Nearly every day, we log onto social media to find a new crisis of immense urgency and scale that affects young people. From school safety to the crippling competitiveness of college admissions process, we skim new stories, lament about the state of the education system, and continue about our day.

After the March for Our Lives in February 2018 and the Youth Climate Strike in March 2019, students across America seem intent on transforming the news cycle from the state of young people to concrete action. We’ve witnessed walkouts, hashtags, and speeches from students eager to drive the narrative.

While we’ve come far, we haven’t come far enough.

Despite sitting at the nexus of these crises daily, students in America’s schools remain excluded from opportunities for authentic civic engagement and silenced from the conversation regarding the shortcomings of their own educational experiences. The Student Voice Journalism Fellowship flips the script by empowering students to report on their experiences and those of their peers as primary, unfiltered sources.

Over the past five months, we have mentored fourteen fellows in the production of four pieces on their educational experiences. In October, we had students tell the story of their academic journey through the lens of Student Voice’s Student Bill of Rights. In November, our fellows from across the country worked together to investigate common shortcomings in their schools. Throughout December, fellows looked outward to their communities and collaborated with school and city publications to start a local dialogue on the state of their hometowns. We concluded the fellowship in February with overarching editorials on federal and state education policies, spanning ESSA, Title IX, and Common Core.

These remarkable students have reclaimed their educational experiences and yielded the power of their voices in a way that offers honesty, sincerity, and hope for all who read their words. We hope that their stories help you empathize with young people nationwide and move you to take action on behalf of students near you.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Bill of Rights</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When Classrooms Become Lecture Halls</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The (Somewhat Addressed) Void in American Muslims</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remaining Inclusive in the Fight for Environmental Justice</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Necessary Discrimination</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Essentiality of Understanding</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomprehensive Means Unprepared</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress for Every Student</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small But Mighty</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Economic Effect on Education</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Harassment Culture in Clark County Schools</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Wrestling Teaches Us About Gender Discrimination</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding an Identity Divided by 8,000 Miles</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Wrestling Teaches Us About Gender Discrimination</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small But Mighty</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Economic Effect on Education</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remaining Inclusive in the Fight for Environmental Justice</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Necessary Discrimination</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Essentiality of Understanding</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomprehensive Means Unprepared</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress for Every Student</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small But Mighty</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Economic Effect on Education</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Harassment Culture in Clark County Schools</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Wrestling Teaches Us About Gender Discrimination</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding an Identity Divided by 8,000 Miles</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
STUDENT BILL OF RIGHTS

Voted into action by thousands of students across the country, the Student Bill of Rights is the de facto constitution of the student voice movement.

StuVoice.org/bill-of-rights

**Access & Affordability**
All students have the right to an affordable and equitable education.

**Civic Participation**
All students have the right to engage with their community and expect their schools to treat them with the rights of citizens.

**Influence Decisions**
All students have the right to shape decisions and institutions that will affect their future.

**Deeper Learning**
All students have the right to an education tailored to their individual needs and that prepares them for life beyond high school.

**Diversity & Inclusivity**
All students have the right to learn in an environment that doesn’t discriminate against them and reflects the variety of backgrounds in the student body.

**Due Process**
All students have the right to understand existing rules in their school and the opportunity to address unfair treatment.

**Free Expression**
All students have the right to express themselves within an educational context.

**Modern Technology**
All students have the right to access modern technology to use for their education.

**Positive School Climate**
All students have the right to feel mentally, physically, and emotionally safe in school.

**WHEN CLASSROOMS BECOME LECTURE HALLS**

by Gabriella Staykova, 10th grade student in Lexington, KY
Crammed. My French classroom is cramped because fitting forty-two desks in a room meant to hold twenty leaves little space to breathe, or to learn. Our teacher weaves between chairs and desks, slides around backpacks as she moves from one student to the next, spending no more than three minutes with each. After all, there is one of her and forty-two of us.

My French III class is far from the exception at Paul Laurence Dunbar High School. For the past few years, budget cuts on the state and district level have devastated our school, bringing up the average class ratio from 24:1 to 30:1. The average is skewed because special needs classes and special-exception at Paul Laurence Dunbar High School. For the past few years, budget cuts on the state and district level have devastated our school, bringing up the average class ratio from 24:1 to 30:1. The average is skewed because special needs classes and special-

DEEPER LEARNING

The program itself is far from perfect. It often fails to account for the various teaching styles used in different classes, and as one ESS student explained, “[if your teacher] doesn’t do ESS, a teacher with a different teaching style has to [help you]. Then, you have trouble connecting it to the class because your class isn’t taught that way.”

Other classes are too niche for ESS, like AP Computer Science, and that leaves students with few options for learning the material beyond self-teaching. A former student expressed frustration in the pacing of the class, saying, “it moved way too fast, and only the access to the material and individualized help, but the class size leads to an awkward compromise in tempo that leaves no one satisfied. Instead of a one-to-one explanation between the teacher and a struggling student, reteaches take the form of classwide reviews of the Powerpoint, or a brief example question at the beginning of class.

Most teachers acknowledge the lack of one-on-one time and suggest that students go to ESS. Dunbar’s after-school tutoring program, if they feel lost, but ESS is difficult to access for many students, especially disadvantaged ones. Because the program is after-school, they need a parent to pick them up rather than taking the bus home, something which may not be possible considering their guard-ian’s work schedule.

A senior at my school told me she was falling behind in math last year and wanted some help, but it was hard for her to take advantage of the only free tutoring available to her because “[her] family had to share a car, and [she] had to get [her] mom from work and then go to work after school.”

One of the leaders described her surprise, saying that “a lot of the students were confused on big parts of the curriculum.” The large class frequently allotted no time for students to ask questions when they were unsure, leaving kids confused about basic concepts that were used in every lesson thereafter.

While students struggle with foundational concepts in some classes, they comprehend even complex material immediately in others. The curriculum can feel too simple, with some students completing the coursework and homework in a third of the time allotted. The difference in learning rates leaves many students feeling like the pace holds them back from higher-level achievement. One student expressed frustration with her crafts class, which has forty students, saying that there was a three week, in-class project which took her only two classes to complete. Many large classes move at the pace of the slower students, leading to omission of parts of the curriculum. One of my peers told me, “I only ever talk [in Spanish] with my sister, since we never do in class. Sometimes our teacher asks us to speak in small groups, but I don’t know if I’m saying things right since no one else is good at speaking either.”

DEEPER LEARNING

“I only ever talk [in Spanish] with my sister, since we never do in class. Sometimes our teacher asks us to speak in small groups, but I don’t know if I’m saying things right since no one else is good at speaking either.”

The difference in learning rates in my French class is striking. My friends and I finish our worksheet and sit back to talk, knowing that the next one won’t come for another twenty minutes. A few tables away from us, our teacher tries to explain a simple concept to my classmate while four other hands are raised. She sighs, tells him she’ll come back soon, and moves to help another student. He continues to stare at his paper in confusion and directs his desperate, increasingly-defeated questions to a friend, who only answers, “I don’t know either,” as they both wait for the teacher to return. 2

It was hard for her to take advantage of the only free tutoring available to her because “[her] family had to share a car, and [she] had to get [her] mom from work and then go to work after school.”

24:1 to 30:1. The average is skewed by special needs classes and specialized classes, both of which have few students, so most classes have well over thirty kids.

The result is a loss of personalization. Most classes have become lecture-based, with students taking notes and having little time to discuss the material with their teacher. Rather than individualized assignments, teachers give worksheets and group projects in the hopes that students will fill the gaps in each other’s knowledge.

Our French teacher takes the worksheet approach. Some students complete the assignment in ten minutes, but others take thirty. These students often require a reteach of the material and individualized help, but the class size leads to an awkward compromise in tempo that leaves no one satisfied. Instead of a one-to-one explanation between the teacher and a struggling student, reteaches take the form of classwide reviews of the Powerpoint, or a brief example question at the beginning of class.

Most teachers acknowledge the lack of one-on-one time and suggest that students go to ESS. Dunbar’s after-school tutoring program, if they feel lost, but ESS is difficult to access for many students, especially disadvantaged ones. Because the program is after-school, they need a parent to pick them up rather than taking the bus home, something which may not be possible considering their guardian’s work schedule.

A senior at my school told me she was falling behind in math last year and wanted some help, but it was hard for her to take advantage of the only free tutoring available to her because “[her] family had to share a car, and [she] had to get [her] mom from work and then go to work after school.” Other students who stayed said that they would sometimes wait upwards of an hour and a half outside of the school until their mom or dad could get them, even in the middle of winter. The program itself is far from perfect. It often fails to account for the various teaching styles used in different classes, and as one ESS student expressed frustration with her crafts class, which has forty students, saying that there was a three week, in-class project which took her only two classes to complete. Many large classes move at the pace of the slower students, leading to omission of parts of the curriculum. One of my peers told me, “I only ever talk [in Spanish] with my sister, since we never do in class. Sometimes our teacher asks us to speak in small groups, but I don’t know if I’m saying things right since no one else is good at speaking either.”

