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HARPER'S CHOICE MIDDLE SCHOOL

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National Junior Honor Society inducts first HCMS students



Nuriyah Minhas,
7th Grade
Reporter

This year, Harpers Choice became part of the National Junior Honor Society (NJHS). Students in 7th and 8th grade with a 3.5 grade point average (GPA) and above were invited to join the NJHS.

The students who were invited had to fill out an application that included their extracurricular, service, and leadership activities, as well as three teacher recommendations.

A formal Induction Ceremony was held in the cafeteria for the students who were accepted into NJHS on Thursday, January 24, 2019. There were fourteen 7th graders and twenty-nine 8th graders inducted into the NJHS.

There was a candle lighting ceremony that explained the 5 characteristics of NJHS:

1) Leadership: being a leader, having good problem-solving skills and promoting school activities. 2) Service: a voluntary act made by a student to benefit others or their community. 3) Character: being an honest, reliable and trustworthy student and have good morals. 4) Scholarship: maintaining at least a 3.5 GPA (mostly A's and B's). 5) Citizenship: understanding the basics of civic involvement and having a strong sense of freedom and justice.



After school on January 24th, parents and teachers gathered for a formal ceremony to recognize the 43 students inducted into the school's first chapter of the National Junior Honor Society.

At the ceremony, students also heard speeches by two National Honor Society (NHS) students from Wilde Lake High School. Afterwards, students were called onstage to receive a certificate, pencil, and sign the NJHS book. Parents and students also celebrated with cake.

Being a part of a program like NJHS can help prepare you for the National Honor Society

(NHS) in high school. It can also help students experience more service learning and lead to opportunities to gain scholarships while applying to colleges.

The National Junior Honor Society was founded in 1929 by Dr. Edward Ryneerson of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, eight years after it was founded for high schoolers. Today, it is estimated

that more than one million students participate in official Honor Society activities.

According to the NJHS website, there are NHS and NJHS chapters found in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, many U.S. territories, and Canada. Chapter membership not only recognizes students for their accomplishments, but challenges them to develop further through

active involvement in school activities and community service.

At our school, the NJHS sponsor is Tess Kania-Lloyd, ESOL teacher. There is also a Faculty Council of teachers, including math teacher Renee Suttner, social studies teachers Patricia Burnett and Amy Smith, and Spanish teacher Laura Cometa.

Kania-Lloyd explained, "We wanted to recognize students who go above and beyond in their academics everyday." She also credited the PTA for helping to bring NJHS to our school.

"Ever since I got here, we have been wanting to get NJHS at our school, so for six years," said Adam Eldridge, our principal. He also stated, "Before we could get National Junior Honor Society at our school, we had to get support from HCPSS."

Seventh grader Josephine Lewis said, "I'm so excited to be a part of NJHS and support our school! I think other students should join NJHS too, since it could help benefit their future."

You could gain so many opportunities in the upcoming years by joining National Junior Honor Society. If you have the grades and characteristics that NJHS is looking for and you are invited to join, it is highly recommended that you participate.

According to Kania-Lloyd, NJHS will be meeting as a group each month and she said that NJHS will most likely hold another round of invitations for 6th graders and newly qualified students before this school year ends.

Test found four school water fixtures with unsafe lead levels



Pierre Kamga,
6th Grade
Reporter

Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) began to test all schools for the presence of lead in school drinking water in September 2018, based on new state regulations. The test at Harper's Choice took place on December 22, 2018.

The test found that our school had four water fixtures that exceeded safe lead levels. The water fixtures identified were not water fountains that are normally used for drinking. They were all sinks, 3 of which were in the FACS room.

A notice was sent to parents on January 4, 2019 to explain the details. The amount of lead has not been noted but it exceeded the limit of lead by going over 20 parts per billion (ppb). The four sinks have been closed down until the issue is resolved.

Our principal, Adam Eldridge, explained, "When a water outlet exceeds the [safe] level, the outlet is closed immediately." He added that the school system will also fix the water fixtures, so it doesn't happen again.

I asked FACS teacher Pamela Colombel if students had been using the sinks to get water for cooking or drinking before they were shut down. She replied,

"Yes, and I drank from there too." According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), even if the students boiled the water it would not have removed the lead. In fact, "because some of the water evaporates during the boiling process, the lead concentration of the water can actually increase slightly as the water is boiled" (CDC).

"In children, low levels of lead exposure have been linked to damage to the nervous system, learning disabilities, shorter stature, impaired hearing, and impaired formation and function of blood cells."

-Environmental Protection Agency (EPA.gov)

Exposure to lead can have negative effects on children's development and behavior.

According to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP), "Even when exposed to small amounts of lead levels, children may appear inattentive, hyperactive, and irritable. Children with greater lead levels may also have problems with learning and reading, delayed growth, and hearing loss.

At high levels, lead can cause permanent brain damage and even death."

In addition to Harper's Choice, water fixtures with unsafe levels of lead were found at 18 other schools throughout the county. The school with the highest number of unsafe water fixtures was Centennial High School, with 10 unsafe fixtures. All of unsafe fixtures have now been shut down, so they are no longer in use.

It is not surprising that many people at Harper's Choice were concerned about the news. Students, parents, and staff members had many questions. What if students were affected by the water with lead in it before it got tested?

Even though the school's water fountains were tested as "safe," many students and staff members now prefer to avoid drinking from the water fountains, just as a precaution. Assistant Principal Kristin Terry explained, "I prefer to fill my water bottle up at home and I rely on it to get me through the whole day."

Some students, like 6th grader Jacob Tucker, said that he doesn't like to drink from the school water fountains anyway because the water tastes "different" and he prefers bottled water.

Sixth grader, Kyle Greenfield, agreed, "I only drink school water for extreme thirst, because it doesn't have good taste."

Now that the unsafe water fixtures have been closed down, the HCMS community hopes this will never happen again.

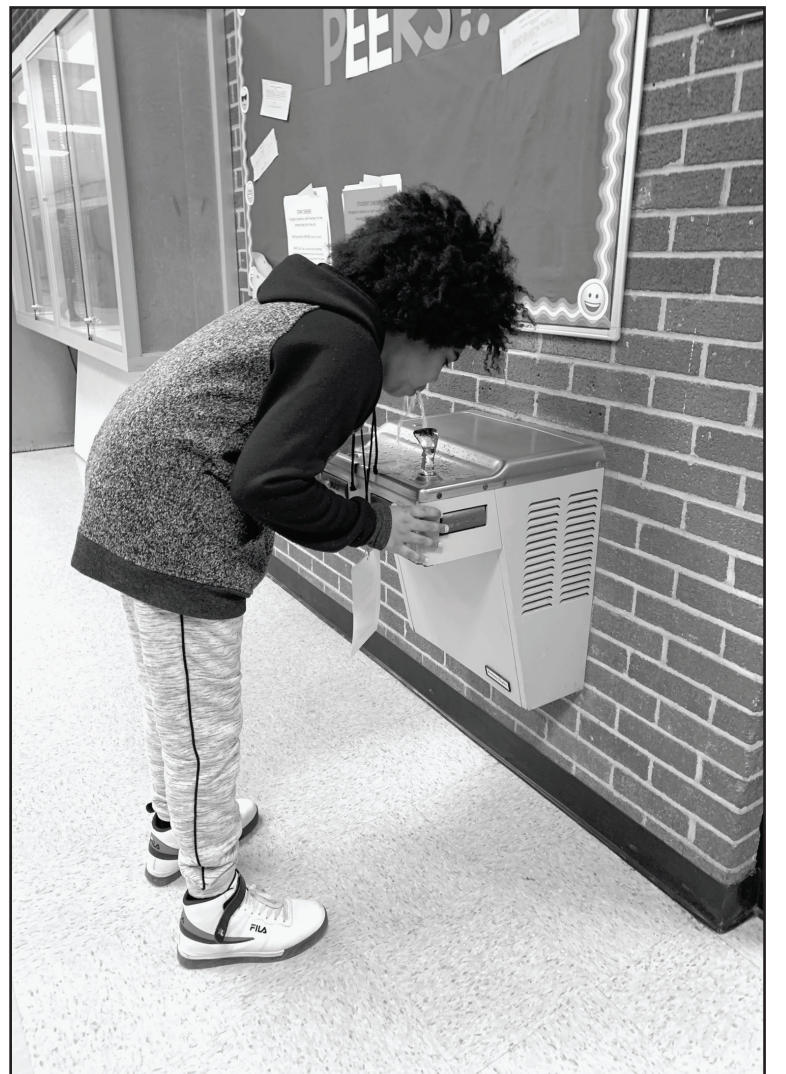


photo by Pierre Kamga

Sixth grader Caleb McKenna drinks from a school water fountain with safe lead levels. The unsafe water fixtures have been closed.

Stressed by too much work? Nothing good habits can't fix



Oliver Song,
8th Grade
Editor

Some books such as *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and the *Big Nate* series depict middle school as a harsh, barren wasteland one must cross in order to get to High School. This is partly because of the supposed "workload" placed on students.

In fact, it's common to hear kids at any school in the United States complaining that they have too much homework. You can hear the same laments here at Harper's Choice, but is it true?

In reality, the stress students feel about homework may be more a reflection of their work habits, than the workload itself. If students have picked up the bad habit of procrastination, or if they don't have good organizational skills, then homework can seem overwhelming even if it's minimal.

Based on my interviews with Harper's Choice students, most actually believe that the amount of homework they receive is fine and appropriate, even if they do complain about it.

I spoke to students in each grade and asked them if they felt the amount of work they received was appropriate or too much.

Anthony Siani, a sixth grader, replied, "It is appropriate. It gets me thinking."

Kaleb Thomas, another sixth grader, replied, "Yes, it's appropriate. It can be simple and difficult at the same time."

This suggests that while the work might be difficult or involve critical thinking, the amount of work being assigned is not too much for sixth graders.

Carl Samuel Jones Jr., a seventh grader, agreed, "Yes, I think it's appropriate for the amount of classes we have – some of them don't even give homework."

What about eighth graders? With high school around the corner, 8th grade teachers are trying to prepare their students to the best of their ability for the next level of education. This could mean more hours of work and effort poured into eighth grade edu-

cation.

However, 8th grade opinions were mixed. Devon McGuiness, an 8th grader, said she feels that the amount of homework can sometimes be too much, explaining, "We usually have a big project to do and a lot of homework at the same time."

Yet some 8th graders, like Vincent Murray, disagreed that the homework was too much. He stated, "Yes, I think the amount of work is appropriate because if you try and study enough, you'll be able to complete it."

What about other countries? Do they have more homework than the U.S.?

According to the website World Atlas, the country with the most homework placed on 15 year olds is... China! It leads the way with a whopping 13.8 hours of average homework each week.

middle school. When asked how they handle stress, many students replied that they did not know how to handle stress well. Some said that they would break down and cry, while others admitted to spending hours on electronic devices as a way to avoid doing work. Of course, this will only lead to more stress, as procrastination will take its toll.

Susan Casey, the school nurse, recommended many stress-coping procedures that can help. She suggested that students should exercise daily and do other fun activities to help relieve the pressure.

Casey said, "The person being stressed should think of what is the stressor. Once the stressor is found, try to chunk it up and handle it in pieces, rather as a whole."

In many cases, stress isn't as



photo by Andrew Heffner

Eighth graders in Betsy Trainer's class focused on a math test.

The United States ranks 15th with an average of 6.1 hours per week. While these numbers are higher than middle school, they are a forecast of what's to come in high school.

While students' opinions may vary, one thing was universal – most HCMS students said that math was the subject that gave them the most homework.

Math teacher Betsy Trainer said that the amount of work she places on students is mostly based off the state curriculum. She also takes into account many factors, like what students are doing in class and what would reinforce what students are doing in class.

