

Walls Retakes Top Spot On U.S. News Ranking of Public High Schools



Benjamin Banneker High School, ranked second to Walls / Credits: Eleanor Houser

By Zoe Becker ('26)
Staff Writer

U.S. News and World Report published its annual ranking of American public high schools last September, revealing that School Without Walls had fallen below longtime competitor and fellow DCPS magnet school, Benjamin Banneker High School. This year though, Walls has reclaimed its top spot among the best D.C. high schools.

The Walls administration shared the new rankings with students and families in an email. Walls Assistant Principal Jennifer Tully explained that she and the rest of the administration felt it important to share the report's findings with the broader community because "rankings are validating."

"Everyone at our school works very hard — teachers, students, admin," Ms. Tully said, "So when you get celebrated for your hard work, it feels good. I think that's motivating for people. It's rewarding, and we wanna share that celebration with the community."

Walls remains second in the Washington Metropolitan Area to Thomas Jefferson High

School for Science and Technology in Fairfax, which ranks fifth among all high schools in the country.

The U.S. News and World Report analyzes schools over two-year intervals, so Walls' current ranking is based on its performance in 2021 and 2022.

U.S. News evaluates schools on six criteria. College readiness holds the most weight (30 percent) and is measured by the percentage of students who took at least one AP or IB test by the end of senior year and the share of students who earned at least a 4 on AP exams.

Last year, Walls ranked 2nd in the DMV on college readiness and this year fell to third. Banneker fell too, from 3rd to 4th place. Walls and Banneker sit behind BASIS DC and Thomas Jefferson, both of which had 100 percent of students enrolled in an AP course.

U.S. News additionally measures how many students pass their AP exams. Walls' AP pass rate exceeded Banneker's in this year's rankings. Banneker's percentage of students

Rankings continued on page 3

Walls Implements New Hall Pass Policy

By Eve Rebora ('26)
Staff Writer

As of this year, students are now required to obtain a teacher-signed hall pass before leaving any class. If they attempt to walk the halls without a pass, security guards will instruct them to return to class. Security guard Myron Bell explained that the reason behind this policy is that students wandering hallways during class time has become an issue at Walls. Administration did not provide comment.

Although the majority of Walls students take responsibly-timed breaks from class, a few have taken advantage of their ability to walk out of class whenever. One student said that some "have abused the system and skipped classes" so "it makes sense the system has been put in place"

However, "that doesn't change the fact that it's annoying," they said. Several students reflected similar sentiments, describing hall passes as "irritating" and "a hassle." Even Ms. McGlennon, who has taught at SWW for eight years, said that the new hall pass policy is "kind of a pain in the neck."

However, she qualified that she didn't take issue with the policy. She said, "if we have kids who can't be trusted to just go to the bathroom and come back, I guess it's what we have to do."

Regardless, the new policy is a big shift for students and staff. In the past, many teachers have let students leave the class without needing to ask permission. This new policy leaves students with a lot less freedom, and for some, a lot more time in class.

Though the policy was designed to keep students focused, for some, it has in some ways become a distraction that takes away from lesson time. Every time students need to leave, the teacher must pause class to provide a signature. The passes distributed by administration

Hall Passes continued on page 3

Affirmative Action is Gone. What's Next for Walls Students?

By Zoe Becker ('26)
Staff Writer

Walls students face a major change in the college application landscape with the recent Supreme Court decision to strike down race-based affirmative action. In July, the Supreme Court sided with the Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA) in the cases of SFFA v. Harvard University and SFFA v. University of North Carolina, finding in both cases that the schools' affirmative action policies violated the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment.

The court's decision limits schools' ability to prefer applicants based solely on their race, but does not preclude schools from using affirmative action policies based on gender or socioeconomic status. Neither did it ban the practice of legacy admissions, where relatives of alumni are preferred in college admissions.

Many colleges and universities across the country have voiced disappointment with the decision and have expressed their continued commitment to diversity.

Students, too, have voiced disdain for the decision. "I was really shocked," said Amira Schroeder ('24). "People are viewing affirmative action as someone else taking their spot at college when this spot wasn't theirs to begin with." She also expressed her frustration "that legacy admission is deemed constitutional and race-based affirmative action isn't."

Niyah Sapp ('24), the vice president of the Black Student Union, also voiced her support for the policy. "I'm an African American student and I'm also a senior, so I know the college process is going to be a little different now," she said. She explained that she believes race-based "affirmative action helps people ... from [marginalized] groups to have opportunities in schools" that they wouldn't otherwise have. Sapp added that the continued use of legacy admissions without racial affirmative action would especially hurt diversity in colleges.

However, not all students see the end of affirmative action as a problem.

Affirmative Action continued on page 4



The Supreme Court of the United States
Credits: David Sipos

Instagram Page Raises Concerns Over Cyberbullying on Social Media

By Georgia Murphy ('26)
Staff Writer

The @sww2026confessions account was active during the last few weeks of summer and focused on the current sophomore class of School Without Walls. The account owner created a Google Form that asked students to anonymously answer questions about their classmates and posted the responses to an Instagram story that was accessible for only 24 hours.

A follower of the account who wished to remain anonymous explained that the account's posts grew more malicious over time. "At first, it was fun and [then] people started getting a little bit meaner," the source said. "They started insulting other people. And I think it kind of reached a breaking point."

After the account had become harmful, one student who wishes to remain anonymous decided to report the @sww2026confessions to Walls administration. This student explained that they took action because they believe that such accounts are damaging to the school's community. "It makes people feel really bad about themselves and it makes us paranoid of what others are saying about us behind our backs," they said.

In response to the report, Walls administrators implemented multiple strategies. They coordinated several school-wide anti-cyberbullying seminars. These seminars included a video on the effects of cyberbullying, a discussion on why bullying is harmful, and a statement of DCPS' policies. In addition, the administration reported the incident to the Cluster Superintendent and Mental Health Teams. Finally, they contacted the various targets of the account and offered mental health resources.

Principal Sylvia Issac said, "engaging in this kind of behavior does not encourage positive relationships in any way in the school. If students have encountered any bullying they should report it ... It's so important that we're able to quickly address the situation," she said.

Some students believe that the administration should have conducted an additional investigation to uncover the identity of the ac-



Students Looking At Their Phones / Credits: Georgia Murphy

count's owner. However, whether such an investigation occurred and the extent of its success is unclear.

Ms. Isaac said, "administration takes bullying very seriously. When more can be done... we're going to investigate. We're going to find out who's involved and we're going to see if consequences are warranted. And if there are, that's what will happen."

The anonymous reporter of the account explained that the administration had reached a stalemate with their investigations. "A friend and I went to Ms. Kosin to talk about the incident, and she said the school was doing all they really could," they said.

As students still do not have all of the facts, many have turned to rumors for information. As one target of the account who wished to remain anonymous explained, "words get passed around and the truth gets mixed up." In any case, the identity of the facilitator is still unknown to students.

