

Walkout Over Response to Racism Incident Rocks Walls Community



Michael Whitaker ('23), center, gestures while speaking to walkout participants / Credits: Tess Buckley

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

Black Student Union (BSU) leaders led a student walkout on March 28 during second period protesting the Walls administration's response to a recent offensive and racially charged incident.

The week before the walkout, an offensive video was posted on an Instagram account affiliated with a Walls student group. In the video, a Black student was seen dancing with the song “Cotton-Eyed Joe,” which is associated with African American enslavement, overlaid. The student was not aware the song would be added and asked that the video be deleted; the account manager quickly did so.

Upon learning of the incident, administrators determined that the actions of the students responsible for the post constituted a tier three offense under Title V Chapter 25 of the D.C. Municipal Regulations and took disciplinary action accordingly. They did not immediately inform the school community that action had been taken.

The involved students' identities are protected and details about the consequences they

faced cannot be disclosed under the Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

Many students were left unsatisfied with administration's response to the incident. BSU leaders Michael Whitaker ('23), Grace Kao ('23), Aniyha Brown ('24) and Niyah Sapp ('24) felt that administration had not justly punished the offending students and organized a walkout to advocate for harsher consequences.

“The students who posted the video ... did not receive a punishment that we think suitable for their highly offensive actions,” Whitaker said in an interview before the walkout. “Had this been a Black student doing something discriminatory against another group, the consequences would've been brutal.”

The four BSU leaders publicized the walkout on Instagram the evening before, on March 27. But the message did not reach everyone — many students were unaware of the protest until people began to leave class.

The walkout was planned on social media

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DCPS Schools Are Supposed to Recycle. At Least Three — Including Walls — Don't.

By Naia Albert ('26)
Staff Writer

Walls has recycling bins in almost every classroom. Custodian Kenneth McCrory says the school is “all set” to recycle. Yet since the return of in-person instruction after the pandemic — now almost two years ago — none of Walls's waste has been recycled.

Before the COVID pandemic, School Without Walls was recycling successfully, with bi-weekly recycling pickups funded by DGS, McCrory said in an interview. However, when the pandemic began and students were sent home, the recycling program came to an abrupt halt.

According to McCrory, a general lack of knowledge about which bins are for trash, recycling and compost is preventing any recycling from taking place at School Without Walls

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Recycling in this bin, in Commons A, can't be recycled when students put nonrecyclable waste in it.

Credits: Gabriel Kraemer

Building Briefly Loses Running Water

*Pipe Malfunction Fixed Before
Start of School Day*

By David Sipos ('24)
Senior Editor

For 45 minutes on the morning of April 7, School Without Walls did not have running water beyond the first floor. Toilets would not flush, students could not wash their hands, and water fountains did not run.

According to a timeline Principal Sylvia Isaac sent to students and families after the incident, the issue was resolved by 8:55 a.m. — before the school day officially began but not before causing much frustration for students and staff alike.

As students arrived at school, the water outage persisted. Without flushing toilets or working sinks, students worried the school could become an unsanitary environment, which some suggested was against D.C. standards. Some students floated the idea of canceling school for the day.

However, the water supply was restored before such actions were necessary.

The issue arose from a damaged water pump that resulted in a leak in the basement, according to custodial foreman Kenneth McCrory. “The filter casing had rusted and water was spraying all over ... so they had to shut the water off in order to get everything straight,” Mr. McCrory said.

After shutting off the pump, the custodial team worked quickly to find a solution. They eventually rerouted water to a backup pump, restoring water flow to upper floors.

“We shut the water down in order to get containment ... then we turned the water back on,” Mr. McCrory explained. He assured that after 9:00 a.m. clean water was available in all parts of the building.

This was a quick fix to a larger problem, however. After water was restored, the custodial team ordered parts to repair the original pump. There are other components of the plumbing system that staff are trying to repair or replace.

Students are not unfamiliar with frustrating building failures. From a broken elevator to ongoing issues with air conditioning to the water crisis this month, the school has faced multiple issues.

“It's not the first time” the building has had issues with water, Mr. McCrory said.

He added that while the custodial staff does its best, many of these problems can't be predicted. “This building is more than 50 years old. There's a lot of parts that are beginning to break down,” Mr. McCrory said. “We can't determine when it's going to happen; all we know is that when it happens, we're on top of it.” ●



Credits:
David Sipos

How Has Walls Changed Since COVID? Teachers and Seniors Weigh In.

By Zoe Fisher ('26)
Staff Writer

Most Walls students' lives have changed a lot in the past three years. Some students were sixth graders, others were freshmen when everyone was sent home for what was supposed to be two weeks. But how has Walls changed as a school?

Across the board, teachers said Walls students have always been independent and motivated not always by school, but instead by interests unique to them. No matter the year, teenagers are teenagers and are at school to learn and have fun. However, the COVID-19 pandemic put a pause on this socialization.

"The one thing that a lot of teachers have noticed is very few kids pick up books anymore if they're done with a test or an assignment," social studies teacher Rachel Blessing said. "Five years ago people would pull out their books and read, and now they pull out their phones and scroll."

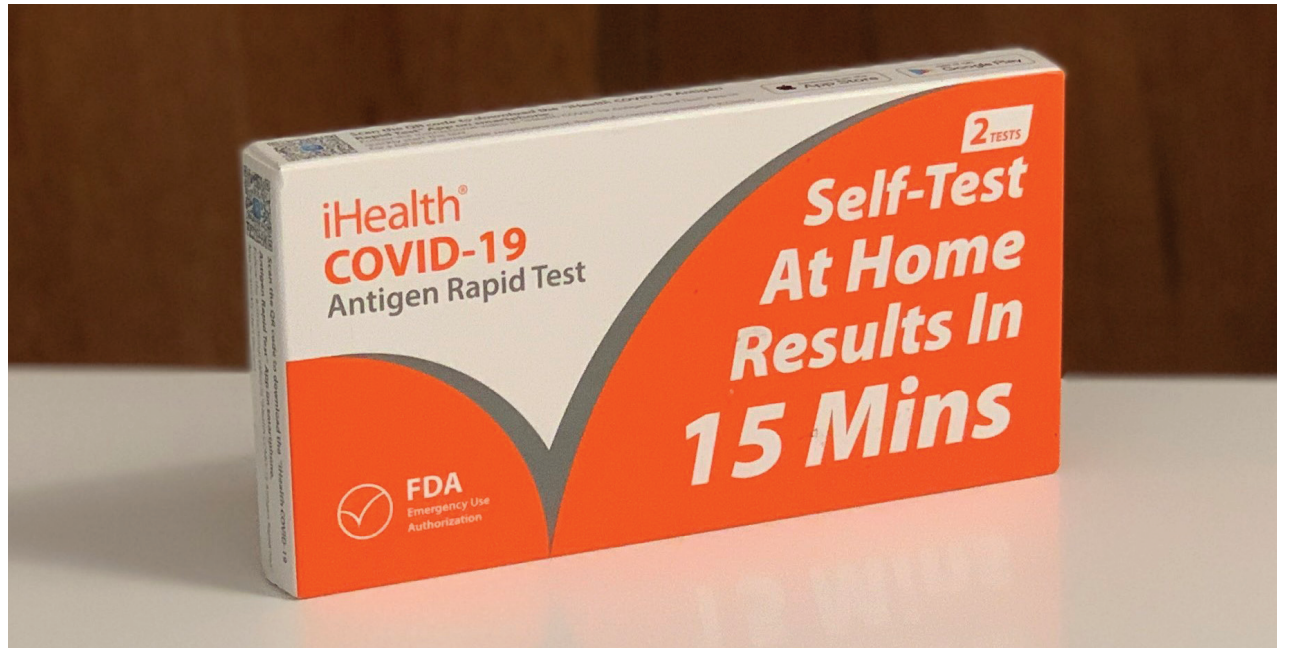
She explained how last year students would sit in silence and not talk to each other the way high schoolers would before the pandemic. Having spent a year and a half online, there was a learning curve to get back into normal socialization again.

