

## Sunrise Hub Lobbies State Board of Education to Pass Green New Deal For Schools



SWW Sunrise Hub members gather for a group photo at the SBOE / Credits: Sofia Smith

By Brady Woodhouse ('25)  
Staff Writer

Following a determined campaign by the School Without Walls Sunrise Hub, the DC State Board of Education (SBOE) passed the Green New Deal for Schools on Jan. 17. DCPS became the second school district in the nation to pass the legislation, which positions schools to take action against the climate crisis.

The SWW Sunrise Hub, led by students Anna Mayer ('25) and Zoe Fisher ('25), drove the effort to advocate for the bill (Editors' note: both Mayer and Fisher write for *The Rookery*). The two club leaders had long been passionate about addressing the climate crisis. Mayer described the climate crisis as “incredibly daunting with the state of the country.” However, she did not feel like her efforts to make change were effective. Fisher said, “I was reposting climate change posts on Instagram and I became a vegetarian, but nothing was going to change.”

However, upon learning about the Sunrise Movement, they realized they weren't alone in their desire to make change.

The Sunrise Movement is a nonprofit or-

ganization that connects youth activists nationwide through hubs on a school and community level. This network aims to push local and national political policies that combat climate change. Fisher and Mayer saw this movement and knew that starting a hub at Walls would help make a tangible difference within the DC community.

The SWW Sunrise Hub started in the spring of 2022, but it “really took off” in the fall, Fisher said. After finding a sponsor, Rachel Blessing, the hub began its work and education. The hub taught students about climate crisis legislation, shared lesson plans for climate education, and encouraged members to network with other schools in order to collectively demand change.

Since November, the hub has focused on passing the Green New Deal for Schools through the SBOE, working with schools in every ward.

In the past few months, the Sunrise Hub at Walls has attended and testified at three public SBOE meetings and developed relationships

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## Delayed FAFSA Rollout Leads to Frustration

By Josie McCartney ('24)  
Managing Editor

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) has always caused many a headache for students and their families applying to college. This year, major overhauls caused new uncertainty and frustration. Between a delayed rollout and platform malfunctions, applicants were left confused in an already tumultuous and complicated college application process.

The FAFSA determines a student's eligibility for financial aid in the form of grants, loans, scholarships, and work-study programs. It is used by many universities, scholarship organizations, and the federal government to award aid.

This year, the Department of Education released the form in January rather than its typical release in October. In past years, the earlier



FAFSA is a program of the U.S. Department of Education / Credits: David Sipos

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## Walls No Longer Looks Like DC. Why?

By David Sipos ('24)  
Editor-in-Chief

In 1990, the student body of School Without Walls, still a small experimental school of only 222 students, was 19 percent white, 71 percent Black, 5 percent Asian, and 5 percent Hispanic. That was not too far from the population breakdown of 1990s DC: 27 percent white and 65 percent Black.

Today, the reality is very different. In the 2022-23 school year, Walls was 48 percent white and 26 percent Black, an overrepresentation and underrepresentation, respectively, of the plurality-Black city.

In the 2012-13 school year, Walls looked almost exactly like DC. The percentages of students of every racial demographic were within a few points of their makeup of DC.

Over the past decade, that dynamic has disappeared. Cristal Piper, who has taught at Walls for 23 years, said the shift in demographics was a symptom of “the transition from it being a majority-minority city to a majority-white city.” DC is not yet majority-white, but the non-white percentage has fallen significantly in the past decade. The demographic shift at Walls has outpaced changes in DC. In 2015, the share of white students surpassed Black students for the first time, though DC remained plurality Black.

A number of factors have contributed to the changes at Walls. “It all depends on the middle schools,” Ms. Piper said, explaining that “some of the feeder schools we used to have before 2012 are no longer elite middle schools and so... the diversity of students has also declined.”

She cited the example of the majority-Black Jefferson Middle School, saying “12 years ago Jefferson was a big competitor. It's not that way anymore. We might have had 50 percent of the kids come from Deal, 50 percent come from Jefferson. Now we might have one kid out of 150... from Jefferson.”

Assistant Principal LaToya Grant added that the number of applications has also swelled in the past decade, contributing to the changes. “When I first started 10 years ago, there were maybe 900 applications. Last year, there were 2000.” These newer applicants have not necessarily resembled past applicants to Walls. “Walls is probably more of a viable option for families that previously it may not have been an option for, whether that is students who went to private schools, or families who decided to move out of DC when it came time for their students to go to high school,” Ms. Grant said. Those students tend to be more affluent and from whiter wards of DC. As the applicant base shifted, so too did the composition of the school.

Over- and underrepresentation can be measured by subtracting a demographic group's share of Walls students from its share of the city population. In the 2022-23 school year, white students were 11 points overrepresented relative to the city. Black students were 17 points underrepresented. Asian and Hispanic students were both within two points of the city makeup.

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## FAFSA Uncertainty Further Complicates College Application Process

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students could submit the FAFSA, the earlier colleges could offer them financial aid packages, allowing applicants more time to weigh their options of schools and aid.

The delayed release was due to changes ordered by the 2020 FAFSA Simplification Act. The purpose of the law was to encourage low-income students to apply for aid by reducing the number of questions from 108 to 36, reduce the requirements for students who are homeless or in foster care, and lessen the amount of money working students are expected to contribute to education costs when making calculations.

This year, the FAFSA was released through a “soft-launch,” which only allowed applicants to access the form at certain random times. As a result, families have waited days, even weeks, to complete the form. The Department of Education cited maintenance as reason for the periods where the form was inaccessible.

The Department of Education published little information about what exactly the delayed rollout would look like. Kathryn Moore, guidance counselor for the class of 2024, said that she learned about many of the challenges with the form at the same time families did. “This fall I attended a webinar about the FAFSA changes. Even the people running the webinar were like ‘we don’t know this yet’ and ‘we don’t know this yet,’” she recalled.

She noted that even the December release date was murky, as “people assumed December 1, but then it became December 31.”

Vivien Dobrescu (‘24) said that, while the interface and shortened process was easy to use, she faced many difficulties throughout the process of completing it. “I was filling it out and it would shut down on me and lock me out,” she explained. She added that the website saved her answers sometimes, but that she did have to restart the application at one point.

Many students apply to a school’s early decision program, meaning they would be contractually bound to go there if accepted. One such anonymous student pursuing need-based financial aid described the anxiety they felt around the delayed rollout and soft-launch. “[Their college] was like, ‘do [the FAFSA] when it comes out, do it as soon as possible.’ So I was like, ‘oh, I’ll do it in the next two weeks.’ But then two weeks becomes three, and then four, and maybe even five.”

