program, placing 2nd and winning \$7,000 towards

the creation of her business.

Rice encountered many ups and downs with the creation of Beeware Apparel. In the fall, the added workload from school and extracurriculars limited the time available to devote to her business.

"The biggest struggle was maintaining motivation while balancing entrepreneurship, academics, and my extracurriculars," Rice said. She often found herself going to her support systems when feeling overwhelmed.

"[My friend Kamtoya] was there for every breakdown and panic and she's definitely been my rock through this ... My mom was also a huge support," Rice said. She also credits her mentor from Tumaini and the people she met at a business academy for their continuous support throughout the process.

While creating Beeware Apparel, Rice attended the Future Mogul Business Academy where she met many fellow young entrepreneurs who were able to provide her with support and resources for her business. From this opportunity, Rice was able to legalize and register her business and open a business bank account.

Rice's proudest moment was launching her business at the Museum D.C., a retail boutique that aims to promote aspiring artists and small businesses. Though she was nervous, the excitement of presenting her final product to the public made her realize that "[she] actually survived" the process. Rice said that the amount

Sarah Rice continued on page 11

A Guide to Free D.C. Library Resources for Students

By Bailey McFadden ('25)
Staff Writer

There are many free resources available for D.C. citizens through D.C. Public Libraries that would otherwise be incredibly expensive. However, many students are not aware of them.

Library cards are free for D.C. residents and can be used to access all of the following resources. All of these resources can be found on the “Research & Learn” tab on the DCPL website.

Research & Educational Databases

JSTOR: Contains the full text of more than 2,300 journals from 1,000 publishers and is otherwise \$19.50 a month (\$234 a year).

Ancestry Library Edition: Contains access to the largest database of genealogy archives online, and normally costs \$24.99 a month (\$299.88 a year).

Gale Databases: Encompasses hundreds of thousands of research materials in different categories, such as science, global issues and opposing viewpoints. Access to Gale databases is only sold to library or school systems, and is thousands of dollars a year.

Harvard Business Review: Provides access to articles published from 1922 to the present, which otherwise costs \$10 a month (\$120 a year).

Newspaper and Magazine Archives: JET, LIFE, EBONY, the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal and others, which altogether encompass thousands of published articles from



The Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Library, DCPL's central location / Credits: Bailey McFadden

the 1900s to now.

LinkedIn Learning: Includes thousands of instructional videos for career learning, normally costs \$19.99 a month (\$239.88 a year).

Entertainment & Creative Databases

Creativebug: Watch or upload instructional videos for a variety of creative endeavors. Normally \$7.95 a month (\$95.40 a year).

Comics Plus: Provides access to thousands of comics, graphic novels and Manga. It is only accessible through libraries and schools.

OverDrive/Libby: Provides access to thousands of books, graphic novels and audiobooks, including recent releases. You can download up to 10 ebooks or audiobooks at a time and must “return” them after a period of 7, 14, or 21 days. This essentially functions as a library system

with practically unlimited access.

Kanopy: Gives access to 30,000+ films and TV shows. You can watch 10 videos per month, using a ‘credit’ system. It features mainly indie and educational films.

Other Resources

In addition to DCPL's online resources, much is available at in-person libraries, particularly the central Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library. This includes “lab rooms,” which offer services like a podcasting station, a 3D printer and a sewing lab. Students can also reserve study rooms and meeting rooms for free. Finally, “The People's Archive” is accessible to the public by appointment, and houses D.C. historical records.

There are so many resources available to you — go use them! ●

“We Help Kids Fight Cancer, While Their Country Fights a War”: Devan Tatlow’s Internship at Tabletochki

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hospitals, and sharing their work with U.S. organizations as well as the U.S. government.

Throughout his time with Tabletochki, Tatlow has been instrumental in getting the organization a US 501(c)(3) designation. This label recognizes Tabletochki as an American charity — called Kids of Ukraine — and allows it to receive tax-exempt funding from American organizations, such as St. Jude's Children's Hospital, more easily.

Tatlow also spoke at the Congressional Childhood Cancer Caucus last fall, raised \$10,000 from the American Association for Cancer Research, and is currently working to find a partnership between Tabletochki and President Biden's Cancer Moonshot program.

Though Tatlow was not involved with the organization prior to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24 of last year, his responsibilities have been dramatically affected by the war. “What we like to say is that we help kids fight cancer, while their country fights a war,” he said.

The organization has evacuated more than 1,500 families with a childhood cancer patient and is doing its best to “bring kids from the remaining 500 families from the frontlines into safer territory,” such as Lviv and Kyiv.

Even with children in safer zones, providing medical assistance is still arduous. “You can't provide cancer care in a subway station,” Tatlow said. “That is what we've had to do — a lot of pediatric oncology care in bomb shelters and subway stations — and it's not sustain-

able.”

“The Russian military has been targeting Ukraine's healthcare infrastructure,” he explained, often in attacks that have little military significance.

These war crimes included the striking of the children's hospital in Mariupol by Russian missiles, which killed many patients and staff. Oksana Leontieva, a doctor who had a lengthy history with Tabletochki, was “killed by a Russian missile on her way to work,” according to Tatlow.

The targeting of Ukrainian children and healthcare workers is not the only difficulty the war has imposed. Complications arising from the invasion have hurt Tabletochki financially, who prior to the war “received almost all funding from Ukraine.”

“Post-full-scale invasion, people just don't have the ability to donate the way they used to, you know, they're fighting for their lives,” Tatlow said, “We've had to rely on the international community and really become much more of a global organization.”

Tabletochki has been able to, with the help of this international support, maintain a budget roughly equal to what they worked with before the full-scale invasion. Still, Tatlow explained that they have many more expenses because of the war.

For Tatlow, who is himself a childhood cancer survivor, pediatric cancer care has a special significance. “I had acute promyelocytic leukemia twice, and so I'm very passionate about childhood cancer and helping other kids facing the same thing.”