Whether the amount of work is appropriate or not, handling stress is also an important aspect of

big as many students think it is. If you find yourself complaining about how stressed you are, think about all the bad habits you have – like procrastination – which weigh you down and catch up to you in the end.

Try your absolute best to complete your assignments and you may find yourself relieved of all your stress after all. Remember that good habits actually help you cope with stress and that you – the reader – are responsible for your own stress management.

If you feel that you need additional support managing your homework or stress, remember that you can speak to our school's guidance counselors, our school nurse, or join an after school tutoring program.

Student Council gets a start



Sarah KC
6th Grade
Reporter

This year HCMS decided to open up Student Council for students in all three grade levels. With the help of our media specialist, Nicole Cathirell, and one of our World Language teachers, Nicole Rosewag, HCMS proudly opened up the Student Government Association (SGA) to any students who wanted to take part in this group.

In general, the purpose of a Student Council is to give students an opportunity to develop leadership by organizing and carrying out school activities and service projects.

Our Student Council tries to meet at least once a month in the media center. The Student Council's most recent meeting was held on Thursday, February 7, 2019 during 6th period. There are currently 33 students attending the meetings, with 16 sixth graders, 13 seventh graders, and 4 eighth graders involved.

So far, Student Council planned a Spirit Week in December and the Ugly Sweater Contest. In February, Student Council has been working on ideas for more events, such as another Spirit Week, Kindness Week, and activities for Black History Month.

Scarlett Lopez, a 6th grader, said, "[Student Council] allows us to share our thoughts, ideas, and opinions which could have a positive impact on the school."

Elena Coburn, a 7th grader,

believes that Student Council will "help with kids having fun events to look forward to!"

Lopez, along with 7th grader Laurel Sands, both represented HCMS at the county convention held on February 13th. Two students from each middle school were sent to help in the selection process for to choose the candidates for Student Member of the Board (SMOB).

So, should we continue Student Council again next year? Cindy Six, G/T resource teacher said, "Absolutely! You can't do something for a year and call it successful!"

If you are interested in joining Student Council or have any ideas or suggestions, you can see Cathirell, Rosewag, or any of the students on the council to help you get started.

What's new in the G/T Room?

By Cindy Six,
G/T Resource Teacher

Here is a brief summary of what we have been up to since our last report!



Film Production

We have multiple film production teams. You may have seen them filming in the hallways. The theme is "Movies that Matter." Some groups are tackling tough topics such as bullying, distracted driving, body image, and more. We hope you will join us for a screening of the films at the Night of Excellence in May.

Debate

The debate topic for this year is "Be it resolved that there will be a junk food tax in Maryland." Our teams have competed in a practice virtual debate with Bonnie Branch Middle which was incredibly eye opening to see how another group tackled this topic. We are refining our arguments and gearing up for our countywide debate at the end of March!

Book Club

We just finished reading the incredibly captivating book *Refugee* by Alan Gratz which features three stories of kids and their families leaving their home to seek safety elsewhere. All three stories take place in different time periods but come together in a surprising twist at the end. Our next book we will be discussing is *Cinder*, the wildly popular start to the *Lunar Chronicles* by Marissa Meyer. Have you read *Cinder*? Come join the discussion!

Future City

This year's theme is to build a sustainable city that is resistant to natural disasters. The group has been upcycling trash to build their city model.

SOCAB

The SOcab group focuses on leadership in maintaining our school food pantry. The group hosted a raffle to raise funds and help restock the food pantry. We are always looking for donations of unexpired, unopened, non-perishable food items. Feel free to bring your donation to Ms. Six's room 404.

Robotics

The theme this year is *Into Orbit*. Three teams went to the qualifier competition. One of our teams received the prestigious Global Innovators Award and are in a special competition category for the state competition. They submitted a video about their inventive idea to play Quidditch in space! If they win they will head to the World Competition in June.

Creative Problem Solving

The students in this seminar are doing some out of the box thinking with all different kinds of problem solving and riddles. We still have space if you want to join us.

Photography

We have so many talented photographers at HCMS! Check out our display case in the front lobby featuring rotating seasonal compositions.

TED-Ed

We are working on determining ideas for original student speeches. There is still space in this seminar if you want to join us.

HCTV

We finally got our new computer system! We hope you are enjoying the new LIVE morning announcements and thank you for being patient as we work out the kinks in the new system. We have room in our crews if you want to join us in the mornings. We look forward to learning other features we can add to our morning broadcast show.

Journalism

We meet on Friday in Ms. Cometa's room to write the articles you read here, in our school newspaper! If you would like to join our team, contact Ms. Cometa or Ms. Six for a seminar pass.



OPINION · LA OPINIÓN · L'OPINION

Confronting bullying in schools is everyone's job



Geleisi Li,
6th Grade Reporter

Contrary to popular belief, many abusive acts can be seen in plain sight. Oftentimes, people don't realize that it's bullying, or they choose to ignore it.

Bullying can occur in real life (person-to-person, face-to-face) or online as cyberbullying. Either way, bullying as defined by the federal government's StopBullying.gov page as "unwanted, aggressive behavior among school-aged children."

It is important to note that bullying is a recurring situation; a one-time incident is not usually defined as bullying. Bullying includes recurrent harassment, abuse, or intimidation.

According to the school system's website, HCPSS has taken a strong stand against bullying with a goal to eradicate bullying. The website states that "no act of bullying in Howard County schools will be ignored" (hcpss.org).

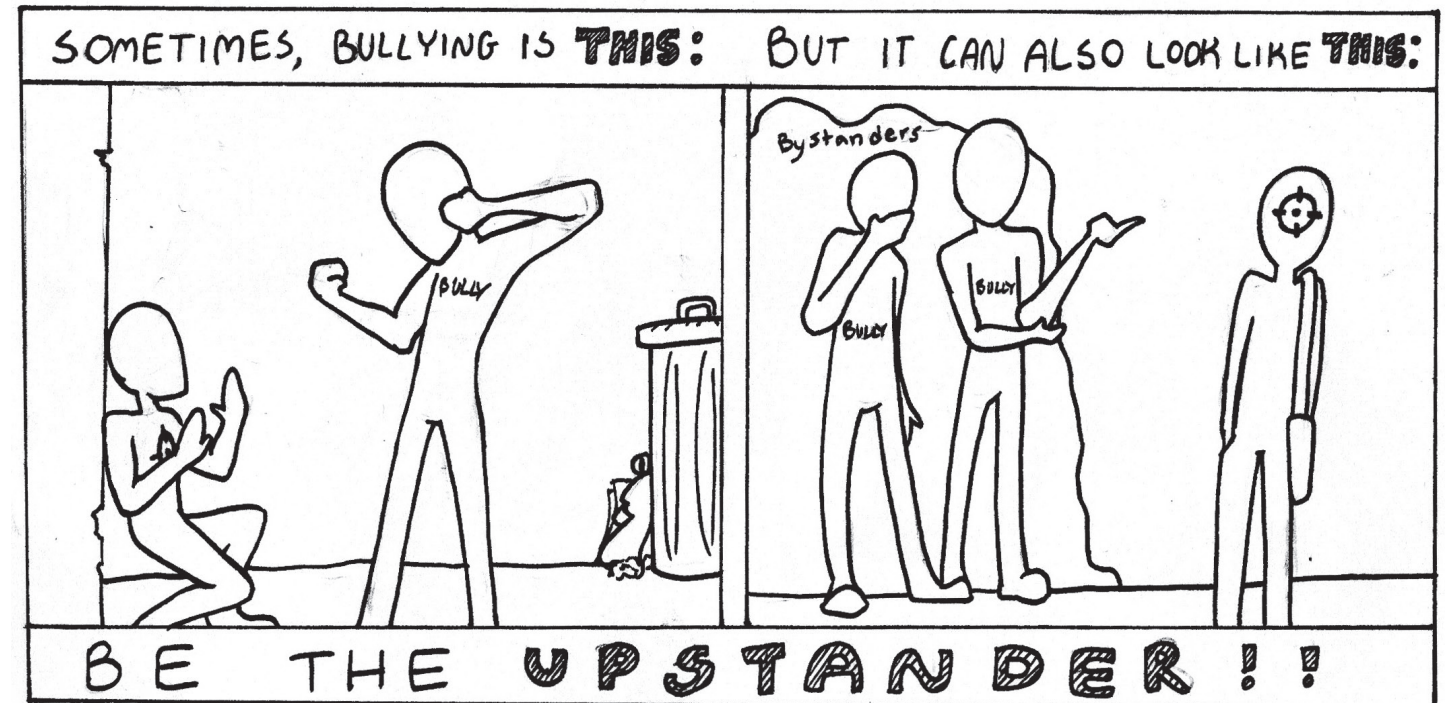
That message seems to have resonated with Harper's Choice students. All of the students I spoke to said they took bullying seriously and felt it was an important topic.

Students agree that kids can get really hurt through bullying, and that it could greatly affect significant aspects of one's life, such as mental health and overall self-confidence.

Those who are bullied may experience depression, anxiety, sadness and loneliness. They can suffer from changes in sleep and eating patterns and loss of interest in activities that they typically enjoy. Children who have suffered through bullying have gone so far as to injure themselves and even take their own life (hcpss.org).

Isaiah Schofield, a 6th grader, thinks that bullying happens "because people enjoy feeling that they are better than other people." I agree with him, since throughout history, we have seen bullies, such as Adolf Hitler, who actually had an inferiority complex.

HCMS and schools all over Howard County have implemented anti-bullying measures, such as a ban on unwanted physical contact, and kindness campaigns. At HCMS, the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports team (PBIS) tries to promote positive behaviors through activities like Kindness Week.



cartoon by Geleisi Li

and Supports team (PBIS) tries to promote positive behaviors through activities like Kindness Week.

In addition, many teachers incorporate anti-bullying activities into their lessons. For example, in DeAndre Ingram's health class, students made posters after studying bullying and its effects. In 7th grade English, students learned about bullying and the terms "upstander vs. bystander" during the Holocaust unit.

All of these efforts to reduce bullying are generally getting positive feedback from students at HCMS, but how do we know if they are really working? Are students stepping in when they know something is wrong, or are they ignoring bullying?

Although there might be misbehavior sometimes at our school in the hallways and cafeteria, most students I spoke to said that they have not seen much bullying at our school. Still, many HCMS students offered advice to those who might be getting bullied.

For example, 6th grader Alexander Ortiz advises those being bullied to "ignore the bullies" and "immediately tell an adult you trust if it gets serious."

Laura Williams, a homeschooled 7th grader in Howard County, agreed, "If I

were to offer any advice, it'd be: don't take the bullies too seriously. They're all bark and no bite."

Whether we see it or not, national statistics state that over 3.2 million students are subject to bullying annually in the United States, and 71% of U.S. students report incidents of bullying as a problem at their school. Over 67% of U.S. students believe that their schools respond poorly to bullying (Dosomething.org).

In fact, when people are bullied, their brains can be altered in a way that resembles the results of child abuse. Bullies and targets of bullying are both at higher risk for substance abuse, and bullying can cause increased production of stress hormones – which can possibly lead to mental disorders, a weakened immune system, aggression and violence (Brainfacts.org).

From personal experience, I know that bullying can severely alter a person's mentality. Sometimes bullies don't know that what they are doing is bullying, and when they are faced with the truth, they deny it.

Can teasing be bullying? For some, it's a sign of friendship. To others, it's mistreatment. But if the person being harassed is uncomfortable, then it definitely counts as bullying, and it's not okay to continue.

Now, I'm not saying that everything in life should be all smiles and rainbows. I'm not saying that every little mean thing someone does to you is bullying. And I'm definitely not writing this article to hyperbolize bullying. I simply want to get it out there that people do care, whether they show it or not.

