

Three Years Post-COVID, Walls Overhauls Admissions with Essays and Recommendations



Funger Hall, a GW building where Walls previously administered its entrance exam / Credits: David Sipos

By Hugo Rosen ('24)
Staff Writer

The School Without Walls admissions committee, a group of teachers and administrators, will add two new components to the upcoming 2024 admissions cycle: an essay and teacher recommendation letters. These additions significantly depart from the interview-based system Walls has employed since eliminating the school's standardized admissions exam in 2020.

In addition to their GPA, all applicants who would like to attend Walls in fall 2024 must submit two letters of recommendation from their middle school, one from a STEM teacher and one from a humanities teacher. The admissions committee will use these factors to decide who passes on to the next stage of the admissions process. Similar to the previous system, students who make the cut will be invited to the Walls building to interview with a teacher and student. Immediately following the interview, students will handwrite an essay in response to a prompt.

The administration is still determining whether to employ one or multiple prompts. According to assistant principal LaToya Grant, who is on the admissions committee, evaluators will examine students' writing skills, use of grammar, reading comprehension, and analytical skills when grading the essay.

Adding an essay heralds significant new responsibilities for Walls' admissions committee, including writing prompts and administering and grading the essay. The committee has already begun asking teachers, including humanities teacher Ginea Briggs, to write prompts. Despite declining the offer, Ms. Briggs nonetheless believes that "an essay could be good for children and the school, if done properly." Ms. Briggs further elaborated on the benefits an essay could offer to humanities teachers in particular: "it could inform our curriculum and show us what we need to adjust to best accommodate new students."

As a result of the added components, interviews will carry less weight in the overall admissions decision will be based on a composite

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DCPS Surveillance Raises Concerns

By Theo Weller ('25)
Staff Writer

School has become more reliant on digital technologies. A computer has become a necessity at Walls, and many students use computers offered by the school. But those who use these school computers should be aware that DCPS staff may monitor their activity.

Previously, only the Office of the Chief of Technology Officer could review activities on school devices remotely. Now, Walls teachers can view all student activity in real time on school days from 7:30 AM to 5:45 PM, a capability enabled by DCPS' switch to Lightspeed Systems Software.

According to Lightspeed's website, their software is used to "gain insights into the safety and usage of tools and devices, prevent risky online activity ... and meet regulations to continue keeping students and data safe." The company cites their ability to detect concerning student behavior like cyberbullying or suicidal ideations in promoting the tracking of student activity.

DCPS' version of Lightspeed has teachers input their class hours into the software. During this set time, teachers can directly observe the activity of any students in their class using school laptops in real time — without notifying the students. This includes students' browser tabs as well as other apps on the computer like Microsoft Word. Teachers can also view students' search history. A teacher confirmed these abilities in statements to the Rookery.

The Lightspeed software offers users the ability to record activity on laptops while students use them.

Furthermore, teachers can begin a live monitoring session on a student's school laptop at any time from 7:30-5:45 on school days. This window significantly extends beyond school hours. This range of hours may have been crea-

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A New Chapter for SGA Leadership Begins

By Sara Weinrod ('24)
Editor-in-Chief

The Student Government Association (SGA) recently concluded its annual school-wide elections, ushering in a new leadership team committed to fostering positive change in the school community. Hugo Rosen ('24) secured a second, non-consecutive term as SGA president, while Felicia Ogundimo ('26) was newly elected to the role of vice president. The elected officials also include William Mabey ('25) for a second term as treasurer, Nirvan Welagadara ('27) as historian, and Joelle Barksdale ('25) as the public relations manager.

Candidates expressed similar motivations behind their election bids. The recently elected representatives all shared a wish to enact change at Walls and serve the student body. Rosen (Editors' note: Rosen is a contributing writer to the Rookery) explained that he chose to run because "the position of SGA president can really make a difference." Ogundimo emphasized her desire to "be closer to the people in charge" and

engage in meaningful conversations that benefit the school community, and Mabey said his number one priority was "service to the people."

Running individual election campaigns, Rosen and Ogundimo found their candidacy to be enjoyable. Through the process of interacting with the school community through the process of securing votes, Ogundimo noted, "it was really fun." Rosen, a three-time campaigner, shared valuable advice for future candidates, emphasizing the importance of name recognition while acknowledging the practicality that students may not focus on detailed policy plans during voting. Rosen said, "the biggest thing is to get your name out there; if people see your name around the school, then they'll be more likely to vote for you. I think that it is important to have a substantive policy plan, but in reality, a lot of students don't care too much about a substantive policy plan while voting." Rosen, with lots of ideas to improve the school,

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President Rosen and Vice President Ogundimo stand together in the Commons / Credits: Sara Weinrod

“Low Probability - High Consequence Threats”: How DCPS Decides What Websites to Restrict

By Georgia Murphy ('26)
Staff Writer

Every Penguin knows the feeling. The feeling when they find that perfect article. The one that will secure an A on an extremely niche paper. The keyword is exact, the date is recent, and the website is reliable. But just as they click that perfect link, they discover that it's blocked.

In 2000, Congress enacted the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) which requires schools to monitor students' activity and access to the Internet. In compliance with this, DCPS requires students to sign the Responsible Use Agreement Acknowledgement Form and deploys filtering software to all their distributed devices.

Recently, DCPS shifted its internet filtration software from GoGuardian to Lightspeed. The two software have similar features, such as the ability to blacklist certain websites and monitor certain student activity. However, Lightspeed is more precise, for example allowing students to access specific educational YouTube videos, while GoGuardian can only block the entire website.

DCPS specifically pivoted to Lightspeed because of its adaptable nature. Lightspeed constantly updates its repertoire of whitelisted websites as they are requested by students and staff. It offers multiple levels of content filtration depending on the age of users. Through this program, the DCPS Office of Data

and Technology (ODT) can monitor potentially at-risk individuals based on their search history. Lightspeed can track devices it has been installed on, giving the ODT even more information on users of DCPS-issued devices.

Cyrus Verrani, DCPS' Chief of Data and Technology said, “at any given time, DCPS, ODT, and OCTO [Office of the Chief Technology Officer] are working on several initiatives to enhance and secure our current technology environment. Our students' learning and academic success is at the core of everything we do.”

Mr. Verrani explained how the ODT strives to avoid “low probability - high consequence” threats that come with students' unpredictable use of the internet.

This mindset led to DCPS' specific system of content filtration. Using Lightspeed as a starting point, the ODT creates a database of educational websites and whitelists them. After this, they blacklist harmful websites with inappropriate messages such as gambling, sexual content, and violence.

Finally, they created a Microsoft Form that allows students and staff to request particular sites to be unblocked.

Some Walls students believe more needs to be done to create an adequate database of accessible resources. Carmen Coutts ('26) said, “sometimes for school when I need to access certain websites ... they'll be blocked, and I'll have to use my home computer.” Coutts noted that this doesn't significantly affect her, but it might harm someone who doesn't have access

to a non-DCPS device.

Other students share some worries about the policy and believe that no content should be blocked whatsoever. Ereftu Patel ('25) said, “it's honestly up to the students ... to use websites responsibly, so I think that freedom [to access all content] would help.” Despite Patel's belief that students should handle their online presence alone, current policy under CIPA requires all schools to exercise some control over their students' online life.

On the other end of the spectrum, some Penguins see the benefits of filtering content. Coutts said, “I would say [DCPS' filtration system] is appropriate considering that this is a public school and ... the filtration could be used as a safety resource.” Coutts explained that there are issues that come with navigating the online world and there may be some virtue to school-wide surveillance.

Mr. Verrani is aware of the criticism of DCPS' policies. In addition to noting the requirements of CIPA, he responded, “content filtering and moderation [are] also important to ensuring students stay focused on learning while protecting them from the many cyber threats that grow more sophisticated by the day.” Due to the various laws requiring schools to monitor such threats, efforts for new policy-making may be futile.