The difference in learning rates in my French class is striking. My friends and I finish our worksheet and sit back to talk, knowing that the next one won’t come for another twenty minutes. A few tables away from us, our teacher tries to explain a simple concept to my classmate while four other hands are raised. She sighs, tells him she’ll come back soon, and moves to help another student. He continues to stare at his paper in confusion and directs his desperate, increasingly-defeated questions to a friend, who only answers, “I don’t know either,” as they both wait for the teacher to return.
The (Somewhat Addressed) Void in American Muslims

“Students don’t want prettier dorms, they want to be fed and taken care of. They want an education with no strings attached. I want to give Muslims representation in this space”

BY Sanaa Kahloon, 10th grade student in Lexington, KY

You can find Hadeel Abdallah holed up in any coffee shop in Lexington, Kentucky. Surrounded by a group of friends, all busily working on their laptops and sipping on an espresso, she looks like any other Muslim college student, albeit one with pretty amazing eyebrows, when in actuality, she’s so much more. She’s a Rhodes scholar, Gaines fellow, Truman scholar, University of Kentucky senior, outspoken Muslim woman, and a leader in one of the most important American-Muslim movements in the West: the involvement of Muslims in local and national civics.

For two years, Hadeel has worked tirelessly on creating the Bilal ibn Rabah scholarship, an opportunity for lower and middle-income kids to get a full ride to the University of Kentucky. When asked why, she says, “students don’t want prettier dorms, they want to be fed and taken care of. They want an education with no strings attached.

I want to give Muslims representation in this space.” But her involvement speaks of a deeper message, one of genuine love for her community, saying, “I wanted to get involved in my community, and I saw that the Muslim community — specifically the Muslim immigrant community — wasn’t all that involved in local politics.”

Whereas most faith groups have civic engagement and political leadership, there’s been a void in the American-Muslim community. Take the Christian population, for instance, which, according to a Pew research study, makes up 70.6% of the American population, but about 95% of Congress. In contrast, Muslims make up 1% of the American population, but only .5% of Congress. When it came to social justice, there were few prominent activists. Cash-strapped nonprofits like the Council of American Islamic Relations, which do important legal and civic work, were desperately begging for funding from glassy-eyed, middle-aged Muslims who couldn’t see the value of having lawyers and politicians defending American-Muslim affairs.

This new Congress will have the first Muslim woman in hijab and a record number of Muslims serving. Muslims turned out in record-shattering numbers during the 2018 election. Linda Sarsour, the outspoken Palestinian advocate and co-chair of the Women’s March; Dalia Mogahed, the Egyptian director of the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding; and Tawakkol Karman, the Nobel Peace Prize-winning Yemeni journalist and human rights activist, have all become common household names among those with a finger on global activism’s pulse.

These steps in the right direction, though important, are just that: steps. There’s still work to be done in involving Muslims at every level of society. We need more Muslims on school boards, as journalists, as researchers, as activists, as local politicians, and most importantly, as engaged American citizens. As our younger generation emerges into adulthood during this tense and sensationalized climate, it’s up to the older generation of Muslims to show us how to be active members of this society while also being champions of our faith, which is something that people like Hadeel are already doing a marvelous job of.

The apathy was dire until Donald Trump got elected. His anti-Muslim rhetoric and Muslim ban spurred Muslims into action, and not just in the social justice sphere.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY

The apathy was dire until Donald Trump got elected. His anti-Muslim rhetoric and Muslim ban spurred Muslims into action, and not just in the social justice sphere.

YOUNG ADULTS

Data from Pew Research Center

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Makeup</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protestants</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholics</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mormons</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know/declined</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RELIGIOUS MAKEUP OF THE 115TH CONGRESS
REMAINING INCLUSIVE IN THE FIGHT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

by Maya Green, 11th grade student in Charleston, SC

PHOTOGRAPHY Ryan Johnson

Charleston, South Carolina is a study in contradictions. The city made headlines in the wake of the tragic Emanuel AME shooting for its demonstration of unity and forgiveness, yet that very same shooting made clear that the city is still rooted in its dark past of systematic oppression. The pungent odor of the paper factory that sits on the edge of North Charleston is in sharp contrast to the sweet smell of seagrass and salt on the more affluent coast. And the city's history, painted by its cobbled streets and iron-wrought balconies, is so central to the community's identity that it feels as if it will exist forever, and yet Downtown Charleston disappears beneath floods every time it rains.

On a national scale, climate change is still unfortunately regarded as a political issue to be believed or disbeliefed. In Charleston, however, a city dependent on its coastal tourism, it has become increasingly difficult to deny a matter of scientific fact. While South Carolina is nowhere near shedding its notorious reputation as a very conservative state, its coast has shifted considerably to the left when it comes to the care of our ocean.

In the most recent midterms, Joe Cunningham took the country by surprise when he was able to flip the state's 1st congressional district from
The environmental advocacy in Charleston has been politically divisive, as evidenced by the Walter Scott shooting. It is important going forward to make sure that any environmental advocacy defies these trends and is socially inclusive. A recent study shows that, across the country, while low-income people and people of color report high levels of concern regarding environmental issues, most people, those groups included, associate the term “environmentalist” with the white, affluent, and well-educated.

Perhaps this phenomenon occurs because it is not widely acknowledged that marginalized communities bear the brunt of environmental crises: “most of America’s “Superfund” sites — areas that are badly polluted and have been poisoned by careless industrial enterprise — are located adjacent to black communities.”

Even with the recent conversations focused on offshore drilling, it’s rarely been publicly discussed that any potential pollution that would result would first affect the historic Gullah-Geechee Corridor, a culturally rich people group located on the Sea Islands and descended from former slaves. An example: in November 2018, Charleston joined a long list of coastal South Carolina communities implementing a gradual ban of single-use plastic and foam products, including plastic grocery bags. While this move is much needed in reducing maritime pollution and garnered enormous community support, it can only achieve success if the city ensures that affordable alternatives are accessible to the people who need them.

John Tecklenburg, mayor of Charleston, addressed this concern in a comment to Charleston City Paper: “We reached out to grocery stores, talked to a number of you, included that every store would have to provide a free bag of some kind to customers. A lot of thought has gone into this.”

Frequently pummeled by the hurricanes that assault the Carolina coast and situated on the very edge of a rising sea level, Charleston is primed to be one of the first cities to face the environmental issues anticipated for the world in the coming decades. As this occurs, however, the city cannot forget that its natural and social environments do not exist separately from one another. One affects the other, and time will only tell whether the city will or will not make changes to accommodate the effects.

While the non-discriminatory clause seems perfect on paper, what does it really mean for minority students at schools? What does it mean for minority students at small private institutions?

Like many colleges and universities, Groton School adheres to a non-discriminatory policy that “does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin, sex, religion, disability, gender identity, or sexual orientation, or any other status protected by applicable law” (Groton School). However, this relates to housing that is not made clear in the handbook, which does not address housing placement on campus.

While the non-discrimination clause protects minority students at schools, what does it really mean for minority students at small private institutions?
Since the senior housing process is so different, it is disregarded for the purposes of this article.

I spoke with the Associate Dean of Students, Libby Petroskey about dorm placement for 10th and 11th graders. According to Ms. Petroskey, the dorm placement process is very subjective. There are 18 dorms on campus—9 girls, 9 boys. 3 lower school (8th and 9th) and 6 upper school (10th-12th). “To be honest,” says Ms. Petroskey, “it’s upper school with fewer restrictions on free time. 11th and 12th graders have the luxury of being out until 10 pm check in.”

I spoke to two 10th graders, Angela Wei and Edwina Polyvych about their experience in their predominantly white dorm. The girls are two of four girls of color out of a dorm of 28. They both spoke about feeling like the other in their dorm, Angela said, “At first it was like, I’ll try. I don’t want to go into my roommate] and talk with her for hours.” Angela agreed, “They don’t say hi to me.” The only prefect whom the girls both enthusiastically said they could go to is another one of the few girls of color in the dorm, a mixed Indian and White senior, who despite being neither black nor Korean “would understand,” according to Edwina.

While the girls have had to make the most of their year, and both said things that they also did not receive the “heads up” that Ms. Petroskey said she grants students who are unfortunately separated from their friend group. In fact, after Edwina’s adjustment was judged subpar, her advisor stepped in and orchestrated a conversation with Edwina and her white dorm head. According to Edwina, the conversation showed that her dorm head cared about her well-being in the dorm more than her prefects do, but it didn’t really change anything.

This story prompts the question: how well are the 18 dorm heads prepared to deal with issues relating to diversity and inclusion? The answer: not very. All new dorm heads undergo orientation at the start of the school year, but the orientation is mainly logistical. Veteran dorm heads often participate in the orientation, sharing stories and methods in their respective dorms. Nowhere in these conversations is time specifically carved out for diversity and inclusion work, however. The faculty as a whole do have some diversity training (the last notable presentation being on transgender students, according to Ms. Petroskey), but there is no uniform training that all faculty have to go through every year.