While the college they will attend next year has given them significant financial aid, they were left with \$10,000 each year their family must pay. Because the FAFSA had not been released when they were admitted mid-December, they had to submit documents directly to the school and complete the College Scholarship Service (CSS) Profile, which is used for applying for non-federal aid. They worried about getting the FAFSA submitted early enough as

many scholarships are first-come, first-serve.

Ms. Moore noted that students often do not apply early because they are concerned about locking themselves into a four-year, six-figure contract. She clarified that the delayed FAFSA release did not deter students from applying early decision since other assessments of financial need were available, including the CSS Profile.

These tools allow students to understand their financial situation at different institutions and help them come to conclusions about whether to apply early decision.

Universities have their own roadblocks with the messy release, pushing back FAFSA deadlines to accommodate students. Ms. Moore outlined the dilemma schools face: “colleges want to push back their deadline as far as they can to let students submit the FAFSA, but then not push them back too far to when they can’t turn around these financial aid award letters.”

She added that “most students don’t want to commit May 1 to a college if they don’t have all their financial aid award letters.”

In late January, NPR reported that the Department of Education now has to address a failure to update financial aid tables for inflation. This affects calculations of how much families must contribute. The error will likely result in more delays for families and universities as the May 1 commitment deadline nears. ●

## Walls Students Immerse Themselves in Rome’s History and Culture

By Georgia Murphy (‘26)  
Staff Writer

In November 2023, a group of seniors went on the annual School Without Walls trip to Rome for a ten-day exploration of the Eternal City’s history and culture.

Walls Latin teacher Jane Brinley and history teacher Carlton Ackerman have been taking students to Rome since 2013. The trip was a classic example of Walls’ field trip culture. At first, the teachers used a travel agency to plan their trip. Mr. Ackerman was dissatisfied with this system because it stifled the flexibility and creativity he hoped to have with the trip.

“Our principal at the time, Mr. Trogisch, heard my complaint [and said], ‘stop whining about it and do something,’” he said. In response, Mr. Ackerman decided to design his own itinerary modeled after a Christian Archeology course he took in college. Ever since, the trip has been a staple for students taking Latin.

Jan McGlennon, a Humanities teacher at Walls, joined Ms. Brinley and Mr. Ackerman as a teacher chaperone. This was her fourth year attending the Rome trip and she loves it.

“I taught Latin for thirty years and I speak Italian, so ... those are the two reasons that I [went] on the trip.” All three teacher chaperones found that their knowledge in language and history enhanced their ability to carry out the trip.

The group flew eight hours overnight from Dulles International Airport in Virginia to Leonardo da Vinci-Fiumicino Airport in Italy. When the group arrived in Fiumicino around 8:30 AM, they immediately began a full day of touring, getting to their hotel in the late afternoon.

Throughout the trip, the group visited the Pantheon, Catacombs of San Sebastiano, St. Peter’s Basilica, and the city of Pompeii, among other places. Prior to the trip, each student was assigned a historical site to research and create an informative presentation on. Once the group arrived at the location in Rome, the student would present their speech to their fellow peers. Mr. Ackerman said the speeches “[give]



Students visit the Colosseum in Rome / Credits: Jeffrey Clarke

the students a sense of ownership over a piece of the trip.”

Jeffrey Clarke (‘24) gave his speech on Largo di Torre Argentina. “It was a slip handed out randomly but I was excited to get that one,” he said. “[It is] most notably...the place where Caesar was killed” during the Ides of March, The site contains the remains of four ancient Roman temples and the Curia of Pompey, where the Senate of Rome held its sessions.

Olivia Waymer (‘24) gave her speech on the Spanish Steps in Piazza di Spagna. Though named for the nearby Spanish embassy, the steps were commissioned by the French in an effort to modernize the city. Waymer said the steps show “the syncretism of France and Spain and Italy.”

These speeches offered passage into the myriad of activities the group did together. A favorite among many were the Catacombs of San Sebastiano. Waymer (‘24) said, “I love history, so it really was so cool.” The Catacombs that run in and around Rome are ancient burial sites of pagan, Jewish and Christian citizens. These particular catacombs were named for

the Christian martyr San Sebastiano who was killed for conversion.

Van Harlee (‘24) and Clarke both favored St. Peter’s Basilica. “The art was incredible and we did a scavenger hunt...which helped me fully experience it,” Harlee said. St. Peter the Apostle was one of Jesus’ disciples and was the first pope of the Roman Catholic Church. His tomb is located at the center of the Basilica and is surrounded by exceptional architecture and art. For Clarke, this was particularly moving. “I’ve never seen anything that comes close to the size and majesty of the building. Looking up at the central dome instilled an incredible feeling that I’ve never felt before.”

The group also went on excursions unrelated to academics, providing fun experiences for all kinds, including biking on the Appian Way. The Appian Way was a crucial economic and military asset for Ancient Rome. It connected Roman troops to their military pursuits and linked merchants to lucrative business exp-

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# Student Activists Work to Pass Climate Bill

*Sunrise Hub continued from page 1*

with Board members, who were more than willing to aid young activists. The hub's relationships with specific members was essential to presenting the Green New Deal for Schools to the full SBOE. Testifying at each meeting, Mayer and Fisher promised to double the attendance of students in support at the next meeting. The representatives joked that they had over-delivered at the meeting that saw the Green New Deal for Schools approved. Seventy-eight students, teachers, and community members from across DC were in attendance, and proud to stand for the ideals of the legislation.

"Watching students become so passionate and our school and city mobilizing to make real change was the most exciting part," Fisher said. The hub collaborated with the SWW Green Team as well as other Green Teams and Sunrise hubs at schools like Jackson-Reed and Basis DC. Connecting students in schools from across the city was essential to demonstrating strong support for the legislation to the Board.

Students in the hub improved their networking and legislative writing skills through this process, and saw how those resources could positively impact their communities. "We got to work with legislation writing which I'd never done before," Mayer said.

To raise awareness for their bill, the pair reached out to many news outlets. Eventually, the local news network Fox 5 featured them in an interview, a segment of which is posted on the hub's Instagram account, @sunrisemvmtsw. With reporters from prestigious news outlets including the *Washington Post* and *Washington Informer* in attendance at the SBOE meeting that decided the outcome of the resolution, the hub has garnered mass support for their cause. In the interview with Fox 5, the leaders gave a brief explanation of the demands of the Green New Deal for Schools.

