

## BEHIND THE WALL



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## Special points of interest:

- Brennan Mazzotte writes a letter to *The Sun* expressing student concerns regarding the merge
- The Freshmen and Juniors win Halloween competitions
- Kaeli Brack's New Vision experience
- Mr. Smith's and Mr. Snyder's increased roles at WCS
- Ragnar and those among us who ran it
- Everything you need to know about the merge



## BRENNAN MAZZOTTE HEADS ANTI-MERGE STUDENT LETTER

BY: HUDSON STEPHENS

A strongly worded letter from Brennan Mazzotte can be found in an October 4th issue of *The Sun Community News*, expressing the displeasure and anti-merge sentiments of students at Westport Central. The letter begins with a reference to a meeting with Mr. Meyer, who apparently explained how dire Westport Central School's financial situation looks and how unpleasant the future will be should we remain an unmerged school district. This meeting sparked shock and unrest among the students (continued on page 2)



## HALLOWEEN; CLASS OF 2019 ROBBED OF FOURTH CONSECUTIVE TITLE



The evening of Friday the 26th marked the potential final high school Halloween program at WCS. Expectations were high, as classes chirped at each other, confident in their ability to come away victorious in at least one of two categories: theme or skit. Perhaps the largest expectations were placed on the seniors, who have won an event for each of the last three years, and were feeling determined with rumors of disorganization amongst the underclassmen. Alas, it wasn't meant to be. Handicapped by a lack of participation, they lost the theme to the juniors, who won by default with their rendition of glow stick men. The skit became their only hope to keep their win-streak alive, and it seemed that it would indeed prove a winner, with non-stop laughing from a completely absorbed audience, and premature congratulations

from their advisors, who felt that they had it in the bag. A shocking silence fell over the crowd when Mrs. Brankman revealed that it was not, in fact, the seniors, who would be claiming the \$100 prize, but the freshman, who had performed a skit titled "Synchronized Swimming." This essentially entailed several minutes of running around the auditorium and performing a variety of synchronized movements. Astonished, the seniors turned their back on the Halloween decorated auditorium for the last time, and made their way to the exits, ending a night which could only leave people wondering where these judges came from, and how much had the freshman class paid them.

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## BRENNAN MAZZOTTE'S LETTER (CONTINUED)

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*"While this is an option, it is definitely not the only way, as many students have been led to believe, and I feel that if people looked into other options besides just this one, they'd be there and they wouldn't be as bad as the ones presented by the school so far."*

who, according to Brennan, felt that it seemed "more like a scare tactic than a fair evaluation of options." The letter goes on to bring attention to last year's censored *Behind The Wall* merge survey, (of which 77 percent of students in grades 7-12 who completed the survey voted to remain as Westport Central) as well as to address the many reasons why students would prefer not to merge with Elizabethtown-Lewis Central School. These reasons include elongated bus rides, school pride, vanishing businesses, increased competition, and, of course the most straight forward reason of all, because they simply don't want to.

In an interview with Brennan, he further explained his incentive and intent behind this controversial letter. "I wanted to make people aware that students really don't want to merge. I also wanted people to know about the poll from last spring which got blocked." He feels the information which has been presented thus far has been biased and revealed his frustration with the lack of power students have despite being the ones who are most affected. "Students have no say in anything, which is almost understandable because we're not old enough to vote, but at the same time it's going to effect us more than anyone." Brennan also stated that if the merge went through, he and a number of other students would not be attending the new school, which is a piece of information certainly worth taking note of. Will a merge cost us a large percent of our student body? This is likely not something the merger committee took into consideration but could be a serious threat. He

wrapped up the interview by acknowledging that he has more plans to push for a "no" before the December vote comes around and by stating the following: "While this is an option, it is definitely not the only way, as many students have been led to believe, and I feel that if people looked into other options besides just this one, they'd be there and they wouldn't be as bad as the ones presented by the school so far." Brennan's complete letter can be found below, as well as the list of names who signed it.

### WCS Students Disagree with Merger Proposal

Recently, we've had to listen to our superintendent explain how awful our future will be if our school remains Westport Central. This was shocking to us, and honestly seemed to be more of a scare tactic than a fair evaluation of options.

