

# The Westword

*Student voice of the Westhill community*  
*"The test of good journalism is the measure of its public service."*

Boys Volleyball: Vikings of the FCIAC  
Page 15

p. 6

SENIOR WILLS  
CLASS OF '23

p. 8

INTERVIEW WITH  
PRINCIPAL RINALDI

p. 11

STUDENT SMALL  
BUSINESSES



# 2 | The Westword

## 2022-2023 Staff

**Editor-in-Chief**  
Arleny Flores  
**Associate Editor-in-Chief**  
Mahathi Uppuluri  
**Online Executive Editor**  
Laasya Kasaru  
**Print Executive Editor**  
Rim Ratibi  
**News Editor**  
Eugene Caibal  
**Viewpoint Editors**  
Ashlei Nunez  
Fatima Hernandez Ortiz  
**Las Noticias Editors**  
Camila Marquez  
Ashlei Nunez  
**Special Editor**  
Dania Pinto  
**Feature Editor**  
Nina Lopes  
**Supplement Editor**  
Juliana Miller  
**Limelight Editor**  
Juliana Miller  
**Sports Editor**  
Aarin Basu  
**Reporters**  
James Ballester  
Isabelle Bassotto  
Eugene Caibal  
Yaniah Chisolm  
Jenna Cohen  
Margaret Denninger  
Djemima Duvernau  
Malcolm Fenster  
Shira Gabay  
Cadence Jagodzinski  
Chidube Kalu  
Julia Marchetti  
Mia Nocera  
Nicholas Ortiz  
Piotr Popowski  
Ana Luisa Radke  
Isabella Rincon  
Taylor Romeo  
Evan Roth  
Olivia Thomas  
Emily Urda  
Christian Vega Galeano  
Tianna Williams  
Michelle Oziembala

**The Westword**  
Westhill High School  
125 Roxbury Road  
Stamford, CT 06902  
(203) 977-4894  
thewestwordonline.com

Visit [ourschoolnewspaper.com/Westword](https://ourschoolnewspaper.com/Westword)  
to view our print archives.

## Note from the editors

### June 2023

Dear Readers,

Thank you for your continued interest in the Westword. We are honored to be the prominent voice of the Westhill community. We are thrilled to share this edition with you.

This is our first physical edition of the paper this year. We maintained a strict online presence for the paper through Instagram (@thewestword) and the website since we had a much smaller staff than ever before. Despite facing short staffing hurdles, we adapted. We wanted this paper to serve as a nice wrapup of the school year, highlighting some of the most important topics and events in our community.

Our main focus of the year was to build a larger

staff, and as the year has progressed, we've succeeded in finding more devoted members.

We are proud of the progress we have made this year as a team, and hope to expand and reinvent the newspaper next year.

As for the content of this edition, News covers student murals, 2023 Senior Prom, the Bee Club, the Environmental Club's innovative composting program, and the absence appeals controversy.

Supplement includes senior wills!

Take a behind the scenes look at Mr. Rinaldi's new podcast 'Viking Voices', Dr. Wax leaving WHS, and student-run small businesses on Feature.

Limelight covers the top five biggest albums of

this year so far.

Viewpoint highlights opinions on the recent surge of AI, specifically ChatGPT, in schools and the latest Voracious Vikings adventure!

Las Noticias cubre los momentos más significativos en 2023 de la cultura pop y la seguridad de los peatones en Stamford.

Sports spotlights the record-breaking year the Westhill Boys Volleyball team had this year and discusses sports culture and locker room talk.

Sincerely,

Arleny Flores & Mahathi Uppuluri

Editor-in-Chief & Associate Editor-in-Chief

## What's inside

- 3 News Westhill Murals
- 6 Supplement Senior Wills
- 8 Feature BTS look at Principal Rinaldi's Podcast
- 12 Limelight Top 5 Albums of the Year so Far
- 13 Viewpoint AI ChatGpt, Voracious Vikings Food Review
- 14 Las Noticias Cultura Pop en la Primera Mitad de 2023
- 15 Sports Sports Culture and Westhill Boys Volleyball

### Editorial Policy

The Westword will be guided in the publication of material by a concern for truth, human decency, and human benefit. It is published during the school year by The Westword staff, along with the Communications and Journalism classes. Letters to the Editor, advertising requests, comments, criticism, or suggestions are always welcome. The views expressed in Viewpoint and the Op-Ed page do not necessarily represent the opinions of The Westword.

### Announcements

There are no announcements at this time.

If you have an announcement or an advertisement you would like published in the next issue, please e-mail us at [westwordwhs@gmail.com](mailto:westwordwhs@gmail.com).

Front cover contributed by **Eugene Caibal**.  
Back cover photos by **Rim Ratibi** (top),  
**Anna Edwards** (bottom left), &  
**Arleny Flores** (bottom right) /  
Editor-in-Chief & Contributors.

## Exploration: Westhill Art Show & Paint the Hill Project

**Malcom Fenster**  
Reporter

“Art stirs things up,” art department teacher Mrs. Ramsey said. “It can provoke, evoke, encourage, connect and it does sometimes surpass understanding. It’s hard to explain the power of art because language is limiting.”

Believe it or believe it, Westhill is actually an incredibly artistic school... if you couldn’t tell somehow. The visual and performing arts department keeps expanding outward as time marches on. Literal thousands of students are enrolled in art programs this year and thousands are due again next year - and likely every year after that. And what a better way to celebrate the creative population of Westhill than with the spring art show and concert?

Once a year, students are allowed to submit works to be shown off in a gallery that spans the entire art level, with the goal of showcasing EVERY kid who takes a visual arts course. It used to be held in the school’s lobby, but according to department head Ms. Konrad, they “ran out of room,” forcing them to move it downstairs. The number of works on display is probably unquantifiable for one person. So many lovely pieces that extend outward the mind of their respective artists are showcased.

The gallery this year featured clay modeling, photography, illustration, knitting, computer graphic art, cardboard crafts, and more. The hall is walled with stands displaying physical works while strings holding up photographs, paintings, and photoshop projects adorn the lockers. There were also props from our fall play, which were built by Mr. Martin and his class.

The thing about the art show isn’t just the variety of pieces, but the variety of students making them. Almost every piece you see is made by a different artist, so no one individual personality or passion overwhelms the others. While no specific students are highlighted, there is a dedicated section of the gallery for students who are submitting AP portfolios, featuring the works

of their respective portfolios with QR codes to take you there.

For example, Ryan Hosantalebi’s paintings show very precise planning and care put into the details of close ups of people and landscape shots of buildings. Lilly Lapine’s mixed media works give an idea of how senses are experienced by special needs kids, inspired by the ones she works with. Sofia Bazan’s

out the school recently.

“Reclaiming, reimagining, and transforming the school environment” are the three legs of the Paint the Hill project, which was started by Ms. Ramsey back at the beginning of Q4 this year. Having conceived of the idea as an extension of her final project for Drawing and Painting 1 in previous years - letting each student paint a ceiling panel - she discussed

connectedness: which refers to when students feel that adults and peers in school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals. This includes a sense of being cared for, being supported, and belonging at school,” said Ramsey.

The art walk project was proposed to Ms. Konrad in mid-March and approved quickly after.

Any student could paint a ceiling tile or mural so long as they submitted a sketch of their idea and discussed it with Ms. Ramsey. “Nothing is allowed on the wall that was not approved,” explains Ms. Ramsey. “There were some mural ideas that had to be reworked but the emphasis is on student voice and student choice.”

That student voice is certainly felt. One mural may be a self portrait with an abstract and overpowering background, another may be a motivational message or quote that stretches through a corridor with accompanying imagery, and another may be a loving tribute to Kenny from South Park. Actually, at least two of them are.

Point is, if you can dream it, you can do it. This ties into the aspect of making the student base feel welcomed within the school walls.

“When students have ownership over their school environment and ‘reclaim’ the space, they are building a sense of belonging, unity and connection with each other by sharing their diverse interests and experiences through visual representations of favorite cartoon characters, quotes and other personal original imagery they have chosen to paint on the wall,” Ms. Ramsey continues in her description of the project.

For decades, the walls of Westhill have been dull, lifeless and white making the school feel more like a clinical institution or prison than a school. The Paint the Hill project has already made big changes and it seems like plans are to continue to turn the school around for years to come.



