



West High Tailgate Was a Success!

By Rihanna Braxton, 25

Booming music, great games, tasty food, and good people followed by an amazing game at the Western Hills football field. Sounds fun, right? We celebrated The Class of 25s last home game (AKA Senior Night) with a big celebration of a tailgate party.

The culture of the tailgate is to celebrate with family and friends and get excited to support the sports team that will play directly after the tailgate. Typical tailgates are good social events as long as the people have something in common or they share interest in the sport and team that are playing the game after.

Our senior class officers and Senior counsel set up this terrific experience for the students and staff at our high school, providing them with a safe space for conversations, bonding, and good food.

With this being one of the first tailgates at Western Hills, it impacted a lot of our students. Some individuals stated that the following aspects of the tailgate could be improved.

Western Hills senior Tariyah Jones spoke about things she wanted to see while at the tailgate. She states, "I expect to see multiple grills cooking a



series of aromatic foods. Generally, there are games involved as well, given that tailgates are inherently social events. Large picnic tables hounding varieties of snacks."

Containing varieties of food and activities while at the tailgate, it made it successful for the attendees. Making time and better arrangements Tailgating is much more than a pre-game activity; it is a celebration of fandom,

community, and tradition. The power of social connection, the appeal of traditions, and the sense of community all contribute to the unique enjoyment of tailgating.

Western Hills Victoria Oakley explained, "There were a lot of peers that hangout after school ends; they might not have necessarily interacted with one another until now. Also, [they were] taking time to get to know

peers they might not have had conversations with before."

Lots of students for the past years have been on their phones making it harder to communicate with one another. With this the tailgate event, it may be a start to help some students who voiced that it wasn't as much of an engaging event as it should've been, which made it difficult to get to know one another.

Western Hills senior Kentasiah Dixon said, "I enjoyed the tailgate but I noticed seniors should've come together and spent more time with each other. Tons of people were absent and people did not know how to socialize because of phone addiction."

Senior class officers and Senior counsel at Western Hills High School successfully organized a tailgate event where students and staff bonded over food and conversation. The event was well-received but faced challenges like communication issues among students on their phones, prompting suggestions for improvement for future events.

Teens Face Academic and Career Pressures

By Diana Lopez-Sanchez, '25

Have you ever sat down and thought about what to do with your future? Would you end up successful? Will You make it out and make a living for yourself? Have you ever felt that pressure of becoming something greater and getting somewhere better from where you are currently?

With pressure, there comes stress and especially because you feel timed into trying to find what you want to do to become a great and successful person. Some people don't know what career to take until they're in college as well. Some people go into college and they drop out and give up. Then there are some students that already know what to do when they're out of high school. I asked a student if she knew what she wanted to be when she grew up or what she wanted to do once she finished high school.

Azaleya Tensley, an 11th grader that goes to Western Hills University High School said, "Yes, when I grow up I want to be a clinical psychologist. When I was younger I wanted to be a lawyer or do real estate."

Some pressure can also come from parents' expectations. A lot of parents expect their kids to go to college or do something that will make them successful. Some parents also want their kids to go into certain careers as well. Some students don't ever want to disappoint their parents and make it seem like their sacrifices were for

nothing. So it pressures students even more to figure out what to do later after high school. I asked a student if she ever felt pressure to disappoint her parents.

Paola Vasquez Morales, an early graduate in the 11th grade that goes to Western Hills University High School said, "Yes, I do feel pressured or scared to disappoint my parents because I don't want them to take me as a bad daughter."

Not only can pressure come from parents' expectations, Pressure can also be accumulated by peers. Some students already know what to do after high school. Some students are already making progress and getting very close to their dream careers as well. So some students who still don't know what career to get into, get even more pressured into figuring out what to do as soon as possible. Some students could even get unmotivated by the stress that comes with all the pressure of figuring out what career or job to get in. I asked a student if she ever compared herself to her peers who are already making progress in careers they're interested in.

Serenity Reid, a senior student at Western Hills University High School said, "Yes, I sometimes do compare myself to others. I start feeling behind

and sometimes it makes me feel like I'm not 'locked in'."

Some students are also afraid to chase after their dream careers. Some students have a dream career, but put aside their dreams for their reasons. Some are afraid to give up easily and some are afraid to go after their dream career because of the pay. This is another pressure students sometimes face while in the process of deciding what career to take part in. It is up to students to figure out what to do as well. Either to risk it and go after that dream career they have dreamed about, or to start looking for other optional careers that seem interesting but with higher pay. I asked two students if they were afraid to chase after their dream careers.

Tensley says, "Yes, my dream career is to be a lawyer. Though it takes 8 years in school. 8 years in school is a long time and that takes a lot of motivation that I don't think I have. With that comes all the debt after 8 years."

Although, some students take the risk of taking on their dream careers, some decide to not take the risk at all.

Reid says, "Yes, my dream career is to be a photographer. I wanted to start a business but I'm scared it doesn't pay well so I decided to change careers and go into criminal justice."

Important West High Dates!

**End of Quarter 2
December 20, 2024**

**Winter Recess
December 23, 2024 to January 3, 2025**

**Hanukkah
December 25 to January 1**

**Kwanzaa
December 26 to January 1**

**Christmas
December 25**

**Ramadan
February 28 to March 29**

OPINIONS

Graduation Brings Opportunities

By Shawnae Rodgers, '25

Graduation rates are influenced by a variety of factors including parental involvement, school resources, attendance, academic performance, mental health, and peer influence. Most students from higher-income families and those with active parental involvement tend to have higher graduation rates. Schools with better resources and support systems, especially for mental health, also see higher rates. Regular attendance and good academic performance are crucial, while positive peer relationships and a supportive school environment can further enhance the likelihood of students graduating.

How important do you think it is to graduate from high school? And why?

A senior student named Zayvion Evans said, "I think it's important because it opens more doors for opportunities."

I agree because graduating high school opens up so many opportunities for further education and career paths. It's a big accomplish-

ment that you can be proud of. It can lead to more opportunities for college or jobs, and it's a big milestone in life.