Some students believe that the administration's response to the account was unproduc-

ive. Another anonymous target of the account said, "I don't think that lecturing the entire grade was very effective ... The whole grade [had to] sit through like 50 assemblies all about the same thing." The student described the assemblies, which referenced outdated social media platforms like MySpace, as "tone-deaf."

The student expressed that the administration's response was disproportionate to what the situation warranted. They said, "for me it's just something to have a conversation about," explaining that "It was just ... rumors and gossip." They also explained that the account didn't really affect them. "I've learned not to take things like that seriously," they said.

Ms. Isaac also believes that if these incidents can be avoided, the school will benefit. "We all belong in a community. That means that each and every person brings to the community something that is unique, something that may be different, but something that should be celebrated ... So first and foremost, it means respect," she said. ●

In Memoriam: Walls Alum Dzhoy Zuckerman

By Theo Weller ('25)
Sports Writer

Just after midnight on July 15, 2023, School Without Walls alum Dzhoy Zuckerman ('15) was tragically shot and killed in Takoma, DC (per MPD). The 27-year-old was best known in DC as an avid cyclist, pedaling around the city clad in their signature purple. They were well-known in the DC cyclist community, volunteering for many years with the DC Bike Party, a massive, once a month group ride in DC. In fact, they were the lead organizer for this year's Bike Party Pride Ride.

Dzhoy (pronounced "joy") was born in Ukraine but was adopted at the age of eight by the Zuckerman family in Takoma Park. They soon began playing soccer, first on neighborhood and club teams and eventually for School Without Walls. They also had a passion for juggling and helped organize a circus group that met once a week in Meridian Hill Park. After Walls, Dzhoy worked at a game and puzzle shop (another one of their passions) in Capitol Hill called Labyrinth. Dzhoy soon found the job that they loved: delivering packages around the city as a bike messenger.

When Dzhoy wasn't cruising around DC's streets, they were investing time into DC bike communities or events. Dzhoy often partook in the wholesome "Tour De Bike Lane," where participants line up along a bike lane and cheer on every biker passing by.

Dzhoy left a big imprint on their Walls peers and teachers. Most people remember Dzhoy as a joyous person — just like their name.

During their time at the school, they were a member of the soccer team, Solar Sculpture Club, and Rubik's Cube Club. William Neidecker-Gonzales ('14) — founder of Rubik's Cube Club — remembered Dzhoy's many hobbies and skills. "I had heard rumors that [they] could solve the Rubik's cube in 12 seconds, better than my fastest time of 14 seconds at the time. I knew I had to get [them] on our team to compete against other schools," Neidecker-Gonzales said. "Dzhoy was an independent person and had a lot of hobbies — juggling, magic tricks, ping pong...incredible at the game go, et cetera."

Harrison Davis, who attended Walls and graduated in 2014 and now teaches science, also remembered them. "I have a vague mem-

ory. . . of [Dzhoy] juggling a cube and solving it at the same time," Mr. Davis recalled. "I met them again in January or February of this year for the first time since high school, and they were so distinctive with their purple bike and sweater," he said. "Even after years, they recognized me right away and wanted to chat about what I was doing and how I was liking working at SWW. Since I'd last met them, they'd had a kid and become an avid biker."

"Always interested in the color purple and juggling and card tricks and just all around funny stuff, they were always a positive person to be around," recalled Jack Ewart, a fellow Walls 2015 graduate. "Definitely a unique person . . . One memory I have personally with them is they put like 200 levels of Mario and tetris and pong and all the classic games on my graphing calculator and I just played games in class all the time."



The Walls Rubik's Cube team at a competition in 2012. Dzhoy is third from right. Credits: Unknown, via William Neidecker-Gonzales / Credits: Unknown

Walls Tops Banneker

Rankings continued from page 1

passing AP exams fell from 76 percent to 61 percent while Walls' pass rate rose from 80 percent to 85 percent.

Walls' high pass rate on AP exams is unsurprising for many students, given the way the school emphasizes doing well on AP courses. "The culture at Walls and just the general attitude of the students has a lot to do with AP success," said Maeve Cunningham ('26), referencing the overall emphasis on AP testing at Walls.

Schools are also evaluated on the percentage of students who took multiple college level courses, performance of underserved students, graduation rate, proficiency level on state standardized tests, and whether or not test scores met or exceeded U.S. News predictions.

In both this year's and last year's rankings, Banneker had a slight edge on Walls in terms of reading proficiency — with 97 percent of students proficient at Banneker and 93 percent of students proficient at Walls both years.

Even so, this year, Walls managed to take the highest position among D.C. schools by improving its overall performance on state assessments. Walls rose from 6th to 5th place in the metropolitan area, and continues to have slightly higher math proficiency scores than Banneker, with 84 percent proficiency both this year and last.

Where Walls seals the deal is with science scores; just 28 percent of Banneker students are proficient compared to Walls' 58 percent. While Walls' first place ranking certainly merits celebration, Ms. Tully cautioned students and families against putting too much stock into such reports.

"I think rankings are limited," Ms. Tully said, "They don't look at the whole picture of a school. I would never pick my kids' school based on ranking alone."

Cunningham echoed what Ms. Tully said, saying that "one number doesn't really mean that much in the grand scheme of things, no matter how cool it sounds."

Ms. Tully further noted that given their overall confidence that Walls will continue ranking highly, Walls administration is currently more focused on what rankings don't capture, such as social-emotional learning and students' overall happiness. "[It's] our job to work on what needs to be worked on — the qualitative stuff they would never be able to catch," she said. ●

Team of Teachers Draft New A.I. Policy

By Jesse Moss ('25)
Staff Writer

Artificial intelligence (A.I.) can be a valuable tool for students. Keeping in mind that usage of A.I. can both help and hinder students, a team of teachers at Walls have worked to create an official school A.I. policy.

The team of teachers building the policy has included heads of each department who have worked to tailor the policy to their individual subject. The humanities department might focus on using A.I. as a "tool for research," whereas, for the arts, "it's much more complicated and complex," taking into consideration the varying definitions of art.

The new policy, implemented this year, requires students to cite generative A.I. tools — such as ChatGPT — "just like any other source," according to Humanities teacher Carolyn Schulz.

The policy will be enforced using the A.I. detector on Turnitin.com, which indicates whether A.I. has been used without citation to write student work. According to Ms. Schulz, this method has been successful in detecting A.I. usage in student work this year.