**MURALS** Top-bottom: Briana Kastrati, Jeisy Trigueros  
Photos By: Mahathi Uppuluri

colored pencil works depict her struggles in a mixed heritage family where she fits into neither side. Ayo Job’s gorgeous life-like showcase a questioning of one’s identity and reality.

This art walk may only last a day, but in its place the rest of time, there’s an ever present feeling of congeniality that’s been growing across the walls through-

the purpose of public murals and these goals with her class.

Ramsey notes that all three parts of the goal connect to an ongoing mental health crisis with our generation which you might’ve recognized at some point in the last few years.

“This project supports social and emotional learning because it directly impacts school



# Senior Prom 2023: Casino Royale

**Rim Ratibi**

Print Executive Editor

Senior prom was held on Friday, May 19th. Themed ‘Casino Night,’ this year’s prom was a night full of music, bets, and entertainment that will surely be remembered as a core memory for Westhill’s seniors.

The loading dock was beautifully decorated with streamers and cards, accompanied with red, black, and gold accents to fit the elegant theme. As soon as students entered the venue, they were met with the mocktail bar, which continuously served drinks all night. The center of the main room was left open for the dance floor, and was surrounded by several tables where students could enjoy their food and have fun with their friends. The menu at prom started off with appetizers, followed by a buffet dinner and lastly an ice cream bar for dessert.

Here is what a couple of guests had to share about their prom night:

“I thought it was fun, I thought everyone had a good time. I think the student government and

the senior class did a really good job of decorating, organizing, and planning the event.” - Mr. McFillin

“The music wasn’t my favorite, but I loved the venue, the whole theme was nice and the company was good. The decor was really well done and I think the seniors did a great job with everything.” - Kamila Brito (‘23)

Guests who wanted some time away from the dance floor

could go to the casino room, where they could enjoy a game of blackjack, poker, or shoot some craps. Students could take their winnings from the tables in exchange for raffle entries at the end of the night for the chance to win one of the many gifts available. There was also a fully equipped game room where students could play foosball, ping pong, arcade basketball, and more. There were also several

photo booths with props available for students who wanted to take pictures to commemorate this memorable night.

This year’s organizers deemed prom a major success.

“We wanted to give people options for the night and I think that played out really well. People loved the poker, they loved the ping-pong, and they loved breaking it down on the dance floor!” - Jacklyn Brzoska (23’)

“As the senior advisor, I thought it went really well. Everyone was super well behaved, the decorations were awesome, and the casino was fun. People mostly stayed the whole night, which shows me that they had a good time. When you throw a big event, you’re always nitpicking. There were definitely things I saw that no one noticed, but overall it all went very smoothly and I’m happy it went well. On to graduation!” - Mrs. Grant

The seniors were able to end their year on a fulfilling note, playing poker, drinking mocktails, dancing all night, and most importantly, in each other’s presence.



**SENIOR PROM** Students having fun on the dance floor. Photo by Rim Ratibi.

## The Club to ‘Bee’ in at Westhill

**Juliana Miller**

Reporter

Just like teachers and students at Westhill, bees have important roles to fill and tasks to complete. Bees work to maintain entire ecosystems, which is why Westhill is home to a club dedicated to bees (more specifically honeybees) and their purpose.

The Westhill Bee Club, as noted by the club’s president Annie Edwards, “tends the school’s apiaries and learns about the importance of the honeybee”. The club has around ten members but they continue to welcome new students who may be interested. Although there are no set meeting days, the club members typically convene on Tuesdays or Thursdays and are always encouraging new members to join.

Not only does the club focus on bee-oriented education, they also operate and supervise the bee hives located on school grounds. The hives, found between the outdoor track and the street, produce honey that club members harvest,



**BEEKEEPING** Bee Club members examining a beehive.

Photo by Anna Edwards.

jar, and eventually sell to limited buyers. The profits are used for club funding, considering it is such an expensive club to run. In an interview with Ms. Grant, supervisor for the Bee Club and teacher for the beekeeping class, she said, “Hopefully we’ll have a lot more honey sales in the future.”

As the club purchases more bees to operate the hives, there is more work that needs to be done by the club members to extract the honey. This process is time-consuming, yet extremely rewarding. It offers members an unforgettable and informative experience and helps them to establish an appreciation for these magnificent creatures. “We’ve learned so much since the club started and we’ll just keep getting better” Ms. Grant states. Edwards adds, “We love BEE-ing a Viking!”

For those who are interested in the Bee Club or who want to learn more about it, more information can be found on their Instagram @westhill\_bee\_club.



# Enviromental Club Cooks Up Composting

**Emily Urda**  
Reporter

Westhill is proudly the first school in the Stamford school district to implement a composting system for excess wasre. Kayla Williamson ('23), president of the Environmental Club, discussed the arduous process it took to implement this at the school. The project has been a long-term goal of the club. They began working on the project in October of this school year. Kayla collaborated with superintendent Dr. Lucero, the Director of Sanitation and Recycling of Stamford Dan Colleluori, and has also worked with the food-waste task force.

In January, composting began at Westhill, but started "in the back of house." This meant that composting began in the back of the kitchen. Those

in charge of meal prep, for Westhill students, were trained on how to compost waste material that is created during the cooking process.

"It's important to teach others the importance of composting and push for it to happen more," Charlotte McDonald ('24) said, a member of the Environmental club.

Just recently, "front of house" composting was implemented. Environmental Club members help sort the garbage into separate barrels and custodians put the trash in biodegradable bags. The material is then collected on Friday by Curbside Compost. The compost is brought to the Katrina Mygatt recycling center.

"I learned some good recycling and composting tips while in the process of teaching ev-

erybody else the dos and don'ts. I even had a fun time helping build the structures that would later be used to hold the barrels in the cafeteria in place," Kaitlyn Gray ('24) said, a member of the environmental club.

The Environmental Club hopes to collaborate with Agriscience's composting system one day. Agriscience's composting system currently only takes organic materials like plants, fruits and veggies, and not food waste that contains dairy or meat products. A system that biodegrades heavier materials requires a larger system that is packed with a variety of microbiomes. Agriscience's system is small and cannot handle the amount of waste produced by Westhill's cafeteria. Future goals include plans



**ENVIRO CLUB COMPOST BINS** line the wall in the Finch Cafeteria to denote bottles, trash, and compostables.  
Photo by Enviromental Club/ Instagram

to implement a pollinator garden in the garden that sits in the front of the building.

To join or to reach out visit the Environmental Club's Instagram

@westhillenviro. The Westhill Environmental Club meets every Tuesday after school and volunteers at Mill River Park every other Wednesday.

## To Appeal or Not to Appeal?

**Michelle Oziembala**  
Reporter

As the school year has gone on, students have had to adjust to the new block schedule. For many other students, their entire high school experience has faced many changes in regards to COVID-19

restrictions, mask wearing, and schedule changes. It almost seems as though every year there's a drastic new change in the way our life at school is structured. However, with the new schedule came altered rules regarding absences

as well. Previously, students were allowed to have a maximum of twenty absences for the entire year before losing credit for the class. However, that number has dwindled down to ten.

Students have the option of documenting these absences in order to excuse them, which would make it seem as though you couldn't lose credit for the class since the absences have been excused, as said by Jaya Thomas ('24) "I thought I wouldn't lose credit because almost all of my absences had been documented." However, on May 16th, 2023, a vast number of students began receiving an alarming email stating that they

had lost credit for their classes. This email was a little unusual, considering that students had previously received a warning email before officially losing credit. "I was shocked when I got the email because my absences were documented, and I thought I would get a warning before losing credit," says Molly Balestriere ('24) when asked how she felt upon receiving the daunting email.

Many students deem this unpleasant surprise as unfair, especially students who have worked hard the entire year and earned good grades. A lot of students claim that if they have a good grade in the class, then having ten absences shouldn't stop them from losing their hard earned credit.

This massive loss

of credit is causing many students to express their outrage. The day the email was sent, it was all that students talked about. A petition was started by someone who kept themselves anonymous, but it was shared all over social media, and got about 1500 signatures (as of May 19, 2023). It's titled, "Mass Grant an Absence Appeal for 2022-23 — Grace period" and has numerous comments from both parents and students expressing their frustration.

A parent from Stamford High stated, "Seems unfair for a child to have to stay back due to absence. If the child is passing the class they should not have to fail because of this." Will the district grant a mass appeal of absences this year? We'll have to wait and see.