Do you feel that teachers and counselors provide adequate support to help students graduate? Why or why not?

A senior student named Jacarie Gordan said, "Yes I do, because they help with making sure you get all your credits and passing all your classes."

I think some teachers and counselors do a great job supporting students to graduate, but there's always room for improvement. It's essential for them to provide the right guidance and resources to help students succeed. Teachers and counselors can really make a difference in helping students stay on track. They can offer academic support, emotional guidance, and even help with college or career planning.

How do you think the school could better support students to ensure higher graduation rates? Gordan said, "I think they could give you better support by lowering the credits you need to graduate."

Schools can better support students by offering personalized learning

plans, mental health resources, tutoring programs, encouraging parental involvement, providing career and college counseling, and engaging students in extracurricular activities. These can help keep students motivated and on track to graduate.

What challenges or obstacles do you think prevent some students from graduating?

A senior student named Chaunell Rodgers said, "I think families and other surroundings could prevent students from graduating."

Some students face challenges like academic difficulties, mental health issues, lack of support and bullying. Addressing these can help more students graduate. Students who struggle with understanding the material may fall behind, which can lead to frustration and a lack of confidence. Conditions like depression and stress can affect concentration, attendance, and overall performance in school. Without guidance from teachers, counselors, or family, students might not have the necessary resources or encouragement to succeed. Negative interactions with peers can create a hostile school

environment, making it difficult for students to focus on academics.

How do you think mental health issues impact graduation rates among students?

Evans said, "Students would come to school feeling down and not wanting to complete their work."

Mental health issues can have a significant impact on graduation rates among students. Students dealing with mental health challenges might find it difficult to keep up with coursework, participate in class, or even attend school regularly. Without proper support and resources, students are at a higher risk of falling behind and ultimately not graduating.

Graduating from high school is super important because it opens up a ton of opportunities for further education and career paths. It sets the foundation for your future. Having a high school diploma can make you more competitive in the job market, even for positions that don't require a college degree. It gives you a sense of accomplishment and boosts your confidence. It also sets a great example for others in your community and family.

Let us hear YOUR
OPINION!

Submit letters to be printed in The Breeze.
Letters can be sent to room 1236, or placed in
Ms. Silbernagel's mailbox
(Letters may be edited for clarity, taste, and length.)

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The Western Breeze is an open forum for student expression produced and for students of Western Hills High School, 2144 Ferguson Road, Cincinnati, OH 45238.

Piercings Popular with Teens

By Dai'Jae Banks, '25

As stated by the Association of Professional Piercers (APP), body piercings have become increasingly popular among teenagers and young adults. As students navigate the halls of Western Hills University Hs, it's clear that self-expression is alive and well - and for many (like myself), piercings are the ultimate form of personal statement. I personally love how piercings allow me to express my individuality, it's a way to show the world who I am without saying a word.

Historically, Piercings have been used in various cultures for different purposes, from rites of passage to symbols of status. Today they are embraced by young people as a means of assertiveness, and projection of unique personality. Each piercing can carry a unique meaning for the individual, whether it's as subtle as an earlobe piercing, or a complex and detailed nose or dermal piercing. The variety of piercings on display reflects the diversity and creativity of a person. Helix piercings, septum piercings, nose rings, and lip piercings are just a few of the many options students are exploring. These choices allow students to communicate aspects of their personality, culture, or personal experiences.

The rise in the popularity of piercings among students can be attributed to several factors. Social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok have played a significant role in popularizing different piercing

styles. Influencers and celebrities often showcase their piercings, inspiring followers to explore similar looks.

However, the rise of piercings in schools has also sparked discussion about dress codes and ensuring self-expression and a distraction-free environment. While some argue that piercings can be distracting or unprofessional, others believe that allowing students to express themselves freely can enhance their confidence and creativity. Western Hills University High School increasingly recognizes the importance of self-expression and adapting its policies to accommodate a more diverse student body.

Health and safety considerations are also important when it comes to piercings. It's crucial for students to choose well-thought-of piercings shops/studios that follow proper sterilization procedures to minimize the risk of infections. Aftercare is equally important to ensure that piercings heal properly. Schools can play a role in educating students about safe piercing practices and the importance of aftercare.

In conclusion, piercings serve as a powerful tool for self-expression among students, symbolizing their journey toward self-discovery and character. As Western Hills University High School navigates this evolving aspect, it is essential to find a balance that respects students' rights to express themselves while maintaining an environment that supports learning and mutual respect.



OPINIONS

IS CHEERLEADING CONSIDERED A SPORT?

By Malaysia Riley, '25

Most people in high school depend on the school and if they are good, and only focus on basketball or football. Most don't consider thinking or supporting other sports. No one thinks about how hard we actually work, for instincts cheering. I know some high school students don't even consider it to be a sport or even hard just because we don't practice pyramids and things like being a flyer.

Every athlete works very hard in the sport of their choice. It's starts with the working out and conditioning to becoming in shape or mentally trained for the sport your choosing to do. After continuing to condition and bettering yourself in your sport, you begin to become better and better. It also takes some discipline as in maybe changing your food, drinking protein drinks, also activities you do and don't do to protect yourself from possibly jeopardizing your future career.

Mikiyah Kinebrew, Varsity Cheerleader for Western Hills has a different mindset than others. I interviewed and asked her some questions about her feelings towards cheerleading.

"I actually don't believe cheerleading is a sport; the only cheering I think is a sport is ALL-Star cheerleading."

Thinking of how cheerleading can impact someone mentally, physically, and emotionally is important to me also.

Kinebrew stated the feeling and emotions cheering gives her. "It's very stressful on the mind when learning a new cheer and having to remember every cheer," says Kinebrew.

She also becomes nervous in front of the huge crowd because it is frightening and everyone is just staring at you without knowing what they are thinking.