Mr. Verrani expressed his confidence in Lightspeed's ability to balance safety and real-world online exposure, saying “DCPS is committed to providing a safe online learning environment for our students without limiting

Elected SGA Officials Discuss Plans for Remainder of School Year

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the school, prioritizes maintaining access to GW facilities and upholding SWW's commitment to experiential learning. Meanwhile, Ogundimo's focus is expanding student access to resources. Both leaders share a commitment to SGA's role in planning school-wide events and boosting school spirit.

This year, SGA has undergone some changes in order to make it more representative of the student body. Recognizing the importance of diverse opinions within the organization, SGA has added two representatives from each advisory class.

“SGA is less top-heavy this year than it used to be,” Rosen said, “The president still has the most power, but all important decisions are made together, as a team.”

This year also introduced a new rule requiring candidates to be SGA members before running for leadership positions. This means that everyone who ran for an SGA position this year had previously held a position as advisory representative. According to Ogundimo, the rationale behind this requirement was to screen prospective candidates for a commitment to SGA.

“I think you had to be in [SGA] first so they could see how well you attend these meetings. Are you present? Are you actually here? Are you going to do what you're talking about? And just so we can hear your ideas before you get in a place of power,” said Ogundimo.

However, not everyone thinks that the new advisory representative system is the best way to improve student representation in SGA. Treasurer Mabey believes that picking a few students from each advisory unfairly restricts which students can participate in government.

“I believe that Walls has many good candidates,” he said, explaining that those candidates may be unevenly distributed across advisories. If only a few students can be selected from each advisory, the school may be artificially limiting how many of those students can participate in government. “The old system where people can just run [is better],” said Mabey. He also pointed out that the new system is undemocratic, citing the selection of advisory representatives on a volunteer basis instead of through elections.

In the pursuit of school spirit, the SGA aims to take on a more active role this year. President Rosen envisions more floor decorating competitions, incentivizing school spirit, and overall amplifying the SGA's presence within the school community. The SGA's main goal, according to Rosen, is to “bring the walls community together as a whole.”

At the team's first meeting after the elections, the new officers recapped Homecoming and Spirit Week while proposing improvements for future events. Recognizing the importance of clear plans when proposing initiatives, Rosen emphasized the need for effective communication with the administration and teachers to translate ideas into action.

“It's very important to, when proposing changes, to lay out a clear plan. If you just say to the administration or to teachers, we want this done, they might care, but they won't always go out of their way to do something about it. If you give them an action plan, say we want this done and this is how we plan to do it, they'll be more responsive and willing to help achieve that goal,” said Rosen.

As SWW's SGA embraces this new era of leadership, SGA remains committed to positive change, student representation, and promoting school spirit. ●



Students sported “Vote Hugo Rosen” campaign buttons during election week / Credits: Hugo Rosen



William Mabey, elected treasurer, said his campaign posters were “JFK inspired” / Credits: William Mabey

Walls Applicants Will Need to Write An Essay and Obtain Rec. Letters

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of GPA, recommendation letters, interviews, and the essay.”

Interviews this year will follow a similar structure to previous cycles; they will involve a twenty to thirty-minute conversation with a teacher and student evaluator pair who ask applicants two questions from a list, and then ask parents one question. The teacher and student interviewer will each fill out a form scoring the applicant based on the composure, originality, thoroughness, and syntax of their responses, as well as on the extent to which those responses demonstrated the Walls values of academic curiosity, resiliency, community, and diversity and inclusion.

Fairness and equity rank high among the admissions committee’s priorities for the new essay. The prior interview system faced significant criticism for its subjectivity. Isabelle Pessey, an eighth grader at Hardy Middle School and current Walls applicant, believes admission decisions based solely on interviews disadvantage quiet kids. In the past two admissions cycles, interviews constituted 86 percent of the admissions grade, while GPA only made up 14 percent, according to a DCPS document. She said that, “more introverted students might not get in simply because their interview didn’t [go] as well as students with more charisma.”

Marie-Celeste Pessey (‘26) echoed her sister’s sentiments, characterizing her own Walls interview as “very arbitrary.” She added, “depending on your mood or anxiety

level, one bad day could make or break your interview, and thus your application.”

Ms. Briggs pointed out that “kids with siblings or friends at the school had more time to learn about and prepare for the interview.” Additionally, some teacher and student evaluators scored more harshly than others, meaning that who the interviewers were could significantly affect an applicant’s chances of being accepted to Walls.

GPA also played a crucial role in the old admissions system. According to DCPS’ webpage for Walls admissions from 2022-2023, interview slots were given to “top students with the highest GPA” from within a middle school. In practice, applicants coming from schools with more Walls applicants, such as Alice Deal, had to clear a higher threshold.

Avajane Lei, a Walls senior in the George Washington University Early College Program, said, “I know a lot of students who would have done well at Walls but never got the chance. They just didn’t meet the GPA cutoff.”

The new recommendation letter requirement will make GPA less important in the first stage of the admissions process. At the same time, it will increase the complexity of the process by requiring evaluators to read and subjectively assess hundreds of documents rather than simply ranking applicants’ GPA and selecting the best among them.

In many ways, Walls’ shift towards essay-based admissions mirrors recent changes in the college application process. According to U.S. News, approximately 80% of colleges have test-optional admissions poli-

cies in the 2023-24 admissions cycle, placing greater weight on admissions essays like the Common Application and school-specific supplementals.

Lei, who took the Walls entrance exam, said, “moving away from standardized testing towards a more holistic approach ... makes sense. Testing is something many high schoolers struggle with, so I don’t think we should make middle schoolers take tests too.” Lei’s comment highlights one of the administration’s main reasons for instituting an interview, according to Ms. Grant, which is to have a “more holistic view of applicants.”

Walls’ former admissions exam tested both humanities and mathematics ability. Though the new essay-based admissions system will require a letter of recommendation from a STEM teacher, it will not directly measure math aptitude or provide any metrics for students’ math performance. Reuven Magder (‘25), who did not take the test, thinks that excluding STEM requirements from admissions could disadvantage mathematically-oriented students. “

Essay writing is a specific skill that some kids learn, and some don’t,” Magder said. He added, “a test with categories like reading and math would more accurately assess students’ intellect.”

According to Ms. Grant, the Walls admissions committee recognizes the importance of math and provides a math diagnostic test during the summer bridge program and remedial courses for those struggling in the subject.

Walls’ application opened on December 11th at myschooldc.org. ●

Lightspeed Monitoring Software Installed on School Computers

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ted to accommodate the school clubs and office hours outside of the regular school day.

However, not all students use school-provided devices, instead using their personal laptops. These students thus aren’t subject to monitoring through Lightspeed. But this disparity raises some concerns. In a survey of School Without Walls students, one student responded, “I think [DCPS’ use of Lightspeed] is really unfair and also targets students who have school computers over those who can afford personal laptops.”

Many students use their school-issued computer for legitimate purposes unrelated to school because they don’t have a viable alternative. This can include private information, which could potentially be viewed using Lightspeed. For example, one student said “I filled out all my financial aid stuff for [the QuestBridge Scholarship] on my school computer with copies of tax forms and Social Security numbers.” The student was unaware that that information could potentially be monitored, and had used a school computer because their personal device was too slow.

Though not necessarily DCPS’ intent, the current system seems to force lower-income students to give up some personal privacy in order to fully participate in their classes. With the prominence of Canvas in DCPS schools, a computer is not optional.

In response to these concerns, Principal Sylvia Isaac reminded that even students who use personal devices are subject to monitoring when using DCPS Wi-Fi. She also emphasized that agreeing to a code of



Teachers can see what students are doing on their school-issued computers in real-time / Credits: Josie McCartney

conduct is standard when using a government-issued device. Referring to her own DCPS-issued work computer, Ms. Isaac said she cannot “use it in a manner that violates that contract that [she has] to sign in order to have the device.”

