



Students Put Teachers to the Test

By Jamarion Mincy, ‘25

Would allowing students to grade their teachers improve education? Are students too biased to fairly evaluate their teachers? Allowing students to grade their teachers could potentially improve education, but it also raises concerns about fairness and effectiveness, with potential benefits being improved teaching quality, increased accountability, and student voice. There are also potential drawbacks like bias in evaluation, lack of expertise, and potential for misuse. While student feedback can be valuable, it may be most effective when combined with other evaluation methods, such as peer reviews and administrator observations. Giving students the ability to grade their teachers raises important questions about accountability and educational quality, bridging the gap between student experiences and institutional improvement. According to Leah Wade a science teacher at Western Hills, “ To

give a traditional grade A-F, No. Teachers are professionals and students are not. It would be fair and valuable for students to offer feedback throughout the years.” Allowing students to grade their teachers, however, may have negative consequences, such as skewed assessments that focus more on personal preferences than on the efficacy of instruction. According to Kelvin Cruz-Anton a Senior at Western Hills, “ Some drawbacks could be negative or bias from students that may simply dislike the teacher for their own personal reason. Another issue could be students not taking the survey or other criteria at all or not answering truthfully. This can lead to misinterpretation between the teacher and students.” If student evaluations provide constructive feedback and are used effectively, they have the potential to enhance teaching quality by helping educators identify strengths and areas for improvement. In discussing the topic Faustina

Ansah, a Senior at Western Hills, said, “ Education is always evolving and there are always new technologies so student feedback will help a teacher know what works and what needs improvement. The teacher will be able to adapt new techniques to teaching.” When evaluating their teachers, students should consider criteria such as clarity of instruction, engagement in the classroom, fairness in grading, and willingness to provide support, as these factors directly impact their learning experience and overall academic success. In relation to the topic about the criteria Cruz-Anton said, “ I think students could do quarterly or semester surveys rating how the teacher did. The criteria I think what should be used is, ‘How often has the teacher communicated with students,’ ‘How well did the teacher teach.’ and ‘Were the topics hard to understand?’ Any questions like these question whether the teacher is truly helping the students or not.”

To ensure that student feedback is fair and unbiased, schools can implement structured evaluation methods, such as anonymous surveys, clear rubrics, and diverse feedback channels, which minimize personal biases and encourage constructive criticism. In accordance with student feedback, Ansah said “ The school must randomly choose students from different bells, different grade point average students, and so forth. The group must be mixed with different sets of students, not just those who have good grades in that class or those who have bad grades and never show up to class. Some teachers are nice but many do not teach well.” In conclusion, allowing students to grade their teachers can provide valuable insights into teaching effectiveness, classroom engagement, and areas for improvement. However, to ensure fairness and objectivity, schools must implement structured evaluation systems that minimize bias and focus on constructive feedback.

College: The Rising Costs and Time Investment

By Mareme Lo, ’27

When it comes to college people have many different opinions, whether you have been to college or not. Some of them who have been there mostly say similar things. However, people, like high schoolers, are afraid of whether they can do it or not; they need to be more confident or it could be they are afraid of the thousands of student loan debt. Many students don’t think they can afford that much money just to get more education, and I think it makes sense they think that way in this generation because we see many people being rich without a college degree. People make so much money by being an influencer. However, most people who went to college didn't regret it. Aaron Thompson, an English teacher at Western Hills High School, said “College is NOT a waste of time. People who go to college and who don’t are not the same; people who go to college change in a good way; they become more responsible. You will learn a lot of things about the world and about life.” In many ways, not getting a college degree doesn’t limit a per-

son’s work opportunities. However specific careers in areas like law, healthcare, finance, business development and leadership areas may require that applicants have college degrees. Without a college degree you will miss out on a lot of important social, political and global knowledge that comes from being part of a student body on a college campus. Those who don't get a college education are mostly having a lack of confidence and a lack of critical thinking. Education can help people advocate for themselves and protect themselves. When it comes to going to college , never go for the money because sooner or later you may regret it. Going to college is something that you are not doing for the money or to find a professional job, but you are doing it because you want to become what you want to become; otherwise you will regret it for many reasons, you will not be happy with your work, and you may be satisfied with your salary, but I don’t think that should be the priority. It is hard to go to a job you don’t enjoy. According to Joshua Elmore, an American History teacher, at Western Hills University High

School, “ being rich in the U.S is to get luck to get wealthy or your parents are wealthy. Teens don't go to college because social media influences them and I think it’s a bad thing because the thing is everyone has their own destiny, maybe the one who influences you has a different destiny than you.” Mustafa Yisrael, an African American History teacher at Western Hills High School, said “ first two years are dedicated for students to find their purpose. What directions in life do they want to choose? They should start beginning to build a career. Those four to five years should be used to strengthen their manhood/womanhood, so they are in a better position to take care of themselves, family, and community.” Mustafa added “when students go to college they should find their meaning, like who do they want to be in life, and start thinking about responsibilities, and be in a better position to take care of themselves, family and community.” Some people think college is a waste of time and money, spending four or five years in college, mostly graduate at 24 years old with a \$60,990 loan debt or more, while you could start a business

and be a successful business owner by that age. Personally I think it is not about the money, it’s about doing what you love to do, what do you want to do as a career for life and be happy with it but not doing it in a fast way without happiness. No matter what you do in life, it needs to be something you love or makes you happy. The money is not worth being at a job that makes you unhappy, not liking it just for the money. It might sound scary, but at the end of the day you will have to think about it so you can just start thinking about it from now on, asking yourself questions, thinking about what you want to do. What do you want to pay for your education? Is that worth it? Think about what you will earn. Will it cover you? I understand that you should not study something just for the earning; however, I think it’s important to study something that is highly-demanding and pays well. Yisrael said, “college is not a waste of time whether it be trade school, or some type of technical training; the time spent completing the programs moves students into a better economic position”.

