

Mr. Jones, center, teaches his African American history class on Jan. 26 / Credits: David Sipos

Walls to Pilot New AP African American Studies Course Next Year

By David Sipos (2024)
Senior Editor

School Without Walls will participate in a College Board pilot of its brand-new AP African American Studies course next year.

This year, 60 high schools across the country introduced the full-year course in the first wave of the pilot program. In the 2023-24 school year, the pilot will expand to several hundred schools, including Walls, that applied to offer the course. Students in the pilot program will not receive college credit for the practice exam they take in May, though DCPS will count it as

an AP course for GPA purposes.

The College Board says the pilot program will give them time to refine the curriculum and will let colleges evaluate whether students taking the course are eligible for college credit. The nonprofit plans to offer AP African American Studies to any U.S. school that wants it in the 2024-25 school year. By Spring 2025, students will be able to take an exam for college credit just like they can in any other AP class.

The course will resemble an expanded and more detailed version of the African

African American Studies continued on page 2

Over 80 Percent of Seniors Applied to College Early Action, Survey Finds

By Gabriella Goldberg (2025)
Staff Writer

College application season is coming to a close, so now is a great time to review our seniors' experience with the process. A major part of applying to college is deciding what application route to follow. Many schools offer a variety of ways to apply before the regular decision (RD) due date, including early decision (ED), restrictive early action (REA) and early action (EA).

The Rookery anonymously surveyed 61 seniors to get a sense of which of these options the Walls class of 2023 chose. About 40 percent of seniors who responded to the survey said they applied early decision, while over 80 percent said they applied early action to at least one school.

ED is a binding agreement: If a student is admitted after applying under the plan, they are obligated to attend. Students can only apply to one school through ED, although some schools offer a second round of early decision, known as ED II, at the time of the regular-decision deadline. Students are allowed to apply to other schools EA while submitting ED. 42.6 percent of surveyed seniors applied through ED.

Students who applied ED cited increased admission odds, more favorable access to

scholarship money, and clear top choices as advantages of the admission plan. "I knew where I wanted to go and I wanted to maximize my chance of getting accepted," one respondent said.

Another agreed: "I love the school but it's pretty selective and ED boosts my chances of getting in!"

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College pennants in the senior project room
Credits: Frankie Ruppert

Community Service Requirement Reduced

*Temporary Measure Said
to Address Impact of COVID*

By Riley Gayle (2025)
Staff Writer

D.C. education agencies reduced the number of community service hours required for graduation from District public schools last month.

According to the new policy, current seniors must complete a minimum of 12 community service hours by graduation, current juniors must complete at least 50 hours and current sophomores must complete at least 75 hours.

Previously, all students were required to complete 100 hours for graduation. Current freshmen and classes thereafter will have to fulfill the full 100-hour requirement.

The Office of the State Superintendent of Education initiated the requirement change "to account for the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic," State Superintendent Christina Grant said in an interview.

The Council had eliminated the requirement for the past three graduating classes of seniors during the pandemic. Dr. Grant said the policy was an effort to "implement a staggered approach before returning to the full 100-hour [requirement]."

Junior Hugo Rosen said that he feels "really good" about the decision. "Now I have more time in the summer and don't have to do as much community service," he said.

Junior Vivien Dobrescu was similarly enthusiastic about the new policy, saying she thought the reduction was reasonable "because not a lot of people have that many opportunities due to the pandemic."

Sophomore Sophie Schell disagreed, saying COVID's impact on underclassmen's ability to complete service hours has been limited. "Given the fact that sophomores have been in person for all of their high experience, I don't think it's necessary for the community service requirements to be lowered," she said.

Senior Sophia Desai, who had already met the 100-hour requirement, said that "such a low requirement" wouldn't help her or other seniors who have completed hours but would instead "dissuade students from completing more hours."

Sophomore Augusta Kankel said she didn't think the reduction for her graduating class was necessary but wasn't unhappy about it. "I do like this new change because there's less pressure," she said.

The policy change also permanently modified the community service requirement for transfer students, who had been required to complete all 100 hours regardless of the year they entered the city's schools. As of this year, students will only have to complete 25 hours for every full year they attend D.C. schools, an approach Dr. Grant said would be fairer to those

Community Service continued on page 3

Why Doesn't Walls Have Class Rank?

By Zoe Becker (2026)
Staff Writer

Every year, as seniors across the country fill out their Common Application, they encounter a field asking them for their class rank. However, unlike thousands of others, Walls students don't enter a numerical answer to this question.

Walls officially stopped ranking its students in 2018. Concern over class rank at Walls first arose the year before, when a group of parents and students wrote to the DCPS chancellor claiming there was unfairness in Walls's rankings system.

According to an FAQ written by the group, "The important and undisputed fact is that each category of SWW students have had different access to and opportunities for weighted grades which result in different potential maximum GPAs and consequently it is severely unfair to rank these students in a single pool."

The group was referring to three categories of SWW students: four-year students, transfer students, students in the George Washington Early College Program. Even if students in each of the three categories had perfect grades, their ranks would be different because of the courses available to them.

The FAQ said that the maximum achievable GPA was 4.24 for four-year students, 4.46 for GWCEP students, and 4.40 for a junior year transfer student.

The group suggested that the easiest solution to the problem was to eliminate class rank altogether, and that's just what Walls administration did.

Principal Sylvia Isaac cited the sheer im-

The Common Application asks students to record their class rank, "if available" / Credits: Zoe Becker

practicality of class rank at a top-caliber school in the region as a primary reason Walls decided to do away with it. "With so many high-achieving students, the accolades of valedictorian or salutatorian may lose some of their significance," she said.