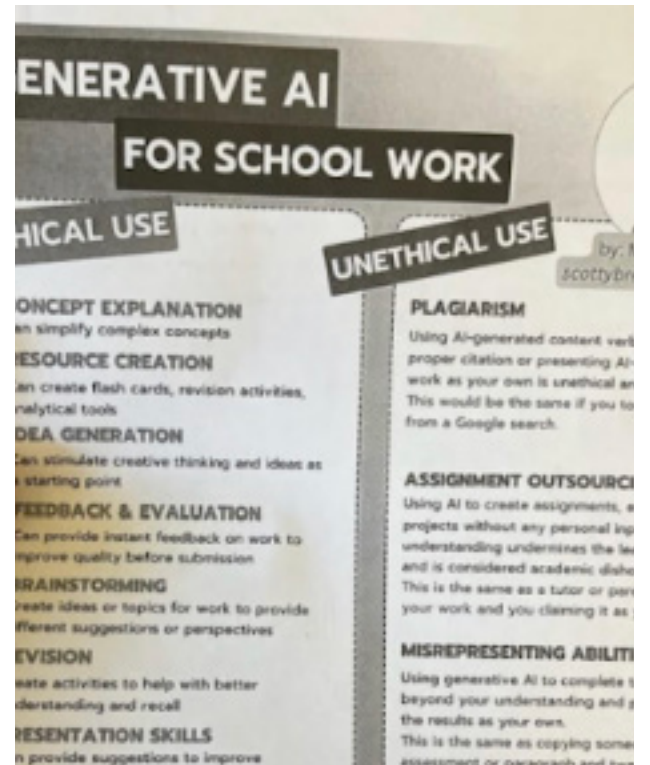
If use of A.I. is detected, students will be subject to the standard plagiarism policy. As Ms. Schulz explained, "the first instance is a zero, the second is a zero plus a verbal reprimand and you meet with the administration, and then the third one is elevated to you possibly might be removed from school."

ChatGPT, an A.I. chatbot with the potential to help students with assignments, offers important educational benefits that Walls does not want to discount. "[Students] have the ability to go onto ChatGPT, for instance, and just say 'can you give me a list of topics that are controversial topics around healthcare?' and it could be really good for the brainstorming phase."

She cited Grammarly, a program that uses A.I. to correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors, as well as help edit and revise, and improve writing as an example of a positive use of A.I. technology. "Grammar is good to know, but if you have a grammar editor, how amazing is that?" she said.

ChatGPT is "kinda a necessity for a school that has such an intense workload," added Kate O'Brien ('24), "A.I. in a way has become a life saver. I use it weekly."

Conversely, for Theodore Mores ('26), ChatGPT is often more of a hindrance than a resource. "I've used it before and found it to be a hassle," he said, "and none of the answers have come to aid in my work."



Guidelines for ethical uses of A.I. technology / Credits: Sara Weinrod

Regardless, excessive use of ChatGPT may hinder students' academic development. Ms. Schulz explained that the technology could prevent students from "developing strong research skills because [they're] limiting those skills to one search engine." She added that has created a "gray area of understanding what is authentically your own work and what is somebody else's work . . . It dumbs it down for students, so it's not creating those critical thinking skills."

For students like Mores who don't often use ChatGPT, the policy will have a relatively small impact. "I don't know, it might be good, it might be bad," he said, "or it might just be a useless answer to an already unsolvable problem."

"For a lot of people, the easy way out would be abusing platforms like [ChatGPT]," O'Brien said. "Although it's kinda a double-edged sword, I would definitely be excited to see how this policy can make a positive change on the future of Walls."

For Ms. Schulz, the crux of the issue is that "we're going to lose authenticity, genuineness, [the] voice of humans, right? The cost [of reliance on ChatGPT] is your ability to develop as a human being." In crafting this policy, she hopes to prevent AI from restricting "the skills that [a student is] developing as a researcher, as an investigator, as someone that's going to be an informed human being." ●

Hall Passes Now Required for Students to Leave Class

Hall Passes continued from page 1

require the student's name, teacher, signature, time, and destination. However, many teachers have found a more efficient method: generic reusable passes that students can simply grab when they want to leave class.

While this method may be more efficient, it lessens the effectiveness of passes. Without specific information such as departure time, security guards have no way of determining how long students have been out of class.

Further, security does not routinely inspect hall passes. Students may wander from floor to floor, unlikely to be stopped. Often, any scrap of paper in hand is sufficient, which security assumes to be an official pass.

Overall the new hall pass policy, although disruptive, is a first step towards reducing excessive time out of class. Although disfavored by the general student body, school security stands by the policy. "If the kids don't like it, that means it's working," said Officer Bell. ●



Hall pass lanyard / Credits: Eve Rebora

NEWS

What Do Students Think About The Affirmative Action Ruling?

Affirmative Action continued from page 1

One senior, who preferred to remain anonymous, celebrated the decision. They described race-based affirmative action as “a racist policy towards Asian Americans and white Americans that discriminates against them.”

Mychael Brown ('24) added another perspective against affirmative action. “As a Black man, I see it as [colleges are] giving me a hand-out because [they] don't think that my ability can compete with people who have a different skin color than me,” Brown said. While he supported efforts to increase diversity and representation in colleges, “the way... to do it is not going by race.” “Really what it's doing is it's saying I can get in because you think my race can't have that opportunity normally,” Brown explained.

Sapp disagreed. “I wouldn't necessarily categorize it as a handout if you're in a society where you're constantly being put down... if anything, it's like someone reaching their hand out to help,” she said. The decision has sparked discussions like these in high schools throughout the U.S., as both students and school faculty attempt to decipher what the court's ruling will mean for the college admissions process.

In the aftermath of the decision, Walls school counselors are grappling with how, if at all, to change the guidance for their students. This, however, is a difficult task because as explained by class of 2024 counselor Kathryn Moore, “we don't know yet exactly how students will be affected moving forward.”

Many students at Walls have questions about whether the end of affirmative action will make discussing race detrimental to their application. “Students should present their authentic selves on their college applications, including race or any other aspect of identity. At this point, we would not advise students to do anything differently than they have in the past,” said Ms. Moore. This general guidance has been echoed by admissions officers across the country including by Mark Dunn, Associate Director of Admis-

sions at Yale University. On a special episode of his podcast, Inside the Yale Admissions office, he said “if you don't work in an admissions office, you don't need to change anything.” This year's ruling isn't the first time race-based affirmative action has been challenged. Prior to the 2023 decision, eight U.S. states already had prohibited the practice, the largest being California, which became the first state to ban race-based affirmative action in 1996.

Advocates for increased diversity in schools remain dissatisfied with the state of California colleges, which have yet to meet their diversity and equity targets nearly three decades after the decision.

Many California schools have worked in recent decades to focus on other ways to increase diversity without affirmative action. However, a statement from University of California chancellors sent to the Supreme Court said that “despite its extensive efforts, the UC struggles to enroll a student body that is sufficiently racially diverse to attain the educational benefits of diversity.” Given that many schools see increased diversity as a valuable vehicle to expose students to new ideas, colleges are not going to stop trying to recruit diverse classes.

