

ChatGPT warns against “academic dishonesty” / Credits: Sara Weinrod

“Great Opportunity” or “Dangerous Idea”? Teachers Weigh ChatGPT’s Implications

By Sara Weinrod (2024)
Staff Writer

ChatGPT, OpenAI’s artificial intelligence chatbot released to the public in November 2022, has caught the attention of educators for its potential to impact classrooms across the country. Given any prompt, the bot can generate writing with the competence of a human in various styles. It can write essays and com-

plete homework assignments for students in mere seconds, leading some educators to be concerned that they will no longer be able to teach and evaluate writing properly. Articles in the Atlantic declared the “end of high-school English” and the death of the college essay.

But not all teachers think that ChatGPT is cause for panic. “I think that teachers who have

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More Stringent DCPS Policy Requires Case- by-Case Approval of Field Trips

By Jessie Moss (2026)
Staff Writer

School Without Walls has long prided itself on students’ ability to easily participate in off-campus activities. A revamped DCPS field-trip policy presents additional hurdles for planning excursions outside the building, potentially challenging that easy access.

Like the old policy, field trips still must be approved by school administration, but each trip will also face individual approval by the DCPS central office, a potentially lengthy process. The new policy keeps the requirement that all off-campus trips have at least one DCPS background-checked sponsor.

DCPS representatives did not respond to multiple requests for comment on the goals and details of the change.

Health and physical education teacher Cory Matthews said that the policy will have many benefits. Under the new system, all field trips are digitally tracked, allowing schools to better account for their students’ whereabouts.

“Everyone will know where the students are if a disaster or emergency were to take place,” Mr. Matthews said. “The major change in effectiveness with the new and old system is that now it’s digital, instead of on paper. Now we have a better checks and balances system to keep everyone safe and aware if something



Credits: Jessie Moss

were to happen.”

However, the new policy’s additional barriers to field trips come on top of existing hurdles: For one, the DCPS background-check process for sponsors has always come with complications. Marielle Cornes, the Walls

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PE Classes Return to GW Gym

University COVID Measures Had Prohibited Access

By Bailey McFadden (2025)
Staff Writer

Most students at Walls have never had full access to George Washington University’s Lerner Health and Wellness Center for PE class, a norm before COVID-19 restrictions. After returning from the COVID pandemic lockdown, GW barred outside groups, including Walls, from renting, reserving, or otherwise utilizing space in many GW buildings, including the Lerner Center. As a result, PE classes have taken place outside or in the cramped Commons, to many students’ discomfort and displeasure.

However, the days of Commons gym classes are coming to an end: GW has permitted Walls PE classes to return to Lerner for the 2023 spring semester. Students will not be allowed in any part of the Lerner Center except for its gymnasium. Other areas, including the basketball and volleyball courts, will be available upon request.

The unique relationship between SWW and GW allows high school classes to use university facilities, according to Andre Julien, GW’s senior associate athletic director of campus recreation, wellness and club sports and the liaison between Walls and GW. “We simply set up hours and times and make spaces available, and your classes can come down individually and engage in coursework for the given period of time,” he said in an interview.

Though GW permitted Walls to return to Lerner, certain conditions and limitations remain. “We will not be able to utilize the locker rooms, which we had been able to do pre-COVID,” PE teacher Cory Matthews said. “So students will have to change up prior to going to [Lerner].”

Other restrictions from before COVID also apply. “Students are required to come in as a group, to operate as a group, and to leave as a group so that there are not folks that are lingering in places that we don’t have supervised,” Mr. Julien said.

GW also will require a “fifteen students for every one teacher” ratio, Mr. Matthews said. Since all Walls PE classes contain about 25-30 students, classes need two supervising teachers if they are going to visit the Center.

Despite the success for gym classes, Walls sports teams will not receive access to GW’s facilities. Walls Athletic Director Kip Smith highlighted that GW’s policy of not allowing sports teams to use facilities is not a major change in policy: Out of Walls’s 22 sports teams, only the basketball teams had access to Lisner pre-pandemic for their 6 a.m. practice. Still, “that may change if they allow use after school,” Walls athletic director Kip Smith said.

This restriction was put in place as a “safety measure, not a COVID measure,” Mr. Julien said.

Mr. Matthews is enthusiastic about his classes’ return to the building. “It’s been really tough not having a gym or dedicated space,” he said. “We’re very excited for our partnership with GW to come back to a portion of what it previously was.” ●

Orchestra Students Miss Weeks of Classes to Play in Musical

By Ava Barcelona (2025)
Staff Writer

The clock strikes midnight for orchestra students as they work to complete assignments and compensate for missed instruction after their February performance of “Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Cinderella Enchanted.” While some orchestra students agree that playing for the musical was a valuable learning experience, others worry that it has placed an undue burden on them and their teachers.

Orchestra rehearsals took place between Jan. 30 and Feb. 8, the two weeks before the first performance. The first week, students alternated between missing morning and afternoon classes, with full day practices on Thursday and Friday. The second week saw rehearsals ramp up, with both performing casts requiring their presence. (The musical was double-casted, meaning that there were two actors for most roles; each cast played one night of the musical.) In total, orchestra students missed six half days and three full days of classes. Attendance at the rehearsals was mandatory and graded.

“We knew it was coming for months,” said Christopher Alberts, the Walls orchestra teacher. “We informed faculty and students to prepare to be out of class for the time period.” He urged students to speak to teachers, make arrangements for make-up work, and to get ahead of assignments when possible.

The orchestra students, though, had no choice in their participation in the play. Teachers working with the production made the decision once the play was selected that the student orchestra would be the best fit for the musical’s



Junior John Wood plays the bass in the musical on Feb. 9 / Credits: Adah Svetlik

instrumentation.

Faculty have made substantial efforts to support orchestra students — one student acknowledged the assistance Mr. Alberts offered in handling potential issues with teachers after missing classes.

Many teachers were flexible regarding the workload and absences, and helped students catch up with their peers. Trumpet player Ian Springer, a sophomore, found his teachers to be understanding of the orchestra’s circumstances. “I really appreciate how my teachers

have continued posting assignments in Canvas and given me extensions when necessary,” he said. “For example, I appreciate how Ms. Kelly took the time to review a lesson that I missed with me and make sure I understood the content.”