For students who are being mistreated, remember there are many people willing to help you, and not just counselors or adults. Friends and peers can help too. So look for support. Find people who have your back – because sometimes, waiting isn't enough.

And for everyone in the school, remember that it's always helpful of be careful of what you say. Although it may seem like a little extra work, it really isn't that difficult to think before you speak. Be empathetic – put yourself in someone else's shoes and treat others the way you would want to be treated.

If you are or someone you know is being bullied, you can find more advice on websites such as Stopbullying.gov or you can call the Maryland Youth Crisis hotline at 1-800-422-0009.

Teachers and counselors are also viable confidants. Remember, people are always there to help, so don't suffer in silence!

TechTalk: The good, the bad, and the broken



Caleb McKenna,
6th Grade Reporter

The technology at HCMS is improving in some ways, but there are still many areas where it needs to be fixed.

One improvement to technology recently was adding better projectors in all the classrooms. The new projectors work well, but are still glitchy. I have seen people from HCPSS coming in and checking the projectors. I have heard teachers saying that they are having some troubles with the projectors – some are not receiving sound or wifi properly.

Another improvement to technology was that HCPSS fixed HCTV by adding an expensive new piece of equipment called a tricaster.

Cindy Six, G/T resource teacher, said, "The new Tricaster system can do so much and I have only just figured out a few parts of it! We are able to have multiple sound and visual inputs. My favorite part is the multiple virtual sets that are available. There are about 50 to choose from!"

However, in spite of the im-

provements, there are still some bad things about technology here. One main issue is the computer lab and laptop carts. There are not enough computers in the school and many of them are broken or missing keys.

Sometimes the computers work, but they take too long to load. I cannot tell you how many times I have gotten the "spinning wheel of death" while trying to complete one of my assignments in class. This can cause demotivation or kids giving up.

The other day, when I was doing the MAP test, the back edge of my laptop broke. The back of the computer cut my finger, not very badly, but this is an example of broken computers interfering with education.

Another common complaint is that the internet here at school is too slow. When the computers and internet connections are too slow, kids can spend a long time in class just waiting for assignments to load. They might end up not finishing the assignments and getting bad grades.

What if you don't have a computer at home and the computers at school don't work well? How will you get your assignments done on time?

Another issue is that when the



computers at this school break or are missing keys, they are almost never fixed or it takes a really long time. Media specialist Nicole Cathirell oversees the computers at the school. She said that most of the laptops are seven years old and out of warranty.

She explained that when a computer breaks, the teachers let her know and then she fills in a

ticket to have a computer technician from HCPSS come fix it, but they have put in a lot of tickets and it can be a long process. The computer technician comes once a week for a few hours or less, so he does not fix all of the computers each visit.

I remember at Longfellow Elementary, it seemed like we got our computers fixed almost in-

stantly. Also at Longfellow, we had lots of computer carts and even ipad carts. Why doesn't Harpers Choice have ipads?

In conclusion, fixing technology at the school will be very difficult, but it's possible to do. I think a good way to start is to be careful with the computers we have. You can also email hcpss if you think this is a problem.

Putting a stop to racism is important



Tatianna Trafton,
6th Grade Reporter

Racism can be defined as prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior. Racism is unfair because no one deserves to be bullied because of their skin color.

When people experience racism, they will feel offended and they might start feeling insecure about how they look.

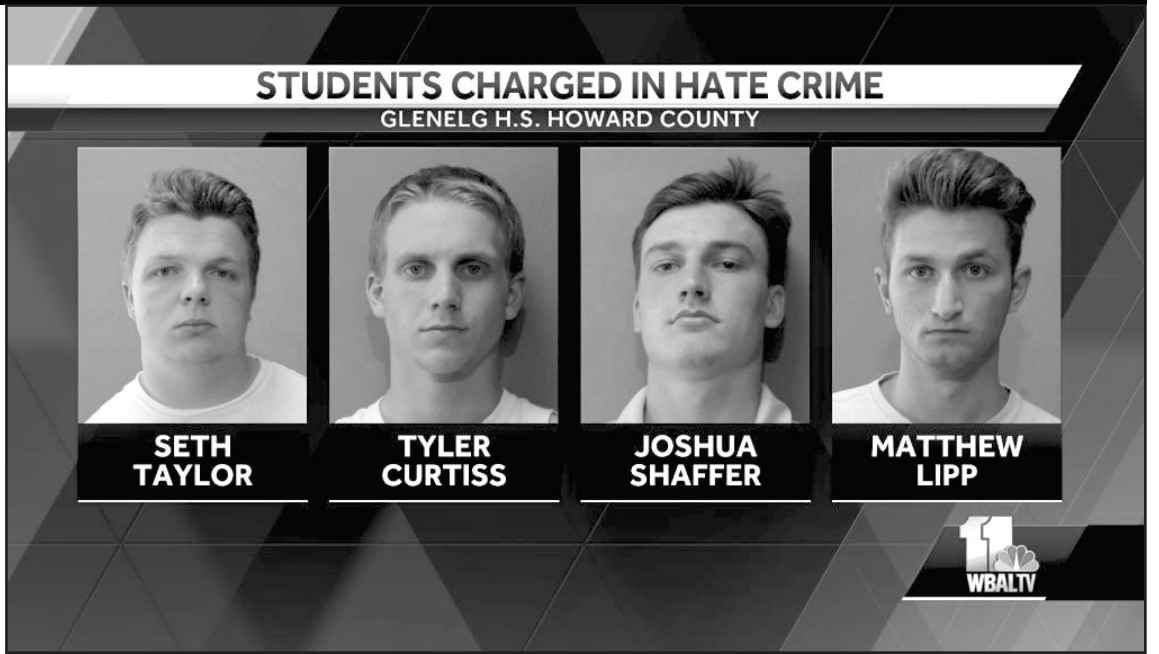
Even though it's wrong, racism continues to be a concern in today's society. All the people I interviewed, along with myself, want to put a stop to racism because it's unnecessary and offensive.

Sadly, racism exists even in the Howard County school system. On January 15th, 2019, a swastika was drawn in the snow at Howard High School. Swastikas are racist, anti-Semitic symbols used against Jewish people. The symbols were erased by the staff, and a student was identified by police.

In a written statement, Howard High School's principal, Nicholas Novak, stated, "This hateful act goes against the values we share at Howard High School and will not be tolerated. All acts of hateful language are taken seriously and please know that this will be fully investigated in cooperation with the HCPD and the HCPSS Office of Safety & Security."

According to the Baltimore Sun, reports of hate-related vandalism in schools have been on the rise in recent years. They nearly doubled to 62 in 2017, from 34 the year before, according to Maryland State Police records.

Four seniors at Glenelg High School, also in Howard County, were charged with hate crimes after they spray-painted a racial epithet targeting Glenelg's principal, who is black, "KKK" and swastikas on the school's sidewalks, exterior walls and parking lot in May last year. According to the *Baltimore Sun*, the students were



These four Glenelg High School seniors were charged with hate crimes after defacing school property with racist symbols and messages in May 2018. They were all found guilty and sentenced in court.

found guilty in court, and given sentences including jail time and community service.

Have you ever experienced racism or seen it in our school? Personally, I've never seen racism at Harper's Choice, but I have witnessed students from my previous school making jokes about other races. They would make fun of people's skin color, which is wrong. Witnessing that made me

feel uncomfortable. Since I haven't experienced racism at Harper's Choice, I decided to ask my peers about their experiences with racism. Many of the students I talked to said they had not seen any racism in our school.

Amaya Copes, a 7th grader, said, "I think racism is still a problem. It's stupid and it shouldn't exist."

Cynthia Six, G/T Resource teacher, added, "I would like to think that racism doesn't exist [in our school], but I'm not naive enough to think that it is not there somewhere."

Overall, we should put a stop to racism because it is not funny or fair to people. It is very unkind. Maybe we can help put a stop to it at other schools too, in Howard County or throughout Maryland.

Soap shortage? Profanity on the rise



Naila A. Ba'th
7th Grade Reporter

Whether it's online, on paper, or verbally, one thing we know for sure is that people love to talk! And the year 2018-2019 has certainly presented a lot to talk about. From politics to entertainment to things happening in our daily lives, people like to express themselves and there are now more ways than ever to do that.

My question is: With so many avenues for communication available these days, why do people still find the need to curse and use inappropriate language?

At HCMS, swearing is highly discouraged. In the HCPSS Student Code of Conduct, it says that profane language is punishable by 1-3 level responses, some of which may be: parent outreach, loss of privileges, or in-school suspension.

However, inappropriate language can still be heard throughout Harper's Choice, including in the hallways and cafeteria. I hear students cursing at each other in huge amounts every day, like when they tease each other, or when they're really mad at another student.

Since profanity is heard so much around our school, many students at HCMS don't mind the cursing. For example, 7th grader Sydney Dandridge said that when people use profanity they are just expressing themselves, and it's other people's problem if they can't handle it.

However, not all feel this way. I think that students should try to curse less in school. I feel that cursing can become addictive.

I know it can be really hard to stop doing something you've been doing for a while. However, I'm concerned about the overuse of profanity. I want to be sure that kids these days still remember how to talk

formally in a professional environment. That can be really important and it can make a difference in students getting good jobs when they grow up.

I'm not the only person who thinks badly about swearing. When asked about his opinion on swearing, 7th grader Arman Bhatti replied, "It shouldn't be a thing. It becomes addictive and people should use more positive vocabulary."

P.E. and Health teacher Jason Fahie agreed, "The school is a place of business and profanity isn't appropriate at a place of business." He said there could be an appropriate time or place for swearing outside of school on your own time, but he does not believe it should be heard in school.

So why do the students of HCMS curse so much? Is it because foul language is everywhere in modern society? Do students hear it from their friends, family, the songs they listen to, or the social media they participate in? Regardless of the reason, the amount of cursing in schools can contribute to a negative climate felt by student and staff.

According to Scholastic Weekly Reader, high schools in Hartford, Connecticut went so far as to have teens pay a fine for cursing in school. School officials noticed that the punishment of suspension wasn't stopping the kids from using their potty mouths, so they began fining the students \$103 for using dirty language.

The fine worked. Apparently, the use of inappropriate language in the school went down, and the amount of violent behavior went down as well. However, many students and parents were not happy about the new costly punishment.

The article quoted a student, Joshua Echevarria, saying, "I think it's ridiculous. It's not like I curse a lot, but even the grown-ups are guilty of swearing."

There are a lot of viewpoints on the topic of inappropriate language in schools, but I think we can all agree that students should try to respect their peers, and make a better effort to use appropriate language in school.



Superintendent Dr. Michael Martirano visited HCMS on December 5, 2018. He spoke with a group of 21 students who were invited to voice their opinions.

Get informed about the quality of your education



Dan Asgedom,
7th Grade Editor

"How will this help us in life?" is a classic question you will hear students ask. The whole purpose of our education is to learn and develop the skills we need to succeed in life, right?

We do not know who will cure cancer or invent the flying car, yet the possibility that they may be walking amongst us is real, and it could possibly be you!

But, what if that potential is not cultivated and gets lost due to insufficient education? Do you think that Harper's Choice is providing you with the best education possible?

According to Maryland's School Report Card, our school earned 3 out of 5 stars. In Howard County, most of the schools earned 4 or 5 stars, with 3 stars being the lowest score for traditional schools HCPSS.

In Howard County, Homewood was the only school that scored 1 star, but according to its website, it's a school designed to meet the specific needs of individual students who have difficulty functioning in traditional classroom settings.

Out of 77 schools in HCPSS, there

were no schools with 2 stars and 6 schools with 3 stars. The other schools with 3 stars were Swansfield and Cradlerock elementaries, Wilde Lake and Oakland Mills middle schools, and Oakland Mills High. That means our school is performing as one of the worst schools in the Howard County school system.