**MR. PAZMINO** working with DeAndre Rodas ('26) to appeal his absences.  
Photo by Arleny Flores.



## Grace Tolla

Hobart and William Smith Colleges 2027

I, Grace Tolla, of caffeine-wired body and busy mind, hereby leave...



**Tech Crew:** The spooky spiral staircase, Monster Energy drinks, the one pair of scissors in the entire woodshop, and enough Trader Joe's snacks to last through tech week. **The Stamford Agriscience Program:** My constant presence in the Ag Office and in not-my-classes, my completely diagonal parking, Ag-Dog obsession, lemon-blueberry muffin recipe, directions from Fordham to Stamford train station, and my genuine, undying love for each and everyone one of you. **Natural Resources Class:** Boyfriend training, seven mile hikes, my favorite country music playlist, a thousand more snowshoe knots, Saturday field trips to maple syrup farms, and "pesto." **Ski Team:** Legendary yard-sale falls, horrendously long race times, my best mom-friend advice and loudest cheers, chair-lift gossip sessions, leftover french fries, and red Gatorade. **Meghan McLaughlin and Erin Casey:** Table, George and Bama, Ticketmaster war stories, and freshmen year heartbreaks. **Mr. Von Wahlde:** Seventeen page essays about dining tables, interruptions to your daily monologues, unicorn points, and a five on my AP Lang exam. **And to Westhill:** Thank you for the lessons, not so much about Chemistry or Precalculus, but definitely about life.

## Milena Prakapenka

Duke University

2027

I, Milena "Mila" Prakapenka, of tired body and determined mind, hereby leave...

**Arleny Flores:** Taylor Swift weekly sharings, Lorca and Honey Joe's "productive" study sessions, 0.5 selfies, and pictures in the government center elevator's mirror ceiling. **Vivian Mendoza:** Pre-first period meet-ups, boba and coffee, spamming my entire camera roll with pictures, your entire APCSP class knowing me because of how often I come there, and Dixie the dog. **Maya Snead:** Your reaction to everything, rides with your brother. **William Snead:** Giant tennis ball and minions. **Kayla Williamson:** Seeing you every day in my APES class, enviro club, and car rides to Harry Styles. **Adil Oryspae:** Data structures labs, competitive coding meetups, and struggling in physics. **Vishal Nayak:** Competing in AP Psychology. **Ms. Dodita:** Talks about Eastern Europe. **Mr. Sarkar:** competitive programming Instagram. **Nataliya Pastushenko:** Morning drives with your mom.



## Meghan McLaughlin

University of Alabama at Birmingham

2027

I, Meghan McLaughlin, of calm body and hectic mind, hereby leave...



**Grace Tolla:** All of our Books and Boba adventures, walking you to class everyday, and our dress up days. **Northstar Playmakers:** Dunkin runs before rehearsal, my constant tardiness, and my absence on opening nights. **Vivian Mendoza:** Your homemade honey sticker, our fights in AP Lit, and my lack of reading. **Grace Gerard:** Our constant therapy sessions, stealing your chips, and constantly thinking you are a senior. **Niko Rinaldi:** Getting you home at a reasonable hour, feeding Aragog, and Covid tests. **Erin Casey:** Screeching my car around corners, ice cream, and breaking heels at homecoming. **Stamford FFA:** My rants in the office, shouting my lines at meetings, always being there until the last possible moment and my constant excitement for the dogs (except Dove). **Dr. Martin:** Being late for field trips and class, my snowshoes, bee puns, and my athletic career. **Mrs. Marenholz:** Distracting the Ag 2's from their work, my lack of reigned in squirrels, and walking your dogs. **Westhill:** Four chaotic years, never attending a football game, and the morning announcements.





## Evan Roth

University of Maryland

2027

I, Evan Roth, of tired body and coffee-addicted mind, hereby leave...

**Milind Sharma:** We grew together, and allowed our dreams to become reality. Countless calls at 3AM about the gym, girls, or anything on our minds, you were always there for me. **Kevin Sasser:** You created my love for cars and put me in a competitive environment to always want to do better and try to beat you even though I would usually fall short or just barely win. **Kimberly Boyd:** The sunshine to my thunderstorm. You are always there to brighten up my day, laugh with me, and most importantly, eat chicken nuggets with. **Coach Ashton:** You inspired me to go outside of my comfort zone and become a responsible and mature man who is not afraid to put in work to achieve success and overall improvements.

## Vivian Mendoza

University of Connecticut at Storrs

2027

I, Vivian Mendoza of a tired body and brilliant mind, hereby leave...

**Arleny Flores:** Mila ruining surprises, car rides home from MYLC meetings, target runs, "your mom" jokes. **Mila Prakapenka:** Weird Instagram reels, rats, and NHS tutoring. **Daniel Vega:** The ukulele I never returned and my longest snap streak. **Maya Snead:** Plain bagels without cream cheese, 5 hour naps, and crazy 8 during Crafts. **Eden Cheung:** Sudoku and post-AP Psych talks. **My English 11 table:** Paper airplanes and pure chaos. **Mr.Sarkar:** Thanks for having patience with my inability to code and being the funniest teacher in the world. **Mrs.Wheeler:** For the daily smiles, kindness and encouragement. **The Westhill Art Department:** Unfinished artwork and baseballs.



## Kayla Williamson

Columbia University: Fu Foundation School of Engineering & Applied Science

2027

I, Kayla Williamson, of sleep deprived body and obnoxious-passionate mind, hereby leave...

**Ms. Grant:** Toilets and crying babies, wind turbines (not windmills), soooo many meetings, lots of compost, and so much love. **Jackie Brzoska:** Blowouts, naps during 1B, AP bio review, sweater blankets, and my entire heart. **Ms. Leveille:** "Cool and tasty beverages," pushing us out of the nest, chicks, pollinator gardens. **Lilly Lapine:** "Everything Everywhere All at Once," glances in the hallway, Instagram recipes, bagel sales with Nicola and Kyhlie. **MYLC execs:** Wednesdays @5:30, birthday surprises, lunch flyers, mental health activism, LG. **Mr. Joseph:** Random visits at your office, cute baby pics, "let's goooooooo," 2:00am emails.



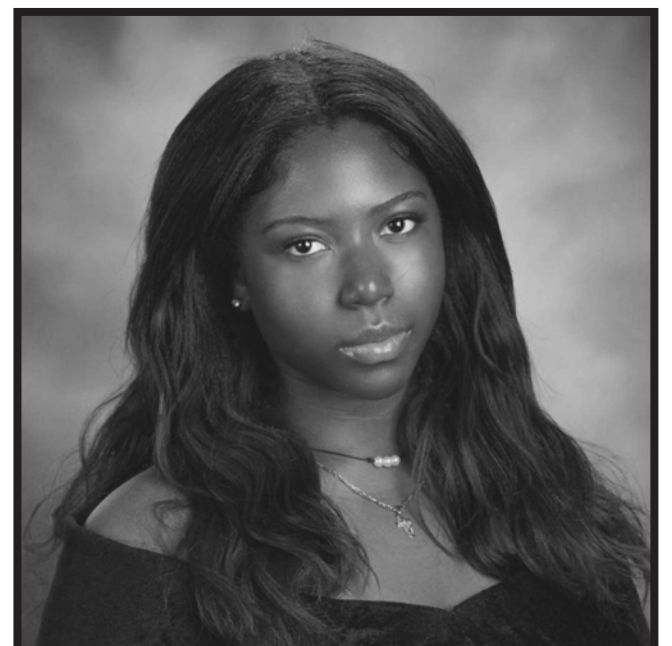
## Zoe McFarlane

University of Massachusetts

2027

I, Zoe McFarlane, of towering body and wise mind, hereby leave...

**Ms.Tobin:** An invisible stack of late passes and my Starbucks receipts from going there every morning. **Mahathi Uppuluri:** A book of lifelong advice. **Mr. Ng and Ms.Midy:** My gigantic book of complaints that I've made in the last four years. **Mr. Nadeau:** My spirit of attention, because I never paid attention in his class. And lastly **Steph Balerazo:** My phone.