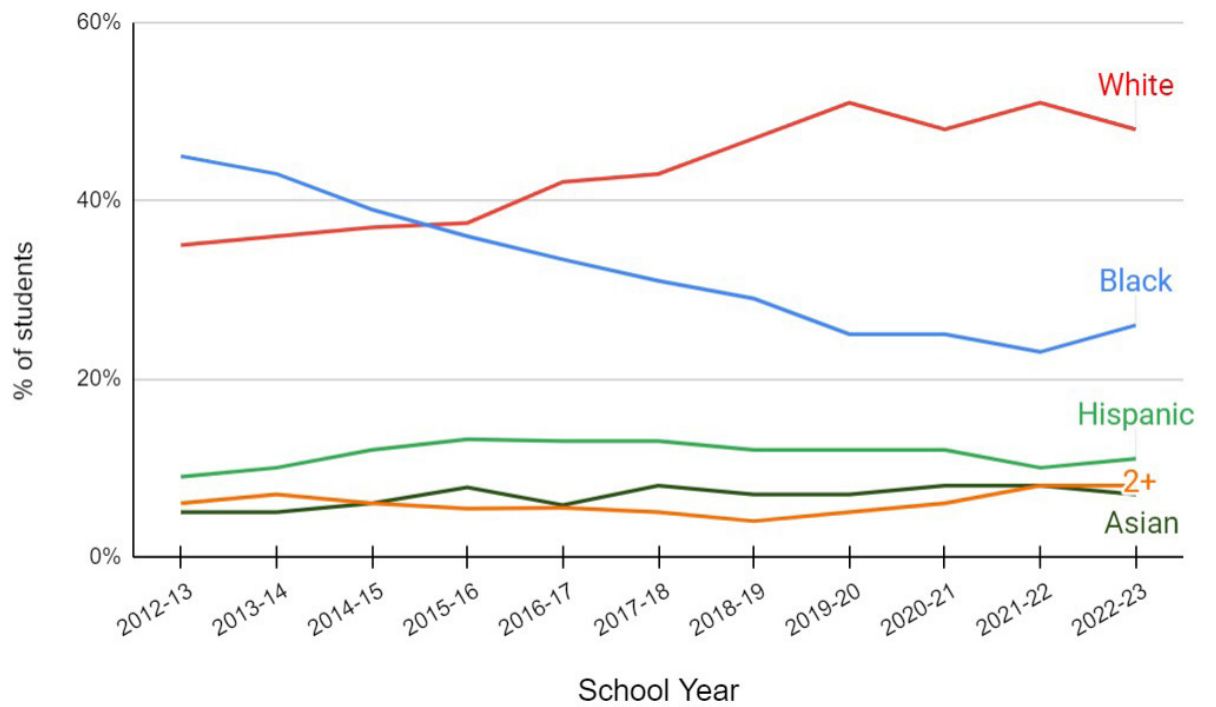
"The Green New Deal for Schools specifically with DC was written by students in DC public schools," Fisher said in the interview. The Green New Deal for Schools has five demands. The demands include more sustainable, safe, and clean infrastructure. This would also mean that future renovation projects and buildings will move towards renewable energy. The deal also demands pathways to green jobs and a climate-conscious curriculum in DC classrooms.

This is aimed to better prepare the next generation to combat the climate crisis. The deal also demands locally-sourced and healthy lunches, while keeping them free for students. Finally, the resolution demands more comprehensive disaster plans, especially regarding natural disasters enhanced by climate change.

At the SBOE public meeting on Jan. 17, Fisher and Mayer gave their final testimonies that reflected the work that the hub has put into passing this legislation. The two no longer had to convince the Board of the deal, and instead celebrated that they already received the support that would pass the legislation. "Thank you for listening and supporting us these past few months, tonight, and beyond as we turn this resolution into action," Fisher closed her testimony. The voting proceeded with their testimonies, and the board passed the Green New Deal for Schools unanimously.

With the Green New Deal for Schools passed, the hub said that there remains a long road to full implementation and effective change. "We have to sit in on budget meetings for the district to find out how the demands can fit within [the budget]," Fisher explained. The hub will also have to work with more than just

# Walls Is Less Diverse Than In the Past



Since 2012, the population of Black students at Walls has decreased, while the population of white students has increased / Credits: David Sipos

*Demographics continued from page 1*

Another example of underrepresentation at Walls is the limited presence of "at-risk" students, those from lower-income families who qualify for certain public assistance programs. "The students who come to School Without Walls tend to be fairly well-resourced as compared to other urban schools in DC," Ms. Piper said. Walls has long educated the lowest level of at-risk students of DC public schools. In 2012, 17 percent of Walls was considered at-risk. That number has fallen to just 7 percent last year, and has fallen every year since 2016. The result is a less socioeconomically diverse student cohort.

In recent years, DCPS and Walls administration have recognized that the school is not fully reflective of the city's demographics. Seeking a more diverse pool of admitted students, they have made several changes to the admissions process. In 2020, the school opened a second testing location east of the Anacostia River, seeking to attract more applicants from Wards 5, 7, and 8, according to Ms. Grant.

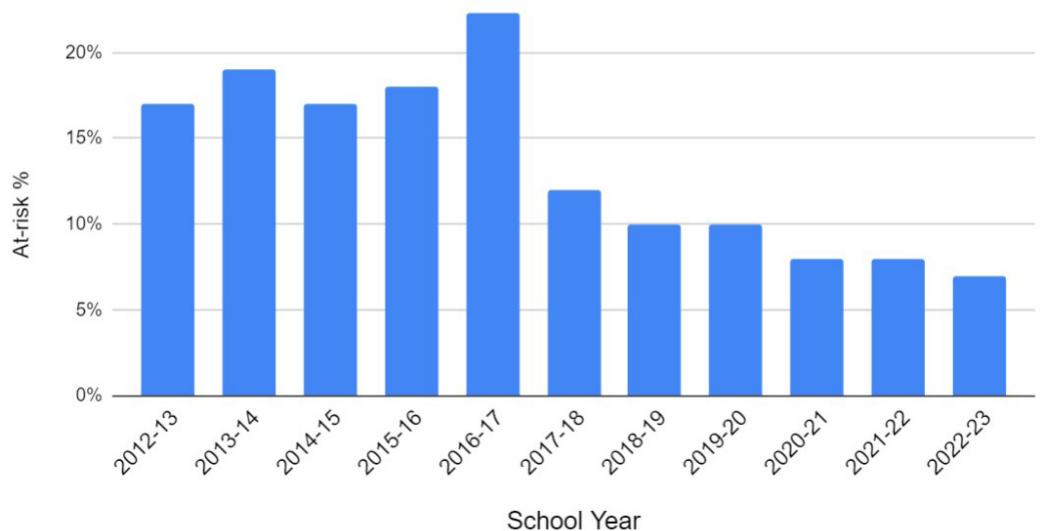
The following year, in response to COVID, the admissions exam was canceled, leaving only a GPA requirement and interviews. That policy continued in the following admissions cycles in the hope that eliminating standardized entrance testing would give students of all back-

grounds a fairer chance of getting in.

The school has also attempted to reach out to students who might not otherwise apply. Ms. Grant said that "we partnered with the NAACP in DC ... [to] have some type of interview preparation because we know some students are nervous when they come to interview. Some students don't have experience interviewing." She explained that the goal of the changes to the admissions process is "to even the playing field between all the applicants."