Out of the possible 5 stars that HCMS could score in the category of "Percent Proficient in Mathematics," we scored a 1.8, a solid E in any teacher's grade book. Only 35.9% of HCMS students were proficient in Math, compared with 55.2% of HCPSS middle school students.

English is not looking any better. HCMS scored again at 1.8 out of 5, with 35.1% of our students being proficient in English. In HCPSS, 57.9% of middle school students overall are proficient in English.

That leaves us about 20 percent lower than the rest of the county. In fact, HCMS scored low in the categories of Academic Achievement, Academic Progress, and Progress in Achieving English Language Proficiency. Our highest scoring area was School Quality and Student Success, which is based on attendance and access to well-rounded curriculum.

So, what can we do to improve our education at Harper's Choice? Is a high-quality education one of your priorities? If so, what are your opinions on how to fix this?



OPINION · LA OPINIÓN · L'OPINION

Sure, we love it, but is social media good for us?



Greta Giuliano,
8th Grade
Editor

As some of you may know, a 12-year-old girl at our school threatened to shoot up multiple Howard County schools on Snapchat in early November 2018.

According to a statement by the Howard County police, they were notified on November 12, 2018 of a social media post claiming that someone was going to commit shootings at various schools in Columbia. Detectives traced the account, determined it was a fake user, and identified the 12-year-old girl as the person who had actually set-up the account.

Investigators found no evidence of a credible threat. However, the police take all threats seriously and she was criminally charged with making a threat of mass violence, disrupting school activities and disorderly conduct.

As it turned out, the girl did not really have the means or intent to follow through on her words. So, why did she put up those fake posts?

We all know that social media can be good, connecting you to the world and letting you express yourself, but it can also be dangerous. You might think this is ridiculous because of how much you love social media, but we can all admit that sometimes people do dumb things on social media.

Why do some students misuse



Many students, from 6th grade (left) to 8th grade (right) use their phones at during lunch time.

photos by Kayla Timmons (left) and Oliver Song (right)

social media? Is it to feel a thrill, to intimidate others, or merely to get attention?

It is worth mentioning that there is a minimum age of 13 to use most social media apps, including Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Since the girl was 12 at the time, she was not even supposed to be on the Snapchat app in the first place.

In my opinion, these age restrictions are put on social media for a reason – because most kids ages 12 and under are not responsible enough to use social media appropriately, as seen with this event.

However, for many students social media is a way of life. Eighth grader Sama Ali stated that she uses social media every day.

Like Ali, according to U.S. De-

partment of Health and Human Services, 88% of U.S. teens have access to a cellphone and 71% of teens with cell phones use social media. Does this include you?

At Harper's Choice, most students appear to have cell phones. You cannot go through a day without seeing a variety of students using cell phones in the hallways, cafeteria, or even classrooms.

I once witnessed a middle school girl share another middle school girl's social media post on different social media platform without her permission. The girl whose post was shared was not happy about this. This is one example of the negative effects that social media can have on students when they misuse it.

Kathleen Keck, 8th grade English teacher, stated that she

does not think many students use social media appropriately. In an interview, she said that kids "overestimate their safety online, trying to gain followers and likes." She also said that kids may say something online to someone that they wouldn't say directly to their face.

When asked if she would make any changes to the phone policies at school, Betsy Trainer, an 8th grade math teacher, said that she thinks students shouldn't have phones out in class, or even with them in class at all.

Both Keck and Trainer stated that they have seen students in their classes using their phones and social media when they weren't permitted. Trainer also stated that parents don't understand how addicted their kids are to social media, and they should

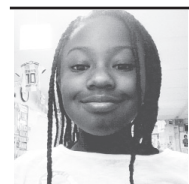
be the ones teaching them how to appropriately use it.

Keck agreed, but she thinks it should be a partnership between parents and the school to teach kids how to use social media safely.

Social media, like any other time spent on a phone, can be healthy in moderation, but excessive use can be bad. According to an article about social media by the Child Mind Institute, social media, more often than not, lowers kids' self-esteem. That is because kids look at unrealistic, photoshopped pictures of people and compare themselves to an unattainable image.

So next time you're on social media, please think before you post and remember that nobody has a "perfect" life – most people only post the best parts.

Kids hangin' in the halls and chillin' in the stalls: Do you remember what you're really here for?



Kayla Timmons,
6th Grade
Editor

Kids these days! It seems like all they do is hang out in the hallways or even the bathroom. Like, who really wants to "chill" in the bathroom?

Left and right at HCMS, I'm seeing students just hanging out in the halls fun when they're supposed to be in class. It's time we get to the truth on the hallway scoop!

I interviewed several students who tried to explain to me the "power of the bathroom" or the "allure of the hall." Arianna Hope, a 6th grader, stated that she likes to go hang out in the bathroom or in the halls because she's "tired of class."

Hope explained, "I want to take a break and check my phone sometimes... because class is boring." This makes sense because our phones are actually becoming more useful than the education provided to us, right? Wrong.

Caleb McKenna, another 6th grader, agreed that he likes to hang out in the hallways or in the bathrooms sometimes. He said that sometimes students will meet up outside of class to get candy from each other.

Candy gives us the energy to do anything we want besides

learn! No wonder some students can't sit still in their seats.

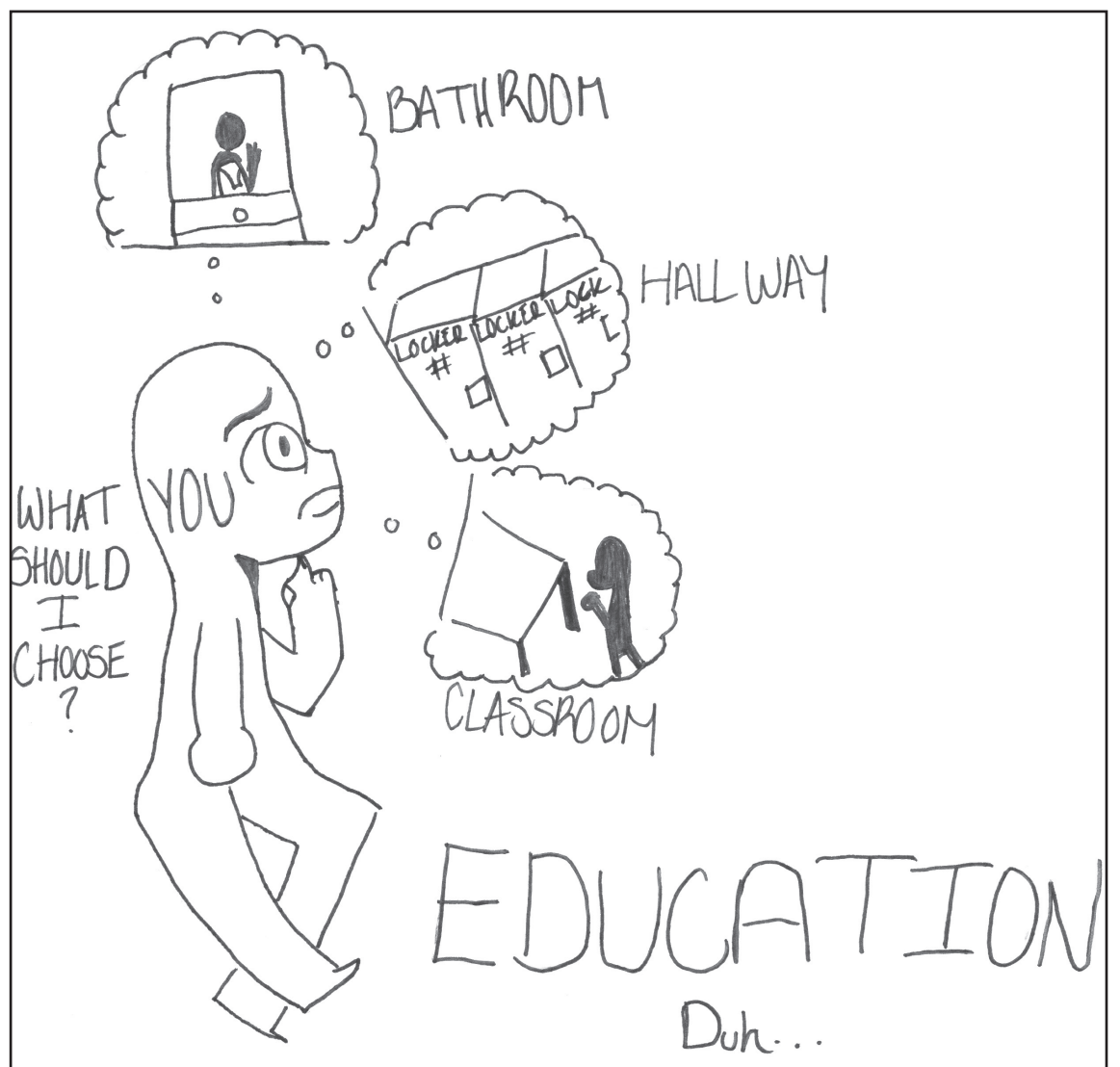
I have to say, to me it is disappointing that kids are looking for all these excuses to get out of class. Our teachers are coming to school early and going home late, so that they can plan lessons to teach us! They are trying their best to help us learn, but the students have to do their part and put in the effort.

Jason Fahie, P.E. and health teacher, has his own take on the hallway thing. "It's very frustrating when students miss a lot of instruction," he said. He said that the problem includes students from all grades and all throughout the day.

It's sad that our teachers have to leave their classes to make us, the students, go back to class. We as a school need to try harder. We need to work harder as students. Sometimes we get bored, yes I understand that, but we need to succeed!

We can't turn out like the generations before us. We are the future! Our teachers are trying to get us ready for it, but some of us our wasting our time in the hallways or bathrooms instead of focusing in class.

But, speaking of teachers, you need to try harder too! In my opinion, when you see a student or a group of students in the hall, why don't you bring them back to class? No pass equals back to class!



cartoon by Kayla Timmons

LETTERS • CARTAS • LETTRES

The COUGAR CHRONICLE



Mission

The Cougar Chronicle staff aims to uphold the highest standards of journalism and ethics in order to provide accurate information and promote the voices of Harper's Choice students.

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Respond

The Cougar Chronicle invites staff, students, and community members to submit their responses and opinions by writing Letters to the Editor. We do not accept anonymous submissions.

Support

We appreciate your ad purchases and donations to print this newspaper. Ads do not represent the views of the school, staff, or newspaper.

The Cougar Chronicle received nearly 500 "Letters to the Editor" in response to our first issue. While we cannot print them all, here is a selection.

"Reading in and beyond the curriculum" by Lindsey Sands:

I think this is very true. When it comes to the books we read, they are so boring and hard to get into. Also, the teachers should have an opinion when it comes to picking the books for the students.

-Sahryha Brown, 7th grade

I agree and a lot of people don't enjoy or avoid reading. I also agree that a lot of books are not interesting and the required books are not liked a lot. One question I have is, will they change how they do things? I hope they change it because it is true that people are not interested and that could not be a good experience in English because people might get discouraged and not read good books.

-Anthony Zhou, 8th grade

I agree that a lot of books I read make me want to crawl into a hole with scorpions, with an anvil on my head. Lots of books in 6th grade, especially *Out of the Dust*, are incredibly boring. Try to allow the kids to choose what book to read.

-Rylan Joshua Jenkins, 7th grade

"HCMS sixth graders compare reality with expectations" by Geleisi Li:

I can relate to how some of the sixth graders feel. Last year I wasn't exactly "happy" about my first year here at first, but I eventually got used to it. It wasn't what I expected it to be, which is a good thing and a bad thing. My only question about the article was about how they thought of middle school as a somewhat "free place?" To be honest, elementary school was more "free" than middle school...