At one point in the interview Ms. Petroskey said, “That’s always the question, isn’t it? Do I keep friend groups together or do I prioritize diversity?” If faculty are not trained in diversity work, and housing placement puts more emphasis on keeping friend groups together than ensuring cultural and racial diversity, then of course there will be mishaps like Angela’s and Edwina’s. And it’s also safe to say that the overlooked feeling that both girls spoke to is entirely implicit. It is clear that the housing problem at Groton is unintentional, but more care should be taken in the future to make sure that oversights like these do not happen in the future. This means having more faculty of color overseeing dorm placement. It means, unfortunately for the Deans, ruffling more students’ feathers. However, more importantly, it means promoting the emotional and social well-being of minority students.

Why is this important?—for all the people who question why prep schools across New England have “black people clubs.” Because white, wealthy, straight, New Englanders do not need support navigating “white culture” at old boys’ schools. Because such “black people clubs” or dorms with a majority students of color are exclusive, purposefully and necessarily so. Administrations need to consider further when “discrimination” can be not only extremely beneficial but also necessary to support students of color.
A t 165 feet tall, the massive, ornately designed bell tower looms over students as they enter Topeka High School each morning. Topeka High is an inner-city school located just blocks away from the Kansas State Capitol building. Students rarely fit stereotypes at Topeka High, as Topeka High is not a typical secondary education institution.

There is something to be gained at Topeka High not many other schools provide. It is not the courses offered, the graduation rate, the number of college-bound students, or even the architectural uniqueness of the building. What makes the Topeka High experience special for many students is the diversity of the student body. At Topeka High, students come from all walks of life. According to the Kansas Department of Education (KSDE), nearly 1,900 students attend Topeka High School. In the same report from 2017, KSDE reported 60 percent of Topeka High students as racial minorities and 65 percent of students as economically disadvantaged.

In one class period at Topeka High, it is possible for a student whose family is struggling daily to make ends meet to sit on one side of you, while a member of one of the wealthiest families in Topeka sits on the other.

As racial and economic divides continue to mount in the country, students at Topeka High reflect on the importance of going to a school with a diverse student body.

“It is very important to have a diverse student body because it helps to create a better sense of togetherness,” said Jiana Higgins, a Topeka High senior. “It helps educate each other and helps us to be more understanding. If not to help rid our generation of division, then it will help future generations.”

Kainalu Rader, senior, similarly stated the greatest advantage of attending Topeka High is working with people from different backgrounds. “The biggest advantage is understanding you’re not the only person in this world, that there are other people in the world with different beliefs. This prepares you for the future of working with people from different backgrounds than yours,” said Rader. “Not only does this prepare you for the future, but it makes you a better person. At Topeka High, kids are a lot more knowledgeable about the real world, due to the fact we are so culturally diverse.”

Kirsten Cigler has been teaching English at Topeka High for 23 years. Cigler says understanding others is part of Topeka High’s tradition. “There’s a long tradition here of listening to people’s stories, trying to appreciate people who are different from you.”

If someone has never stepped foot inside of Topeka High, they would never be able to truly understand the atmosphere. At Topeka High, students take the time to understand each other. They take the time to have real conversations with their peers who might be completely different from them. While this may sound all too perfect to an outsider, it is true. There are Topeka High students who face real-world struggles—homelessness, poverty, and economic disadvantage. Some kids are relied upon to take care of younger siblings. Some kids are in gangs. Some kids are in the foster care system. On the flip side, there are students who are scoring high on standardized tests, doing work from within the Topeka community, and are getting into some of the best universities in the country—none of those things being mutually exclusive.

“Topeka High is really odd. You know, when I first came here, the governor’s kids went to school here and then you have the kids who are working three jobs because their families need it,” said Cigler. “I think part of it is that there’s this location that’s in the inner-city that is going to create diversity no matter what, but there’s also a long tradition of a lot of electives, great arts, great music, great debate, great forensics, that bring people interested in those things here as transfer students.”

Cigler said parents have told her in the past they want their kid to “see the real world.” Cigler said, “parents see the value in exposing their kids to lots of different kinds of people.”

Going to Topeka High means learning from and about others. It means taking the time to consider other people’s circumstances and experiences.

As an example, Cigler described a situation in which a student might smell bad to others.
“It’s really easy if you have a pretty good life to think ‘Well, why don’t they just take a shower,’ when in reality, maybe they don’t have hot water at their house,” said Cigler. “Maybe they’re at the homeless shelter. Maybe they don’t have a washer and dryer. So what you assume the answer is, and what the answer might really be are different.”

Cigler explained that teachers need to point out to students examples of circumstances that could be the cause of problems. She also stated, “what’s normal here, is not normal other places.”

While every student who attends Topeka High is uniquely different, we all understand we share our learning spaces and we respect each other because we are different.

you assume the answer is, and what the answer might really be are different.”

Cigler explained that teachers need to point out to students examples of circumstances that could be the cause of problems. She also stated, “what’s normal here, is not normal other places.”

At Topeka High, students are surrounded by people who do not look like them, who do not share the same beliefs as them, and who have different interests. There is an ethereal beauty about the mixture of people at Topeka High.

At the end of the day, we all understand there are parts of us we share and parts of others which are shared with us. Not only do Topeka High students have the opportunity to engage with students of different backgrounds and walks of life, but students have the opportunity to become politically engaged, as Topeka High is located only a few blocks away from Kansas’ State Capitol building.

After the presidential election in 2016, students were feeling upset with the outcome of the election. There was a group of students planning a walkout in protest of the elected administration, as they felt president Trump’s election was a green light for racist attitudes and remarks. Students planned on walking out of class to protest racial discrimination. When school administration got word of what students had planned, they intervened. This upset some students. However, instead of shutting the walkout down completely, the administration proposed a “unity walk,” in which students of all different political beliefs would come together to walk to the Capitol building to show the community “Topeka High is unified.”

After the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, approximately 1,000 Topeka High students took part in the national walkout on March 14. Due to the school’s close proximity to the Kansas Capitol building, Topeka High students once again marched to the Capitol building, this time in protest of gun violence and in support of the Parkland victims, survivors, and their families.

Topeka High students are diverse, understanding, and politically engaged. Taking the time to listen to others’ experiences, cultures, and outlooks can transform us in the most beautiful ways.

Created by students, for students.

StuVoice.org/bill-of-rights

FREE EXPRESSION

INCOMPREHENSIVE MEANS UNPREPARED

A cross the country, students of all types go through one common experience: puberty. Yet the way students are taught to respond to puberty and an accompanying interest in sexuality varies wildly based on location. In their quest to learn about their changing bodies and desires, teenagers are derailed by a lack of sexual education or an insufficiently inclusive sex ed experience or sex ed that offers no access to the physical resources necessary for responsible sexual decision-making. This article follows three different stories about three different teenagers’ experiences with sex ed. It is our hope that these narratives will make it clear just how integral comprehensive sex ed is to students’ mental and physical wellbeing. The ABCs of Abstinence (Sadie, KY)

“IT’s okay to talk about sex. It’s okay to think about sex. It’s okay to have feelings about sex. And it’s GOOD to postpone sex.” That song was the entirety of my brother’s middle school sex education. I received even less guidance, my health teacher deciding it was more important for us to create presentations about psoriasis and celiac disease than to learn about the reproductive organs we all had. This coming from a school where there was always at least one pregnant student come eighth-grade graduation — obviously, the catchy melody wasn’t working.

It should come as no surprise that in a southern, conservative state like Kentucky, I got practically no sex education. But the fact that I have never once heard menstruation mentioned by a teacher somehow never ceases to amaze me.

To be fair, part of the problem was with my health education in general. Although I’m not sure it would have been any better in a brick-and-mor-
While claiming to be a safe space for LGBTQ+ youth, this teacher denied the education necessary to establish equity in STD and HIV/AIDS prevention.

Individual schools in Kentucky still have mostly free rein to develop their own sex ed curriculum, so long as they include abstinence education. But facing pressure from higher-ups, parents, or their own personal biases, it is unclear whether administrators will listen to the increasingly desperate pleas of students to present students with information that will promote the development of positive attitudes towards sexual orientation, adolescent growth, gender expression, etc.; to promote sexuality as normal for human behavior; to give students comprehensive, inclusive and unbiased sexual health and STD and HIV/AIDS prevention instruction; and to promote healthy sexual behaviors using the tools and guidance given.

Studies prove that California’s steps toward initiating change in sexual education conversations among young people are working. Nationally, California is 34th in teen birth rates and over half of all high school students who have had sex used a condom in their last sexual encounter. Though these conversations regarding sex freaked me out at the time, I’m proud that I got the opportunity to discuss birth control, consent and my body before I realized the implications of the curriculum that I was forced to learn. A majority of high school students who live outside of California don’t have the same privileges that I do; some of these people probably need access to the sex ed curriculum much more than I do.