Lai'Yawni Zanders, also a Western



Hills Varsity cheerleader, tells about her experience of being a cheerleader. This would be her 3rd year cheering for West High and her 2nd year as a varsity cheerleader. The experience always has up and downs with not always getting along with everyone on the team but, "cheerleading makes me feel good and i love doing it , it gives a

confident boost to anyone"

Fatema Sine, Western Hills Varsity cheerleader, this cheerleading is a sport and is time consuming. She states, "Having to be able to balance school, practice, and working on the side is pretty time consuming for me."

And, it's not only Fatema who feels this way about the time it consumes.

Let's take a look into professional cheerleading. It consists of high activity, position changes (a lot), and acrobatics for minutes at a time. Present day cheering has given itself the right to be called a sport.

Originally cheerleading was associated with men not women, according to Britannica "History of cheerleading, 'cheerleading was connected to the emergence of gridiron football at Ivy League colleges and universities in the United States in the mid-1800's, and the growth and formalization of cheerleading paralleled that of football. Over the latter half of the 19th century, as attendance at college games grew, large stadiums were constructed, and spectators were distanced from the playing field. Any and every cheerleader's whole objective is to entertain and be preppy to the crowd and the time they are cheering for."

AI: RAPIDLY BECOMING A FORCE TO THE RECKONED WITH

By Jules Matheny, '25

According to the Campus Technology website, 86% of students already use AI in their studies. AI is rapidly becoming a force to be reckoned with, especially in the education industry, due to how many students utilize it to generate prompts for their essays.

The use of AI has gone up every day for both right and wrong reasons, such as completing a child's work in a matter of seconds without the child themselves learning anything. It may seem like an amazing companion that'll do all the work for you, but the output of it is al-

ways typically soulless and noticeably AI, especially to English teachers.

Not only is AI a worry to education systems, but to us as well.

According to Mx. Kline, "Our concerns should be less about the evolution of AI, and more about how we view it. We should worry about how we use it in place of ourselves."

Machines have quickly taken over factory jobs, ones that are easy yet can also be dangerous. For example, sealing cans of food and assembly lines. Machines can be more precise and manufacturing may

cost less.

"AI could take over easier jobs which could make things easier for us to focus on harder tasks," says Kline.

We should focus more on the harder tasks at hand as AI takes over the easy work for us. We can utilize not needing to do the less significant tasks to better ourselves when it comes to doing things that machines and AI can't quite do as well as humans yet.

Animal Testing Is Cruel

By Jennifer Reynoso Reynoso, '25

1.27 million animals and more every day are used to test products that we use. According to PETA, animals are also used for science experiments

According to the National Library of Medicine, "Animals have been used repeatedly throughout the history of biomedical research. Early Greek physician-scientists, such as Aristotle, (384 – 322 BC)." During this time animals were exposed to chemicals and other harmful substances and harmful objects.

Innocent animals' lives are taken away and forced. Animals shouldn't suffer like this, isn't this cruel?

Mrs. Natalie Seybold, a teacher at Western Hills High School says, " Yes I believe that animal testing is cruel when used to test chemicals."

Animals can't talk, and all we hear is them crying.

How can people be cruel and do this to poor animals? Mrs. Angie Moore, a teacher at Western Hills High School says, " Yes because animals don't have a voice to say your hurting me "

Most cosmetics and products we use today are part of animal testing. These items include things like sunscreens, anti-dandruff, shampoos, fluoride-containing toothpastes, and anti-acne creams.

According to Cruelty Kitty-Free-Kitty some companies that use animal testing for their products are Aquaphor, Aveeno, Balenciaga, Biore, Burberry, Calvin Klein, Carolina Herra, CerVe, Cetaphil, Chanel, Chapstick, Christina Aguilar, Dior, and Clorox .

Many of these products we use today and still do . But thanks to animal testing that risks their lives being forced into doing this . To have these 100% working products. Working for us without any damages to our-

selves. Scientists should use more natural resources instead of animals. According to Grants and Finding .com ,Scientists should use testing cells tissues tubes, stem cells and also non-invasive diagnostic imaging.

What do you think scientists should use other than Animals?

Mrs Espinal, teacher at Western Hills High school says " I'm not sure maybe stem cells or some other science technology "

We need to stop Animal testing and see animals as humans as well. How would you feel not being able to talk and being forced to do something and feel the pain but scientists don't care about you just care about if you're useful or not .

FEATURES

West High Observations

E-Sports: A Healthy Form of Entertainment

By Sommora Marshall, '25

Did you know Western Hills University High schools e-sports team came first in their region for season one this year. E sports is a multiplayer game played competitively by teams.

Western hills E-sports team is fairly new; we've only had a team for about 2 years.

E-sports has many benefits! Just in any other sports e-sports take teamwork and communication.

This is great for people to socialize and is great for personal development in high school.

Western Hills Prob and Stat teacher, Mr.Caproni, Coach of the E-sports team, describes E-sports as "fun, motivating, and joyful."

There is plenty of room for diversity in E-sports; This gives space for some students to feel like they belong because it's not like a traditional sport, and it may be something they are accustomed to.

E-sports is great for learning

how to multitask, and hand eye coordination; you have to think fast and communicate with your team; the E-sports team practices just like any other sport. Kaidyn Knox Robinson says "you always have to practice to improve your skill."

This often helps students in their school life. While playing video games you get a better understanding of computers; this can lead you to technology careers and scholarships.

Gaming is a great stress reliever for many students. E- sports is a healthy way of providing entertainment, but also building a community where kids feel themselves and less isolated. Being a part of a team can help you feel a better sense of achievement.

Overall E-sports is great entertainment and fun! If you enjoy playing games and being on a team, you should check it out before it's too late!

Restroom Issue Sparks Debate

By Dominik Creech, '25

Western Hills University High School has many great things about it. We have an amazing sports department, education system, and great teachers that are passionate about teaching. But even though we have these facts worth boasting about, there are still a few negative things about our high school.

In this issue of West High Observations, I will be writing about one of the negatives that effects all of the students using facts and opinions... the restrooms. As most of you likely know, the restrooms are not very clean most of the time.