Some researchers and admissions officers have suggested that universities should shift their focus to socioeconomic diversity, which would prioritize lower-income applicants. Richard Kahlenberg, who served as an expert witness for the plaintiffs in both affirmative action cases this summer, has called for the implementation of class-based affirmative action policies. Kahlenberg has noted that many elite colleges, despite diversifying racially in recent years, have been stagnant in terms of their socioeconomic diversity. At Harvard, for example, 71 percent of the black, Hispanic, and Native American student population comes from the richest one-fifth of the national black, Hispanic, and Native American population.

In an interview with PBS, Kahlenberg further highlighted, in an interview with PBS, that in seven of the ten US states that had banned race-based affirmative action prior to this year's supreme court ruling, they were able to get

just as much Black and Hispanic representation through using metrics such as socioeconomic status as they previously did using race.

Many also see socioeconomic status as a simply insufficient replacement for race-based affirmative action. “I think trying to increase diversity is wonderful but I don't think it should be just through socioeconomic status. For college admissions to [be] truly fair they should implement a combination of race-based affirmative action and also try to increase diversity in socioeconomic status,” said Schroeder.

“Although it's not affirmative action, it may be one of the closest things to it,” Sapp added, noting the economic challenges often disproportionately experienced by racial minorities.

The proposal for class-based affirmative action has some more support among students opposed to the original race-based policies. “I'd have to do more research on what kind of impact that would have... but I'm definitely more open to that than race,” one senior said.

“If you really want people of different backgrounds, go by economic diversity,” said Brown. He also suggested that colleges should allow applicants to write an essay about how race or racial adversity has affected their life. Besides socioeconomic diversity, some schools have offered applicants this option. The Supreme Court decision mentioned this as an option for colleges, with Chief Justice John Roberts writing that the decision does not prevent schools “from considering an applicant's discussion of how race affected his or her life.”

Given this now more convoluted playing field in terms of diversity efforts, Ms. Moore advised students to arm themselves with as much information as possible about the affirmative action or affirmative action adjacent policies at schools they're applying to. She said, “many colleges have issued statements regarding their efforts to prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) on their campuses in light of the decision. We would encourage students to ask about those efforts during college visits, tours, etcetera to get a better understanding of how that college supports and fosters D.E.I. on their campus.” ●

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Slipper Thursday: Frivolous Fad or Forever Fashion?

By Tillie Freed ('24)
Senior Editor

Thursday could be considered the most mundane day of the week, but not at Walls. Here, Thursdays are for slippers.

Wyndham Mills ('24) and Ganesh Bhojwani ('24) started Slipper Thursday back in May. Mills was looking for an excuse to wear her brand new Ugg Tasman slippers and recruited Bhojwani to join her, as the duo liked wearing similar outfits for fun.

Bhojwani was initially met with ridicule. His friends made fun of his slippers, saying he looked like a “bum.” Bhojwani had a clever response, “I was like, ‘What do you mean? It's Slipper Thursday.’” His friends “thought that was hilarious.”

The next Thursday, Bhojwani's friends showed up to school sporting their own slippers. From there, Slipper Thursday blossomed into a grade-wide affair, “It just kept growing,” Bhojwani said. “Before we knew it, we had a movement going.”

Many different types of shoes qualify



Wyndham Mills ('24), left, and Ganesh Bhojwani ('24) / Credits: Tisha Nikolayev

for Slipper Thursday. The list includes Crocs, Uggs, flip-flops, Chacos, and even traditional Indian wedding shoes. “It's up to personal interpretation to an extent,” Mills said.

Initially a class of '24 tradition, Slipper Thursday soon spread to other grades. Kai Henrikson-Brandt ('25) enjoys rocking his pink crocs for the occasion. “I'm a fan. I think it's

something kind of fun to do. Walls doesn't really have spirit, so it's something.”

Statistics teacher Pedro Zara has noticed that Slipper Thursday can become a disruption in class. He cited a particular situation in which a student allegedly “grabbed” another student with their toes while wearing slippers. “Toe grabbing is not [...] okay,” he said. Despite that incident, Mr. Zara said he would still consider participating in Slipper Thursday.

The future of Slipper Thursday is up in the air. The founders of the movement have big dreams. “I want Slipper Thursday to be something that's beyond us,” said Bhojwani, floating ideas such as a shoe drive.

As for passing on the legacy, the pair are considering preserving the movement under the leadership of a trusted junior. Bhojwani and Mills also hope to bring Slipper Thursday with them to college, albeit privately. “I think it'll be always something that I carry with me,” Bhojwani said.

To the founders, Slipper Thursday represents so much more than an excuse to wear a certain style of shoe. Bhojwani explained, “I want Slipper Thursday to represent community and people coming together.” Though it may be “silly to some,” to Bhojwani, the tradition is “beautiful and impactful.”

Reflecting on Slipper Thursday, Bhojwani said, “when you look at ... what we're leaving behind — the seniors' little quirks — little things like Slipper Thursday is how we'll be remembered.” ●

Should You Submit Your SAT Scores to Colleges?