SWW counselor Kathryn Moore agreed, saying, "Rank is less significant at a high-achieving school like SWW, where many students demonstrate exceptional academic achievement."

Ms. Moore also noted some upsides to

class rank. "[It] can be beneficial to recognize student academic achievement, as it provides the highest achieving students in a particular class or school with an extra honor and recognition for their performance," she said.

While many DCPS schools still use this benchmark given its benefits, some nearby school districts, such as Montgomery County Public Schools, have gotten rid of class rank as well.

Ms. Isaac said Walls's end-of-year award

Class Rank continued on page 3

College Board Pilot of AP African American Studies Offers Higher-Level Alternative to Existing Elective

African American Studies continued from page 1

American History half-credit elective that Walls has offered for several years, according to William Jones, who will teach the course. The course intends to go beyond the focus on slavery, emancipation, and the civil rights movement that general history classes cover. According to the College Board, the course "reaches into a variety of fields — literature, the arts and humanities, political science, geography, and science — to explore the vital contributions and experiences of African Americans."

The College Board hopes to attract minority students, who typically enroll in AP classes at a lower rate than white students. Additionally, the College Board aims to encourage students to pursue African American studies in college, saying, "Students who take AP courses are more likely to take additional related coursework in college."

The introduction of AP African American Studies comes at a contentious time: Conservative governments have tried to limit discussions of race in classrooms, opposing critical race theory, a graduate-level academic theory discussing the prevalence of racism in American institutions. This month, the Florida Department of Education announced that they would prohibit the new AP course from being taught in Florida schools, describing it as "filled with Critical Race Theory and other obvious violations of Florida law."

Mr. Jones, who has taught the elective for two years, is eager to teach the AP course next year. "One problem I've always had was the fact that [African American History] is usually taught as a semester course, so the fact that [the AP course] is a full year, I'm excited about

that," he said. With a full year course, he said he will be able to incorporate additional content that doesn't make it into the elective. Students "seem to get a lot out of [the half-year course], and they seem to want more of it," Mr. Jones said.

"It's important to see [African American studies] as worthy of academia. It's not just a fringe topic."

He also sees the introduction of the class as an issue of broader importance. "It's important to study African people and see it as worthy of academia. It's not just a fringe topic," he said, adding that the College Board's creation of the AP course "recogniz[es] its academic merit."

He also dismissed conservative opposition to the course and discussion of racism in the classroom. He said the conservative argument shows "they don't want people in this country, Black, white, whatever, to learn different perspectives and the complete history of this country."

Junior Niyah Sapp took the African American history elective last year and said she learned a lot from it. "Prior to African American History, I knew about my history...but I didn't know specific details," she said, adding that since she took the class, "I've done more research and I've gotten more invested in African American history." She hopes that the AP course will have more content and intends to take it in her senior year.

Sapp saw value in discussing race in a classroom setting. "Everyone of any race should be able to enjoy and take from African American studies," she said. "U.S. history includes Af-

frican American history."

Sophomores William Mandy and Graham McMorris both said they would consider taking the course next year. "I'll be the first to admit this, I don't know too much about my own history, as much as I could know," Mandy said, adding that he wanted to know more about the civil rights movement.

McMorris disagreed about what the course should focus on. "We know about MLK, we know about all of that...we want to know about the stuff that isn't already told to us." McMorris agreed that AP African American Studies would be a good addition to the school.

"The things we're learning are essential to understanding the state of our country today."

Jackson-Reed High School is one of the 60 schools participating in the first stage of the pilot program this year. Simon Holland, a Jackson-Reed junior taking the class this year said that "it's really engaging, and I'm enjoying getting to take an interdisciplinary course." Holland said the pilot course focuses on details "in a way other regular history classes don't necessarily have room for." Additionally, the course connects the subject matter to the modern day.

Though the curriculum is not yet finalized, he recommended that Walls students take the course next year. "There has never been a moment where I feel like that this class is being used to teach hatred," Holland said, dismissing conservative opposition to the course. "The things we're learning are essential to understanding the state of our country today." ●

Survey: Seniors Overwhelmingly Apply Early Action, Split on Early Decision

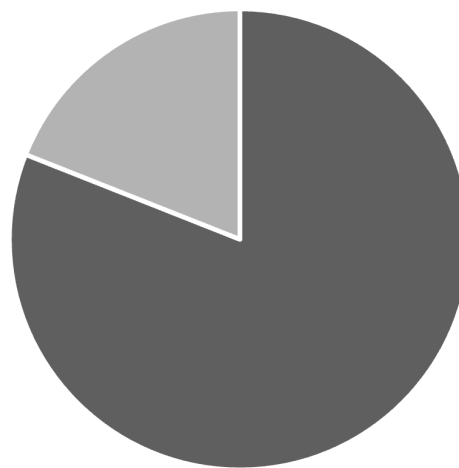
Early Applications continued from page 1

However, other students were deterred by ED's binding agreement, and many were not comfortable financially committing to a school without knowing the cost. "I did not [apply ED], because the only schools that I would feel comfortable applying ED to, I would need a lot of financial aid, which isn't guaranteed," one senior said.

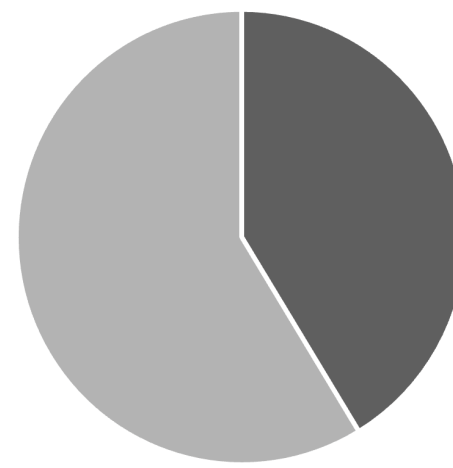
Others did not want to emotionally commit to a school, citing indecisiveness. A respondent said that "I did not have a strong top choice and wanted to keep my options open."