Still, there are some areas more difficult to prepare for than others. “I felt that a bunch of classes like AP World and Chemistry require physically being in class in order to do well, and I’m feeling the effects of being absent in the week following the play rather than during the play itself,” percussionist Gideon Ratke, a sophomore, said. “I feel like Mr. Alberts gave us everything he could, but given the time constraints there was a lot of anxiety catching up on late work.”

Other students echoed this sentiment, with missing instruction presenting the foremost challenge rather than overdue assignments or testing. Not all teachers have the time to go over lessons with absent students, especially when considering the amount of content students missed as rehearsals progressed.

The musical challenged orchestra students academically and in the theater, but their perseverance proved remarkable. As those who witnessed it can attest, their performance was a highlight of the production. Mr. Alberts commended his students, saying, “I think they absolutely killed it; it was amazing.” He continued, “Most people don’t realize how much work goes into preparing for something like a musical. Professionals in the real world would take months to prepare for a show. We did it in about six weeks, with about two weeks of actual rehearsal time.” ●

New AP Precalculus Course “Makes No Sense,” Teachers and Professors Say

By Maia Albert (2025)
Staff Writer

The College Board last year announced a new AP Precalculus course, which it says will “prepare a more diverse set of students to succeed in higher-level math and reach college graduation.” But whether there can really be a “college-level” precalculus class is far from clear.

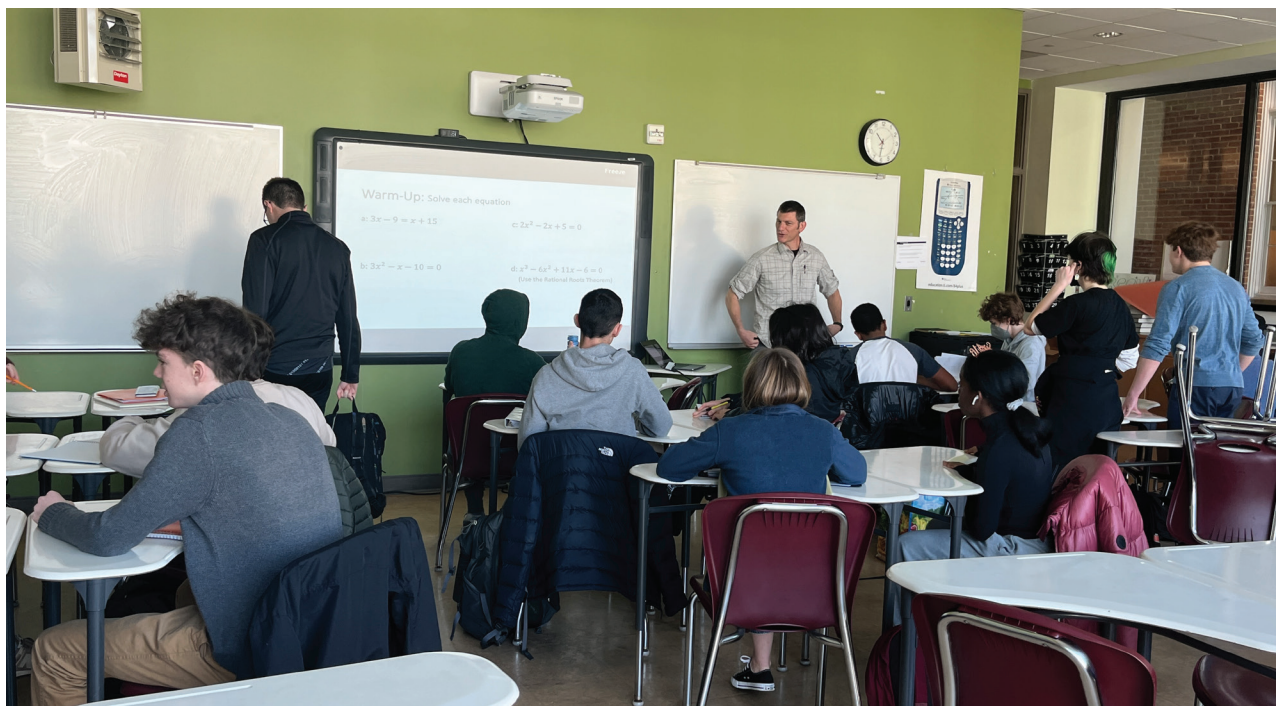
Walls will not be implementing the class in the near future, according to Assistant Principal LaToya Grant. “Our math teachers looked at the curriculum and it’s really just a review of what we already do in this school, so it seemed repetitive and not beneficial for students,” Ms. Grant said.

Jesse Koplowitz, who teaches Algebra II and precalculus at Walls, said that he does not think this class would be valuable to students. Based on his experience teaching the class, a fixed curriculum for precalculus may harm the overall benefit of it. “Precalculus to me is not necessarily about getting kids ready for AP Calculus,” Mr. Koplowitz said.

There is no standard precalculus content an AP exam could test, according to Mr. Koplowitz, because schools have different curriculums based on what their students need to be ready for calculus. “The thing I’m trying to get out of precalculus is I want students to think more mathematically,” Mr. Koplowitz said. “There’s no one precalculus, there’s no standards for it.”

Kristin Kelly, the Walls AP Calculus AB and BC teacher, also struggled to see the value of the class. “I don’t even know what a college-level precalculus class would look like,” she said.

Additionally, the timeframe for this class



Mr. Koplowitz teaching a precalculus class Feb. 27 / Credits: David Sipos

would be cut down, as teachers would have to squeeze the curriculum in by the AP test in May, as opposed to having the entire year to cover the content.

This further inhibits the flexibility of the course, meaning less time to tailor the course to the students. “If it turns out people don’t remember as well how to factor quadratics they can stop and do that type of stuff,” Ms. Kelly said. “An AP curriculum doesn’t lend itself to giving a lot of time because you feel this constraint.”

Ms. Kelly and Mr. Koplowitz both thought the added pressure of another AP course might be harmful for students. “Our kids are already really overloaded with AP stuff, I don’t know that another AP is going to add a lot of benefit in light of the amount of stress I think it would cause,” said Mr. Koplowitz.

On top of all of this, AP courses are supposed to be college-level. Joseph Bonin, a professor of mathematics at George Washington University, said “although some universities offer it, precalculus is high-school-level material, not university-level material, and so offering AP credit for it makes no sense.”

