

Amidst Rising Tensions, Walls Students Join in DMV Student Strike for Gaza



Students march in the DMV Student Strike for Gaza / Credits: Andrew Derek Strachan

By Zoe Becker ('26)
Staff Writer

Against the backdrop of continuing college protests over Israel's war in Gaza, DC high schoolers staged a protest of their own. Over 200 DC students participated in the DMV Student Strike for Gaza on Friday, May 24, organized by a collective of students from various DC public and private schools.

According to the DMV Student Strike for Gaza Handbook (which was made available via the organizers' Instagram), the purpose of the protest was to "show that the youth will no longer be complicit in the incessant violence against Palestinians." Organizers also sought to use the protest as a way to start conversations about the ongoing war.

Organizers rallied students by creating school based "pods," each with their own lead organizers who were tasked with spreading the word about the protest at their school.

Anna Mayer ('25), the lead for Walls, became involved in the strike through friends in the Sunrise Movement, a youth climate activism group.

Mayer worked alongside Dawn Drake ('25) and Augusta Kankel ('25) on outreach and press releases for the protest. "[The strike is] a forum for students to talk about [Palestine] with their peers, as that has been a bit lacking within Walls," Kankel said.

Protesters congregated for a rally at McPherson Square at 11 AM on Friday morning. From there, the group marched through barricaded streets, accompanied by swaths of members of the press, chanting slogans about Palestine and student activism.

Protesters marched to the White House, a significant site considering that their demands of ending unconditional military aid to Israel and calling for a permanent ceasefire were directed towards the Biden Administration.

Following the morning's rally and march, attendees participated in "teach-ins" about Palestine. At 12:15 organizers led a teach-in entitled "Palestine 101" which offered an overview of movements for Palestinian liberation.

Gaza Strike continued on page 3

Health Justice Club Fights for Safer Schools

By Carlotta Rother ('25)
Staff Writer

Many Walls students regularly go to the nurses office seeking care, only to find nobody there. The frequent vacancy of the nurse's office is a result of the fact that DC follows a nurse-cluster program, meaning that a DCPS nurse is split between four schools. Nurses are unable to establish meaningful connections with the students at all these schools, and students are often left alone when they are met with medical issues during school hours.

Recent data from the CDC reveals that approximately 40% of school-aged children have some form of chronic health issues, underscoring the critical need for healthcare resources within schools. The Walls Health Justice Club was created to help students who have been placed in a vulnerable position by the DCPS nurse-cluster system.

DCPS schools require that there be two unlicensed medical practitioners present in school buildings at all times in order to provide students with basic medical care and support. Yet, in a survey conducted by the Health Justice Club, a staggering 52% of students were unaware of the identity of the unlicensed nurse practitioners within our school. This alarming gap in awareness leaves students vulnerable in times of crisis, with no designated healthcare professional to turn to for immediate assistance.

The Health Justice Club is focused on "enhancing the nursing capacity of DC schools and promoting student health in the face of a nationwide nursing shortage," according to the President and founder of the Health Justice Club, Brady Woodhouse ('25). The club's main goal is to ensure the presence of a nurse in every DCPS school at all times.

Recently though, the Health Justice Club has faced difficulty achieving their goals given the ongoing strain on the DCPS budget.

Given financial constraints, the club is pursuing alternative paths to achieving their goals. Woodhouse explained that these alternatives "include advocating for DC's entrance into the Nursing Licensure Compact, which would allow for a broader selection of nurses from the metro area to work in DCPS schools without difficulty...also supporting opportunities for nursing or health education and internships to young students."

The members of the Health Justice Club have attended one DC Council meeting and two budget hearings since its establishment in February. Students used the events as an opportunity to testify about how they have been personally impacted by the way DCPS distributes nurses.

Lucy Cosgrove ('25), who suffers from Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome, explained in a personal statement that "the needs of my condition have caused me to miss a lot of school since I do not always feel confident in the safety and health measures that my school can offer under the nurse-cluster system that DCPS schools currently use."

Health Justice Club continued on page 3

2024 AP Tests Face Hiccups, Disruptions

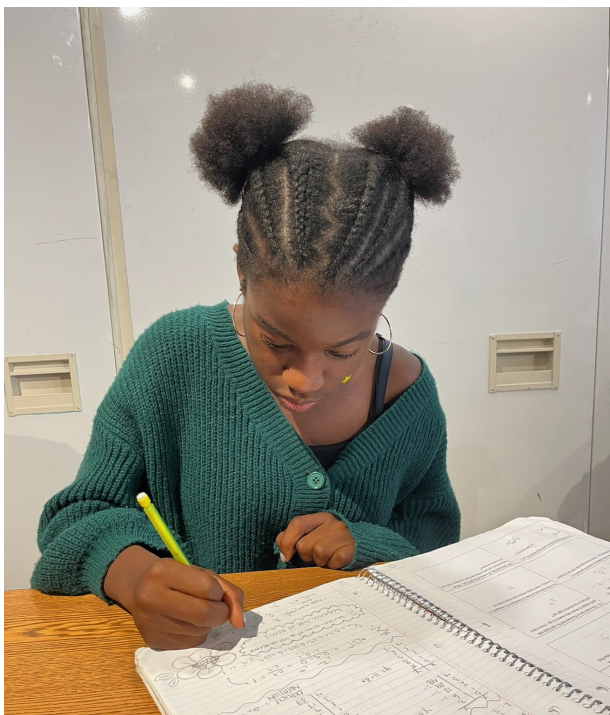
Zoe Fisher ('25), Anna Mayer ('25), Maia Riggs ('25)
News Editor, Staff Writer, Staff Writer

Between May 6th and May 17th, the majority of School Without Walls students discarded their usual routines for the annual AP testing.

Despite the importance of AP tests, many students and faculty have reported disappointment at how they were handled this year by the school. Distractions, poor proctoring, and inefficient processes left students peeved and frustrated, with many feeling that outside interference limited their test performance.