There are a lot of mixed opinions on the cleanliness of our restrooms. Some students say that the restrooms are dirty because the custodians don't do a good job, while in complete contradiction to this, others say that the students are the reason.

11th grade student Keonte Fuller has been attending West High since his 7th grade year. Fuller believes that the custodians do not do a good job with cleaning the restrooms.

"I can be the first person to go

to the restroom in the morning, and there's a mess everywhere," Fuller claims. "The restrooms are



terrible, and I put the blame on both students and custodians. The restrooms have always seemed to be an issue to me."

A Senior that just transferred to West High in September, Shawnae Rodgers claims that even the women's restroom will

be dirty at times too.

"When I enter the bathrooms there is tissue everywhere and the

stalls [are a mess]," she claims. "I feel like the restrooms could be cleaned way better, and that the blame needs to be put on students and custodians."

And finally, another senior many of you know, Hakiem Penn, states that the bathrooms are dirty

and foul smelling at times. Penn tells me that he has been at West High since the 7th grade, and that the restrooms have not always been an issue.

"Personally, I would put the blame on the kids with no home training," says Penn.

Mr. Wright, a security guard who has been here at West High for 8 years claims that the restrooms have always been an issue for him too.

"We receive a lot of complaints from the students regarding the restrooms," Wright tells me. He claims that the restrooms could be blamed on students and teachers! "To resolve this, we need to meet with students and custodians on the importance of keeping the restrooms clean."

In conclusion, all four of the people that I have interviewed says that the restrooms are an issue. Fuller claims that to resolve this issue, the custodians actually need to do their job, while Rodgers suggested that the custodians need to be trained to properly clean the restrooms, Wright claiming a meeting will help. Will this Observation be resolved? Only the future holds the answer.

Is News Production Good for the Future?

By Dyon'K Justice, '25

How do you like your classes far on your schedule? What is your favorite class so far? Do the teachers teach? At Western Hills University High School, there is a class that puts out the monthly newspaper called News Production which is taught by Ms.Shannon Silbernagel who also teaches English for grades 11-12.

The Western Breeze is an open forum for student expression produced and for students of Western Hills High School. As a student in this class, we brainstorm about what story ideas we want to put in the newspaper. Once we

find out the story topic we want to write about, we think of questions that refer to the topic. After we get the question printed on paper, we get people around the school or community to be interviewed. Once we get all our information, we sum it all up into one new story.

"There are so many interesting topics in West High's newspaper. The stories also help keep us informed," said senior Youssouf Diallo.

Diallo was in the class for two years during her freshman and sophomore year. She contributed many engaging stories. One of her stories was about her Muslim faith and about her life being Muslim. She has learned a great quantity of information in this class that she could use in the future.

"I'll be able to use the writing techniques I learned when writing professional emails," said Diallo. Being or having this class in your high school years will benefit you to become a better writer. Once it's time to move on to college life or anything else after high school, there will be something that has to do with typing an essay.

"This class will be helpful for my future because it teaches me the basic foundations of writing, it helps improve my writing, and you need writing skills for almost every career choice you choose," said Diallo. "I feel as though the assignments are very doable. It's not hard or knowledge based like other academic classes," said Diallo.

FEATURES

Pursuing the Culinary Dream

By Jules Matheny, '25

Taking a culinary course at least once could make you feel better about your dishes and presentation. It may also help you learn valuable life skills, such as costing, and common food combinations, and it may even get you to broaden your tastes when it comes to food you were too scared to try.

Culinary courses are not only enjoyable to students, but for teachers as well.

According to my teacher, Trew Quackenbush (Otherwise known as Chef Q), "Cooking has always been my favorite thing to do. It brings me joy, and being able to spread that joy to new cooks is awesome. Mostly it's the relationships I get to build."

If the culinary industry is some-

thing you may be interested in, then taking the four classes Dater High School offers may prove to be beneficial to you! You'll learn about hospitality all around the



world with our hospitality class, how to put together dishes in fundamentals of food production, and how to make pastries and bread in the senior class: baking and pastry arts.

Even if this industry isn't quite what you're looking for, taking that class may be a way to learn healthier ways to eat and serve

food.

Western Hills math teacher, Jill Hallahan, said, "It's beneficial for those interested in a culinary career as well as beneficial for all students - learn the foundations of cooking well and healthily!"

Alongside healthy choices and other valuable life skills, you'll get many opportunities to learn about cultures! In a majority of cultures

around the world, food is a massive part of them.

In Dater's culinary courses, we'll get to make, eat, and learn about the different cultural dishes. Many students enjoy creating dishes apart of these cultures, one of them, Melat Tewolde, said,

"It's fun learning different cultural backgrounds through food."

Despite the many attributes of the many culinary classes in Dater, it isn't as advertised as much as you might think.

According to Tewolde, "This class is such a wonderful time to learn at our age to cook for ourselves."

Personally, my experiences in these classes have been nothing short of wonderful. I'm proud to present my creations, as well as stand with my class when catering. If you are interested in this class contact your counselor and if you have any questions, I'll be happy to answer any you may have!



From High School to Adulthood

Marques Partin, '26

The transition from high school to adulthood is a defining moment in a young person's life. With it comes a mix of excitement, apprehension, and critical decisions that can shape their futures. While some students are confident about their next steps, others remain uncertain, navigating concerns about career readiness, financial stability, and societal expectations. For students like Aniya Wolfenberg, Nicolas Smith, and Akeelah Lordeus, life after high school presents unique opportunities and challenges, along with a shared desire for a fulfilling and successful future.

Aniya Wolfenberg, a sophomore at Achieve Point, has the goals to become an English teacher. For her, college is the clear path forward.

"I think a college degree is fundamental for what I want to do career-wise," she explains. Inspired by her own English teachers, Wolfenberg decided early on that she wanted to follow in their footsteps. However, she feels that high school has done little to prepare her for the demands of adulthood.