PE teacher Cory Matthews explained that students have already begun to come back from their COVID-induced backslide in social skills. He said, "I think the students have done a great job showing resiliency. They're kids having fun. I think we're on the way back to almost pre-COVID social and emotional [health], folks are just happy to be back."

The pandemic impacted students' academic motivation as well. Chemistry teacher Cristal Piper shared, "One of the downsides of COVID is that everybody thinks they're brilliant now ... and that everybody gets A's or should get A's. That's not really the case." According to Ms. Piper, with DCPS' new grading policy, in an attempt to level the playing field, DCPS has given students a skewed impression of how hard they need to work in order to achieve their goals. (The Rookery reported on grade inflation due to pandemic-era DCPS policies last month.)

Ellie Sanders ('23) said, "COVID year taught me how much work I actually have to do in order to get a good grade ... coming back from COVID, things have been easier." Sanders may not think that she is "brilliant" now, but she has learned what it takes to be a good student and how not to overdo it.

The pandemic offered a rare opportunity for students to develop interests they would



Students are still required to use at-home antigen test kits before returning to school after long breaks.
Credits: Nick Nikolov

otherwise not have had the time to hone. Ms. Piper said, "People started gardening, people started knitting, all these other hobbies that you might not have participated in, all kinds of cool stuff, and that makes everybody a lot more interesting and cool."

The hunger for new interests and experiences has spilled over into in-person school as well. Ms. Blessing said, with school dances, "People are like, 'Oh we didn't have this [during COVID]. I want this experience.' So I think it's really positive that people have bought into many of the more typical high school things that they might not have before COVID."

Mr. Matthews had a similar impression. He said, "Now more so than ever, students are willing to try new things, to be a part of new things that they have not been a part of before." Whether it be trying out Model UN or a new sport, COVID has created excitement for students to do something that they could not do during the pandemic.

Before COVID, one of the defining aspects of Walls was that its students frequently left the school building for their education. Mr. Matthews said, "School Without Walls meant that the world was our classroom, the city was our classroom, we had anonymity to do things we wanted. And it was wide open." But because of the pandemic, GW and other outside entities wanted to keep groups that could spread the virus away, so the Walls students had to stay put. It's only now in the spring of their senior year that the Walls class of 2023 is finally getting back to the openness that they knew in their

freshman year, he said. An example of this is PE classes returning to the GW gym.

Mr. Matthews added, "This year we got to have multiple dances and a welcoming field day; previously we only had a field day at the end of the year. I actually think since COVID we've been able to do more social and emotional things than we were in the past."

A major tradition that has yet to fully return is the Thanksgiving feast. Around Thanksgiving, the school would gather to eat and talk to returning alumni about their experience at Walls and since graduation. Both Ms. Blessing and Mr. Matthews miss this tradition most as it's fun, unique, and makes the Walls community stronger.

Amaia Noursi ('23) said the Thanksgiving feast used to be "amazing. I came back and was like, 'Guys I had the best day today.'" It was a great way for her to be introduced to the Walls community and high school as a whole by bonding with new friends as they ate and seeing all the upperclassmen's talents during the assembly.

"It's a little sad and disappointing to see what the Thanksgiving feasts have come to be," she said.

Every student, teacher, faculty member, and administrator at Walls has been challenged at one point or another in the past couple of years. But this community is resilient and has come back stronger. As Ms. Blessing said, "People are just excited to be in high school again." So let's make the most of our time at Walls! ●

Walls Might Have Recycling Bins, But Little Is Actually Recycled

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because students put trash in recycling bins, which forces their contents to be thrown out.

"We have all the areas set up where we can have it sorted for the trash company to come pick it up," he said. "We just need to get a team together so students know what goes in what area."

While Brooke Hartman, the school conservation coordinator at DGS, said D.C. schools were "required to recycle the recyclable items described on the Mayor's List of Recyclables and Compostables," she noted an exception for "contaminated recycling."

"Unfortunately, recycling contamination, which is when non-recyclable materials are mixed with recyclable materials, is a significant challenge for the recycling industry," she said. "If recycling collections are contaminated by non-recyclable materials, those collections should be disposed of as trash."

U.S. schools produce 530,000 tons of

waste annually, according to the World Wildlife Fund, and around 80 percent of that waste is recyclable.

In 2013, the DCPS Recycles program was established as a partnership between DCPS and D.C.'s Department of General Services (DGS) to decrease waste from DCPS schools.

According to the DGS website for the program, "All DCPS schools are expected to sort and collect paper recyclables, mixed recyclables and non-recyclable trash."

While Walls at least has the resources to start recycling, students and staff from both Jackson-Reed and Eastern High Schools reported that neither of those two schools have any recycling bins whatsoever.

Hartman said that while all schools should be recycling, "managing consistent school recycling programs can be challenging as students and staff change each year."

She added that "schools can request supplies and support from DGS at any time, including supplies such as recycling bins and labels to

depict the acceptable recyclable materials and recycling training for school staff."

Information on the DGS website last updated in 2017 lists Walls, Jackson-Reed and Eastern among just 47 percent of DCPS schools that do recycle — even though none of the schools do today — suggesting a broad failure of the program to ensure recycling is consistently adopted throughout the system.

Hartman noted that her program was adapting to the challenge. "DGS has recently expanded our team to increase the recycling support we are able to provide to schools in the future."