OPINIONS

Islam in the West: A Story of Faith, Culture, and Integration

By Salamata Ball '27

What does it mean to be a Muslim in a mostly Western society? With globalization bringing different cultures and religions together, Islam is the second most largest religion in the world. Islam is often talked about and is very misunderstood. Islam is a religion based on believing in one God and one God only.

As a black Muslim hijab girl living in the West I can say it is a very misunderstood religion. In America when you hear or see Muslims, some people might think of terrorists. Which was a horrible attack that took place on September 11th 2001. The people who carried out the terrorist attack do not represent true Islam. The actions they made and sins committed that day goes against the core teachings of the Islamic religion, which highly emphasizes peace, justice, and compassion.

Aminata Soukouna a Freshman at Western Hills High School stated Peace comes to my mind when she thinks of Islam.

"I feel like Islam is a religion of

pious people. I think now some society in the West portrays Islam as this religion of bad people or evil people, but in reality they are not. It is a religion of peace."

Sometimes Muslim people tend to feel out of place as Muslims.

Roughiatou Diallo a Junior at Western Hills High School, said, "to be a Hijabi in the Western society sometimes it is degrading to me, People can judge me just because of me wearing my hijab, Sometimes people can make me feel less than, But I continue to stay strong and thrive because I believes in my religion"

In the article "Modern Islam" by the Wed Leigh University states, that according to Gallup, 52% of

Americans agree the West does not respect Muslim societies and studies show negative public opinions of Muslims.

After 9/11 anti-Muslims attitudes

in America advanced, leading to a rise in hate crimes and discrimination against Muslims.

Government reports and civil groups have documented numerous incidents.

This is just highlighting how negative stereotypes are here in the West.

Austin Bump, a sophomore at Western Hills High School, said, "I think Muslim people are just regular people just with different beliefs of religion sometimes religion doesn't show in a person

sometimes people will not act upon their religions; it's your choice whether you're a good or bad person."

I agree with him 100% because for example 9/11 those people claimed to be Muslim but are not true Muslims; they were in fact not acting upon their religion because Islam does not condone those behaviors. At the end, we are all just people, and we all are human.

In conclusion, I believe Muslims are not bad people. The negative stereotypes only serve to hide the reality on how Islam is based on peace, compassion, and justice. As I have seen and experienced, it's our actions not our labels that define who we are as a person. Even though sometimes people tend to misuse the religion of Islam on their own, that does not represent the true teachings of Islam. At the end of the day, we are all humans, and it is up to us people to look beyond bias and embrace understanding.



Let us hear YOUR OPINION!

*Submit letters to be printed in The Breeze.
Letters can be sent to room 1230, or placed in
Ms. Silbernagel's mailbox
(Letters may be edited for clarity, taste, and length.)*

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The College Sport's World of NIL

By Markeece Mitchell, '25

As college sports make millions of dollars, the question is if you think athletes should be paid off their NIL (name, image and likeness) has been a rising conversation. Before NIL came around, athletes only received a little compensation in

scholarships for all their hard work, while their colleges benefited much more from the student athletes.

While NIL is still a developing process, their efforts to help college athletes get paid for all their hard

work could be a great thing. A big problem with NIL is the equal opportunities some of bigger stars will make a lot more.

Coach Tim Coleman at Western Hills says, "all should be paid the same because they are a part of the same institution," and this would be the best cause for NIL. Another problem is without proper oversight, student-athletes risk being taken advantage of by unscrupulous agents or sponsors.

Senior at Western Hills Faustina Ansah says, "It shouldn't be negative because they already are balancing their sports and academics."

Head of the NCAA was worried that paying athletes would take their focus away from the classroom, but Ansah

makes a great point about how you would be able to play your sport if you're not doing well in the classroom. Everyone would work harder if they know they're getting paid to do it.

NIL has its pros and cons, but one good thing about it is that it gives college athletes money while they are

playing the sport, because fewer than 2% of college athletes go pro. Western Hills Coach Bryce Stokes said, "Yes, since most athletes won't make it pro they are staying in college longer to play the sport they love and get paid while

doing it." That's something that athletes can really benefit from to help maintain a good living after college.

The overall argument of this topic was if college athletes should get paid. There's lots of opinion on this topic going around right now. Senior at Western Hills, Cheickna Diaby, added that "yes, they deserve to get paid because they're the ones actually putting in the hard work." With colleges on average making 100 million dollars a year and some of the top schools making 200 million dollars, I could see his point in that. Personally I would hope to get paid for my hard work just like anyone else would, so I definitely feel for all the athletes that could be struggling, while their college makes all the money.