There is some sign of improvement in the data. Last year, the disparity between Walls and the city decreased slightly from its peak in 2021. In 2022-23, when half of students had not taken the entrance exam, percentages for all races inched in the direction of DC. It is a slight mark of progress for the administration. This year, though official data is not yet available, Ms. Grant said "there is a higher percentage... of minority students in the building this year over last year."

It remains to be seen whether reforms to the admissions process will make a difference in creating a school reflective of DC. Additionally, the inclusion of an essay and teacher recommendations as requirements may further affect the racial and socioeconomic makeup of the school. ●



The number of at-risk students at Walls has shrunk to below 10% in recent years / Credits: David Sipos

the SBOE, as several of the demands fall under the jurisdiction of other DC agencies. For example, only the Department of General Services has the ability to realize the demands for sustainable infrastructure, and the integration of climate curriculums in schools would have to pass through the Office of the State Superintendent of Education.

Despite those challenges, leaders and members of the Sunrise Hub at SWW are confident that DC legislators will bring the demands outlined in the Green New Deal for Schools

into full effect, given the connections that the hub has established with DC officials. "We will not stop working until every demand is implemented into every DCPS school," Fisher said in her testimony.

Beyond that, the hub believes that the power of a school district in the nation's capital passing this legislation is incomparable, and may set off a chain reaction of other districts adopting similar deals.

The SWW Sunrise Hub meets on Tuesday mornings at 8:15 in room 322. ●

## CLUB SPOTLIGHT

## The Show Must Go On: Walls Theater Faces Significant Challenges

By Zoe Becker ('26)  
Staff Writer

In some ways, Walls has a typical high school theater program. Like many schools across the country, Walls' theater department typically mounts two full-scale productions per year: a play in the winter (often Shakespeare), and a musical in the spring.

Unlike many other schools, however, Walls doesn't have a theater to perform shows in. The play is typically performed in the Commons at Walls, while the musical has been staged in borrowed spaces, such as university theaters and at School Without Walls at Francis Stevens. Most recently, Cinderella was performed at the University of the District of Columbia's Theater of the Arts. Yet, the theater department at Walls wasn't always so successful.

Christopher Alberts, music teacher and chair of the performing arts department, has been involved in Walls theater for all of his fifteen-year tenure at the school. He noted that when he arrived at Walls, "the theater scene was nonexistent."

At a school where space and resources are limited, performance and rehearsal space has always been a struggle to obtain.

"I have always used room 311 and the Commons to rehearse. [For] the musical we use room 111" said drama teacher and Walls theater director Lea Zaslavsky. These rooms though, are cluttered with furniture and much smaller than a real stage. Also, classrooms must be maintained in their current condition which prevents them from being used as rehearsal rooms which accommodate set pieces and taping out spaces for certain sections of the stage, etc.

On top of that, with the volatile schedule of club and faculty meetings at Walls, Ms. Z noted that it is often difficult to find available space for after-school rehearsals. "This limitation hinders the growth and potential of the performing arts department," she said.

Ms. Z wishes that Walls would dedicate "a theater space or an actual classroom" to rehearsals and performances. Finding a dedicated space for theater "aligns with the broader objective of providing a platform for the artistic expres-



The theater department staged *Romeo & Juliet* in the Commons / Via @swwhsofficial

sion of our talented students," said Mr. Alberts. A dedicated theater space would be available to "facilitate concerts, recitals, dance performances, plays, and musicals."

Another challenge currently faced by the theater department is low participation. With such limited resources, it is understandably difficult to attract swaths of students to get involved in Walls theater. Georgia Murphy ('26), the department's student costume design head, said that student interest has been a particularly large issue this year because last year's graduating class made up such a large portion of the students involved in the cast and crew.

Though interest today may be diminishing, Ms. Z noted that there was a time when it was the exact opposite.

When she, Mr. Alberts, and music teacher Malcolm Willoughby began working together five years ago to expand the range of the Walls theater department; she "had many students who were dying to do shows."

One Walls alumna, Becca Grace ('21) noted

that despite the restrictive rehearsal and performance spaces, she found the program so impactful that it led her to pursue acting beyond high school.

Over the last five years, the Home and School Association has allocated the Walls theater department an average of \$15,000 to split between use on concerts, the winter play, and spring musical.

One of the most costly parts of the production process is securing the rights to shows, which have often played on Broadway. The leftover budget is spent on the set pieces, costumes, props, playbills, and more.

In addition, the limited budget prevents the department from bringing in outside contractors such as professional choreographers, designers, and production managers, placing additional burdens on teachers.

Despite financial obstacles, at Walls, the show has managed to go on, with the planning

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## FIELDTRIP SPOTLIGHT

## Dancers Attend DCPS Dance Honors Festival

By Rachel Kolko ('24)  
Senior Editor

School Without Walls students hopped on a bus Jan. 12 to spend the entire school day doing nothing but dance. Whether they were taking one of the dance classes offered at Walls, a part of the Dance Team, or on the B.O.M.B. Squad, Walls' dancers attended the 2nd Annual DCPS Dance Honors Festival.

Hosted at Joy of Motion's Atlas Performing Arts Center, students from DCPS schools around the city joined in for a day of masterclasses taught by professional dance instructors in the city. The workshops Walls students participated in centered around learning dance styles such as house, hip-hop, and West African dance.

Carmen Coutts ('26) who is in Walls' Dance Orientation class, found the workshop to be an opportunity for her to expand her knowledge of different dance styles. "I have never done house," she said. "It's kind of like street dancing. But it has some links to ballet and contemporary."

Coutts, who is a ballerina and contem-



Walls dancers perform at the DCPS Dance Honors festival / Via DCPS

porary dancer, explained she can use some of what she learned in the workshop to enhance her dancing at school and in the studio. "[I can] experiment with like, improv, or choreography, [and] add those elements into my dancing."

Along with learning different styles of dance, students had the opportunity to choreograph their own, performing it at the end of the day to an audience of parents, and DCPS Chancellor Dr. Lewis Ferebee.

Heather Pultz, who teaches the Dance Orientation and Dance Technique classes at Walls felt the day was an important stress reliever for students. She said Friday was a

good day "to dance all day," and that "a lot of students at Walls might be stressed . . . Being able to be together and dance all day could be a really big relief from [the] pressure of school"

Coutts agreed. "It was nice to have fun with my classmates," she said.

Though there aren't any other workshop field trips currently planned for Walls' dancers in the upcoming months, Coutts thinks it would be a good experience for future dance students to have. "I think it would be a good experience for dancers who haven't taken any classes or want to try something new." ●

## Penguins Explore The Eternal City

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loits. Today, it is a gorgeous way to experience the Roman countryside, especially by bike. Mr. Ackerman said, “These kids got on their bikes and flew. They’re gone. And then like two hours later, just in time they had...they all flew back... That level of athleticism is impressive.”