To move forward with the recycling program at Walls, "we [have to] start putting the word out," McCrory said. "Everything is already in place: signs in the cafeteria telling you what goes where, which is trash and which is compost."

All Walls needs to build a more sustainable future is for students to simply put everything in the right bins. ●

Walls Team Competes in National Ethics Bowl at UNC

By Maia Riggs ('25)
Staff Writer

From March 31 to April 2, the School Without Walls ethics team competed in the National High School Ethics Bowl (NHSEB) at UNC Chapel Hill, placing 11th overall.

Ethics Club is a group of students that meets weekly to discuss moral approaches to difficult situations. This team argues the ethics of different situations, from consent in the world of photography to the danger of lethal force police robots.

The four students who went to the national competition went through much preparation to get them there. Josie McCartney ('24), Mary-Louisa Leopold ('23), David Sipos ('24) and Zoe Becker ('26) had to first win the regional D.C. ethics bowl, on Feb 11.

In previous years, a regional bowl victory would be enough to get you straight to the NHSEB. However, since more ethics teams have cropped up around the country, a new divisional entry round must now be cleared as well. The SWW team went head to head with the winner of the Virginia regional ethics bowl and came out successful earlier this year, ensuring their spot at the national competition.

With funding from the HSA and the Parr Center for Ethics, the team was able to fly down to North Carolina and stay in a hotel for only about \$100 each.

In a bracket style competition, the participating ethics teams competed against four other teams in the morning on Saturday, and the top eight teams progressed to the quarterfinals round of competition.

The team that attended the national competition undertook a great deal of preparation in order to be ready for the intense competition to come. There are 15 different ethical situations — or “cases” — discussed throughout the competition. The cases cover a wide range of subjects, on both large and small scales. The four students split the cases up evenly for individual research, and then arranged times for group discussion.

The SWW team just missed the top-eight cutoff and therefore did not make it to the quarterfinals. However, winning is not everything. McCartney, the co-president of the ethics team (who is also a senior editor at *The Rookery*), said, “In the month before I think we all got kinda caught up in the idea of winning the whole thing, but then I remember that my original goal was just to qualify for Nationals.”

This is the first time in several years that the SWW team has qualified for the NHSEB.

Walls didn't “need to win,” McCartney said. “I'm just grateful to be able to qualify and be able to go and have that opportunity to discuss with people.”

The students who attended Nationals also made new friends and connected with participants hailing from Iowa to Miami. “You're talking with people from all over the country who have different approaches to how they present their ideas and what their ideas even are,” McCartney said. “Everyone there is so nice, and also so smart and accomplished as well.”

Though only four participants went to Nationals, Ethics Club is much larger than that; around 10 to 15 students meet mornings every Wednesday to unleash their philosophical thinking. Some students return weekly, while others float in and out.

McCartney invited anyone to come, adding that at most meetings, you will be pleasantly greeted with a warm cup of jasmine tea.

Ethics Club meets in room 330 on Wednesdays at 8:15 a.m. ●

DCPS to Eliminate February Break, End School Year Earlier in 2024

By Gabriella Goldberg ('25)
Staff Writer

DCPS students can expect some major changes to the calendar next school year — including moving forward the last day of school by almost a week and eliminating February break.

Changes will also include one extra day off each during winter and spring breaks, delayed parent-teacher conferences to better align them with the advisory schedule and fewer single-day holidays. The last day of school for students this year is Thursday, June 22, 2023; next year, it will be Monday, June 17, 2024.

DCPS conducted a survey of families' preferences on school schedules earlier this year to inform its calendar decisions for SY 2023-24 and beyond. In a statement on its website earlier this year, the agency said families surveyed “overwhelmingly preferred a 3-day Thanksgiving break, a spring break aligned to DC Emancipation Day, and mid-term parent-teacher conferences. They also identified ending school before the last week of June as a top priority.”

Because DCPS schools must be open to students for a specified number of instructional days, offering additional days off during breaks and ending the school year earlier necessitated sacrificing a holiday: February break.

Many students have strong opinions about this change. February break offered a rest for students and staff in the middle of the winter. Going strong from January to spring



This year's DCPS calendar / Credits: Zoe Becker

break in April with mostly five-day weeks and no longer breaks, some argue, can be difficult.

February break offered a respite, as well as something to look forward to, Charlotte Mendelssohn ('25) explained. “I'm not happy,” she said. “I would rather have a break in February than extra time in summer.”

Others, though, see the change as a positive one. “We [will] graduate earlier, which is nice,” Max Cooperman ('24) said. ●

Why Do Some Students Transfer From Walls?

By Rachel Kolko ('24)
Senior Writer

One left abruptly in the middle of his sophomore year. Another left as a senior year to pursue an internship. Thanks to the pandemic, a third never had a class in the building and decided to keep it that way. None of them have regrets about their decisions.

Though Walls is a competitive high school to which students have to apply to attend, a small minority each year decide it's not for them. Here are some of their stories.

Senior Saranda Rolett had only one year left of high school at Walls before she graduated, but after the first two weeks of her senior year, she transferred to Jackson-Reed. Why would she leave Walls so late in the game? Because she was bored.

“Just sitting in a classroom every day I started to get really restless, especially towards the end of junior year. I felt like I had senioritis prematurely,” she said. So, at the end of junior year, Rolett started to research possible internships that would help cure her boredom.

Luckily for her, Rolett stumbled upon a research-heavy internship in a neurogenetics lab at the National Institute of Health (NIH). The only problem was that the internship would require her to miss a good number of her classes each week.

“I didn't realize that I would end up finding something that would be like a full-time work experience,” she said. Walls requires all of their students to take a full schedule of classes each year. While students are occasionally allowed a free period for jobs or internships, Rolett's program would have required multiple free periods, which Walls could not accommodate, even though she had completed most of her graduation requirements.

“I transferred to Jackson-Reed so that I would be able to only take the classes I had

left in order to graduate,” she said, since Jackson-Reed has a less restrictive scheduling policy.

Given the choice of staying at Walls and not accepting the internship or transferring and pursuing it, her decision felt clear. “I didn't want to leave, but in the end, once I realized that my only option was to go to Jackson-Reed if I wanted to do the internship, it was a pretty easy decision,” she said.

So, for this past year, Rolett has been taking her remaining required courses one day a week at Jackson-Reed, and then spends the rest of her week at the lab.

Although she is happy with her decision, Rolett does wish that Walls had allowed her to stay and pursue the internship. “I feel like if someone is showing that they're trying to pursue their interests, especially academically, in a way that mandates them to take time off of school, they should really accommodate that.”

While Rolett attended Walls for three years before leaving, junior Dylan Park decided he wanted out much earlier in his high school career — after only a few months of in-person classes. Although he had been thinking about it for a while, one experience pushed him over the edge.