Disruptions, especially from phones, were a primary culprit of the issues. Sirin Toal ('25), who took the AP US History test in a GW testing room, was upset with one particular disturbance. "There was a ringtone going off that said, 'Can I put my balls in your jaws,'" she said. According to Toal, this song was especially distracting because it was "so catchy."

AP Testing continued on page 2



Nebe Okeke ('27) studies for an exam/ Credits: Oluwamayowa Akinsanya ('26)

AP Testing Goes Awry

AP Testing continued from page 1

Further, she and other APUSH students strongly believed that “a ringtone asking for oral sex” had no place in a testing room.

Many students felt proctors should have worked harder to ensure student and proctor devices would be turned off and put away during exams.

During the AP Music Theory test, a proctor’s phone began playing music while students were listening to an audio. “On one of my last listens, my proctor started playing music on her phone,” said Chiara Galloway-Slick (‘25). “I missed a crucial portion of the clip because of it.”

It is worth noting that, according to the College Board’s rules, proctor phones must be silenced in AP test rooms. Another issue with the 2024 AP Tests was frequent technological failures. Students taking the AP Music Theory exam struggled through faulty sound systems and playback issues, despite much of the test revolving around listening.

Lucy Byron (‘25) reported that administration required students to use school computers for the sight-singing section of the test instead of the tape recorders requested by their teacher, Mr. Alberts. According to students, the medio-

cre audio quality limited their performance.

Though this disruption was frustrating, the fire alarm that went off during the test was even more disruptive.

“Everyone was frantic because we didn’t know if [the drill] was going to affect our scores,” said Evie Corr (‘25), who took the AP Lang test along with Galloway-Slick. She felt like “the administration forgot we were in there.”

According to Ms. Moore, the SWW AP Coordinator, the fire alarm was “a mistake.” How the fire alarm went off remains unclear.

Corr added that “When you have the AP tests in school,” she said, “kids are walking in, opening the doors, and being super loud and distracting. It felt like other teachers didn’t even know we were taking a test.”

Students and teachers have additionally raised concerns about how proctors are decided, especially for students with accommodations.

The College Board is clear that proctors must be properly trained to administer AP tests. Many proctors for accommodations rooms seemed to not understand many of those needs and neglected to provide adequate support for students. Administration has not commented on the training of proctors.

The lack of respect for AP testing guidelines also exhibits a sense of privilege that many

have felt rampant at Walls. For some, AP tests offer an opportunity to save thousands of dollars in college courses, which can represent huge financial relief. Distractions in testing rooms may cause many students to face financial repercussions because they did not receive the scores to get them out of entry level college courses.

There are systems in place for students to report concerns with the administration of AP Tests. Any student can file complaints with Ms. Moore, who will take the appropriate actions, if necessary.

Despite the multitude of problems with AP Testing this year, Ms. Moore has received no complaints and believes the testing went well. “I would say overall, AP Testing this year has gone really smoothly,” she said.

Trinity Foard (‘25) chose not to file a complaint because she feels the school “would not do anything to fix these problems.”

An anonymous junior added that they both don’t “know how to file a report” and feel like if they did, they would be “singled out by administration.”

The 2024 AP season at SWW contained a multitude of issues that must be avoided in the future. Students who have any lingering concerns should not hesitate to approach administration. ●

ACLU Sues On Behalf of Jackson-Reed Arab Student Union

By Maia Riggs (‘25)
Staff Writer

On April 24, the DC chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a lawsuit against Jackson-Reed High School. The case in question? Free speech.

At Jackson-Reed, the Arab Student Union (ASU) worked hard to organize a Palestinian Culture Night in November, aiming to amplify Palestinian culture and tradition as many contend with the reality of a brutal war.

Students, however, quickly faced opposition. The Jackson-Reed principal, Sah Brown, and other administration members continuously set seemingly arbitrary rules that worked against the ASU and inhibited their ability to hold the event.

Administration also barred the ASU from showing a film, entitled *The Occupation of the American Mind*, about the impact of Israeli leaders, media, and propaganda in the United States.

Upon hearing about the administration’s restriction of such events, frustration quickly built within the Jackson-Reed community.

Wesley Hoy (‘24), a student at Jackson-Reed said, “The amount of hurdles that the ASU had to jump through...was very messed up. The conflicting messages received—with initially the reason for the culture night not happening being ‘safety’ but then saying it was because it wasn’t ‘Palestinian month’—shows that the real cause was censorship.”

In the wake of the situation, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) took up a lawsuit against Jackson-Reed for their “Unconstitutional Censorship of Pro-Palestinian Speech.” Arthur Spitzer, the senior counsel at the DC chapter of the ACLU, was the lead lawyer in the case.

He said that the ACLU was initially contacted by the parents of one of the students who is a member of the ASU.

“We defend freedom of speech,” Spitzer said, “Defending students’ first amendment rights is something that the ACLU has done in many places around the country for many years.”

The ACLU filed a complaint and a motion for a preliminary injunction—essentially asking to take immediate action on an urgent matter of rights being violated. The court quickly re-



Jackson Reed students were eventually allowed to hold Palestinian Culture Night/ Credits: Jackson Reed ASU via Instagram

sponded to the preliminary injunction, leading to a discussion of a compromise before the judge’s decision.

In the end, the ACLU reached a compromise with the DC lawyers: Jackson-Reed agreed that the Arab Student Union could show one of the other films that they had previously been prohibited from showing, and made a public statement that, in the future, the ASU would be treated equally to all other clubs.

On April 25th, the Jackson-Reed ASU finally held the Palestinian Culture Night they had been planning for months. The night included poetry, art, speeches, food, and even dabke, a traditional Palestinian dance. The night was a huge success, but many members of the ASU still felt resentment over its long-term delay.

“I think the nature of a compromise is that nobody is totally happy,” Spitzer said. “Given the very short time frame until the end of the semester, and given the uncertainties about how the court would rule, I think the compromise was a sensible decision for the time being.”