His colleague Frank Baginski, the chair of the GW mathematics department, agreed, saying the university would not offer credit for a subject that “is not university-level material.” GW does not currently offer a standalone precalculus course, according to its course catalog.

Though the idea of avoiding math classes in college may appeal to students, there is no guarantee that the credits will actually transfer at most schools. “To be honest, a lot of colleges don’t take the credits,” said Crystal Pace, the class of 2025 counselor. ●

New High School Set to Open This Fall in Northwest D.C.

By Zoe Becker (2026)
Staff Writer

A long-anticipated new public high school in the Palisades is set to open this fall, DCPS announced in January.

The January announcement said the new school will “help alleviate overcrowding pressures” at Tenleytown’s Jackson-Reed High School, which enrolls over 2,000 students according to publicly available DCPS statistics — almost 25 percent above the carrying capacity of 1,550 that the agency listed for the building in 2011.

MacArthur High School, whose permanent name has not yet been confirmed, will be located in the former Georgetown Day School lower school campus and will offer guaranteed spots to students at Hardy Middle School.

The school will only host ninth and tenth grade classes during its inaugural year. DCPS will keep class sizes small, aiming to enroll 200 ninth grade students and 50 tenth grade students.

DCPS anticipates that as MacArthur becomes fully enrolled in the coming years, it will reach a student population (grades 9-12) of around 1,000.

In addition to Hardy Middle School students, any current eighth graders at Alice Deal Middle School or Oyster Adams Bilingual School will receive lottery admission prefer-



MacArthur High School will open in the old GDS lower school building this fall. / Credits: Tess Buckley

ence. Jackson Reed High School ninth graders will receive preference. MacArthur will also accept out of boundary students via the DCPS lottery system.

Hardy Middle School is about 40 percent white and its students have an average household income of \$170,931, the highest of any DCPS middle school, according to Niche.com.

Incoming principal Dr. Harold McCray said that “my main goal is to ensure students receive a high-quality rigorous education while being prepared to be leaders in society.”

Dr. McCray has worked in education for 18 years: 14 in Prince George’s County and four

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As ChatGPT Gains Momentum, Teachers Consider Their Priorities

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been thinking about teaching and writing for a long time have realized that students have been cheating for a long time, and so the more they have students do work outside of class, the less they know how much the student has done,” said Jan McGlennon, who teaches AP English Language and Composition at Walls. “So I’m not really worried about it. She doesn’t see ChatGPT as a new threat, but rather as the amplification of a chronic issue that has been around for ages.

Humanities II teacher Ginea Briggs said there was “justification for concern,” but agreed that “the idea that high school English will end” was overblown and “fear-mongering.”

Neither Ms. McGlennon, Ms. Briggs, nor Humanities I and IV teacher Mr. Jordan have noticed ChatGPT use among students at Walls, but none were sure they would be able to identify an essay generated by the bot.

Regardless, students at Walls may not even be interested in using ChatGPT for their assignments. Ms. Briggs recalled a Humanities II class discussion she observed in which “overwhelmingly the students were like, I don’t want to use that, I want to write my own thoughts and ideas.” Still, some students admitted to The Rookery that they had used ChatGPT for minor assignments, but were unwilling to comment on the record for fear of disciplinary action.

Many public school systems, including in nearby Montgomery County, have blocked ChatGPT on school computers. DCPS Wi-Fi, however, still allows students to access ChatGPT, and has yet to announce a formal policy about it. Regardless of whether DCPS blocks it going forward, students can still use their personal devices or use hotspots to access the bot.

Ms. Briggs thought it better to “point [students] away from using [ChatGPT] in a manner that might be plagiarism” than to ban the program outright. Ms. McGlennon said a ban would be unfair, as “the kids who have their own data will be able to use it, and the kids who

aren’t that privileged won’t.”

Teachers at Walls have a few options at their disposal to rein in AI-assisted plagiarism. Even if ChatGPT-generated writing is not immediately obvious, Mr. Jordan suggested that a teacher could know if a student’s work is their own by interviewing the student about the assignment. He would question the student, and ask them about “what they wrote, and how they wrote it” since he believes that “there’s a difference in giving some knowledge and internalizing something that you yourself wrote.”

Additionally, software companies have scrambled to put together apps that can identify ChatGPT-generated writing, which are in various stages of development. Turnitin.com, a plagiarism checker many Walls teachers use, is developing its own detection capabilities.

“Learning how to write is really supposed to teach students how to think.”

Another potential strategy is to change some aspects of teaching. Ms. McGlennon said she plans to assign “less work outside of class” and would like to “teach students how to use [ChatGPT] effectively.”

“I think perhaps before we start a discussion about preventing students from using it, I think the school should probably have discussions about the use of it and our philosophies around it first and communicating that to students,” Ms. Briggs said, saying it was important to be “on the same page as a department, as a school.” The School Without Walls administration has yet to instruct teachers about how to handle ChatGPT, and Principal Sylvia Isaac declined to comment.

ChatGPT could help English classes as well as hurt them. Ms. McGlennon said students could use it for research, like “synthesizing a Google search,” and Mr. Jordan said it could be used to get an overview of various perspectives on an issue.

Ms. McGlennon thought ChatGPT could

be used to help students outline papers, “especially since we don’t teach students how to do outlines anymore. When I was a kid, that was something everybody learned starting in fifth grade, but most kids don’t know how to do that right now.” She said it could be used as a tool to help students organize their ideas more efficiently.

Ms. Briggs added that “there are a variety of ways that teachers are currently using it to help organize papers, to have sample writing so that kids can practice editing and revising, to show examples.” Students could also ask for feedback on their own work, she said. Ms. McGlennon described some more possible uses, including making teachers’ lives a lot easier by generating permission slips, creating rubrics, and writing emails.

What’s more, ChatGPT could make teachers reconsider what their goals are and how to improve student learning. Ms. McGlennon, for one, thinks “it’s a great opportunity to focus more on critical thinking.” Mr. Jordan said it makes him want to “put more emphasis” on writing, because “you need that whole process of what it takes to learn words and how to use them.”

At the heart of the conflict between ChatGPT and education is a looming uncertainty about the value of learning how to write. If ChatGPT-like AI is only going to get better and better, some may question whether writing should remain a central part of education. But teachers at Walls maintain that writing classes are crucial.

“Words are important — everything that we do consists of words,” Mr. Jordan said. Letting technology write for us, he argued, means that “we’re becoming a dumb society.”