-Amirra Fielder, 7th Grade

"Disruptive students affect everyone's chance to learn" by Greta Giuliano:

We disagree when she said people that are not in G/T classes are disruptive, because not everybody that isn't in G/T is disruptive... Also, not everybody wants to be in a G/T class.

-Elijah Sow, James Aka, 8th grade

You are so right. There is always that one person who talks a lot and disrupts the class. Although we all have bad days sometimes it gets annoying when people talk back to the teacher everyday. Then again, we don't know what home is like for disruptive students so we shouldn't just blame them for everything.

-Tiara Williams, 7th grade

I agree because in some classes I just want to do my work and there is always one kid who distracts everyone and the teacher can't send them anywhere.

-Brady McGonigal, 8th grade

When was the last time you were in a non G/T class? Not all non-G/T classes are loud and reckless. What other people are doing should not affect you! We think that what you said could have been said better. In so many ways, you got a lot of people to get frustrated and to strongly disagree with you.

-Bradley Fields, Heather Ramirez, Kimberly Orellana, Emerson Alberti Ramirez, 8th grade

Not to be rude, but not at all the G/T or supposedly smarter kids' classes are not disruptive. I'm in a G/T science class and my teacher constantly stops because of the students. My first question is: Do you think that G/T students are calmer? You also say that we should have a place for disruptive kids, have you thought about how big of a problem that class would be? It would be worse. I really like your solution about talking to them and finding

out why they act like that...
-Jayla Copes, 6th grade

I completely agree with this article you wrote. Having disruptive kids in the classroom can take away from everyone's time. Like in gym Mr. Morse and Ms. Vieira keep on pausing in the middle of a sentence because of several students chatting. It's so bad we can barely do one thing in the class... While in some classes, like Ms. Jones' class, it's under control.

-Alice Saher Elahi, 7th grade

Not all non-G/T students are disruptive... I definitely agree somewhat with what she's saying because some people (in both G/T and non-G/T) don't have a good mindset and don't want to learn, but it doesn't mean that they can't. Some of them are very smart, but they just don't try that hard. Although, some do and they're very smart whether they're in G/T or not.

-Devon McGuinness, 8th grade

I think it's true because in all of my general classes they are a lot more disruptive. I can admit that it's also that way in G/T classes sometimes, but still it is a lot more disruptive in normal classes.

-Sydney Hood, 7th grade

I think that it is so true, and I relate to it so much. If I tell the student to please be quiet, they will yell at me telling me to mind my own business. I hate the fact that kids will look at straight E's and think it's funny...

-Daniela Pineda-Orellana, 8th grade

If we can get people to come to class, sit down, have everything out and ready, we could get a lot of work done and probably have a lot of fun days and stuff like that.

-Jonte Williams, 7th grade

I agree that some students are disruptive, but what I don't agree with is that Greta states that G/T classes are not disruptive but non G/T classes are. That makes me feel somewhat stupid since I'm not in G/T. We are only in middle school with 11-14 year olds. Of course, we have times where we are off task. We're still young and will do childish things. Not only does it bother G/T kids, but this also bothers non G/T kids...

-Adelin Derakhshanian, 8th grade

"Do 'fidgets' help you focus?" by Liliana Chopellas:

I disagree with the statement, "I would actually classify the spinner as a toy" because a toy is something you play with for enjoyment, but the fidget spinner, unlike a toy, is something you use to help you focus or relieve stress. When used in a proper manner (discreetly, not waving it around or distracting others with it) I believe it could help you.

-Ashlyn Thoren, 6th grade

I agree with the fidgets being distracting because people take advantage of being able to have a fidget. Also it is hard to tell the difference between someone who needs it or not. They should do a test to see who needs it.

-Nasir Scott, 7th grade

I mean, yeah, they distract you, but instead of banging on desks and tapping your foot and teachers getting angry at you for not staying still, you can just play with the fidget.

-Elizabeth Perez-Rivas, 6th grade

"First it's hot, then it's cold" by Kayla Timmons:

I agree because I go to classes which are hot and cold. We should have all classrooms at one temperature, like 72 degrees. I strongly support this.

-William Roenum, 6th grade

Frankly, I agree that it's very dis-

tracting that our classroom temperatures vary day after day. I never know how to dress because of this. I also agree that the county should look at what they can do to keep classrooms from reaching distracting temperatures. It would help with more than complaints, and I think that Kayla couldn't have explained this any better.

-Peace Williams, 6th grade

I relate to this very much. In one class you'll burn so you take off your jacket and put it away in your locker. Next period you're so cold you can't focus.

-David Carroll, 7th grade

YES! The classroom temperatures are so different. In Ms. Pope's room you are so hot and in Ms. Smith's room you feel like you're in Alaska. We really need regulated heating, please!

-Ella Moss, 6th grade

The school needs to make a change because studies show that classrooms with hot or uncomfortable temperatures can affect students' learning capabilities and bring down test scores, and it will cause some kids to sleep or have personality changes. Do we need to start a protest or convince the public system to help?

-Eyo Admassu, 7th grade

"How can we solve our cafeteria catastrophe?" by Caleb McKenna:

So, two months back I got milk and it tasted like how nail polish smells, and then for the rest of the month the milk tasted bad and the expiration date was scratched off of the carton, so I just stopped getting milk. Also, I once got a tater tot and I had to use both hands to break it, so I can relate. Thanks for talking about this because nobody else really does.

-Micaila Demas, 7th grade

I agree with Caleb because now, looking back at lunch, it really is a big crazy party. Caleb is also right about the food given in the cafeteria. The food is no good at all and I don't even eat it all. We all know that there are a few kids who have short tempers and have problems to deal with. With that pandemonium going on in the lunchroom, those kids can snap easily. Also, the bit about the lunch staff, I have to admit, is pretty bad as well. I can see the staff yelling across the room to stop fighting but not going over until the last minute. So this is why I agree with Caleb McKenna about this issue, and hope this can be solved soon.

-Victoria Contreras Valles, 6th grade

I really like how you wrote the article. Also, you are right, especially about the dang fries. Like seriously, I chipped my tooth on a fry! I hope your voice is heard and we have better food!

-Kyle Greenfield, 6th grade

I totally agree with everything you said in this article. I actually think it's the teachers, not the kids. The teachers are way too easy on these kids. I've been scared away from my lunch table because the kid are screaming, dancing, and being crazy. That's when the teachers need to come in and say, "stop" or "bring it down." The language kids are using isn't even appropriate and they won't know it's wrong until someone tells them or they get in trouble for it.

-Victoria Goforth, 6th grade

This article is really relatable. I can agree with everything this mentions, especially about the rock hard fries. The noise in the cafeteria bothers me so much I go to the library.

-Arianna Hope, 6th grade

I strongly agree that the food is terrible and so is the behavior. I definitely think the food should be better quality, especially if it's \$3. I also think that the behavior needs to

change, but teachers are trying their hardest and I respect that.

-Thomas Aarsbergen, 7th grade

"Pandemonium in the hallways must stop" by Megan Wolters:

I agree entirely with this article. I have had my hair pulled and I've been pushed and someone once running scratched my arm with a pencil... I am glad that someone finally brought it up because I am tired of getting harassed while trying to get to my classes or locker. My locker is in the loop so everyday when school ends I go to get my stuff and nonstop I get run over like I'm invisible, so I am so happy that someone has brought this to attention.

-Gia Nadal Bauza, 7th grade

I honestly completely agree with Ms. Wolters. The hallways can be a scary place. While switching classes, I also have to acknowledge that people don't follow the "one way" rule in the hallways. Sometimes I even get scared just to turn the corner. In the wild hallways, people can easily get trampled. It also does not help that the teachers do not see these catastrophes. I am very glad that you have addressed this problem, because too many people have experienced getting trampled in the busy hallways.

-Jordyn Chaimiti, 6th grade

I really enjoyed reading your article, Megan. It is so relatable. I too have been verbally harassed and know what it feels like to have someone show disrespect towards me... Why is it anyone else's business to make comments about your condition?

-Annalise Vizcarrondo, 7th grade

I agree that there are a lot of problems with the hallways. I think that the teachers aren't doing enough about kids running in the hallway and pushing people. I also agree that the hallway is way too narrow. They should try to somehow make it so not so many kids are in the hallway at one time.

-Di'jae Mosby, 7th grade

In a way I can relate to you about the hallways. Because kids were running, I dropped all my stuff. I had to reorganize my binder, so I was late to class. Then two more kids were running and they bumped into me, and I bumped into a teacher and I almost got in trouble for not saying, "Excuse me!"

-Linsey Diaz, 6th grade

I agree with this article that people in the hallways make it hard to move. I will be walking along, and someone will come barreling out of a side hallway and slam into me... I have tried to go through a transition without touching or bumping into anyone, and 95% of the time I fail. I think this is a problem.

-Kira Bork, 7th grade

I agree with this article completely. I have also witnessed terrible behavior in the hallway... The article talks about how people are being pushed around and that does happen a lot. I think that everybody nudges people out of the way to get to class on time, but some people outright shove people out of the way. That leads to about 10 people getting jostled around. I definitely hate being pushed around; it causes me a lot of stress...

-Hope Dzuray, 7th grade

"New in town: Meet Ms. Hidey!" by Aniya Douglas:

I think it's really cool that Ms. Hidey went to Japan and was teaching and learning about their language. It's cool that she can speak Japanese and she got to teach those children how to speak English.

-Elena Laren Coburn, 7th grade

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Ms. Cruz and her mother Ms. Murray teach students how to make exquisite Christmas and Valentine's Day cards.

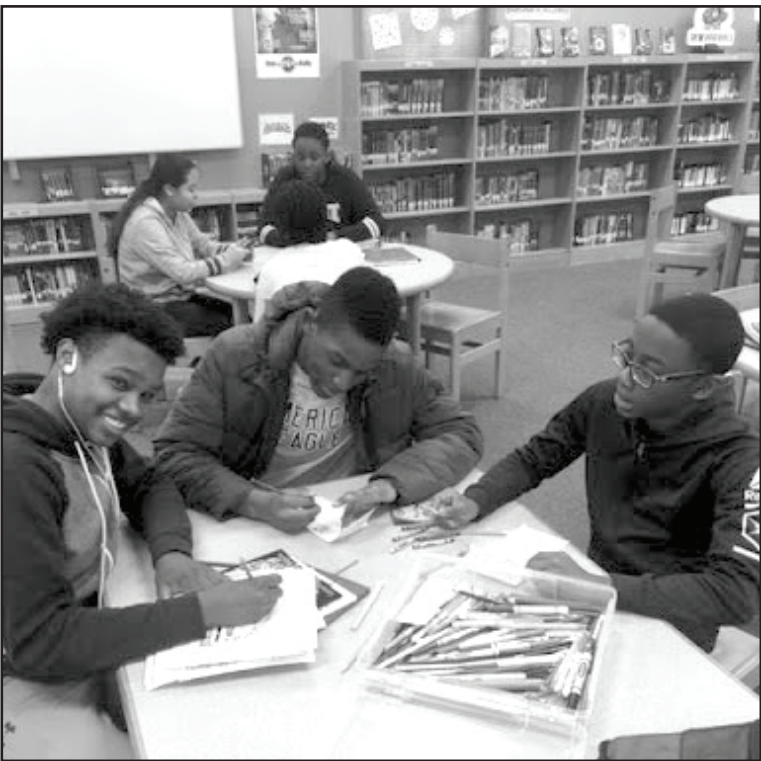


LIBRARY CORNER

Did you know that your school library is a busy bustling place! Not only is it filled with readers, workers, and thinkers but it's also filled with do-ers!

Check out the pic collage to see many things TO DO in your school library. Come by during your lunch with a library lunch pass or visit during the day with a pass from your teacher! What's new? Between January and March HCMS library received over 200 new books! Come by and check one out today!