Unlike ED, students who apply restrictive early action (REA) are prohibited from applying to any other private schools EA, with limited exceptions, but it isn't binding. It is only offered by a few highly selective universities, including Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Stanford, Georgetown, and Notre Dame. It offers students more flexibility and variety, especially if they don't have a top school, but is not an option at most colleges. Only 11.1 percent of survey respondents applied through REA.

Many seniors said that they didn't know what this choice was. Still, a proponent said "I knew this school was my top choice and I want-



■ Applied EA ■ Did not apply EA



■ Applied ED ■ Did not apply ED

Results of The Rookery's survey

ed to hear back as soon as possible, so I applied for REA."

Early action (EA) offers early application and decision dates without the restrictions of other admission plans. Its flexibility makes it appealing to a broad range of students: 81.0 percent of surveyed seniors applied through EA. One respondent said that they applied EA "to get [college applications] out of the way and get results quicker."

Unlike ED, EA has some financial bene-

fits. One respondent said, "applying EA made it more likely for me to receive a merit scholarship."

Many students noted the stress of Senior Project deadlines overlapping with college applications. "Don't procrastinate, especially as Senior Project has a similar timeline as college apps so it's kind of a pain," one senior advised.

Now that applications are in, we are so excited to see where our penguins end up! ●

"Full WWE": Walls Confronts Mice in Classrooms

By Rachel Kolko (2024)
Staff Writer

Every mouse that has called room 24 home for the last five years has been named Ralph.

"It was always Ralph," Dr. Thomas Bright explained. All 20 to 30 of them.

Unfortunately for him, the physics classroom that Dr. Bright has taught in for the last five years is located on the basement floor next to the warm utility room, which often has served as a home for any mouse who wanted to make its way into the School Without Walls community.

"If you have one mouse and you get rid of that mouse, then another one will come in and take over. But it's just easier to call them Ralph." Mice have infested the school building for as long as some faculty can remember, and those teaching in the basement have had a front row seat to it all.

Art teacher Jason Bulluck, whose classroom is right down the hall from the physics room, has been frequently interrupted by Ralphs while in the middle of teaching. "I go full WWE, you know what I mean? I'm coming off the top rope on those jokers," he joked. "What do I do? Nothing. I'm kind of live-and-let-live in general. I don't like to kill any living things," he explained, saying he prefers to leave that up to the exterminators.

Typically, the appearance of a mouse



Dr. Bright's onetime anti-mouse weapon

Credits: Rachel Kolko

disrupts Mr. Bulluck's class. "It's gonna stop things. People are going to comment on it," he said. "We're gonna observe the visitor and think about it together, you know how it goes."

Dr. Bright described more intense student reactions to their mice visitors. "Think of what happens when a student sees a wasp in your room and then multiply that by 10," he described. "You've got the classic 'oh my God' jump onto the table type of thing, and then you have kids raising holy heck just because they can."

Though the heat coming from the basement provides warmth for mice, what really attracts them is food, according to both Dr. Bright and Mr. Bulluck. "I had a pack of Oreos on my desk," Mr. Bulluck recalled. "I came back, and uh, there were no Oreos. The Oreos had been

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GW Program Made Walls Reconsider Class Rank

Class Rank continued from page 2

ceremony is a substitute for class rank as a means of student recognition. In lieu of class rank, "we want to recognize students who may not be at the top but who are trying," she said.

Although some students may worry about not having a rank on their college applications, administrators said it wouldn't be an issue. "If a school does not rank, that information is shared with colleges and they use other metrics (such as grades, scores, essays, recommendations, etc.) to evaluate the student's academic performance," Ms. Moore said. "Students are not at any disadvantage by not having a class ranking."

Walls maintains some signifiers of students' academic achievement: summa cum laude (GPA of 3.8 or above), magna cum laude (GPA of 3.60 to 3.79), cum laude (GPA of 3.40 to 3.59).

Senior Eli Rethy agreed that the lack wasn't important and said not having class rank "didn't really affect college applications."

Ms. Isaac highlighted the benefits of the elimination of class rank, arguing that it has had the effect of "relieving stress about being valedictorian or salutatorian."

Senior Ellie Sanders found just that. She was relieved to not have rankings on her mind throughout high school, saying she found the benefits of "a more collaborative environment outweigh any academic validation I would have received."

Rethy agreed that not having class rank had benefits but no real downsides, saying that "not having a rank has made Walls less competitive in terms of students being cutthroat with each other without lowering academic standards." ●

Fewer Service Hours Needed to Graduate

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who transfer late in their high school careers.

The new policy also expands the definition of "community service" to "school-directed activities, government-led work, volunteer work with private organizations, regardless of

tax status, and community service compelled by court-order," Dr. Grant said, "providing needed flexibility to students who have had limited opportunities for service." D.C. previously only recognized community service at nonprofit organizations. ●

Breakfast at Walls: An Unappreciated Service

By Carys Shepard (2023)
Senior Writer

DCPS offers every one of its students free breakfast, including those at School Without Walls. To get breakfast, students simply have to walk into the room beside the Commons, type their student ID into a keypad, and pick what food they would like.

Studies by the U.S. Department of Agriculture show that breakfast helps decrease hunger for up to four hours after eating and can improve students' mood and alertness. Although the D.C. Healthy Schools Act of 2010 made school breakfast free for everyone, the policy's specific goal was to increase the meal's accessibility to low-income students who might not have breakfast at home. During the 2017-18 school year, 46 percent of low-income DCPS students ate school breakfast, a far cry from the goal of 70 percent, but still an improvement from previous years.

