

VIEWPOINTS



Increased mobility during finals urged

W. **Suhail Ansari**
Viewpoints Editor

During the recent finals week, closed hallways proved to be the bane of many students' existence. Nevertheless, limiting mobility during finals does make sense, both in terms of potential disruption and accountability.

Finals are totally different from regular school days as students have the freedom to plan their arrivals and departures according to their schedule. As a result, students do not have specific room assignments or anyone to monitor their activities. To allow students to roam the halls at will would be chaotic.

However, students' needs might change over an 80-minute period, and under the current system, they may choose only one area to spend the duration of that time.

Consider this scenario: if, during my intense study of Spanish vocabulary or grammar in the Information Resource Center (IRC), I decide I want a bite to eat, I cannot go from the IRC to the cafeteria and back. I could begin the period elsewhere, but the cafeteria and student commons are too noisy for intensive study and do not allow access to Internet resources—thus, my dilemma.

Finals are an important time for students. Proper nutrition and a quiet environment in many instances can be the difference between a higher and a lower grade. Therefore, it is important to allow students to be at their best.

There is a solution to both accommodate students who wish to stay nourished and to study quietly or collaboratively. Currently, the cafeteria is a place to both eat and socialize, which makes sense. However, the student commons is also an area to both eat and socialize, a redundant waste of space during finals. Furthermore, the Literacy Center is closed during finals week.

All three of these spaces are within 75 yards of one another, isolated from classrooms in which finals are conducted. Here is my plan:

- the cafeteria would remain a center for socialization and sustenance;
- the student commons would be made into a quiet study area equipped with Netbooks for those students who need to do Internet research;
- the Literacy Center would be opened for those students who wish to do collaborative study that would be too noisy for the commons but which would require a space less raucous than the cafeteria;
- because of their isolation from classrooms, students would be allowed to move, with a pass, from space to space during the 80-minute periods; and
- the IRC would remain exclusively designed for students who need IRC services and who would be expected to remain there for the entire period.

This plan allows students access to a variety of options in a relatively limited area without bothering test takers. Security personnel could monitor the traffic, while Literacy Center personnel who, one supposes, must work during finals week, could oversee that resource.

I urge the administration to consider this change for second semester. It provides students with an opportunity to perform at their best while eliminating the possibility of disruption.

Gap year gives college-bound students welcomed respite



W. **Zoe Ljubic**
Editor in Chief

Until recently, I never questioned the four-year rat race known as the college selection process. I would take as many courses as I could, do as well as possible, get into a good school, go off to a university upon my graduation from high school, serve my four-year apprenticeship and get a job.

My perceptions about this plan of attack were changed after shadowing District 219's national college advisor Jerry Pope for this month's A Day in the Life feature. Through Pope, I learned about the value of a "gap year."

Recently, Pope traveled to Israel to participate in the MASA Study Trip where he was selected with 25 other candidates from around the world to attend this all-expense paid study trip to Israel for college counselors. He came back with a better view about gap year programs than ever.

The term gap year refers to taking a year out of studying, usually the time between high school graduation and first year college, to do something else. Gap year programs range in a variety of excursions to benefit the needs to individuals. Here at District 219, many students are participating in the Young Judaea Year Course, which includes academic study, volunteering, community living, travel and fun in Israel.

When Pope returned from his trip, he said he met students that were in this program and described them as "so mature and articulate with a greater sense of self-awareness." Although many students participate in the Jewish gap year programs, thousands are available for students to choose from. Another common District

219 program includes the rapidly growing Kivunim program which includes international travel opportunities beyond Israel.

Pope's insights caused me to reflect on my own non-traditional education, especially the travel experiences that I have undergone. I have traveled around the entire United States and many countries around the world. As a result, I have learned to accept other's differences and have become more aware of the diversity around me. Traveling extensively, along with my Croatian background, has allowed me to realize that such heterogeneity extends to all elements of life, creating an interesting community in which we live. I believe that individuals that gain the respect of other differences and experienced other cultures have a better sense of self-awareness. As described by Pope, gap year programs provide such lessons as well.

Pope said that the students he met in the gap year program looked as if they "knew what they wanted of themselves." By traveling to a foreign country and dedicating time to helping others while experiencing a totally new culture and environment, gap year students become independent and much more responsible, Pope added.

Furthermore, Pope noted, the travel and social experiences that students enrolled in gap year program endeavor exceed anything a textbook can teach a student. In addition to gaining respect for individuals of any race, religion or viewpoint, the independence fostered by a gap year can help one learn who (s)he is and discover the steps in how (s)he can become successful.

After being exposed to the gap year concept, I see clearly that students who take a semester or year off to travel the world, work or pursue volunteer work may well have an advantage over those who just begin college immediately after high school.

Although I still plan to attend college in the fall, a gap year is something that I would strongly advise juniors to pursue by contacting Pope. Moreover, gap years can be taken at any time.

While I never would have considered it two months ago, jumping off the college merry-go-round for awhile doesn't seem like a bad idea at all.