Ms. Isaac confirmed that DCPS has notified the school before about potentially concerning student communications made on school computers outside of school hours. She also confirmed that findings on school computers could be grounds for disciplinary action by the school.

Additionally, the DCPS Student and

Staff Technology and Network Acceptable Use Policy, which students agree to when they sign the Responsible Use form to receive a laptop, says that “there is no expectation of privacy” using school-issued devices. The policy continues that “all student accounts created by DCPS for students ... may be monitored by DCPS staff.”

While students must agree to that policy in order to take home a school-issued device, the full 15-page policy is only referenced on the Responsible Use form. Many

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What Was SWW Like 30 Years Ago? A Picture of Walls in the '90s

By Zoe Fisher ('25)
News Editor

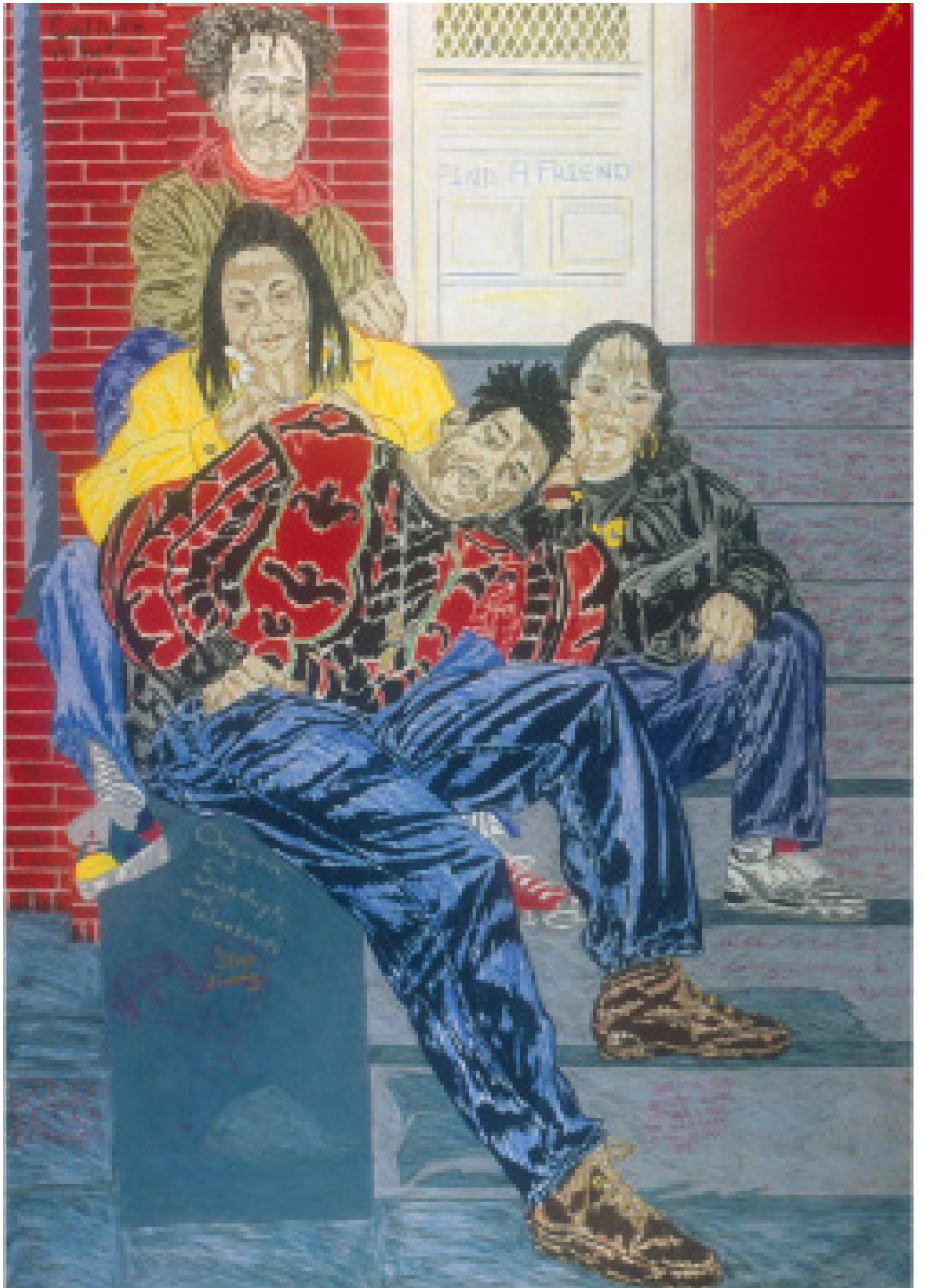
It's the early 90s, you are about to turn 15, Nirvana and the Notorious B.I.G. are playing on the radio, you have baggy jeans and Adidas on, and it's your first day at School Without Walls. All except for the year, this story is relatively familiar for many students today as 90s musicians and fashion trends remain popular among Gen Z. But, how has Walls changed in the last 30 years? Willa Reinhard, Class of 1995, can answer this question.

In the 90s, "[SWW] was sort of like an alternative high school to some degree." Ms. Reinhard chose Walls because she thought the students were cool and unique. She wanted to go somewhere different from Jackson-Reed, to a place that could challenge her, which is what she found.

In 1991, junior high went until 9th grade, so many students started at Walls in 10th grade. The Class of 1995 graduated with about 60 students, making the community much smaller and tight-knit. Ms. Reinhard explained that even though there were some cliques, "there was also like intermingling across some of those groups and across grades." However, the community began to feel smaller much faster than it does today. To paint a picture, there were few enough students that all 200 pupils were able to crowd into the entrance hallway of the old school, and the principal, Emily Crandall, stood at the front and gave announcements.

The 90s Walls community wasn't just different in its size. "[Walls] was definitely diverse racially, and I know the friends that I had there were friends from Southeast and like different parts of [DC] and it didn't feel like there was a whole block of kids that came from Deal, for example. There were a few, but it felt like kids came from all over," Ms. Reinhard explained. Today, Walls has lost some of its diversity as it is made up of 48% White, 26% Black, and 26% Hispanic, Asian, or multiracial students, according to DCPS.

Students would go off campus at lunch and hang out in food courts at GW and in front of Leo's Deli across the street. There they used the Deli's payphones to reach friends from other schools. Ms. Reinhard added, "We would all just be like sitting on the steps of the building and hanging out." Ms. Reinhard's mother, Judy Byron, created a woodcut piece of art that showed students in 1991 on the front steps. This piece



WE ARE YOUR SONS & DAUGHTERS: School Without Walls.
woodcut/rubbing - 68" x 48" - ed 1. 1991

Artwork created by Ms. Reinhard's mother, which inspired her to attend Walls / Credits: E. Ethelbert Miller



Willa Reinhard, class of 1995 / Credits: E. Ethelbert Miller

is what inspired Ms. Reinhard to attend Walls, as the students looked "cool" to her.

Walls also had a similar relationship with GW, holding its assemblies and graduation in the Lisner Auditorium, as is done today. Students also had access to classes at GW similar to the current Exposure Program. At GW, Ms. Reinhard took one class on the Bible and literature simply because she did not know much about the Bible and was curious to learn more. She also attended two Spanish classes, and two Creative Writing classes, which inspired her to study creative writing when she went to college.

At the time, Walls did not yet have a new wing, so most elective classes like music, PE, art, etc. were in alternate locations. Also, students would leave the building for their internship during the afternoon in their Junior or Senior years. Still, Ms. Reinhard said, "The 'Without Walls' wasn't as true then ... we were more

in the building than we weren't." This is the reality even more so today. Now, students only leave school for lunch, internship, the odd drill or trip to the GW gym, and official field trips as most classes can happen in the Walls building itself.

Going to School Without Walls has influenced Ms. Reinhard's career, as she is now an administrator at Parkmont School, a small private school committed to helping students with learning disabilities. It may be only 75 students but, like Walls, it has a strong community that is focused on helping students become strong learners.