This seemingly one-sided presentation of the school's situation brought us to this letter. Last spring our school newspaper conducted a poll; how students viewed merging. Seventy-seven percent of our student-body (7-12) voted for our school to remain, Westport Central! Instead of being published, we were censored!

We don't want this merge to happen. Although it's late, we need to share our reasons. Our bus rides are long! Some of us get on the bus at 6:45 am with a 7:40 am arrival. Another 15 minutes to our 55 minute ride, both ways equals well OVER 2 hours spent on the bus daily!

Most of us have been here our entire school career and don't want to give up our school and ability to graduate from Westport Central. We

think this merge won't work as is foretold, with people voting yes for the wrong reasons. Our superintendent stated, voting yes to merge for lower taxes and a new building, are the wrong reasons.

Knowing this, we want to give you reasons to VOTE NO! Business in Westport will decay, school pride will vanish, bussing will be extreme, and we will have to fight for things we have the ability to do: sports (teams, positions, playing time), drama/clubs (parts, membership) scholarships (graduation, Jr awards).

Our school culture is very different from ELCS. Our school has less turmoil and stronger academic achievement. The number one reason to vote no, we don't want it! This merge will affect us most and we have no say, for us, please, vote no!

Signed,

Alexis Baumann, Kassidy Brack, Abigail Carlson, Trent Clark, Solomon Fair, Madison Kirkby, Magnus Kohler, Abby LaMotte, Lawrence Lobdell, Brennan Mazzotte, Gabrielle Mazzotte, Walter Moore, Kaleb Pettit, Nathan Pettit, Liz Poe, Daniel Rutz, and Tomasi Vaiciulis.





# WCS MED-SCHOOL TRAILBLAZER

BY: MAGGIE PLOUFE



This year's senior Kaeli Brack has been the first in history at WCS to be accepted into the exclusive, one-year New Visions Medical Program for High School Seniors through CV- Tech in Mineville, NY. In order to be accepted into this program, she had to use her high marks and thorough teacher recommendations to compete with many students/schools in the region for a coveted spot, a feat that not all students are able to accomplish. The rigorous medical program seats twelve seniors out of the multiple schools in the region, making

the application process quite strenuous. In order to be chosen, Brack had to write an essay and interview with the program coordinators. "It was pretty hard-core," says Brack. When asked about her first day, Kaeli said: "At first, I was like, woah, what am I getting myself into?" But then she went on to explain that there were people just like her too, who were nervous and new to the program, and they were all in the same boat together which was more comforting. "The first three days we had orientation and played lots of fun games to get to know each other better... and the people that I met actually turned out to be really friendly."

Apart from the social aspects of the program, students are quickly expected to take on a challenging course of study, pertaining to medical skills and academics. "Although the work is challenging, it's really not hard if you enjoy what you're studying and manage your time well."

Through the New Visions Program, Brack plans to venture

through many topics of medical study in search for her passion. This will provide her with hands-on clinical experience at the Elizabethtown hospital, shadowing professionals in the medical field. This certifies her in CPR, and also offers her college-credit medical courses such as "Medical Terminology" and "Medical Law and Ethics". "The medical field has always interested me, so I chose to apply to this program, so that I wouldn't have to waste time in college trying to figure out what kind of medical field I want to pursue when I can just get that out of the way while I'm in high school," explains Brack. The field of Neuroscience is her main area of focus, and she is passionate about exploring and researching the medical aspect of it more in depth.

Brack recommends that anyone who is even remotely interested in the medical field should apply and try to take advantage of this program because overall, "it saves time and money."

*"Although the work is challenging, it's really not hard if you enjoy what you're studying and manage your time well."*

## MR. S & S

BY: EDWARD NESBITT

Last May, after the first budget was defeated, the Administration of Westport Central School made the difficult decision to not replace Ms. Erin Barton when she announced she was taking a teaching position closer to her family, nor replace Mr. Brad Rascoe after his retirement decision. This left Mr. Tom Smith the lone 7-12 Social Studies teacher, and Mr. David Snyder alone in the gymnasium to teach every physical education class K-12. This year for Mr. Smith has



become an awareness game on how to manage all of the duties of being the single teacher in a department. Mr. Smith's other job as the athletic director takes even more of his time. He doesn't have enough time to grade or do paperwork, so he does it out of school on his own time. Mr. Snyder knows what Mr. Smith faces daily. While he does have a few preparation



periods a week, he still feels like he doesn't have enough time to "put up" with all the kids.

