New lunch policy balances waste and convenience

BY RILEY DEL SESTO ’24 AND MADELEINE LAMPIETTI ’24
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Burke changed its lunch policy to limit the amount of wasted food, making a trimester pass the only option.

Last year, students had an option to pay six dollars daily, to pay $275 to sign up for lunch every day of a trimester, or to pay $30 for a punch card which included 5 lunches. The change to only using the trimester passes occurred because of the amount of food that was being wasted.

“So the way the plan works is that we have to actually buy a number of lunches every day from the catering service. If we don’t sell them, the food gets wasted, but Burke has to take on those losses from the food we can’t sell,” said Matt Seiler, Assistant Head of School for Finance and Operations.

During the summer, Seiler felt that as a result of wasted food, a new lunch policy was necessary. “Number one, what’s currently in play [last year] no longer works,” he said, “So either Burke is going to do no lunch or we’re going to try and do something along these lines.”

Some students find flaws in the new lunch policy, however. “I don’t really agree with it; I think you should be able to buy lunch,” said Will Mellen ’24. “[A trimester pass] makes it easier for some people but some people have to get lunch on certain days and not on other days.”

Seiler said he has not seen widespread issues arising as a result of the change. “The concept is highly problematic, but the reality is actually not problematic, at least from what I’m hearing,” he said.

Seiler also realizes the potential for individual problems, but felt this was manageable compared to the major problem of wasted food. “Rather than have fifty unsold lunches, I would rather take the risk of having three people who needed lunch that day to try and figure that out,” he explained.

The trimester pass system is also intended to be more efficient, because it is simply a list of names for an adult to check off. However, some students have encountered a minor problem. “It’s nice being able to just go down and just say my name, but they never remember my name, sadly,” said Mellen.

Front desk mainstays April and Denise open up

BY JEN CHIANCONE ’21
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April Mathis and Denise Little both work at the front desk at Burke, letting people inside and greeting them on behalf of Burke. Mathis, who works mornings, is the first person students see when they come to Burke and Little is the last person they see when leaving the school in the afternoon.

April Mathis discovered Burke thirteen years ago through a parent after expressing an interest in working at a school again. Previously, Mathis had worked at a non-profit organization called KaBOOM! where she helped build playgrounds for children.

“I wanted to work back in a school,” said Mathis. “I have worked at a school before and I really enjoyed it.”

Mathis describes being at Burke as a new experience, especially compared to her own high school.

“Burke was different. It was different,” she explained. “It was kind of a culture shock but it didn’t take me long to get into the swing of things.”

However, she quickly formed relationships with many of the faculty, students, and parents at Burke.

“I learn more about [the school] and I see the kids who have done well and succeeded,” said Mathis. “My first graduating class was 2008 and I’m still in touch with those kids and they are young adults now.”

When Mathis is not at Burke, she spends her time with her sorority and volunteering at various organizations. She also has a passion for ice skating.

Denise Little started at Burke 5 years ago at Mathis’s suggestion. Little had retired a few years previously but was looking for something to fill the time.

“April and I are neighbors, and when I told her I was bored with retirement and wanted to find a part-time job, she told me that Burke was looking for an afternoon receptionist,” Little said.

Little grew up in DC and worked at an organization called Veterans and Fears before Burke. Little liked the environment of Burke when she first arrived.

“I loved the school and the diversity and unity of it,” said Little. “I really liked seeing the way the students interact with each other. Each year I feel like the students are looking younger.”

Little values the relationships she has formed with students and teachers, and she loves getting to talk to Burke people everyday.

“In the five years I’ve been here, I have only missed two days of work because that’s how much I love the job,” she said.

Little has three kids, and when she’s not working, she spends most of her time helping out the people in her family or working at her Church as a missionary.

Both Little and Mathis spend a large part of their day simply helping with the operation of Burke or interacting with Burke people, whether that be students, staff, or parents.