Though the job can be immensely rewarding, the goals of Tabletochki are difficult to achieve. Especially in the midst of the war, Tatlow often finds himself disheartened and emotionally exhausted. To his frustration, his internship also carries the same perils as many office jobs, such as hours of paperwork and reliance on the often slow-moving U.S. bureaucracy.

Despite these challenges, Tatlow is grateful for his opportunity to take part in this cause. “I knew I had to do something to help,” Tatlow said, recalling the first time he met the founder, Kudinenko, at a conference. And from speaking before Congress to rallying critical support, it is clear that his impact has been profound.

Tatlow also urges the Walls community to support childhood cancer patients in Ukraine. “If you have the ability to donate, you can go to tabletochki.org/en or kids-of-ukraine.org. You can also email me at devan@kids-of-ukraine.org if you have any more questions.” ●



Ukrainian deputy chief of mission Yaroslav Brisiuk, left, and Devan Tatlow

Credits: Devan Tatlow

An Alabama Representative Called D.C. Schools “Inmate Factories.” He Should Look at Schools in His Home State.

By Zoe Becker ('26)
Staff Writer

Rep. Gary Palmer of Alabama's 6th congressional district, in a Mar. 29 congressional hearing on “Overdue Oversight of the Capital City,” called D.C. schools “inmate factories.” The House Oversight and Accountability Committee, which Mr. Palmer serves on, has authority over all matters within the jurisdiction of the House of Representatives, including decisions pertaining to D.C. public schools like Walls.

Addressing D.C. Council chairman Phil Mendelson, Mr. Palmer said bluntly, “You’ve got crappy schools.” Such a comment was received as a punch to the gut by some in D.C. Mendelson called the comment “racist and offensive.” DCPS Chancellor Lewis Ferebee responded in a statement to FOX 5 D.C., “We have some of the most brilliant minds, committed educators, [and] dedicated staff,” he said.

Not only were Mr. Palmer's words insulting, but they also only tell part of the story. A comparison between the condition of the education systems in D.C. and Alabama shows that Mr. Palmer would be better off advocating for change in his own state.

Mr. Palmer, a Republican, could not be reached for comment on this story.

Here's what Mr. Palmer gets right: As he suggested when he called D.C. schools “dropout factories,” D.C. dropout rates are extraordinarily high. D.C.'s 75 percent graduation rate remains far lower than Alabama's 88 percent.

This is as far as the truth in Mr. Palmer's comment goes, though.

As the Washington Post reported in December 2022, despite being low, D.C.'s graduation rates are on an upward trajectory. D.C. graduation rates were as low as 60 percent in 2010. By 2020 they were hovering around 70 percent and rose to 73 percent in 2022.

Data from the Alabama State Department of Education revealed that the state's graduation rates are declining. Last year, the Alabama graduation rate slipped below 90 percent for the first time since 2017.

Furthermore, D.C. is hardly an “inmate factory” when put side by side with Mr. Palm-

er's home state. The Prison Policy Initiative reports that D.C. has an incarceration rate of 899 people per 100,000 residents. Alabama, on the other hand, has an incarceration rate of 938 people per 100,000 residents.

Mr. Palmer also fails to acknowledge extenuating circumstances behind graduation rates in D.C.

First, according to the 2020 Census, D.C. has a median income of \$52,000 per year. By comparison, Alabama's 6th district has a median income of around \$70,000 per year.

The cost of living in Birmingham is 8 percent below the national average overall. D.C., however, has a cost of living around 50 percentage points above the national average.

This situation exacerbates D.C. dropout rates because many students leave school to support their families. The National Education Association finds that at least 30 percent of students who drop out of high school do so because of economic and financial pressures.

If Mr. Palmer cared about making D.C. schools less “crappy,” then surely he would support the creation of an economic safety net that helps students to stay in school.

His voting record, however, paints a different picture.

Mr. Palmer voted against the Federal Reserve Racial and Economic Equity Act of 2022, which expanded minority access to financial resources. DCPS's minority enrollment sits at around 80 percent, and the act intended to eliminate disparities in “employment, income, wealth, and access to affordable credit” — factors that influence graduation rates.

Mr. Palmer also voted against the Community Services Block Grant Modernization Act of 2022, which expanded eligibility for various social services and activities up to 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). The Census Bureau reports that nearly 30 percent of D.C. residents fall within 200 percent of the FPL. For a household of one, this means an income of less than 30,000 per year or, for a family of four, an income of less than 60,000 per year. This act would increase anti-poverty efforts in D.C.

With these votes, Mr. Palmer has used his position in Congress to make life harder,



Rep. Gary Palmer (R-Ala.)'s 2018 official portrait
Credits: Congress.gov

not easier, for D.C. residents. As long as poverty remains stagnant and congressmen like Mr. Palmer refuse to act, students will continue to drop out of D.C. schools.

The sharp hypocrisy in Mr. Palmer's words highlights that negative views of D.C. public schools and students are based more on stereotypes than solid evidence. Policymakers should be taking a more thoughtful approach to addressing issues in the D.C. education system.

And while Congress may not currently be moving in the right direction, Walls students may one day prove people like Mr. Palmer wrong. Walls leads the rising tide in DCPS — with citywide graduation rates being up seven points in four years — and boasts over a 99 percent graduation rate with many students going on to enter top colleges and degree programs. So much for being an inmate factory. ●

Spring Fling Fashion Review

By Leah Levy ('25)
Staff Writer

School Without Walls held this year's Spring Fling on Apr. 28 at Eastern Market. Starting at 7 pm, Walls students and their guests entered the Springtime in Paris venue. Everyone was dressed to their best, and there were certainly many outfits worthy of the unofficial, student-run @fashionofwalls Instagram page.

“Springtime in Paris,” this year's theme, was well-executed by many. Classic and silk dresses were very popular and created an effortless and expensive feel reminiscent of Parisian fashion styles. Jewelry, such as pearl necklaces and earrings, further elevated these looks. Some brought small handbags and clutches, mirroring the small designer bags that are trendy, everyday accessories in Paris. While not everyone followed the theme, there were certainly many chic outfits that would blend in during the Springtime in Paris!