Ultimately, School Without Walls was a great place to be in the early 90s in similar ways to today. Students continue to be interesting and curious people, get to take classes at GW, and to simply be high schoolers. Now, the Walls might be over three times the size, but at its core, it remains the same. ●

Winter Play Returns with Disco-Infused “Romeo & Juliet”

By Teagan Lynch ('27) & Ava Orfield-Shah ('27)
Staff Writers

Each year, School Without Walls performs a winter play and spring musical. This year's winter play was the classic “Romeo & Juliet,” written by William Shakespeare. The five act show was performed in the commons “experimental space” at the beginning of this month. “Romeo & Juliet” is a tragedy about love, miscommunication, and family conflicts. Walls' production of the well-known tragedy reimagines the story of star-crossed lovers against a 1970s backdrop, complete with disco balls and '70s dance hits.

The cast worked hard for months to prepare for the performance, studying lines and their characters whenever possible. Maizie Klevan ('27) who played Juliet's cousin, Tybalt, said, “[I had to] memorize my lines, memorize my blocking, do my acting work.” This work involves finding “your objectives and tactics for your character. You have to find their motivation, what is important to them, how that relates to the play, and what makes them do what they do.”

Phoebe Sabar ('26), playing Juliet, described studying her lines as a nonstop task: “Memorizing constantly! On the train, during class, at home.”

The cast members also had rehearsals every day. Despite all the work, the actors still enjoyed putting together scenes. Sabar explained, “we do get a lot of work done, but people are also very giggly and having fun, you know, it's a good vibe.”

For many performers, acting has also helped them in life off the stage. Patrick Carey ('24), who played Capulet, said, “it's great for public speaking and confidence.”

Chamiya Carnathan ('24), who starred as Romeo, agreed that acting has helped her confidence, adding that it was her first time acting. School Without Walls' performance, while based on William Shakespeare's “Romeo & Juliet,”



Scenes from *Romeo & Juliet* in the Commons Experimental Space / Credits: Teagan Lynch

was not identical to the original. Klevan explained, “it's set in the '70s, and they're using switch blades instead of swords. And, you always cut Shakespeare a little bit.”

Sabar described it as an abridged version of the show set in the 70s. Incorporated in this version of the play is a party scene, including 1970s music and a few dances of the 2000s. The actors will also wear 70s attire remaining from previous shows.

The backbone of any play is its director. For “Romeo & Juliet,” that was drama teacher Lea Zaslavsky — Ms. Z. She assisted the actors by helping them fully understand their characters.

“We talk a lot about what their character wants, what their character's motivations are, what they want from the other characters in the scene, what they want for their future. I have students work from there and try to figure out how to embody that character,” said Ms. Z.

In addition to the director, stage managers are vital to keeping a production running smoothly. Sarah Rice ('24), an intern for Ms. Z,

was the stage manager for “Romeo & Juliet,” and worked constantly to maintain the steady progress of rehearsals. “I pretty much just help her make sure that everything goes the way that it needs to go. I was involved in casting, both in running auditions and helping her with some of the decisions that we made for the final cast,” said Rice.

Actors worked since late September to build their characters, and by extension, their play. Throughout many challenges, they persevered and found solutions.

As a whole, the play “went very well,” according to Sabar. “I even heard that I made someone in the audience cry,” she said, “which was like the best compliment ever.” Rice said that the play “turned out to be one of the most rewarding experiences ever” and it helped to “rekindle [her] love for theater.”

From start to finish, everyone involved in the play fulfilled their vital role in the development of “Romeo & Juliet.” Shakespeare fan or not, all kinds of audiences were enthralled by this performance! ●

Students Reflect on Social Media as a Tool for Political Discourse

By Anna Mayer ('25)
Staff Writer

Students are in the midst of an increasingly tumultuous political climate across the country. Not only are Generation Z exposed to the changing political landscape of recent years, but they are also increasingly actively participating in political discourse. According to Tufts University, Gen Z participates more in elections than previous generations, and that level of engagement is expected to continue.

One key difference in the political lives of Gen Z compared to that of older generations is the presence of the internet. According to the BBC, social media, specifically Instagram and TikTok, have given youth opportunities to participate in politics more actively than previous generations. In fact, 77 percent of Gen Z relies on social media as their primary news source.

Many students consider themselves to be consumers of social media, including political content, while not posting.

“I'm on social media a lot, though I don't post anything,” said Dawn Drake ('25). Alana Sapp ('25), identifies herself similarly, saying “I am an avid social media user but I'm not an avid poster.”

Some students, however, see social media as a vessel for conveying political messages. “When I do post on social media it usually is political content,” said Gabri Kurtzer-Ellenbogen, a School Without Walls senior and GW student. “It's not necessarily political in making

a statement. It can be about knocking on doors for a political candidate, or things about what I'm doing as a call to action.”

Logan Alana ('25), for example, considers herself an avid social media user. “I share my daily life and stay connected with others,” she said. “I used to steer clear of political content on social media due to my limited understanding of U.S. and global politics, knowing how detrimental that is. However, [the Israel-Palestine conflict] motivated me to overcome my reluctance and share information.”

Similarly, the Biden Administration's approval of the Willow oil drilling project in Alaska moved many students to share their political views for the first time on social media.

Sapp appreciates seeing users advocate for their beliefs with their platforms. “I'm all for advocating for what you believe in,” she said, “it's very interesting to see when people share their point of view.”

Some users, however, observed the emotional toll constant consumption of politics on social media can have on youth.

“Seeing content from people who disagree with me can get me angry because I feel like it's coming from a place of lack of knowledge, sometimes a lack of empathy,” said a student who preferred to remain anonymous. “It can be hard on your mental health, but I think it's more important to see it than to be isolated from it,” they added.

Drake shared a similar sentiment; “Sometimes you're just not in the space to hear about

politics. It's so easy to get really negative, especially when you're hearing a lot of it and seeing it all the time on social media,” she said, “some people are very emotional about certain topics,” and seeing social media posts about sensitive issues can negatively affect them.

Matthew Weitzner ('25), who is a frequent poster of political content, also noted the combative nature of social media politics. “I'm tired of constantly fighting,” he said. “I'm not sure it will bring that much change.”

Another theme observed by social media users is the spread of misinformation and polarization.

“Sometimes there seems to be this pressure that everyone needs to post about everything at all times,” said Kurtzer-Ellenbogen. She said “that ends up being harmful because there ends up being a lot of misinformation spread.”

“People are mostly posting infographics someone else made, and usually they're definitely very strongly on one position,” said Weitzner, noting that “it's usually a couple people you'll see doing a lot of posting.”

Many students believe that it's crucial to consider your own level of knowledge before engaging in discourse on the internet.

“If you're super passionate, of course post,” said Drake, “but if you're not very educated and you just see something make sure you go in depth about it to make sure you're not spr

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Can Teachers Tell if An Essay is Written by ChatGPT?

By Zoe Becker ('26)
Staff Writer

As generative artificial intelligence (AI) programs have grown in popularity, they've become an increasingly viable tool for students yet pose a point of concern for teachers. Already, students are using ChatGPT to help with assignments, even if they "don't know if the teacher would have permitted it," according to one anonymous student.

Teachers are increasingly aware of the prevalence of generative AI and have used tools like turnitin.com to detect its use in class. For example, humanities teacher Laura Webster uses the software for assignments that are not handwritten.

The anonymous student noted that they found ChatGPT to be a valuable tool but did not believe it could produce work at the same level as an actual student.

Ms. Webster agreed, stating that as a classroom tool, "AI is not good." It is particularly unhelpful for her 12th grade students, who have to write on more complex subjects.

To examine the difference between AI and student work, The Rookery conducted an experiment to see if teachers could determine who wrote a paper.

Three teachers — Ms. Webster, humanities teacher Ginea Briggs, and art history teacher Jason Bulluck — were provided with three versions of an opening paragraph of an essay analyzing John Cheever's short story, "The Swimmer."