Another favorite location was an olive grove in the town of Sacrofano just outside of the city. “[The] olive orchard [is owned by] a gentleman we know well and he has a tree house there. And of course, the kids are gonna get in the tree house” Mr. Ackerman said.

He described how the students climbed the rope attached to the tree house. “I’ve never seen anyone climb that rope...I was most impressed at that moment.” All three of the teacher chaperones have relationships with people in Rome, giving them access to unique experiences like these.

Others found their favorite experience in Rome to be more spiritual. Ms. McGlennon said, “I found out that a friend of mine who lived in Rome...had died last year... His friend’s daughter had left his ashes near the church, so I was kind of happy to be there and feel his spirit.”

Ms. Brinley shared a fond memory, recalling a heartwarming discussion she had with a student about a piece of artwork. “It was really wonderful to be able to talk about that... [and] have that student feel comfortable talking about it with me,” she said “[It was] really touching to be able to share about that.”

All of the teachers expressed immense gratitude for the grace the group displayed on the trip. Mr. Ackerman said, “My biggest point of favor would be how well the kids got along



Penguins listen to a student presentation in Ostia, near Rome / Credits: Jan McGlennon

with each other, worked with each other, and took care of each other. No one was left out... they came together as a community.”

He described how each student’s curiosity made the trip more enjoyable for himself and enlightening for them. “If they didn’t understand it, they asked and they cared to ask. [They didn’t] just go and look at the art and leave.... They really did seem to care about what we were trying to show them...that was unusual.” Ms. McGlennon and Ms. Brinley reported similar impressions.

Multiple students also expressed gratitude for the connections they made during the trip. Waymer (‘24) said, “[When] you’re with the same 16 people literally every single day that you’re not usually with... [it’s a] really a good experience to just get to know new people.” Luca Shrohl (‘24) agreed. “You learn a ton and you also get to be with people that you will get much closer with.”

The trip transpired with minimal complications until the final flight. On the group’s flight back to the States, a passenger separate from the group had a medical emergency. The plane temporarily landed in Dublin, Ireland to get the passenger aid. Waymer (‘24) said, “We technically went to three countries:...Italy, Vatican City, and Ireland.”

If students are interested in applying for the Rome Trip, the selection process is fairly straight-forward; junior and senior Penguins attend an interest meeting in the fall where they sign up to be considered. Interested students are given a random number, and a waiting-list is formed.

The three teachers running the trip recommend applying. “It’s a great opportunity and it’s a very well organized trip, thanks to Ms. Brinley and Mr. Ackerman ... it’s a really good trip,” said Ms. McGlennon. ●

## What Goes into Putting on a Show at Walls?

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process starting long before the final production.

According Mr. Willoughby, he, Ms. Z, and Mr. Alberts sit down with one another at the beginning of the school year to discuss their respective ideas for the musical and play that year, considering a variety of factors.

“The main factor is budget,” Ms. Z said, explaining that the show cannot involve “an intricate stage or costumes.” Mr. Willoughby added that, when choosing a show, the gender breakdown of the characters is an important factor, as typically many more female students audition for roles than male students.

After considering logistical factors, the three department faculty leaders will consider the artistic value of the shows to further narrow down what they choose to produce.

“It comes down to what might the students relate to,” Ms. Z said, preferring “a show with depth of story, timeless themes and emotional relatability for the actors.”

The three of them recently underwent this very decision process when they decided on this spring’s musical. They chose *Rent*, Jonathan Larson’s hit rock musical about a group of twenty-somethings in New York City’s East Village grappling with love and love and loss amidst the HIV/AIDS crisis.

“*Rent* was chosen for its relevance, social impact, and artistic merit,” Mr. Alberts said. Once the faculty have worked through these criteria they are able to purchase rights to the

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PERSPECTIVES • COMPILED BY ANNA MAYER (‘25)

## New Year’s Resolutions

Whether it be a personal improvement, additional routine, or academic goal, many students are striving for self-improvement this year. Here are some of those students’ goals for 2024.

“My New Year’s resolution is...”

“...to try to reduce plastic waste, cut down on dairy consumption, think things through more, and be kind to others.” — Dahlia Anderson (‘27)

“... #1 to submit my assignments on time, #2 is when making a decision to go through with it and try not to have any regrets, and #3 is to expand my music taste.” — Yeselyn Iraheta (‘27)

“...to stop procrastinating my work.” — Willa McCartney (‘26)

“... to come to school later. I get to school way too early” — Reuben Gartenbach (‘24)

“... to get Reuben to do all of my stats work, not just 50%” — Ben Shelsby (‘24)

“... to stretch to avoid injury because I don’t want to be like an old woman in my twenties.” — Gabi Goldberg (‘25)

“... to get jacked” — Sam Herzberg (‘24)

“... to take vitamin D and my anxiety medication.” — Carlotta Rother (‘25)

“... to keep my plants alive. I want to read a book a month. I want to drink more water. I want to meditate weekly, and I want to not be stressed.” — Charlotte Mendelson (‘25)

“... to get more team records on my swim team, and to sleep at least six hours a night because currently I’m at four, and that’s not very good. And also to stop getting hurt.” — Ava Goins (‘25)

“... to sleep more, I want to stop procrastinating, and I want to lock in for college apps.” — Stefan Bumbaugh (‘25)

“... more motion” — Ben Yarkin (‘24)

“... to get more sleep, practice more violin, and play less video games.” — Lucy Byron (‘25)

“... to get better at music, including playing the piano and singing. I want to read more often and get better at saving my money.” — Sonja Talwani (‘25)

## Big Results in the Big Apple for the Walls Track Team

By Eve Rebora ('25)  
Staff Writer

SWW's 33-person track team traveled to New York City to compete at The Armory Hispanic Games, a meet that hosted over 5,000 athletes from across the Northeast in January. SWW runners left with big results, placing highly and breaking records.

On the girls side, several performances stood out. The 4x400-meter relay team, composed of Olivia Waymer ('24), Reia Stock-Heard ('27), Kaylee Simon ('25), and Charlotte Tama ('24), finished in 5th place overall. In addition, the relay team's time beat the 4x400-meter school record by 7 seconds, which qualified them for Nike Indoor Nationals, an invite-only meet held in the beginning of March limited to the top athletes from across the country.

Waymer, a team captain, placed third in the 55-meter hurdles, breaking both her personal best and the Walls record. Nadia Lytle ('25), a standout thrower on the team, placed third in girls shot put. Both also qualified for Nike Indoor Nationals.