A few months into his sophomore year, Park was in class one day and had extra time to do some homework. “I wanted to get a science textbook, and one of the teachers yelled at me for going to try and get a textbook,” he said. “It's like, man, this school is not it.”

Afterwards, Park started seriously considering the idea of transferring back to Washington Latin, the school he had gone to before coming to Walls. “I looked at the Latin return policy. I was like, ‘Wait a minute, like what if?’”

It turned out that Washington Latin allows high school students to return up to the

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CLUB SPOTLIGHT

Ornithology Club Makes a Comeback

By Jack Meltzer ('24)
Staff Writer

Ornithology was a popular club at Walls last year but has not yet been active in the 2022-23 school year. Now two juniors, Rami Noursi and Ishan Hsu, are restarting the club with the interest of spreading their passion for learning about birds and nature photography.

Helena Bello, a class of 2022 Walls graduate, started the Ornithology Club in her junior year. "I got the idea during online school and I thought it would be an interesting club to start at Walls," Bello said. Under her leadership, the club mostly consisted of hiking and birdwatching in Rock Creek Park and other local green spaces.

This mission will stay consistent under Hsu and Noursi. As Hsu puts it, the goal is to "have monthly birding trips where we will help people find good spots, identify birds and give tips on birding in general."

Many people find comfort and a connection to nature through bird-watching and ornithology. Bello says it was a good activity during lockdown and "something to do outdoors and to keep my mind off of the pandemic." Hsu also described it as an engaging way to become more familiar with D.C. wildlife and more observant of nature all around us.

The new iteration of the club, however, will have an added focus on photography. Noursi has extensive experience with photography, and the two club leaders even run a birding Instagram account together. While Bello's club was mostly focused on recognizing calls and ornithology knowledge, Hsu and Noursi plan on teaching club members about nature photography and editing skills as well.

The Ornithology Club is a rewarding community for all Walls students who are interested in the outdoors, Bello said. "Even if you aren't interested in birds or birding, [participating in the club] is still a great opportunity to get



Credits: Nick Nikolov

outdoors and enjoy nature."

Hsu and Noursi plan on making the club social without too much of a time commitment, and Bello emphasized that those without experience can get involved easily.

Hsu said that bird-watching is a great activity for people living in urban areas without easy access to nature. Rock Creek Park is home to 150 different species of birds, including many rare species. During springtime many new species migrate into the DMV, making it a popular destination for bird watchers.

"I have always felt like I underappreciated nature, and birding has really made me appreciate all the birds of D.C.," Hsu said.

Hsu and Noursi plan to have the club running after AP season ends and encourage all Walls students to give ornithology a try. ●

Dawn Leijon and Her Industrial Kitchen

By Sara Weinrod ('24)
News Editor

When Walls sports teams and clubs need money, they often turn to Dawn Leijon and her family's industrial kitchen over at Killdeer Valley Farm.

Their kitchen is equipped to prepare enormous quantities of baked goods — hundreds of pies and tens of thousands of cookies in a single day — which teams and clubs can then sell to friends and families at a hefty profit.

Ms. Leijon and her family have hosted Walls teams and clubs at their home in Woodbine, Md., since the first fundraiser they sponsored in 2018. Over the last five years, their bake sales have raised almost \$90,000 for six different student groups, including Model UN and the baseball, volleyball, field hockey, ultimate frisbee and tennis teams.

Ms. Leijon is a Walls parent, which led to her involvement with these various teams. But her remarkable kitchen has a much longer history.

"When I was in college, my dad gave me a large mixer," Ms. Leijon said. "It was a 20-quart mixer. He found it in the junk shop, he fixed it up, and I didn't know what to do with that. Then we decided to get together and make Christmas cookies."

"So for 30 years, we got together a group of people, and it got a little bigger and it got a little bigger. And for the last ten years, we were making 30,000 cookies in a day, like a one-day factory."

Later on, when her sons played on the baseball team, Walls athletic director Kip Smith informed her that the baseball team could benefit from some more funding.

"[Mr. Smith] said that if [the baseball team] really wanted to get better, we should do fall baseball, we should do winter conditioning,

Dawn Leijon continued on page 5

How to Beat the AP World Exam

By Bailey McFadden ('25)
Staff Writer

On May 11 at 8:00 a.m., all sophomores at Walls will gather for a grueling experience: the AP World History exam.

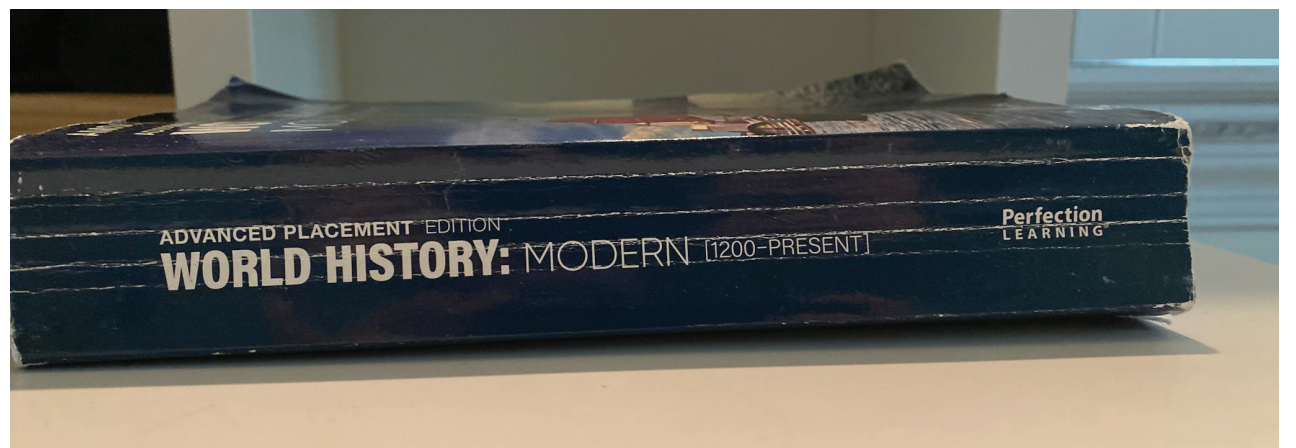
One of two exams that all SWW students take, AP World has a pass rate of just 60.2 percent, according to College Board data. It's most sophomores' first AP exam, making it stressful and overwhelming for some students. But older students can give advice on how to conquer the exam.

Carlton Ackerman, who teaches AP World History, said that "the number one means to do well on the AP exam is study groups." He added that "kids who study together do well together."