One was written by a Walls AP Literature and Composition student, another is that same student's writing edited by ChatGPT, and the last was written entirely by ChatGPT, based on the same prompt. The teachers were then asked to identify which was which.

Mr. Bulluck successfully identified the student work, Ms. Briggs identified the AI written work, and Ms. Webster accurately identified all three.

Ms. Webster attributes her success to the fact that she has spent a lot of time learning about and using ChatGPT and has come to understand its writing patterns better.

"Everyone has a style," she said, "and I know its voice." She explained that "ChatGPT is very general in its language but has very sophisticated word choice."

Looking for these hallmarks allowed her to identify the AI written work and she found that she easily identified the student work as well because the way it was structured was "how you'd teach a student to



A student ponders his use of ChatGPT / Credits: Generated by the Dall E text-to-image model by David Sipos

structure a thesis. ChatGPT wouldn't do that unless you told it directly."

Other results were more of a mixed bag, highlighting that without spending time analyzing the differences between AI and student writing, ChatGPT's writing can be more difficult to identify.

However, Mr. Bulluck is not particularly concerned about increasing student usage of AI. "The classroom ... should reflect that AI can be super helpful, and who knows what brilliant surprises are ahead as student artists, student STEM explorers, and student writers find ways to incorporate the machines to help us towards more equality and broader understanding," he said.

Mr. Bulluck further noted that he sees AI as a potentially valuable tool in eliminating busywork in the classroom because "traditional editing [is] more time consuming and less direct."

Other teachers see AI as a tool for doing just the opposite — for focusing more on editing and revision. "I think in the future," Ms. Webster said, "AI's presence will have

us switch to caring more about editing and revision than first drafts because ChatGPT can write first drafts."

Ms. Webster further explained that she thinks editing will continue to be important despite AI being able to edit drafts. This is because, even if a student is using AI to revise a paper, being able to prompt the AI proves that they understand the skills that they are applying in a certain piece of writing.

Students believe that AI is valuable in making their work more efficient. "[ChatGPT] was really helpful in a time crunch," said the anonymous student.

Although both Walls' students and teachers seem to be beginning to accept some uses of AI in the classroom, school policy does not yet reflect their open-mindedness.

Walls' current AI policy implemented this year requires students to cite generative AI tools like they would any other source.

ChatGPT continued on page 9

Students Navigate Politicized Social Media

Social Media continued from page 5

reading misinformation."

Weitzner agreed. "It depends how well informed you are on a particular issue," he said, in reference to sharing content. "If you're just reposting someone's infographic then it might not be the best. If you're posting your own analysis that could be good, or if you're trying to organize protests then posting can be good too. If you're just posting what everyone else is then it's not necessarily the best."

Despite student's concerns about negative impacts on social media, many agree that the benefits outweigh the harms.

"We're in a generation where kids love to learn and because of social media we have access to a lot of information," said Sapp.

"I encourage you to post about it so we can know more ourselves and we can spread what we know with other kids around us."

"The more people who are informed, the better we can collectively address [political dilemmas]," said Alana, "By sharing information on something so heavily used in today's society, we help ensure that the topic remains in the spotlight and that more individuals become aware of the complexities and nuances involved. Even if it's just a miniscule contribution, it matters." ●



Weitzner shares Instagram story celebrating Supreme Court nomination / Credits: via Matthew Weitzner

Stage Band Shifts from Class to Club But Remains True to Its Mission

By Mitchell Kasdan ('27), Astrid Leppig ('25), & Matilde Martinez-Schott ('27)
Staff Writers

Every morning, Walls hallways reverberate with the harmonies of various instruments — guitars, trumpets, violins — pouring out of room 211, the meeting place for the Stage Band. Established in 2007 and having performed all over the world, Stage Band is one of SWW's most accomplished clubs. They meet daily at 7:30 to rehearse, and while they play all genres of music, their repertoire primarily consists of rock, R&B and pop.

The Stage Band has a variety of performances throughout the year, including annual performances at Spring and Winter concerts. Most recently, it performed in the Winter Concert on Dec. 14, alongside the SWW Jazz Band, Orchestra, and Choir. Last year, the club performed at GW and the prestigious Kennedy Center.

Stage Band gives performers the opportunity to practice their passion and play music they love. Trumpet player Xavier Miller ('25), recalled that he "really enjoyed" performing Aerosmith's song "Dream On."

Since the establishment of the Stage Band in 2007, it has gone through all sorts of changes. This year, the Stage Band made a dramatic change, switching from a class to a club. Christopher Alberts, the Stage Band club sponsor and former Stage Band teacher, described this change as "a source of disappointment" because it undermined the effort of the students and made participation less rewarding. Students no longer earn academic credit, despite the intense time commitment required for participation in the band.

Miller ('25) said that the Stage Band



Stage Band performs at the Winter Concert on Dec. 18 / Credits: David Sipos

is now "a lot more independent" because students have more flexibility in practicing and coming to club meetings. He explained that with that flexibility, members must have a certain level of accountability. Members keep each other "in check" — everyone needs to make it to the early morning meetings and practice individually in order to stay on track for their next performance.

Despite the adjustments that have been made this year to the Stage Band, it has still remained successful. It performed at the 2023 National Ribbon Ceremony, a celebration held to demonstrate the beauty and significance of education. Stage Band's performance stood as a testament

to the dedication of its members and to the importance of the musical arts. This event is one of the many that the Stage Band has performed at. In past years they have demonstrated their talents globally, performing in foreign countries such as Brazil and China.

Mr. Alberts recognized these achievements and praised his students for their accomplishments. "As a music teacher, [I am] deeply proud of my students' hard work, dedication and commitment to both music and each other," he said.

The Stage Band meets daily in room 211 and will accept auditions for the 2024-25 school year in June. ●

"Put Yourself Out There": Senior Advice to Freshmen

By Leah Levy ('25)
Staff Writer

Despite only having attended Walls for a few months, the new class of 2027 has already claimed the couches on the first floor and even won this year's hallway decorating competition. Nevertheless, the transition from middle to high school is an ongoing process, and, while they have become accustomed to life at Walls, the transition from middle to high school will never be easy. New Walls students are still adjusting to a heavier course load and getting to know unfamiliar peers. Luckily for the class of 2027, the seniors from the class of 2024 have plenty of advice to share.

The seniors understand the academic climate at Walls and they have some tips for dealing with a heavy course load. Darya Filippova ('24) recommended "watching YouTube videos," particularly for subjects like physics and advanced math. She also emphasized the importance of diligent

note-taking and consistent studying. Lily Turcotte Keen ('24) added that an "organizational method" such as keeping an agenda is important to keep track of homework assignments. She also advocates tackling assignments promptly, and said to "always try and do small work either during school or the day that you get it."

Julia Kelly ('24) stressed the importance of establishing good study habits early on, urging freshmen to maintain these habits even if they initially feel comfortable with the workload. Especially since "a lot of people come into Walls already being good students," she said that it is important to not be overconfident and to stay on top of your work.

Recognizing the challenges of adjusting to a new social environment, the seniors also recommended actively engaging with the school community in order to develop new relationships. Alex Benach ('24) encouraged new students to "put themselves out there" by joining clubs and attending sports games. And, despite initial fears associated with interacting with older students, Abi McGraw Traser ('24) said, "don't be afraid of the seniors and the juniors because they're going to like you and think that you're cute." "Well, be a little scared," jokingly interjected

Ginger Burke ('24).

However, there is not one way to participate in the Walls community. While Burke recommended joining lots of clubs, Ainhua Aron ('24) cautioned against joining too many of them in order to maintain a well-balanced schedule. Regarding clubs, Ayele Gousseva ('24) advised freshmen to seek out upperclassmen to discover unique and interesting clubs not always featured at club fairs. Finally, in order to make connections within their own grade, Turcotte-Keen urged freshmen to "make an effort to speak to everybody and make sure to at least know their name."