The picture painted of California’s sexual education policy isn’t as beautiful as it may look; there is still a myriad of issues with the curriculum because it is state-wide including lack of LGBTQ+ inclusivity pertaining to birth control, the brevity of the curriculum itself and less student-centered approach to teaching sexual education.

During health class, my teacher skimmed through the use of contraceptives for queer people, namely female condoms, most likely because she didn’t think it applied to most of the students in the classroom. While this may seem like a singular incident, refusing to teach LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum could very well happen throughout California. Jenni Chou, a reproductive justice and gender equity attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union Foundation of Northern California, laid out a legal flaw in the accountability health teachers have to teach the newly instituted curriculum standards.

“Our sense is a majority of districts are already complying with the law or are on their way to complying with the law,” said Chou. “Unfortunately, there is no mandated reporting requirement associated with the California Healthy Youth Act. As far as I know, no agency is sort of tracking that granularly.” Additionally, the sexual education unit lasted less than a month, and out of 6 months designated to teach health to freshmen class, it seems nearly impossible to teach the functions of both reproductive systems, birth control, STDs, HIV/AIDS, sexual
orientation and identity and so much more within the span of 14+ days. Since California ensures that instruction for medically accurate, objective non-abstinence only education is required through the Sexual Health Education Accountability Act, the education students receive is all talk from teachers and instructors, which causes a lack of student engagement in conversations meant to benefit them. For the most part, I noticed this in my own classroom when students had little to say in discussions of STD and HIV/AIDS prevention.

**The Contraception Conundrum (Lillian, KS)**

As we sat on the floor of my school’s gymnasium, our teacher flashed a picture of someone with gonorrhea onto the projector screen. Half of the kids in the class responded with “ew” and “gross,” while the other half turned away to avoid looking at the image again. Our gym teacher told us there were two ways to avoid sexually transmitted diseases. The first way, she explained, was to use every form of protection possible. The second way was to avoid having sex altogether.

Two months later, the girl in my P.E. class whose locker was next to mine found out she was pregnant. After two months of condoms and birth control pills, she never had any form of protection at all. The second way was to avoid looking at the image and “gross,” while the other half turned away to avoid looking at the image again. Our gym teacher told us there were two ways to avoid sexually transmitted diseases. The first way, she explained, was to use every form of protection possible. The second way was to avoid having sex altogether.

While my school educated us on the necessity of using birth control and protection, it wasn’t enough. It doesn’t matter how much kids are educated about using birth control, protection, and emergency contraception if they don’t have easy access to items such as condoms and birth control pills.

According to a survey from 2017 by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), 40% of teenagers have had some sort of sexual intercourse. Of the 40% of students who have been having sex, 30% reported they had done so within the three months prior to the survey. Out of 30% of those who reported having sex in the prior three months, 46% did not use a condom the last time they had sex and 14% did not use any form of birth control.

In 2007, the Topeka AIDS Project, now known as Positive Connections, donated about 100 condoms a month to Topeka High. The condoms were placed in a wicker basket in the nurse’s office. Information about free AIDS testing and how to use the contraceptives were also provided.

After two months of condoms and information about AIDS being provided, the school district pulled the plug after a reporter from the local newspaper wrote a story about it. Both Topeka High and the district received backlash from unhappy parents, especially parents who were part of the booster club. The superintendent claimed the Topeka High principal was unaware condoms and information were available to students. In addition, the superintendent said it was something that needed to be dealt with between children and parents. He also stated it was something that needed to be discussed with the school board. Nothing was ever implemented after that ordeal.

The lack of access to in-depth sexual education and contraception is an issue which stems further than just my school district—it impacts students from all across the state of Kansas.

“While it may have been better than some, I think that my sex education at Topeka High had some major issues,” said Bannon Beall, a recent Topeka High graduate. “First, we had no education about consent or sexual assault. That is incredibly dangerous for obvious reasons and, I would argue, even more important than some aspects of sex education that we covered in detail. Second, we had no sex education in regards to LGBT relationships. That is horrifyingly ignorant, exclusive and dangerous.”

Beall also stated that she thinks it is more important teenagers “practice safe, consent-based sex” than just remaining abstinent. In addition, she said she absolutely believes condoms should be provided in schools and that even though providing condoms will not solve every problem, “it would be a step in the right direction.”

**Stress for Every Student: Competition in Academics at Adlai E. Stevenson High School**

School’s work in protecting mental health and a positive academic climate stops where the student’s responsibility starts.

by Mary Polupon, 12th grade student from Buffalo Grove, IL

I felt my chest constrict around my heart, a regular vise of anxiety. I wrote in “AP Calculus AB” on my schedule request form as my friends talked about how crazy hard taking BC was going to be next year. I had only taken Pre-Calculus Honors during my sophomore year, and I too was on the math track to take AP Calculus BC. But I’d gotten a C first semester in the affectionately nicknamed “PCH” (you ever just bubble in the Scantron on a final exam at pseu-

do-random, hope for the best, and still get an F?) and there was no way I could take even a B in a class my junior year. It was fine to drop to AP Calculus AB. It was right for my mental health, and I could get an A. But I couldn’t shake the feeling that those As — and my learning overall in what was considered an “easier” math class for people who “didn’t care” — would be worth less than that of my friends.

Adlai E. Stevenson High School was ranked the best public high school in the nation by Niche.com in 2017. Local property tax inflows mean Stevenson boasts an Olympic-size swimming pool, two coffee shops, and over a hundred and twenty clubs on a two-building campus of a little under 4,500 students. Endless opportunities are the norm at Stevenson, especially in an academic context. According to the College Board’s 2017-18 Student Achievement Report, nearly half of the student body took at least one AP Exam last spring, with an average score of 4 on a 1-5 scale out of a total 5,606 exams. Academics are the foundation...
Academics at Stevenson were about self-comparison, competition, and recognition by others.

“academic happiness […] comes from challenge” and that these classes “sati-
ate [his] urge to learn.” Both Aditi and Alex noted that they would find them-
selves “bored” in a regular level class. For both of them, the increased stress of a more rigorous class-load is a price they’re willing to pay for the deeper learning every school ought to provide under the Student Bill of Rights. Many Stevenson students accept that cost; I myself have taken 13 AP classes by the time I graduated in May. Yet both sophomores let on that on some level, academics at Stevenson were about self-comparison, competi-
tion, and recognition by others. When asked to assess Stevenson’s academic climate overall, Alex rated it as negative despite describing his own progress as

for Every Student. Through Alex and Aditi’s eyes, success appears to be a
limited resource rather than a public good. If academics lend themselves to competition, is Success for Every student really possible?

Senior Josh Ezrol implies that it is. He characterized Stevenson’s academic climate as more positive than nega-
tive, telling me that we tend to “over-
think the negative aspects.” He’s taken a few less AP and honors classes than his peers, dropping from Pre-Calculus Honors to Accelerated and exploring normally paced electives like Constitu-
tional Law. He echoed Alex and Aditi’s thoughts on being “bored out of [his]
mind” in some College Prep classes, but he felt that the academic experi-
ence in a class was very course-spe-
cific and that it was the task of the teacher to engage a student, not the
rigor of the class. Class counterpart Dora Guz is also an AP heavy student outside of her dance electives, and she felt that positivity in Stevenson’s academic setting was intrinsic. She managed the rigor of her classes by reenergizing with her dance commu-
nity and “3-dimensional” groups of friends that didn’t spend all of their time hashing out their grades that she could take back to her academics. For her, reducing competitiveness in her classes was about the people, not the
school.

The diversity of student experiences in Stevenson’s world of academia is even more interesting considering the focus on maintaining the positive, vibrant aspects of student life. Outside of fully staffed Student Support Teams of counselors, social workers and school psychologists available to students, The Freshman Mentor Program or FMP is a big one. For half of their lunch period, freshmen spend two semesters developing bonds with the other students in their advisory class. For half of their lunch period, freshmen spend two semesters developing bonds with the other students in their advisory class. From simple social-emotional learning activities like name games to a Signs of Suicide program to counselor talks on schedul-
ing and GPA waivers make FMP an inte-
gral part of the transitioning process to high school. As a mentor myself, I feel that more and more it may be an imper-
ative of the FMP program to combat or reframe the way kids think about academics and how they compare to one another. Alex, Aditi, Josh and Dora all noted that participating in FMP their freshman year may have helped them adjust socially or represented a brain break from their day, but didn’t really contribute to learning how to cope with stress and thrive academically in high

school.