"I feel like high school is a giant waste of time," she states, citing a lack of emphasis on practical life skills, such as learning to communicate effectively with others. Despite this frustration, she re-

mains committed to her dream and is determined to achieve financial stability and career success.

Nicolas Smith, a junior at Western Hills High School, has chosen a different path. Instead of attending a traditional four-year college, he plans to enroll in a trade school, exploring careers in HVAC, welding, or becoming an electrician. Smith's decision was fueled by online research and a desire to work in a hands-on, practical field.

"I decided on this path when I heard about it and it interested me," he says. Unlike many students who feel pressured to attend college, Smith is confident in his choice, viewing it as a natural part of growing up and finding his own way. However, he is critical of high school for its lack of specialized courses that align with students' diverse career goals.

"Most of these schools aren't equipped with classes that others want to take," he explains. As he looks ahead, Smith admits to worrying about losing friendships and finding excitement in his daily life, fearing that post-high school life might become monotonous.

Akeelah Lordeus, a sophomore at Lely High School, represents the uncertainty many students feel as graduation approaches.

"I'm not actually sure what I want to do," she admits. "I just

know that I want to have a good job that I enjoy and that pays well." While Lordeus values the time management skills she gained in high school, she believes more focus should be placed on practical subjects like taxes, budgeting, and life responsibilities.

"I wish we had classes on taxes, budgeting, and basic life skills instead of just focusing on academics," she says. Lordeus also feels societal pressure to pursue a college degree, even though she is unsure whether it is the best option for her. "I think college is important for certain careers, but it's not the only way to succeed. Trade and entrepreneurship are good options too," she explains, emphasizing the need for alternative paths to success.

Despite their varied plans, Wolfenberg, Smith, and Lordeus all share common concerns about life after high school. Financial independence is a recurring worry, as is the adequacy of their high school education in preparing them for the real world. Each of them agrees that high schools should offer more practical courses to help students develop the skills needed to navigate adulthood, such as financial literacy, interpersonal communication, and career exploration.

Wolfenberg, for instance, wishes for more emphasis on people

skills, which she views as essential for success in any field. Smith echoes this sentiment, believing students would benefit from a broader range of courses that cater to diverse interests and career paths. Meanwhile, Lordeus highlights the importance of life skills that go beyond academics, suggesting that schools should balance their focus between college preparation and real-world readiness.

The transition from high school to adulthood is a complex and often daunting process. For students like Wolfenberg, Smith, and Lordeus, it is a time of both hope and uncertainty. While their paths differ, their stories reflect a shared determination to overcome obstacles and achieve their goals. These students serve as a reminder of the importance of offering diverse educational opportunities and resources to help young people navigate the challenges of this pivotal stage in their lives.

As society continues to evolve, so too must the education system. By equipping students with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in a rapidly changing world, schools can empower them to face the future with confidence and resilience. Whether pursuing higher education, entering the workforce, or exploring alternative career paths, students deserve the tools to shape their own destinies and find success on their terms.

MAKING MEMORIES WITH HOLIDAY TRADITIONS

By Lydia Barnes, '27

Family traditions are activities, routines, and behaviors that are repeated and passed down from generation to generation within a family. Some people have different types of family traditions, like some families do game nights, movie nights or decorate the family Christmas tree. Family traditions are important to some families as it's something that the family has done for years.

Some people have cultural traditions, religious traditions. Cultural traditions are practices related to religion, holidays, food, dance, clothing, language, music, and crafts. Religious holidays are beliefs, practices and institutions used to describe a type of religion.

Glen Beach, a teacher at Western Hills High School says, "family traditions are important to me and my family because it keeps everyone in contact and everyone gets to see each other".

Beach also says that his most important family tradition that his family has is making a meal together. Although family traditions seem fun, not everyone likes family traditions because they have bad family traditions. Some people may disagree with others about some family traditions because each family is different.

Arianna Elena Reyna, a freshman at Western Hills High School said, "I like family traditions because we live by their cultural traditions and keep our reputation going".

Some families celebrate traditions within their culture. Many families have different cultural traditions.

Anyelin Garcia Mejia, a freshman at Western Hills High School, says that "Me and my family celebrate holidays because it's fun and we get to spend time with family."

Some people celebrate holidays like Christmas, Hanukkah, and Eid al-Fitr. Hanukkah is celebrated for dedication and Eid al-fitr is celebrated to commemorate the end of the holy month of Ramadan. Christmas is celebrated to remember the birth of Jesus Christ.

Karen Adams a teacher at Western Hill High School says "Family traditions ground us and connect us to other members of our family. We feel at ease and reassured in our ties to the past present and expectations for our future generations."

Overall you can tell that these traditions are important to some families. According to Jeremiah Say, "Holidays are about creating cherished memories with loved ones and finding magic in the simplest moments." Let's celebrate together!

Achieving Proper Academic Discipline

By Diana Lopez Sanchez, '25

So where does discipline begin? You're sleeping in bed all warmed up in your blanket. Your alarm goes off, and you realize it's another school day. You don't feel like getting out of bed, and leaving the warmth of your blanket. Motivation is hard to find in the morning to some people. Some people find it easy to wake up and start their day.

Discipline starts when you wake up. Even if you don't feel like waking up and getting ready to go to school. You push yourself to get up. Even when the motivation leaves you, you still discipline yourself to get the day over with excellence. I asked a student if they took a while to get up from bed and get ready to go to school.

Azaleya Tensley, an 11th grader that goes to Western Hills University High School said, "Yes, it takes me a while to get out of bed and get ready for school. I feel like it is hard to find the motivation to get up for school."

Most school discipline is more towards the school work the students receive. When students receive assignments some take more than a day to finish that assignment. Some find the motivation and have the discipline to finish their assignments the day it is assigned. When students don't have discipline they end up more stressed. Students get piled up with homework and start stressing at the end. If students had the discipline to finish their assignments right away most of their stress toward the end of the quarter would decrease immensely. I asked a student if he finished his homework right away or didn't finish it at all.