## Behind the Scenes With Viking Voices

**Arleny Flores & Mahathi Uppuluri**  
Editor-in-chief & Associate Editor-in-chief

**Mahathi: What was the purpose of the podcast?**

**Mr. Rinaldi:** I've been a podcast fan for a long time, even before podcasts really super blew up. After I got settled in halfway through my second year, I had this thought that I would love to start a high school podcast where the Principal gets to talk to different people about things in the school and all that stuff. I'm full transparency, I think podcasts are cool. I wanted the equipment and to be the host and all of that stuff like I just thought it would be neat. I do like to talk to kids a lot and teachers too about different topics so I thought it might be good. What interested me the most about it was that so many people have a perception of high school, what goes on in high school from the outside looking in and they have no idea--they know you have to go to school, they remember maybe what it was like to go to school--but they have no idea that there's so much more to school than just class and different things and what's on kids' minds. So I wanted to create a podcast so the general public and parents can have a deeper understanding of what goes on in our high school. I've also always been, at least I believe this in my heart, a strong advocate for student voice and kids want to, you know, express themselves and talk about topics so I thought that would be a good avenue to be able to do that.

Now, the part that intimidated me the most was the technical aspect of all that. I had it in the back of my mind but I couldn't bring the idea--the dream--to fruition because every time I would research podcast equipment--It wasn't the price you know, that whole setup is less than five hundred dollars, but it was like the setting up. You know some people are really comfortable with the tech part of things and some people aren't. I'm not. Even though I do Instagram and stuff like that I really don't understand the ins and outs of all that stuff but last year around this time actually, two former students of mine, boys--well now they're men--invited me. They have their own podcast. And it's just a goofy podcast that they do on different topics and they--they're in their thirties now, I had them at Dolan Middle School when I was an assistant principal there-- and they invited me to be on their show. So I was like yeah call me out! I'd love to. You wanna talk to me? "Yeah, It would be fun cuz' you're like the principal and this and that". So I said sure. I went to Trumbull, where they live, and they had a whole studio in their basement and I was on their show. And I loved it. From the moment we put on the headphones. They had the cameras going and all of that stuff. And then when I watched the show and listened to it I was like yo this is a sign. So they were really grateful. I said well how grateful are you? I said help me set it up.

So they told me what to buy and it was as simple as a click on Amazon, got the equipment, and one of the two twins came to Westhill and set all that up for me and showed me how to do the show. Then I recorded the intro that you guys remember. We had to do that like five times. He showed me how to download it on my computer, set it up, and , and get the buzzsprout account. He took me step by step by step. If you listen to the very first episode, you hear his voice because I said to him "Alright I'm inviting Mrs. Grant and two former students in to do the first episode but I'm afraid I don't wanna do it by myself, can you be in the room?" So he's in the room, and you can hear him when I start the recording, he's like "go ahead, go ahead." And there it is. I committed to trying to do at least one show a month. I have to check, I think we're up to at least ten episodes.

*Editor's note: 20*

**Arleny: How do you come up with your ideas for the episodes?**

**Mr. Rinaldi:**

Oh that's a good question. You know it's kind of organic in that I don't sit down and give it conscious thought. I let it come to me. The first one I did think about. I was like what am I gonna do to kick this off? And I thought, well, let's go with former students. I chose Ms. Grant because I have a really nice relationship with her and I always feel really comfortable. Because I knew I'd be nervous on my first episode too and I wanted the adult on the show to be someone I was comfortable with, 'cuz I knew it had to be like a conversation and I picked two students that graduated and I called it "Wisdom For Your Elders"--that's the other thing, I come up with the title afterward-- and I just wanted to talk [to them] about now that you guys are leaving, what advice would you give to kids in high school? So that was the only one, ladies, that I really thought about. And then we had a new football coach last year, so I wanted to introduce him. Oh! Did you guys come to freshmen family night when you were freshmen?

**Mahathi: I don't know if they had that.**

**Mr. Rinaldi:** Because of Covid. So we didn't do it that year but we brought it back last summer.

**Arleny: Oh yeah, I was there! I was a student leader.**

**Mr. Rinaldi:** Oh you were helping out?

**Arleny: Yes!**

**Mr. Rinaldi:** Yeah! So that night, I got the idea to put freshmen on, so that episode is called "Welcome to the Class of 2026," and then we have the DOMUS group "Love Lives Here," NorthStar Playmakers--I definitely wanted to do that 'cause I wanted to get their show--you know, get them excited 'cus that was like a come-back year for NorthStar too. Westhill cheerleaders, Connecticut Rise, yeah. Some of these titles are cool. "Who is MYLC and what's the deal with all those green circles?"

**Arleny and Mahathi: \*Laughter\***

**Mr. Rinaldi:** You know what I mean? 'Cuz people are like "what's up with the green circles?" And some of it's goofy, like Niko would make fun of me. "Westhill's JROTC ATTENTION." Like you know, goofy dad jokes or goofy old principal jokes. Oh and then like the Ukrainian Club. We had so many kids, we've had over--probably close to thirty kids who had to leave their war-torn country and settled in Stamford. And a young lady named Emily Peka-- Uh what's her last name?

**Arleny: Yeah, Emily Pekar.**



**PRINCIPAL RINALDI** and his podcast setup.

Photo by Arleny Flores.



# Behind the Scenes With Viking Voices

**Arleny Flores & Mahathi Uppuluri**  
Editor-in-chief & Associate Editor-in-chief

**Mr. Rinaldi:** Yeah, she started the Ukrainian club with some other kids. I thought that was the most beautiful thing ever to help those kids. So I was like Emily, let's do that. So we did that. Oh! And then ChatGPT. What is that about? So sometimes it's about what I wanna learn about too. But that's how I come up with it.

**Mahathi:** So basically like whatever's going on you try to come out with that?

**Mr. Rinaldi:** Yeah, whatever pops off. Like as soon as I realized "oh, May is Mental Health Awareness Month," let's do it on that. 'Cause I have a nice relationship with Ms. Prescott, one of our social workers, and she and I talk all the time. It's interesting because even people who are comfortable in conversation or even comfortable with presenting are a little uncomfortable when they look at the setup over there and know it's recorded and it's gonna be listened to. You know you've gotta get people who are comfortable. But that's how I come up with my ideas, I just let it kind of come to me.



Left to right: Arleny Flores, Michael Hyman, Mahathi Uppuluri, and Principal Rinaldi.  
Photo by Arleny Flores.

**Mahathi:** Thanks! What do you think are the next steps for the podcast? Like future plans?

**Mr. Rinaldi:** I have it down to a science, right ladies? So tomorrow when the folks come we're gonna be on the show. From the moment they walk into the room and from the moment I download it, it's gonna be about an hour. What I would like to do going forward next year is I'd like to continue to try to keep it to at least one episode a month. I definitely was successful with that this year 'cause we did a lot of episodes. I would like to have students come up with topics. I would like to upgrade the show itself, and Mr. Otterspoor gave me a great idea--and I bought the camera. But of course, I'm admitting to you, I'm intimidated by it. You know which camera I'm talking about? The three sixty? It has like the little lens on both sides? You ever see those reels where somebody's skiing and you're like how are they filming themselves skiing? Those are called three sixty cameras. Yeah, so I definitely would like to do a video component. Now..that's ambitious. Look, not for nothing, that [the podcast] was ambitious. I have a lot of responsibilities as principal, right, and there's a lot of things I have to do so it's not a burden, but it's a lot to always do 'cause I've gotta do a lot of stuff. But the other thing I'd really like to do is have students edit. Like I need a team. I can't do it all myself, it's too much. If I'm gonna upgrade it and have a video component to it, I can't be doing all that stuff. It's too much for me to do. As it is tomorrow, I know I'm doing it right after school. I've gotta get all the other stuff done I gotta get done. I mean I can't be here 'till like eight o'clock every night. It's too much. You know I think that's the other thing I want to get done. I'd like to have students involved in helping me edit it and stuff like that. And you know what I'd like to do too? And you two convinced me of this. I just

never...I never really initiated it. I'd like to have student guest hosts.

**Arleny:** Yeah, that was really fun!

**Mahathi:** Yeah, I constantly think about that.

**Arleny:** Just building off that.. How do you run it right now? You edit it yourself?

**Mr. Rinaldi:** I do it all myself. And you know, I've gotten better and better at it but boy did I struggle when I started, like when I would download over here [points to his desk]. You've gotta--haha I know this is nothing for you guys--but you've gotta drag the file over, and then release it and then the little thing comes up-LET IT RIP-and then it goes and it's downloading and then I listen back and there were times I thought I didn't shut it off. And there were times I had little panic attacks because I didn't think I was doing it right but now I don't even worry about it.