Above all, the seniors emphasized the importance of balance. They encouraged students to study hard and excel academically, but also to be aware of their social and emotional well-being. Turcotte-Keen said, "Just make sure that you're being cognizant about your social-emotional situation and also balancing that with academics. Lean on your teachers and your counselors because they understand that their students are transitioning from middle to high school so they are going to offer support."

Benach advised, "follow the path that's right for you ... you should just do what's going to make you happiest." ●

CLUB SPOTLIGHT

Bike Club: Transforming Commutes and Unleashing Adventure

By Carlotta Rother ('25)
Staff Writer

Students pass the bike racks every morning when they walk into school. Whether they notice them or not, the amount of bikes has drastically increased from last year. This is because the School Without Walls Bike Club has been promoting biking to school.

In order to encourage biking, Bike Club has created group chats for different DC neighborhoods so that members can find someone to bike with. Sofia Bui ('25) said, "These group chats make it easy to find someone, and it is a lot more fun to bike with friends, and a lot safer too."

Some students choose to bike to school because it's simply the most efficient transportation option. Gideon Brosowsky ('26) said, "I really like biking to school, it is a lot faster than the bus or metro." Sofia Bui also agreed, and explained, "it is about 25 minutes faster for me on the way there and about 15 minutes faster on the way back. And I'm able to get right to my house, whereas when I metro, I still have to walk home."

Cyclists ride rain or shine. "I've biked to school everyday for the past 7 years. When it's cold I have a jacket and when it rains I have a rain jacket," said club sponsor Jesse Koplowitz. However, not all cyclists bike to school daily. Sofia Bui commented, "when it rains I just take the Metro, I'm not that crazy! Also, since I don't have a rain jacket to protect my computer, it is just the better option."

There are many School Without Walls teachers who bike to school regularly. "Biking to school is a great way to start your day, you can exercise," P.E. teacher Cory Matthews said, "and it boosts your energy for the rest of the day, I definitely recommend it!" Math teacher Gabriel Webster also agrees that biking is "a great way to end your day, as it is relaxing after a hard day at work."

While biking to school, planning ahead is essential. Riley Gayle ('25) said, "once you bike to school, you are practically forced to bike back," even if it starts raining.

The Bike Club previously existed at Walls before the pandemic, but its activities were suspended when school went virtual. The president, Maia Riggs ('25), restarted Bike Club when students returned to school. She said, "I've always had a passion for bik-

ing and I wanted to share it with the wider Walls community." She also mentioned that she thinks "biking is such an incredible way to commute that is better for not only the environment, but your own physical and mental health. Plus, it is really fun when you can do it with friends!"

The club leaders are aware that for some people it is not possible to bike all of the time. "We go on weekend bike rides and have done field trips in the past, and hope to go on more," said Riggs.

Last spring, around 25 students attended a biking field trip. The students met in front of the school and from there biked down to Georgetown and continued along the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal trail.

Rafi Fox ('25) said, "I had a great time, and it was a great way to get outside with other bikers and friends." Mr. Koplowitz agreed, saying, "I had a lot of fun seeing students appreciate the outdoors, I hope we can continue these field trips."

Gideon Brosowsky ('26) added, "I really loved the trip. I thought it was a little short, so I'm hoping this spring we will do some longer trails." The Bike Club has a goal of biking to Harpers Ferry, West Virginia along the C&O Canal and camping there for the night and then returning. This would be about 120 miles roundtrip.

Riggs acknowledged that, "an overnight trip would definitely take a lot of logistics and planning." Regardless, she remains optimistic that with the right group, Bike Club can make the trip happen.

Bike Club understands that not everyone owns a bike, or even knows how to ride a bike, so they are committed to teaching people more about biking. During an advisory period last month, the Bike Club had their first workshop where members got to learn about how to fix their bikes. On field day, members brought their bikes down to the field and taught students how to bike.

Bike Club meets on Friday mornings at 8:40 in Room 227. ●



Bike Club gathers for a group photo on one of their expeditions / Credits: Cy Wuerschmidt

"Maybe This Isn't for Me": Walls Teachers Recall Steep Learning Curve

By David Sipos ('24) & Masha Pavlova ('27)
Editor-in-Chief, Staff Writer

In his first weeks as a teacher, Walls math teacher Gabriel Webster considered quitting. Teaching is difficult for everyone, but particularly for those new to the profession. Several teachers expressed how difficult teaching was in their early years. Walls has many veteran teachers, all of whom have persevered through initial doubts and emerged with a renewed love for teaching.

"I wasn't that good of a teacher yet ... the first couple weeks I had thoughts of quitting," said Mr. Webster. "I wasn't sure if I'd become a good teacher, the right person for the job," he explained.

Mr. Webster was able to adjust to teaching after a few weeks. But for fellow Walls math teacher Carole Philip, it took years. "I

was this rookie teacher and I thought 'okay, maybe this isn't for me,'" she said. "I came back the next year and I thought 'okay, let me try it one more time.' And it took me 5 years to decide that I really really wanted to be a teacher but from that point forward I never regretted it." Today, Ms. Philip is in her 37th year of teaching, her fifth at Walls.

Physics teacher Harrison Davis is in his fourth year of teaching, having started the career at Walls right out of college. He said that many days can be "overwhelming," explaining that often "there's not enough time to do all of the things I need to do during a regular day and if I want to stay ahead, I need to work outside of school. And I don't want to do that because I have a life to live."

Mr. Davis said that "when I started, I heard from pretty much everyone I knew

who's a teacher that the first several years would be very stressful," just as Ms. Philip experienced. Thinking about adjusting to teaching, Mr. Davis said, "it takes a little bit to really figure out a routine and figure out 'does this work for me?' I think I'm still in that period."

Music teacher Chris Alberts has similarly experienced rough patches throughout more than 20 years as a teacher, recalling "moments where I questioned if I should continue." But he said that "what kept me going was the belief that music education is transformative, and I could make a positive impact on my students' lives. The support of my students, their enthusiasm for learning, helped me persevere through

Motivation continued on page 10

INTERNSHIP

Working Nightshifts with the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Rescue Squad

By Eve Reborá ('25)
Staff Writer

Most students spend their weeknights finishing up homework or watching Tik-Toks, but for Sarah Frances Jones ('25), nights are for working alongside Bethesda-Chevy Chase Fire Safety and Rescue Squad. Though responding to emergency calls isn't the most relaxing evening, it's very rewarding.

All students at SWW are required to work at an internship as upperclassmen to graduate. Most students choose to work virtually or at a typical office job, but Jones took a different approach, spurred by her long-standing interest in the medical field. She has leaned into this passion by pursuing work with the Rescue Squad. Her personality also influenced her decision, as she describes herself as "naturally a very helpful person," which Jones said has proven to be a very beneficial trait to the internship so far.

Jones quickly learned that the job can be full of abrupt calls as after a short break to the grocery store, "we got radioed for a wreck on I-495 and had to take that call before returning to the station." However, she noted not all days on the job are like this and often busyness fluctuates. For now when the squad does get called, Jones is tasked with observing and helping carry equipment. However, as she progresses through the internship she will become able to do hands-on jobs helping patients in medical emergencies.

Although she loves helping others, Jones also emphasized that not every emergency has a happy ending. "We get some really gruesome calls, and also some really sad ones. We can save a life or a limb one day, but maybe not the next day," she said. Despite the tough reality check, Jones still values the experience.

In addition to the emotional difficulty, the schedule of firefighters and EMS workers is not ideal for a high schooler. They tend to do late night shifts from 7 PM to 7 AM, but as a minor she's only allowed to work until



Sarah Francis Jones, pictured above, spends her evenings volunteering with the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Fire Safety and Rescue Squad / Credits: via Sarah Francis Jones

11 PM. "It's really hard to adjust your sleep schedule.

I am big on going to bed early," she said, yet another challenge she's had to overcome.