"They deserve to get paid because they're the ones actually putting in the hard work," said West High senior Cheickna Diaby.

FEATURES

What's Going on at West High?

Protecting Our Classrooms: The Push for Better Student and Teacher Safety

By Prachi Patel, '28

Although schools have security guards, students and teachers might still feel unprotected. Only half percent of students feel safe at school and 51% reported that their schools provide a false sense of security, according to ACT- center for equality in learning.

Some schools and students across the world feel unprotected and unsecured. With many school shootings happening across the country, many students and educators feel threatened. *The Security Magazine* survey found that 80% of educators worry on

a regular basis for their physical safety.

"The school needs more trained security guards," said Western Hills freshman Marianna Bishop. Many students and teachers would feel less threatened if school security was taken seriously. Teachers would be comfortable teaching students without having to worry about their physical health.

Many studies have shown a strong link between students feeling unsafe in school and attendance at school. Students who feel unsafe at school experience more symptoms of depression, attend school less, receive lower

grades and have a harder time graduating.

"The day they found a student with a [weapon] at school was a day that made me unsafe at school," said Western Hills Freshman Bee Munoz. Schools need to take safety seriously because students can also be one of the reasons why another teacher or student might feel unsafe.

According to French teacher, Ms. Karen Adams, "schools should provide more education about the rules we have in the classrooms. No one likes lots of regulations, but safety is our number one concern."

If students were obedient and fol-

lowed school rules then there would be less security needed and most importantly students and staff would feel much safer.

"I believe that we try to keep our school safe, but we need the cooperation of all students," said Adams.

Safety is schools' number one concern, and if everyone cooperated then the school environment would be secure. Students should learn to be respectful to regulations so there would be a safer environment for all students and teachers.

Artificial Intelligence: My Good, Our Bad

By Elder Lopez Cabrera, '25

Have you ever thought about how AI (Artificial Intelligence) has begun to affect and change people's daily lives? Do you believe that AI will begin to change us for the better or for the worse?

Mauhlik Riley, a student at Western Hills University High School, states that, "It's good up until we lose control over them."

As time goes on, more people begin to believe that AI is a rather good thing that has greatly affected our times.

A research by the Pew Research Center found that nearly half of U.S. adults say that they are either equally concerned and excited. AI has its great benefits such as helping students think of ideas, helping them with improving their grammar, and also with giving them suggestions on how they can improve their ability to convey their ideas.

While some may seem to believe that it's a good thing, it can also be seen how they can affect how students learn and develop.

The use of AI in schools has been pretty new as of late only beginning to gain lots of attention since 2023. Although it may have started getting popular in 2023, it had been

around before that year. When asking Riley the question of about when did he started to notice that AI was being used to make essays, and he states, "In 2022, when I started using Chatgpt for work."

AI's development started way before then, roughly around the

1950-1956, which is when the idea of AI first started, and didn't have a fast start, but has begun to rapidly grow as technology gets more advanced and people put more effort into AI. It has begun to be used more often by students since AI can now begin to do complicated math questions, answer questions, and even create long paragraphs based around the topics that they want it to talk about.

When asked the question about how frequently do students use AI

to write essays, Megan Groat, an English teacher from Western Hills University High School, states, "More frequently than ever before. It's more common than traditional plagiarism, in my opinion. On the first essay of the year for my class, I detected 12 essays that had large

portions of AI."

When also asked the question about whether AI was affecting students' ability to write essays, Ms.

Meg states, "Yes, because they simply don't have to if they can find their way around it. People in my generation and older had to learn how to write essays properly. Now, AI just refreshes our memory and helps us out versus never actually learning how to do it themselves which is what is happening to the current generation that I'm

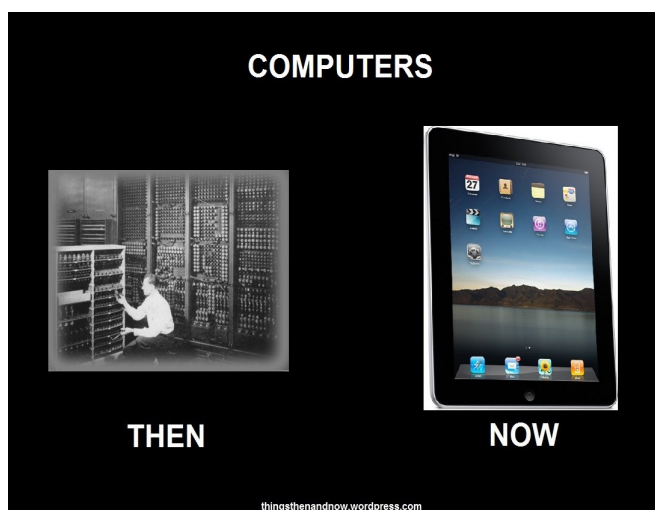
teaching."

While AI has become very helpful in improving student's abilities to write essays, there is also the fact that it has become a way for some students to avoid having to do any work at all. Although we do know that AI has become a problem for the education system, there is no likely way to avoid this from happening due to the fact that technology has begun to advance much quicker than before.

Ms. Meg states, "It will increase and become more socially accepted. We live in an age of technological advancement. It makes everyone's lives easier."