Eli Rethy ('23) agreed that having a study group was helpful while he was studying for the exam. "If I had a question ... I could ask somebody else, and maybe they'd know it better than I did."

Jaelyn Jackson ('24) also worked in a study group. "I worked with a partner," she said, "and we would meet up at the library a couple days a week. ... I would recommend that."

Understanding the structure of the exam is also important. Abigail McGraw-Traster ('24) said "You have to make sure you understand how the essay questions are formatted," Abigail McGraw-Traster ('24) said. "What are the elements that you need for an LEQ [long essay



An AMSCO AP World History textbook / Credits: SF Jones

question], how much evidence do you need to use for a DBQ [document-based question]? Those are really important to know." She added that if you understand the structure, you can "prioritize what things you want to try to get the points for."

An overwhelming number of students recommend "Heimler's History," a YouTube channel run by Steve Heimler, a history teacher and a reader — a grader for the College Board — for the AP World exam.

He created review videos that align with the AMSCO AP World textbook units and cover all the information that students need to know for the exam.

Lily Turcotte-Keen ('24) recommended using "Heimler for major events and doing research and honing in on things you don't know." "For each [unit] you should have specific examples of all the different themes, like continuity and change," she added.

While there are many paid studying resources, many students said free materials more than covered their needs. "I don't think I used any paid resources," Nicola Klarfeld ('24) said.

In addition to Heimler's History and the AMSCO textbook, she recommended using the Oversimplified YouTube channel, which produces simple, animated explanations of major conflicts and events. "They help you learn the faces of people," she said, calling it helpful for analyzing political cartoons.

Upperclassmen encouraged sophomores to get enough sleep the day before the exam, eat a hearty breakfast, and make sure not to cram.

Mr. Ackerman emphasized the importance of stress management before the exam. "Realize that there are more important things in the world," he said. "But at the same time, give it everything you've got." ●

They Left, But Why? Three Former Walls Students Explain Their Transfers

Transfers continued from page 3

start of the second semester of sophomore year. “I was literally looking at it a week before the deadline, so that’s why I really had to make a decision, quick,” he said.

Looking back, Park said that had he not had that negative experience with a teacher, he might not have looked at Latin’s return policy in time to transfer.

In the end, he realized how much he missed his old school. “It feels easy to get involved [at Washington Latin],” he said. “I didn’t feel that involved in the Walls community.”

Before leaving, Park also consulted some Walls upperclassmen to help him make sure he was making the right decision. “They were just waiting for college,” he explained, saying he wanted a different environment for his high school experience.

More than a year later, Park is confident he made the right decision. “Latin is just a really special school,” said Park. The only thing he wishes would have been different is having to leave in the middle of the school year. “If I could have stayed through 10th, I would have,” he said. “No one wants to switch schools in the middle of the year and leave all your friends behind.”

At one point, Park thought he might not have had to go back by himself. Both Ganesh Bhojwani (‘24) and Stephen Showalter (‘24), who had attended Washington Latin in middle school with Park, considered transferring with him. Similarly to Park, both missed the smaller, more tightly knit Latin community and were worried that Walls wouldn’t be able to provide



Jackson-Reed High School, where Saranda Rolett and Nicholas See transferred / Credits: Rachel Kolko

that, especially after they spent their freshman year online.

“Latin seemed way more fun because we were familiar with it — that’s because of the pandemic,” Bhojwani said. “But I think sticking it out kind of for me at least proved that Walls could be that place.”

Showalter decided to stay for one particular thing: the baseball team. “One of the leading factors for me coming to Walls was I knew they had a baseball team, and a competitive one at that,” he said.

But as he spent more time at Walls, Showalter found other aspects of the school worth staying for. “I get the benefits of a better, more rigorous education, and what I wanted when

I was initially choosing to come to Walls,” he said. “So I would say as of now there’s no regrets.”

Although Park, Bhojwani and Showalter felt Walls was too big, Nicholas See had the opposite problem with Walls.

“I wasn’t a fan of how small [Walls] was, how everybody knows everybody,” he said.

See, now a junior at Jackson-Reed, spent his freshman year at Walls. He had attended Alice Deal Middle School, the largest public middle school in D.C.

See doesn’t regret coming to Walls in the first place. “I think it was good for me to see if I would have liked a smaller environment more,” he said. “It clearly didn’t work for me.” ●

One Family’s Kitchen Is a Fundraising Powerhouse

Dawn Leijon continued from page 4

we should have extra coaching. All that costs money,” recalled Ms. Leijon, who serves as the HSA treasurer. That was when she decided to sponsor a fundraiser.

In the first year of fundraising, 2018, the baseball team raised around \$6,600. Every year since, the team has held a cookie platter fundraiser. Even during the COVID pandemic, the team had “people working outside all day in the cold,” Ms. Leijon said.

After such a resounding success, the operation would only continue to expand. This school year, they made 24,000 cookies and \$14,460.

In 2019, Model UN began baking pies, a less demanding process. Many other teams would soon follow.

There are a variety of reasons behind Ms. Leijon’s success. The baked goods are tasty, for one thing. “Ms. Leijon’s pies are honestly the best pies I’ve ever tried because of the homemade crust,” Hugo Rosen (‘24) said. “You can definitely taste the effort she puts into making them, as well as all the great fillings student volunteers make throughout the day.”

“You want it to be good,” Ms. Leijon said. “So when we come to the Walls community next time and say we’re making pies again, they’re going to be like, ‘This is not a sacrifice. This is good stuff. And it gets delivered to my door.’”

Another strategic move is centering the



Students making pies in the Leijon kitchen
Credits: Sara Weinrod

fundraisers around a holiday, such as Thanksgiving or Easter. “The philosophy about doing something around the holiday is that you’re tapping into spending people were already going to do,” she said.

Finally, a particularly effective move has been providing an option for those who do not want to buy a pie for themselves to purchase a pie to be donated to a food bank. “It’s like a double win,” Ms. Leijon said.

Each organization has different plans for what to do with the money they raise. For

Model UN, it might be traveling to their next conference. For the tennis team, the goal is to “play non-conference matches against private schools,” said team captain Ben Yarkin (‘24), which requires funding for transportation.

Ms. Leijon does a huge amount of work behind the scenes to keep the whole process running. Raising this much money is an intensive endeavor. Ms. Leijon begins even before students arrive, making the necessary trips to Costco and setting up workstations a few days before.

For reference, dozens of pies of various flavors might call for 4.5 bushels of apples, 29 pounds of sugar, 25 pounds of flour, 1.5 cups of cinnamon, half a cup of nutmeg, 10 lbs of butter, 1 cup of vanilla extract, and a whopping 84 eggs. Ms. Leijon might test out a pie recipe four different times over the course of a week to perfect it for mass production.