Outside of the work of faculty, clubs like OneStevenson and Peer Help-
ers are meant to help the student body feel unified and de-stressed. Despite Peer Helpers hosting a Kind-
ness Week with laminated cards, they can’t seem to make a dent on the over-
whelming stress students feel being in a rigorous academic environment. The College Career Center hosts a hot chocolate station during first

For more about positive school culture and mental health: 

PODCAST

Sleep V. School: The Debate Over Zero Hour

StuVoice.org/podcasts

upon which Adlai’s kingdom rests. Despite Stevenson’s best efforts, though, students’ minds tend to learning often undermine the school’s attempts at sustaining a positive school climate.

Take the experiences of driven, active sophomores Alex Zhou and Aditi Singh. They’ve had a year to acclimate to the Stevenson lifestyle, and they’ve chosen the motivated track of an AP class. Both of them have found Stevenson’s academic climate challenging, and recognition by others. When asked to assess Stevenson’s academic climate overall, Alex rated it as negative despite describing his own progress as
SMALL BUT MIGHTY
How a Local Organization Empowers The Hearts And Minds of Broward County Students

It’s not every day that you see floods of tiny legs bustling about in black suits. But if you were at Everglades High School on that Thursday, you would’ve found yourself lost in a sea of colorful ties, tiny backpacks, and sheets of paper at every corner. On December 13th, 2018, the Broward County Debate Initiative held its second and largest Elementary After School Tournament, commonly referred to as the EAST. The EAST Tournament is a countywide debate competition, offering school students the opportunity to find their voices and learn the art of argumentation. For students, the months leading up to the tournament were filled with weekly training, engaging with coaches, and memorizing their pieces to perfection as well as developing key arguments. Although Speech and Debate is popular at the high school and collegiate levels, the Broward County Debate Initiative is making waves to expand this activity to middle and school students alike. The previously mentioned EAST Tournament alone hosted over 700 schools with nearly a thousand students who had not yet reached fifth grade. On the other hand, things weren’t always like this, as the Broward County Debate Initiative has come a long way.

The Broward County Debate Initiative is a public-private partnership between Broward Public Schools and local businesses. In order to maximize outreach and resources, the two work hand in hand to fund Speech and Debate elective courses for disadvantaged communities, sponsor and run local tournaments, financially support low-income kids to compete at national tournaments, and overwhelmingly, introduce young students to public speaking. According to the Florida based, Hollywood Gazette, “BCPS (Broward County Public Schools) has the largest Debate initiative in the nation—with approximately 12,000 participating students.” Through the Broward County Debate Initiative, hundreds of students have embraced their inner talents and have found a community of belonging.

Zac Jacobson, a competitor in Dramatic Interpretation from Wellington High School, shares that, “The Broward County Debate Initiative has changed my life because I’ve been able to have a platform where I can have a voice and opinion on controversial topics that I never thought I would have the opportunity to speak out against. The initiative has helped so many other kids find their voices and to find a spark in their mind to make a change.” Dramatic Interpretation is one of Broward County Debate Initiative’s most popular categories. In Dramatic Interpretation, students cut, memorize, and perform a 10-minute performance arguing a social, political, or cultural issue. While Dramatic Interpretation tends to cover darker topics, there is also Humorous Interpretation and Duo Interpretation, in which competitors work in pairs to perform either a humorous or dramatic piece. Daniel Bishop, a student who competes in a multitude of interpretation events and hails from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, has found that even in the wake of tragic events such as the Parkland School Shooting, the Broward County Debate Initiative has “allowed him to use his voice in a way no other activity can”.

It’s clear that the Initiative offers a gateway to the community for both private and public school kids. Ella Marshall, a student from NSU University School (a private institution) who competes in Extemporaneous Speaking (Exttemp) and Original Oratory, admits that initially, “[she] was kind of apathetic about politics before speech and debate, and extemp forced me to be aware of it. [The Broward County Debate Initiative] has also made me a better public speaker, plus I have made a lot of really good friends through speech.” Often times, teenagers lack a sense of community and belonging, which in turn allows us to feel isolated and turn towards harmful outlets to numb the emptiness. The Broward County Debate Initiative offers students a sense of purpose, pride, and friendship. The Brookings Institution writes how; “I know it’s unconventional and possibly counterintuitive, what with all the partisan shouting matches we see on cable TV or (if you can bear them) in congressional floor speeches. But those are not the skills taught by competitive debating in school, namely how to: research, think critically and do it on your feet; back up arguments with evidence (not fake news); work collaboratively with partners; speak persuasively in a civil fashion; and, perhaps most importantly, being able to argue both sides of most any issue or subject.” It is true, as our political society turns more polarized, the Initiative stands as a beacon of unity and hope.

That same Brookings report goes on to explain that, “One county in America, Broward County in Florida, recognized this to be the case in 2013, when it became the first and only county—so far—to require all high schools, middle schools, and even elementary schools (beginning with fourth grade), to offer speech and debate classes. After getting off to a slow start, this “Broward Initiative” is now thriving, with over 12,000 students currently participating. The county proudly touts how its debate initiative is improving educational performance of its student-participants, and survivors from the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting debated competitively.

The debate initiative is improving educational performance of its student-participants, and survivors from the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting debated competitively.
**SEXUAL HARASSMENT CULTURE IN CLARK COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT SCHOOLS**

The fifth largest school district in the nation has an ongoing problem of sexual harassment.

*by Salomee Levy, 11th grade student in Henderson, NV*

Know someone that has been bullied? Tell an adult today! They will listen to you. As the SafeVoice posters were distributed throughout the Clark County School District campus, students felt like they were progressively safer. However, that feeling quickly dissipated when an eighth-grade student filed an incident for sexual harassment on December 7, 2018. She faced online sexual harassment that occurred on school campus based off a rumor that she had sex with another student that had a crush on her. “I went to the dean and she told me to ‘calmly’ deny all these false claims, I told him I did and he did nothing to the identified perpetrator,” the eighth-grader, kept anonymous, reported. When it comes to anti-bullying campaigns and school safety programs, the administration does all they can to make their school look good, however, are the students really safe? What is being done about sexual harassment on school campuses? For over a year in the fifth largest school district in the nation, there has been an ongoing issue of sexual harassment culture on school campuses. The administration knows when there is an incident but does nothing about it.

Governor Sandoval announced the week of October 3–7 to be the Week of Respect for all CCSD schools. “Students need to work as hard as they can to make their environment a safe and bully-free.” Even though there have been several campaigns like “Stomp Out Bullying” and “Anti-Bullying Awareness Day” on CCSD campus, the issue of sexual harassment has not been handled. Administrators are still not charging perpetrators for the acts they commit. Why do these campaigns even happen in the first place? The main reason is to make Las Vegas school districts look good. In this past school year, there have been 14,000 sexual harassment cases that have been reported on CCSD campuses, unfortunately. When schools host these campaigns and assemblies, it is seldom that they will actually do something. In fact, the high reports of sexual harassment continue, as the administration does nothing about these cases throughout the different school campuses in the Clark County School District.

SafeVoice, a common program that all schools have been using since its debut a little bit over two years ago has been recognized by the Clark County School District Board of Education along with the Legislative Committee of Education. “SafeVoice is an amazing reporting system that uses anonymous tips to make K-12 students feel safer, whether it revolves around bullying, harassment, or suicide attempt.” The committee of education brought up these resources. But, are they really useful? The answer is quite simple. No, they do not combat the several incidents of sexual harassment. Julia Wildanez, a high school sophomore, explained her experience using SafeVoice. “I don’t feel safe at my school, after I have been groped by a random student, the admin said they were ‘too busy to handle my case’ so I turned to SafeVoice to help me. However, the weeks went by and the athlete who groped me faced no charges. The school does not care about us.” SafeVoice does not help the victims of harassment, “There was a significant decline in my student’s work ethic, the student received a D average and may not be able to graduate.” A teacher from Desert Pines observed a student’s behavioral change when they shared their incident revolving around sexual harassment. “There is a significant decline in my student’s work ethic, the student received a D average and may not be able to graduate.” The Clark County School District is considered one of the worst school districts in the nation with a graduation rate of 85%. Even though there was a graduation increase in 2018, the disregarded
sexual harassment cases can reduce this graduation rate. There may also be a change in behavior along with academic performance.

The CCSD reported a surge in violent behavior among students, where there was a 55% increase in criminal and violent behavior from past incidents. Students who were sexually harassed at a younger age are more likely to express violent behavior because of the lack of resources the school has to offer. There are no resources for the victims of sexual harassment, the students need someone they can talk to, a reliable safe space, and justice.

With the disregard of the sexual harassment reports on campus, schools can change by taking more initiative into the situation instead of depending on SafeVoice. Looking at the University of Nevada Las Vegas, Noelle Masangkay discusses the plethora of resources students receive when an incident revolving around sexual harassment occurs. “The University has several resources for victims. There are plenty of safe spaces in which you can confide to, but the Jean Nidetch Women’s Center is the biggest resource. When there is an incident that occurs, they send timely crime alerts to notify the entire school so others can stay vigilant.” The University informs the students with the recent incidents which have them cooperate with other students to keep the campus as safe as possible.