As AI continues to grow throughout many generations, many will believe that it will be something that can help people grow stronger or something that can reduce our need to work harder.

Daniel Caproni, a teacher for Computer Science and Statistics at Western Hills High School, was asked the question of how AI will continue to influence people in the future, and he states, "It will create a longer divide between the educated and uneducated; expanding learning for some while replacing the learning for others."



Healing Through Harmony: Why Teens Turn to Music for Emotional Support

By Tiana Williams, '25

What is music to you when you listen to it? How does it make you feel? How can it make someone feel? Music isn't just something you listen to, but it's something you feel; it's an emotion that you feel when you listen to music like hip-hop, pop, jazz, R & B, soul, and more. Music is something you listen to for fun, or it can be used for bad days or for meditation.

It can become someone else's other half. It gives people motivation to be who they truly are, to express who they want to be. A senior from Western Hills High School Youssouf Diallo says, "When I listen to music, I feel many different emotions depending on what kind of music I'm listening to; sometimes I feel sad, excited, relaxed, amused, and

annoyed."

See, different types of music makes some people more excited or annoyed than others. You could even have a bad day, but music is the only thing that can bring you up or help you feel better than the days you had been into it with someone else. Music could be a great thing for sociality when the right music brings you to your feet.

It can help other people see music is not just something you sing, rap, or song write; it's an expression someone sees around them or what happened to them.

Diallo also says, "People from different parts of the world make lyrics in different languages to communicate one message; their love for music, and music is important to our society because it brings people together."

I think music is important to our society too, it gives people a chance to express themselves through music, especially when others don't listen or don't want to listen.

Another student from Western Hills High, James Nolasco says, "When I listen to music my emotions are happy, excited, and inspired. It gets me hyped and ready for my day. It depends on the person to be honest, but I think it's to express themselves and their feelings." I think most people consider music to be able to focus on their work or for calmness.

It's more of a need to be inspired by music to be able to want to create and feel your own. "I think music in itself is healing. It's an explosive expression of humanity. It's something we are all touched by. No matter what culture we're from, everyone loves music," said famous singer Billy Joel.

FEATURES

Meet the Masters: Teachers Who Make Learning Awesome!

By De’Nell Spikes, ‘25

Every day students go to school, meet with other students and their teachers. Although students converse and get to know each other, you don’t really see students too interested in their teacher and what brings them to teaching.

So I had the idea of taking it into my own hands and asking them myself, and I think that more people should be interested in their teachers because they definitely have great stories to tell. Doing this entire thing made me realize how under appreciated most teachers are.

I started off interviewing three different teachers here at Western Hills, Ms. Meg, Mr. Dan Caproni, and Mr. Paul Dombrowski, and this is how it went.

So, why did you become a teacher?



“Well, I may be one of a minority with my reasoning. I didn’t have great teachers growing up. I wanted to be the teacher I and other kids like me needed,” said Ms. Meg.

Do you honestly feel that your students actually care for your class or are they here because they have to?

“I think it’s a mix; most students start not even knowing what my class is, but some do desire knowledge no matter the content,” said Caproni.

What do you do in order to keep your students engaged and interested?

“I’d like to think my personality is what keeps students engaged,” said Dombrowski.

Is there anything you could possibly do to make the class more fun and interesting?

“Yes and no. We have guidelines we must follow from the district. I think certain projects can be fun and offer them when I can. Poor attendance though can ruin this

experience and we struggle with that,” said Caproni.

When asked if their younger self would be confused about their cur-



rent profession all three teachers responded with similar answers: no, their younger self would be proud of what they are now.

Out of all the subjects, why did you decide on teaching this one? “English allows you to find yourself and escape into another world within books, where everything is different. Writing allows you to

express yourself and develop your own opinions,” said Ms. Meg.

If you could’ve taught any grade level, why this one?

“My sarcastic behavior goes best with an age-level that understands it. I also like offering help for the transition to after high school,” said Mr. Caproni.

When the teachers were asked if they had a fun and enjoyable teacher or more of a hardworking teacher where they try getting their students to do their hardest, both Ms. Meg and Mr. Dombrowski responded with that they do a mix of both and there needs to be a balance; Mr. Caproni on the other hand stated, “I hold students accountable for the work because I know they are capable of doing it. I believe they are skilled enough to handle it even if you don’t think the same.”

Well, as that completes the little teacher student conference. I’d like to say for a final time that teachers are people too who have/had goals and have stories to tell, so asking them about their come up story should be normalized.

Gaming Generation: How Video Games Are Shaping Today’s Teens

By Elder Lopez Cabrera, ‘25

Since the introduction of computers in 1946, they have changed completely; they have gone from big machines that take up a whole room and could only solve math problems, to machines that can be taken anywhere and are also able to do anything like finding information, creating apps, and even making entertainment for all ages. One of the biggest creations that have come from the evolution of computers is the development of video games.

Video games have changed a lot due to the evolution of technology and computers. Originally, video games weren’t a thing that many people sought to do, but one man, Physicist William Higinbotham, created the first video game which was a tennis-like game. This game was very simple; it only included two lines and a dot; since then, video games have drastically changed from going to 2D into 3D games.