Credits: Leah Levy

Many dressed in accordance with other popular trends. For example, the mini-dress was the most popular dress style, similar to

many dresses worn at homecoming. Most of these were tight, but some wore flowy, summery dresses. Floral patterns and solid pastel colors also featured prominently, continuing a recent trend. As for the two-piece ensembles, most decided to pair dress pants with a collared shirt.

One trend that seems as if it is here to stay is sneakers. Even those dressed in their fanciest attire opted for a pair of platform sneakers or tennis shoes over heels or dress shoes. Elise Rundlet ('24) paired a flowy lavender dress with white sneakers. While dress shoes and heels may be more elegant, a pair of sneakers was certainly more popular, not to mention more comfortable.

As usual, there were some particularly unique and eye-catching outfits. Senora Akoma ('25) styled a gold sequin dress with strappy shoes. The few who wore floor-length dresses stood out in a sea of mini-dresses. A small number wore suits, some of them with fun patterns on the blazer or the tie. To be sure, Walls Penguins are very fashionable. ●



The Senior Project room May 31 / Credits: Gabriel Kraemer

Rethinking Senior Project

By Gabriel Kraemer ('23)
Editor-in-Chief

Senior Project is one of the defining elements of the Walls curriculum. In the class, which is presented as a rigorous capstone to our high school education, students gain valuable experience writing extended, college-level papers; conduct in-depth research on a topic for an entire year; and, ideally, have an opportunity to learn about and make a positive impact in an area they are interested in.

Yet this is not how seniors see Senior Project. Instead, it's "disorganized," "tedious," "dragged-out," "a waste of energy" or "mismanaged," according to the first five people I asked. Senior Project in its current form — characterized by a lack of structure and clarity, insufficient guidance from instructors and inconsistent standards — simply doesn't facilitate the student growth it's supposed to.

Senior Project might meet at regularly scheduled times, but any senior will tell you it doesn't feel like a real class. The vast majority of classes are used as work periods with little to no instruction — and, for plenty of students, little to no productivity.

There are a number of reasons for this. The first is that students have every incentive to procrastinate. For one thing, what many see as the most daunting part of Senior Project, the 15-page paper, coincides with another daunting writing project most seniors face: college essays. Moreover, lengthy periods of time go by during which students don't have to submit substantial work on the paper or the product. Out-of-class expert interviews, the mentor search process and other secondary assignments don't really require the weeks — even months — of class time we get for them. Later in the process, students have a full month to finalize plans for their products, and then another month before the mid-March product deadline comes on the radar. Without any accountability for progress, time is simply wasted.

Flexibility is key to Senior Project — every project is vastly different, and a demanding schedule of strictly defined assignments would hardly be conducive to students making the course their own. Still, more frequent, substantive benchmarks, especially in the fall, would keep students on track. Even simply requiring regular meetings with Senior Project teachers throughout the year to check in on progress, a requirement that already exists in March before the product is due, would put some much-needed pressure on students not to treat

the course as an afterthought.

More fundamentally, though, the fact that so many students are able to procrastinate until the last minute on multiple portions of their projects and still be successful in the course suggests that an entire school year is simply too much time for Senior Project in its current form. As it is, we have almost four months to write a 15-page paper — less than a page a week, not including time spent weighing potential topics in AP Lang at the end of junior year and intended research time over the summer. We have more than a month to produce a PowerPoint presentation in the spring. And even this very generous timeline extended only to April 14 this year, leaving about two months for, so far [as of May 22], nothing at all.

The April end date is supposed to leave time for students who fail their presentations to retake them. And Jenine Pokorak, the Senior Project coordinator, said that the timeline makes sense if we "understand that writing is a process," arguing that "whether or not we are successful in getting students to follow that [process is where] we have a lot of work still left to do." That's certainly a valid consideration. Nevertheless, we shouldn't use "process" as a justification for lack of progress. Whether adding to the Senior Project curriculum, condensing its timeframe, just conceding that some Senior Project classes serve as free periods or some other solution is the best option is not up to me, but there is no getting around the fact that the current timing is problematic.

Another reason many don't maximize the time they have is that throughout the Senior Project process, but especially during the paper stage, students suffer from a void of adequate resources for strong support. Because Senior Project teachers are selected seemingly at random — they are equally likely to be from the humanities or math or art departments — some are inevitably better equipped than others to teach what Ms. Pokorak called a study in "research and composition."

This is not at all meant as a criticism of individual teachers — speaking from personal experience, the teachers this year have put a ton of effort into their classes and provided great advice and guidance. Ms. Pokorak noted that administrators have argued all teachers "ha[ve] had to write their own research and do their own documentation ... and have been in a similar situation to the students and therefore should be able to help them."

Senior Project continued on page 9

Add an Entrance Essay to Walls Admissions

By Josie McCartney ('24) and David Sipos ('24)
Senior Editors

Walls has striven to improve our selective admissions process since 2019, seeking to make it accessible to all, while remaining true to the spirit of the school. We wisely abandoned a standardized entrance exam in 2021 and it hasn't returned since.

But we've moved from one broken system to another.

Now, Walls invites anyone to apply — yet it only takes the applicants with the top 500 GPAs to an interview at the school. The 501st applicant is rejected instantly. That interview then makes up the overwhelming majority — 86 percent — of each applicant's score, with their GPA making up the rest.

Using GPA as an initial limit on applicants is a poor system. We end up leaving many otherwise ideal students behind when we use an imprecise methodology and focus on middle school grades.

Middle school is not particularly challenging for most, and recent grade inflation makes a high middle school GPA easy to achieve. The difference between getting an interview and automatic rejection is a matter of decimal points, excluding many who may have simply had a bad month or semester in one class, yet remain strong students.