Ms. Briggs agreed, adding that “the idea of ChatGPT being a solution to people who don’t want to write is faulty and dangerous.”

Fundamentally, Ms. McGlennon said, learning how to write is not about learning where to place commas and semicolons. “What learning how to write is really supposed to do is teach students how to think,” she said, “and if you can’t think it, you can’t write it.” ●

New DCPS Policy Mandates System Approval of Field Trips

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speech and debate coach, said, “My background check took about six months. I had to put in an application to DCPS for clearance...I had to get fingerprinted, and I had to get drug-tested.” She said the process was so lengthy not because of any delays on her part, “but because they were unresponsive and unclear about which forms I was supposed to fill out.”

These delays could create challenges for chaperones who need to be quickly background-checked, according to Ms. Cornes. She said that while background checks for employees and coaches are important, mandating them for “every possible chaperone would only create issues” in her view.

The need for DCPS to individually approve every field trip could limit teachers’ ability to sponsor spontaneous field trips. Many teachers find being able to travel off-campus hugely important, especially as Walls is an urban school.

Mr. Mathews said that he understands needing to fill out a form for “longer distances,” but said, “I regularly take my classes out of the building ... if a field trip is within our class period and does not affect other classes, it should

be fine.”

For Ms. Cornes and the debate team, off-campus trips are almost always longer distances. She said, “Especially because we are not in control of the dates of when we travel — that’s determined by the tournament — if DCPS has delays or does not get clearance back to us before the preset [tournament] date, it will inhibit us from being able to go.”

This policy is especially pertinent for Walls since the school has always maintained a strong connection to the city. “The Walls ideology for me is ‘the world is our classroom,’ Mr. Matthews said. “There’s a lot of things you learn within the classroom, but there are so many different museums, programs, and activities that happen outside the School Without Walls.”

Ms. Cornes added that many field trips for the debate team are “school-sponsored academic events.” Inhibiting travel, she said, “is only harming the students.”

The Walls administration declined to comment on the new policy and how it will affect Walls.

“We’re still in the first [few] weeks of the system,” Mr. Matthews said. “I think there will be a learning curve with the system and some complications with it, but I think it’ll work.” ●

New High School to Supplement Jackson-Reed in Ward 3

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in DCPS. He has leadership experience at both elementary and high school levels and has taught middle school math.

“My hope is that the community will continue to support and uplift the goals and aspirations set by the school,” Dr. McCray said, “which will be heavily focused on developing global leaders in society.”

It is unclear how MacArthur’s opening will impact the Walls student body, if at all. Walls principal Sylvia Isaac said that Walls would conduct its 2023 admissions process as usual.

According to DCPS’s profile of the school, MacArthur “will offer rigorous academics, Career and Technical Education (CTE) pathways, arts programming, and a range of athletic and club options.”

The school will offer AP programming in academic and other subject areas and engineering and information technology specialization programs for small groups of students.

“I want MacArthur to be the flagship of what a high school experience should be, known for its academic rigorous instruction,” Dr. McCray said. “My motto is that above average is the standard.” ●

DCPS Plan to Intervene in Duke Ellington Administration Sparks Student Backlash

By Camille Galvani (2026)
Staff Writer

The Duke Ellington School of the Arts (DESA) community has long valued the school’s focus, unique in DCPS, on the performing arts. But now, students are worried that interference from DCPS will take away the very thing they love about it.

DCPS Chancellor Lewis Ferebee said in a statement last year that DCPS would “assume full operation” of the school, eliminating DESA’s current role. The proposal outlined by DCPS would have all teachers become DCPS employees, thus increasing their pay and putting their personnel files in the hands of the central office due to concerns about teacher licensure and school recordkeeping following sexual assault allegations against a writing teacher.

Unlike every other DCPS high school, the school system is only a partner in running the school — it shares authority with DESA’s school board, the Duke Ellington School of the Arts Project (DESAP). For two decades, DCPS has provided funding in exchange for Ellington using DCPS core classes alongside its in-depth arts curriculum, according to the Washington Informer.

According to the Informer, only 30 members of DESA’s teaching staff have contracts with DCPS. The rest are working artists wanted for their lived expertise, hired by the school separately from DCPS. All other DCPS schools, including Walls, hire teachers through the central system. DESA teachers’ salaries are, on average, 25-35 percent less than those of other DCPS teachers.

Because DCPS’s teacher licensure requirement could eliminate many qualified artists from the teaching staff, the proposal has generated intense criticism among students and current faculty. “Replacing them would effectively break up the Duke community, and things would be much more structured, with much less freedom in our arts,” Duke junior



Duke Ellington School of the Arts in Burlieth / Credits: Mari Abbate

Mari Abbate said.

DCPS has said direct governance of the school will not adversely impact the existing curriculum. “DCPS is committed to maintaining the integrity and high-quality of the Duke Ellington School of the Arts phenomenal arts programming,” DCPS representative Enrique Gutierrez said in an emailed statement to The Rookery. “We value the arts professionals on staff and their unique expertise, and our proposal supports pathways both to licensure and compensation parity when licensure is not the best option.”

When asked about the school’s current environment, Miki Mulugeta, a senior and DESA’s student body president, said that he “truly can’t think of any changes I would want to see with how the school is run.”

Mulugeta said that “all of DCPS’s demands if they take over our school, even if not all of them explicitly mention students, will have a domino effect that will eventually trickle down and affect us disproportionately.”

Mulugeta highlighted students’ protests against the move. “Actions are being taken by

both the student body and student government with video testimonials being recorded, multiple protests being both organized and executed, interviews with the press, flooding thank you letters to both the city council and the mayor for funding arts, an official student Instagram page being created for the movement,” he said. He added that students have created a “student Instagram page [@dukeellingtondc_students] for important information and updates on the protests.”

Gutierrez said that the details of the plan are not yet settled. “We are continuing to meet in good faith with the Board of Directors with a shared goal of a strong future for the Duke Ellington School of the Arts that includes improved support for student safety, operations, and accountability,” he said.

“Our school is all about freedom whether it be artistically, socially, or emotionally,” Mulugeta said, “and to take away our freedom to make our own decisions as a school would be to cripple all other values we have, since they would no longer be our values, they would be DCPS’s.” ●

“Cinderella Enchanted” and the Making of a Musical

By Sara Weinrod (2024)
Staff Writer

The School Without Walls Music and Performing Arts Department recently performed its rendition of “Cinderella Enchanted” at the University of the District of Columbia Theater of the Arts, capping off months of rehearsal and preparation.