According to DCPS school data, only 8 percent of the Walls student population is classified as "at risk." But even though the majority of Walls is not the target population for school breakfasts, many students still benefit from eating breakfast at school. Referring to the free breakfast, sophomore Chiara Galloway-Slick said, "I think it's so helpful because I would not eat breakfast otherwise." Seniors Myra Shalaty and Asha Mueller both said they get breakfast "every day."

DCPS Food and Nutrition Services says on its website that it "proudly holds some of the highest nutrition standards of any school district in the country." To fulfill these standards, each student is required to take something from each food group regardless of their preferences. This includes one fruit, one whole grain, and milk, with the option of a meat or meat alternative.

Interim director LaMonika Jones of D.C. Hunger Solutions, a non-profit that works with DCPS to eliminate child hunger, said in an interview that the system's approach to break-



Walls breakfast on Jan. 23 / Credits: Carys Shepard

fast appeals to everyone's interests. "D.C. Public Schools school nutrition staff spend time hearing from students, parents, and other staff about what they would like to see served during breakfast," she said.

Yet breakfast's inherent lack of choice leads to students throwing away a lot of food, mostly milk and fruit. "Sometimes the fruit is not ripe or it is rotten or it's just some things that I can't have so then I throw away most of the fruit," Mueller said.

Galloway-Slick agreed that she wastes part of the breakfast, saying, "I don't drink the milk, and I usually don't eat the graham crackers."

Shalaty expressed a similar sentiment, saying she wished the school "would let us just choose what we want instead of making us get ... the full meal, because sometimes I only want one part of the breakfast and I end up throwing it away."

Mueller and Shalaty both said that they like the breakfast at Walls most of the time. Despite its challenges, the School Without Walls breakfast program has managed to benefit many students. ●

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Sophie Schell and Her All-Girls Boy Scout Troop

By Brady Woodhouse (2025)
Staff Writer

You've probably heard of Boy Scouts collecting merit badges for learning how to interact positively with nature. What you might not have known is that some of these troops have girls.

Sophie Schell, a sophomore at Walls, has made inspiring contributions to her Boy Scouts troop. In the sixth grade, Schell joined Boy Scouts of America and was a founding member of Troop 248, an all-girl troop in the DC area. Schell was unafraid to join this male-dominated atmosphere, and provided opportunities for other girls to join in as well. Schell is key in the accessibility of Boy Scouts to girls in the DMV.

Becoming a Scout is a valuable experience, and should not be limited to boys, Schell said, explaining, "The countless friendships and beloved mentors that I met and had the opportunity to work with in Troop 248 pushed me to be the best version of myself."

Within her time as a Boy Scout she has held the roles of patrol leader, quartermaster, troop guide, and one of the highest ranks, Eagle Scout. "My work with Troop 248 pushed me to be the best version of myself and eventually achieve the rank of Eagle Scout," Schell said. This rank requires years of dedicated work and careful review from the Boy Scouts of America. Not only was Schell the first woman to achieve this in D.C., but she achieved it at age 13. This journey on average takes Scouts to the age of 17, according to Scouting Magazine.

Later in her Scouting career, Schell was voted as Lodge Chief, Order of the Arrow. "I

Sophie Schell continued on page 6

CLUB SPOTLIGHT

Youth & Government Tries to Fix the City's Problems

By Naia Albert (2026)
Staff Writer

It's a typical Thursday afternoon and the future politicians of Walls are gathered in room 330. During their bi-weekly meetings, the Youth and Government (YAG) members at Walls — led by seniors James Setty and Amina Ford — discuss current issues affecting youth in the D.C. area and brainstorm ideas for possible legislation, all while earning community service hours.

YAG is a YMCA program with chapters around the country that teaches students to learn about the legislative process by drafting and debating original legislative proposals regarding issues in D.C.

Ms. Sylvia, the Walls chapter's sponsor, says YAG makes "students aware of local government and [gets] them engaged in local issues by having students take on the roles themselves."

This year, Setty says the team is drafting bills about "mental health days in schools, expanding Metro access, [increasing] frequency of trash cans, decreasing public dumping, and expanding SNAP [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program]" to lessen the devastation of food deserts.



Walls seniors Amina Ford (second from left) and James Setty and junior Maya Maaloul at the D.C. Youth Summit in December / Credits: Amina Ford

Bills drafted within the Walls chapter will eventually be debated by YAG members across the District, and the final legislation will be reviewed by the actual D.C. Council.

Throughout the school year, YAG members participate in two major district-wide events: the Youth Summit in the fall and the Legislative Weekend in the spring.

The Youth Summit is a one-day conference that takes place in D.C. where participants write and debate bills, and attend speeches by District elected officials.

During the Legislative Weekend, students campaign for office and vote for mock officials including a Youth Mayor, Youth Council Chair (currently Ford), and Youth Superintendent of Education (currently Setty). Setty explained that these elected officials oversee the debate of

mock legislation and "work together to plan all the events and meetings for the citywide program throughout the year."

Though the pandemic prevented the program from operating at full capacity, prior to the pandemic, legislation proposed by YAG, such as an expansion of the Kids Ride Free program in 2017, has been made into law.

School Without Walls has had much to do with that success, with four of the past six Youth Mayors being from Walls.

Many YAG leaders have gone on to careers in politics and government, such as Ward 4 council member and Walls alumna Janeese Lewis George, who was Youth Mayor from 2005-2006.

Youth and Government meets in room 330 every other Thursday at 3:30 p.m. ●

TEACHER SPOTLIGHTS

The Teachers Who Were Walls Students

Ms. Blessing Didn't Want a "Boring" Job

By Sonja Talwani (2025)
Staff Writer

Rachel Blessing is a social studies teacher with a unique relationship with Walls — before teaching, she was a student here.