The President of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Marta Meana sent an email back in October in response to multiple harassment incidents. “The incidents on campus are deeply disturbing in that we simply cannot tolerate. This has to stop and everyone has to be a part of the solution. We are acting now.” The President’s email to over 20,000 students showed how the university responds to these situations immediately. In fact, when the perpetrator is not identified, they take the next step to simply, “Assert our values and let them know in uncertain terms that the conduct does not belong” along with listening to student reports of who the possible perpetrators may be. CCSD school officials need to learn from the University of Nevada Las Vegas, the university has a larger student body in which their policies and resources for victims of sexual harassment are much more effective.

The CCSD campus needs to implement better policies that have principals and the dean of students act when there is an incident of sexual harassment. In other words, teachers need to better communicate with what is going on to their students and principals needs to discipline perpetrators regardless of their background.

It can also be helpful to have actual adult allies that listen and take the situation seriously. Teachers need to receive adequate training to respond to these situations and find ways to help the victim of sexual harassment and advocate on behalf of the student to the administration about the incident. A teacher at Chaparral High School offers emotional support: “I am all ears, but when there is an incidence of sexual harassment, us teachers need to respond by not only listening and nodding, but my pushing the admin to charge the perpetrator.” The teacher not only gives the students hope but shows other teachers throughout the valley that this is something all teachers need to do. “Even though some may not be comfortable in handling incidents of sexual harassment, teachers should go through training or learn how they should handle the cases instead of brushing students off their sleeves.” It is a CCSD teacher’s job not only to teach for a student’s future future, but to ensure the safety and well-being of a CCSD student. When the administration is ignoring the recent sexual harassment incidents, teachers need to step up and bring up the situation and push for disciplinary measures on the perpetrator. The more adult allies students have on campus, the safer they may feel.


StuVoice.org/tagged

BY Ranen Miao, 12th grade student in Short Hills, NJ
Millburn High School is, by all quantifiable metrics, an outstanding institution. I have been educated by teachers with degrees from Princeton University, the London School of Economics, the University of Pennsylvania, and Columbia University. We live in an affluent community that was called the wealthiest zip code in America in 2014 by Time Magazine. As a result, I’ve had the privilege of learning in classrooms with air conditioning, school-provided laptop carts, and Smartboards, luxuries that many students never experience throughout their years of high school.

We consistently send students to Harvard, Yale, The University of Chicago, and other top schools. We have astronomically high percentages of students that score fives on their AP exams, and an average of 1322 on the SAT, ranking second in the state of New Jersey in 2016. The question we’re uncomfortable asking ourselves is, at what cost?

It doesn’t take long to feel the pressure to take the most rigorous courses, pursue the most prestigious universities, and hold the highest GPA. The toxicity of competition seeps into every aspect of life, from dozens of students running for student council spots they only seek for their resumes to completing community service for stamps of approval from the administration. The feelings of loneliness, of inadequacy, and of imperfection are deep-seated and universal.

Millburn High School is not alone. Hundreds of high schools around the United States gain prestige and notoriety for the difficulty of courses, at the expense of students’ confidence and mental health. An article from The Atlantic in 2014 found that more and more teenagers are suffering from mental illness and anxiety disorders, in large part due to rising competition and expectations for students. In an effort to distance myself from academic stress and the focus on grades, I pursued my interests outside of the classroom by writing for our school paper and joining our debate team. Unfortunately, I’ve met plenty of kids who joined solely because they felt it would strengthen their resumes. “This will look great along with the community service I’m doing.” Pragmatism is increasingly overtaking passion, serving as the prime motivator for why students join clubs in the first place.

Emily, from a competitive high school in Texas, told me that since her freshman orientation, “We were told to be cognizant that education was less and less secure about their place within their schools and communities and are increasingly asked to compare ourselves with the accomplishments and grades of their peers, we stunt the ability of students to flourish at their fullest. Instead, we force them to compete in a race to nowhere, hurting their mental and physical health along the way.”

While students contemplate between attending prestigious schools, we too commonly forget that 30 percent of high school graduates enter into the workforce right away, often times due to economic constraints and familial obligations. Competitive schools like mine are also often filled with kids who don’t have the privilege and place in our society. It’s easy for students like us to forget our positions of privilege.

It’s easy for students like us to forget our positions of privilege.
THE ECONOMIC EFFECT ON
EDUCATION

BY
Ry Lei of Belmont, CA, Mary Polupan of Buffalo Grove, IL, and Juliette Reyes of Parkland, FL

I moved to Belmont in 2012, like many others did, amidst what might be called some sort of new wave, or a tech boom, if you will. At the time it was affordable (relatively), available, and it had nice schools.

Belmont lies in the center of the silicon valley, with as much distance between it and San Francisco as it does San Jose. So it’s safe to assume that it has the demographics to match the area around it.

But this was before we moved here. And we won’t get a more accurate sense of the breakdown until after 2020; a lot can change in 10 years. Still, though, Belmont is like many other cities and towns across the U.S. There are no white picket fences, but it gives you classic Americana sprawled out across the Belmont Hills, sprinkles of new touches here and there.

Belmont, like many other suburban towns, is balancing on the tightrope; to adapt and change to be included in the new wave of the modern city, or to sit back and miss out on potential economic prosperity? (This conundrum as it relates to Belmont and its neighboring cities, by the way, has been detailed extensively by my friend Sam Hosmer for Carlmont Journalism.)

As the demographics change, so do schools; public schools get money based on the property value of the area around them—a cyclical happening that is a whole other story—so when wealthier tech workers move into more areas of the U.S., they shape the world around them. This, of course, has its downsides. Gentrification, for example, has happened in cities like San Francisco, Oakland, and even Palo Alto because of the tech industry.

According to the US Census, San Mateo County, as of 2010, was 42.3 percent white, 25.4 percent Latino or Hispanic, 24.5 percent Asian, and the other 8-or-so percent composed of African Americans, Pacific Islanders, and those who were biracial. Belmont, on the other hand, was 67.6 percent white.

But this was before we moved here. And we won’t get a more accurate sense of the breakdown until after 2020; a lot can change in 10 years. Still, though, Belmont is like many other cities and towns across the U.S.

There are no white picket fences, but it gives you classic Americana sprawled out across the Belmont Hills, sprinkles of new touches here and there.

Belmont, like many other suburban towns, is balancing on the tightrope; to adapt and change to be included in the new wave of the modern city, or to sit back and miss out on potential economic prosperity? (This conundrum as it relates to Belmont and its neighboring cities, by the way, has been detailed extensively by my friend Sam Hosmer for Carlmont Journalism.)

As the demographics change, so do schools; public schools get money based on the property value of the area around them—a cyclical happening that is a whole other story—so when wealthier tech workers move into more areas of the U.S., they shape the world around them. This, of course, has its downsides. Gentrification, for example, has happened in cities like San Francisco, Oakland, and even Palo Alto because of the tech industry.

But while we’re here, let’s note that it’s impossible to separate race from class, just as it is impossible to erase the history of redlining, a systematic denial of services (like taking out a loan) to certain communities, largely consisting of minority groups. In the U.S., black folk suffer the most as a result of redlining—and economic disparity has only grown over the decades.

Now, let’s go back to classrooms. There’s much to be said about Carlmont’s history with racism, and while we’ll inevitably have to discuss race and class at their intersection, this is less about racism than it is simply about the way race influences class and shapes our classroom environments.

Those around you in AP or advanced classes may be those of the same skin tone, those of the same income bracket. Granted a few will fall outside the mean, many will be like you. In my case, many are people who moved here in the late 2000s to early 2010s because of tech jobs, while others are those who have had families here their whole life; while Belmont is merely a chapter in my life, it serves as the origin point for many.

The stereotypes of Asian kids taking more AP classes might, for some communities, be rooted in truth. In communities like Palo Alto, wealthier East Asian immigrant parents have laid down their roots for new generations, and while housing prices continue to get driven up by serious demand and scarcity in the area, public schools in Palo Alto are getting increasingly more funding.

It’s cyclical, but it happens. It’s not natural, but it’s implicit; we drift towards those who look like, talk like, act like us. We drift towards those who live lives similar to ours, and in doing so, we are gently separating our classrooms and courses by class and race. Though my experience may be more, to put it bluntly, colored, other communities see the effects of class and race very differently.

One such community would be the poignant example of the Chicago Public Schools in predominantly black areas of the city compared to suburban schools with more “diverse” populations. Similar to Belmont, schools like mine, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, nestled away in the Northwest suburbs of Chicagoland, reflect the demographic compositions of their county very well with a total minority enrollment of 37% in a district that is around 70% White, 20% Asian, 5% Hispanic, and 2% Black.

ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY

According to the US Census, San Mateo County, as of 2010, was 42.3 percent white, 25.4 percent Latino or Hispanic, 24.5 percent Asian, and the other 8-or-so percent composed of African Americans, Pacific Islanders, and those who were biracial. Belmont, on the other hand, was 67.6 percent white.
Here’s where it gets interesting; only 5% of the student body is considered “disadvantaged.” It’s when you examine the context of those statistics and the extremely low proportions of black Americans specifically that it becomes clear “diversity” prefers the rich when you’re operating in the good schools near Chicago, where redlining has kept black Americans out of quality districts and yet attracted Chinese and Indian immigrants out of quality districts and yet attracted Chinese and Indian immigrants. Thus arises the argument with a racially diverse or really any abandoned cities in favor of suburbs in the 1960s, where white Americans academically. The opinion argues that it may reduce the outrage. In fact, affirmative action policies something between discontent and disadvantaged have been met with link in which races are the most fiscally academically that it becomes clear “diversity” proportions of black Americans specifically “disadvantaged.”

5% of the student body is considered ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY grants to expose their children to the best opportunities capitalism has to offer. Attempts to remediate for this clear link in which races are the most fiscally disadvantaged have been met with something between discontent and outrage. In fact, affirmative action policies usually catch heat because public opinion argues that it may reduce the overall academic quality or competitiveness of a school, further cementing the baseless opinion that a black child by virtue of living in a poorer district does not deserve better education since they are not as developed academically.

This logic holds along the same lines of the white flight phenomenon back in the 1960s, where white Americans abandoned cities in favor of suburbia, often motivated by new considered to be bigoted concern that living with a racially diverse or really any significant black population would be detrimental for the futures of their children. Thus arises the argument that the socio needs to be taken out of socioeconomic admissions decisions and that only financial diversity and need should be considered in making admissions decisions. These kinds of policies at the university level have been extremely successful and even increased racial diversity as a result. Take Colorado-Boulder, for example. Admissions officers reviewed 478 applications, first under CU-Boulder’s race-based policy and then under the new class-based policy, with all racial identifiers removed. Officers ended up admitting 9 percent more underrepresented minority students under the race-blind policy than and 20 percent more students of very low socioeconomic status.

Yet interestingly enough, if you go back to the local level, the “Chicago Public Schools’ (CPS) competitive selectivity-admissions public high schools like Lane Tech and Walter Payton and the income-based acceptance features of said admissions demonstrate that racial diversity may actually be more beneficial for academics than focusing on financial diversity.

In 2011, CPS decided to switch to a financial need based admissions system over the previous racial quotas they had pursued in filling their select admissions schools. Chicago’s racial quotas set pre-2011 produced a class with an average composite score of 98.5 in which 25% of students received subsidized lunch. The new income-based admissions policy brought no more subsidized lunch students despite reducing the average composite score to 98.0. It’s an unsatisfying answer, but it appears that further research is required as to whether schools can equalize opportunity more by addressing racial diversity or boosting the admissions chances of those with other disadvantages. The close, intersectional relationship of these two factors also ought to be taken into consideration. Although finances often perpetuate racial inequalities in education, as weird as it may sound, they can also increase diversity like, for example, International Schools.

Private schools with international boarding programs cost extensive amounts of money, but on the flip side, provide American students interactions and a chance to build relationships with children hailing from unique backgrounds. They offer insight to an otherwise closed-off view of global cultural differences. Universities such as Brown University champion study abroad programs and international workshops, they help dispel fears related to studying in a foreign nation and how to handle with the various social and cultural barriers one might face.

Dr. Kendall Brostuen, Brown University’s Director of International Programs and the Associate Dean of College elaborates how: “The workshops evolved out of the essential areas of identity acknowledged in the diversity and inclusion report on the OIP website—race/ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion and disability.” Moreover, it’s not just colleges who are engaging in such affairs. From K to 12, American institutions are investing more and more into student exchange programs and annual boarding for foreign students. Take for example my school, American Heritage in Florida. American Heritage is known for having a plethora of international students who speak a variety of languages. In fact, some of my closest friends are apart of the International Program. Since my first year at Heritage, being in a diverse environment of various economic and ethnic backgrounds has certainly been enlightening. This is a national trend, because as Duke University argues; “As the number of international students on U.S. college campuses continues to grow, their American classmates who actively interact with them are not only learning about foreign cultures but also enhancing their own self-confidence, leadership, quantitative skills, and other abilities long after they graduate”.

Not every school has the resources required to kick-start an international exchange program and not every student has the extra funding required to host or stay away. According to the International Institute of Education, “the all-encompassing average cost of studying abroad in a foreign country hovers around $18,000 per semester or $36,000 per full academic year.” Although my family is fortunate enough to be able to squeeze $30k, they’re just barely making it and not every American family can cough up that kind of money. The US Census Bureau reports last year that, “The mean income per capita was $48,150” and “Real median household income was $61,372.” Imagine, a single workweek earning in urban American, struggling to provide for three kids with a salary of around $45,000 (assuming she has a stable, decent paying job). She works 9 to 9, six days a week and still has to juggle the responsibilities of a mother. Now picture this, one of her children, a 14-year-old boy named Michael, wants to go to the international school just down the street. The school is a private institution and has an annual tuition of $33,450. Doing the math, if our single mother chooses to send Michael to his dream school, it would only leave her with hardly 11,500 dollars for the rest of the year.

To put things in perspective, our single mother still has to pay rent, the bills, her annual taxes, and pay for her children’s education. What if her daughter Lucy gets into the Dance Travel Team? What if her other son, John, breaks his leg at soccer practice? What if the house gets damaged due to unexpected flooding? The list of unexpected costs goes on and on. Funny thing is, it only takes one of those what if’s to send the house of cards tumbling down. Welcome to the American Struggle of 2018.

International schools are a blessing to modern education, but not every believer gets the privilege nor luck of attending them. Consequently, we end up back where we started, how financial inequality creates racial inequality. I’d like to argue in this section that it doesn’t make racial inequality per se, but rather identity inequality, a form of tribal politics currently dividing our nation. Identity varies from person to person; you could identify with our hypothetical white single mom in Urban America or you could identify with a gay, wealthy middle class, African American. The concept of Identity is meant to give us a sense of common-ality, of belonging. However, as Amy Chua argues in her book, “Tribal Politics: Group Identities and The Fate of Nations”, the US is one of the largest melting pots of identity, yet it systematically fails to classify and treat various identities fairly.

During the 2016 Election, Trump attempted to identify with rural, low to middle income, white Americans who felt as though their identity was being undermined by the Democrats. However, he did this by targeting identities who were put on so-called “socio-political pedestals” – protected by recent progressivism. These identities ranged from Hispanic immigrants, non-binary LGBTQ+ members, Islamic youth, college-educated women, African American males, to name a few. The problem with both parties and how they approach it is that the only way for advancement is if you have attended in your school system is one simple word, Groupism. Merriam Webster Dictionary defines ‘groupism’ as, the tendency to think and act as members of a group, the tendency to conform to the cultural pattern of a group at the expense of individualism and cultural diversity.”

International Schools demand specific types of students in their attempts to be “diversive.” If you are an International Student, you need to be rich enough to pay the extra tuition, have superior grades in comparison to your peers, demonstrate a talent or impressive extracurriculars, and display “honorable character.” The impoverished student from Cambodia or the hard-working student from the political unstable DRC doesn’t make the list. But rather, elite students from Russia, China, Brazil, Spain, Saudi Arabia, and other developed economes get the golden ticket to study in

While the benefits of schools with International Students are high, they also link back to a pervasive problem in global society; socio-economic inequality.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

While the benefits of schools with International Students are high, they also link back to a pervasive problem in global society; socio-economic inequality.
the States. The Migration Policy Institute reports this year that the top 5 countries of origin for international students in the US were China, India, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Canada. China made up 32%, India made up 17%, South Korea made up 5%, and the rest were in the single digits under 5%. Shockingly enough, nowhere did Sub-Saharan Africa nor the Eastern European region make the leaderboard, regions known for stagnant development and most in need of international education opportunities.

As a result, when American students meet international kids, they get this idea that they all are smart, wealthy, and talented. American students never get to truly learn about the struggles of their peers in other nations, rather they get this idealized perspective that only perpetuates stereotypes and identity inequality abroad. Hence, as students, we don’t become global citizens but instead, apart of the problem.

Although this problem may seem to only affect international students, it hurts American students just as much, if not more. To apply for stay away programs and international schools, students must either be willing to pay, have an extraordinary talent or extra-curricular ability, or simply be willing to swallow the costs. The system of approval is not inclusive and sets very strict guidelines for students who identify with minority groups brought down by the US economy.

This doesn’t provide equal growth for America’s most disadvantaged children.

I am very thankful for my family’s financial situation as a middle-class Hispanic household, but I know that at school many of my friends have been reduced to being ‘products’ just to get a decent education. When I say ‘products’, I refer to being the most marketable, attractive model student. I and several other kids at American Heritage have been subjected to such a mindset at the expense of our emotional and mental health.