The show took place in the evenings of Feb. 9 and 10, along with a matinee performance Thursday morning. “Rodgers & Hammerstein’s Cinderella Enchanted,” the first musical Walls has put on in three years, re-envisioned the classic fairytale as a musical in two acts.

Students in the cast, crew, and orchestra spent months preparing for opening night. The time-consuming rehearsals required students to miss large amounts of class time, but proved rewarding when the actors stepped on the stage in front of the Walls community earlier this month.

Drama teacher Lea Zaslavsky, the director of the production, said in the show program that “there were clashes with everyone... teachers, administration, students, costumes, copy machines.” Still, the show went on.

In fact, the performers had two weeks to put the show together. “It was kind of last minute,” freshman Aden Goldberg said. “We found out it was going to be at UDC, but we weren’t sure what day.” Regardless, “it was really great to hear” that it wasn’t going to be in the Commons.

The musical demanded help from the entire school. In addition to the main cast, 30 orchestra students performed the score. Costume dressers, make-up artists, set designers, and a stage crew also spent hours perfecting the sets and costumes.

Ms. Zaslavsky said this teamwork revealed “how dependent we truly are on one another, how we affect one another, how we grow, learn, and thrive with one another.” She added that “after a year and a half of living in COVID pandemic silos, this sense of community was so needed.”

Even those usually uninvolved in the performing arts at Walls pitched in. Desperate for male ballroom dancers, Ms. Zaslavsky gave calculus teacher Kristin Kelly a list of upperclassmen to recruit despite their lack of dancing experience. Ms. Kelly recalled one student saying, “I am a terrible dancer and don’t know how to dance.” Still, Ms. Kelly recruited so many senior boys to dance that they outnumbered their female partners. The ballroom dance ended up being one of the audience’s favorite scenes, prompting cheers from across the auditorium.

The musical was double-casted, with each cast having performed one night of the show’s



Senior Wes Greene and freshman Lucy Crino in “Cinderella Enchanted” on Feb. 9 / Credits: Adah Svetlik

two-night run. In total, there were 17 main cast members, along with a chorus, two dance ensembles, and an orchestra.

Sophomore Lexi Padre, who played stepsister Grace in cast B, explained the benefits of a double-casted production. “Sometimes we’ll have rehearsal together where one of us watches the other [actor playing that role] go through the blocking, or vice versa.”

Goldberg, who played stepsister Grace in cast A, said that scheduling is the most challenging aspect of rehearsal, “because it change[d] week by week.” The fluctuating rehearsals created difficulties for students planning other extracurriculars, as cast and crew had to be available on a week-to-week basis in case the schedule changed.

Junior Patrick Carey, who played Prince Christopher in cast B, said that, “the only bad aspect [of rehearsal was] getting home late.” The production began in October with auditions, when aspiring singers, actors, and dancers performed a memorized monologue and a thirty-second snippet of a song.

In November, rehearsals were held two to three times a week. Cast members familiarized themselves with the script and began learning their lines in a group. Rehearsals intensified in December, with students staying almost every day after school to practice blocking and build sets.

The musical’s production fostered a tight community, which appealed to many students. Padre recounted choreographing the dance with the seniors Ms. Kelly recruited: “I love just all sitting around and working through our choreography or our lines and having fun, laughing when we get something wrong together.”

Goldberg’s favorite memories of rehearsal involve a bit of mischief as well. Goldberg remembers “some undershirts that [they] would try on as hats,” among other “ridiculous things that make the cast special.” ●

Model UN Team Finds Success at Pa. Tournament

By Evie Corr (2025)
Staff Writer

Members of the Walls Model United Nations (MUN) team traveled to Philadelphia for four days to attend the annual conference Ivy League Model United Nations Conference (ILMUNC) on Jan. 26. The club brought home an honorable mention and two verbal commendations.

ILMUNC hosted over 2,000 students, some traveling from as far as Venezuela, to act in committees representing different branches of the UN. These student committees debate international policy in the same way the formal UN does. Students were assigned to represent a UN member country or a significant historical figure. This year’s topics ranged from combating financial corruption to maintaining essential health services in combat zones to discussing how to end World War I during the Paris Peace Conference of 1919.

To prepare for the conference, the Walls MUN team read ILMUNC’s topic background guides, drafted position papers, and conducted background research on the topics and their country or role.

MUN conferences consist of different types of committees including the General Assembly (GA), and the crisis committees. In GA committees, students representing UN countries debate and consider international issues. Some GA committees include the Economic and Financial, Special Political and Decolonization, and Disarmament and International Security committees.

Every crisis committee is a historical event, or a fictional one in a few cases, which allows the delegates to discuss how to handle the situation best, creating an alternate reality. Differing from GA, a crisis committee is composed of fewer delegates and instead of students representing a country, they are assigned a role of a character. Crisis committees also consist of crisis updates — surprise announcements which force delegates to use quick thinking skills and create a fast-paced environment. Examples of crisis updates include natural disasters and pandemics.

During ILMUNC, junior Petra Debelack acted as the Prime Minister of Belarus in the crisis committee reproducing the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. “My original plan was to start a war with Russia, but the chair did not let me communicate with Lenin until later,” she said, so she “started a socialist revolution by spreading propaganda and organizing revolu-

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STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

At Young Women’s Project, a “Real Job” With a Real Impact

By Camille Galvani (2026)
Staff Writer

For students seeking self-improvement through community service, the Young Women’s Project (YWP) is a great option. YWP, a nonprofit founded in 1992 by and for women, defines itself as an organization which “builds the leadership and power of young people so that they can transform DC institutions to expand rights and opportunities for DC youth.”

YWP currently employs around 200

youth, including five Walls students who work in either sexual health or mental health programs for pay or community service alongside personal education.

YWP currently has a staff of six permanent adults alongside their youth employees. According to the YWP website, youth in the program have distributed close to 100,000 condoms, conducted nearly 25,000 educational interviews, and made over 900 clinic referrals. They work with adult staff to pass laws, expand employment opportunities, examine the D.C. Health Education Standards, train health teachers, collect various kinds of data from more than 500 youth, present testimony to D.C. Council committees, and provide youth outreach for school STI testing.