Furthermore, differences in middle schools' calculations of GPAs are not taken into account. For example, one of us finished middle school with a GPA above 4.0 because she was encouraged to take high school classes with greater weight. But the other finished middle school with a GPA below 4.0 simply because his school considered an A 96 percent and above, whereas DCPS and Walls mark it at 92.5 percent.

Setting GPA as the prerequisite puts prospective Walls students on a plainly uneven playing field.

The interview process is similarly uneven. Seeking fair judgment of 500 interviewees is a difficult task, and Walls has failed it. The questions are vague, as is the rubric. They leave too much open to interpretation and can be very subjective, depending on the attitude of the interviewers.

Further, an interview as the sole factor relies too much on personal charisma. Charisma in an interview, while it may impress the interviewer, does not paint a complete picture of the student. Rather, charisma makes analysis of other important traits more difficult. An interview benefits the smooth-talker with nothing to say, yet hurts the brilliant but nervous or uncomfortable student.

So, in the face of these issues, what do we propose? All applicants with at least a 3.5 GPA should be invited to write a two-hour in-person essay. Students would respond to a broad prompt designed to elicit responses that demonstrate their individuality and scholarship. These essays would be scored, and the writers of the top 500 essays would then be invited to an interview.

This solves the fatal flaw of the current system. In offering an essay to all applicants with a decent GPA, we move toward a more even playing field and a more accessible admissions process. No longer would it arbitrarily filter out good students based on an imprecise metric of GPA. Rather than rely on a questionable system that varies between schools and between teachers, an essay relies on a common denominator

Admissions continued on page 8



The Walls building in February / Credits: Meerabela Kempf

The Walls Admissions Process Is Broken. An Entrance Essay Would Help Fix It.

Admissions continued from page 7

students: the ability to write and form complex thought.

An essay also returns to the selective spirit of the school. Lately, we've scarcely been a selective school: we're the only selective D.C. public school that doesn't require a letter of rec-

ommendation, and one of only two that don't have an essay. Instituting an in-person essay ensures we stay competitive but still fair.

An essay is also true to the idea of Walls as a college preparatory school. The best colleges adopt a holistic approach towards admissions. Rather than looking at a singular aspect of a student, like an interview making up 86 percent

of the score, the admissions process is broader and more balanced. An essay combined with an interview and a GPA is a holistic approach that a college preparatory school should aspire to.

Requiring an essay has broader implications for the nature of School Without Walls. As a humanities-focused school, we ought to place the greatest emphasis on writing. If strong writing is not our foremost focus, we risk losing sight of our mission as the only selective humanities school in D.C., and the loss of this emphasis will be seen in the writing of incoming students.

An essay at the start of the Walls admissions process proves that we are serious about our commitment to writing. It restores that emphasis at step one. Prospective students will recognize this and enter Walls accordingly.

Our recommendation will preserve our mission for years to come. It will ensure that incoming Walls students hold both complex thought and a strong grasp of writing. We aren't necessarily looking for the best writers. While we expect proficiency when it comes to the mechanics of writing, most important is the ability to convey sophisticated and unique thought. An essay accomplishes this.

We recognize that this is not a complete recommendation. Should the Walls administration and DCPS heed our call for change, the implementation of the essay will not be identical to what we write here. There remains the issue of who will grade the hundreds of student essays and how these will be graded. For the former, we suggest small panels of Walls faculty, and for the latter we suggest a rubric that balances writing quality and originality of thought, but we look forward to engaging with the administration over this. ●

What advice do you have for underclassmen?

"Time management: make schedules and don't procrastinate." — Meerabela Kempf

"Don't take an AP just to take one. It's not worth it. ... Enjoy high school while it lasts, don't be miserable for nothing." — Malia Weedon

"School is important but it's not everything. You don't want to regret not spending enough time with the people around you." — Charlotte Harkrader

"Enjoy your time because it goes so fast. Also genuinely care about the topic of your senior project. Also don't apply to a ridiculous amount of colleges. More than 15 is too much." — Rynne Barstow
"Make good friends and help each other." — Aliyah Blake

"Don't push yourselves too hard. Burnout is something all Walls students are bound to go through at some point, so take care of yourselves." — Sarah Anderson

"Spend as much time as you can with your friends and make good memories, so you can reminisce about your time in high school with more positive reflections than negative ones." — Liya Johnson

"Take the time to get to know your teachers and for your teachers to get to know you. You will never know where that can lead you and what opportunities it can bring." — Malcolm Douglas

What are your favorite memories from your time at Walls?

"Calculus Olympics; the Rome trip; when Nathan [Bickart] and I shook up the Rock Creek Fruit Punch Reed [Polutta] had bought at the fire station vending machine and made it explode all over Commons A; winning the robotics competition this year." — Simon Kirschenbaum

"Having engaging discussions in class, both about real things like politics and some nonsense." — Malia Weedon

"Mr. Ghazi's class; Street Law; not doing anything as a second-semester senior; the 2022 prom after-party." — Rynne Barstow

"Black History Month Assemblies." — Aliyah Blake

"Going on the trip to Rome. It was a lot of fun, and just a really cool experience I got to share with my friends." — Sarah Anderson

"Exchanging looks with Mr. Zara (like Jim does with the camera in 'The Office') whenever something strange or funny occurs in class, because Mr. Zara is the person to look at when those things happen." — Liya Johnson

PERSPECTIVES • COMPILED

Seniors Reflect on the Walls

We asked graduating seniors a few questions about

2019 –

Students were asked to rate the

7. "Covid made it worse and there is so much work but overall I liked Walls." — Meerabela Kempf

8. "I don't think I could have gotten a better high school education anywhere else, but I could have done better socially." — Simon Kirschenbaum

8. "While my experience was great in the beginning, the school's quality decreased over time." — Nikola Nikolov

7. "I enjoyed the time I spent here, learned a lot and like most of my classmates/teachers, but I also lost a few years to Covid so that's bringing the score down. Also, this school is too competitive and stressed out all the time. I don't know anyone who hasn't had a meltdown or two." — Malia Weedon

See seniors' final thoughts

Simple Changes to Senior Project Could Make a Big Difference

Senior Project continued from page 7

But it should not, as a general rule, be the responsibility of a teacher whose area of expertise has nothing to do with writing research papers to give feedback on research papers.