Ms. Leijon said her mother, Sharon Leijon, also deserves much of the credit. “She is the one that keeps opening her house to this craziness.”

Sharon Leijon — whom all affectionately call Grammy — said her family’s support for Walls comes from a desire to do its part. “We just feel well-equipped [to help],” she said. “How many people have that many big bowls? Doesn’t exist.”

Despite the fact that none of Ms. Leijon’s children have been on the baseball team since 2020, she continues to conduct the yearly fundraisers.

“When Dawn started this, she saw a need,” Sharon Leijon said. “And she questioned why [teams] didn’t have equipment and funds. And she said, ‘Well, why isn’t anybody fundraising? This is ridiculous.’ We’re a family that [when] we see a need or a problem, and if we have the ability to, we try and solve it.” ●

Frisbee Team Finds Success at First-Ever Travel Tournament

By Jessie Moss ('26)
Staff Writer

Walls competed in the Spring Fling ultimate frisbee tournament located in Freehold, N.J., on April 22-23.

The tournament, played at Turkey Swamp Park, was the first travel tournament the Walls ultimate team has attended since its founding in 2011. Moreover, it was the first tournament in which the Walls girls-matching team (for those who identify as girls or non-binary) competed.

"Spring Fling is an annual event that has been occurring since 2016 here in New Jersey and is our largest spring event with 24 teams in attendance from six different states," tournament director Ryan Belline said.

To compete in the tournament, the Walls team had to qualify for the competition. Out of only eight girls teams and sixteen open (players of any gender, but mostly boys) teams accepted, Belline said that he was "very excited to offer School Without Walls a spot in their first application since they received some positive reviews from local teams in the area."

Belline added that "about 30 teams in total applied for this event."

While the team did not expect to win, it was a great learning experience for the players, who had the opportunity of playing teams from New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York, Maryland, Virginia and D.C. (including Jackson-Reed High School).

"You only get better by seeing the people



The Walls boys' team lines up before a point at the New Jersey tournament / Credits: Gabriel Webster

above you, and that will give you something to strive for," Walls math teacher and ultimate frisbee coach Gabriel Webster said.

Their performance at the competition was also a resounding success: The Walls open team placed third, and the girls-matching team came in fifth, milestones for the team at its first-ever regional tournament.

Preparation for the competition was strenuous, involving three to four practices per week. Students competing worked diligently to "learn more advanced plays and strengthen ourselves," according to one of the team's captains, Amaia Noursi ('23).

This hard work culminated in a weekend

of competitive ultimate. Walls began in a pool of four teams, out of which the best teams moved forward to a bracketed competition. "If you're the best in your pool, you get the best position when they seed the bracket based on that," Mr. Webster said. From there, the competition followed a single elimination structure, in which "if you win, you move on."

"On Saturday, during pool play, games take 80 minutes unless a team gets to 11 points before then," Noursi said. "Then, on Sunday, bracket games, take 90 minutes unless a team gets to 13 points first."

Frisbee continued on page 7

Walls E-Sports Group Receives Athletic Team Funding After DCSAA Qualification

By Camille Galvani ('26)
Staff Writer

The Walls e-sports team has begun to receive athletic team funding from the Walls HSA after qualifying as an athletic team by the District of Columbia State Athletic Association (DCSAA), which oversees postseason high school sporting contests.

Kip Smith, the Walls registrar and athletic director, said that while DCSAA does not directly fund e-sports, its recognition of the Walls group as an athletic team qualifies it for HSA support, given that it "compete[s] in interscholastic activities."

The team had received funding only as a club from the Walls HSA since its founding in October 2018. Mr. Smith added that team leaders at Walls "do not determine the funding allotment" from DCSAA.

Sponsor and self-described "e-sports elder" Jason Bulluck said that while both a club and a team exist as two separate groups with a lot of overlap, only the team is receiving athletic funding. "We don't administer the funding," he said. "The E-Sports Club has done their own fundraising. The e-sports team specifically is sponsored by the DCSAA. I'm not involved in that decision-making."

He specified that he could request necessities for competition, "but other than that, things just kind of come to you."

The team has competed against other schools, including Eastern Senior High School on Wednesdays virtually and at an invitation where a few members played and started to form the [Nintendo Super Smash Bros.] team, according to Kargatis. "If it's a video game, if



Kingston Stephen ('24), part of the Super Smash Bros. Ultimate team / Credits: Nick Nikolov

it's played on a computer, a PC, a console, maybe even a phone, ... we will play the game," Kargatis said. Mr. Bulluck said "the first year that there were e-sports in D.C., Walls won the DCSAA League of Legends tournament" against schools across the country.

Co-leader Thor Kargatis ('23) said he, Mr. Bulluck and co-leader Nick Nikolov ('23) "are figuring out what direction we want to take the club" with its new resources.

The team hopes to use funding primarily for equipment and operation fees. "Our first priority now is to make sure we have equipment because we've had some issues with equipment theft," Kargatis said. "We also need additional console[s]."

Mr. Bulluck added that e-sports has "a pretty low cost, aside from the infrastructure that's already there, like for example the internet and computers. The only thing we do pay for are subscription fees to leagues [which] contract and hire out referees to schools and provide a platform to play a bunch of games

competitively."

The club has installed a new Ethernet system (technology for connecting devices in a local area network) to avoid school Wi-Fi connection issues.

Kargatis said new equipment means they may be able to start hosting school-wide competitions. These tournaments would include Smash, Mario Kart, and Tetris, "because they're something everyone can easily get into," Kargatis said. "Depending on how successful these are, we can expand it to other games."

Although "a lot of people discount the medium of video games as something that rots your brain or makes you antisocial or makes you worse at everything else," Kargatis said, he doesn't think that's true. "I'd argue video games have a lot of potential. ... They don't take up physical space, the barrier[s] to entry [and cost are] low, and you can actually become more social through video games. ... If you're a nerd, and need some extracurriculars for college, this is worth your time."

"Schools have Division I e-sports programs," Mr. Bulluck said. "You can get recruited out of high school to get a full athletic ride to college playing e-sports. Pro e-sports players make hundreds of thousands, or millions of dollars. It's like other emerging sports, and established economically."

While some may call e-sports less legitimate sports, Mr. Bulluck said it was "silly to turn it into a zero-sum proposition, like this should get money or this shouldn't get money, because this is more or less a sport. When the kids wanna do a thing, give them the money to do the thing, to follow their hearts and their minds; you support it."

The E-Sports Club meets in room 27 on Fridays and Wednesdays at 3:30 p.m. ●

ATHLETE SPOTLIGHT

Athletic Recruit Mary Louisa Leopold on Swimming, the Mountain School, College

By Zoe Becker ('26)
Staff Writer

This October, Walls senior Mary Louisa “ML” Leopold committed to attending Pomona College in Claremont, Calif., where she’ll be competing on the Division III swim team. Getting there, however, was a long road for her.