The YWP website says its “programs guide youth through a process of personal transformation so they can become leaders in their peer groups, schools, families, and com-

munities who are able to analyze problems, identify solutions, and advocate for change.” YWP focuses on sexual and mental health laws, education, resources, and more.

Stephanie Tran, a Walls junior, works for the mental health program, Youth Justice Advocacy. She says that she enjoys “meeting new people and actually becoming involved in solutions rather than just listening to someone talking about the issue.” She also appreciates that “you feel like you’re part of something, testifying in front of D.C. Council and helping your peers with any troubles they are having.”

Chiara Galloway-Slick, another sophomore working for the sexual health program, said that “YWP has been a really safe environment, I’ve always felt like I can say really vulnerable things and not have to worry about being judged or anything like that...I look forward

Young Women’s Project continued on page 8

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Meet the Walls Security Guards

By Georgia Murphy (2026)
Staff Writer

School Without Walls currently employs five security guards to maintain a safe school environment. You may recognize a few of their faces from the chaos of the metal detectors or passing them in the halls.

DCPS assigns officers to schools in a largely random process. Officer Myron Bell, who has worked at SWW for over ten years, said, “Personally, I’m glad I was put here. It’s a good school.” Officer Bell added that he enjoyed how drama-free Walls is. “I don’t have to take my work home,” he said.

Many Walls security guards have had a wide variety of assignments, including elementary, middle, and high schools. Officer Dorothy Perry has worked at almost every public school in D.C., and she said Walls “is one of the best schools that I’ve worked at.”

Officer Yvette Curtis, who has worked at SWW for over ten years, said she appreciates that Walls students rarely require disciplinary action. She highlighted “the students, how respectful they are, how wonderful they are, they’re always good students. They have ambition and I love it.”

While the security guards said they have generally positive relationships with SWW stu-

dents, they still have occasional grievances. Officer Bell noted he does not appreciate “any kid that’s disrespectful,” though he assured that such behavior is uncommon.

Many of the security guards have lived in D.C. their whole lives, and many even attended DCPS schools. For example, Officer Perry went to Francis L. Cardozo High School.

Officer Bell, a graduate of Charles Herbert Flowers High School in Maryland, noted the contrast between his high school experience to that of Walls. “It was different from here in so many ways,” he said. “For me, having the fields, having the support, the whole city coming to your games and supporting the school... that whole camaraderie was different. Unfortunately, [Walls is] in the city so everybody’s all over the place.”

As a former high school football player, Officer Bell hopes to give students the joy of playing a team sport. He currently coaches the girls’ flag football team. “I’m passionate about coaching, especially football,” he said. “I think the girls have a great time. They went out there and it’s been great ever since.”

“My favorite part of working here is just seeing the students come in and greeting them in the morning,” Officer Curtis said. “They actually make my day.” ●

Model UN Team Goes to Philadelphia

Model UN continued from page 5

tionary movements in Germany, France, and Italy... [building] up the Belarusian army.” Deblack’s ability to adapt earned her an honorable mention.

Junior Hugo Rosen won a verbal commendation for his work on the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. He said that his favorite part of the conference was “getting to meet a room full of new people and figuring out how to work together to address the issue of the committee.”

Sophomores Seojin Kim and Claire O’Keefe also won a verbal commendation for their work on the Committee of United Nations Development Programme.

Erin Pollack, the president of Model UN, has attended ILMUNC for two years. She said, “I really enjoyed seeing the solutions in my committee because some of them were not at all what I would have expected going in committee. There were some really diverse solutions.”

She is proud of Walls’s performance, saying, “we had ten more delegates this year than we did last year. I think everyone did spectacularly and I am very proud of everyone.”

SWW MUN also attended NAIMUN this month, which was hosted by Georgetown University Feb. 16-19. ●

Class of 2022 Alumni Discuss Life After Walls

By Josie McCartney (2024)
Senior Editor

Walls students spend a lot of time thinking about applying to college, but we rarely consider what life after high school really looks like. Four 2022 Walls graduates recently reflected on their time in high school and how it impacted their college experiences.

Many said Walls academics prepared them well for college, making the transition easier. Nicole Lytle, who was recruited as a Division I hurdler at Fordham University, explained that “the AP classes at Walls definitely prepared me for the workload in a good amount of my classes.”

Clara Shapiro Morton, a student at Haverford College, concurred. “Walls specifically sets you up to be a really good writer,” said Shapiro Morton, who was The Rookery’s editor-in-chief last year. “I took AP Seminar and AP Research, and I think those both really helped with learning how to structure papers and research appropriately for papers. But even beyond that, I think the rigor of Walls writing will prepare you for college-level writing.”

Alex Kirk is a graduate of the George Washington University Early College Program (GWCEP) and attends Princeton University. Because of his participation in GWCEP, he experienced high school very differently than most Walls students, taking on four semesters of college classes and the challenges that come with them. “I had a different kind of transition than a lot of people have and I felt much more prepared,” he said, citing strong time management skills.

Fiona Bishop, who studies at the University of Vermont, said seniors at Walls face excess pressure during the college admissions process. “Everyone’s kind of basing their [applications] off of what others are doing and comparing themselves to others,” she said. “The best thing to do is to just think about yourself

and think about where you’re going to be the most happy.”

Bishop noted a contrast between UVM’s and Walls’s academic cultures. “[There is] not the same amount of expectation that was put on us in high school,” she said. “It’s nice to know that once you’ve graduated [high school]

Bishop highlighted differences between her friends in high school and college. “It’s nice to get together with people [from high school] over break, but it’s just not the same,” she explained. “You’ve made new friends [at college], and you’re living with them 24/7, [so] you kind of have to become closer to them much more quickly than you did with friends at home.”

On the other hand, Lytle was surprised by how close her high school friendships remained throughout the first semester, “I thought it would be hard to keep in touch. But you only go so long without talking and when you see your [close friends from high school] over break, it’s like no time has passed.”

Shapiro Morton outlined the challenge of making new friends while also staying in touch with friends from home, saying “it’s hard to maintain friendships — even really close friendships — when you’re putting a lot of energy into making new friends as well.”

Still, Bishop said “it’s still a nice reminder to have people from home that you can talk to and understand who you were before you came to college.”