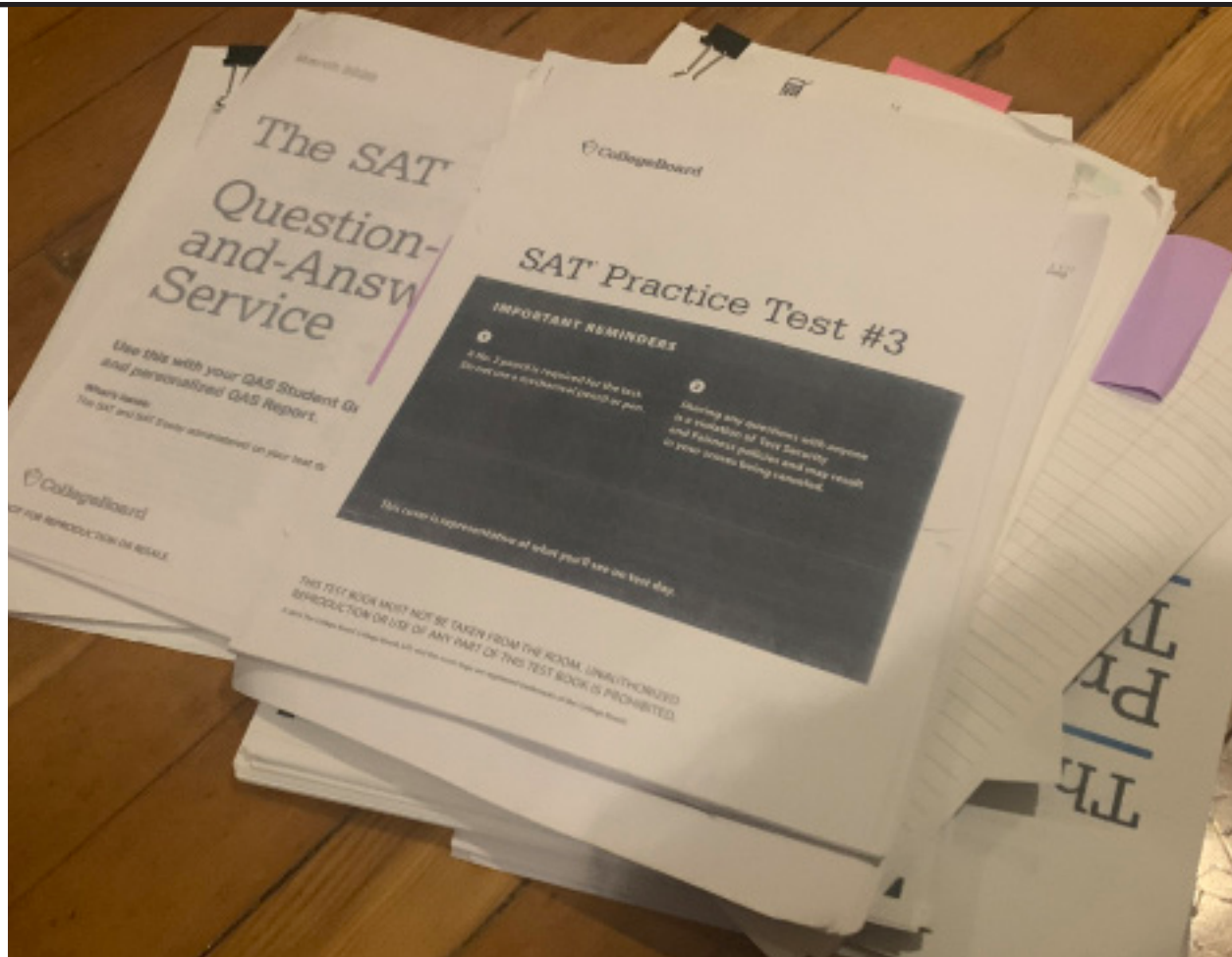
By Nola Coyne ('24)
Staff Writer

While the SAT has been a defining part of the high school experience for nearly a century, a strong SAT is no longer an essential element to most college applications. About 80% of schools are test-optional for the fall 2023 admissions cycle — including the vast majority of elite universities. In fact, 19 out of the top 20 universities ranked by U.S. News are test optional. The suspension of the requirement has caused many students to wonder whether they should submit their scores.

This month, many seniors sat for the SAT for their second or third time, and underclassmen took the PSAT in preparation. Despite more schools opting for test-optional policies, most seniors have spent the past year studying and preparing for the SAT in the hopes that their score will strengthen their college applications.

However, a high SAT is no longer a prerequisite for a competitive application. Class of '24 counselor Ms. Moore offered insight into what factors students should consider when deciding whether to submit their scores to colleges. “Students might have test anxiety” or may not “have opportunities to take a prep course,” Ms. Moore said, meaning that one test might not accurately reflect their academic abilities. If a student believes a test is not a good reflection of their skills, then they might want to consider applying test-optional.

Another factor students should keep in mind is that the elimination of the standardized testing requirement has inflated colleges' reported test score range. This range describes the SAT scores that the middle 50 percent of accepted students had, but only the scores of



Pile of SAT Practice Tests / Credits: Sara Weinrod

students who submitted them. Ms. Moore explained that, “many of the students submitting have high scores, making the score range skewed.” This means that some SAT score ranges are artificially inflated, and don't represent the scores that many of the accepted students — who applied test optional — had.

However, Ms. Moore recommended that, if a student's score does happen to fall into the school's score range, they should submit their scores, even if they fall on the lower end of the spectrum.

While the SAT is still a very real part of high school and college applications, students now face less pressure to test well because they don't necessarily have to submit their score. In-

stead, many schools put more weight on other parts of a student's application such as their essays, recommendations, grades, and extracurricular activities.

Many colleges use the metaphor of a pie for student applications. If you remove one piece of the pie (for example, test scores), the admissions officers simply make the other pieces bigger to make up for the missing information. In other words, a lack of a standardized test score on your application makes admissions officers put more consideration into other aspects of the student's profile. Students should not worry about not submitting scores to a school because there are many other aspects of their application that can make up for a lack of test scores. ●

TEACHER SPOTLIGHT

Ms. Martinez-Lopez: From Aspiring P.E. Teacher to Spanish Teacher

By Evie Corr ('25)
Staff Writer

Ana Martinez-Lopez did not initially want to become a language teacher. She was considering studying either architecture or physical education. In high school, Ms. Martinez-Lopez thought being a P.E. teacher would be “so much fun,” a “perfect idea,” she said.

Ms. Martinez Lopez was born in Spain and has been a teacher since 1997. She now teaches her native language, Spanish, at Walls. But her career in linguistics began unexpectedly.

To Ms. Martinez-Lopez, being a P.E. teacher seemed fun, but the process to study in physical education was far from enjoyable. “In Spain, to go into physical education at high levels, you need to pass this super hard exam,” she said. Initially, she did not pass the exam, but she waited a year, tried again, and passed. Her persistence and patience put her on the path to her dream job.

Ms. Martinez-Lopez began studying physical education and health at a Spanish university. There, she was offered the opportunity to study abroad at King's College in London.

“I loved London,” she recalled fondly. “It was a really good school, it was hard.” King's College offered a program to study linguistics which piqued her interest, and there her

career goals began to shift. There, she studied with students who hoped to become language teachers. She liked sharing knowledge with other people. After studying alongside other language teachers, she decided that she too wanted to teach a language.

Throughout her career, she has had the opportunity to live and study internationally. She has lived in Spain, England, and India before D.C. Prior to teaching at Walls, Ms. Martinez-Lopez taught at Bancroft Elementary school in Mount Pleasant.

Before that, she taught at a variety of D.C. schools, including Oyster Adams for seven years. Spingarn High School until its closing in 2013, and Lincoln Middle School.

Because she has taught at many different schools, Ms. Martinez-Lopez appreciates the unique environment at Walls. “It's very different. I really really like the students here. They are very engaged, and it is awesome to teach because you can teach in a way that feels really free and students reciprocate.”

Just like the students at Walls, Ms. Martinez-Lopez is already very engaged in the community. In addition to teaching Spanish III, Spanish IV, and Film Studies, she sponsors the Robotics Club with Mr. Vrooman, helps with the Gardening Club, and hopes to sponsor the Latin Student Union.

She hopes to “stay at Walls for a long time.” Welcome to Walls, Ms. Martinez-Lopez!



Ms. Martinez-Lopez in her classroom / Credits: Evie Corr

OPINION

Affirmative Action Was Unfair; It Was Still Good For Everyone

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

Over the summer, the Supreme Court ruled that affirmative action — the policy of factoring race into college admissions — was unconstitutional. Since the 1978 case *University of California v. Bakke*, the Supreme Court had held race-conscious admissions to be permissible and many colleges have practiced them to increase diversity among their admitted students.

The end of affirmative action will result in less diverse higher education. This is an unacceptable impact.