Evyann French, a senior who plays for the men's basketball team at Western Hills High School says, "I try to do my assignments right away, but if I don't get to finish it right away I end up finishing it later in the day."

I also asked what he did when he would get piled up with assignments, and if he got stressed about the piles of homework.

French says, "I just find a day when I have a lot of time, and then get to do all my assignments that day. So I usually don't get stressed about the assignments I get."

Although some people don't find it difficult to find this mindset of finishing their assignment, some students find it very hard. Discipline is sometimes hard to achieve. When you have to push yourself to do things you don't have any motivation to do it can be difficult. I asked a student if it was hard to have the mindset of getting her assignments done right away.

Tensley says, "Very very difficult! Motivation comes with a positive mindset and it is kind of hard to have a positive mindset doing something you don't feel like doing."

Some students say that discipline can be influenced by friends and some say that some friends can interfere with your school discipline. Kids usually do what their friends would do. Most follow the path their friends follow. You can also build more discipline by not following the bad influences of certain friends. I asked a student if she thought that certain friends could interfere with their school discipline.

Tariyah Jones, a 12th grader that goes to Western Hills University High School said, "Yes, if you hang around with the wrong people; people that don't do their work. You would want to be doing what they're doing and eventually forget about your assignments"

Although learning to have school discipline can be helpful in school it can also be helpful later on in life. When you finish high school you would require a lot of discipline. Discipline is everywhere in life. You have to have discipline when having a job. Sometimes people get a job that they don't like, but pay them well. People have to find the discipline of going to that job everyday not because they want to but because they have to. I asked a student if being academically disciplined would help them later in their life.

Jones said, "I think being disciplined can be helpful later in life. For example, if you get to go to college or want to go to college. You would require a lot of discipline, so when you get an assignment you would get it done and not stress as much."

Exploring Thoughts and Feelings with Poetry

Jalymar Ruiz Rosa, '28

What is poetry, and why is it important?

Poetry is a way to communicate your thoughts and feelings, way to give them meaning, way to provide understanding and truth.

Poetry is a way to empathize with one another, and to understand that we are not the only ones there are others who feel and think the same way we do. Poetry reveals that you're not trapped underneath it all alone, are there is a way to navigate all the storms.

A teacher at Western Hills, Mr. Kline "says, "Poetry, like all forms of artistic expression, gives voice to people's emotions. It can be a doorway to understanding the feelings that may otherwise be difficult to express."

"It's a way to make sense of everything that's going on. A way to gain healing from those moments. To put the feelings into words. Poetry is a form of art and expression," Kline states.

They also believe that poetry is so much deeper than just something to pass time.

"Poetry can certainly entertain, but also connect people through emotion. The right poem can help someone feel seen and let them know others have similar feelings. That's the true power of poetry: Connection," Kline stated.

Ms. Karen Adams French teacher at Western Hills says poetry is important because "Poetry can strike an emotional chord deep in our soul. The simplicity of words can resonate and evoke complex reactions within the reader."

Poetry is a common ground for many people not just adults and teachers but people of all ages and backgrounds especially teenagers example who write or make songs.

Youssef Diallo a senior from West High says "Poetry means a way of expressing myself without fear of being (and having fun while doing it)."

Mustang Basketball Shoots to Win

By Danyon’K Justice, ’25

The 2023-24 Western Hills High School basketball team had one of the best seasons in Head Coach Bryce Stokes’ coaching career. The team went 17-7 last year, and with Stokes coaching, he has had 17 games won and the last 3 years. This group of boys are better than last year's squad.

“A good group with great leadership, Junior Allandkim, a senior heading into his second varsity season, this group will take us where we need to be,” said Coach Stokes on his impression of the 2024-25 senior class.

“I can only hope for a state run,” on how far Stokes thinks the team will get this season. With having one of the best basketball teams in the city, Stokes has students wanting to transfer to play under him; not even just basketball players but the cheer-leading program has girls who wanted or have transferred to cheer for his wife, Shauntee Stokes.

Coach Stokes produces a lot of basketball players with talent. Mostly every senior of their class that played for him has got into college for their hidden talents on the court.

“I don’t have a top 3 player, I just have a balanced team that can play the ball really well,” says Stokes about being asked who his top three players are. This roster is looking really good this season. The team has returning players like Junior Allandkim, a physical player that can put up points. Seydou Keita, a 6 ’6 guard/wing that can drive to the rim really well, and Markece Mitchell, a 6 ’3 guard that can shoot around the court. These players and the rest of the players will have a huge impact on this season and how far they will get. The coaching performance is the “best in the city” Coach Stokes says.

“The coaching is always intense because a lot from the seniors and the team. We have fun but most of the time it's hard work, blood sweat, and tears. Games are very intense, it's a battle for a winning spot on their record,” said Sada Berry, a junior basketball player on the team.

DO PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES DESERVE MILLIONS?

By Sommora Marshall, ’25

Imagine a society where social servants, and sports players get paid the same salary; However, in today's society that is far from true. The average contract for an NFL player is 3.26 million dollars, while the average teacher makes 57k.

Supply and demand plays a big role in the pay difference. Becoming a sports player isnt easy, and actually being great at the sport you play is even harder. It can take years to have high level skills, so teams are prepared to pay for rare players.

On the other hand, social servants like police officers, teachers, and firefighters. Are popular in demand, but are also accessible to more people. Making the supply higher. Which makes their contracts lower. Western Hills High school student Danyon’K Justice says, “I believe that the pay rate for athletics is a little too high for their job.”

Major league sports teams make a lot of money from sponsors and

fans from all over. According to the website Sportico, the business of sports during the 23-24 NBA season they made 1.5 billion just off sponsors. That does not include the revenue made from the tickets, shows, entertainment, etc..

However social servants do not receive the same amount of attention; society prioritizes sport for entertainment, so social servants rarely receive any recognition. They are often paid by the government, so the budget is lower.