Shapiro Morton had a few words of advice for her former classmates, emphasizing the importance of spending quality time on extracurriculars and activities. “You’ll have more fun and be less stressed if you focus on a smaller amount of things and do them really well,” she said

Bishop urged students to “take your time. Find a way to relax, because I feel like everybody just needs a reminder to relax once in a while.”

Lytle advised students to “enjoy high school while it lasts. I still remember the first day of freshman year, and I feel like it went by in a flash. Don’t let the stress get to you. Enjoy knowing your friends live just a couple miles away and getting to see them every day. Don’t let anxiety about the future hinder your happiness.” ●



From top left: class of 2022 alumni Fiona Bishop, Alex Kirk, Nicole Lytle (left) and Clara Shapiro Morton / Credits: Fiona Bishop, Alex Kirk, Nicole Lytle, Clara Shapiro Morton

and you’re a freshman [in college], there’s a lot of pressure that’s off your chest, and it makes it easier to do the things you want to do.”

The Walls alumni also explained that some of their friendships from high school changed in the months since graduation.



Coach Scott talking to Maximo Stowers-DeWolfe ('23) / Credits: Miles Felix

COACH SPOTLIGHT

Coach Scott and the Rise of Walls Track

By Charlotte Tama (2024)
Sports Writer

It takes a special kind of dedication, passion, and patience to coach high school sports. Coaching is difficult work, and can occupy upwards of eight hours per week. School Without Walls track and cross country head coach Nick Scott spends these eight-some hours each week at a community track in Columbia Heights, contending with winter weather and rival running groups to support his running penguins and get them time on the track. Driven by a passion for coaching, Mr. Scott brings unique heart, dedication, and energy to the Walls track team.

Mr. Scott's coaching expertise stems from a background rich with athletics. He ran track at a high level for most of his childhood, participating in club circuits through the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), an elite sports organization with a reputation for producing professional athletes. By 11th grade, he had clocked impressive personal records of 51 seconds in the 400-meter and 1:59 minutes in the 800-meter.

Although Mr. Scott left the track for college football, he thanks his daughters for bringing him back to it. He recounts how he first became a coach by aiding his oldest daughter's track coach. "He was overwhelmed ... so I came and helped out for that outdoor season," Mr. Scott said.

From that moment forward, Mr. Scott knew he had found something special in coaching. For him, to have a pursuit outside of his day job that allowed him to further "engage with [his] daughters and watch them grow," as well as the opportunity to "help other kids and feed [his] personal competitive nature."

From the starting point his daughters presented him with, and with help from his accomplished background in running, Mr. Scott "fell in love with coaching young kids; an opening was up at School Without Walls and I just decided to do it."

However, Mr. Scott's start at Walls was no walk in the park. Mr. Scott describes the 2019 cross-country team as small, with performance being "very below average, subpar, not finish-

ing top seven in any event" — a stark contrast with this year's track team, which contains 30-plus athletes and several consistent medalists.

Mr. Scott brought with him a fresh perspective on the Walls sports program. Regarding the challenges that come with Walls' small size and limited resources, Mr. Scott's motto is "no excuses." While he recognizes the "objective" disadvantage, he maintains an uncompromising view on the school's limitations, saying, "it doesn't matter, we have to get [the work] done."

This outlook revitalized the team. In March 2020, when COVID-19 hit and Walls track was shut down for a full year, the team did not stall. Mr. Scott points to how a small group of athletes, including Nicole Lytle and Morris Walker, both Walls class of 2022, Maximo Stowers-DeWolfe ('23) and Nadia Lytle ('25), worked hard throughout quarantine, becoming "pillars" of the team.

Mr. Scott encapsulates the transformation stating, "COVID happened, those athletes ... continued to work. They became great, and then when we came back the whole team kinda was built off of them and we just kept momentum going."

The track team truly has kept the momentum going. Recently, the girls team earned second place in the DCIAA city championships — beating Jackson Reed for the first time in Walls track history — and competed well at the DCSAA state championships, with several podium finishes in individual and relay events. But outside of coaching and family, who is Coach Scott?

Mr. Scott works in the production of live events, managing live events at anywhere from Warner Theater to the Capital One Arena. He typically works in "sprouts," dividing chunks of time, usually several days or weeks at a time, for coaching and chunks for work. As Mr. Scott says, "the time I'm off...I really have the opportunity to just put my time and effort into track."

He confesses that he does prioritize track, "shaping [his] schedule around [it]." To Mr. Scott, coaching at Walls presents a unique opportunity to pursue a passion that most adults don't get. He expressed his gratitude, saying, "[At] 42 years old and [having] something that I care about that's outside of family and money-making, many people don't get that at my age." ●

Spikeball Banned In Building Outside PE Classes After Disruptions, Broken Light Fixtures

By Nola Coyne (2024)
Staff Writer

Just a few weeks ago, it would have been impossible to miss clusters of cheering students playing Spikeball in the halls of school. Seen at field day, pep rallies, and PE classes, most Walls students have enjoyed the game. Now, games in the school building can only be seen during an occasional PE class, supervised by a teacher.

Simply put, Spikeball is a game in which two teams of two compete to keep a ball in the air for as long as possible, similar to volleyball.

Although Spikeball has always been a popular activity at Walls, it has not always been as prominent as it was a couple of months ago. "During the weeks leading up to December break, it was all of the sudden everywhere, all of the time," Assistant Principal Jennifer Tully said in an interview.

Ms. Tully said that the game became a problem to administration when students began skipping class to play it.

At the end of January, administration put an end to Spikeball games in the building. Ms. Tully recognized that students enjoy Spikeball, but announced that the game would no longer be allowed indoors unless it "aligns with the curriculum" of P.E. classes.



Students playing Spikeball in the GW quad
Credits: Adah Svetlik

Ms. Tully cited broken light fixtures as another reason for the ban. Additionally, she said that the administration wanted to protect other students in the building because they were getting hit by the balls when they walked by. The biggest issue, though, was that students in unrelated classes were missing class to join Spikeball games held in PE classes.

Administration has acknowledged student responses and understands their frustration with the new limitations on Spikeball. Ms. Tully stressed that the administration's

move was not an unconditional ban and that "if kids are looking for alternative ways to play or [more] physical activity, we are happy to support it."

Spikeball may still make appearances at school events such as pep rallies and continue to be played for P.E. class or on the terrace.

Many students are upset about the effective ban on Spikeball. Sophomore Rafi Fox said that he and his friends used to spend significant time during lunch playing Spikeball. "They're penalizing us for having fun during lunch," Fox said.