Ms. Blessing recalls really liking Walls as a high school student. "Back in the day, we did a lot of field trips," she said. "You would show up and there would be a sign on the door that says, 'meet me at the Mall in 20 minutes.'" She said the school was "much more hippie" when she attended.

Because the school building hadn't yet been renovated and the science labs hadn't been built, some science classes were held at University of the District of Columbia. "Sometimes [teachers] would be like, 'Hey, there's this really cool exhibit at the Mall right now, let's all go.'"

Ms. Blessing's dreams of travel and affinity for working with young people led her to teaching. "I've always liked working with kids and I wanted a job where I had summer off," she explained. "I could travel and see the world,



Ms. Blessing outside the Walls building
Credits: Sonja Talwani

and so that led me to teaching." This summer, she plans to travel to Copenhagen.

"I didn't want a job where I sit at a job all day — that's boring," Ms. Blessing added.

Ms. Blessing says, "I started teaching during the [2008] recession, and D.C. was one of the only places hiring on the east coast, and I

knew the school obviously."

Ms. Blessing considered teaching Spanish before deciding to become a social studies teacher. She always knew that teaching elementary or middle school was "off the table." "I didn't want to do elementary," she said. "I mean really you're crying over feelings? There's bodily fluids everywhere? I mean, little kids are cute, but that's a whole lot."

Now, Ms. Blessing teaches AP Prep World History, AP Psychology, and D.C. History. She sponsors the Sunrise Club, Women Inspiring Strength and Empowerment, and Dessert Club. Her favorite part of her job, she said, is "the people — we get so many different types of kids from all over."

Reflecting on her experience, she said, "I try to teach the way I would want to be taught. So I try to be clear and be organized and all of that. I think that being a student here has helped me recognize that kids want to be out of the building." For example, she tries to take her D.C. History class outside of the building "at least once a week."

The biggest piece of advice that Ms. Blessing would give to her students is to "just recognize that everyone's going through something ... be kind all the time because you never know how important that [could] be." ●

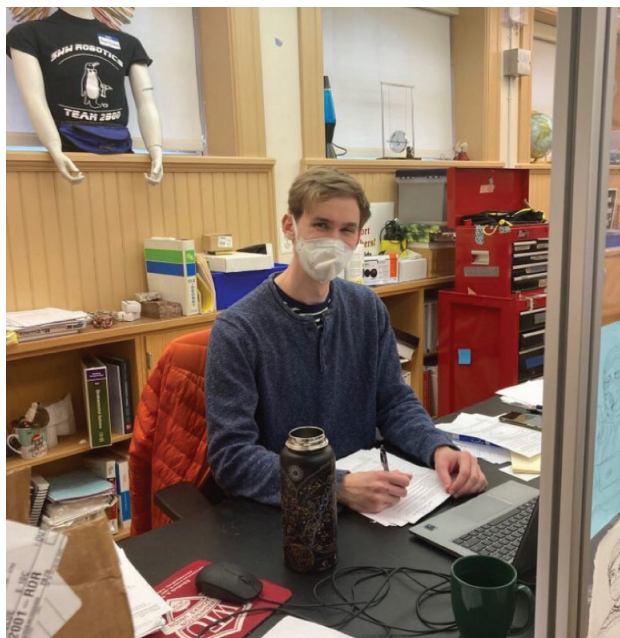
Mr. Davis Became a Teacher to "Fix How Science Is Taught"

By Nola Coyne (2024)
Staff Writer

Harrison Davis has been a physics teacher at Walls since 2020, but was a student not long before that, graduating in 2014. He remembers having a positive experience at Walls. He was very involved as a student, participating in Robotics Club, crew, and even his own Rubik's Cube Speed-Solving club.

Mr. Davis favorably recalled his advisory, which was led by Ms. Tyson. He said that there were a lot of people he "knew and could rely on." His group remained the same all four years and served as a strong source of support outside of class.

Mr. Davis also liked the Walls humanities program, saying there were things he "was exposed to and thought about differently" from students at other schools. When he got to college, he felt more prepared for humanities classes than peers who had taken "traditional English classes" in high school.



Mr. Davis at his desk in room 27
Credits: Nola Coyne

Mr. Davis's favorite class in high school wasn't physics, but chemistry. He said Ms. Piper's class inspired his interest in science because he liked "learning about what was going on and the things [he] couldn't see."

His interest in learning how the world worked motivated him to take AP Physics C

instead of an introductory physics class his junior year. Because he had no prior course experience in physics, which is usually required to take AP Physics C, his dad helped him work through a school textbook the summer before his junior year. He struggled a lot, saying that it was a "tough class without having a background" in the subject.

After graduating from Walls, Mr. Davis considered majoring in engineering but ultimately decided on physics. During his senior year, while applying to graduate schools, he realized that he wasn't interested in doing academic research.

Mr. Davis first considered becoming a science teacher when he observed a general ignorance towards science during Donald Trump's presidency. He said he saw education "as a place to go and fix problems with how science and physics are taught generally." Mr. Davis also participated in educational outreach programs throughout high school and college which he had enjoyed doing.

Mr. Davis encouraged Walls students to "be curious about the stuff you learn in school," especially with subjects a student might dislike. He said classes can be easier and more fun with a positive perspective. ●

Walls Learns to Live With Longstanding Mouse Problem

Mice continued from page 3

replaced with a similarly colored substance."

Since then, he has learned his lesson, and doesn't keep food in his classroom that a mouse could easily access.

Alfonso Jones, a member of the custodial staff, advised students and faculty to be cautious of the food they bring into class. "Any type of food draws them," he explained. However, if students have "something like a container, something they can't eat through, then you're safe."