Letter to the Editor

To The Readers of *West Word*:

West Word is an award winning student-run newspaper that regularly publishes editorials expressing positions on controversial topics. Sometimes editorials criticize policies the administration has adopted; sometimes editorials address local, national, or international political issues. I read all of the pieces in *West Word* prior to their publication. In many cases I disagree with all or part of a student editorial. As principal, it would be wrong, and often illegal, for me to censor our student publication to the point of infringing our students' rights to free speech.

However, it has been pointed out that in a box on the editorial page, my name and that of Sanlida Cheng (Director of English and Reading) and that of Dr. Nanciann Gatta (District 219 Superintendent) are together listed with that of Mr. Conroy, the sponsor, and the paper's staff members. Readers inferred from this fact, that I and Dr. Gatta and Ms. Cheng and Mr. Conroy agree with the opinions expressed on the editorial page. This has never been suggested before, but I can understand such an inference being made.

Nonetheless, no such relationship exists. There is no implied administrative agreement with or support of the views expressed on the editorial page of *West Word*. It would be completely improper

for an administrator to be publicly supporting or condemning the editorial positions expressed in the student paper.

In order to rectify this misconception, the staff box on the editorial page and the editorial page itself is being redesigned to accurately reflect the relationship between the student paper and the administration. The disclaimer is being revised to make clear that the views expressed in the paper are not the views of the administration. Additionally, other formatting revisions will occur that make clear the demarcation between editorial and opinion pieces.

The administration's guideposts for its relationship with the student paper are only a few. First, the constitutional right to free speech does exist in schools (within certain proscribed limits laid out by the Supreme Court). Second, the student-run newspaper is an educational arena; a place where lessons are learned as the result of firm steps and missed steps. Third, therefore, administrative involvement should be minimal, if at all possible, so that the power vested in administration does not distort or restrict the opportunities identified immediately above. That involvement should be understood such that I, Dr. Gatta, Ms. Cheng and Mr. Conroy, in no way publicly endorse or condemn the views expressed in the *West Word*.

Principal Kaine Osburn

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West Word is a student-produced newspaper published monthly during the school year. Bylined columns reflect the views of the individual columnists, not necessarily the opinions of the West Word staff. The staff editorial reflects the consensus of the West Word editorial board. Neither columns nor editorials reflect the views of District 219 staff, administrators or board members. Replies to pieces from West Word are strongly encouraged as are letters to the editor reflecting the views of the school community. This correspondence may be delivered to West Word, located in room 3160. Letters also may be mailed to West Word, 5701 Oakton, Skokie, IL, 60077 or submitted to westword219@yahoo.com. Where noted, pictures courtesy of MCT Information Services are used with permission.

WestWord

Tabloid site establishes journalistic credibility



Hillary Lindwall
Managing Editor

In the 1997 film *Men in Black*, Agent Jay (Tommy Lee Jones) extols the virtues of supermarket tabloids to Agent Kay (Will Smith), calling them the most reliable news source on earth.

Those who scoff at such notions and who do not consider celebrity gossip hubs to be legitimate news sources reference periodicals such as *Star* magazine and the *National Enquirer* when discounting such “scandal sheets.”

For years, celebrity gossip networks have been persecuted for not having genuine information. The tabloids’ outrageous claims (outing allegedly gay celebrities, for example) have given news-seekers ample reason to believe that many such sources are not valid.

Then, there is the online site and television presence known as TMZ.

TMZ, has proven that its information is authentic and that the organization should be taken seriously.

Say what you will about their intrusive form of guerilla journalism, many of the stories recently reported by TMZ have

been completely reliable and were reported before any other news network.

TMZ’s first breakthrough story was released in 2006, when Mel Gibson was reported as having been arrested for a DUI and his subsequent anti-Semitic slurs. The event was reported by TMZ before anyone else, and it turned out to be a completely true story.

Another more recent reported event that was first reported by TMZ was the death of Michael Jackson. While other big-name news networks were merely reporting that Jackson had been admitted to a hospital, TMZ reported hours previous that Jackson had died. This report was also completely authentic.

Another example is the Tiger Woods saga, which has played out over the past couple months. TMZ was the first to report the truth about Tiger Woods’s car accident and continued to scoop the competition with revelations of Woods’ numerous affairs while other networks waited to find what TMZ knew.

“How do they get their stories first?” one might ask. Well, the answer is simple: hard-core, relentless reporting. In a world of get-it-done-yesterday deadlines and half-hearted reportage, TMZ has dug up the biggest and juiciest stories, checked sources to ensure legitimacy, and reported their news to the public first and without error.

Are their methods obnoxious? Yes. Are their stories lurid and sordid? Definitely. Are they accurate? They certainly are.

This reporter’s only concern is, however, that with its reputation established, TMZ’s zeal to break stories first, its reporters will become less zealous in their legwork.

Although TMZ’s somewhat sleazy ethos makes it seem like an unreliable celebrity gossip news network, the hub’s reliable, down-and-dirty reporting style has earned its the title of a legitimate news organ.