Leopold has been swimming on a club team since she was seven. She made the decision not to become a Division I athlete two years ago, when she committed to a semester program in which students live and learn in a small community for the beginning of junior year at the Mountain School in Vermont.

Going to the Mountain School meant taking a semester off of swimming, which was incompatible with swimming at the highest level in college.

“I was comfortable making that decision so early because while I love swimming I don’t want to make swimming the key thing about my college experience,” she said.

Ultimately, Leopold felt she made the right decision. “It was such an incredibly meaningful experience and I got a greater appreciation for community and living in a community ... being understood without having to try,” she said.

Though she couldn’t swim, while at the Mountain School Leopold still thought about athletic life after high school. She made a list of schools she wanted to swim at but still wasn’t entirely committed to the idea of swimming in college.

“I wanted to open as many doors as possible and not close any. I was emailing schools even if I didn’t think I’d swim there and focusing on not narrowing myself into ‘I’m going to swim in college no matter what,’” she said.

In her correspondence with coaches, primarily of D-III schools, Leopold highlighted her academic achievements and grades rather than her swimming times.

All the while, Leopold was transitioning back from being at the Mountain School to life in D.C., which she described as “a rude awakening.”

On top of having to reacquaint herself with the facets of everyday life in the city, “going from seeing no strangers for months to seeing



Credits: Ashley Mattoon

a hundred strangers on the Metro every day,” Leopold said returning to swimming felt “really demoralizing.”

At the end of her summer swimming season, Leopold attended a meet where she “tanked, [adding] multiple seconds in all of my events.”

Leopold recounted that at the moment she thought this might mean she would never swim in college. However, “I already found schools I really liked and wanted to swim at,” she said.

After that meet, Leopold emailed her times to coaches she was in touch with, as was expected of student athletes in the recruiting process.

“I said that I know progress is not linear, and I have so much more I can do,” she said. “I’m proud of that maturity I demonstrated.”

Coaches responded well to that maturity, Leopold said. “A lot of them agreed that you don’t drop [time at every meet]. I was really lucky that the coaches didn’t write me off. It is my interpretation that they would have if these had been D-I schools.”

Since then, Leopold has come back from the time she added and dropped 3 seconds in the 200-meter butterfly race, her primary event.

By the end of that summer, Leopold had narrowed her initial list of twenty some schools down to four schools that she still liked and where she was still in touch with coaches — Bates, Bowdoin, Pomona, and Middlebury. She sent all four of them her test scores and grades as part of an “early read,” admissions officers’ review of student athletes’ transcripts prior to the beginning of the formal application process.

The early reads came back positively from all four schools. “At a D-III school that means you have a high likelihood of getting in if you apply [early decision] with coach support,” Leopold said.

After early reads, Leopold was invited on recruiting trips to Bowdoin, Middlebury and Pomona and attended an online recruitment event for Bates.

“It was the kind of thing where when I was at every school I was like ‘this is the best one!’,” Leopold recounted.

“I would have been very lucky to wind up at any of them,” Leopold said. However, given the fact that she was planning on applying ED and an acceptance would be binding, she had to narrow down the list to one school.

Leopold ultimately decided on Pomona because of the “smaller classes and connections with teachers. I also love swimming outside and will have that opportunity at a school in California,” she said.

Leopold plans on studying environmental science, a field in which Pomona stands out. She said that “the consortium is what ultimately gave it a huge edge.” The Pomona consortium refers to the Claremont Colleges — Scripps College, Claremont McKenna College, Harvey Mudd College, and Pitzer College — with which Pomona has a very close relationship.

For Leopold, this meant swimming on the same team as students from Pitzer. “[The consortium] makes it feel like more is happening at the school and there’s more different kinds of people ... which creates a more interesting team dynamic,” she said.

On Oct. 11, while she was sitting in the basement at Walls, Leopold received a likely letter from Pomona, which meant that she would almost definitely be admitted to the school. Then, on Dec. 16, while she was attending Walls’s winter concert, Leopold received her official acceptance into Pomona.

“I still swim a lot and am trying to get ready for next year,” Leopold said, “but I’m able to put less pressure on myself at meets.”

Congratulations to ML, and best of luck at Pomona next year! ●

Walls Frisbee Teams Place Third, Fifth at New Jersey Tournament

Frisbee continued from page 6

But practice was not the only aspect of preparation for the tournament. For Mr. Webster and team parents, an additional step of logistical preparation was required: Prior to competing, they were tasked with “organizing the hotel rooms and paying for hotel rooms in advance — which is really expensive — getting carpools figured out, a lot of parent communication, and figuring out team meals,” Mr. Webster said.

These expenses accumulated, and in order to compete, the team was required to fundraise, and did so using methods such as a bake sale, which was held outside of Walls on April 14. While the HSA offered some funds — such as participation fees for players who struggled to pay their own — Mr. Webster explained that the team was attempting to cover the expenses themselves.

Another struggle arose in finding enough students to compete in the tournament. “We have a lot more boys than girls,” Mr. Webster

explained, “so it wasn’t hard to find a full squad for the boys’ team. For our girls-matching players, we have some new ones that I really wanted to encourage to come out, even if they’re a little less comfortable on the field.”

The team found a creative solution: They brought five other girls-matching players from schools including Montgomery Blair High School, Bethesda Chevy Chase High School, and Walt Whitman High School in Maryland in addition to the 13 girls-matching and 17 boys-matching players from Walls. “They’re very good,” Mr. Webster said of the girls from other schools who joined Walls for the weekend, “but they don’t have a single gender match opportunity, and now they’re able to compete regionally.”

Because of the small number of girls-matching competitors in ultimate frisbee nationally, there are fewer opportunities for girls-matching players in the sport.

This gender differential in ultimate has limited the tournaments girls-matching players at Walls have historically been able to compete

in, making the New Jersey tournament — a first for the Walls girls-matching players — particularly special.

“I’m excited to participate in this tournament and finally get some recognition for the Walls girls’ team,” Walls girls-matching player Jillian Sanders ('26) said before the tournament.

For the girls matching-players and Walls as a whole, the Spring Fling served as an important landmark. Still, Mr. Webster urged for the players to enjoy themselves in addition to their hard work, and the team also relaxed with a trip to the beach and dined together at the hotel both nights. “This is about learning and getting better, but really also about bonding and finding chemistry as a team,” he said.