“I always see myself as working for everyone,” said Mathis. “I work for the parents, the students, the faculty, and the staff because everything comes through the front. Everything. That’s the way I view my job.”
D.C. adopts Indigenous Peoples’ Day, Burke sticks with “fall break”

BY OSCAR FERGUSON ’23
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Columbus Day is in the past, at least for now. On October 10, 2019, the Council of the District of Columbia voted to replace Columbus Day with Indigenous People’s Day (IPD). The change is temporary, but the council hopes to make it a permanent way to honor Indigenous Peoples nationwide. The idea for this change originated in South Dakota in 1989, when Governor George Mickelson backed a resolution to create Native American Day on the second Monday of October. Then Berkeley, California adopted a new resolution for Indigenous People’s Day in 1992, which coincided with the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Christoper Columbus in America.

“It’s about celebrating people instead of thinking about somebody who caused genocide on a population or tried to cause the genocide of an entire population. By bringing Indigenous People’s Day, we’re bringing awareness that we’re not going to allow someone like that to be glorified into a hero, because of the hurt that he caused to Indigenous people of America,” said Baley Champagne, who lobbied the Louisiana legislature for the adoption of the resolution of IPD, in an NPR interview.

“Columbus Day originated in the United States primarily as a way for Italian American immigrants (Columbus was born in Genoa, Italy) to celebrate their status in their new land,” wrote Henry Olsen in an October 14th column for the Washington Post. Columbus never set foot in what we now call the United States of America. In Washington and at Burke, the change remains relatively obscure. Head of School Damian Jones said, “I’ve heard about moving to call it Indigenous Peoples’ Day from Columbus Day, but I didn’t realize that it happened in DC.”

Another point Jones mentioned was that it fits into his scheduling for “ensuring that every six weeks, we [teachers, students, and other staff] have some time off.” When asked if he knew the reason the holiday appears on Burke’s calendar as ‘Fall Break,’ he responded, “It has always just been called fall break and that’s what it was called when I got here. I don’t know what my predecessors were thinking.”

For now, Jones is not thinking of changing the name from fall break to Indigenous Peoples’ Day.

Long-awaited Whittle opening begins interschool relations

BY REED RODDY-JOHNSON ’23
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As of September 3rd, 2019, Burke’s neighboring building has 185 new residents: the students of Whittle School and Studios.

“The start of the school year has been great and crazy. For most schools, there’s a lot of stuff happening because there’s new systems being put in place, but we have to design everything. You may have great ideas, but once you throw people in the mix...” said Whittle’s Head of School, Dennis Bisgaard. “You try things and they may not work- from little things like Halloween to bigger things like how we teach them instead of fundraising. [Our model] simply allows us to spend more time investing in our students and how we teach them instead of fundraising.”

The student experience

On any given school day, kids aged preschool through tenth grade enter through the temporary front door on Tilden Street. We implement the idea of learning Chinese by immersion. Grades Pre-K through 2nd have half of the school day in Chinese, and once they reach 3rd grade they get the additional opportunity to learn Chinese.

An international vision

Whittle plans to have campuses around the world. So far, the two up and running are in D.C. and Shenzhen, China.

“The idea is that once you’re a part of one school, you’re a part of all of them,” Bisgaard says. Even in the early months of the program, there are already students from the Shenzhen campus who are scheduled to come to D.C. for three weeks in December.

For our next campuses, we plan to be in New York City and Suzhou, China. On the horizon, we have London, Mumbai or New Delhi, Dubai or Abu Dhabi, Paris, we get the idea. We want to have one-on-one time with their teacher.

The for-profit model

One of the aspects of Whittle that stands out most is the concept of its being a “for-profit” school. Most independent schools in the area, including Burke, are non-profit.

“For-profits — they get a bad rap,” Bisgaard said. “Non-profits, in the area, including Burke, are non-profit.

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What does it mean for Burke?

One of the effects of having another school so close to the Burke campus is the opportunity for community engagement. Bisgaard and Head of School Damian Jones have had plenty of discussions, as have co-presidents Nathan Weisbrod ’21 and April Watts ’21 with the students leaders at Whittle.

Whittle invited a few different schools to their homecoming dance, one of them being Burke. “It was mostly kids from other schools. They invited Burke, Whittle, Wilson [and one other school],” Kaitlyn Diaz ’23 said. “It was fun, and I definitely think we should keep doing Burke-Whittle events.”