Some shortcomings have yet to be addressed. The students of the ASU have still been barred from showing *The Occupation of the American Mind*, with Jackson-Reed having previously cited antisemitic ideas in the film as a reason for the restriction.

“Next steps are that we’ve asked the court to give us some time to continue discussions with each other to see if we can come to a further agreement for the future,” Spitzer ex-

plained. If the two parties are not able to fulfill a compromise agreement to resolve the remaining contested issues, the litigation will resume in further court cases and continued lawsuits or dismissals.

Jackson-Reed’s case is one of many to emerge amidst a sea of student protests like those at George Washington University. The ACLU has gotten involved in some similar cases, such as a lawsuit against Governor Ron DeSantis’ forced disbanding of the Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) at the University of Florida.

“Just to be clear, we defend everybody’s freedom of speech,” said Spitzer. “If a Jewish Student Union at Jackson-Reed or any other school came to us and said ‘we’re not being allowed to show the film that we want to see,’ we would be just as interested in that.”

Amidst a climate of continued tension, Hoy added that “What I think is most upsetting is that there are people at this school, on both sides, who have been gravely affected by this current conflict... The censorship has further polarized the Jackson-Reed community at a time where we need to come together to reconcile and discuss our various perspectives.” ●

APs Are Over. What Comes Next?

By Georgia Murphy (‘26)
Staff Writer

Walls students took AP season by storm. They filled their backpacks to the brim with meticulously curated notes. They recited facts about the Mongols and memorized the formula for Trapezoidal Riemann Sums. They crammed for hours into the night, Khan Academy and Heimler’s History lulling them to sleep.

Now though, Penguins find themselves considering the post-AP season and all the exciting prospects that come with it.

AP teachers can be inconsistent and vague about their lesson plans. Students have different ideas about what they will use their free time for. What does this post-AP season actually entail?

After APs continued on page 5

Student Protest Praised, Criticized

Gaza Strike continued from page 1

“Palestine 101” was filled by a teach-in titled “Queerness, Abolition, and Palestine.” which “focused on case studies of intersections of Palestine and other identities...such as race,” according to lead organizer Wei Zhou.

Some protesters took issue with the rhetoric and information used during teach-ins. A leader from one of the protest’s sponsors, American Muslims for Palestine (AMP) said, for example, in a portion of the afternoon covering Palestinian history that “the first intifada was beautiful.”

Mayer, for example, said that she found the statement to “lack nuance and fail to consider all perspectives.”

Prior to the strike, many raised concerns over AMP’s sponsoring of the event. The AMP has had considerable overlap in leadership with the Islamic Association for Palestine which shuttered in 2004. Namely, the executive director of the AMP, Osama Abuirshaid, worked for the IAP prior to the organization’s collapse.

Following a lengthy FBI investigation, leaders of the IAP and its fundraising organization, the Holy Land Foundation (a designated terror group in the US), were indicted and sent to prison for supporting terrorist organizations. Federal agencies found both organizations responsible for funneling money to Hamas, the Iran backed Palestinian militant group and Gaza’s primary governing force (also designated as a terror group by the US government) responsible for the October 7th attacks on Israel.

Several pending lawsuits claim that the AMP has links to Hamas, however, the AMP has denied any such ties.

Dori Wilson (‘26) noted that they were on the fence about whether or not to attend the strike but after learning about potential ties to Hamas, “it was a definite ‘no’ for me.”

Sophomore Cameron Levelle shared a similar sentiment, stating that “I likely would have participated had the AMP not been a sponsor.”

Organizers declined to comment on the AMP’s sponsorship of the protest. ●

Students Advocate for More Nurses in Schools



Brady Woodhouse (‘25) testifies at a DC Budget Oversight Hearing/ Credits: HJC via Instagram

Health Justice Club continued from page 1

Cosgrove’s testimony demonstrated that, without readily available medical assistance, students with chronic health conditions are often unsure as to whether they should come to school. This leads to increased absenteeism, in turn impacting academic performance.

The Health Justice Club has begun to expand its reach beyond Walls, with a new branch established at Washington Latin Public Charter School. On May 9th the Committee on Health released its recommendations for DC’s budget Fiscal Year—the Committee proposed a 2.5 million dollar budget increase, which included, for the first time, a section of the budget for students’ health.

The Health Justice Club will be hosting a summit on June 14th from 6pm-8pm at 100 M St SE, Suite 600, Washington DC, for students, staff, parents or anyone else who is passionate about the nurse shortage. Together, attendees will work towards a future where every school, in DCPS and beyond, can have a full-time nurse. ●



HJC Members pose for a photo at the DC City Council Building/ Credits: Health Justice Club via Instagram

CLUB SPOTLIGHT

Sunrise Hub’s Green New Deal Seeks to Create a Brighter Future

By Brady Woodhouse (‘25)
Staff Writer

The DCPS Sunrise Hub, formerly known as the SWW Sunrise Hub, has been leading the crusade for climate justice in the DC school system, and their efforts have only intensified with time and increased demand for the green schools that many students seek.

Since the passage of the Green New Deal for Schools (GND4S) within the State Board of Education, the DCPS Sunrise Hub has begun to contend with the challenges that come with affecting real change.

The DC State Board of Education has limited power regarding the changes that the GND4S outlines, save for the body’s influence. To enact the desired legislation, the hub has broadened its base and heightened its sights.

Since its passage, students from all wards of DC for the Sunrise Hub have testified at three DC Council Hearings to advocate for legislative action that implements the five goals of the GND4S. According to the Hub’s website, these goals include safe and green infrastructure, free and healthy lunches, pathways to green jobs,

climate disaster plans, and climate curricula.

Sunrise Hub member Charlotte Mendelson (‘25) voiced the importance of and benefits posed by the five goals of the GND4S in that it “prepares students to face the climate crisis with the facts...the idea that knowledge is power.” If accomplished, the goals will prepare the students for a future fight against climate change and are important to addressing student safety in the context of school infrastructure failures and climate disasters that schools can’t yet handle.