To the delight of many teachers and staff, there have been far fewer mouse sightings since the pandemic. "Having no one in the building

for two years solved the problem," Dr. Bright said, given no one was bringing food into the building.

Harrison Davis, who also teaches in room 24, recalled watching Dr. Bright "chase a mouse with a baseball bat." The mouse had been hiding in between the row of storage bins at the side of the classroom before it was driven out. Mr. Davis was quick to clarify that the bat never made contact with the mouse.

But as Mr. Jones said, as long as there is food they can reach, the mice will be drawn back into the building. "As long as you're kind of staying on top of it, then you won't see them," he said. ●

Submit a photo of a mousetrap
in the building for a chance
to win a Starbucks gift card!

Email your photo to
theswwrookery@gmail.com.

CLUB SPOTLIGHT

Sunrise Club Aims to “Actually Make a Difference” on Climate

By Carys Shepard (2023)
Senior Writer

The Sunrise Movement is a youth organization dedicated to fighting climate change. Its main goals are to end the influence of fossil fuel companies on politics and make climate change a political priority by electing similarly minded politicians.

There are currently over 100 factions of the movement, or “Sunrise hubs,” in the United States, including eight in D.C. and the surrounding suburbs. Sophomores Anna Mayer and Zoe Fisher founded Walls’s Sunrise hub in October 2022.

“We are stressed about climate change and Sunrise is a great organization. We want to make as much of an impact as we can,” Mayer said on why they founded the hub.

“We felt like it was the only way to actually make a difference,” Fisher added.

One of the club’s largest projects so far was advocacy for the Green New Deal for Housing Act, a bill proposed by D.C. councilmember and Walls graduate Janeese Lewis George (D-Ward 4). The legislation aims to address the



A chalk protest illustration by the Sunrise Club on the terrace / Credits: @sunrisemvmtsw via Instagram

housing crisis in D.C., particularly by providing more environment-friendly, energy-efficient affordable housing.

Explaining how the club contributed, Mayer said, “We basically compiled testimonies of students here about how they support that bill into a video...and then we sent that to the city council.” Fisher said the club worked with Ms. Lewis George herself to “get over 60 students to help make the video.” Although there was a public hearing on the bill in November 2022, the official vote on the Green New Deal for Housing Act has not yet occurred.

The Sunrise Club typically discusses future plans during meetings. “We also talk a lot about events in the world because it’s good to

have a space to talk about that because a lot of people don’t,” Mayer said. The group has also drawn chalk messages on the terrace outside as a call to action for Walls students, she added.

Fisher said the Walls hub hopes to work with its counterpart at George Washington University as well as participate in Sunrise-led national programs. “In the coming weeks we’ll be part of [a] training program which will get us connected with people from hubs all over the country,” she said, “and also get to learn hands-on about Sunrise’s mission and how we can translate that to our environment.”

The Sunrise Club meets in room 322 on Tuesdays at 8:30 a.m. Contact the club at swwsunrisehub@gmail.com. ●

Sophie Schell Discusses Her Scouts Successes

Sophie Schell continued from page 4

“I was honored to be voted as the youth leader for 3,500-plus Scouts in the honors society of Scouting,” Schell said about the role. “The Scouts in our lodge represent D.C., Maryland, Virginia and the U.S. Virgin Islands. I was the first female to be voted into this role.”

Schell has big shoes to fill. “My responsibilities are to serve the Scouts in our lodge, chair the executive committee, appoint people to empty positions, work to ensure that our yearly events run smoothly, and serve on the council executive board,” Schell listed. This leadership sounds like a lot of responsibility, but she said she was “sincerely enjoying it.”

Schell has not only had fun with her role, but has focused on making important change and progress in her community. In conjunction with the Ward 8 Woods Conservancy, Schell led her Eagle Scout project, in which she and over

100 volunteers dedicated more than 480 hours to revitalizing the George Washington Carver Trail in Anacostia. Schell filled the much needed role to upkeep the trail. “Historically, this trail had lacked a lot of maintenance and so it was very fulfilling to see what a difference such dedicated volunteers could make,” Schell said. Through her work, she has enabled countless D.C. residents to further experience nature, something especially important in a big city.

For this work, Schell was the recipient of the 2021 George and Helen Hartzog Youth Award for Outstanding Volunteer Service, recognized as the most outstanding volunteer contribution among a pool of 300,000 nationwide. Schell said that she was “a Girl Scout for 6 years,” but that she realized that “the program was very dependent on adult leadership.”

Schell elaborated: “We rarely participated in activities, and there was less opportunity for youth leadership in Girl Scouts. I joined Boy Scouts because it’s a youth-led organization with an emphasis on using the outdoors as a classroom for leadership and growth.”

With all this considered, Schell said that “it’s only fair that young girls get to experience Boy Scouts.”

With her national recognition, Schell is inspiring to members of the Walls community.



Credits: Sophie Schell

Her contributions as a Boy Scout set a model for Walls students, and we’re excited to see what she does with her next few years here. ●

The Rookery’s Ins and Outs, 2023 Edition

By Tess Buckley (2023), *Editor-in-Chief*, and Josie McCartney (2024), *Senior Editor*

In: Penguin Pride
Out: Disrespecting @swwpenguins

In: The Rookery
Out: The Washington Post

In: The Deli
Out: Panera

In: Audiobooks on Libby
Out: Podcasts

In: Stealing someone’s personal hotspot
Out: DCPS Wi-Fi

In: Single-photo Instagram posts
Out: Instagram photo dumps

In: The library
Out: The Commons

In: Bananagrams (on Friday mornings at editor Tess Buckley’s Word Puzzle Club)
Out: Wordle

In: Tatte
Out: Starbucks

In: Walking
Out: Lime Scooters

In: D.C. Public Libraries
Out: BookTok

In: Bandoola Bowl
Out: Falafel Inc.