-Ms. Cathirell,
Media Specialist



Coloring is a therapeutic stress reliever!



Friends catching up during a busy school day.



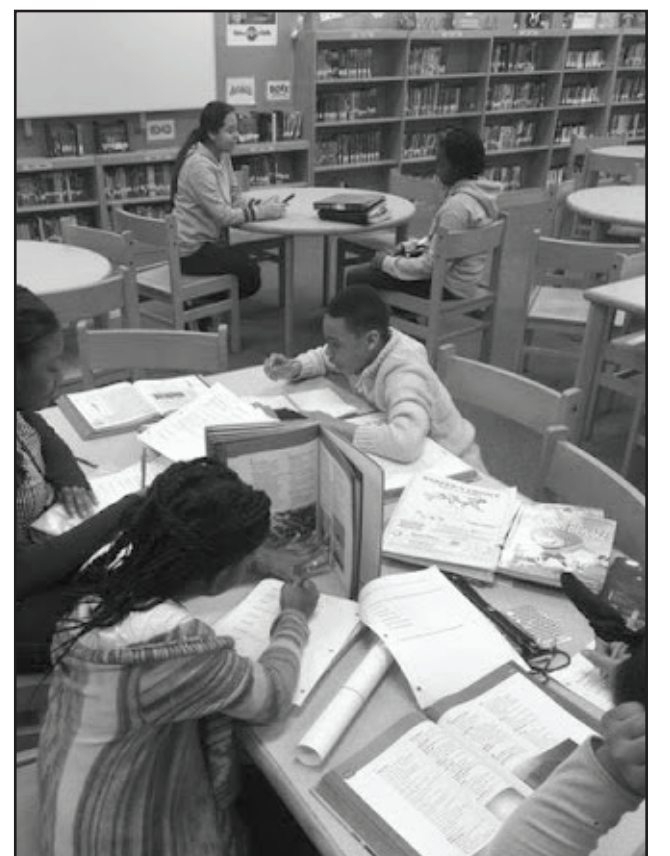
Ms. Cathirell and Ms. Cruz process the new books.



These girls collaborate to finish the mural.



These gentlemen partake in a friendly game of Uno and Mancala.



Sometimes you just need to hit the books! These students are completing important classwork.

The *Cougar Chronicle* would like to thank Mr. Jones, Kristina Minott, the Giuliano family, and the Ba'th family for your donation to support our school newspaper!

Thank you



Richard Belizaire was honored by *Legacy* magazine for his outstanding service and leadership in South Florida. Pictured (right) with Russell Motley, Editor-in-Chief.

New in Town: Cougars welcome Mr. Belizaire



Arianna Miller,
7th Grade
Reporter

Richard Belizaire used to cheer for the Florida Gators... not anymore! Now, he is on our team, so let's show our new teacher how the Cougars ROCK!

If you don't know who he is, than let me tell you a little about him. Belizaire is the

new 7th and 8th grade math teacher who came here all the way from South Florida.

I asked Mr. Belizaire some questions starting with, "What interests you about Harper's Choice?"

"The students! They always make my day, you never know what you're going to get!" Belizaire replied.

"Are the kids here different from the old school you used to work at in Florida?" I asked.

"Not too much," he responded, "The culture is different, to an extent."

"I heard that you flew back to Florida for an award. Can you tell me anything about that?" I asked him.

"Yes, [the award] was for *Legacy* magazine," Belizaire explained.

According to its website, *Legacy* is South Florida's premiere publication for Black "influencers". It showcases an elite group of individuals for its annual "40 Under 40: Black Leaders of Today and Tomorrow." People chosen have made a significant impact not only in their professional careers, but in local community, as

well.

Belizaire was honored at an award ceremony on October, 14, 2018 in Miramar, Florida for his outstanding community service and leadership in South Florida.

Seventh grade student Angel Minor said, "I think Mr. B is a good teacher. His teaching style is good!"

In conclusion, stop by Mr. Belizaire's class to say "hi!" and welcome him to Harper's Choice. Maybe he'll influence you in a positive way, like he's influenced others!

Do you know about HCPD's BearTrax program?

**Information provided by
School Resource Officer
Leah Littlefield**

The BearTrax Program is a mentoring and outreach program for middle school students that begins with a week-long overnight summer camp for youth entering middle school and continues into and through the start of the school year.

The students are closely mentored during their middle school experience through individual and group meetings, field trips both during and after school, and consultations with school staff and administrators.

BearTrax camp started in 1978 by the Howard County Police Department. The name "BearTrax" is derived from the slang term "Bear" for police officers and "Trax" which is used to promote the concept of following in the footsteps of the law enforcement mentors.

The original BearTrax Program began with a one-week camp. Each year, the day camp was held in a different area of the county and evolved over the years to an overnight camp that is held at Mar-Lu-Ridge Camp and Retreat Center in Frederick County, Maryland.

BearTrax was originally designed to enhance the relationship between police officers and youth, through a week long summer camp. For years the campers were selected from only one elementary school.

In 2012 the selection pool was expanded to include elementary schools that are feeder schools to the 6 middle schools that have an officer assigned as a School Resource Officer.

The target population is youth that attend Howard County Middle Schools (Harper's Choice,

Wilde Lake, Oakland Mills, Lake Elkhorn, Patuxent Valley and Mayfield Woods).

The Youth Division of the Police Department works with elementary school guidance counselor's to identify up to 50 students who have completed 5th grade and are graduating into middle school that would benefit from this program.

The relationships established between officers and other campers help these children as they make the sometimes difficult transitions between elementary and middle school and even later into high school. The campers will be able to enter their new school with an established group of friends they developed while attending the BearTrax Camp.

The children are monitored by their assigned mentor (School Resource Officers and/or Youth Services Staff) to ensure that they receive some extra guidance and support.

The mentor will meet with the students on a structured monthly basis. The child's academic and social performance both at school and home will be discussed in an effort to help make improvements where needed. Mentors discuss how the child's academic and social achievements today will help them achieve their future goals.

Mentors help these kids learn to understand and communicate their feelings, to relate to their peers, and to develop positive relationships with other adults and kids which will in turn prevent them from becoming a victim of bullying.

Through the BearTrax program, mentors attempt to instill children with a healthy sense of importance and self-confidence. They are taught communication skills, conflict management and a sense of respect for others. Offer-

ing them guidance, consistency, and the assurance that they have a firm ground to stand on helps provide children with an invaluable foundation.

Mentors also communicate with school administrators throughout the year to further monitor the child's progress. Officers meet with these students twice a week between September and June for interactive mentoring sessions.

Field trips on days that students have off from school are also incorporated into the program. We maintain a close working relationship with both the elementary school counselors and middle school counselors and administrations throughout the year. Elementary school counselors are asked to nominate 5th graders moving into 6th grade who they believe could benefit from the BearTrax Program.

These nominated students begin the BearTrax Program by attending a week long overnight summer camp during the month of August. At camp, the children have the opportunity to meet both their middle school resource officer and other students that will be attending the same middle school to include a 7th or 8th grader already in the BearTrax program to help them and mentor them throughout the school year. This year, the camp will be held at Mar-Lu-Ridge Camp located in Jefferson, MD.

Each student that completes the summer camp is accepted into the program and the middle school resource officer meets with the students in the school setting. The mentors eat lunch with the children and visit while they participate in school programs.

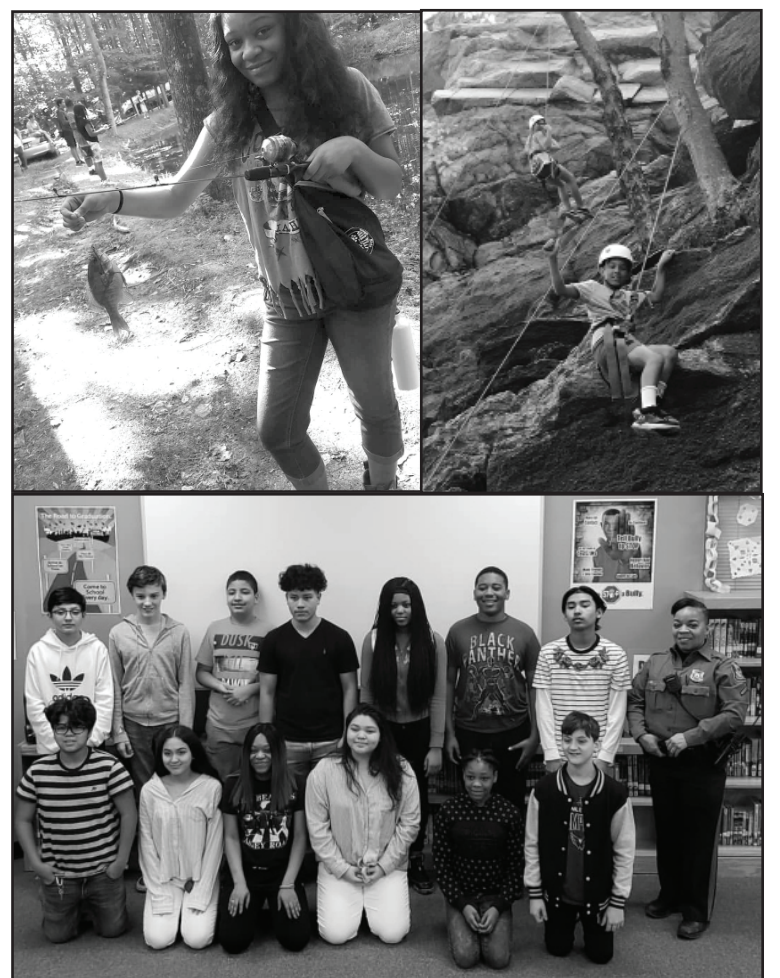
The student's academic and social performance both at school and at home are discussed in an

effort to make improvements if needed. Mentors and school administrators throughout the year talk to the students about how their academic and social achievements today will help them achieve their future goals.

To reinforce important social lessons, each month BearTrax students and police mentors have group meetings after school to focus on topics such as bullying, peer pressure, anger manage-

ment, gang awareness, personal safety, cyber safety, team building, character building and community service to name a few.

Children, especially middle schoolers, are faced with dangerous choices that can alter the course of their lives completely. BearTrax helps provide them with the tools to face and overcome these challenges. BearTrax empowers children to make the right decision.



Fourteen HCMS students participated in the 2018 BearTrax summer camp and 19 students take part in biweekly meetings this year.



HCMS promotes achievement for students of color



Lindsey Sands,
8th Grade
Editor-in-Chief

During your time at Harper's Choice, you probably have heard terms such as "BSAP" and "Hispanic Liaison," but maybe you didn't completely understand what they meant. BSAP stands for the Black Student Achievement Program, and the Hispanic Liaison serves as an intermediary between Hispanic/Latino families and the school.

But why do we need these programs? According to the HCPSS website, the Black Student Achievement Program, Hispanic Achievement Program, and Mathematics, Engineering, and Science Program are all parts of the "Academic Access and Achievement" initiative. The goal is to provide students with "support to achieve the high academic standards of the Howard County Public School System." These programs aim to help minority students perform well in school and go on to college.

Hannah Zimmerman, BSAP Liaison at Harper's Choice, is passionate about helping black students succeed. She says, "The BSAP liaisons are present in schools to work towards closing

the achievement gap that is present in the data trends for black students."

Paola Bleichner is the Hispanic Liaison at Harper's Choice. She said her role is to "serve as a communication link between school staff and Hispanic students, and their families." She says, "I facilitate the involvement of Hispanic families in the educational process."

Both Zimmerman and Bleichner spend their time working with students, their families, teachers, and community organizations, to help students reach success and feel proud of their achievements. They check in on students regularly to see how they are doing academically and emotionally, and provide as much support as they can.