Additionally, new talent shone brightly. "The new freshmen on the team are so awesome," Waymer said. One such freshman was Stock-Heard, who team manager Heather Lytle called "MVP of the weekend." In her first ever high school meet, Stock-Heard came in first in the 55-meter dash and third in the 400-meter dash, and also contributed to the 4x400 relay team's strong performance. "She surprised us all with her outstanding achievements," Ms. Lytle said.

On the boys side, Elijah Lott ('25) placed 4th in the 1 mile, setting a new school record with a stellar time of 4:50.47. He was also part of the boys 4x400 team, whose performance came close to setting a school record. Lott credits the team's success to hard work throughout the sea-



Reia Stock-Heard runs at the Armony Hispanic Games / Credits: Nadia Lytle ('25)

son. "I'm seeing people dedicating themselves to the team," he said.

With these and other strong performances, the team left New York holding DCIAA season records in 7 events.

On top of their big results, many team members shared how fun the weekend was as a whole. "The atmosphere at The Armory was electric and was definitely felt on the track," Lott said. "From what I saw, no one competed without a crowd of Walls teammates cheering them on."

In addition, the trip was a valuable bonding experience for the team. The day before the meet, the team visited the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island together before exploring Times Square in smaller groups later that night. "The

team felt more social this year," Waymer said. Looking towards the season ahead, the team hopes to continue their success at DCIAA and state meets. "I'm confident that we'll put on a show at the city, state, and eventually national level," Lott said.

However, so far, the team hasn't been given much of a stage. Due to construction at PG Sports and Learning Complex, all three of the scheduled DCIAA developmental meets have been canceled.

As construction wraps up, the running penguins look towards DCIAA championships and DCSAA states as a chance to extend their success from The Armory. "After New York, I just feel that this is really gonna be a great season," Waymer said. ●

## Students Weigh In: Washington Sports Franchises to Relocate to... Virginia?

By Mitchell Kasdan ('27)  
Staff Writer

The Washington Wizards and Capitals have both played their home games in Capital One Arena since the late 90's. This will soon change. The Wizards and Capitals will move from Downtown DC to a new arena in Potomac Yard, Virginia. The move means that the teams will be miles from the Capital One arena, where many Walls students have often attended games. Ted Leonsis, owner of both the Washington Wizards and Capitals, announced in December his decision to relocate the teams by 2028.

Money is one of the key reasons behind the decision. Virginia offered \$2 billion for both teams to move and build another stadium in the state. Meanwhile, DC offered Leonsis \$500 million to renovate Capital One Arena.

Luke Voss ('27) would want to have the Caps and Wizards stay if they could. "I feel like we have lost a part of DC culture," he said, "our sports teams are a part of what defines DC, and when they move away, the entire district will feel the effects."

Walls PE and Health teacher Cory Matthews also works as a statistician for the Washington Wizards. As a longtime DC resident, he said that the potential move "hurts more as a Washingtonian than it does as a sports fan." He explained that in downtown DC "many of the restaurants and businesses will lose a revenue stream, and many of our residents will lose their primary or secondary incomes."

Adam Chilbert ('24) said, "[I've gone to] a lot [of games]... maybe five [or] six," just this season. One of the main reasons for going to that many games in a season was, "because it's

so easy to get to. So just being able to hop on a train, get off right at the exit and go to a game again, it's so easy that if I have a free Friday night, it's just [simple]."

Max Goldberg ('24) has only been to a couple of games in the last year. He also found getting to games "very convenient. I take the Metro to Gallery Place." Even though, "the Wizards suck. They really suck," it still can be fun just to head downtown through the metro or even the bus. The new stadium is "definitely out of the way."

The effects of moving away from a city's downtown can be seen in the Atlanta Braves' move from downtown Atlanta to Truist Park, more than 13.3 miles from downtown. The old Braves stadium was located right next to a light rail station in Atlanta. The new stadium never got linked to the MARTA train system in Atlanta, so it is very difficult to get to a game from downtown without a car.

The Wizards and Capitals will face the similar challenge of public transit access to the new stadium. The new arena would be closest to the Potomac Yard Metro station which is on the fringes of the system, only connected to the Blue and Yellow lines. While it will be connected, the WMATA General Manager has said that the Potomac Yard station is not capable of accommodating as many fans as the Gallery Place station. The new arena might become more car-centric and isolated from many fans in the region.

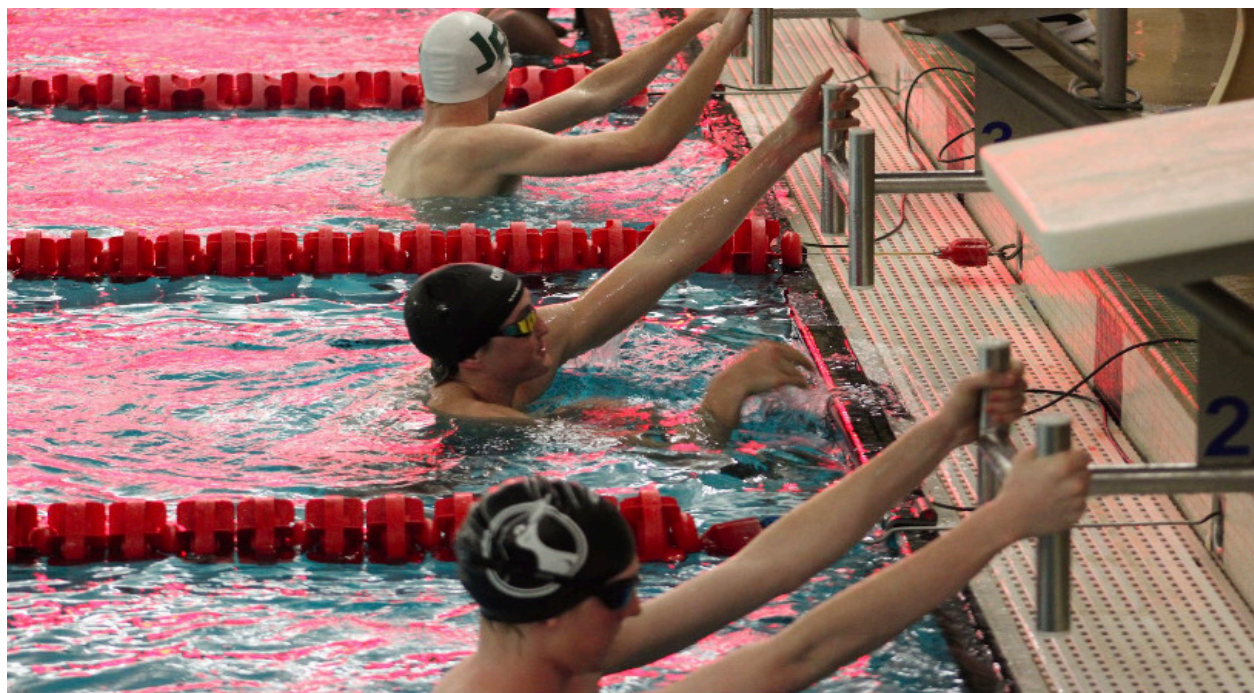
Another cause for the move is the Wizards' poor performance. The team currently has a .167 winning percentage, the second-worst record in the NBA. The Wizards have the NBA's lowest percentage of seats filled in the arena at games, only 82.7 percent. The Capitals are not faring much better: from December 2022 to

December 2023 they had the worst attendance dropoff of any NHL team. The teams' lack-luster performance has had an impact on attendance, and thus the profitability of games at the arena. This has likely contributed to the decision to relocate. Voss said, "I think both teams have been mediocre in recent years... I believe the low quality of these teams could be one reason for low attendance and the stadium being moved."