In: Using capital letters
out: typing in all lowercase

In: Bullfrog Bagels
Out: Call Your Mother Deli

In: Class of 2023
Out: Class of 2023

Walls Basketball Program Reinvents Itself, Battles For Elusive Winning Season

By Theo Weller (2025)
Sports Writer

It's fair to say that basketball hasn't historically been one of the strongest sports at School Without Walls. In fact, neither the girls' nor boys' teams have a winning season on record in MaxPreps, the score-reporting site used by the D.C. Interscholastic Athletic Association (DCIAA). But this year things feel different. The boys are off to a 7-5 start, and the girls aren't too far behind at 5-5.

Historically, the girls team has not just struggled to win games — they've struggled to field a team. Point guard Erin Pollack ('23) explained that in her freshman year, the team "only had eight girls, most of whom had never played basketball before." She credited her fellow seniors Price Burton and Charlotte Beers with working to maintain the team and turn it around through COVID. Their work resulted in a 20-player-strong 2021-22 squad. That season they went 6-10 — not eye-popping, but the girls' best record in over a decade.

This year, the team has continued their upward trend. Pollack attributed a lot of the improvement to being "able to gel together as a team" last year. She said that difficult practice arrangements, including evening practices at Francis-Stevens and sharing a court with the boys, have only brought the team closer.

Pollack praised a trio of sophomores, Joelle Barksdale, Sophie Whitaker, and Joyce Kao, for bringing in big points. Kao in particular has taken a big step up this year, averaging 9.1 rebounds per game along with 3.1 steals. This comes as a dramatic change for the forward who averaged 4.1 and 0.9 last year, respectively.

Sophomores, particularly Chidiire Nwokwu and Paul Joire, have similarly powered the boys' team. Elijah Lott ('25) has also played a significant role, leading the team in rebounds



A strong sophomore class led by Joelle Barksdale, Sophie Whitaker, Paul Joire (top left) and Chidiire Nwokwu (top right) have headlined a great basketball season / Credits: Sports Information Club

per game with 7.4. Max Stacey, also a sophomore, has become a regular starter on the team, sometimes playing over 25 of the game's 32 minutes.

Julius Cohen ('23) pointed out that the junior varsity team is receiving a lot more care than in past years, and there are a solid number of freshmen invested in the program.

Cohen observed significant change from even last year's team. "Last year we had good players and they made good plays, but we didn't play as one unit [as we have this season]," he said. This selfless style of play has resulted in a team that's constantly getting open shots, shooting over 40 percent from the field and over 30 percent from three. Cohen praised the team's coach, "Coach Dee," for her commitment to the team and effort to understand each of her players.

This season seems to have a sort of magic to it; the boys have won four of their games by 3 points or fewer, including a miraculous 3 point buzzer beater against Eastern by senior Eliav Brooks-Rubin. The magic won't be easy to maintain, though, as the two teams' remaining games feature some tough matchups against Jackson-Reed, Dunbar, and Anacostia.

Regardless, students are hopeful. "I think that the future of Walls basketball is very bright," commented Paul Joire ('25). Both the boys and girls are built around young cores — Joire and other star sophomores like Chidiire Nwokwu, Sophie Whittaker, and Joelle Barksdale have two remaining seasons to improve. With a newfound team culture and freshmen waiting in the wings, Walls's once struggling basketball program could soon be a real contender in the DCIAA. ●

Track Team Returns to New York Meet Post-COVID

By Josie McCartney (2024)
Senior Editor

After a two-year hiatus, the School Without Walls track team returned to New York City to compete in the U.S. Army Officials Hall of Fame Invitational this month.

The team took a bus to New York early Jan. 19 and departed late Jan. 21. While in New York, Walls athletes explored Manhattan's neighborhoods, and attended the Broadway hit Hamilton in addition to competing alongside hundreds of schools at the meet in Upper Manhattan.

Coach Nick Scott expressed pride in each athlete's performance at the meet. "I think everybody stepped up and did their best," he said. "They competed at a high level. Everybody met or exceeded expectations."

Kylie Emmanuel ('25) broke the school record for the sophomore girls' 1000-meter run. Walls placed second in the novice girls 4x400-meter relay. Captain Ryanne Barstow ('23) and Tillie Freed ('24) earned fourth and sixth, respectively, in the novice girls' 1000-meter run. Captain Malcolm Douglas ('23) and Jack Meltzer ('24) came in fifth and eighth places in the novice boys' 1000-meter run.

Nadia Lytle ('25) placed second in the varsity girls' shot put, out-throwing hundreds of competitors and qualifying for Nike Indoor



Ellis Olander ('26) competes in the meet this month / Credits: Miles Felix

Nationals. "Track is 100 percent now gonna be a part of my future with college because I qualified, which is a big accomplishment," Lytle explained. She aims to break the D.C. shot put record this season.

Coach Scott said the trip to the Empire State was a unique opportunity. "You really can't get the same experience [in D.C.] as you would going up to New York or Connecticut, where the track programs are more experienced and have more kids," he said.

Miles Felix ('24) said the trip brought him closer to his teammates in what is largely an individual sport. "I've never really felt this close to a team that I've been on," he said. "I just think actively spending so much time with one another brought our relationships closer."

During the meet, Felix ran the school's

sports Instagram account, @swwpenguins. He thought the takeover was a positive team bonding experience, saying, "I think our team was pretty close going into this meet, but just small things like that was a nice thing for the team to bond over and also have a good laugh."