Citing ESPN, the average NFL player's career is about 3.3 years. This is due to the physical injuries players may sustain.

In contrast the average career for a teacher is about 30 year

Overall, the pay difference between professions rely on various reasons, like society values, the demand in each profession and more.

The History of Christmas

By Mylee Meyer, ’26

Christmas is a holiday filled with traditions like making cookies, decorating the tree, opening presents, etc.... However, many people are unaware of the origin of this holiday and these traditions.

Domanik Smith, a junior at Western Hills University High School says, “Every year my family open gifts, have dinner, and binge-watch Christmas movies every Christmas.”

Christmas trees, wreaths, and candy canes originated in Germany and not the U.S.. Evergreen trees have been used to mark the winter solstice and signified the beginning of spring and new life. The first Christmas trees as we know them started in Germany, becoming popular due to a sketch of Queen Victoria and her husband, Prince Consort Albert standing in front of a Christmas tree with their children.

Wreaths are even a religious symbol, according to Good Housekeeping, “The circular shape and evergreen material of the wreath represent eternal life. The circle, which has no beginning or end, "symbolizes the eternity of God, the immortality of the soul and the everlasting life we find in Christ.”” The tradition of wreaths started in Germany by using the cut-off parts of the Christmas tree and weaving them making it more uniform instead of throwing the parts out.

According to Good Housekeeping, “The National Confectioners Association says a choirmaster originally gave the red-and-white-striped candies to young children to keep them quiet during marathon church services back in 1670. It wasn't until a German-Swedish immigrant decorated his tree with candy canes in 1847 that they became popular as a Christmas candy.”

Zayne Thomas a junior at Western Hills University High School says, “When I was a kid I believed in Santa Claus until other kids around me stopped, I then learned that he was not real. I think it's good for kids to believe in Santa Claus, they need to have something to believe in, because they need that Christmas spirit.”

The modern Santa Claus used to be very different. Back in the 19th century there was a man called Father Christmas yet instead of being the jolly man that gives children gifts, he was more focused towards entertainment for adults. According to Legacybox, “The character of Santa Claus originated from a 3rd-century monk called Saint Nicholas. Saint Nicholas lived in modern-day Turkey and became well-known for his kindness and generosity – it is believed that he gave away all his inheritance to the poor and needy, and devoted his time to serving those less fortunate. His popularity continued to spread over many years, with stories of his good deeds traveling all over the world.”

In fact Coca-Cola played a big role in the shaping

of the character we know today as Santa Claus. There have been many different versions of Santa Claus; a tall skinny man, an elf, and even a scary Santa Claus. In 1931 Coca-Cola released advertisements including the jolly gift-giving character we know today.

Sierra Thomas, a senior at Western Hills University High School says, “I don't think the naughty or nice list is cruel or unnecessary. A child needs to be disciplined and know what's right or wrong. They need to have some type of incentive to behave well or a punishment for when they don't, like receiving coal.”

The first mention of the naughty and nice list is in the song “Santa’s coming to town” by J. Fred Coots and Haven Gillespie in 1934. The idea of kids being naughty or nice came from 16th century Holland. Before stockings, parents placed their children's shoes near the fireplace. Good children would find candy or cookies while naughty children would find coal.

Not everybody celebrates Christmas and not everybody who does knows the origin of specific parts of the holiday. Whether you celebrate it or not, it's interesting to see the origin of things and how they came to be. Simple things overtime became this popular, joyous, and happy holiday people celebrate today.

FEATURES

Standardized Testing Brings Students' Stress

By Marques Partin, '26

Standardized testing has become a standard in modern education, shaping how students, teachers, and schools are evaluated. With each passing year, the pressure surrounding these assessments grows, as scores influence everything from school funding to student placements and teacher evaluations. For students, the stakes feel higher than ever, intensifying the already substantial weight of academic expectations.

Standardized testing pressure is the stress and anxiety students feel surrounding these critical exams. This pressure can stem from numerous sources, including family expectations, school mandates, and the students' own performance goals. The impact of this testing stress can be profound, leading to issues such as burnout, sleep deprivation, and mental health challenges, including anxiety and depression. In extreme cases, the burden of testing pressure can cause students to lose motivation or develop a fear of failure, ultimately affecting both their academic outcomes and overall well-being.

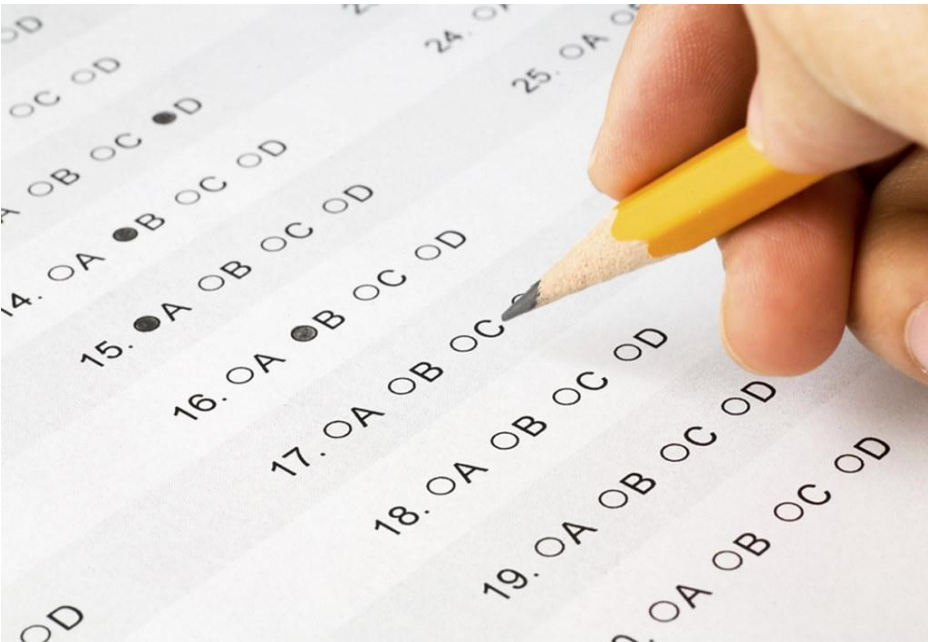
Nicolas Smith, a student at Western Hills High School, believes that standardized tests do not measure a student's knowledge and skills very well.