“When I get a physics problem from a student, I’m able to go, ‘This is the mistake they made, this is why I think they made the mistake, so here’s a comment to get them to think about how to fix that,’” said Harrison Davis, the physics teacher who teaches my Senior Project class. “It takes me a lot of time to think through that when it comes to writing — how to give good feedback. I think that’s something that the people who teach writing in this building are much better equipped to do than I am.”

Alternative supports are few and far between, and — crucially — rely on students seeking them out. Ms. Pokorak is always available for students who need help, but she said many never reach out to her, especially post-COVID. People from the GW writing center were available to give feedback on papers in December, but only for a few select days and not during class time. Expanding opportunities like that, and mandating that students receive high-quality feedback — beyond the existing requirement that we get feedback from anyone at all (parents, for instance) — would go a long way toward improving the standard of Senior Project papers.

The grading processes for stages of Senior Project also raise multiple issues. For one thing, GW’s Nashman Center still [as of May 22] has yet to return a significant share of the Senior Proj-



College pennants in the Senior Project room
Credits: Frankie Ruppert

ect papers its affiliates were supposed to grade, five entire months after it received them. Why? Because, according to Ms. Pokorak, only during the university’s winter and summer breaks will professors spend time on Walls work.

Not having those grades for most of the school year is more than “a frustrating part of the process,” as Ms. Pokorak put it. In theory, paper grades should not just serve as valuable general feedback, but should also inform students’ work on their products and presentations.

“We are exploring ways to guarantee [the delay] will not happen again,” Ms. Pokorak said. The school should keep in mind that any advantages GW graders offer are somewhat diminished if people can’t see their scores until June.

The grades themselves (if and when students do get them) reflect inconsistent standards of quality and come with varying levels

of feedback. One teacher who has taught Senior Project in the past said some graders very clearly score papers more harshly than others. Moreover, some of this year’s seniors got feedback on content, and not writing; some got feedback on writing, and not content; some got only grammar edits; some, like me, got a single numerical grade and nothing else.

Ms. Pokorak said students can challenge their grades or request additional feedback, but while those are good options to have, they don’t address the fundamental problem: that those responsible for our grades, which have real consequences, are interpreting the Walls-provided rubric and instructions differently.

The presentations have just as few safeguards for ensuring equal standards. Teachers and outside experts who graded students’ presentations were given no scoring instructions beyond a one-page, ambiguous rubric, hardly providing an objective measure of performance.

Even small steps to make sure graders know how they are supposed to grade would make a big impact on consistency in scoring. Exemplars, more detailed rubrics, minimal oversight — anything to streamline what many students see as an unfair and haphazard process is welcome.

Senior Project, in spite of what some seniors may tell you, is not pointless. The experience students gain by writing the paper and the chance to do some good in the world that the product provides are not opportunities we should discount. We should simply consider whether we are approaching them the right way. ●

LED BY ZOE FISHER (‘26)

What’s High School Experience

about their Walls experiences. Here’s what they said.

2023

What’s your favorite Walls experience from 1-10.

8. “There were a lot of rough moments but I don’t ever regret going to Walls.”
— Charlotte Harkrader

6. “There were many ups and downs. I’ve made some amazing relationships here and also have had the worst days of my life. So overall it averages around 6.” — RYANNE BARSTOW

8. “Overall I had an amazing time, but I did struggle a bit at first.” — ALIYAH BLAKE

7. “I’d have to say that score is mostly because of my friends. They’ve definitely made high school not just bearable, but enjoyable, and I wouldn’t have had such a wonderful Walls experience without them.” — SARAH ANDERSON

9. “I absolutely loved my time at Walls. It’s a smaller school ... but I’ve been able to find my community here. From being able to engage in extracurricular opportunities at Walls, I’ve been able to find and participate in what I like to do.” — MALCOLM DOUGLAS

What are your least favorite memories from your time at Walls?

“Cornell Notes in Humanities I.”
— SIMON KIRSCHENBAUM

“The gas leaks (when they didn’t let us go home).” — NIKOLA NIKOLOV

“The few weeks when college deadlines and senior project deadlines overlapped ... everything sucked.” — MALIA WEEDON

“Online school [and] writing my senior project paper.” — RYANNE BARSTOW

“The entire year and a half of online schooling.” — SARAH ANDERSON

“Having those bad days where you just have to take a breather in the bathroom.”
— LIYA JOHNSON

“Pulling all-nighters for AP Research.”
— MALCOLM DOUGLAS

What will you miss most about high school?

“Friends.” — MEERABELA KEMPF

“The people and classes. There’s a lot of fun people and good discussion that happens. There’s enough nerds at this school you can start an argument about anything and someone will know enough to join. It’s really widened my worldview.” — MALIA WEEDON

“How unique it is. There’s truly no other school like it.” — ALIYAH BLAKE

“The routine of it all. It’s good to experience new things ... but it’s always comforting to be sure of what’s coming each day.”
— SARAH ANDERSON

What are you glad to say goodbye to?

“Many people in my grade; cliques; fake people; this small small building.”
— RYANNE BARSTOW

“AP exams.” — LIYA JOHNSON

“Humanities.” — ALIYAH BLAKE

“Standardized testing. And bathrooms that don’t flush.” — SARAH ANDERSON

“Metal detectors.” — MALCOLM DOUGLAS

“6.5 straight hours of school.”
— SIMON KIRSCHENBAUM

“The stress. I’m going to a tiny, less prestigious college that’s not as competitive ... I’m really looking forward to the freedom that comes with that.” — MALIA WEEDON

lights on Walls on page 12.

Flightless Bird Squad Caps Off Its Most Successful Season Yet at Virginia States

Frisbee continued from page 1

gretted the outcome of the final, saying “we could have easily beat [James Madison High School].” As the only tournament played fully by the girls team this season (rather than mixed), Noursi considered it a strong performance.