According to Zimmerman, Harper's Choice is 50.2% black or African American, 18.1% white, 15.7% Hispanic or Latino, 8.4% Asian, 0.4% Native American, and 7.2% two or more races. Although white students are a minority at Harper's Choice, they make up the majority of students in the Gifted/Talented (G/T) Program. This can be described as part of an "achievement gap," as well as standardized test scores.

The BSAP and Hispanic Liaison are working to connect with students and families, to address these inequities and help all students achieve.

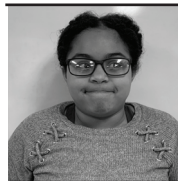
These kids can sing!!



photo courtesy of columbiefestival.org

Columbia Festival of the Arts features a video of the HCMS chorus on its website.

New chorus option for next year



Aniya Douglas,
7th Grade
Reporter

On January 22nd, 2019 at our school assemblies for 6th and 7th grade, chorus teacher Angela Pope announced that there might be a new chorus group forming next year. The group would be for students who are currently in 6th and 7th grade, who want to join chorus next year.

Due to recent changes in the way students can select their elective classes, students are now able to select two art/music courses at HCMS. For example, you could take band and orches-

tra, art and chorus, music and band, or any combination.

This means that students in band and orchestra will now also be able to join chorus if they want to. Band and orchestra students will no longer have to choose between playing an instrument and singing. If they really enjoy both, they can take both classes.

Many students were excited about this news. Seventh grader Gabriella Segovia-Giron said, "It's cool that Ms. Pope is giving band and orchestra students a chance to do chorus."

Seventh grader Arianna Miller added, "It's cool to have another chorus group for students who have wanted to be in chorus, but couldn't because their parents wanted them to be in orchestra or band."

At the same time, students like 7th grader Elena Coburn wondered if taking two performance-based music classes might be overwhelming. She said, "It's kinda cool, but it could become too much. It could be hard to balance. I was never in band or orchestra, but I feel it could be stressful to balance both."

In addition to music and art choices, HCMS students can choose to take Project Lead the Way, a technology/engineering elective, a World Language elective (French or Spanish), or an Inquiry and Innovation class.

If you have questions about which courses you should take next year, discuss your options with your guidance counselor and parents to make the decision that is right for you!

There's lots of love for *THUG: The Hate U Give*



Atiya Ba'th,
7th Grade
Reporter

It's a familiar story: an African-American gets shot over a... misunderstanding. It's something we see on the news and many people have opinions about it... although some would rather not even acknowledge it. Angie Thomas is not one of those people.

Her book, *The Hate U Give* (*T.H.U.G.*) was published on February 28, 2017 and it rose to number one on the *New York Times*' Young Adult Bestseller List, where it stayed for 50 weeks. One year later, the movie has now been released and it is receiving a lot of attention as well.

The story is about a teenager named Starr Carter. Her friend, Khalil, was shot by a cop because the cop believed he was holding a gun, but it was really a hairbrush. The rest of story is about how Starr's life changes and her deciding if she should stand up for Khalil.

In the Fall, English teacher Kathleen Keck and Black Student Achievement Program liaison Hannah Zimmerman led a group of Harper's Choice students in reading and discussing the book. Many students were eagerly anticipating the movie's release.

I would highly recommend

both the movie and the book to anyone. I personally preferred the book because it had more details and the characters were more fully developed. However, the movie was also very well done, with an excellent cast, acting, and sets.

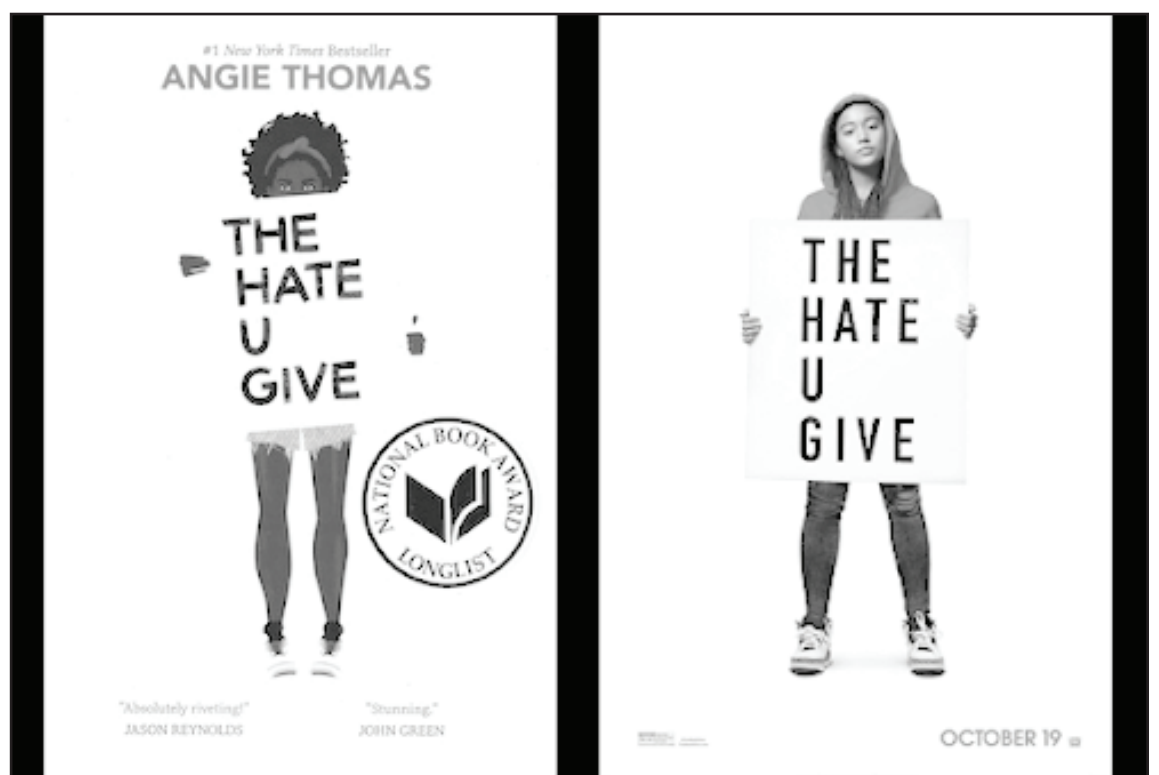
Hannah Boyer, a 7th grader, also enjoyed both the book and the movie. She said, "It was educational and it talks about how African-Americans live every day. It showed a girl debating if she should speak up because she could be targeted..."

Eighth grader Noah Terry added, "Some people might have enjoyed the story because it had a good message and funny aspects, but others might not have enjoyed the story because they might have a different opinion than Starr Carter, the main character."

One actor was Amandla Stenberg (Starr Carter) who also played Rue in the movie *The Hunger Games*. Other actors include Regina Hall (Lisa Carter), Russell Hornsby (Maverick Carter), Common (Uncle Carlos), and Algee Smith (Khalil).

According to the movie review website Rotten Tomatoes, the critics gave *The Hate U Give* the movie a very high rating of 97%.

The critics stated, "Led by a breakout turn from Amandla Stenberg, the hard-hitting [movie] *The Hate U Give* emphatically proves the YA [Young Adult] genre has room for much more



than magic and romance."

A parent who reviewed the book on the Common Sense Media book website, said the book was "Beautifully written and so poignant. I haven't read a book that impacted me as much as *The Hate U Give* did in a very long while."

While most of the reviews were positive, one critic from *Plugged In* had this to say about the movie: "But even as it at-

tempts to be fair-minded, this film still comes off feeling one-sided in its treatment of controversial issues."

In my opinion, this critic is missing the point entirely! Now, if I'm not mistaken, *The Hate U Give* is from the perspective of one girl, so wasn't the movie supposed to show mostly, if not all of, her opinion?

If you're curious or want to join the conversation about *The*

Hate U Give, you can check out a copy of the book from our school or public libraries. The movie is already out of theaters, but you can see it on Redbox or OnDemand.

Harper's Choice is holding a "Community Conversation and Movie Night" for *The Hate U Give* on March 1st. Students can watch the movie and have discussions before and after the movie is over.

How to Care for Your Pet Teacher:



Andrew Heffner,
8th Grade Reporter

A SATIRE

Are you having trouble caring for your pet teacher? Do they keep nagging you about all the homework you need to finish? Well, here are some helpful tips on how to keep your pet teacher happy in just 5 simple steps!

Step 1: Always give them work on time!

A happy pet teacher is a happy pet owner! If your pet teacher gives you homework that is due the next day, you should complete it and hand it in by the next day. Otherwise, your pet teacher will get very angry, and probably rip up your left shoe...

Step 2: Don't interrupt!

Many pet teachers dislike being interrupted. Some even say things like "I'll wait" or "Continue with your conversation if it's more important than learning" which can be embarrassing when it comes from your pet. The best option would be to listen to what they have to say, and then ignore it completely.

Step 3: Don't talk at all! Not even a single word.

On second thought, just don't speak near your pet teacher! After talking near mine for a while, I've noticed that he started to copy my voice and now impersonates me so that he can order pizzas to the classroom or wire money into his bank account! He's quite a silly little fellow.

Step 4: Don't be late to class!

One of the biggest pet peeves of a pet teacher is tardiness. If you schedule a grooming session at 3, then you should be at the groomers by 2:50, just to be safe. A great motto to follow when you have a pet teacher is "early is on time, and on time is late."

Step 5: Feed your pet teacher!

Lastly, feed your pet teacher! Apples are typically suggested. But remember, never overfeed them! If you do, they will become too powerful, and will initiate their plan for world domination. It's no biggie, though. A bit of diet and exercise will help them work off their thirst for human blood!

And there you have it! The 5 simple and easy steps to keeping your pet teacher happy! I hope your day is full of peace, joy, and harmony with your teachers!

Success in school starts with teacher-student relationships



Daesha Johnson,
7th Grade Reporter

For some people, school is just about sitting in class, listening to the teacher, and raising our hands until the end of class – and that's that. But the truth is, school can be so much more than that when you develop a good relationship with your teachers.

Having a good student-teacher relationship can help you start to feel more comfortable with your teachers, which helps you to ask questions and not be scared to talk to your teacher.

In fact, forming a good relationship with a teacher is always possible, even if you started off on the wrong foot.

Social studies teacher Amy Smith said that both students and teachers can "learn to forgive others and admit when you may be wrong."

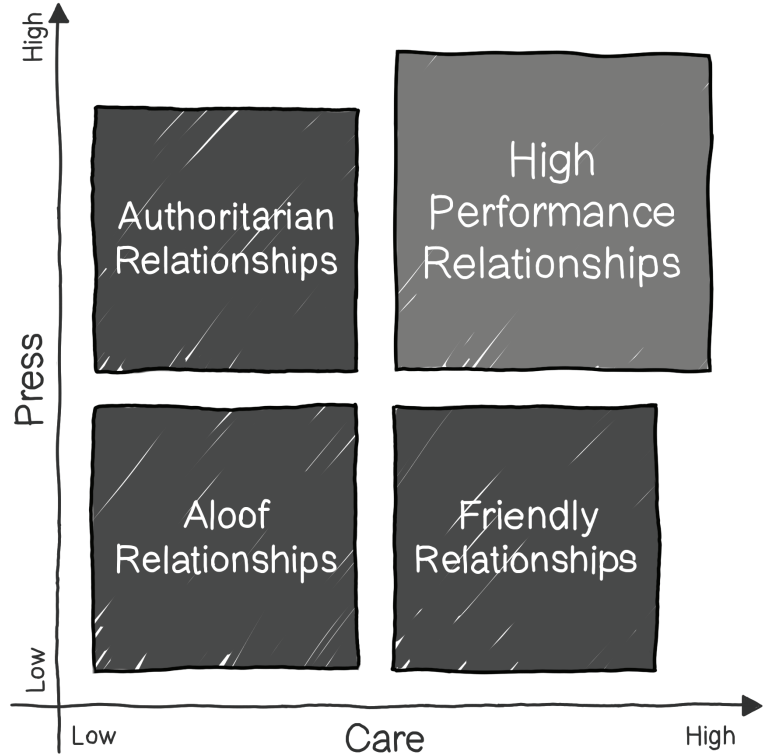
Smith suggested that if a student-teacher relationship isn't good, the student or teacher could ask for a meeting to be open and discuss with some changes you would like to see.