Mendelson continued, “It became really evident that our schools aren’t equipped for climate disasters...when we had the wildfire smoke from Canada impacting our learning.”

The GND4S designates school buildings as relief zones for communities in the case of natural disasters, which are enhanced by climate change. Reb Spring, a student from Duke Ellington School of the Arts, testified to the issues spurred by outdated infrastructure and power sources, suggesting that, “Instead

of leaky gas pipes funneling toxic gas into our schools, schools should be run on clean and safe solar and wind energy.” Supporting student health through environmentally sustainable changes is a major part of the GND4S.

Recently, the Walls Sunrise Hub has taken down the barriers between the hub and other schools throughout the city, uniting students from various DC schools advocating for the same policies. On April 25, the hub announced on its Instagram account it would no longer represent only School Without Walls students but all of DCPS.

Sunrise Hub co-leader Anna Mayer (‘25) said about the brand change, “All of our work was outside of school...and we had as much support from other schools as we did from Walls. It felt like a better representation of who we actually are.”

Green New Deal continued on page 4

Sunrise Hub Intensifies GND4S Efforts

Green New Deal continued from page 3

This step has been integral in demonstrating to council members the expansive base of students who care about these problems while recognizing that climate justice isn't solely a Walls problem, and shouldn't be solely a Walls endeavor.

In fact, the hub carries hope that their progress will inspire mobilization across the nation, a goal that their recently created website reaches for. Maia Riggs ('25), who created the website, said, "From my end I can see the analytics and I have seen people looking at it...in Arizona...California, Colorado. It is really special to be part of something that is reaching so far."

The hub has already found success working with other groups, including EmpowerEd, an organization dedicated to creating more equitable education systems for DC students. On Earth Day, April 22, the Hub joined EmpowerEd and students from Mundo Verde for a day of lobbying council members in the John Wilson building. On this day, Sunrisers and other students got to continue conversations with Councilmembers about implementing a Green New Deal for Schools.

Members have consistently participated in budget oversight hearings as the Council worked to finalize the budget for Fiscal Year 2025. However, convincing council members of the importance of the GND4S has proven difficult amidst a broader DCPS budget crisis. The Sunrise Hub has taken leadership in helping students express the shortcomings of DCPS budget planning on all bases, including climate justice.

In a February budget oversight hearing, Sunrise Hub co-leader Zoe Fisher ('25) said, "We understand that the budget is already very tight, but the immense benefits that these demands will yield are undoubtedly worth every penny you can give them."

As noted by Riggs, broader education shortcomings and climate justice are intertwined. "Think about how impactful teachers are to students.... My fourth grade teacher...is the reason that I care so much about the environment," she said, adding that "We are nothing without our



Sunrise Hub members advocate for a Green New Deal for Schools / Credits: Anna Mayer ('25)

education."

Luckily, the Sunrise Hub has been able to persevere through these challenges and lobby each Councilmember about the goals of the GND4S campaign. Walls alum and Ward 4 Councilmember, Janeese Lewis George, has agreed to champion these efforts in a potential bill, which could then go through a working session and be

voted on.

(Editor's note: Fisher, Mayer, and Riggs all currently write for the Rookery)

For more information on the movement and its goals, reference the movement's Instagram, @sunrisedcps, or the hub's website: <https://sites.google.com/view/gnd4s-dc/home>. ●

Walls Musicians Embark on Spain Trip

By Mitchell Kasdan ('27)
Staff Writer

The School Without Walls music department visited Southern Spain from May 31 to June 8. During the trip, Walls' music ensembles performed at the Maestro Alonso on Theatre on Monday, June 3rd at 7:00 PM and at Rodrigo Caro High School on Wednesday, June 5th at 11:00 AM, both local time.

Christopher Alberts, SWW music teacher, symphonic orchestra director and stage band and jazz band club sponsor chose Southern Spain for this trip because of "its vibrant musical heritage and its historical significance in the development of various musical styles, particularly Flamenco."

The Flamenco musical style was on full display at the second performance at Rodrigo Caro High School in Sevilla, where, in addition to Walls, the school's Flamenco group performed.

Walls musicians performed some songs newly added to their repertoire including "Shallow" from "A Star is Born" and "Impossible Dream" from "Man of La Mancha."

Mr. Alberts attributed the trip's importance to the fact that "it offers our students a



Walls students perform at the Winter Concert / Credits: HSA via Instagram

unique cultural and educational experience by immersing them in the rich musical traditions of Spain."

Additionally, Alberts believed the experience of traveling and performing in a different country will have helped students learn to adapt to new environments and hone their crafts, both of which are "invaluable skills for their future careers."

Beyond the musical elements of the trip, students and staff looked forward to visiting exciting new sites. "Southern Spain's picturesque landscapes and historic cities will offer an unforgettable experience outside of [the students'] musical activities," said Alberts.

Ian Springer ('25), trumpet player in the orchestra and jazz band, was excited not only to perform in a new environment, but to see historic landmarks in Spain.

"I'm really looking forward to getting to see some of the cultural sights of southern Spain, like the Alhambra in Granada," he said.

Sites that the travelers saw include the Alhambra, the Mezquita in Cordoba, and

the Plaza Mayor in Madrid.

The trip was organized through World-Strides, a common name in long distance school travel. After flying to Madrid, students visited Granada via Toledo for a day trip, and traveled from Granada to Seville, with a day stop in Cordoba. Finally, they are spending the last two days of the eight day trip in Madrid.

Tuition for the trip was \$3,000 for each of the 45 attending students from Walls. While there was no official fundraising for the cost, students and families were offered monthly payment plans and were encouraged to reach out to their communities to help with the cost.

Although Walls' music ensembles will be an ocean away, their performances, according to Alberts, were available via a livestream. Additionally, "we plan to record the performances and upload them to our YouTube channel for those who cannot watch the livestream, so that everyone can celebrate the achievements of our students," he said. ●

After APs continued from page 2

The Rookery conducted a poll of AP students at Walls to see what was actually to come.