**Arleny:** Our next question is: what have been some of your favorite experiences with the podcast?

**Mr. Rinaldi:** My favorite episode was definitely your episodes. The Board of Ed series. It was the first time, and really the only time that I gave the reins over to kids. I thought it was so pertinent because we teach civics, we teach about citizenship and elections and Board of Ed, and bringing that all together, that was the coolest thing. Every single Board member that ran last fall participated.

There were other episodes that meant a lot to me. Certainly, the Ukraine episode on an emotional level meant a lot to me. I had Emily Pekar on and we had a couple of kids on but their English--so Emily's English is perfect, right, one of the students, her English, she's working on it, and then the other student that was on, her English--absolutely not English whatsoever. I'm thinking man I hope he feels embraced and loved by his school because he had to have felt awful to leave his country. The worry he must have--'cause he shared it during the podcast-- about his relatives in Ukraine. Think about that for a minute. But yet he came to this country, scared probably, and now he's in the Principal's office, on the podcast. I hope that made him feel good. That was on an emotional level. On a pride level, your episode. I was like woah this is awesome! On an emotional level, the Ukraine episode.

**Mahathi:** So final question: Do you have any advice for any students trying to start something new like this? Or even like a podcast, for example.

**Mr. Rinaldi:** Yeah, so podcasts or anything else, there's a comfort zone. And the comfort zone feels comfortable, that's why they call it the comfort zone. But don't be so concerned about stepping out of your comfort zone. I encourage you to step out of your comfort zone. If you have an idea about something, go for it. Knowing you're gonna make mistakes. Knowing it's not gonna be perfect. Knowing you might feel embarrassed 'cause you might blow it or whatever. But that's okay 'cause that's how everybody started, right? And then also, especially if it's something you're not familiar with at all, find a mentor. My mentor is Jakai Wilson. He's one of the twins. Now I haven't talked to him in a long time. But without him, I probably would not have had the courage to step out of my comfort zone. So, find a mentor and then jump and don't be afraid. Or, be afraid and do it anyway. You'll be fine. You will remember now, for the rest of your life, that you were interested in something and you took a chance and you had fun. And that will inform you going forward as well. Anything that you guys are interested in, you feel that tug, you've gotta honor it. Because what's interesting is that when you get older, and you have your career, especially if you start a family and all that, that's all wonderful, but those responsibilities kind of put a--it's harder to explore the things you're interested in when you start adulting out there in the real world, you know? So everything you're interested in, especially as a young person, you've gotta go for it.



# Ciao! Dr. Wax off to Greenwich Public Schools

**Chidube Kalu**  
Reporter

Dr. Wax is well-known at Westhill. He has been at the school as Assistant Principal since 2012, serving through the administrations of Principal Figluizzi and Principal Rinaldi. Throughout this time, he has cultivated friendships with many teachers and students. However, it was recently announced that he will be taking over the position of Principal at Western High School in Greenwich, Connecticut. The Westhill community, especially administration, is sad to hear about his departure, but is optimistic about his future. “The positive impact Dr. Wax has had on our school community for over a decade can not be overstated,” Principal Rinaldi said. “His leadership and steadfast support for students and teachers alike will be sorely missed. We congratulate Dr. Wax on his new position as principal with Greenwich Public Schools and wish him continued success and happiness.” Assistant Principal Rinaldi also offered his remarks, saying that “he has been a great colleague, and a great person to work with. When I first became an assistant principal, he helped me quite a bit. He mentored me and helped me get good at my job. I’m going to miss him a lot, but I’m happy that he’s going to be a principal somewhere.” Many teachers also had things to say about Dr. Wax’s departure. “I’m going to miss him very much,” said Ms. Tobin, an English teacher at Westhill. “He’s always been a wonderful person to collaborate with. I’ve also gotten a lot of great ideas from him over the years.” Ms. Wheeler, another English teacher at Westhill, said the following: “It has been a true privilege to work with Dr. Wax. He has been sup-

portive of my own professional growth. As well, he has supported a culture of creativity and innovative teaching in the English Department. I wish him great happiness and success in his new role as principal of Western Middle School in Greenwich!”

Dr. Wax was interviewed regarding his time at Westhill and his future plans. Here is the interview in full:

**When did you originally start teaching?**

I first started teaching in 1995. Long time ago.

**What was your path to administration?**

In the classroom, when I was teaching in Fairfield, my principal came to me and she asked me what I thought about becoming an administrator. She’s the one who pushed me into it. So, I went and got my six year degree and certificate from University of Bridgeport. I then applied for the Assistant Principal job in Fairfield. I also applied here at Westhill, and I was fortunate enough to get the job here at Westhill.

**What do you love about working here?**

I think that the thing I love most about Westhill is the fact that I’m working with such a phenomenal staff. The teachers here are amazing. In the last 11 years, I’ve met so many kids from so many different backgrounds and cultures and ways of life; that’s really kind of the thing I appreciate the most. In a lot of ways, it’s a lot like when I grew up in Norwalk, with the same kind of feeling, the same kind of diversity. That’s what I really love the most about it.

**What are some of the most memorable moments as Assistant Principal for you?**

One of the highlights was being chosen to give the graduation speech. Also, being part of the boy’s

basketball run—the runner-ups for the state championship—was an amazing thing to be a part of and to see the students and the staff. It really brought the Westhill community together. You know, that was a lot of fun. There’s so many, it’s hard to think about specific ones, but those two really kind of stick out the most to me. I think COVID had an impact. And then our first prom back from COVID, having that outside on the football field. You know, the class advisors were Ms. Grant and Ms. Tobin. They did a great job of setting up the field with lights, and it was incredible.

**How has the school evolved since you originally began working here?**

Our student body has definitely grown. You know, we’re definitely one of the largest schools west of New Haven at this point. You know, seeing the ways that the students have become accepting of all the different cultures that are here, as we’ve grown. I think that the fact that we are now with a block schedule, adding more semester electives, which gives kids the opportunity to take more classes. Those are those things I’ve seen it evolve into.

**Education has also evolved considerably. Since you originally began your tenure here, what are some of the changes you’ve noticed?**

The explosion of technology. When I first started teaching, if you used PowerPoint, you were on the cutting edge. Now we’ve got so many different student platforms, we’ve got Google Classroom, Blackboard, Canvas, and all of them lend themselves to working in real time with students in a way that wasn’t available when I first started teaching. I think technology has been

a blessing and a curse at the same time. And I think, you know, as a result of COVID, we were kind of ‘zoomed out’. We’ve had enough of it. But, keeping pieces of that such as putting a document in Google and being able to work as a collective are benefits that, in the long run, serve students after they graduate from Westhill and get into the workforce.

**What do you see as one of the most pressing challenges in education right now?**

Finding new and innovative ways to keep students engaged. I think teachers are going to have to figure out ways to use more AI that is coming out and how to harness that in a positive way. Students are definitely going to have it as part of their daily life, in the way that we’ve evolved from PowerPoint to Google Classroom. Now, we’re probably going to move off from Google Classroom to AI as well.

**Looking back, what are some of the accomplish-**

ments you’re most proud of in Westhill? I think the first one is probably our new partnership with Manhattanville College. That is going to open so many doors for students and staff here. The benefits to that partnership are limitless. The fact that any student who graduates from an SPS school that matriculates in Manhattan will get 50% off their tuition is huge. That’s going to open the doors for a lot of students who may not have looked at going to a four-year college, and immediately give them that opportunity. As for the staff, being able to take part in the professional development programs that they run and access to graduate courses, that’s going to help to make Westhill a stronger educational community.

**As you move on, what will you focus on in your new role as principal? What vision do you have?**

My vision is to build a school community in a school culture that is inclusive and equitable that reflects the microcosm that it is the school. I keep calling it a ‘Westhill shrinky dink.’



**DR. WAX** new Principal at Greenwich Central MS  
Photo by Westhill SAGA

**ments you’re most proud of in Westhill?**

I think the first one is

It’s a very similar population with similar needs. I’m (continued)



hoping to bring the ‘Principal Rinaldi’ energy with me down to the middle school level. I’m looking forward to it.

**Is there anything that you wish you could have done while you were here that you didn’t?**

Teach a class! I really wish I had been able to teach a class when I was here. Just because even though we’re administrators, we were teachers before. There’s a piece of us that needs to have a foot in the classroom. It’s important that we understand the needs of

students, and when teachers come to us with unique problems about the classroom, that we’re able to speak to them about it. So, I wish I could have taught a class. When I first started teaching, the principal that I worked for taught one class. I think it made a big difference in his leadership abilities that the teachers understood. He was still in the classroom. So that’s one thing I wish I had been able to do.