For a half semester of internship, SWW requires 60 hours, which students typically split up throughout the weeks getting 2-3 hours per week. However, Jones works two night shifts a week, each around four hours.

On top of that, every sixth weekend she works a continuous 20 hour shift. And during her internship class period, she does virtual work, easily exceeding the minimum hour requirements.

Due to her interest in emergency medicine and the physician's skills that come with

it, she feels that the extra hours are worth the payoff. Although she's not being paid, the experience still has value. "Med school is a huge commitment, both financially and career-wise and by doing this I can discover if this is something I want to pursue," she explained.

That being said, for students interested in emergency medicine or firefighting, Jones could not recommend it more. She's had nothing but good things to say about the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Rescue Squad, and recommends it as long for any students willing to commit to the challenges that come with the demanding nature of the internship.

Teachers Read ChatGPT Essays

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The policy further dictates that should AI be detected in student work without a proper citation the student will be subject to typical punishments and grade reductions for plagiarism.

The updated policy, though, is unclear as to how to cite the AI. It also does not specify whether or not AI would be acceptable in the way many students and teachers envision its use — as an outlining, drafting, revising, or editing tool rather than as a sole author of the work.

Confusion abounds when it comes to AI in the classroom. A Common Sense survey released in May found that nearly 60 percent of high school students had used ChatGPT or similar generative AI. As AI becomes commonplace, Walls may be forced to grapple sooner rather than later with these areas of uncertainty. Until then, teachers and students will continue to debate what constitutes appropriate use of AI. ●

Students Feel Misinformed About DCPS Technology Privacy Policy

Surveillance continued from page 3

students feel they haven't been informed about their digital privacy.

In a survey of 52 Walls students, a staggering 94.2 percent of respondents responded "No" to the question "Do you think the school effectively communicates its laptop monitoring policies to students?" In another part of the questionnaire, just 11.5 percent of respondents said they felt adequately informed on the school's laptop monitoring policy.

Though a slight majority (56 percent) of respondents were at least partially aware that their activity on DCPS-issued laptops could be viewed live by teachers from 7:30-5:45, few learned this from the school or DCPS. Rather, they had learned about DCPS' monitoring from teachers or fellow classmates. One respondent said, "it is weird how the school has never mentioned anything about this ever to us. First time I found out about this was by word of mouth.

They should have mentioned something about this during an advisory meeting so the whole school is informed."

Ms. Isaac responded that the school has done multiple presentations to students on digital citizenship and safe online behavior. She added, "there's always opportunities to educate and provide information to students, again, about sites they should or should not be using." Nonetheless, no presentations in recent years from DCPS or Walls have clearly explained privacy in the use of school devices.

In addition to students, many members of the School Without Walls administration, teachers, and staff too, weren't very familiar with Lightspeed and its capabilities.

The introduction of Lightspeed Systems Software to DCPS was done quietly but raises important questions about students' digital privacy. The monitoring of school computers is indeed legal since DCPS owns the laptops and students agree to a contract. However, many students feel

Soccer Star Kylie Emanuel Commits to the University of Pennsylvania for Division I

By Brady Woodhouse ('25)
Staff Writer

This August, Kylie Emanuel ('25) verbally committed to the University of Pennsylvania for Division I soccer. After playing on the DCIAA Championship-winning Walls girls soccer team, being named the DCIAA Player of the Year, and leading the league in scoring with a resounding 26 goals, her commitment comes as no surprise.

“Soccer is the biggest thing in my life,” Emanuel said. The DC soccer star started playing when she was four-years-old, and the sport has been a consistent part of her life ever since. However, she only became serious about the sport during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, “I just started training on my own at RFK and I improved drastically in that time,” Emanuel explained. When competitions and practices opened up post-pandemic, her hard work had paid off. Emanuel decided she wanted to join a team that would be looked upon more fondly by college recruiters.

Joining a strong team was not just for fun — Emanuel knew that it would be important for her future of playing soccer in college. Emanuel said, “I had known by then that I wanted to play in college, and colleges mostly look at your club team. So, I tried out for a very strong team called Arlington ECNL [Arlington Soccer Elite Clubs National].” Being one of the best club teams in the region, colleges like the University of Pennsylvania were much more likely to attend and notice her at games and showcases.

On June 15 of Emanuel’s sophomore year, per NCAA rules, college coaches were allowed to reach out to her as a potential recruit. The University of Pennsylvania acted quickly. Emanuel explained, “like 3 am of June 15, the Penn Coach, Krissy Turner, texted me expressing interest.” Emanuel organized chats with Coach Turner, ecstatic about this opportunity.

However, this was just the beginning of the process. Turner and other recruiters continued to watch her performance at games and showcases over the summer. NCAA rules state that colleges can only offer potential recruits visits on Aug. 1. On that day, Coach Turner was able to set up a visit for Emanuel, during which Emanuel was offered a place on the team. Emanuel accepted the offer about a



Emanuel posted this image on her Instagram account, announcing her verbal commitment to the University of Pennsylvania / Credits: Unknown

week after.

For prospective college athletes, Emanuel advised, “start earlier than you expect.” Besides starting early, she also emphasized that being proactive throughout the process is very important. “You should be constantly sending out emails, introducing yourself, and going to ID camps that colleges host from way before colleges can even reach out,” she said.

Additionally, “for soccer and most other sports, colleges look at club teams,” Emanuel said. She explained that joining a competitive club team is important for being on recruiters’ radar. “I was able to get a lot more exposure to college coaches,” Emanuel said.

But most of all, Emanuel counseled students to “work hard.” In order to be recruited,

“you need to be a really good player,” she said, emphasizing that her other advice only works if students have put in the work to perform well in their sport.

Looking ahead, Emanuel is excited to play Division I soccer. “I know that I will need to work harder than ever both on the field and in the classroom. But I’m really excited for this, and to play for huge crowds.” She continued, “my dream is to win an NCAA tournament, that would be amazing.” The possibilities are endless. With only a non-binding verbal commitment, however, Emanuel will need to maintain her grades and soccer performance.

To be sure, Walls will be expecting another triumphant soccer season next fall from Emanuel. ●

The Challenges of Staying Motivated as a Walls Teacher

Motivation continued from page 8

challenging times.”

Mr. Webster’s passion for teaching math has likewise kept him in the teaching profession. “I think that it’s a very neat thing to know, and I want to help other people experience and feel that, and to benefit from it,” he said, attributing his sixth year at Walls to this fact, and adding “that’s why I come back every year.”

Mr. Davis recognized that difficulties often come only periodically. After a difficult stretch, “you sort of come out the other end, and you’re like ‘oh, actually, things are not that bad ... those periods pass and you kind of return to normal.’” He added that finding a distraction from rough times has helped: “when I’ve felt very overwhelmed with school, playing volleyball has been

very helpful.”

Despite its challenges, Ms. Philip has not once found teaching students boring or tedious. “I like to see growth and I still like it. Somebody said to me the other day ‘well, you can retire,’ and I was like ‘What?! Retire? What am I going to do?’ I still love teaching,” she said. Through long days and tiresome requirements like standardized MAP testing, Ms. Philip has remained focused on teaching students.

For the thousands of new teachers who struggle to start their first year — many of whom may be Walls alumni like Mr. Davis in 2020 — Walls teachers know the feeling of being in a sink or swim environment. Unlike many graduated office jobs, “in teaching, what you’re expected to do starts on day one,” Mr. Webster said, but added “that’s what’s cool about it.” Recalling his initial

doubts, Mr. Webster would tell his inexperienced younger self, “Stick with it, you’re going to be a good teacher someday.”

In Mr. Davis’ first year, he often sought suggestions from fellow teachers, which he found helpful. Now, he’d suggest to himself to not attempt to “reinvent the wheel” in teaching practices and to “avoid... perfectionism.”