According to a poll of 19 students, 26.3% plan to begin “sleeping” after APs are over. This makes sense, as 89.9% of students reported staying up past 10pm during the AP season. Many Penguins find themselves with ruptured sleep schedules because of late-night studying for both APs and non-AP classes. The constant need to practice seems to give them no choice but to stay up late.

This desire to return to a normal schedule is common among the SWW student body. The consensus is that everyone wants to be done with APs. When asked what they were most excited about for the post-AP season, 37% of students said they were looking forward to the lack of stress. Irene Wiegand-Vera ('25) said, “I’m excited for the weight to be off of my shoulders.” Many Penguins see this season as the end of an era rather than the start of a new one.

On the other end of the spectrum, many see the post-AP season as the chance to start something new. AP studying often forces students to pull away from their favorite activities. A few Penguins reported that the post-AP season is an opportunity to make up for lost time. Chiara Galloway ('25) said, “I’m gonna get back into all of my art projects.” Van Harlee ('24) is “[excited to start] playing spike ball during class.”

Some Penguins are indifferent about the

post-AP season, mostly because they have had other priorities that were just as important to them as APs throughout the year.

Julia Kelly ('24) said, “Nothing changes [for me in the post-AP season because] I didn’t really do much work anyways.” This mindset of not putting unique emphasis on AP exams can be beneficial for student mental health, as APs can be extremely stressful. Kelly gave her mental health an 8/10 rating. 42% of juniors who participated in the survey reported to be taking more than three APs. 100% of juniors who participated in the survey reported having a mental health level of 7/10 or lower.

Ben Maniscalco ('25) said, “[I am most excited about] not feeling like I have to spend all my available time studying.” On the other hand, 80% of seniors who took the survey reported to have a mental health level of 7/10 or higher. This heightened mental health level is mostly likely due to a lack of stress over college admissions. After four years of constant academic duress, it’s understandable that many 12th graders would feel a sense of relief in these final months.

While SWW Penguins may have one idea for their post-AP season, teachers may have other plans. 68% of students who took the Rookery’s survey reported expecting some kind of additional work in the post-AP season.

The post-AP season holds many exciting opportunities for the SWW community. Whether they are resting or working on their next project, it’s safe to say that Penguins are interested to see what’s next. ●

Softball Team Faces Lack of Resources and Support

By Astrid Leppig ('25), Anna Wood ('27)
Staff Writer, Staff Writer

On the surface level, it’s been a successful year for Walls softball. According to seniors and captains Samantha Goldfrank and Tess Usher, “the season is going great.”

The team had six wins and three losses in their regular season and were the runner up in DCIAA softball finals against Jackson Reed. The team has seen a lot of progress welcoming players who are new to the sport, Usher ('24) said, “A lot of people have improved drastically.” Additionally, two players, Usher, who plays second base, and third baseman Anna Morelli ('27) made the DCIAA all league second team which comprises the best players from all DCPS schools, voted on by coaches.

Beneath the surface level though, the team has struggled tremendously with transportation and funding issues. Walls does not own buses to transport the teams to fields, so the team has to find alternate transportation for each game, often relying on other schools’ (usually their opponent’s) buses.

Most of the buses were not even on time, “The bus would come like hours late,” said Thu Huynh ('25). Not only were the buses late, according to Maeve Cunningham ('26), “Usually we have to share a bus with the other team, so the bus is really late to Walls and extremely crowded.” The bus being late has been a significant hurdle for the team. Usher ('24) expressed, “We’ve gotten to the field 10 minutes before the game starts, so that we can’t fully warm up.”

Another problem the softball team faced, like many Walls sports teams, was difficulty accessing facilities for practice. Usher ('24) said, “We practice right on the mall in a public field, so we don’t have a permit or anything, this means anyone can be on the field when we’re there, and we can’t tell them to get off of it.”

Beyond logistical difficulty, the team has struggled with the implications of their game—softball, a women’s sport.

Goldfrank ('24) said, “Even the name softball itself, people kind of downplay it, because it has the word ‘soft’ in it.” Cunningham ('26) compared it to the baseball team, “The baseball team raised a ton of money, they play a bunch more games, so there’s more opportunities and recognition for them.”

While most schools in D.C. have a baseball team, many schools don’t have softball teams, and the ones that do, are not well developed.

Goldfrank ('24) expressed, “It also just makes me sad because the softball teams through DCIAA are not very good and not very well-funded, so our games aren’t even that competitive. I feel like that’s not the case with many sports,” an issue that Goldfrank largely attributes to softball’s connotation as feminine.

Although the softball team has faced some problems, players have continued to band together and express their love for the team and the community it has created. Huynh ('25) said, “It’s not just a team, it’s like being a small family.”

Cunningham ('26) said, “Last year it was mostly seniors, this year it’s been a lot more fun, because we’re more connected as a team.” ●

Kai Henrikson-Brandt Makes a Splash in the Swimming World

By Miles Felix ('24)
Staff Writer

“Most days of the school year I go to bed at 7:30 and wake up around 4:15 in the morning.” While this may sound abnormal for most people, it has become a routine for Kai Henrikson-Brandt ('25) as he chases his goals of collegiate swimming.

The Junior swimmer has accomplished some of the fastest times in School Without Walls history and some of the best on the East Coast. Henrikson-Brandt has boasted times of 49.14 in the 100-yard backstroke, and 49.02 seconds in the 100-yard butterfly.

To achieve these milestones, Henrikson-Brandt has had to work consistently on a demanding schedule. For swimmers, the large bulk of the year is spent preparing for championship meets which take place December to March. “September through November we’re in a gearing up phase with six morning practices a week, it’s the grind phase of the swim season” Henrikson-Brandt explained.

On top of his busy practice schedule, Kai incorporates weight lifting and plyometrics into his training.