Goldberg said, "I get that sometimes you have to suck in order to rebuild, but it definitely isn't a good look that you're trying to generate excitement about your team while they've won five games." Travis Tiller ('24) believes that relocating the teams could help them to rebuild "because [moving] brings attention to the teams and hopefully more money to the teams, which attracts more players and hopefully will make the teams better in the long run." A move to a new stadium in the coming years means that both teams could potentially be entering their years of contention in the playoffs.

Further, moving the teams to Virginia may help boost the economy. Tiller said that, "Potomac Yards would become a new destination for not only sports, but many other activities in the area." On the other hand, an already struggling Gallery Place and Chinatown will lose a major attraction.

In many American cities, the NBA and NHL arenas are in the heart of the city, like Capital One Arena is now, but this move will bring both franchises into the largest state without a major five league professional franchise. Will both teams start to gain support from Virginians across the state, or will even fewer fans show up to a brand-new state-of-the-art and state funded arena? ●



The swim team wins second place at DCIAA Championships / Credits: Erefu Patel ('25)

## Stellar Performances and Team Spirit on the Swim Team

By Charlotte Tama ('24)  
Sports Editor

For many, the crisp air and sub-freezing temperatures of December mean it's time to cozy up at home. However, for a small group of Walls students, the cold weather signals the opposite: it's time to hit the pools. This winter, despite several unusual obstacles, the Walls Swim Team has had a successful season marked by team camaraderie and perseverance.

At DCIAA championships on Jan. 24, the Walls swim team concluded their DCIAA season with an array of strong individual and team results. On the girls side, Hazel Klein ('26) and Maddie Moffitt ('26) took home first and second place, respectively, in the 500-yard freestyle, and Ava Goins ('25) won the 50-yard free over a substantial field.

On the boys side, Kai Henrikson-Brandt ('25) and Max Scott ('25) captured first and second place, respectively, in the 100-yard fly. Additionally, the boys relay team of Henrikson-Brandt, Max Scott, Ned Scott ('27), and Dylan Schon ('24) finished first in both the medley relay and freestyle relay.

Both the boys and girls teams took home second place team trophies, bested only by

Jackson-Reed. Additionally, seven swimmers received all-league awards: Klein, Moffitt, Goins, Claire Campbell ('25), Henrikson-Brandt, Schon, and Ned Scott.

Though the season was largely a success, it did not come without challenges, especially at the season's commencement. "We didn't find a coach, or at least I didn't hear about having a coach until very soon before the season started," said Campbell ('25).

In addition to the team's lack of a coach, their usual practice pool, located at Dunbar High School, was closed for renovations. "It was all kind of a mess...we were choosing between Takoma and a few other [pools], but all of them were super inconvenient because swimmers [live] all around the city," Campbell explained. Luckily, both issues were eventually resolved. The team found a coach, Mercedes Maynard-Randall, who has been a strong addition. "She seems very invested in the team," said Henrikson-Brandt.

As for practice space, the team decided on Barry Farms, a pool in Anacostia. Though swimmers are happy with the facility, the commute is inconvenient. "I think [Barry Farms] is pretty nice, but it's kind of far ... Because it's a long bus ride, they have to take people out of class early," said swimmer Audrey Hayes

('27).

Despite this tricky start to the season, the team gained momentum quickly. "At the first meet, the boys were only outscored by the Jackson-Reed boys by a pretty small margin," said Henrikson-Brandt. A few weeks later, at their third meet, the boys earned 524 points, putting them just 44 points behind Jackson-Reed's boys.

For the swim team, contending with Jackson-Reed is a uniquely impressive feat. In DCIAA meets, to earn points for their team, a swimmer only needs to place in the top fifteen — an undemanding requirement, considering that many events have less than fifteen competitors. This means that point totals are heavily weighted towards the teams that simply register the most swimmers, such as Jackson-Reed.

"The main issue we're facing is that Jackson-Reed's team is just so much bigger ... So Jackson-Reed is kind of automatically getting more points, just based on the fact that they have more kids in the event," explained Henrikson-Brandt. At championships last week, Jackson-Reed registered 38 swimmers, while Walls registered 17.

Despite this disadvantage, Walls swimmers are hopeful about their future chances against Jackson-Reed. "[In 2022], the girls beat Jackson-Reed. And so I think that's a goal that we can make, especially if we have more swimmers," expressed Campbell.

Walls swimmers encourage other students to give swimming a try, even if they are inexperienced. "We have a few swimmers who have never swam or have swam very little," said Campbell. "If you just go to a meet, you really make an impact, and so anybody can join."

Hayes, who just started swimming competitively this year, provides another perspective. "I know a lot of people do swim as conditioning for other sports ... I'm doing it for track and soccer," Hayes said. "[The team is] split between people who do swim as their main sport, and people who are doing it for conditioning."

Overall, Walls swimmers agree that no matter one's level of experience or level of commitment, there is a place on the team for them.

"Nobody really thinks about joining the swim team. But it is like a community and a lot of people are on it for all four years. And so you do for the community," said Campbell.

Although championships have passed, the swim team has two meets left on their schedule: DCSAA States on Feb. 14, in which they will compete against DC public, private, and charter schools, and Metros on Feb. 10, in which they will face top athletes from across the DMV. ●

## Is There Hope Yet for a Walls Football Team?

By Graham Mesiah ('26)  
Staff Writer

At the heart of many high schools' spirit lies an overwhelming passion for their football team. Although football is highly regarded within the DC area, School Without Walls has been without a team since its opening in 1971. This fact, coupled with the new students entering School Without Walls, has raised interest in the possibility of forming a football team.

In the past, attempts at creating a Walls football team have been largely unsuccessful. Julian Andrade ('26) believes this is because of students' "lack of commitment and passion." He explained that, "No one yet has taken the opportunity serious enough to show up for the football program."

One major reason for the lack of commitment is the football season conflicting with other DCIAA sports seasons. A substantial number of athletes are drawn to the

soccer team, and their season kicks off just as fall begins, coinciding with the football schedule. This makes it nearly impossible for Walls soccer athletes to fully participate in football without skipping games on the soccer team.