“If I could speak to my younger self starting at Walls, I would say: Embrace change and growth. Teaching is not a static profession, and you’ll constantly evolve as an educator,” Mr. Alberts said. He added, “don’t be too hard on yourself” and, “most importantly, cherish the connections you build with your students, as those relationships are at the heart of teaching and will endure for years to come. ●

The Wait is Over: Girls Soccer Defeats Jackson-Reed to Clinch First DCIAA Title in 13 Years

By Josie McCartney ('24)
Managing Editor

The School Without Walls girls soccer team defeated Jackson-Reed in the DCIAA championship for the first time in 13 years. The Penguins emerged victorious from the late October game as Tillie Freed ('24) scored off an assist from Simone Meltzer ('27) in the first half. Goalkeeper Campell Tiller ('26) had a stellar performance with centerbacks Neve O'Connell ('26) and Charlotte Tama ('24) locking down the backfield. They maintained their one-point lead through the second half, capitalizing on their momentum and drawing from the fans' energy.

This upset capped off an excellent fall for the Penguins, who went 13-2-1 in the regular season. In the DCSAA postseason, which, unlike DCIAA, included private and charter schools, the girls scraped out a 3-1 quarterfinal victory against DC International before losing to Jackson-Reed 4-0 in the semifinal. Jackson-Reed went on to lose 3-0 to Georgetown Visitation in the state final.

Captains, coaches, and players alike had a sense that their DCIAA victory and stand-out season was a long time coming. For years, Walls has gone toe-to-toe with Jackson-Reed, coming close to a win many times. They have played each other in the DCIAA championship 13 times, each time falling to the rival Tigers — until now. DCIAA Player of the Year Kylie Emanuel ('25) said that beating Jackson-Reed was “bound to happen one of these years. Every time we play them, it's a good game.”

From the onset of the season, the team energy felt different. Beyond the 11 strong starters, there was more ambition and determination on the team, especially amongst the seniors. Athletic Director Kip Smith said that captains Freed and Tama carried momentum and energy from last season to this year, explaining “they went into the season with the mindset that they could win the championship. They felt confident with the team and what they could do.”

Lilly Gore ('24) added that the team's sense of community this fall was stronger than in previous seasons. “This is the first year that I've seen it be so connected and the team just had really good chemistry between grades.



Penguins celebrating their win with fans while hoisting their trophy / Credits: Rami Noursi

The team just really deserved it this year,” Gore said.

While a lot went right for the Penguins, the season was not without challenge or change. Gabriela Encarnacion joined the team as the new head coach and made changes to the team's formation and practices throughout the season. She could not be reached for comment.

Emanuel noted that under Encarnacion, players had less input in practice and on the formation. She added, “[the new coach] wasn't the most open towards us and we didn't really form any connections with her. She was definitely more on the quiet side.”

Despite the leadership shake-up, the team found success from hard work and on-and-off-field chemistry. Meltzer, who played her first season with the team this year, agreed with Gore, saying it was important that the upperclassmen were welcoming and supportive because “if the team didn't have good chemistry, then [they] wouldn't work well together.” Meltzer's dedication to the sport earned her

significant playing time as a freshman. On her crucial assist, she said, “I was pretty excited and I was happy to contribute to the win.” She looks forward to future seasons with the team and is hopeful to continue recent success.

Giovanni Sandoval was head coach of the team for seven years and is now the goalie coach. He is also optimistic about next season, acknowledging that “year after year, [players] always talk about ‘oh we're gonna lose the seniors, we're gonna be struggling next year,’” but noting “we always come out strong again.” He hopes to start a junior varsity team soon to expand the Walls soccer program.

Gore found the championship game incredibly rewarding and a fitting way to end her high school soccer career; “the seniors felt like we left our mark with that [win]. We just worked so hard for it this entire season and the three years before this.”

While reflecting on her experience with the team, Gore said, “it's such a special group of girls. It's one of the reasons I've really felt like Walls is a home for me.” ●



Eve Rebora ('25) (right) hustling down the field in a previous game against Jackson-Reed on October 18 / Credits: Rami Noursi

COMICS

“Running Late”

By Derek Emons ('24)
Guest Artist



CROSSWORD

World Power

By Max Goldberg ('24)
Puzzle Editor

ACROSS

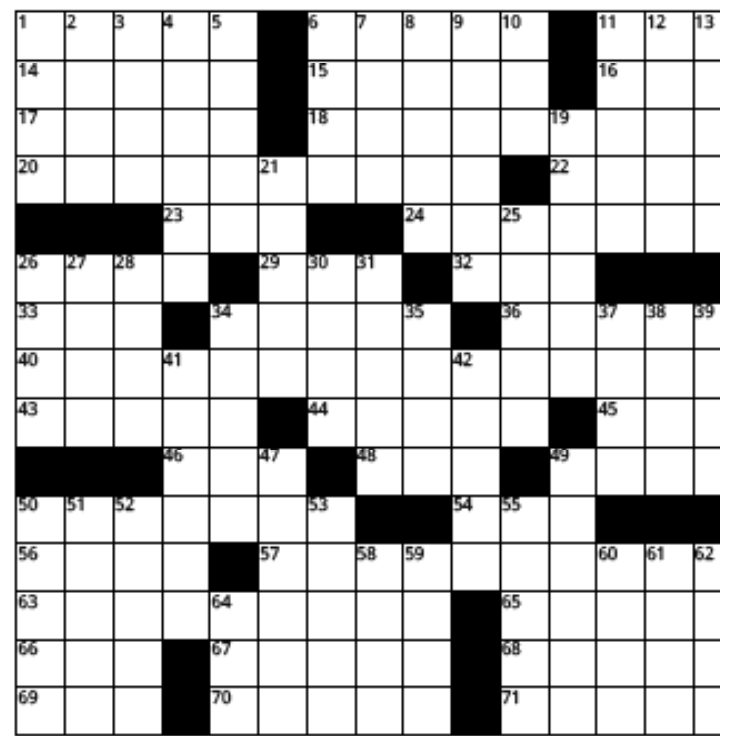
- 1 Muscle contraction
- 6 Speech difficulties
- 11 German exclamation
- 14 Florida bay city
- 15 Very dim
- 16 British bathroom
- 17 ___ac (farmer's calendar)
- 18 Syndrome where prisoners bond with captors
- 20 DC's oldest neighborhood
- 22 Against
- 23 American uncle?
- 24 Thai cat breed
- 26 1D's gender
- 29 Vegas action
- 32 Sgt.'s subordinate
- 33 ___lima
- 34 Family car
- 36 Therefore
- 40 Global seats of government... or what 18A, 20A, 26A, and 57A (surprisingly) all are
- 43 Tribal leader
- 44 Agreed (with)
- 45 Director's shout
- 46 Baseball hat
- 48 Touch lightly
- 49 Desperate request
- 50 Highway around DC
- 54 Hit the slopes

56 Philosopher

- Zeno of ___
- 57 Beef ___ English steak dish
- 63 Assurance
- 65 Cooking oil source
- 66 Commercials
- 67 Trick move
- 68 Pre-fax communication
- 69 Tennis court divider
- 70 They go in the Assessment category
- 71 Surgical tube

DOWN

- 1 Harry Potter's Patronus
- 2 White as a ghost
- 3 Paintballs, e.g.
- 4 Thinly scattered
- 5 Japanese comics
- 6 Strong desire
- 7 "What's gotten ___ you?"
- 8 Decreases speed
- 9 Meal on a blanket
- 10 Wall St. purchase
- 11 Solo
- 12 Indianapolis NFL team
- 13 How Mr. Klawender might address a student
- 19 "To be, or not to be" play
- 21 Fire leftover
- 25 Garden pest



26 Computer clickers

- 27 Military no-show
- 28 Nolsy
- 30 Ice cream brand
- 31 Implied
- 34 Milkshake insert
- 35 Zilch
- 37 Table salt, in Room 14
- 38 You're reading one right now
- 39 This, in Mr. Catlin's class
- 41 Hummingbird food
- 42 Coke archival
- 47 "Parks and Recreation" location

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