Homeroom swipe system arbitrary and misguided

Staff Editorial

As reported in the article “Administration to implement new policies” in the November issue of *West Word*, a second tardy swipe system was initiated at the outset of the second semester Jan. 25. Apparently designed to cut down on absenteeism and tardiness during homeroom, the program is unnecessary, its rationale is specious and its logistics have been poorly conceived and will be difficult to enforce.

A common scenario takes place at West almost every day at 10:31 a.m.

“Why do I even have to be here,” the student asks his/her homeroom teacher.

Instead of a logical explanation, what follows is any number of abstract responses.

“If this were at the start of school, nobody would ever show up.”

“When else can the entire school simultaneously stare at a colorful banner and chant that they are all under God?”

“How ever will those slips informing students that they need to participate in a club activity ever be handed out days after the activity has passed?”

Since homeroom teachers find themselves at a loss when explaining the concept of homeroom, why is it of such importance to come on time?

In an interview, Assistant Principal of Operations Ryan McTague said the administration wishes to establish an advocate for every student and establish contact with a teacher whom each student can get to know for four years and go to for help.

That is a noble rationale. However, the reality is that homeroom teachers are often so busy with their own class work, whether it be grading assignments or forming class schedules, that their primary functions are to deliver mail, turn on video announcements and take attendance.

Thus, it is not of dire necessity that students arrive on time (or at all) because there is no point to homeroom.

On the other hand, the homeroom period does have its benefits, just not what the administration articulates. Students take advantage of the passing period before homeroom to deprogram from stressful mornings, often packed with early bird classes and extracurricular activities.

It also provides students with perhaps the first opportunity since the beginning of school to visit the restroom and their lockers

While some faculty members may maintain that the restroom and locker can all be used during the five minute passing periods during the day, homeroom offers a practical break from the regimented scheduling of the school day. A defining feature of West is its vast physical plant, which includes long halls and crowded stairwells, compounded by an endless supply of students who refuse to walk at a normal pace. Therefore, getting from one’s class to one’s homeroom on time is often an unfair expectation, especially when one’s locker or the restroom is not on the way.

During homeroom, students have the ability to go to their lockers, actually open their assignment notebooks and plan out the day in their heads. They can utilize those precious minutes to grab the novel they need to bring to English class and the Spanish book they should drop off since they have a test. Students also may encounter several restrooms on the way to their homerooms, and going just to get a pass to walk back to where they just were is not a logical option.

Not only will this new system work to harass students, the tone it sets outweighs any benefit. Instead of promoting a few minutes of the day for hard-working students to escape from the drudgery of the school day, the administration apparently wishes to construct the entire school day around negative consequences, as if enough students are getting detentions (or perhaps just using the detention-dispensing machine once per day were not cost effective enough).

The status quo has been working fine for this *West Word* staff’s tenure, and the administration does not seem to comprehend the logic of “if it ain’t broke then don’t fix it.”

Not only did West administrators decide to carry out the plan, they did it with virtually no input from the student body. McTague said in the aforementioned interview that the administration would like to create a dialogue between the students and administration. Although his words seemed sincere, the failure of the administration to do this prior to planning the new system sets a bad tone. The only hint of the new program came when a *West Word* reporter had to solicit the West administration for new changes to school policies. Thus, school administration clearly does not wish to open dialogue with students about the fairness of policy that affects students directly.

Even if the program itself made sense, the logistics will be a nightmare for all involved. In the first few weeks of this program, students will most likely be tardy in the hundreds. Where will all those students go? Will they cram into one small classroom for lunchtime detention?

When presented with this eventuality, McTague said that in his years at West, he has never seen a detention room filled to capacity and that such an issue would be dealt with when the time comes. At press time, the policy had been in place only two days. Time will tell if McTague will need to make adjustments to his claim.

Historians may remember the last time such an illogical, counterintuitive policy that replaced a perfectly workable system was imposed upon students unilaterally: the district’s shift from a module system to periods in 2005. As anyone who has older siblings who attended West can attest, nothing about the period schedule is superior to that of the modular schedule, and some features (80-minute lab periods for example) are worse.

The decision to alter the ethos of homeroom is just as arbitrary and just as misguided. *West Word* urges school administrators to reconsider this ill-conceived policy change.

west opinions

Should the West administration implement a homeroom tardy swipe system?

Staff



Scott Baum

Yes, because I miss some of the kids in my homeroom, and I hope this brings them back. This will give everyone a chance to see the [video announcements] too.

Senior



Fiona Stephens

No, because that is ridiculous, and we need a more human system. An automatic detention [does not allow students] to plead their cases.

Junior



Melanie Albaum

No, because it is not really a class, and one might stay later to talk to a teacher [since the period before] is the only open slot some people have.

Sophomore



Andrew Matias

Yes, because [students] walk in late. It is not fair for the kids who do not socialize and get to homeroom early.

Freshman



Aria Caldwell

No, because homeroom is not an important time. Students just sit there.