“During the season I’ll split up my training between pure strength and speed work,” he explains “Recently, I’ve added in an athletic day where I focus on improving my hips’ and ankles’ resilience to improve my athleticism overall.”

Henrikson-Brandt attributes his ability to stay on a tight routine year-round to his disci-

pline and passion for the sport. “On a day-to-day basis I’ve now gotten to a point where it’s more discipline than motivation that keeps me going,” he noted, “But also how much I care about the sport and how much time I’ve put into it over the years.”

Henrikson-Brandt’s passion for swimming stretches back to when his parents signed him up for the swim team at Cheverly Swim Club over the summer of first grade. Kai recalls being unenthusiastic at first when his parents signed him up, but he soon fell in love with the sport. He loved the process of improving and he continued his progress the next summer. He remarks, “it really connected for me because it was something I worked on everyday – I got a lot better doing that.”

The following winter, Henrikson-Brandt joined his first club team, DC Wave, which allowed him to practice year-round. Since then he’s been swimming for the club alongside school teams. The future is bright for Henrikson-Brandt as his times are on pace with the NCAA Division One level for swimming.

He has already taken multiple recruiting visits to D-1 programs including at Brown University, the University of Delaware, and the University of Loyola Maryland. He plans to commit early in his senior year to a school “where I’ll fit best, where my times will be able to score, but also where I can be challenged in a way I haven’t before.”

Henrikson-Brandt’s future aspirations include qualifying for the NCAA Swimming Championships in his collegiate career “If I develop a lot at a D-1 program, I think I have the capability to go to NAAs one day,” he said.

In the meantime, he’ll be training over the summer at Banneker Pool as he gears up for his Senior season. ●



Left: Reia Stock-Heard runs at the Armony Hispanic Games / Credits: Kai Henrikson Brandt

A Note to all Sports Readers:

Find our 2023-2024 sports recap by Charlotte Tama ('24) on our website, swwrookery.com



2024 SGA members pose for a photo / Credits: Mychael Brown

Why We Should All Care About the SGA

By Hugo Rosen ('24)
Staff Writer

Everyone at Walls knows the Student Government Association. We vote in SGA elections, dance at SGA-organized homecomings, and attend SGA-planned in-school food giveaways, game afternoons, and club showcases. However, SGA remains on the periphery of most of our daily lives. At any given time, the average Walls student probably doesn't know or care much about what SGA is doing.

Instead, we hear something like "SGA is hosting a pep rally" or "SGA is protesting budget cuts," and we evaluate student government based on how well it pulls that thing off. Then, we forget about SGA until the next thing comes around. This is how school politics traditionally works, and it is wrong. The SGA has more to offer than you might expect.

Many of us don't know exactly what SGA does. SGA has two main purposes. First, SGA advocates the student perspective on school-wide issues, like admissions or attendance policy, giving us influence over what goes on around us.

Second, SGA works to create a school community. At Walls, a school with many cliques, there is definite value in things like the homecoming dance, the club fair, and pep rallies (all planned/organized by SGA), which give us a chance to interact with people we usually wouldn't.

The SGA and the position of SGA president are powerful; my fellow officers and I regularly create substantive changes within our

school. Last month, for example, I asked the administration for a meeting, where I brought up that DCPS lunches were consistently arriving late to school and that a urinal in the first-floor boys' bathroom had been out of service for months. The administration contacted the custodial department and called the DCPS lunch provider. Both issues were resolved.

As SGA president, I've spoken with DCPS Chancellor Lewis Ferebee, Chairman Phil Mendelson, and several D.C. Councilmembers about Wall's funding and other issues and weighed in on how to structure Wall's admissions process for the incoming freshman class. Perhaps best of all, I've canceled over ten hours of class time for schoolwide activities. At SGA, such opportunities to create change come regularly.

Because our SGA is powerful, we should take elections seriously. By voting for serious candidates whose policies align with our vision for a better school, we as students give ourselves a voice within a complex and cumbersome system where our concerns are easily lost within the slow wheels of bureaucracy. Thus, I encourage every Walls student to vote, and vote mindfully, in the upcoming June 2024 SGA elections.

Beyond voting, I encourage you to get involved in SGA, which is nothing without its representatives, who are a crucial force in SGA.

For example, Representative Mille Wright's ('26) idea to hold a schoolwide Olympics is now set to happen next Monday, June

3rd.

Vice-President Felicia Ogunduwu ('26) selected the theme for this year's homecoming dance and organized many of the decorations. By running for a representative position, you too can shape the SGA and, by extension, School Without Walls.

In order to be successful, SGA must be self-determined by students. Every year for the past three years, SGA has changed faculty sponsors, and each change has significantly impacted how SGA operates. This year, for example, the new sponsors, Ms. Piper, Ms. Pace, and Ms. Grant, overhauled our election system without student input.

The new system is intelligently designed, and should remain in place. However, unlike in the past, it was instituted unilaterally, and lack of advance communication surrounding the new rules prevented some students from running for their desired positions by no fault of their own.

SGA's main purpose is to give us, as young adults, a say in how our school operates and, if we so choose, to change how our school operates. That is only possible, however, when we empower ourselves to be agents, and not merely passive recipients, of change.

Future SGA leaders should ensure that all SGA decisions begin and end with student input. Anything else would defeat the point of student government.

One more suggestion to future SGA officers and members: take yourself seriously. If you do not take yourself seriously in high school student government, no one else will.

To everyone else, remember: we all have the capacity to vote for someone who will listen to us and work to represent our interests. To vote for someone unprepared for that level of responsibility, or to not vote at all, is to do yourself a disservice.

Every November for the past three years, I've asked you to "Vote Rosen for President!" I'm immeasurably grateful for the opportunity and hope my actions have lived up to my words.