Heather Lytle, the team manager, agreed. "I'm always proud of our kids," she said. "Coach Scott and I put a lot of time into the team and so it's really exciting to see how much [the athletes] get out of it. It's like they're my kids, so I like watching them all do well."

Coach Scott said the New York trip will help them going into future meets, explaining, "I think [the New York meet] changes some of the athletes' outlooks. I think it gave them some confidence." ●

Walls Students' New Year's Resolutions

To get to 200 LinkedIn connections
— Kai Setty ('23)

To stay better because I am better
— Maharani Yogi ('25)

To be less social
— Michael Whitaker ('23)

To test my limits
— Matthias Dominguez ('23)

To gain 72 pounds
— Felix Melto ('23)

To fix my posture
— Ishaan Hsu ('24)

To breathe through my nose, not my mouth
— Lorenzo Govoni ('23)

To stop threatening people
— Katrina Tracy ('23)

To remember friends' birthdays
— Lily Gore ('24)

To stop cropping Lorenzo out of Instagram posts
— Adah Svetlik ('23)

To build a sliver deck in "Magic: The Gathering"
— Owen Blanc ('24)

To get faster and stronger
— Soraj Gassama ('26)

To learn a new language
— Raphael Udemba ('24)

To construct an army of squirrels and take over the IMF
— Tomás Abeledo ('23)

To eat more beets and go on a beet juice cleanse
— Oona Pitter ('24)

To stop faking phone calls
— Juliette Howe ('26)

To rizz up
— Demetrius DeMammos ('23)

To fix my sleep schedule
— Amira Schroeder ('24)

To talk to Mr. Jordan every day
— Jack Meltzer ('24)

To bench 735 pounds
— Malachi Merriam ('24)

CROSSWORD Good Grades

By Emmett Brosowsky (2023)
Puzzle Editor

ACROSS

- 1 Pronoun partner of she
4 Last Chinese dynasty (1644-1912)
8 Something taken by students... and a hint to the shaded squares
13 Lumberjack's tool
14 Salt Lake City's state
15 Like an uncomfortable mattress
16 Worldliness and refinement
19 Football stadium cry
20 The United States
22 Playground structures
27 Southpaw on the mound, for short
28 Language suffix
29 Extinct flightless birds
30 Notification
32 Fresh meat, in gamer-speak
34 Popular camera type: abbr.
35 Greek pita sandwiches
36 ___ Francisco
38 Medicine-approving org.
40 Not on
41 Ghana's capital
43 Word after ready and before fire
45 Walked (on)

48 It's as sure as taxes

49 Home of the Taj Mahal

50 Corn unit

51 Capone, Roker, and Pacino, to name a few

52 Febreze, Air Wick, and Glade, for some

55 NYC event termed

"fashion's biggest night out"

58 Bird: Prefix

59 What might cause one to look back?

65 More real

66 "Darn," but stronger

67 Lion or tiger, but not bear?

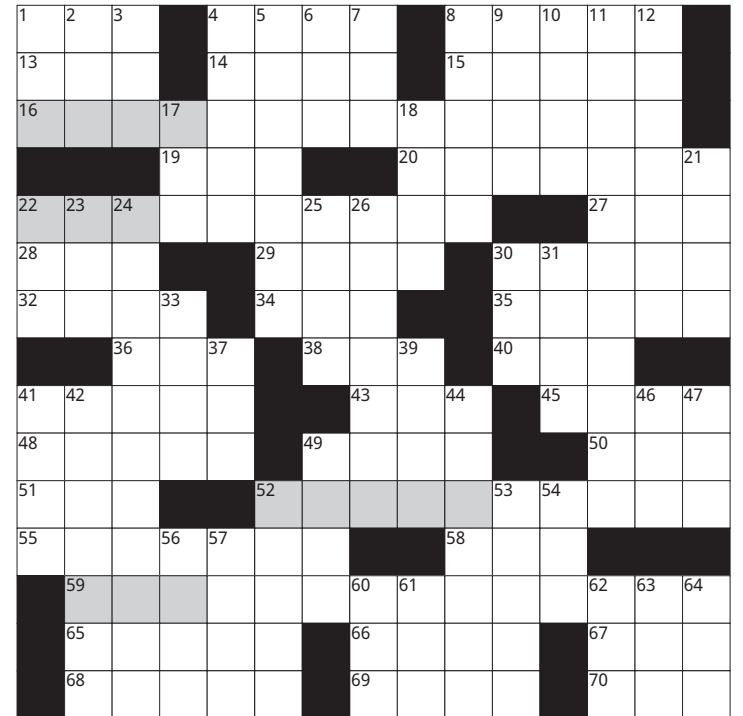
68 Liability's opposite

69 Spots for relaxation

70 Finish

DOWN

- 1 Owns
2 Prefix with skeleton
3 Unit in a set
4 Old-timey pen
5 "Apparently..."
6 ___ King Cole
7 Trio after F
8 Quahogs or little necks
9 Pear-shaped instrument of yore
10 Mideast ruler
11 Like a review that doesn't reveal too much



12 Mostly-women Olympic swimming discipline, for short

17 Refuse to share

18 Pic takers

21 Rental units: abbr.

22 Hollywood's Aniston, familiarly

23 Take advantage of

24 Anchors

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26 Football field measure

30 In the past

31 Uber rival

33 Homer's son

37 "Nope"

39 Runs on TV

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46 Paddle

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52 Seductive one

53 Chris of Marvel fame

54 Zero, for a Tottenham fan

56 Bearded antelopes

57 "Fit to ___"

60 Magazine VIPs

61 Short snooze

62 Diamonds, slangily

63 Light brown

64 From Jan. 1 to now

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Find us on Monday mornings at 8:30 a.m.

in room 127 to contribute to the paper!