**What advice would you offer to students who aspire to become school**

**leaders and educators in the future?**

Devour everything you can. Read and devour everything. Be open minded and accepting of whatever comes your way. You know, in the graduation speech that I gave 9 or 10 years ago, I said that you’re a novice at whatever you’re doing, and you’re going to make mistakes. Don’t let the mistakes stop you. Learn from them. Part of becoming a lifelong learner is failing. Your reaction to that failure is going to dictate what you do and

who you become. If you let the failures just continually beat you down, and you don’t try to figure out a way to correct or learn from it, then you’re not going to move forward. I love Ted Lasso. One of my favorite quotes on the show is: “you know what the happiest animal on Earth is? It’s a goldfish. It has a 10-second memory.” When things go wrong, you’re a goldfish: forget about it, learn from it, and move on.

Dr. Wax’s legacy at WHS will be remembered for

years to come. The Westhill community wishes him the best of luck on his future endeavors at Western Middle School.



**DR. WAX** poses for a photo at the NEERO 2023 conference. Credit: Dr. Wax/Twitter

## Showcasing Westhill’s Student-Run Businesses

**Juliana Miller**

Supplement and Limelight Editor

Westhill is home to an abundance of creativity whether it be art, music, languages, or crafts. Not only this, but some ambitious students have even gone so far as to pioneer their own businesses. It is important to recognize these students in order to promote their determination and inspire others to do the same.

Kelley Palladino (‘24) owns a jewelry and accessory business called Cupid’s Choice. She focuses on making themed necklaces, earrings, rings, and bracelets; as well as jewelry repairs and commissioned pieces. Kelley was motivated by her friends and family to cre-

ate her own business after realizing the confidence it gave her. She was able to express herself through her own jewelry and wanted to do the same for others. Although she claims the work can be tedious, “the feeling of achieving your goals and sharing a practice you love with others is worth every ounce of hard work”. Kelley hopes to continue her business in the future and expand her audience. Her advice to others who may be interested in starting their own business is to “Just go for it.”

Another student at Westhill, Lola deGraft-Johnson (‘23) runs her own unique treat and entree business. As someone with a passion for cooking, Lola was determined to sell her goods to others without having to rely on someone else’s schedule. While it may have been difficult for Lola to balance food choices and order quantities, her many successes have made up for it. Her business has made tremendous growth serving delicious foods from birthday cakes to party treats. Lola claims that “you have to spend big to make big,” making it clear that starting a business comes with sacrifices and devotion. Her love for

cooking and her aspiration to have her own catering/event planning business when she is older are clear reminders that anything is possible and that hard work pays off.

Similarly, Aryan Hassija (‘23) also found opportunities via one of his passions. He started his clothing brand, ahstudios.co, due to his love for clothes and because of free time that came with the COVID-19 pandemic. He was inspired by seeing others establish businesses of their own and decided to take on the challenge as well. Along the journey he has received various promotional offers from influencers and has sold out a plethora of clothing drops. According to Aryan, he hopes to “work with more influencers, start doing more pop-ups, and hopefully open a few stores across the U.S.”. He is an ambitious entrepreneur that has clearly made a name for himself (literally). Although Aryan was forced to start over after being hacked, he prevailed and got right back to selling his clothing. For those who are considering starting a business of their own, Aryan suggests, “Don’t get discouraged when things go wrong. Learn from your mistakes

and try again.”

But small business success does not simply halt after high school, it can also carry over into and after college. Lily Hardman (‘23) was only a freshman at Westhill High School when she started her own nail business, BarbieTipsByLil. As a nail technician she works with clients to develop their ideas into hand-drawn sketches and provides acrylic powder applications. She also spends most of her time acting as Chief Customer Experience Officer to enable her clients to express themselves and bring their visions to life. Her expertise in customer relations sparked the start of her business during the peak of COVID-19 and motivated her to improve her artistic capabilities. Starting out, Lily faced many obstacles especially since the pandemic limited clientele due to the requirement of face-to-face services. Working in an otherwise non-diverse field as a young person of color can also prove difficult. But with barriers and struggles come accomplishments. Lily was able to increase clientele using ventilation and by adding sanitation/safety features. Eventually she was able to establish a steady flow of

clients, upgrade her space to a studio, and increase her profits.

Lily is now a student at Howard University and strives to build her business even further. As she states, “I will continue being a young POC in this field. I aim to ultimately own a studio with multiple nail technicians working under me, while I transition into owning, managing, and directing!” BarbieTipsByLil is only a stepping stone to her success in the world of business and it is clear that her dedication and creativity will get her far. Lily’s piece of advice is “If you are interested in starting a business, do it! You don’t need to know how to do it, you don’t need to be good at it, and you definitely don’t need to have it all together, you just need to start.”

Starting your own business in high school can be difficult. Challenges will confront you and things won’t always go your way. While that may seem intimidating, the students mentioned above persisted and did it anyway. Owning a business is rewarding and Westhill High School is proud of everyone who has had and will have the courage to do so.



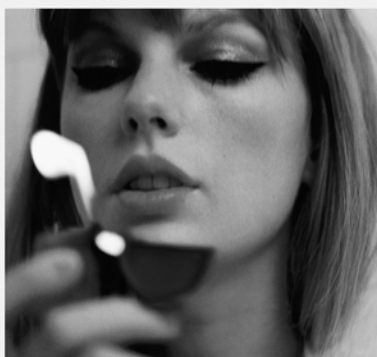
**ARYAN HASSIJA** Credit: @ahstudios.co



# MUSIC RECAP

## TOP 5 ALBUMS OF THE YEAR

### Midnights



Lavender Haze  
Maroon  
Anti-Hero  
Snow On The Beach  
You're On Your Own, Kid  
Midnight Rain  
Question...?  
Vigilante Shit  
Snowed Out  
Labyrinth  
Karma  
Sweet Nothing  
Mastermind

### 1. Taylor Swift, 'Midnights'

'Midnights' was released at the end of 2022, but proved to be one of the top albums of this year, selling 282,000 copies in its first week of release.

### 2. Morgan Wallen, 'One Thing at a Time'

Spending 12 weeks at #1 of the Billboard 200, Morgan Wallen tops the charts with the best-selling country album of all time.



### 3. SZA, 'SOS'

SZA took the charts by storm with her long-awaited comeback 'SOS', topping the charts for 10 weeks, breaking the record for an R&B album previously held by Drake's 'Views'.

### 4. Metro Boomin, 'HEROES AND VILLAINS'

Featuring a collection of rap superstars such as 21 Savage, Future, Migos, and Travis Scott, Metro Boomin sold 185,000 units in the album's release week. The album is the second release of the star producer's upcoming trilogy.



### 5. TXT, 'The Name Chapter: TEMPTATION'

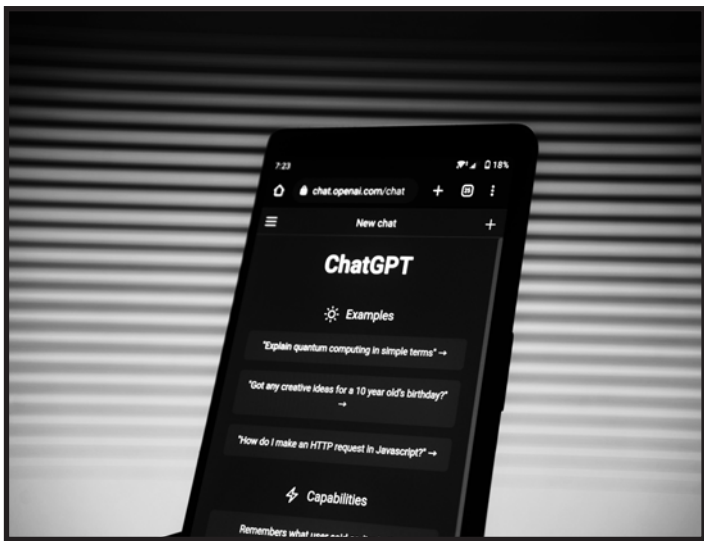
K-pop group Tomorrow X Together (abbreviated as TXT) landed their first No. 1 hit album on the Billboard 200 this year. TXT is the 3rd K-pop group to top the Billboard 200, after BTS and BLACKPINK.