Next year may be a challenge for the team, as almost all of the team captains are seniors, as are many of its best players. “We’re gonna have to work really hard ... to fill the gaps left by all of our seniors leaving,” Tiller said.

“We’re not gonna have as complete of a team.” Chris Seyfried (‘24), another player, said that this year’s team “could be the best in the country” at their peak performance. With the departure of the seniors, that standard will become much harder to meet. Still, Tiller thinks they could stay competitive at the highest level “with a lot of hard work and dedication.”

“We’re losing... some of the best players in the city, and they can’t be replaced,” said Gabriel Webster, coach of the frisbee team and a teacher at Walls. But he said he hopes that the year spent playing alongside the seniors has “shown younger players how to be really great... they can take what was modeled by the current seniors” into next year. He said that the team will need to recruit more players next year if it wants to keep playing at the same level.

Noursi, who graduates this year, hopes the team will continue to thrive, and also em-



The Walls boys ultimate team / Credits: Rafi Fox

phasized the importance of recruiting new students and growing the team, particularly the girls’ team. However, she said it was important to remain a primarily mixed team. Frisbee is a rare sport in that, except for some spring tournaments, practices and most games are not separated by gender. Noursi said that was essential to a strong Walls team.

“I see great things for the future of our team,” she said. Noursi intends to continue playing ultimate at the University of Vermont next year, and said, “I am gonna miss this team incredibly and everything it’s given me and everyone who’s been a part of this journey with me. Best of luck future flightless birds!” ●

Rival or Resource?: The Walls Students Who Play on Jackson-Reed Sports Teams

By Eve Rebora (‘25)
Staff Writer

Jackson-Reed High School is a sports powerhouse in D.C. Walls sports teams often find themselves head-to-head with the Tigers in DCIAA championships, and these events are consistently very competitive. However, School Without Walls lacks the facilities for certain sports. On the other side of the city, rival Jackson-Reed does have some significant advantages, including a larger student population and its own sports facilities.

Under DCIAA rules, students are allowed to play sports at another school if the sport is not offered at their school. So when students want to play a sport not available at Walls, it’s an easy choice to join Jackson-Reed’s dominant teams.

Lila Rosenberg (‘24) has not had a problem playing for the Jackson-Reed field hockey team as a Walls student. Next season, she’ll be one of the captains. Rosenberg has found her time on the team very enjoyable, saying “everyone was pretty accepting,” despite the fact that she didn’t know many people when she first joined.

A positive team environment is a common draw of Jackson-Reed sports. Declan Chada (‘26) didn’t know anybody at Jackson-Reed before joining boys crew, but now, his “teammates are some of [his] best friends.”

However, Chada doesn’t display his love for the team at school. Chada and Rosenberg both said they would never wear Jackson-Reed merchandise at school. Chada receives enough jokes from “every single person” about playing for Jackson-Reed. Showing up to school in their merch would push it over the top.

Despite the opportunity, the challenges stretch beyond occasional jokes from class-



The Jackson-Reed girls’ crew team, for which Maia Riggs (‘25) plays / Credit: Maia Riggs

mates. First, practices are right after school and across the city at Jackson-Reed facilities. Walls players often rely on their parents to get them to practice — and usually arrive late regardless. In addition, student-athletes miss out on a big team bonding experience: spirit days. Every game day, the Jackson-Reed teams will dress up at school with a theme, like “rockstar,” “pink out,” or team jerseys. That’s tough for a player who doesn’t go to Jackson-Reed.

“There’s only 3 of us [from Walls],” Rosenberg said, “so none of us really want to go all out because no one [at Walls] knows what we’re doing.” A huge part of being on a team is bonding, but Walls athletes often do not get to experience it to the fullest extent.

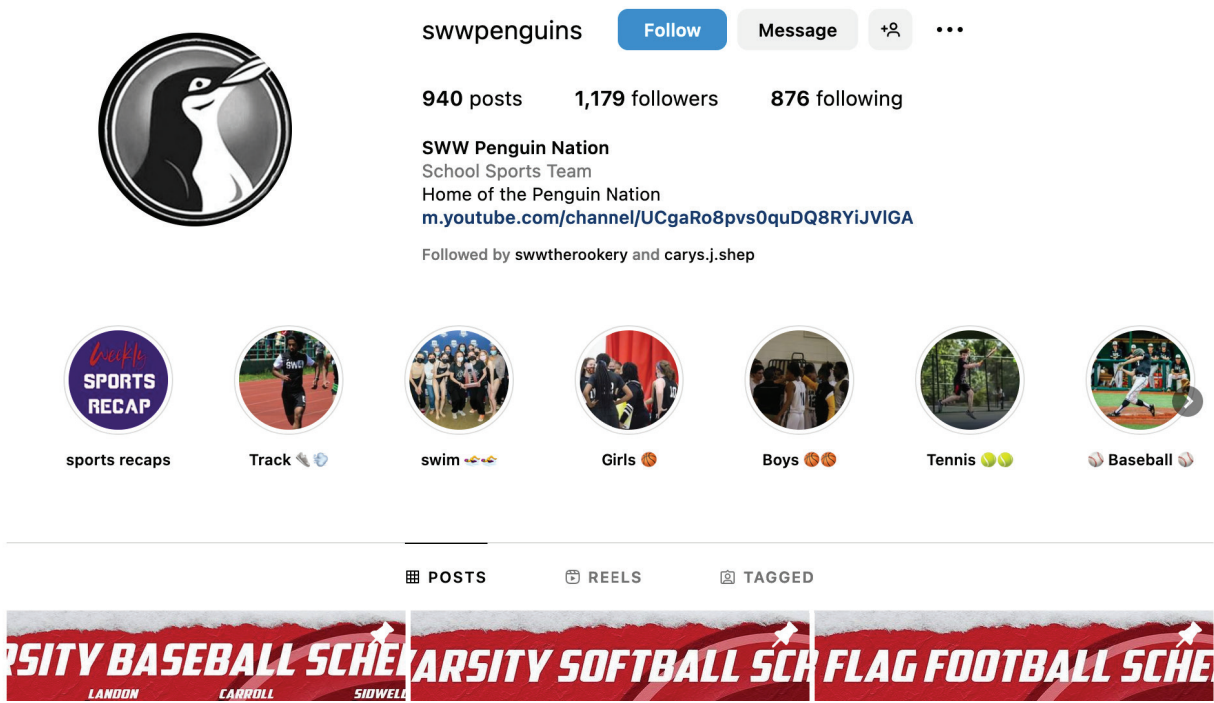
Like Rosenberg, Maia Riggs (‘25) has loved her time with Jackson-Reed sports. Rowing for the crew team, Riggs has spent the last few months training hard to earn a spot for the re-