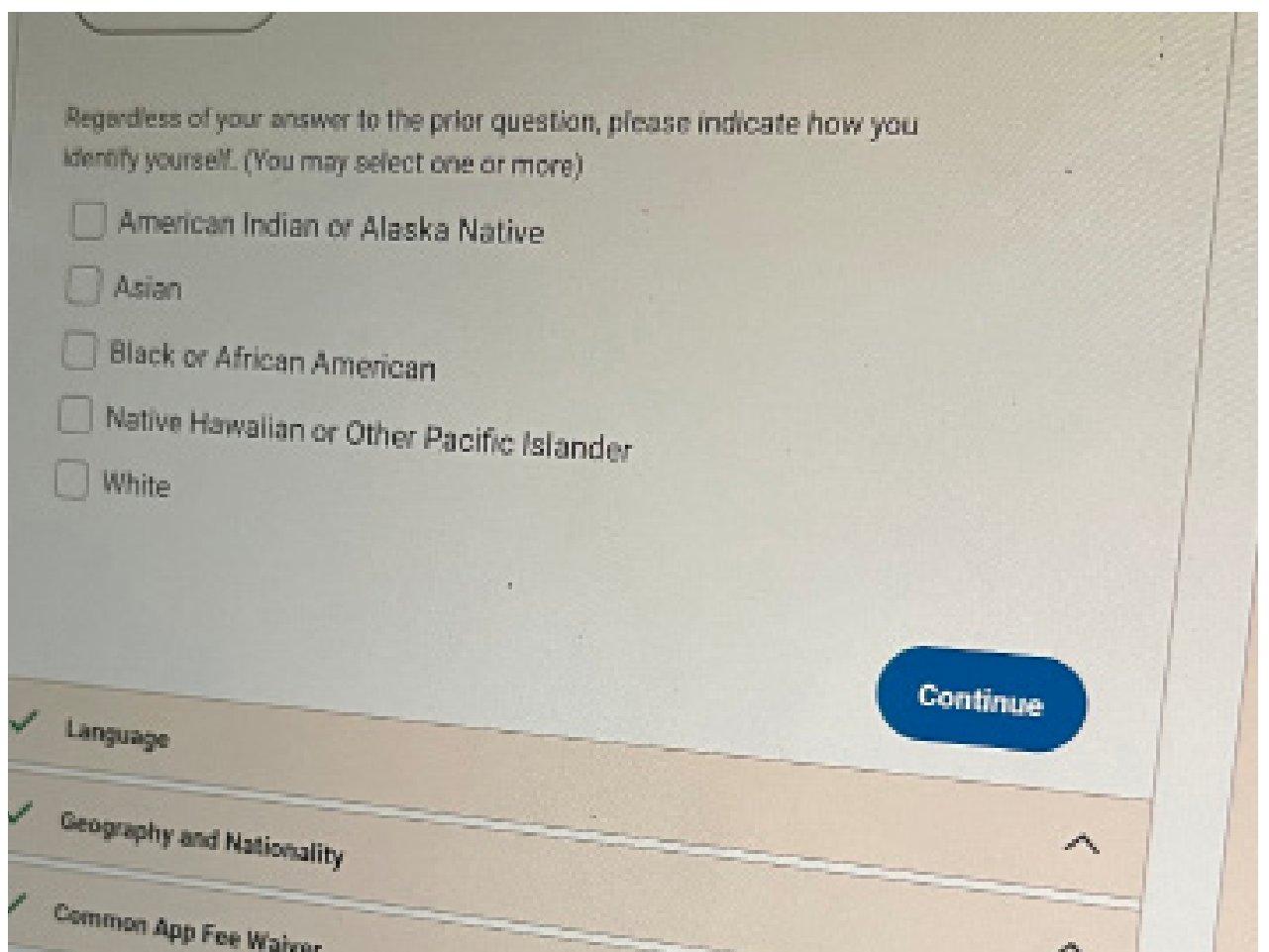
As a white person from a middle-income family, the end of affirmative action should benefit me on paper. Statistically, prohibiting race-conscious admissions would increase my chances of admission to top schools. It follows that I should view the end of affirmative action as a benefit to me.

I write this editorial to my peers who believe this fallacy. The American populace is unusually conservative on this topic. In a CBS poll before the Court issued its ruling, 70% of respondents said colleges should not be allowed to consider race, including 48% of liberals and 74% of white people.

That 74% sees that marginal disadvantage as enough to oppose affirmative action. Even many white liberals lend their support to affirmative action only begrudgingly, placing their beliefs in racial equality above their personal desires. This opposition is rational, but it reflects a narrow understanding of the purpose of college.

I believe that affirmative action is good for all of us, and I ask that my fellow white peers look beyond just college acceptance. I ask that they reexamine what they seek to gain from attending college.

For most students, attending college is their first time living outside of their hometown. We'll spend four years surrounded by people from across the country — people with backgrounds, life experiences, and perspectives vastly different from our own. These new perspectives are fundamental to the nature of college. They set it apart from just a way to get a better job. Encountering new people and new beliefs will make us more informed, more considerate, and better people.



The Supreme Court of the United States / Credits: David Sipos

All of us should embrace college as an opportunity to broaden our cultural understanding. It is incumbent upon us as citizens that we do not overlook the importance of multicultural interaction in college. I believe many of my fellow white students understand this.

But essential to meeting a diverse range of people is, well, the presence of those people. When top selective schools — where Walls students are most likely to apply and attend — end affirmative action, their racial makeup becomes decisively whiter and less diverse.

Take the example of the University of California (UC) system. After a voter referendum banned affirmative action in the 90s, diversity at UC schools plummeted. At UCLA and UC Berkeley, enrollment of Black and Latino students fell by 40 percent. Twenty five years later, UC schools still haven't been able to meet their target of a student body that reflects the diversity of graduating high school students.

This is naturally bad for the thousands of Black and Latino students who are shunted into lower-quality schools and see worse economic outcomes, or, worse, choose not to attend college at all — one result of California's referendum, according to researchers at UC Berkeley. Yet this either does not get through or does not convince the majority of white students of the value of affirma-

tive action.

So I ask these students to do something unusual now: be selfish. Think about how the homogenization of college will affect you. Consider what is lost: the people we'll never meet, the experiences we'll never understand, just because we wanted to up our admission chances by a couple points. College swallowed in a sea of sameness.

If I wanted to spend four years around wealthy white people, I would simply apply for a membership at a country club. Instead, I support affirmative action, in the hopes that college can truly be a place of diverse perspectives, for everyone to benefit and learn from.

I write this editorial to do more than simply change minds.

Race conscious admissions took hold in the aftermath of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King. A chorus of students called upon colleges to increase their efforts at racial diversity. Weeks later, Harvard announced such efforts and other schools followed. As a result, Black enrollment nearly doubled the following year.