# Chat GPT presents new opportunities, plagiarism pitfalls

Evan Roth  
Reporter

ChatGPT, a relatively new software created by Open AI, works similarly to Google. It uses artificial intelligence to help answer questions that all search engines known to date have not been able to do. It has the ability to create stories, write computer code, do math equations, answer almost anything google can, and so much more. The application's popularity originated from social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram and quickly became known worldwide by both kids and adults.



Chatbots are computer programs that simulate human conversation through text or voice interactions. They have become increasingly popular in schools, as they can provide personalized, decisive, and immediate responses to students' queries. However, implement-

ing chatbots in educational settings has both benefits and drawbacks. The main benefit of using chatbots is that they can provide students with quick answers to their questions. The reliability of the answers are dependent on the material that these chatbots source. For students, chatbots have been used to do work for them, most notably for writing essays. Their ease of understanding directions (simple or specific) that are imported into the search bar allow them to create work that is customizable by the user within a matter of seconds. They can change the length, writing style, word choice, etc.

On the other hand, there are some drawbacks to using chatbots in schools. For example, AI-generated essays may be challenging to differentiate from those written by humans, which could lead to cheating. Some students think that it is hurting the education system. "The students don't actually do the work, and they could rely on ChatGPT instead of learning or putting in words [themselves]," said Piotr Popowski ('25). Additionally, chatbots may not be able to answer more complex questions or provide detailed explanations for certain topics. Finally, if not properly monitored, chatbots could potentially spread misinformation or inappropriate content. Overall, there are both pros and cons to using chatbots in schools and their effect on both students and the education system as a whole.

This also changes the educational system and its relevance in the technologically advanced society we live in today. Since questions and logical thinking can be answered and completed by artificial intelligence, it will soon require schools to format learning differently. Education in the last several years that has had little change, while the rest of the world is rapidly evolving and adapting.



## Voracious Vikings

**Arleny Flores, Mahathi Uppuluri, Laasya Kasaru**  
Editor-in-Chief, Associate Editor-In-Chief, Online Editor

**Service:** ★★★★★

**Taste:** ★★★★★

The Voracious Vikings are on another adventure out exploring the world searching for shiny and valuable treasure. The Irritable Viking was exhausted and couldn't stand surviving on saltine crackers for much longer. The Pleasant Viking was overjoyed by the water—as they were voyaging on the Long Island Sound, next to the Egotistical Viking who was rowing and checking her reflection out in the water every few minutes. Suddenly, they heard a strange noise that made the boat tremble, causing panic. It was the Irritable Viking's stomach growling in hunger. It's been days since the Vikings had a decent meal. The Egotistical Viking saw land close by and decided to dock at the shore to look around for something to satisfy the frightening noise of hunger. As the Vikings got off the boat, a salivating aroma mesmerized them, luring them to the destination. As they walked closer and closer, they arrived at the dashing place: Shah's Halal Foods. The three Vikings walked in and looked at the menu trying to decide on the variety of dishes that Shah's offered. The Irritable Viking ordered a chicken over rice, the Pleasant Viking ordered the chicken wings and fries, while the Egotistical Viking ordered the falafel on pita. Losing her patience, the Irritable Viking was about to cause a scene when the food arrived.

The Irritable Viking was amazed by what she saw. A plate full of color. The gorgeous chicken came with rice, chickpeas, beans, lettuce, onions, hummus, tomatoes & cucumber. On top of the flavorful chicken, she drizzled an array of sauces that blended together to create the perfect mouth-watering meal. Every bite the Irritable Viking took of the food was just as tasty as the first. The fresh tomatoes and cucumbers were delightful and added the perfect crunch to her meal. The chicken was splendid and helped the once-irritable Viking restrain her fury. The Irritable Viking had stumbled upon a pot of gold. Upon finishing her meal, the Irritable Viking knew she could order a chicken over rice over and over again and it would never grow old. The savory chicken wings were deep fried, crunchy on the outside and juicy on the inside, with long, crispy fries and a side of ketchup. As the Pleasant Viking took a bite, the crunch changed her whole life. The chicken was the best thing she had ever tried. She was delighted and her stomach was satisfied. The inside was cooked at best and together, released a flavorful bite. Overjoyed with the wings, she took a fry. The fry was fried flawlessly giving it a crunch with every bite and a delicious potato overload in her mouth. She gobbled up the rest, eventually falling asleep as the

chicken and the fries appeared in her dreams.

The Egotistical Viking was utterly shocked when she received her falafel on pita gyro. The beauty of the presentation mesmerized her. The wrap was oozing with a red, spicy sauce and tzatziki sauce. It was also overflowing with three falafel balls, cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers, and onions. Immediately after taking the first bite, the Egotistical Viking realized that she had found something she loved more than herself. The combination of the chickpea falafel balls, sauces, and vegetables was extremely flavorful and delicious. She was very satisfied with her order and vowed to come back many more times to this magical and humbling discovery. Overall the Vikings were delighted with their discovery. Though they were looking for treasure, they didn't realize that their scrumdiddlyumptious dishes were the biggest treasures of all. The Vikings departed happy with fulfilled bellies and went off to their quest for more treasures.



**Chicken over Rice** Credit: Shahs Halal Foods



Camilla Marquez  
Reportera

## Seguridad Peatonal

En la noche del 3 de diciembre, dos peatones (Giovanni Vega Benis, de 25 años, y Yuliana Arias Lozano, de 25 años) fueron atropellados por un Mercedes Benz 2022 a toda velocidad mientras cruzaban un paso de peatones en Washington Boulevard después de salir del trabajo en un restaurante de Stamford. El conductor, Michael Talbot, golpeó a los dos peatones y huyó de la escena, abandonando su automóvil destrozado. La policía de Stamford lo encontró detrás de un contenedor de basura y lo detuvieron. Las víctimas fueron transportadas al hospital de Stamford, donde ambos fueron declarados muertos. Se dijo que la fuerza del choque fue tan violenta que arrojó a las dos víctimas al carril norte.

La noticia conmocionó a muchos residentes de Stamford y dejó a muchos desconsolados, impactando especialmente a la comunidad hispana. Muchos miembros de la comunidad hispana se reunieron para manifestarse pacíficamente por justicia para Giovanni y Yuliana, ya que había pasado casi un mes desde el accidente y no se habían presentado cargos. “Merecen justicia. Yuliana vino recientemente a este país en busca de una vida mejor y Giovanni tuvo dos hijos. Es desgarrador que así fue como les quitaron la vida”, dijo

Soraya Hernández (‘23).

Talbot fue arrestado a principios de enero. Tenía múltiples órdenes de arresto y fue encontrado en Florida visitando familia. Fue arrestado y acusado de dos cargos de homicidio involuntario en segundo grado, dos cargos de homicidio involuntario en segundo grado con un vehículo motorizado, dos cargos de delito grave de evasión de responsabilidad, operar bajo la influencia y operación imprudente de un vehículo motorizado.

Desafortunadamente, este no es el primer accidente de peatones en Stamford recientemente. Muchos otros incidentes han ocurrido a lo largo de los años, especialmente más recientemente. Cada vez estos accidentes traen la misma pregunta a la mente de muchas personas, ¿Es Stamford seguro para los peatones?

Muchos residentes de Stamford se han presentado y han mencionado sus pensamientos sobre la seguridad en Stamford. “Con todos los accidentes recientes, ha cambiado mi forma de ver a Stamford. Me siento inseguro como peatón, es desafortunado”, dijo Zachary Price (‘24). Después de escuchar las perspectivas de muchas tragedias peatonales repetidas, Stamford ha decidido hacer



**UN LETRERO** adornado con luces en Columbus Park en Main Street dos días después del día de Navidad. Foto por Eugene Caibal.

cumplir el “Proyecto piloto de seguridad peatonal de Greyrock y Forestal”. Greyrock y Forestal son algunas de las calles con más peatones, por lo que la idea que tenían era hacer cumplir adiciones más pequeñas a esas calles para ver cómo ayudan a impactar la seguridad de los peatones. Agregar topes de velocidad, distancias de cruce más cortas y velocidades de automóviles más lentas son todas formas de intervención que la ciudad de Stamford ha aplicado para ver cuál funciona mejor para proteger la vida de los peatones.