Daniel Caproni, a coach for the Western Hills University High School E-sports team, believes that there are games that have laid a foundation for what games are today. He states that, “I would say it [because it] depends on which genre of game. Different games have popularized different genres. The Mario Franchise paved the way for side scrollers, casual racing games (*Mario Kart*), & party games (*Mario Party*). Games like *007 Goldeneye* paved the way for first person multiplayer shooting games, while *PUBG* moved that into the battle royale format we see today. *Everquest*

led the world into the age of MMORPGs and the level grinding magic users.”

Paul Dombrowski, another coach for the Western Hills University High School E-sports team, has seen how games have changed since these early stages of game development. He states, “The Graphics have gotten better and the games have gotten increasingly complex. Overall they explain more of the game, which usually makes it easier.”

As these games have begun to get better and how some games have even begun to become iconic due to the new innovations that they bring to gaming, there have been some games that created things that have been seen as original for their time.

J.W. Lonaker, a senior at Western Hills University High School, believes that there are some games that have done things that have been original. He states that, “*Outlast* was a budget title that made it to the big screen, *Super Mario 64* helped with the development of 3D games, and *The Stanley Parable* introduced the concept of decision making in games.”

Although video games have begun to evolve very quickly due to the massive development in technology, its

quality is also affected by many other factors other than technology.

The quality of games can be affected by the amount of budget that developers have or the environment that the workers have to be in.

Lonaker was asked the question about whether he believes that work environment and budgets are the only things that affect a game’s quality, and he responds that “No, I feel like love is an important factor when developing

a game. For example, *Outlast*, a game released in 2013, is still popular today despite its low budget.”

Having love for a project is a major factor when it comes to making a game since it shows the players that it’s not just something that they make just to make money but as something to have fun with.

Even though there are games that have been made to entertain people, there are other games that are solely made to make money by some big companies. There have been companies that have stopped putting effort or love into creating their games and much rather begun to utilize micro-transactions into their games to profit more off of them.

Lonaker believes that there are some companies that have used games

and micro-transactions to profit more off of them. He believes that “Companies like Blizzard, Treyarch, and Riot have used their most popular games like, for example, *Call of Duty* and *League of Legends*, as a way to keep players buying more stuff by making their games Pay to Win.” Things like these can really affect a game’s popularity as more players can begin to distance themselves from playing those games due to the amount of money they have to put in to get better, and that the only way to get better is to buy items that can only be bought with money.

As companies begin to shift more into the idea that adding transactions into their games is fine and that those transactions could be pretty impactful, there is the question of whether the quality of games will be impacted by that or not.

Mr. Caproni believes that “The quality of games will always get better in my opinion as tech gets better. Many people who claim the ‘good old days’ are gone will also admit it is painful to go back and play old games.”

As companies test out new pay methods (monthly subscriptions, season pass, flat, pay for expansions, etc.) there may be growing pains, but I think it will level back out and there will always be someone out there that is creating top-tier games regardless of the cost for them.



Prom Fever: The Hype, The Prep, and The Magic Ahead

By Jamarion Mincy, '25

What makes prom so unique? Does prom come at too steep a cost? Juniors and seniors gather for a special event called prom, where they have to dress up and have a fantastic time. You vote for the King and Queen, and there is dinner, dancing, and music.

This year at Western Hills High School our prom is on April 5th, and our theme is “Red Carpet Ready.” The term "Red Carpet Ready" describes a polished, glitzy, and camera-ready look at high-profile events. It comes from the custom of celebrities strolling the red carpet and frequently refers to designer clothes, expert hairstyling, faultless makeup, and accessories.

According to Meg Groat Senior English Teacher at Western Hills stated, “Prom is a reason to dress up and be fancy and remember the fun times you had with your classmates before you graduate. These will be pictures and experiences that many look at years later and show their children.”

Prom is a night worth going to because of the priceless memories and social experiences that are shared, such as dancing with friends, taking memorable pictures, and commemorating a milestone together.

According to Carmen Williams, a Senior at Western Hills, “When being in high school can be hard, not talking to others not fitting in, but that one single night you feel special

and getting compliments can be nice.”

Even though prom is frequently regarded as a wonderful occasion, there are drawbacks, including exorbitant expenses, peer pressure, and the strain of organizing the ideal evening.

Williams said, “ Sometimes it can be the cost or just not a social person. Some feel spending a lot of money on one night is not worth the waste.”

Adding onto what Williams said about cost. Meg stated “It's an unfortunate reality that dressing up and being "fancy" is expensive. It is justified in my opinion, but an unfortunate reality that things are so expensive.”

Those who choose not to attend prom can still make enduring memories by planning a special photo shoot, throwing a themed dinner party, or going on a weekend getaway with pals.

In discussing prom, Darnea Davis-Walker, a senior at Western Hills, said, “I feel like we have our senior dinner dance, senior retreat, homecoming, and just going to senior or school events like spirit week.”

To sum everything up, prom is not required, but it can be an enjoyable and unforgettable event. Attending can be worthwhile if it fits within your budget and interests. There are many more ways to commemorate your senior year, too, if that isn't your thing.