Students created affirmative action. We made the decades of progress in diversifying colleges possible. Now it is up to us again — all of us. No one demographic or organization will restore affirmative action (or some equivalent). Only our collective voices can do that. ●

TEACHER SPOTLIGHT

Mr. Murray Loves Science and Teaching

By Anna Mayer ('25)
Staff Writer

Despite growing up alongside white sand beaches and beautiful Caribbean sunsets, Elroy Murray found himself to be “bored” and ended up in Maryland.

After hearing about a vacant physics teaching position at Walls, Mr. Murray applied to join the School Without Walls faculty. Mr. Murray is very happy to be at Walls, and Walls is happy to have him.

In college, Mr. Murray followed a simple philosophy: “I love science.” To pursue his passion, he studied both biology and chemis-

try at Andrews University in Southwest Michigan.

Education is another passion of Mr. Murray's. He started his D.M.V. teaching career in Prince George's County, Maryland, until he had the opportunity to teach in the city. “I think [teaching] is in my blood,” he said. “My mom was a teacher, my sister has been a teacher — but I think it's also that I like working with kids and I like science.”

Previously, Mr. Murray has had experience teaching both middle and high schoolers. He prefers teaching high school because the students have moved past the “transitioning” stage of adolescence. “I just love being

able to reason with kids and I can only get that at [the high school] level,” he said.

In order to pursue his combined love for science and education, Mr. Murray has taken over teaching Physics and Earth Science this year. Having a passion for medicine akin to his passion for education, Mr. Murray loves teaching subjects that are near to his heart. As such, he is also teaching Anatomy, a new class at Walls.

So far, Mr. Murray has enjoyed his time at Walls and is enthusiastic about teaching here. “I love that the kids are motivated to learn ... the freedom to choose the curriculum, pacing, everything,” he said, “I love it.” ●

SPORTS

Crossing Boundaries: Soccer Unites Students from Different High Schools

By Jack Meltzer ('24)
Staff Writer

This year, three students from Eastern High School in northeast DC have chosen to don black and white and join Walls soccer teams. Maria Payan, Lucas Campbell, and Mieke Reil are three talented individuals who have chosen an unconventional path by playing for a different school's sports teams. But what led them to this decision, and why did they pick Walls out of all DCPS teams?

Payan, a freshman at Eastern, said she chose Walls because she had previous experience playing with Walls students in a summer league. She knew that Walls had a good team that could help her improve her soccer skills. But her decision was not solely based on the team's soccer prowess, but also on the sense of camaraderie she found among the players. "I chose Walls because I had fun practicing with them and playing in the summer league," she said, "they were just great people to be around, [and] compared to other schools, I felt welcomed."

Reil, a junior and a German foreign exchange student, offered her perspective: "I chose Walls because somebody recommended them to me, saying they're a great team which turned out to be the truth." She has found Walls to be an excellent way to improve her skills while enjoying the company of her teammates. She added that the consistency of the extra practices and games with Walls has helped her to improve her game much faster.

Campbell also emphasized the importance of high school soccer in his life. For all three students, Walls soccer has not only offered a chance to enhance their skills but also a community they felt connected to.

Furthermore, the inclusion of these students from Eastern has undoubtedly had a positive impact on Walls soccer teams. Simone Meltzer, a freshman on the girls' team at Walls, shared her thoughts on how Payan and Reil



Campbell, a sophomore at Eastern, is allowed to compete for Wall's soccer team because Eastern doesn't have their own team / Credits: Mira Hsu

contribute to the team's dynamics. "Having Maria and Mieke on the team has been fantastic. They bring unique skills and perspectives, which have made our team stronger."

Playing for a different high school does come with its set of challenges. Payan expressed difficulties in maintaining her schedule, saying, "an obstacle for me would probably be arriving to practice on time because I have a routine after school, and sometimes it can become a little hectic." She added that another issue was missing class, but that "a lot of people can relate to that." Reil, on the other hand, found the logi-

stics of practice and games relatively easy to handle, given the proximity of RFK fields to Eastern High School.

"Getting to practice is luckily very easy for me and us Eastern players in general since we practice at the RFK fields, which are only a ten-minute walk away from school." The benefits of having players from different schools extend beyond the soccer field. Walls has witnessed the formation of a diverse and united soccer community, where the students defy the confines of their individual high schools and come together out of shared love for the sport. ●

CLUB SPOTLIGHT

Behind the Camera:
the Walls Film Team

By Matilde Martinez-Schott ('27)
Staff Writer

The start of the school year means "Action!" for the School Without Walls Film Team.

Stepping into Room 27 Thursday mornings should be a nice surprise for any film enthusiast. The film-team will be discussing their favorite movies and making plans for future film projects while they sip a cup of tea. Anyone who shares a passion for movies — either behind or in front of the camera — is more than welcome.

The Film Team is often busy making individual short films, group films, or participating in workshops to learn more about their craft. In past years the team has done imitation projects, studying specific filmmakers and creating a film based on the style of the director. Film Team member Ginger von Klein said, "my freshman or sophomore year ... we imitated Martin Scorsese, it was really, really fun." The team also participates in film festivals such as the All American High School



Film Team Meets at 8:20 on Thursdays in room 27. / Credits: Sarah Francis Jones

Film Festival (AAHSFF).

The AAHSFF takes place from October 20-22 in New York City. It allows for students to work together within their club and come up with a film based on a given prompt. The festival is a chance for Film Team members to contribute their skills to a common project, learn more about film, and develop their abilities. A city-wide film festival, held by the film team, is in the works as part of a fundraising effort to cover the cost of a trip to New York to attend the AAHSFF festival.

The Film Team is not just about making

movies, but about being part of a community that values creativity and art. The club sponsor, Jason Bulluck said, "it's neat to see folks engaging in filmmaking and videography as a process." The film team allows students to be part of a group process and work together to learn the ropes of filmmaking while still having fun with peers.

At the end of the day, to join the club, determination is all that is needed. von Klein notes, "You just have to want to be there is the biggest thing. If you have any interest in film and have something to contribute, you should join." ●

Words of Advice From Ms. Abbas

By Brady Woodhouse ('25)
Staff Writer

Elaine Abbas has tried to retire from teaching multiple times. But she's never been able to leave for long. "I enjoy being around the young people, I learn so much from them all the time," she said. Not only does Ms. Abbas learn much from students, but students can learn much from her.

Everyone at Walls knows Ms. Abbas. She's the substitute teacher who always has something to share with students. Before Ms. Abbas joined the Walls community, she worked at Alice Deal Middle School as a math teacher for 30 years. Whether it be college advice or stories from her trips to Egypt, Ms. Abbas always has something valuable to say. She shared lessons that she has learned throughout her life.