## Cultura Pop en la Primera Mitad de 2023

Nicholas Ortiz  
Reportero

La década de 2020 ya ha sido todo un momento y, en ocasiones, no por las razones correctas. Con un 2020 sin incidentes para la cultura pop debido a la pandemia de COVID-19 que limitó la realización de muchos eventos de entretenimiento y premiaciones, los años siguientes han tenido momentos memorables: el 2023 ya no es una excepción. Aquí hay una lista de los tres eventos más importantes de la cultura pop que han tenido un lugar este año.

### El Año de Ice Spice

A lo largo de los primeros años de esta década llena de acontecimientos, hemos visto a varias estrellas de la música convertirse en superestrellas: Doja Cat en el 2020, Olivia Rodrigo en el 2021 y ahora Ice Spice en el 2023. Después de que su canción ‘Munch (Feelin’ U)’ se volvió viral en TikTok a finales del año pasado, las cosas comenzaron a ponerse serias. Luego, Ice Spice lanzó su EP, *LIKE?*, que incluye ‘Munch’ y otras canciones como ‘Princess Diana’, que se popularizó aún más a través de un remix con la rapera veterana Nicki Minaj. Su canción más popular hasta el momento, que ha podido expandir su nombre y música al estrellato internacional a través de países como el Reino Unido, es ‘Boy’s A Liar (Pt.2)’ con PinkPantheress. Tanto los críticos musicales como el público han elogiado su estilo distintivo de rap, que ya se ha convertido en uno de los aspectos más notables de Spice, respaldado por su estilo moderno y, por supuesto, su característico cabello anaranjado.

### ¡Ha Tardado Mucho en Llegar!

Desde el final de su ‘Reputation Stadium Tour’ en el 2018, la ya imparable Taylor Swift continúa haciendo lo inimaginable. El álbum *Lover* del 2019 se ha convertido en un elemento básico en la discografía de Swift. Los álbumes hermanos *folklore* y *evermore* del 2020 han demostrado la versatilidad estelar de Swift, las regrabaciones de sus álbumes *Fearless* y *Red* del 2021, pronto se unirán a *Speak Now*, que se lanzará el 7 de julio. Ella continúa sacando fuertes ventas de álbumes incluso con un mínimo de material nuevo. Y no podemos olvidarnos de *Midnights* (lanzado en el 2022), el mayor debut de un álbum en la historia de Spotify. A medida que toda su discografía continúa acumulando

números astronómicos en todas las plataformas imaginables, parece correcto que Swift recorra todos sus diez discos. ‘El Eras Tour’ no es una gira típica: se ha convertido en un momento cultural en todo el país, con Swift rompiendo récords de asistencia dondequiera que va y las diferentes canciones sorpresa cada noche agregan anticipación y emoción a esta experiencia ya de otro mundo.

### El Met Gala: Homenaje a Karl Lagerfeld

Como siempre, la noche más importante de la moda fue noticia en todo el mundo, como de costumbre, por los atuendos extravagantes de algunas de las celebridades más importantes del mundo. Sin embargo, a diferencia de los temas anteriores de Met Gala, que se han dedicado a estilos de arte como el campamento y la moda americana vintage, el tema de este año se centró en una persona: el difunto Karl Lagerfeld, director creativo de Chanel desde 1983 hasta 2019. Muchos creían que esta era una forma maravillosa de honrar a Lagerfeld, mientras que gran parte del público en general creía que Lagerfeld no debería haber sido honrado debido a sus comentarios cuestionables sobre el mundo del modelaje e inclusión en la moda. Independientemente, muchos de los asistentes de este año honraron a Lagerfeld vistiendo todo tipo de Chanel, desde colecciones vintage hasta piezas personalizadas. No hace falta decir que la Met Gala 2023, aunque en gran parte tranquila y elegante, se mantuvo llena de acontecimientos y, como siempre, un evento cultural que demuestra por qué Met Gala es la noche más importante de la moda.



Taylor Swift y Ice Spice en el ‘Eras Tour.’ Foto por Lacey Berg.



## Boys Volleyball spikes competition in it's best season to date

**Nina Lopes**  
Editor

This year, the Vikings Volleyball team has made impressive achievements: qualifying for states' quarterfinals, FCIACs semifinals, a 16-4 win/loss rate, ranking 5th in CT, Matthew Skiendziel ('24) getting FCIAC 1st team, Josin and Denis Barahona ('24) getting FCIAC 2nd, Konstantinos Servos ('24) getting an FCIAC honorable mention, and Coach Mike Smeriglio receiving the Coach of the Year award.

Denis Barahona ('24) attributes these wins to the team's bond both on and off the court saying "I believe that our relationship with each other has also impacted our success because in or out of the court we were still a family by finding ways to bond and

improve everyday." For those who aren't familiar with the difference between states and FCIAC, states is a tournament between all the teams in the state of CT and FCIAC is only teams in Fairfield county. Considering that the team only started 5 years ago and the current varsity team consists of mainly juniors, these accomplishments are especially impressive.

This year's varsity team captains were Jostin Barahona ('24) and Matthew Skiendziel ('24). Konstantinos Servos ('24), who also accredited these successes to the positive team culture.

"Besides our amazing coaching by Coach Smeriglio (nicknamed Smurf), I think the reason for our success this year was because



**WESTHILL BOYS VOLLEYBALL** team huddle around coach 'Smurf' Smeriglio. Photo by Eugene Caibal.

we have such a strong bond on and off the court. We view ourselves as a family first, team second and that dynamic helps us play better throughout the year,"

said Servos ('24).

Although he was unable to play this year due to an injury, Michael Franovic ('24), is the team's biggest fan and went to nearly all of their

games. Michael is also very hopeful about the team's future. "Everyone is extremely dedicated to the team; we all want to see us win states next year," he said.

## Sports & Locker Room Culture

**Michelle Oziembala**  
Reporter

Playing a sport is definitely quite the commitment. For the most part, it should be fun. Being able to see and hang out with friends after school everyday and playing the sport you love should always be a positive experience. However, not everything can always be

es that come along with playing a sport. The disappointment a person can feel after losing a game, tough conditioning and exercises, and even pressure from parents or coaches. One thing that isn't talked about are the cliques and the toxic "locker room culture" that exists.

An unhealthy

of creating a supportive environment, it leads to cliques and a lack of trust among teammates. This can hinder team performance and undermine the overall experience of participating in high school sports.

"My club team often yells at each other, because everyone is very opinionated and thinks their way is the only right way, and that they're always right," said Patrick Larsen ('24), who plays varsity soccer at Westhill and plays with Inter Connecticut FC.

Cliques that occur in school can carry over onto the field as well. Not only can this make others simply feel uncomfortable and left out, it also affects the way the team plays. A team cannot successfully connect on the field during a game if the players refuse to form interpersonal connections

with one another.

The intense competitive nature of high school sports, paired with the expectations and pressures within the locker room, can contribute to increased stress and anxiety among athletes. The fear of not meeting standards or the thought of letting down teammates can be emotionally draining and damage an athlete's mental health. "When I was playing basketball, the weight of failure hanging over me at all times caused me to try to please others instead of trying to play my own game," said Jonah Rosenberg ('24).

The intense focus on performance in sports can place excessive pressure on young athletes. The constant emphasis on meeting high expectations can lead to burnout. This can have negative consequences on both

physical and mental well being of student athletes. "When an individual is pressured to perform in a negative and uninspiring environment, they are much more likely to perform worse than their best," said Pippa Cooper ('24), who plays varsity field hockey and lacrosse at Westhill.

The emphasis on winning can overshadow the importance of growth and skill development. When the focus is on victory, athletes may be discouraged from taking risks or enjoying the learning process.

The coaches are actively working on making the sports facilitating cooperation within their team. "Working together works. Cohesion within families, organizations, and teams manifest commitment to their vision," said Coach Birch for Westhill Field Hockey.



**LAX SEASON:** Pippa Cooper for Westhill Varsity Girls Lacrosse. Photo by Sarah Berry.

sunshine and rainbows. Of course, there will always be challeng-

locker room culture can disrupt team cohesion and cooperation. Instead



# Westhill Vikings

Non-Profit Organization  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
Permit Number 57  
Stamford, Connecticut



**Casino Night at the Loading Dock for Senior Prom p. 4**

**The Club to 'Bee' in at Westhill [p. 4](#) / Exploration: Paint the Hill Murals [p. 3](#)**



@thewestword



thewestwordonline.com