Beyond the Stars: Exploring Other Galaxies

By Marques Partin, '26

The question of whether intelligent extraterrestrial life exists has intrigued humanity for centuries. With scientific advancements and ongoing space exploration, the debate over aliens has only intensified. While some believe the vastness of the universe makes alien life inevitable, others argue that a lack of concrete evidence suggests otherwise. Perspectives on this topic vary, with opinions shaped by scientific inquiry, personal beliefs, and popular culture.

Nicolas Smith, a sophomore at Western Hills high school, strongly believes in the existence of intelligent life beyond Earth.

“Yes, I do believe there are other intelligent life forms out there, just not in our solar system. We probably haven't been discovered yet,” he says.

Smith envisions a future where humanity could coexist with extraterrestrial beings, sharing knowledge and technology.

“It could change the world if possible. We could coexist with the aliens, travel with them,” he adds.

However, Aidan Caddell, a sophomore at Dixie High School, holds a different perspective.

“No, if aliens existed, we probably would have found proof by now. Scientists have been searching for years, and there's still no solid proof,” he states.

Caddell is doubtful that humanity will ever make contact with extraterrestrials, suggesting that if they do exist, they are either too far away or uninterested in making contact.

“No. I think they'd be too far away or don't want to

come in contact with us,” he says.

Ethan Crockett, a sophomore at Dixie High School, agrees with Smith and believes that intelligent life is highly probable.

“Yes, the universe is way too big for us to be the only intelligent life. There are billions of galaxies, so it just makes sense that something else is out there,” he explains.

Crockett also emphasizes the profound impact alien discovery could have on human civilization.

“It would change everything; science, religion, even how we see ourselves. We'd rethink our place in the universe,” says Crockett.

The search for extraterrestrial life has long been a focus of scientific and government efforts, but opinions on these initiatives differ. Smith believes that crucial information is being withheld from the public. “I feel that they are hiding stuff from the world and are afraid of what the world might do if we knew,” he claims.

Conversely, Crockett views the search as beneficial, regardless of whether aliens are found.

“I think it's worth it. Even if we don't find aliens, we're still learning a lot about space,” Crockett says.

One major factor in the debate is the discovery of simple extraterrestrial life, such as bacteria. Smith believes such a discovery would strengthen the case for intelligent life.

“Yes, because it is said we are part of a much bigger thing in our solar system, we are just a speck in the Milky Way,” he says

Crockett shares a similar viewpoint, saying, “Yes, if there's even a tiny form of life out there, then intelligent

life is way more possible than we thought.”

However, Caddell remains unconvinced, arguing that bacteria and intelligent beings are fundamentally different.

“Not really. Bacteria and aliens are two different things. It's a big jump from bacteria to an entire advanced being,” says Caddell.

Popular culture has played a significant role in shaping public perceptions of extraterrestrial life.

Smith acknowledges its influence, saying, “Yes, because aliens could be just like us and maybe they're looking for a home where they can coexist with others.”

Crockett agrees, noting that media representations of aliens often lead people to imagine them as advanced or menacing.

“For sure, movies make us imagine aliens as super advanced or scary, but they could be really different from what we expect,” Crockett explains.

On the other hand, Caddell dismisses the impact of popular culture on his beliefs.

“No. Movies exaggerate things, so I don't really take them seriously,” says Caddell.

In conclusion, the question of alien life remains open-ended, with strong arguments on both sides. While individuals like Smith and Crockett see the vastness of the universe as an indicator that intelligent life likely exists, skeptics like Caddell argue that the lack of evidence suggests otherwise. Whether or not humans will ever make contact with extraterrestrial beings remains uncertain, but the search for answers continues to fuel scientific discovery and public fascination.

Protecting Our Schools: Promoting Safety in the Face of Gun Violence

Jaleaya Howell, '29

The Sandy Hook Promise Website stated “each day about 12 children die from gun violence in America, along with at least 32 shot and injured. Guns are the main cause of death among American children and teens. One out of ten gun deaths is age 19 or younger.”

School shootings can be a very heavy topic and take a toll on someone's mental health, especially if they're a student, teacher, or a staff member in general who's been in the situation.

Jaia Bankhead, a Western Hills freshman, stated, “I've seen cases of people who caused school shootings, and every time they had a mental illness, depression, or bipolar disorder, and they never got the treatment they needed because schools chose to outcast them and pre-

vent them from getting help.”

According to the Sandy Hook Promise Website, about 5% of mass shootings are related to extreme mental illness, 25% are associated with nonpsychotic or neurological illness, including depression, and an estimated 24% are associated with substance abuse.

“Focus more on the students and getting better school systems is a must,” Bankhead stated.

She also said, “Schools shouldn't be focused on a Yondr pouch and spending thousands of dollars but using that money to use towards better security guards, better education, and especially therapy for children.”

In addition, schools have spent thousands of dollars on Yondr pouches when they could be putting that money towards better things, better protection, better lunches, etc.

Western Hills freshman, Marianna Bishop, stated, “I believe gun violence is something nobody should ever take lightly; it has immeasurable impacts on society today.”

In 2022, 34 students and adults died while more than 43,000 children were exposed to gunfire at school (Sandy Hook Promise Website).