As I leave, I will ask one last thing of you: take advantage of student government. Do this not for the admittedly abstract idea of school community, but for yourself. A strong, SGA directly benefits every Walls student who wishes for some change within our school. In exchange for a small investment of time and attention, SGA provides a platform for all of us, as young adults, to amplify our voices and shape how our school, where we each spend at least 30 hours a week, functions. ●

Dear Fellow Activists: Protest is Easy. Change is Hard.

By Devan Tatlow ('24)
Guest Contributor

To my fellow youth activists,
Our world can be a scary place. Climate change threatens a sixth great extinction. The number of people who died in conflicts in 2022 doubled over the previous year. Hundreds of millions of people are starving as I write this.

In such turbulent times, millions have raised their voices. Nearly 10 million people protested across America last year over gun violence, reproductive rights, environmental threats, the Hamas attack on Israel, the war in Gaza, and more. Even more have spoken out on campuses and on social media.

As a youth activist, I passionately believe we need to make the change that we want for our futures. But I believe just as passionately that speech and protest alone are not the only — or even the most effective — tools for change.

Social media has made it easier than

ever to raise our voices. But no strongly worded statement on Instagram to a few hundred — or even a few hundred thousand — friends and followers can save a child from starvation. Raising awareness is only useful when it spurs meaningful change. It's easy to denounce inequities or injustice. But it's much more important to take meaningful action to change conditions on the ground.

When we post online, we may feel as if we took action. But that illusion of action can make us complacent, reducing the likelihood that we take concrete next steps.

Social media activism also tends to create decentralized, leaderless movements without specific or agreed-upon goals — movements that are easier for those in power to ignore. Compare that to the suffragette struggle, the Civil Rights Movement or South Africa's anti-apartheid campaign to name a few — movements in which recognized leaders with moral authority negotiated and put pressure on discriminatory or

repressive governments, ultimately achieving many of their goals. Those leaders and their organizations channeled collective speech into concrete action, organizing civil disobedience, boycotts and general strikes that often hit businesses and governments and where it hurts — in the pocketbook.

The use of social media to amplify protests exploded in the 2010s, famously with the Arab Spring uprisings. But at the same time, the share of nonviolent movements around the world that achieved their goals in that decade fell to half of what it was in the 1990s, according to an analysis by Harvard political scientist Erica Chenoweth.

If protesting, rather than concrete change, becomes the goal, movements can become dominated by those with a shallow understanding of the issue, who see things in black and white or who push for extreme or unrealistic solutions. One reason speech is so satisfying is that it's instant.

Activism continued on page 7

Making Our Activism More Productive

Activism continued from page 6

Building a campaign to achieve real change is slow.

So what are some ways to get there? Start by acknowledging that you don't know all the answers. Instead, work with grassroots leaders and movements directly affected by problems you're hoping to help solve, and see what you can contribute to make a difference.

As a two-time childhood cancer survivor troubled by inequities in global healthcare, I wanted to help other kids get access to life-saving treatment. After Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, I approached the largest children's cancer charity in Ukraine and offered to help set up their U.S. chapter. They already had an experienced Ukrainian leader and a network of hospitals and funders across Europe. As U.S. outreach director, I contributed something they didn't have — an advocate in Washington who could take their cause directly to U.S. organizations willing to help.

Another lesson I've learned is to try to persuade others rather than alienate them. Don't burn bridges with those who make some decisions you disagree with. It's possible to build issue-specific coalitions among people on political extremes; I did this with members of the Progressive Caucus and their adversaries who voted not to certify the 2020 election, but who agreed on one thing: helping kids with cancer.

Finally, set specific and achievable goals. Prioritize concrete policy changes over grand, non-binding resolutions.

Activism is powerful but sand demonstrating is not enough — we need to focus on steps that achieve meaningful change. ●

Connections Without Walls

By Max Goldberg ('24)

Puzzle editor

Find nine groups of four SWW-related items that share something in common. While some words may fit into multiple categories, there is only one solution for the entire puzzle.

Category Examples:

Trig Functions: Sine, Cosine, Tangent, Secant

Standardized Tests: CAPE, SAT, NMSQT, ANet

L2	MOORE	GYM	PERU	AMERICAN	IDIOMS
BASEBALL	HOWARD	ALGEBRA	AUDITORIUM	NATS	INDIA
UNIVERSITIES	SPAIN	WIZARDS	SINPRASITH	33	STATISTICS
SINS	SOFTBALL	GEOMETRY	ROME	GOLF	CAPS
PACE	SLOGANS	42	COMMANDERS	FIELD	GEORGETOWN
LOCKERS	S2	GW	CALCULUS	IRO	LACROSSE

Parting Words from Our 2024 Editors-in-Chief

By David Sipos ('24) and Sara Weinrod ('24)

Editor-in-Chief, Editor-in-Chief

First, we want to thank everyone who contributed to the paper this year, starting with our writers. Without them, the paper would not exist. We would also like to thank our senior editorial team of Tillie Freed, Rachel Kolko, Josie McCartney, and Charlotte Tama for dealing with our rushed deadlines and last-minute requests.

Thanks to our dedicated website editor Layla Rethy and thank you to Max Goldberg, our puzzle editor, and to Derek Emons, our first resident artist, for being the only reason most students pick up *The Rookery*. Finally, we're grateful for the support of our faculty advisor Mr. Ghazi and the HSA in getting *The Rookery* published for the eight year running.

We hope to leave behind more than just a farewell article. We hope Walls students years down the line will continue to enjoy the new Comics section placed strategically next to the crossword. We also have expanded our puzzle offerings with Connections. We look forward to how *The Rookery* will get even better in the years to come.

We are excited for next year's editor-in-chiefs, Zoe Fisher and Zoe Becker, and our new managing editor, Jessie Moss, who will take on the challenge of putting a newspaper together each month. And special congratulations to Becker, who is the first to attain the status of editor-in-chief as a junior. But while we're confident we're leaving *The*



2024 Rookery staff poses for a photo / Credits: Naomi Nassar

attain the status of editor-in-chief as a junior.