One of my best friends, who is an international student from China and will be referring to by her ‘international name’, is Ceila. Ceila loves American schools, junk food, books, cartoons, and culture. The other day, before our AP Comparative Government and Politics class, she lamented to me how upset she was over being deferred in one of her college applications. To add context, Celia has one of the highest GPAs and test scores in the entire school, averaging straight A’s in nearly all AP classes. Never have I seen someone so dedicated to their studies and learning experience before, but Ceila took her deferral to heart. To her, it meant she wasn’t good enough, that she was a failure as a ‘product’. I reassured Ceila by telling her it was only one college out of many and that she was bound to get it into a better one.

However, this story only goes to show the impact our system has on not young adults, but children. Sadly though, American education leaders and policymakers are still turning a blind eye to this issue. At American Heritage in order to stay, get benefits, and have our concerns heard; we have to prove our worth by succeeding. It’s a twisted cycle but in a market economy. It’s just the norm, right?

Whether or not you see the effects of your economic standing on your education as directly as others do, the truth of the matter is that your education is directly influenced by what you can afford; your ability to afford to live in a “good” community or a private school gives you access to immensely more than someone who can’t, and though pressure in academia poses an immense threat, that in itself is a privilege.

Your education is directly influenced by what you can afford.

Learn more about accessible and affordable education.
StuVoice.org/bill-of-rights

WHAT WRESTLING TEACHES US ABOUT GENDER DISCRIMINATION
by Charlotte Barron, 9th grade student in Sewanee, TN
O
one of the very first days of practice, we
practiced the “Table Top” drill. The bottom
person sits on their hands and knees, while
the top spins over them, chest to back.
One by one, however, the girls fall off
of their partners, winced faces and
clutched breasts. Our coaches apolo-
gize profusely, as they assure us the
intention was an ab workout, not tear-
ing pain. We all look at each other and
at the horrified looks on our coaches’
faces and laugh. My partner Illiana
shakes her head at me, smiling, “This
sport was not made for us.”
We scoured every supply closet in
the school for a singlet in women’s
sizes. There aren’t any. So instead, my
teammates and I, all four of us, stand
awkwardly before the locker room.
Mirror. The waistband hugs my hips so
tight that I can feel every bone through
the fabric. The neckline and sides are
cut so low that they hang closer to my
stomach than my chest. We laugh light-
ly, but it doesn’t matter. Girls who are
forced into a long line of teenage
boys that stretches around the gym.

THIS SPORT WAS NOT MADE FOR US.

Now at the first tournament of the
season, my hands shake as we await
hydration testing. A tall man with
dark hair and sunglasses on the inside and a yard-
stick in hand barks at us as we are
shoved into a long line of teenage
boys. He sticks a cup and sticks a thermometer into it. He
takes Illiana’s with the other hand. After
a few moments, he says, “Y’all must be
on the same diet or something.” I smile
with the same grated teeth. “We’re
actually not dieting this season.” He
blinks, and now the boys, the terrible
smell, the stall doors, and Illiana have
disappeared and it’s just me and his
damn baldness. “Bold choice.” As he
laughed my uniform felt tighter and
the lump in my throat swelled, “Let me
know how that works out!”

THIS SPORT WAS NOT MADE FOR US.

When people hear my teammates
and I discuss wrestling, their first
reaction is often if not always: “I could
never do it. It just seems so… intimate.” And
to their credit, it is. Not only is the sport
itself physical, but my teammates and I
know each other’s weight and pee color
to a T. But it has never been weird. The
next question, which is always whis-
pered, is “Do you all have to wres-
tle... the boys?” Of course, we do. Our
team has four girls, all of which are in
completely separate weight classes.
If we didn’t wrestle the boys, we would
rush and probably kill each other. But
despite the obviousness of my answer,
the gaping mouths and squinted eyes
echo the same judgment of the other
coaches at tournaments, sizing me
up more like meat than a competitor.

THIS SPORT WAS NOT MADE FOR US.

When people hear my teammates
and I discuss wrestling, their first
reaction is often if not always: “I could
never do it. It just seems so… intimate.” And
to their credit, it is. Not only is the sport
itself physical, but my teammates and I
know each other’s weight and pee color
to a T. But it has never been weird. The
next question, which is always whis-
pered, is “Do you all have to wres-
tle... the boys?” Of course, we do. Our
team has four girls, all of which are in
completely separate weight classes.
If we didn’t wrestle the boys, we would
rush and probably kill each other. But
despite the obviousness of my answer,
the gaping mouths and squinted eyes
echo the same judgment of the other
coaches at tournaments, sizing me
up more like meat than a competitor.

This sport is not made for us.

Despite the obviousness of my answer,
the gaping mouths and squinted eyes
echo the same judgment of the other
coaches at tournaments, sizing me
up more like meat than a competitor.

This sport is not made for us.

If we didn’t wrestle the boys, we would
rush and probably kill each other. But
despite the obviousness of my answer,
the gaping mouths and squinted eyes
echo the same judgment of the other
coaches at tournaments, sizing me
up more like meat than a competitor.
The walls of the small religious private school I went to seemed to be a perfect symbol of my childhood mindset — simple, colorful, and neat. Up until the 5th grade, I spent my days inside these walls. I found that I fit in. None of us questioned our identity. We didn’t think about it — it came naturally to us, something we never had to bring up or talk about. Never once did we have a discussion saying “What are we? Who are we?”

“Everybody else has to hyphenate.” — Toni Morrison

However, in middle school, I transferred to a small STEM school called Metro Early College High School, slightly bigger than my previous school, and quite diverse. This was when the question of my identity began to grow inside of me. And it wasn’t only me: kids around me, all from different backgrounds (and especially those from Muslim backgrounds), began to do the same. Too. Where did we fit?

We weren’t American enough for our peers — we weren’t ethnic enough for our family back home.

As a Pakistani-American I struggled to find where I fit in. Was I just an American? I am constantly trying to find the parameters that define these terms. These questions continued to lurk in the back of my mind throughout my school life.

Though our school never actively responded to any of the situations that came out of this, and many of us frequently labeled specific staff as racist or homophobic due to their actions or lack thereof. We often noticed that teachers would pick on those of color more often than those who were not — though it was whispered among the halls and ignored by many, inwardly, we all knew it. In fact, occurrences like these were not limited to our school — across the US, black students were expelled at three times the rate than white students.

“At first I was a stranger in the school, then I was labeled a terrorist.” — Malala Yousafzai

He was just completely let go. I was shocked.

Unfortunately, schooling in America has a history driven by intolerance. Nowadays, teachers and administrators often ignore uncomfortable topics such as racism. Moreover, students of color often are given limited access to higher level courses and in-school resources.

The way the school handled these situations passively increased resentment among students towards teachers. Furthermore, it created a culture where students stop reporting these kids of incidents, as they become aware that nothing would happen.

This dynamic was present throughout my experience in middle school and contributed to the growing sense of identity crisis within me and others around me.

I lived most of my life here. I was been born here. I went to school here. Yet, I was singled out. I was still a foreigner to some, a symbol of oppression to others. Did I belong in Pakistan, then? My question was seemingly answered.

I moved to Pakistan my freshman year of high school. I hoped to find some peace within myself, but instead, found an even deeper identity crisis. In Pakistan, where I went to school, two main ethnic groups existed — Pathans (Pashtuns) and Punjabis. Pathans are often looked down heavily by Punjabis for being uneducated; however, they are often praised for their lighter skin (a sad beauty standard arising from centuries of colonization).

As a Pathan, I was in this unusual circumstance that I found myself caught in. As I sat in class, people would turn to me and say, “Tum Pathan hai?” “Are you Pathan?”

Students and teachers would often make remarks like this, laughing, promoting unfair stereotypes of Pathans. I remember vividly when a girl turned to her friend and laughed saying, “All these Pathans—us Punjabis, we own them! They work for us.”

There are countless stories I’ve heard of teachers singling out Pathan students, asking them mocking questions. “Pashtun jokes” were common. These kinds of racial divisions seemed to exist above the school. The same

Though this club must have begun with good intentions, the execution and effort put into creating an opportunity for those of diverse racial backgrounds was lacking.

Incidents and situations like these are not isolated to Hilliard Davidson. Many schools do not know how to respond and correctly address problems of diversity and inclusion of all races. Students across America, especially those of immigrant parents, struggle to understand where they belong.

It is high time that institutions began to talk to students directly to gain insight into the issues they face and to understand that second and third generation immigrants, people of color, and those of any minority are struggling in between chasms of cultures. Institutions of learning need to acknowledge these facts instead of shying away from them. Students and teachers alike must be educated as education is the key to ridding of ignorance and prejudices.

“Every voice raised against racism chips away at its power. We can’t afford to stay silent.” — Reni Eddo-Lodge

Hopefully, one day, we can exist in a world where nobody is asked, “But where are you really from?”

Student Voice in your inbox.

StuVoice.org/subscribe
Dear Reader authored by Journalism Fellowship coordinators Christopher Maximos and Taylor Kahn-Perry