But lack of commitment isn't the only issue. According to SWW Athletic Director Kip Smith, starting a full-contact football team is "very unlikely," because of Walls' "lack of facilities and resources." In addition, he said that Walls' lack of a field and lack of "people of interest to participate" would make it extremely difficult. Walls also has a relatively smaller student body, meaning a smaller pool of potential players. Still, there are students who are passionate about the sport at Walls. "All I want to do is play football, that's one of the only things that interests me," said Andrade.

Although the odds of the immediate formation of a contact football team seem relatively low, there is still hope. Some stu-

dents at Walls refuse to back down this easily, reflecting their passion for the sport. "If you give us this opportunity now, we would play without a second thought," Andrade said.

In fact, some students at SWW have chosen to practice with the girls flag-football team as a means of pursuing their love for the sport, sparking the idea of starting a boys flag team. This sort of passion has spread to other students, including Zahid Mohamed ('26), who has resorted to playing football at Jackson-Reed, since "Walls isn't really capable of having a team." Regarding the prospect of a Walls flag-football team, Mohamed said he "would definitely participate."

Mr. Smith said of a flag team, "I've had several students with interest, and it is a possibility." While flag-football is not the ideal outcome for several Walls athletes wishing to participate, it is surely a start. ●

COMICS

# “Deadly Sins of a Snow Day”

By Derek Emons ('24)  
Resident Artist

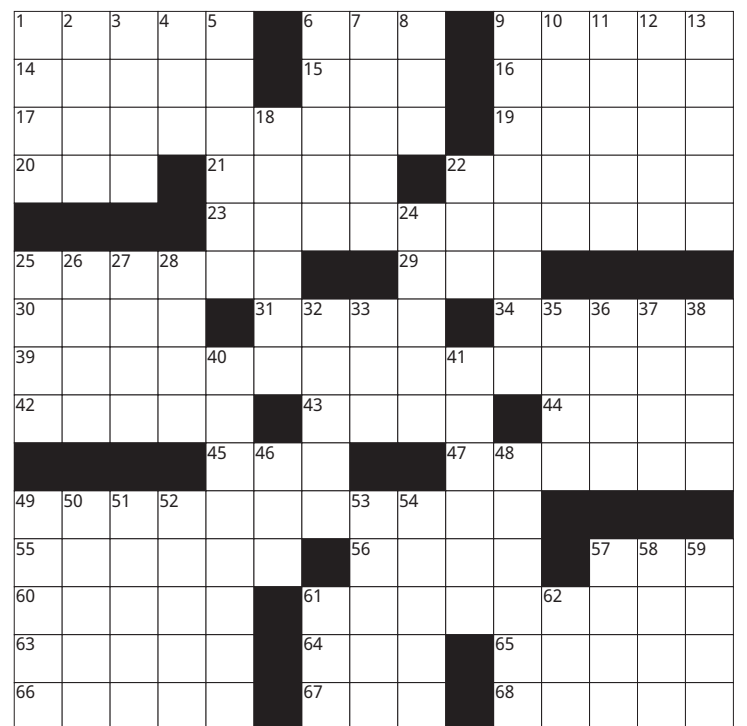


CROSSWORD

## Immoral Compass

By Max Goldberg ('24)  
Puzzle Editor

- ACROSS**
- 1 Desire for more and more
  - 6 Local law enforcement, abbr.
  - 9 Pop's pop
  - 14 Total, as a bill
  - 15 Poetic preposition
  - 16 Beverly Hills baller
  - 17 Greatly enjoyed
  - 19 Join forces
  - 20 Apology over text
  - 21 "Put \_\_\_ on it!"
  - 22 Union members?
  - 23 Leaders of the pack
  - 25 Like the worst excuse
  - 29 Kung \_\_\_ Chicken
  - 30 Silver State sch.
  - 31 Exile isle
  - 34 Clara Barton, for one
  - 39 Capital vices, or what 1A, 3D, 7D, 9D, 25D, 49D, and 68A all are
  - 42 The tie that binds
  - 43 Length times width
  - 44 It's a long story
  - 45 Psychic power
  - 47 Media relations people, for short
  - 49 Equilibrium
  - 55 Nationals owner
  - 56 Chain with stacks and links
  - 57 Pic taker
  - 60 Rowed
  - 61 Politeness reminder
  - 63 Trick alternative
  - 64 Is for you?
  - 65 Spring in the desert
  - 66 Water prefix
  - 67 See 58D
  - 68 "The Grapes of \_\_\_"
- DOWN**
- 1 Angry noises
  - 2 Sorry soul
  - 3 Covetous feeling
  - 4 Summer, according to Ms. Saady
  - 5 Exercise in the pool, perhaps
  - 6 Doctor
  - 7 Group of lions
  - 8 Family room
  - 9 Constant appetite
  - 10 Charged toward
  - 11 "Go fly \_\_\_!"
  - 12 Unit of length in Room 30
  - 13 Word after bench or leg
  - 18 On cloud nine
  - 22 The Caribbean, for one
  - 24 Black playing card
  - 25 Uncontrolled passion
  - 26 Fresh
  - 27 1056, in Ms. Brinley's class
  - 28 Like 2, 12, or 200,000
  - 32 Jumps
  - 33 Legal passage?
  - 35 \_\_\_-friendly
  - 36 Ready for picking
  - 37 Scissors sound
  - 38 Bailout keys?
  - 40 Had no choice
  - 41 Annual Mr. Ware handout
  - 46 Leb. neighbor
  - 48 Clear the snow again
  - 49 Very, very slow animal
  - 50 Misty-eyed
  - 51 Messed up
  - 52 Lend \_\_\_ (listen)
  - 53 Princess's crown
  - 54 "Now I see"
  - 57 House in Havana
  - 58 With 67A: Harry Styles hit
  - 59 Fit together
  - 61 Wood cutter
  - 62 Spot for a stud



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## Theater Department Faces Challenges

Theater continued from page 5

show they've selected (another financial burden).

The fact that the day when all the needs of Walls' theater are met may still be a long time away doesn't seem to deter Walls faculty from investing time, energy and care into the program. No matter the challenges, "witnessing the students' growth, passion, and the impact of our productions on the community is truly rewarding," Mr. Alberts said.

Mr. Alberts may be right that the process is ultimately a fulfilling and necessary one, because if there's anything that's true in the theater it is that no matter what it takes to get there, the show must go on. ●

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Faculty Advisor: Shakir Ghazi

Contact

[theswwrookery@gmail.com](mailto:theswwrookery@gmail.com) (editors-in-chief)

[shakir.ghazi@k12.dc.gov](mailto:shakir.ghazi@k12.dc.gov) (faculty advisor)

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