The “Put the Guns Down, Pick the Ball Up” West High event is a yearly community-wide initiative to raise awareness of gun violence. An occasion that raises awareness of mental health and gun violence while promising a day of peace in our community. This community event is to pledge a day and bring awareness to gun violence and mental health. This event helps promote safety in our community.

Afghan Women Barred from Nursing and Midwifery: A Crisis in Healthcare and Human Rights

By Aminata Soukouna, ‘29

Imagine living in a society, or culture where you can’t study what you love doing. You are forced to stop studying midwifery and nursing. How would you feel seeing others doing what you want to do, or that you can’t even do? According to *The Guardian*, as of December 2024, the Taliban have effectively prohibited Afghan women from training as nurses and midwives by ordering the suspension of these courses at various educational institutions across the country. Some Afghan women are going through something most women don’t go through. Some of them are not allowed to study midwifery or nursing. According to one of my interviews, “I do not agree because everyone deserves to be happy and doing what they love,” Kadiga Diallo said. This also shows that people do not agree with this law and it should stop. Without education, girls face an even higher risk of being exploited, rated, or married off early. Fatima Soukouna says that

“cultural norms and historical inequality” is the reason why they want to ban nursing and midwifery or banning things for Afghan women in general. Mariam Soukouna said would feel “an overwhelming sense of loss and frustration.” They feel lost because what they have invested in is gone and it is not good to feel that way because that means you have unfulfilled goals, desires, or needs. “Afghan women can return to studying nursing and midwifery through a multi-faceted approach that addresses both educational access and social barriers,” said Soukouna. This quote from my interview shows a way of Afghan women having a chance of getting back their right of studying. In their hearts, they held onto the hope that one day the barriers preventing women from pursuing their passion will crumble. They envisioned a future where girls could study freely where midwives could practice openly.

Strong Minds, Strong Game: The Mental Health Benefits of High School Girls’ Basketball

By Justice Taylor, ‘28

Playing basketball is not for the weak. You have to have a lot of confidence and chillness. Richard Cox said, “It causes a little stress for me but I usually take a breath so I can go back to focusing.” Basketball isn’t just a game to most people. Basketball can also be someone’s everything, and it could help their mental state; people could even use basketball as an escape. Basketball can be a job or help you cope with your feelings. Mckenna Martin said, “I want to improve my confidence in the game.” If you’re depressed and you’re feeling down playing basketball and having teammates to be there for you, and your coach can help benefit you better for you. Playing basketball can also help you burn calories. The quick lateral movements, running and jumping give you an aerobic workout, which allows a person who weighs 165

pounds to burn about 600 calories. A person who weighs 250 pounds can burn approximately 900 calories. But basketball can help with a lot of things, especially with weight loss. Basketball can also help with building bone and muscle. It could help you get your bones stronger. Basketball is a great stress reliever. When stress is decreased, you have more energy and focus to complete other tasks. It also makes you more social, which can help prevent depression. Your immune system will receive a boost when stress is lowered, making you overall healthier and your body naturally combative! Basketball is a hard sport unless you have the confidence and know how to handle things like people screaming in the crowd, but at the end of the day it’s just a sport. Kyra Black said, “I want to improve confidence most because it plays a key role in focussing in the game”

Living with ADHD: Challenges, Triumphs, and Breaking Stereotypes

By Mareme Lo, ‘28

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is one of the most commonly diagnosed neurodevelopmental disorders in the world, yet it remains widely misunderstood. Affecting both children and adults, ADHD can have a profound impact on academic, social, and professional lives. Despite its prevalence, misconceptions about the condition persist, leading to stigma and a lack of proper support for those affected. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is a neurological condition characterized by persistent patterns of inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity that interfere with daily functioning. It is not simply a case of “kids being kids” or “lack of discipline.” Instead, these behaviors arise from differences in brain structure and function, particularly in areas related to attention, impulse control, and executive function. Zyaira Gross, a 10th grader at Western Hills High School says, “When I hear about ADHD I think about me. I can get upset easily. ADHD is kind of hard to deal with sometimes because my mind is all over the place.” Some people may struggle with focus, frequently losing track of tasks, while others

may find it difficult to sit still or control impulse. It is important to understand that ADHD can affect people differently and requires proper support and strategies to manage effectively. Lindsay LaRoche, a history teacher at Western Hills High School says, “I have had a lot of students that have ADHD, and in class it’s hard. They don’t like to stay in their seats. They like to walk around the room. If I am trying to explain something and they distract other students, I would be upset, but I understand that it’s something that people can’t always control. It’s something that is in their brain. They are not doing it on purpose.” Diagnosing attention deficit disorder is not as simple as a quick test. It requires a comprehensive evaluation by a trained professional who considers a person’s medical history, behavior across different settings (home, school, work), and the impact of the symptoms on daily life. ADHD is often first identified in childhood, but many people are not diagnosed until adulthood, when difficulties in managing work and relationships become more apparent. Despite growing awareness, many myths about ADHD continue to thrive. One of the most common misconceptions is that it is over diagnosed or that it is just an excuse for

laziness or poor behavior. In reality, ADHD is a legitimate medical condition supported by decades of research, and its diagnosis relies on standardized criteria, not just subjective judgement. Students with ADHD may struggle to maintain focus on tasks, leading to careless mistakes and incomplete assignments. They might find it difficult to organize their work and follow through with instructions, resulting in lower academic performance. “It’s not difficult at all to keep it organized for me because I like myself organized and everything has to be a certain way for me. I can’t be in a messy room. I would get upset if my house is messy because it has to be clean. ADHD affects my grades sometimes but not really because if I don’t do it at school. I will do it at home and I can do it easily when it’s more quiet and peaceful,” says Gross. I feel like people don’t really understand ADHD, and that’s a very big problem. We can’t really blame people for mental health issues. I think we need to understand them more. Mostly teachers, and I can comprehend that sometimes it’s understandable that teachers feel upset because when you are speaking or explaining, and someone keeps distracting you or students who are trying to focus.