But while we're confident we're leaving *The Rookery* in capable hands, we worry about the new obstacles its next editors will face.

Since its first edition eight years ago, *The Rookery* has operated just as any college student newspaper: with editorial freedom to publish what needs to be read and write how we want to write.

That changed this year, for reasons unclear to us. Walls administrators have required that each edition we produce first be sent to them for approval. Fortunately, the extent of their review was limited.

However, the specter of censorship threatens *The Rookery's* status as the voice of the student body. Throughout the year, the risk of administrative scrutiny has hung over

decisions of what we publish.

We are not the most controversial of papers. But for any piece of student journalism, from criticism of DCPS to staff misconduct to controversial student activism, the independence of the student press is what makes it trustworthy. Our ability to publish unpopular or contentious ideas is what makes us journalists and not glorified newsletter writers.

For *The Rookery's* ninth year, we hope that the paper's independence is restored. We hope that Walls administrators recognize that the free student press must be a voice of the student body, not of the administration. And we hope that *The Rookery* never backs down from covering what needs to be covered. ●

COMICS

So Long

By Derek Emons ('24)
Resident Artist



CROSSWORD

Parting is Such Sweet Sorrow

By Max Goldberg ('24)
Puzzle Editor

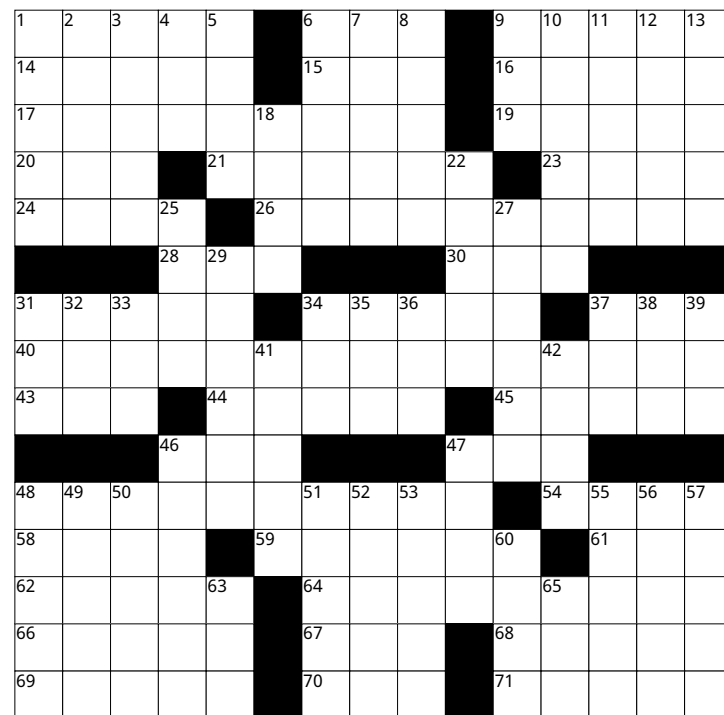
ACROSS

1 Sir counterpart
6 Twisty shape
9 Actress Bissett*
14 Addis ___
15 "Eureka!"
16 Some golf clubs
17 Took advantage of
19 Bathroom cleaner?
20 Pasta suffix
21 Novelist Olsen*
23 1979 Fleetwood Mac hit*
24 Uses the + sign
26 Pessimistic types
28 Loos, briefly
30 Test for many rising seniors
31 Best possible
34 Raring to go
37 Friend or ___?
40 People we're saying goodbye to in this issue... or 3D, 9A, 21A, 23A, 46D, and 64A
43 Peacock network
44 Sport with clay pigeons
45 Mass times acceleration
46 Kylo ___
47 Bay Area airport, abbr.
48 A Pringle, perhaps
54 In ___ of (replacing)
58 Larger-than-life
59 "Slow down!"
61 Collar

62 Czech capital, to Czechs
64 Largest city in North Carolina*
66 Frame in Derek's comic
67 Fine and dandy
68 404 clue not generated
69 Grind to ___
70 Lonely number
71 NYC borough

DOWN

1 Elder Obama daughter
2 Evening in Essen
3 Goliath's 37A*
4 Lincoln nickname
5 K follower?
6 Extremely patriotic bird
7 Bookcase unit
8 ___ Hawkins dance
9 Triangular sail
10 Doubt-raising question
11 Coke, Pepsi, and Sprite
12 Still
13 "Cómo ___?"
18 Helps out
22 Let up
25 Merch
27 Trade tax
29 Skeleton's place?
31 Charged particle in Room 14
32 Victory, informally
33 List-ending letters



34 Opposite of WSW
35 Get on in years
36 Pick up
37 Part of FYI
38 Tolkien monster
39 Language suffix
41 "Don't remind me"
42 Home Depot purchase
46 Environmentalist Carson*
47 Urge on
48 ___ Pig of kids' TV
49 Media mogul Winfrey
50 "Princess and the Frog" princess
51 Hershey harvest
52 Spousal greeting

53 "May ___ your plate?"
55 Show starter
56 Use, as plates
57 Low-cost rideshare option
60 Roman commoner
63 Space bar neighbor
65 NHL great Bobby

Visit our website at
www.swwrookery.com

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

The Rookery

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

Managing Editor Emeritus: Josie McCartney ('24)

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

Editors-in-Chief: Zoe Becker ('26) and Zoe Fisher ('25)

Managing Editor: Jessie Moss ('26)

Sports Editor: Charlotte Tama ('24)

Resident Artist: Derek Emons ('24)

Digital Editor: Layla Rethy ('25)

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A Note from Our Puzzle Editor

By Max Goldberg ('24)
Puzzle Editor

As the title of this issue's crossword suggests, it's time for me to say goodbye. I'm very grateful to have had the chance to make crosswords and, more recently, Connections for you all to solve.

I'm also proud to announce Leah Levy ('25) as my replacement for next year who will continue bringing you all crosswords and any other games she decides. So, for one last time, I hope you enjoy the puzzle, and happy solving! ●