"Try to start each day fresh, with a clean state," Smith added.

I agree with Smith that forgiving others is part of how we build good relationships, because when you forgive someone it shows them that you respect them and are able to trust them, even after a wrongdoing.

So, how do teachers try to promote good relationships with their students?

Art teacher Maxquesar Jones explained, "I try to find out what I have in common with my students and try to relate with them. It also helps to get to know their generation."



Research shows that teacher who care about their students and also push them to do their best, can get students to achieve the highest level of performance.

I think Jones is right because with the generation today, it can be hard to find out what kids like and it's always good to learn something new about your students.

"I try to find out what I have in common with my students and try to relate with them."

-Maxquesar Jones, Art teacher

Alternative education teacher, Judy Lerner, said that she hopes she always has good relationships with her students. She sees student-teacher relationships as very important for students achieving success in school.

Lerner explained, "When students are learning, they should know they are able to ask their teachers for help and they can ask questions."

While teachers are trying to learn more about their students and build good relationships with

them, what can students do to help?

Avi Rhodes in 7th grade suggested, "You should ask for help when they are not teaching or when there's free time and you should ask questions when you are confused or when you don't understand the assignment."

Students agree that when they have good relationships with their teachers, it makes the class and learning more enjoyable.

Two 7th graders, Arianna Miller and Nuriyah Minhas, said that when they have good relationships with their teachers it's more fun because "we can talk about funny things and make jokes about the subjects we are learning."

I hope this article helps students and teachers connect with each other and learn that it's okay to ask questions and get help from teachers. You shouldn't be scared to speak up and reach out to your teachers for guidance. Thank you for reading!

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Thank you, Ms. Smith, for supporting our school newspaper.

Congratulations from Ms. Burnett to all the Journalism students on their successful newspaper launch! Great job!

CULTURE · CULTURA · LA CULTURE



Law & Order hits the stage Spring musical now in production

Top left: 7th graders Ashleigh Thur, Avi Rhodes, Tiffany Blakely, Kamil Roberts, and 6th grader Jordyn Chaimiti in their *Law & Order* scene. Center: 7th graders Joshua Tucker and Cece Roca strike a pose. Top right: 8th grader Samya Miles and 7th grader Elise Varoli as fairy tale police.



Deya Dimitrova,
8th Grade Reporter

This year Harper's Choice Middle School's Drama Club performed the play *Law & Order: A Fairy Tale Unit* on December 5th and 6th, 2018.

The play is a comedy written by Jonathan Rand. It is about a fairy tale criminal justice system.

According to Playscripts.com, "The characters from fairy tales and nursery rhymes are represented by two separate yet equally ridiculous groups: the fairy tale police who investigate fairy tale crime, and the fairy tale district attorneys who prosecute the fairy tale offenders."

According to the Drama Club sponsors, social studies teacher Jessica Padgett and music/chorus teacher Angela Pope, there were about 35 HCMS students in-

involved in the *Law & Order* play. The students said they joined the Drama Club for many different reasons. Some wanted to be a character in the play and others wanted to be a part of the crew. The students who were actors and actresses had different parts and they had to spend time practicing their lines outside of the Drama Club.

For example, Helina Amera, an 8th grader, played Little Red in the play. She said, "Being a character is like being someone else. It's like you are being someone and you are being them in their situation and you really get in character, meaning you have to be them and forget you are pretending for a minute."

She also explained that she would say her lines whenever she could to practice them and get them in her mind. What inspired her to join Drama Club? She said she loves acting, art, and watching lots of movies and she thought it would be cool to just pretend to be someone else.

In addition to acting, Amera said that it was a new experience for her to also be part of the backstage crew. These are the students who help out behind the curtains.

Another student, Liliana Choppelas in 8th grade, played Queen Anne. She said that the experience was fun, but it was also stressful at times. "It can be hard to learn your lines and work out blocking at home... but it's usually really fun."

Choppelas added, "It lets you take a break from the world where everything is 'like this' and it lets you be different." She explained that she usually practiced her lines about twice a week. What inspired her to join the Drama Club was that she likes acting and seeing if she can become a temporary "new self."

In the end, Choppelas and Amera both said they enjoyed the experience and planned to audition for the Spring musical.

The Spring musical will be *Little Mermaid Junior*. Auditions were held in January and 52 stu-



Above: Drama Club sponsors Jessica Padgett and Angela Pope.

dents will be in the show, as well as 20 students in the crew.

Although the Drama Club met twice a week after school to practice for the *Law & Order* play, they are meeting more frequently for the musical because the production has more elements.

Performance dates for the Spring musical have already been set. You can check out the *Little Mermaid Junior* show on May 9, 10, and 11th at 7 p.m., with an additional 2 p.m. performance on Saturday, May 11th for all the understudies to perform their roles.

VOTED

You voted,
we listened!

The winner of
last issue's
Art Contest was:

Geleisi Li
6th grader

for her piece entitled
"2 Boys Bonding at the Lockers"

If you want to enter
the Art or Poetry
contest in our next
issue, please submit
your original artwork
or poem to Ms.
Cometa or Ms. Six.

"Winter's Not Over Yet..." Word Search

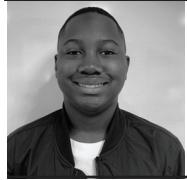
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- WINTER
- PATRIOTS
- FRIENDSHIP
- RAMS
- MALCOLM X
- MUHAMMAD ALI
- SUPERBOWL
- BLACK HISTORY
- FORTNITE
- FEBRUARY
- SNOW DAYS

Created by Naila Ba'th

Play this puzzle online at : <https://thewordsearch.com/puzzle/532968/>

SPORTS COMMENTARY: Is John Wall worth all the hype? Are the Wizards a good team?



Joshua Cofie,
8th Grade
Reporter



John Wall playing in his last game before his injury.

photo courtesy of the Washington Post

The former University of Kentucky guard hasn't really been showing his dominance lately, missing 16 games due to injury, and the Wizards losing half of the 16, due to Wall's absence.

The G-Men have still done well due to the exceptional performances by Bradley Beal and the gang.

This somewhat proves the Wizards aren't in need of John Wall. I'm sure Scott Brooks just saw money lying in the team's account and was like, "Let's overpay this liability whose injury could end his career!"

The Wizards had some other options in the 2010 Draft instead of John Wall. They could have acquired Paul George who has

been going off this season. Or, they could have gotten, wait for it... DeMarcus Cousins. Come to think of it, Cousins wouldn't really stay because of how poorly the Wizards have been playing.

Tomas Satoransky has been a pretty efficient point guard if you ask me, but if we compare his paycheck to John Wall's, it don't add up, chief! If they were to release Wall, a team that would need him would be the Hawks.

Trae Young is just a rookie and from the looks of it, being a start-

ing playmaker hinders his ability to choose good shots. He hasn't really been giving his all in the minutes he gets, but he tries.

Now watch the Trae Young fanboys send me messages like, "Oh TrAe YoUnG wAs ThE bEsT pOiNt GuArD In HiS cLaSs."

So are we gonna overlook Luka Doncic? The Hawks would have had him in an Atlanta jersey if they didn't trade him to the Mavs on Draft Night. The Hawks just lost out on a player who's

being called the "Next LeBron" for the Tesco version of Stephen Curry (excuse my British).

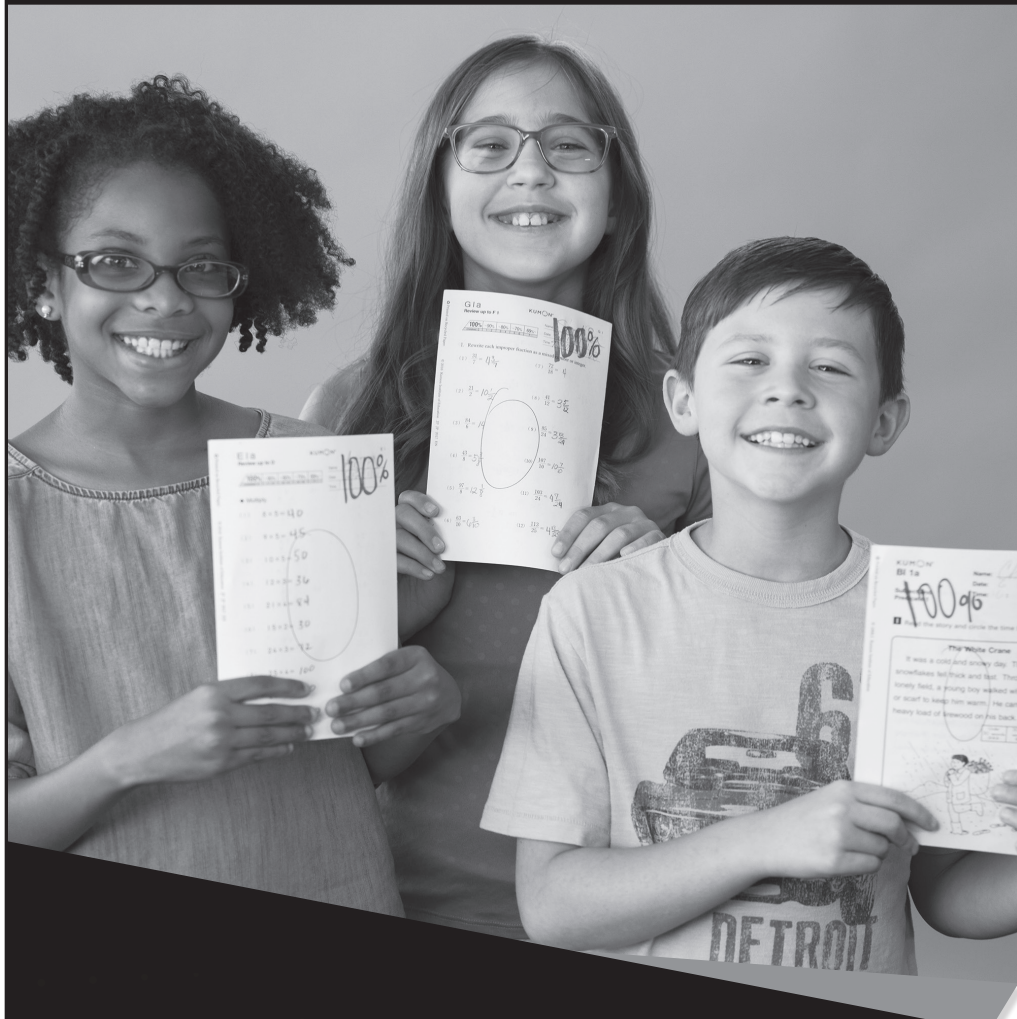
But, back to Wall. He is a decent all-around player. I think the Wizards should keep Wall, but cut his contract to sign an efficient free agent, which means keeping him but paying him less.

An 8th grader, Jeremiah Darden, said, "His contract is too big. He used to be pretty good, but not this season due to his injury."

A 7th grader, Tyler Mooneyhan, agreed, "His contract is too big for someone who gets injured a lot."

Sixth grader Pierre Kamga added, "It's not ok for someone who doesn't play on a daily basis to get paid that much!"

Overall, the Wizards are a 6/10 team to me. They have their ups and downs (mostly downs) but they've proven to be tough cookies. John Wall, in my opinion, is an overhyped player.



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