gatta with the Scholastic Rowing Association of America (SRAA), an event in Tennessee where the top teams from all around the country will compete. Recently, however, regulations for multiple regattas have changed. Now, at SRAA and other competitions, boats are only allowed to have rowers from one school in them. This means Walls rowers won’t get to be a part of the Jackson-Reed crew team for these competitions.

“More and more races are disallowing us from competing which is a really hard experience ... We’re moving into championship season and I only have two races or so left because of a lot of [competitions] I was not able to race in,” Riggs said.

Despite the frustrating situation, Riggs still plans to row for Jackson-Reed next year.

Jackson-Reed continued on page 11



Sports Information Club runs the @swwpenguins Instagram account, which updates the Walls community on athletics / Credits: @swwpenguins via Instagram

CLUB SPOTLIGHT

The Sports Information Club Looks to Be More Inclusive

By Jack Meltzer ('24)
Staff Writer

The Sports Information Club (SIC) is a club at Walls that focuses on media surrounding school athletics. This includes statistics, broadcasting, commentating and social media updates. Recently, the club has focused on promoting female athletes to make their club more representative of all student-athletes at Walls.

The club was started in 2021 by Eliav Brooks-Rubin ('23). Brooks-Rubin is a multi-sport athlete who wanted to “promote [Walls] athletes and highlight their accomplishments.”

According to Rubin, the goal of the SIC

is to “bring Penguin Athletics to the student body.” Methods for communicating information include awards, live broadcasting and social media. The Instagram account @swwpenguins was originally started by athletic director Kip Smith but is now entirely run by members of the SIC. It boasts over 1000 followers and posts everything from weekly schedules to monthly recaps.

One of the biggest achievements of the club has been its growth in stat tracking. According to SIC member Erin Pollack, Mr. Smith had always tracked baseball statistics, but it wasn't until the SIC that every sport began to see their numbers reported.

“Stats are my favorite thing about SIC,”

said Price Burton ('23), who plays several sports at Walls.

Through the efforts of current club leaders, including Van Harlee ('24), Noah Pershing ('23), and Sean Aldridge ('25), the SIC has increased the popularity of Walls athletics and has nurtured a growing sports culture at Walls.

“Since the SIC started, there has been a lot more attention given to Walls sports,” Pollack said.

Despite these achievements, some have critiqued the club's gender ratio. Currently, only 8 out of 55 members of the club are female, which is roughly 14 percent. Burton, who examined the lack of media coverage on women's sports as part of her Senior Project, said, “if you go on Instagram there have been a lot more photos of male [than] female athletes.”

Brooks-Rubin said he is aware of this inequality. “I try to mix [men's and women's photos] up,” he said, “although I'm sure I could do a better job of it.” Burton also has noticed that all of the club leaders and the majority of commentators are male. Rubin explained that the club is based on a volunteer system and he is hoping to get more women consistently involved.

Outside of Walls SIC, women are under-represented in sports media. Roughly 40 percent of all professional athletes are women. However, both media personnel and media branding are largely skewed toward male athletics. Both Burton and Brooks-Rubin agree that it is important to put effort into recruiting more women into the SIC.

“I try to highlight everyone,” said Brooks-Rubin. “We have more highly successful female athletes than male athletes and it's really important to highlight them.”

Van Harlee ('24), who plans on leading the SIC next year, said he is committed to increasing female representation in the club.

While there is still room for improvement regarding gender representation at the SIC, the club has been incredibly successful in its mission to popularize Walls athletics and celebrate student-athletes. ●

The Student Building a Sustainable Business

Sarah Rice continued from page 4

she had learned that day and the relief she felt made it worth all the effort she had put into her product. After her business was launched at the Museum D.C., Rice shipped her first online order and graduated from the business academy; she also held her first solo pop-up event on the same day.

Rice advised any aspiring entrepreneurs at Walls to “remember that you are human and you're allowed to ask for help.” She stressed the value of support systems as the people within her circle have helped her when she felt like everything was “falling apart.” Additionally, she emphasized being passionate because “late nights will absolutely feel worthless if there is no passion behind what you are doing.”

Students can support Rice's business on Instagram at @shopbeewareapparel or her website www.beewar3.biz. ●

Is There Too Much Pressure on Students to Go to Prestigious Colleges?

College Pressure continued from page 3

an elite college could be incredibly advantageous.

For other students, however, the benefits are limited. For careers that don't involve as much social climbing, such as one in education or marketing, places of work tend to disregard where a job candidate acquired their undergraduate degree.

Also, although Ivy League graduates tend to be successful, students who seek out prestigious schools would likely find success regardless of the undergraduate institution they attended. The most prestigious schools generally come with a hefty price tag that can plunge students into piles of debt. While there can be benefits to attending prestigious colleges, they mostly depend on the student's individual situation.

Overall, many seniors agree that the pressure to attend prestigious schools, regardless of its source, is damaging to Walls students. Hurry, who recently got off the waitlist for an Ivy League school, said that reactions to her accep-

tance are yet another concern.