Weisbrod and Watts noted in an assembly that Burke and Whittle will be inviting each other to more dances and school activities.
AP students and teachers reflect on courses

By Nate Miller '21

Although Burke is one of the most progressive private schools in the D.C. area, when it comes to Advanced Placement (AP) classes, Burke has taken a more traditional course. Last year, when seven private schools in the area announced that they were ending AP classes, Burke was not on the list. In fact, Burke continues to offer nine of the classes.

“Do AP courses differ from regular courses?” Peter Attarian '21, who is enrolled in AP U.S. History, his first AP course in high school, summed it up: they are hard.

According to Attarian, “It’s definitely a more difficult class but it’s also kind of rewarding just being able to know that I’m taking a more difficult level of class.” Still, he is not looking forward to the actual AP test. “I’ve never been that strong at tests,” Attarian explained, “and the whole idea of the AP curriculum revolving around one singular test is kind of difficult for me.”

Mitch Masucci, who joined Burke’s faculty this year, recognizes this problem. Masucci has a lot of first-hand experience with AP courses. Even though this is his first year teaching AP U.S. History, Masucci has taught AP Economics for 12 years. He has also taught AP U.S. Government and even serves as a College Board scorer for the AP U.S. Government exam every summer.

Despite his extensive experience with the AP curriculum, Masucci recognized that it has limitations and can be “constricting.” “The curriculum for AP classes is set by the College Board,” he explained. “This means that teachers are limited to a specific curriculum and there is less ‘freedom to do kind of what you’re interested in as a teacher.’” As Masucci put it, “you have to teach what the College Board wants you to teach.”

One disadvantage to this approach is that teachers may not have time to engage students in class discussion on interesting topics that would divert them from the AP curriculum. “There may be things that I want to go off and explore in American history that I think my students might really be interested in,” Masucci explained, “but there’s not always a lot of time for that because we are under a time crunch all year.”

Another, related problem with AP courses is that they advance a certain perspective that is not always consistent with the values of a progressive school. According to Masucci, “Certain courses lend themselves more to the AP style, probably a lot of math and science courses.” By contrast, he explained, “For things like European history, or U.S. history, or World History, especially with progressive schools, there is a lot of American history that is very whitewashed and it’s told from a very Westernized point of view, and I think that there are a lot of other important points of view to explore. And I don’t think AP classes always do the best job of offering the opportunity to explore those voices and those points of view within their curriculum.” One way Burke has addressed this problem was by having AP US history students read Lies My Teacher Told Me, a book that discusses some of that whitewashing, over the summer, before the crunch of the AP curriculum begins.

Although there are downsides to AP classes, there is another side as well. Dropping AP courses raises economic issues for students attending public universities and other colleges that give college credit to students who pass the AP test. For these students, AP courses can mean graduating college in 3 ½ years, which is a significant financial savings.

Visit from playwright helps actors grapple with heavy themes

By Isabel Gottlieb-Nemo '21

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Burke’s theater department premiered “The Wolves” by Sarah DeLappe and “we, the invisibles” by Susan Soon He Stanton in the first two weeks of November.

Both plays grappled with heavy and groundbreaking themes for high school productions. In fact, Burke’s production of “we, the invisibles” was its first highschool presentation about these issues.

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The Wolves’ program’s emphasis this year on women’s contributions to art. Not only was the playwright a woman, but the show touched on many female issues that aren’t often expressed in the arts.

This was also apparent in “The Wolves,” which followed an all-girls soccer team before each

Interested in writing for The Cageliner?

Email Jeremy at grej210@burkeschool.org
At last, D.C. sports fans have something to cheer about

BY WILL KENNEALLY ‘22
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Washingtonians are now able to say something that they perhaps couldn’t before this October: DC is a sports town.

“I think DC has always been a sports town, and people in DC believe that,” Ben McNelaghan ’20 said. “It really became apparent to people around the country when the Caps won the Stanley Cup.”