A lot of teachers were hit hard with reductions in staffing this new year, but in all their positivity, they believe this year is going to be a good year and a productive year. So with all the new tasks given to them there's still hope for a great year.

*"A lot of teachers were hit hard with reductions in staffing this new year..."*



*"Fiegl says that coming back this year as reigning champions gave them a bit of a target on their back."*

## A STAR AMONG US

BY: ANNETTE STEPHENS

Once a year a 200 mile relay race ensues and thousands of runners pass through our community on their way from Saratoga Springs to Lake Placid—the Adirondack Ragnar Relay. Adirondack Ragnar is a prestigious race with an estimated 3,000 avid runners racing just to sign up for the crazy twenty-four hour experience each year. Among these some-odd 3,000 exercists are a few familiar faces; returning for his third year competing was our very own Mr. Fiegl, along with five other locals on their team *Danger Zone*, which is growing in fame as they are the 2-time reigning champions. In an exclusive interview done partly on the run with Fiegl, I was able to gain insight on the race from the view of a humble champion.

While most teams that compete have 12 people, there are a handful of "ultimate teams," like *Danger Zone*, with only 6 crazy people on them (a 33 mile per person average). This makes the race a grueling, physical and emotional challenge, that Fiegl

describes as "not normal human stuff." Making this especially impressive, Mr. Fiegl and his comrades ran at a sub-seven mile pace, beating over 200 teams including the Cornell University running team. What makes it extra special for Fiegl is for such a major race to virtually turn into a block party when he reaches Westport. Along the 200 mile course there are volunteer-run exchanges where runners relieve their teammates. Most of the exchanges from Westport to E-town are run by people who know Mr. Fiegl and greet him excitedly. Not only are the roads familiar to him, but arriving at these exchanges and getting the support of his students and friends carries Fiegl. He also loves the bond he shares with his teammates, doing something so extraordinary with 5 of your friends calls for high moments and low moments; in those low moments *Danger Zone* rallies around each other making those times so memorable.

Not all is jolly in the life of a

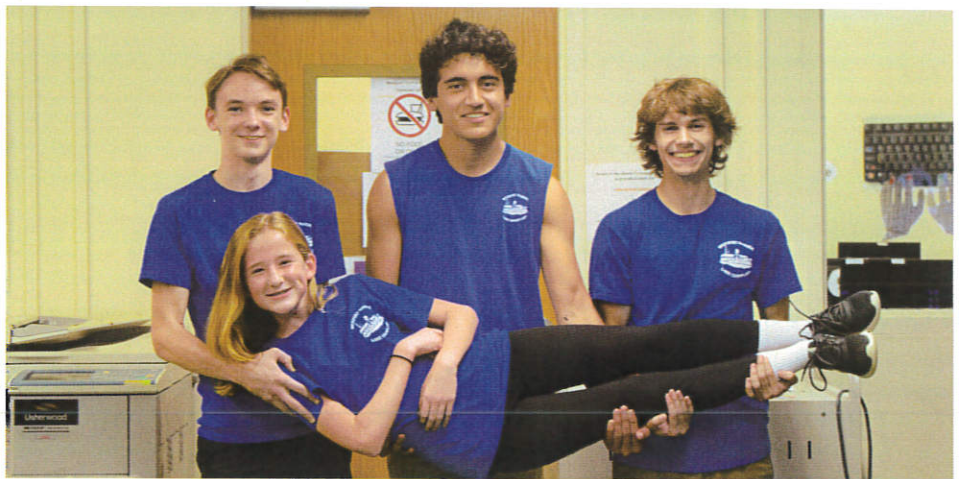
star however; Fiegl says that coming back this year as reigning champions gave them a bit of a target on their back. Other teams knew who they were and what they could do and were eager to contest them. There is also an added level of competition as they were looking from the beginning to hold their title. While winning is a major plus, the race is really about the journey, the relationships that are built with others and yourself, the euphoric feeling after the race and some sleep, and the victory of breaking physical limits.