"I don't feel well about it at all, [because] of how we are supposed to just go into it and not really have a refresher," he explains. Smith feels that there is too much emphasis on test scores when it comes to colleges and scholarships. He says, "Yes, cause they all base it on knowledge of anything, instead that person who wants to one thing but can't because they don't have knowledge of a certain subject like someone trying to become a doctor but not knowing something that's holding them back yet they don't need that thing to be a doctor."

Smith is explaining how schools base their tests on subjects that don't relate to the kinds of things that a student would

want to be.

"Yes, because how easily it could put someone down by just hearing it while someone who doesn't really go to school comes before them. This provokes the feeling that the student



wouldn't want to keep going after that," Smith states.

Joseph Lehnert, a history teacher at Western Hills High School, feels the same way about standardized tests, not measuring a student's knowledge and skills all too well. He states that, "While some degree of testing is important, standardized tests may not fully, or accurately, measure student learning and knowledge. More significantly, students are subjected to too many tests. This leads to 'testing fatigue,' which can impact students' performance on tests."

As well as Smith, Lehnert feels that there is too much emphasis on testing.

"Yes, I believe testing scores are overemphasized in regards to college admissions and scholarships. Test scores tell a smart part of a student's story. Test scores can be used as a factor in the decision-making process, but a more realistic review of accom-

plishments, achievements, and aptitude should be utilized," he states.

Lenhert stays on his idea that there are too many tests given out. He explains that, "I would change the

amount of tests given to students. Building in more time for learning and practice (i.e. gaining experiential knowledge) would serve to improve, in my opinion, the effectiveness of the tests we do give.

On the contrary, Skyler Welbers, a sophomore at Western Hills High School, believes that standardized tests measure knowledge and skills "pretty well" and thinks that test scores do not have too much emphasis on colleges and scholarships.

"No, because I think that test scores are the best way to show what you know," he says. Welbers believe that timed tests are the best method for learning.

"Timed tests with very hard problems about that topic," he explains. Welbers explains in what way he would change testing. He says that, "I

would make the test have less questions and instead make the questions harder."

He explains the way that he would prepare for these tests as well, "By learning the topic then practicing that topic." Welbers believes that testing can impact students' motivation.

"Yes, because a lot of students don't like tests because it's hard to cheat on them."

In conclusion, the debate over the efficiency and impact of standardized testing reflects varied perspectives among students and teachers. While some, like Nicolas Smith and Joseph Lehnert, feel that standardized tests do not fully measure a student's capabilities and place undue stress on learners, others, such as Skyler Welbers, view these assessments as an accurate gauge of knowledge. Smith and Lehnert are particularly concerned that tests may not align with students' long-term career goals, potentially causing disinterest and stress that can hamper motivation. The issue of "testing fatigue" and the overemphasis on scores for college and scholarship opportunities are seen as detrimental, pushing students to perform in areas that might not reflect their true abilities or aspirations.

Meanwhile, supporters like Welbers argue that standardized tests serve as an effective means to evaluate students fairly, asserting that they accurately reflect what students know and can do. However, even Welbers suggests adjustments to the testing format to enhance its effectiveness, proposing a focus on fewer, but more challenging, questions. This divergence of opinion highlights the complexity of standardized testing in modern education. As schools continue to rely on these assessments, finding a balance that evaluates students' skills without compromising their well-being remains crucial for educational reform.

Horror Movies: A Genre That Elicits Fear

By Mylee Myers, '26

Horror is a film genre that seeks to elicit fear or disgust in the audience for entertainment. Horror has been around since the 18th century during this time Georges Méliès created the first horror film called, "The House of the Devil" in 1896.

While Edgar Allan Poe wasn't the first writer of horror stories and Horace Walpole's "The Castle of Otranto" was and created the horror genre he still plays a big role in how horror films are written today. Horror stories came before horror films and can have supernatural elements like vampires, ghosts, and witches or address more realistic fears. Edgar Allan Poe's writing style and use of psychological horror through first-person narration have inspired countless writers. He has also influenced and inspired many films like "The Lighthouse Keeper", "The Tell-Tale Heart", "The Raven", "The Crow", and "The Fall of the House of Usher."

Horror films and stories were created to strike a sense of fear, adrenaline, and an unsettling feeling for entertainment, so it's not uncommon for people to dislike horror films.



Kiara Brooks, a junior at Western Hills University High School, states, "I would rate horror films a 1/10 because I don't really like them, as I'm not really a big fan of surprises or scares."

There are multiple different kinds of horror films to entertain a large variety of people, such as psychological, slasher, and supernatural. According to the Beginners Guide to Psychological Horror, "In psychological horror, suspicion, distrust, self-doubt, and paranoia about oneself, others, or the world are present." Physiological horror is meant to

dig into your emotional and mental fear to cause a feeling of suspension or fear.

Slasher films commonly involve a series of killings rather than necessarily focusing on putting dread into the audience. A slasher film is a subgenre of horror films thus it can be a part of other sub-genres like supernatural and physiological films.

Supernatural horror films combine the aspects of supernatural films and horror films, commonly including aspects of the afterlife, the devil, and demonic possessions. For example *The Conjuring*, *The Exorcist*, *Carrie*, *The Shining*, and *The Curse of Frankenstein*.

According to Mishila Collins, a Senior at Western Hills University High School, "My favorite genre of horror films would have to be psychological because I love watching horror films and being at the edge of my seat scared."

Even with the wide variety of sub-genres in horror films some people still tend to dislike a wide variety of them for a variety of reasons. Horror films aren't everyone's favorite thing, however it's interesting to see the assortment of different horror films and their sub-genres, along with how they originated.