Lesson #1: You can find your dream even in a profession that wasn't your first choice ... or second choice. Ms. Abbas wanted to travel the world from a young age, and in fact, she was ready to enlist in military service. When her parents rejected the idea, she answered, "Okay, I'll be an airline stewardess." However, her parents encouraged her to go to college first. Although teaching was not the first path she wanted to follow, it was one that she would soon come to love. Not only that, but she was able to travel the world through sponsoring school trips at Deal. "We went to London, Paris, Rome, [and] the South of France," she boasted. "I enjoy traveling, but I love coming back home," the substitute emphasized. Ms. Abbas ended up traveling as a teacher, without ever working as a stewardess or in the military. Point being, the life you want is in reach, but perhaps in ways you haven't considered.

Lesson #2: Your dreams will change, and even change back. Heed their call. Earlier in her teaching career, Ms. Abbas left to work in research and development. "That was my first retirement from DCPS," she joked. While she worked, she found that she wasn't as happy as when she was surrounded by bright young people. She was happy to make the decision to come back to teaching. It is most important to chase your aspirations, even if it means backtracking or returning to something you've left. "Anytime I think I'm ready to retire ... I have that desire to teach," she concluded.

Lesson #3: Surround yourself with smarter people. As a substitute, Ms. Abbas often oversees groups of students who are learning a subject she might be a little rusty in. "In maintaining language classes, they taught me more than I taught them. I was studying every day to make sure I could give them something," she explains. "Here I am, among all these smart, young people. You all don't even realize it, but you give me so much," she said. Ms. Abbas recalled a saying her mom used to tell her: "if you're the smartest person in the room, you're in the wrong room." It is advice that all Walls students can take to heart.

If you see a woman walking around school with chic outfits and an earnest smile, say "Hi" to Ms. Abbas. She has plenty of advice to offer, and is more than willing to learn from you as well. ●

CROSSWORD

Top Tier Marketing

By Max Goldberg ('24)
Puzzle Editor

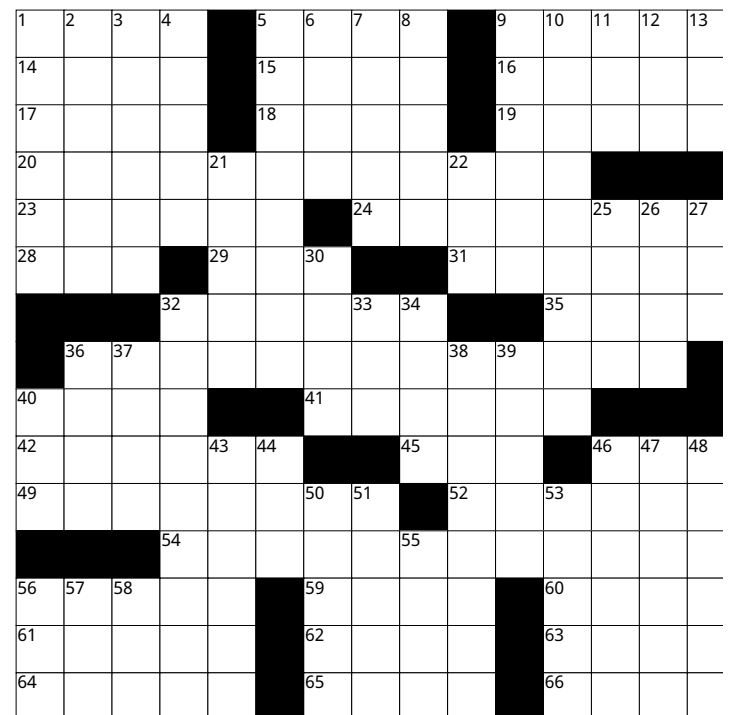
ACROSS

- 1 Religious breakaway group
5 Actor Jon
9 DIY moving rental
14 Native Canadian
15 Double Stuf cookie
16 ___ Dame
17 Raggedy dolls
18 Bread at Chaat House
19 Texter's "for real?"
20 Words of an adventurer, or a Toyota driver
23 Neighbor of Jordan
24 Obama's 2008 message
28 Consumed
29 Popular bathing place
31 Suffering
32 Snow block houses
35 Green citrus fruit
36 What 20A, 24A, 32D, 54A, and 64A all are... or a hint to the theme of this puzzle
40 Smallest unit of life, in Mr. Kopliku's class
41 Poll or questionnaire
42 Savory Indian pastry
45 Rep. counterpart

- 46 Closest airport to Walls, abbr.
49 Desperate wants
52 What "Bob" might be short for
54 See 64A
56 Messaging on Instagram, perhaps
59 Taiwan's first female president
60 Alleviate
61 Creepy
62 Social skill
63 Middle Earth tree creatures
64 With 54A, Capital One question
65 Egyptian symbol of life
66 Washington newspaper

DOWN

- 1 SCOTUS justice who died in 2016
2 Author Hemingway
3 Middle of Manchester?
4 Valkyrie actress Thompson
5 Largest city in Hawaii
6 Give ___ (care)
7 Coarse and crumbly
8 Singer and actress Janelle
9 Apart at the seams
10 Roughhousing
11 @@@



- 12 Web link
13 Suffix with Brad- or Ash-
21 "From the ___"
22 CBS forensic show
25 Abel's brother
26 Goals
27 Opposite of SSW
30 Workplace superior
32 Appropriate BigMac reaction
33 Columbus univ.
34 Some cameras, abbr.
36 Phobia
37 ___ mater
38 Done at last
39 Salami option
40 1/sin
43 Just barely burns

- 44 Whichever
46 D in F.D.R.
47 Wave peaks
48 Swear to
50 Have to, slangily
51 Black-eyed flower
53 TV censor sound
55 ___ of ribs
56 Mountain ___
57 Not good or bad
58 Savings plan initials

Visit our website at
www.swwrookery.com

Find us on Instagram
[@swwtherookery](https://www.instagram.com/swwtherookery)

The Rookery

Editors-in-Chief: David Sipos ('24) and Sara Weinrod ('24)

Managing Editor: Josie McCartney ('24)

Senior Editors: Tillie Freed ('24) and Rachel Kolko ('24)

Sports Editor: Charlotte Tama ('24)

Puzzle Editor: Max Goldberg ('24)

Digital Editor: Layla Rethy ('25)

Faculty Advisor: Shakir Ghazi

Staff Writers: Naia Albert ('25), Ava Barcelona ('25), Zoe Becker ('26), Evie Corr ('25), Nola Coyne ('24), Miles Felix ('24), Zoe Fisher ('25), Tillie Freed ('24), Riley Gayle ('25), Rachel Kolko ('24), Leah Levy ('25), Matilde Martinez-Schott ('27), Anna Mayer ('25), Georgia Murphy ('26), Jack Meltzer ('24), Jessie Moss ('26), Lexi Padre ('25), Carlotta Rother ('25), and Brady Woodhouse ('25)

Sports Writer: Theo Weller ('25)

Contact theswwrookery@gmail.com (editors-in-chief)
shakir.ghazi@k12.dc.gov (faculty advisor)

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