Also running in the race, and putting up a strong showing in the women's division was Thea Shaw, Mrs. Loher, and 10 other strong Westport women on the team: Emma Gibbs, Lonnie Forcier, Deirdre Forcier, Kristen Hatch, Cena Abramo, Jess Storey, Valentina Rodriguez, and Dawn Gay. From volunteers to runners, Ragnar becomes an exciting event in Westport leaving behind good memories and high spirits.





## THE BEST OF WCS SPIRIT WEEK





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*"I found myself in a seat designed to sit three children, accompanied by three other fully grown teenage boys, one of which was lying across the other three of us."*

## MERGER IN THE WORKS; WHAT TO KNOW

BY: LAWRENCE LOBDELL

September 27, 2018, students arrived at school at 7:40 a.m., grades 8 through 11 crammed into a single bus, and away they went to Elizabethtown-Lewis Central School for a day of touring the facilities. The goal of this "Exchange Day" was to show how a potential shuttle bus would work in result of a merge, and to show the potential future high school students of a merged school what the facility they'd be using looks like. Most students found concern in the bussing situation. On the ride home, most seats were filled with the maximum number of allowed occupants: three people. Some seats even sat more. I found myself in a seat designed to sit three children, accompanied by three other fully grown teenage boys, one of which was lying across the other three of us. Besides the bussing issue, the rest of the day was enjoyable. The Elizabethtown-Lewis Central Student Council members led a tour around the building showing off the different classrooms and facilities. Overall, I would say that the exchange day was successful in its mission of showing the students how a merged school would look.

On October 9, 2018, the straw vote to see whether or not a vote to merge school districts was held. Out of 556 Westport voters, 357 voted yes, while 198 voted no, with 1 voided ballot. On December 5th, the towns of Westport and Elizabethtown will vote to see if this whole merger thing is going to happen. Due to both towns' approval in early October, this brings up an important question: What do the kids think?

Cooper Halloran, 7th grade student at Westport Central School, and I, conducted a

poll to answer two questions. Question one: Do you want to merge schools? Question two: If you could vote on the merge, how would you? The reason behind the two separate questions is because in talking to students, I've found that most do not want to merge, but most students see no other way to save our education. In a poll of 82 students, in grades 7 through 12, 61% of students did not want to merge, even though 60% of students surveyed said they would vote yes if given the opportunity.

In the survey there was also a section to leave your reasoning behind your decisions. Most students gave simple, one sentence responses similar to, "I think it's a bad idea," or "I think it has to happen." Other students put more time and thought into their answers. Alessia Caputo wrote, "I think the merge would absolutely benefit our school. There could potentially be more learning, growth, and a better education for all the students. It would also be nice to meet new people and gain social skills. In our school I feel like it's everybody knows everybody and it would be refreshing." Alexa Doherty, a senior, said, "It is understandable to not want to merge, to have (semi) new people sort of invade our pre-existing class. To bring new people into a group we've been with for years now isn't easy. Nor does it sound very fun. However, to make a decision based on that alone is extremely unwise. People need to look at the big picture and the future of this school without the merge. The expected outcomes if we do not merge is not a "scare tactic" or something to pressure people into voting yes. It's supposed to show us that neither school will be able to

survive (for very long) without it. Nor should we even want to. The opportunity is to improve their education. When considering the merge, I beg people to not be selfish and to look at the big picture."

On the other side of the coin, sophomore Brennan Mazzotte says, "I think the merge won't only be bad for the school but also for the community. I personally feel as though this should be the last option both communities turn to since it won't just kill school pride and business, but it'll also kill the Westport community and there won't be any turning back from it. People should really be thinking about that rather than their taxes, which won't decrease anyways, contrary to popular belief."

Whether you love it or hate it, the merge is an important issue that we all should be paying attention to. December 5th will be a day that will go down in history for Westport Central School and the Community.