The Capitals hoisted the NHL’s top prize in June of 2018, ending Washington’s 26-year major sports championship drought in the process.

Then entered the Washington Mystics, the consensus powerhouse of the WNBA. The Mystics cruised through the entirety of the regular season, posting a league-best 26-8 record. Elena Delle Donne led the way, earning the WNBA MVP award with a tremendous season. Alongside Delle Donne, Emma Meesseman was a major presence on the court all year off the bench. The Belgian went off in the finals, helping the Mystics secure the franchise’s first-ever WNBA title over the Connecticut Sun in five games. Meesseman won the WNBA finals MVP award, making her the first European-born WNBA finals MVP.

The Nationals’ path to their championship was an entirely different story than the Mystics. The Nats were counted out as a legitimate contender before the season even started, as Bryce Harper left the team to sign a 13 year contract with the Phillies. To start the year they posted a record of 19-31, which was the second worst in the National League. Sloppy defense, poor hitting, and a hapless bullpen led analysts to doubt that they could even make the playoffs. According to Fangraphs, the Nats had a 22.2% chance to reach the postseason and a 1.5% chance to win the World Series when they were 19-31 on May 24th.

While the numbers counted them out, the team and their fans believed they could pull off the miracle they needed to make the playoffs.

“I hadn’t given up. [I] looked at it pretty realistically though,” said Academic Dean and Nats fan Nigel Hinshelwood “I knew there were every day players coming back, and over 100 games left.”

The Nats defied the odds and played top-tier baseball for the rest of the year. A 93-69 record earned a spot in the National League Wild Game, which they won in come-from-behind fashion. The Nats proceeded to upset the Dodgers and Cardinals, punching their ticket to the World Series against the heavily favored Houston Astros. After falling behind 3-2 in the series the Nats won back-to-back games in Houston, clinching the World Series title.

Lowest Common Denominator returns: on munching squares

BY HUIT BLACKMON ‘21
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It’s good to learn something every day. For example, I used to think that this column was about math. Turns out it’s not. My first draft about the nuances of adding and subtracting fractions was harshly rejected.

And I always thought garlic sauce was just for those who want their pizza to be extra greasy. But then I saw Jeremy, clearly in an unstable emotional state, skip the pizza step entirely and use the garlic sauce container as a shot glass. I hate rectangular pizza. It’s the worst. You know the ones that, instead of a normal, reasonable, circular pizza, are just a sheet? And then they’re cut up into thin, flaky rectangles? You know that pizza? How do you even eat that? Maybe the edge pieces are okay, but once you get into the middle, there’s no crust! What are you supposed to hold on to?

And then, even if you’re lucky enough to get a piece with crust—which, let’s be honest, you won’t be—there’s no way to eat it. Slices of circular pizzas have points, so you can ease your way into it with no big commitments. With square ones, you just have to jam a wall of pizza into your mouth. And if you’re thinking, “You could just start with the corners,” I’ve got some news for you. A corner is a 90° angle. Nice try — that’d be like eating a whole quarter of a round pizza at a time, that 90° angle.

The only thing worse than pizza, as far as square food goes, is square brownies. We get those pizza at a time, that 90° angle. And subtract fractions. But no one too complicated.

Our writers wanted to share it, so they asked Jeremy what to do. He suggested they just cut it up in a way that four people can have the same amount of pieces.

But these were just middle schoolers, so they didn’t know how to divide nine parts evenly four ways. Jeremy had it figured out (nine thirty-sixths) until three more writers came over and said they wanted some as well, but one wasn’t that hungry and only wanted half of what everyone else was getting. By then, the math became too complicated.

At this point, I bet he wished he had an article about how to add and subtract fractions. But no one ever listens to me.

NEW: Puzzles!

QUOTE BOX: Fill in the quote below by dropping letters from each vertical column—not necessarily in the order in which they appear—into the empty squares below them to spell a quotation reading from left to right, line by line. Words may continue from one line to the next; black squares indicate the ends of words.

The author of this quote is Kurt Vonnegut. Good luck! (Solutions in the next newsletter)

Puzzle by Huit Blackmon ‘21