“I don't want to seem like I'm bragging about it, or I'm somewhat better because I know that's not the case,” she said. “And if I don't tell them, they're gonna be like ‘Why didn't you tell me?’”

Hurry also lamented the strong culture of comparison at Walls. “We're all in the same little bubble,” she said. “The people who have 50 extracurriculars, 50 APs, they're the ones who get noticed even though everybody else has the same amount of effort that they put into the work.”

Some seniors have concluded that where they go for undergraduate study is fairly unimportant. Some see the benefit of attending an undergraduate-only college. For example, Salunga believes that Ivy League schools are “overrated” because they focus on graduate students. Others are planning to attend prestigious institutions this fall, and are looking forward to taking full advantage of that opportunity.

Regardless, Salunga said that “no one is going to a bad school, and Walls has made us all very strong applicants.” ●

Penguins Compete For Crosstown Rivals

Jackson-Reed continued from page 10

She enjoys the community and finds crew a fun way to get in some exercise. As for Chada, he will continue rowing but is unsure if it will be at Jackson-Reed due to the increasing number of competition restrictions on outside athletes.

Although they may be our rival, Jackson-Reed provides opportunities for students to play sports they cannot at Walls. Walls's

athletic director, Kip Smith, supports this decision as he wants students to play the sports they love. Still, for the foreseeable future, Jackson-Reed will remain Walls' primary sports rival. Mr. Smith said, “We're gaining on them. This rivalry is gonna be interesting in the next few years.” ●

One Last Note

By Tess Buckley ('23) and
Gabriel Kraemer ('23), *Editors-in-Chief*

Somehow, the year is already nearly finished, and our brief reign over The Rookery is coming to an end! It's difficult to say goodbye to something that we've become so invested in. Nevertheless, we know the paper means just as much to next year's editors-in-chief, David Sipos ('24) and Sara Weinrod ('24), and our incoming managing editor, Josie McCartney ('24); we're confident they'll do *almost* as good a job as we did.

We can't possibly acknowledge all the people who made The Rookery great this year, but we'll try our best: Thank you to our puzzle editor, Emmett Brosowsky ('23), for building the many crosswords that — let's be honest — were the primary reason most students bothered to pick up a paper every month; to our digital editor, Layla Rethy ('25), for reinventing and painstakingly maintaining our much-improved website all year; to our entire editorial team for all its hard work behind the scenes getting each issue to print; and, of course, to all our writers, whose reporting is what The Rookery is all about.

We also want to thank the Walls Home and School Association for generously funding The Rookery, allowing us to print seven issues (including expanded ones in March and May). Finally, thank you to Mr. Ghazi, our faculty sponsor; we will always be grateful for his constant support and confidence in us this year.

To our readers — we greatly appreciate you taking the time to look through our pages each month. If you're interested in contributing to The Rookery — as a writer, photographer or anything else — please don't hesitate to join David, Sara and the rest of our team in making the paper better than ever next year.

To The Rookery and everyone involved in this incredible institution: Good luck and farewell! ●

Seniors' Final Thoughts on Walls

"This is a great school and I am incredibly glad I chose to come here." — *Simon Kirschenbaum*

"I enjoyed it; I think it was the right choice of school and I'm glad I had this experience. That said, I'm not coming back. Good luck next year!" — *Malia Weedon*

"I expected it to be very different. I thought I would experience more "without walls" things, like international trips and field trips in general." — *Ryanne Barstow*

"It was great. The perfect school for me, honestly." — *Aliyah Blake*

"Not as bad as I'd thought it'd be."
— *Liya Johnson*

CROSSWORD

Black, White and Read All Over?

By Emmett Brosowsky ('23), *Puzzle Editor*

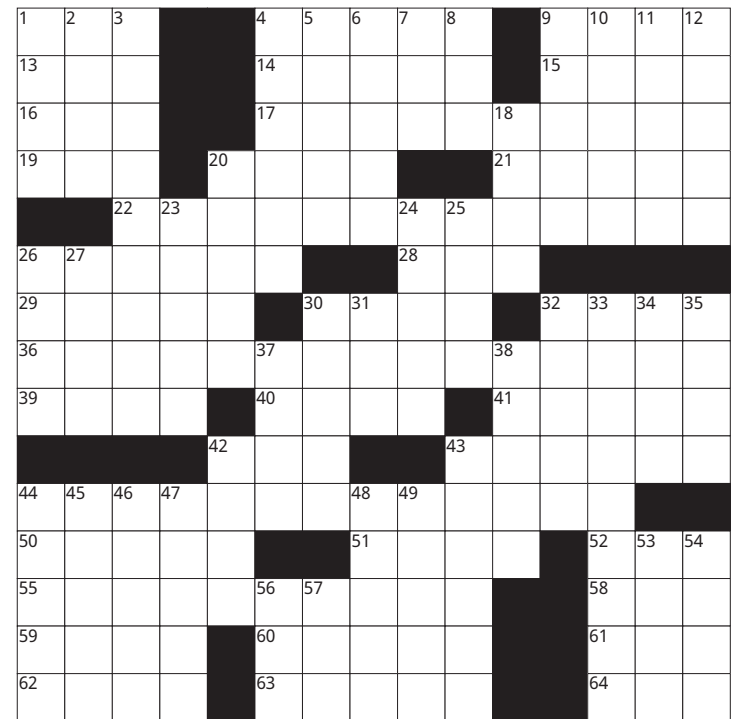
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- 44 With 55A, omnipresent Post posting?
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33 Attends prom in style, perhaps
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35 One who might self-describe as a Barb, maybe
37 Just
38 Common yogurt flavor
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44 Like butter, but not margarine
45 Bert's roommate (and potential partner) on Sesame Street
46 Wife of Jason, in myth
47 Milky gems
48 Overt
49 Mario's dino sidekick
53 Castro's country
54 The other departing editor-in-chief
56 Woman often featured in Eminem songs
57 Don't-tell letters

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The Rookery

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Find us on Mondays at 8:30 a.m. in room 127 to contribute to the paper!