FEATURES

Passion and Aspirations of the Youth

By Marques Partin, '26

Passion is a driving force that shapes people’s aspirations, guiding them toward fulfilling careers and meaningful pursuits. For most students, passion plays a crucial role in their goals for the future. Whether it’s teaching, entering a trade, or photography, each student has found inspiration and motivation to develop their interests despite challenges along the way.

Aniya Wolfenberg, a sophomore at Achieve Point, has a deep love for reading and writing, and is passionate about teaching English. She credits her former teachers for inspiring her to pursue education.

“They made class engaging and actually made me want to be there,” Wolfenberg explains. “I would like to do the same for others.”

To refine her skills, she spends much of her time reading books and writing stories; however, she admits that self-doubt has been a challenge.

“I don’t always feel confident that I could encourage and engage students the same way my teachers did,” she says.

Despite this, she remains determined to become a teacher

who helps students improve their reading and writing. Given the opportunity to dedicate all her time to this passion, she

uncertainty about when to begin—whether to start in 12th grade or wait until after graduation. His friend Kenny, who

tures of things I found beautiful,” she recalls.

She now spends her time capturing images of her community and learning editing techniques through online videos; however, one major challenge she faces is affording professional equipment.

“I’m saving up money right now to afford a good camera,” Lordeus says.

Social media photographers have had a significant impact on her journey, inspiring her with their stunning work. She dreams of becoming a professional photographer and, if given the opportunity, would travel the world to document breathtaking landscapes.

Each of these students has a unique passion that fuels their ambition and shapes their future. While their interests differ, their commitment to overcoming obstacles and pursuing their dreams remains the same. Whether through education, trade, or art, their dedication to their passions demonstrates the power of perseverance and self-discovery.

"Keep true to the dreams of your youth." - Friedrich Schiller

would focus on developing innovative teaching methods and honing her own skills.

For Nicolas Smith, a junior at Western Hills High School, the path to his passion is more hands-on. He is determined to enter a trade, inspired by both the financial benefits and the growing demand for skilled workers.

“What inspired me to pursue it is the money you make. Most trades are short on workers,” Smith states.

He actively learns about trade professions by speaking with coworkers and researching online; however, he faces

has experience in trade school, has been a major influence.

“He teaches me things in his free time,” Smith says.

Looking ahead, he envisions using his trade skills to build financial stability and eventually start his own business. If given the chance to fully commit, he would focus on mastering as many skills as possible to prepare for unexpected challenges in life.

Akeelah Lordeus, a sophomore at Lely High School, discovered her passion for photography when she started using her mother’s old camera.

“I had a lot of fun taking pic-

Dressed for Success: The Role of Fashion in Student Identity

By Tiana Williams, '25

Have you ever wondered who was the creator or designer of fashion? I know I was curious as to who was the creator of one of the most popular creative things in the world, it’s one of the most fashionable things people ever talk about, one or more.

Did you also know that designers started to have models to walk their designs back in the 1860s?

Charles Fredrick Worth was an English fashion designer who founded the House of Worth, one the foremost fashion designer houses of the 19th and early 20th centuries. A senior from Western Hills High School, Youssauf Diallo says, " Fashion means to me is to express yourself through clothing, and fashion is a way people express themselves." And when it comes to dressing up, Diallo feels happy, excited, and energetic.

This is a great way of expressing yourself

physically and emotionally through your clothing. Fashion is also a way to see yourself in a different way. According to television, television coverage began in the 1950s with small fashion features. In the 1960s and 1970s, fashion segments on various entertainment shows became more frequent, and by the 1980s, dedicated fashion shows such as Fashion Television started to appear.

Diallo also says, “Fashion is everyday life, clothing doesn’t have to meet society’s fashionable expectations to be considered nice.”

Dressing up can also help other people get some ideas to help with their fashion, other people's fashion can help other people fashion. It’s like trying new food and liking it; dressing up is like eating but without eating it, but wearing it.

Another student from Western Hills High, James Nolasco says, “I think fashion is hap-

py, fun, surprising, and exciting; and that people do take fashion seriously, fashion makes people feel good, and it makes them look divine in their own way.”

Fashion can mean differently to everyone, it can mean it’s nice to wear or it’s just pretty to look at. Today's fashion is more casual and cute wear. We have different designs, girls and women wear pants almost more than men now:).

We even have more patterns to our clothing, we can wear hats to our clothing, you can even wear hats with your dress. Students today wear more casual styles nowadays. So when you do get ready for school, to go out, or to an event, look in the mirror and think about why dressing is important to you.