“Of course, we hope to win! But we also hope to have a great time as a team and play our best yet,” Noursi said, prior to the competition. “Our chemistry has only been building up more and more the whole year and we want to show that.” ●

Walkout Prompts Debate About Racism at School

Walkout continued from page 1

in large part because it was not school-sanctioned. Although the leaders were all BSU members, not all BSU students participated in the walkout. The BSU faculty sponsor, William Jones, was also uninvolved in the protest.

During the walkout, students walked through the halls, chanting, "Hey hey, ho ho, we will not be made a joke." Around 75 walkout participants gathered in front of the administration office while Whitaker, Kao, Brown and Sapp gave speeches.

Kao discussed the context of "Cotton-Eyed Joe" to "educate the community about our history," she said.

In his speech, Whitaker said, "I feel disgusted ... with the administration's blatant disregard," calling for stricter punishment.

Jobari Shelton ('23), a BSU member, echoed this sentiment, saying, "I was shocked by the incident, but I was honestly even more shocked by ... the punishment."

However, the Walls administration said it has no choice in specific disciplinary decisions. Instead, Chapter 25 outlines what punishments must be given for various tiers of offenses. Administrators also cannot disclose those punishments to other students.

Ms. Grant also said that the protest leaders were meant to meet with administration before the protest, but they walked out. Had they come, she said, they would have heard that "punishments aren't based on the color of your skin ... but the tier of the offense" as dictated by Chapter 25.

The speeches also protested offenses beyond the "Cotton-Eyed Joe" incident, calling out unequal treatment of Black students at Walls.

"Black students have been repeatedly singled out by our own admin who are supposed to make us feel comfortable with comments about the way we act, dress, and look," Kao said. "We feel less loved."

Samiyah Muse ('25), a member of BSU, was protesting "Black students in this school being given unfair punishments compared to the other students," she said. "The administration picks us out, calling us fast because of the clothes we wear ... 'out of love,' but really it feels like they are just picking on us."

BSU member Simone Franks ('23) concurred: "I have had comments made about my attire, my clothing, my attitude ... students who have the same clothes I have on, who act the same way I do, and those comments aren't being made."

However, school administrators denied any unequal treatment, at least on their part. In fact, they said the dress code is extremely lenient and almost never enforced.

Assistant Principal LaToya Grant said that "we are not an unfair administration" and that "we have no dress code." Regarding students' claims of unequal treatment and dress code violations, she said, "That's a lie. Your clothes are not our business."

On March 29, the day following the walkout, Principal Sylvia Isaac said in an email to the school community that the "administration team is now addressing the situation with student leaders and the faculty to uphold our responsibility to educate students about issues around racism, microaggressions, gender-gender identity, and discrimination."

Later that week, administrators including Ms. Isaac and Assistant Principal Jennifer Tully spoke to students in classes about the incident and actions that had been taken in response. ●

CROSSWORD

Lines and Angles

By Emmett Brosowsky ('23)
Puzzle Editor

ACROSS

1 Sports venues
7 Qty.

10 Prune, before drying

14 Academic prodigy

15 Language closely related to Thai

16 Strauss of denim fame

17 Heels over head?

19 "Son of ___!"

20 Pointy romance?

22 Cleopatra's killer

25 Narrow inlet

26 Yucatán natives

27 Do-si-do doer?

32 Oklahoma city home to the MiLB Drillers

33 College official

34 "I'll keep it real," for short

37 Impulsive

38 Act of kindness

40 Greek Earth goddess

41 Poem of praise

42 Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, informally

43 In one's birthday suit

44 Round thing in The Lion King?

47 Facing the pitcher

50 TV monitoring agcy.

51 Part of CBS: Abbr.

52 Vampire, e.g. ... or a hint to 20A, 27A, and 44A

57 Mexican money

58 Shake things up

62 "How ___ Your Mother"

63 Help

64 Violent weather phenomenon, briefly

65 Give up

66 Subdivisions of cms.

67 Domelike Buddhist shrines

DOWN

1 Tempe sch.

2 Spit bars

3 Teslas and others: Abbr.

4 Hammer's target

5 Tiny country between France and Spain

6 Nicks of Fleetwood Mack

7 Tons

8 Bryn ___ College

9 "The Bluest Eye" author Morrison

10 Two-dimensional

11 Long limbed, as a model

12 Throat dangler

13 Ore sources

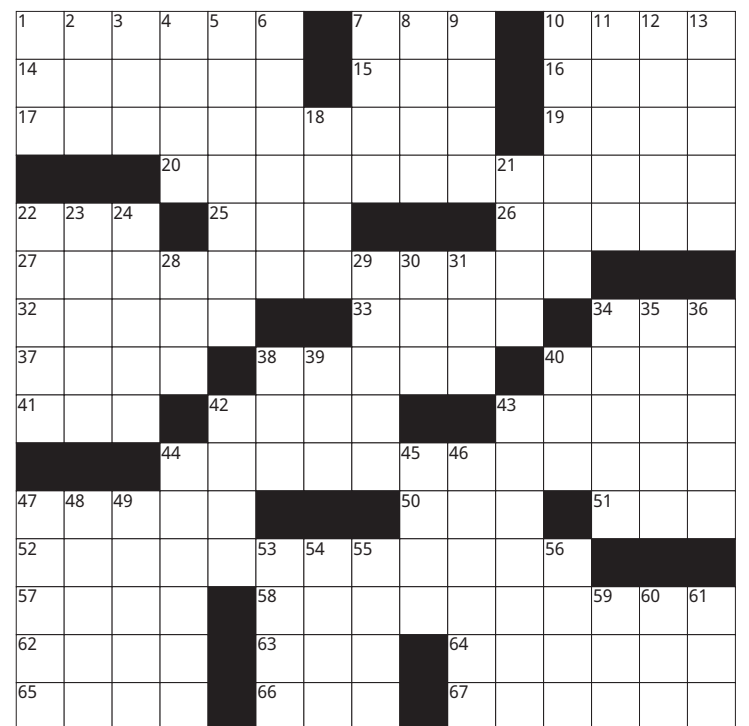
18 Out of juice

21 "You can say THAT again!"

22 Houston ballplayer

23 Team

24 Heart rate



28 ___ Wednesday

29 Tylenol rival

30 Prefix with classical

31 Automobile

34 Rolled tortilla chips with a "Fuego" variety

35 Strong

36 Greek god of the underworld

38 Tree with needles

39 "The Bachelor" network

40 Guy's counterpart

42 Take the bait

43 Div. of the Commanders and Cowboys

44 "In Cold Blood" author Truman

45 Failing grades

46 Groups of eight

47 Savory jelly

48 Motif

49 Opposite of cringe, slangily

53 Rip off

54 Three-part sister rock band

55 Birth control options: Abbr.

56 Queue after Q

59 Do better than

60 Nest egg letters

61 Apt. units

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