Fox started a student petition to reverse or lessen the restriction. As of this writing, 28 of his peers had joined his petition, and he hopes to continue to spread awareness and get the message to administration.

Sophomore Elijah Lott was similarly frustrated with administration's choices, saying the restrictions were "unjust in that there [was] a lack of communication and transparency between administration and the student body."

Many who play Spikeball feel that it is an imperative part of school culture. "In its absence, [Walls] is not the same," sophomore Kailas Campen said.

Students also emphasized that Spikeball is a good way to connect with others. Sophomore Noah Lee said, "Anybody can play it and anybody can learn it." ●

“Actually Becoming Involved in Solutions” at YWP

Young Women’s Project continued from page 5

to going to work.”

YWP offers not only community service hours, but also pay. A job as a youth health educator (for those under 18) begins for 4-6 hours a week including educating peers on sexual health, distributing condoms, and more, either at school or an office, according to the website. The starting pay is \$7.25 per hour. Educators can be promoted with raises.

“It’s my first real job where I make my own money, and they give you so many resources to learn how to handle that money and save it and use it wisely,” said Tran, who works for pay.

She proceeded to say that the job may get a little stressful but “they provide you with a lot of outside resources for service hours, scholarships, financial aid...I feel like these experiences are going to help me once I get into internships and my career. YWP has really shown there is always more to learn.”

“Walls is a unique situation since we are a very rigorous, small magnet school so our experiences are different from our peers at different schools,” Tran said. “Having not only adult supporters, but also peer mental health advocates who have experienced the same struggles and challenges [students] have is really important to having a student body that feels heard and safe at Walls.”

Galloway-Slick agreed, saying, “I’m friends with everybody.” Moreover, YWP helps cultivate good relationships. “You don’t learn just sexual health, you learn relationship and anger management skills and how to assert your boundaries and how to negotiate and how to be an advocate for yourself.” ●

CROSSWORD

First Prize

By Emmett Brosowsky (2023)
Puzzle Creator

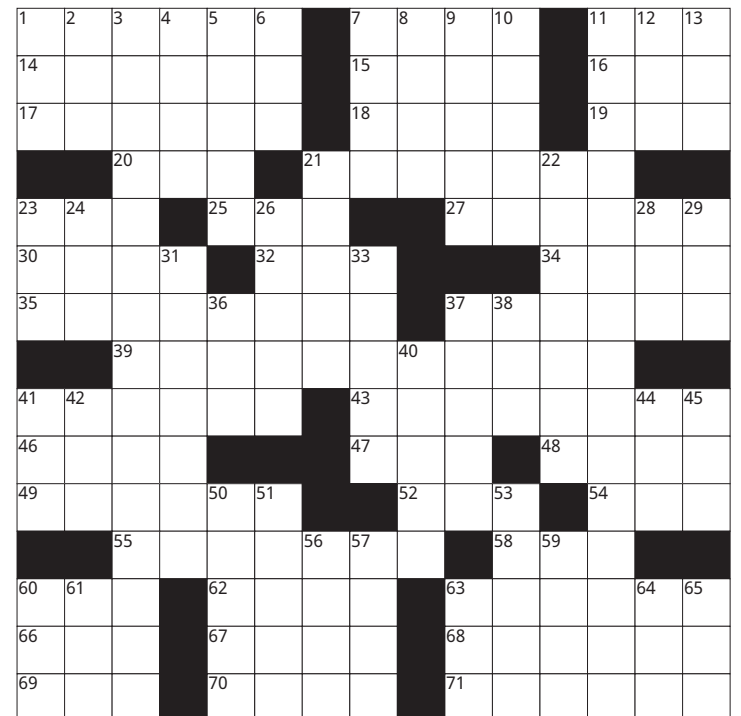
ACROSS

- 1 One of 23 for Beyonce
7 Lib. section with books about people
11 Tear
14 Command to a bird you're letting go, maybe
15 Former name of Rus.
16 It's worth 1 or 11 in Blackjack
17 Run as fast as you can
18 Dry, in Spanish
19 Nickname for Eisenhower
20 Orbiting research facility: Abbr.
21 Penny pinchers, slangily
23 Alphabet starter
25 ___ Wednesday
27 Break in proceedings, as in a trial or a school day
30 Plain and colorless
32 Me, in Paris
34 Where el sol rises
35 Essence of the Hippocratic oath
37 Nobel Peace Prize winner ___ Yousafzai
39 Time of year where one might receive a 1A, 70A, 9D, or 57D
41 He said "To be, or not to be"
43 Genius
46 Actor Baldwin
47 ___ Friday's
48 Match up
49 IHOP condiment offerings
52 Possessed

- 54 Double curve
55 "Oh, you're on!"
58 Poke fun at
60 Rainbow shape
62 Do the backstroke, perhaps
63 Sparkling crowns
66 ___ constrictor
67 Academic acronym
68 Loser of the 2000 Presidential Election
69 Former job for 68A: Abbr.
70 One of 6 for Angela Lansbury
71 What puberty causes, hopefully

DOWN

- 1 "Pygmalion" playwright's initials
2 Counterpart of 69A
3 National Museum of ___ History with a 2016 D.C. opening
4 Some hospital scans, for short
5 High-IQ organization
6 Thus far
7 He defeated 68A
8 "Gotcha"
9 One of 3 for Daniel Day-Lewis
10 Touch lecherously
11 Shows surprise
12 What makes you lose interest, with "the"
13 Urinate
21 Musical triad
22 Spotted wildcats of the South American jungle
23 Don't subtract?
24 Sibling of sis
26 Intelligent
28 Letters on a Cardinal's hat
29 Mediterranean, for one
31 Unfashionable hairdo named for a kitchen item
33 "No more for me, thanks"
36 "Have," to a Scotsman
37 Craze
38 Donkey
40 Four plus four
41 Owns
42 Gymnast Raisman
44 Connections
45 Girls' Episcopal sister school of St. Albans, for short
50 "Hey!"
51 Made sure happened
53 Word after fire or lockdown
56 Good, in Paris
57 One of 11 for Julia Louis-Dreyfus
59 Jafar's parrot in "Aladdin"
60 Crunch targets
61 Fish eggs
63 Playground game
64 Indonesia's ___ Islands
65 Month before Oct.



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