



ZEUGNIS - REPORT CARD

**I D E A S**

Promotion of  
 academic  
**Anxiety**

**44%** \_ **5**

Support for  
 neurodiverse  
 Students

**38%** \_ **6**

Burnout  
 Prevention

**60%** \_ **3**

Western History  
 Curriculum  
 Focus

**70%** \_ **2**

Enforcement  
 of unclear  
**Dress Codes**

**88%** \_ **1**

Conservative  
 Ideological  
**Freedom**

**38%** \_ **6**

Gender  
 segregation  
 in HS **Sport**

**61%** \_ **3**

Freedom of  
 Religious  
 Expression

**44%** \_ **5**

*Ideas Club*  
 IDEAS Club

Read: \_\_\_\_\_

*Shah Raza*  
 Student Body



The percentages on the cover are based on our survey of 250 JFK students. Each grade has been calculated as follows:

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Based on the Question: JFKS school culture actively promotes severe academic anxiety.

Strongly Disagree (7.2%) + Disagree (37.2%) = 44%

Based on the Question: JFKS does not do enough to support students with learning challenges due to neurodivergence.

Strongly Disagree (6%) + Disagree (31.6%) = 38%

Based on the Question: I experience burnout as a direct result of my academic work.

Often (30%) + Sometimes ( $1/2 * 33.2\%$ ) + Rarely ( $1/3 * 22.4$ ) = 60%

Based on the Question: The Berlin history curriculum focuses almost exclusively on Europe. This is racist.

Strongly Disagree (29.6%) + Disagree (40.4%) = 70%

Based on the Question: A JFKS faculty member has commented that my clothing is inappropriate.

Never (76.4%) + Rarely ( $1/2 * 13.6\%$ ) + Sometimes ( $1/3 * 6.8\%$ ) = 88%

Based on the Question: I've heard JFKS students make fun of conservative people.

Never (17.2%) + Rarely ( $1/2 * 20.4\%$ ) + Sometimes ( $1/3 * 31.6\%$ ) = 38%

Based on the Question: Sport classes should be segregated by gender in grades 7-12.

Strongly Agree (22%) + Agree (39.2%) = 61%

Based on the Question: I've heard JFKS students make fun of religious people.

Never (19.2%) + Rarely ( $1/2 * 30\%$ ) + Sometimes ( $1/3 * 33.6\%$ ) = 44%

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# Letter from the Editors

Dear Readers,

JFKS is a diverse place, with students bringing a variety of backgrounds and identities from all over the world to the table. However, one thing we all have in common: as students, we currently spend a majority of our lives learning, growing and, yes, sometimes struggling, within these walls.

As a school community, we should continually be on the lookout for ways to make JFKS a safer, fairer, and more positive space for all students. This is not always easy. In today's world, students face a myriad of challenges that cannot be straightforwardly eliminated. How many of us, for example, struggle with near-constant academic anxiety and burnout? How do we work to combat this while still striving for excellence?? How do we support students with disabilities who may be struggling in class? And what of the classes themselves- should we continue to teach the way we currently do, with sport classes segregated by gender, discrimination that is unfortunately still widespread, and arbitrarily enforced dress codes?

These questions about creating a safe and fair environment to ensure potential for productive learning have become all the more important because of the heightened state of violence and hate in our surrounding community. A rise in hate crimes and violence mandates that schools become a refuge for children--especially those disproportionately affected--to preserve their innocence and teach them not only academics, but how to live as yourself and without fear. The recent antisemitic vandalism of our Romero Britto bear has for some destroyed the sense of safety so imperative to learning, making it +all the more important for the school to take action to eliminate discrimination.

The IDEAS team dedicates this issue of our journal to the examination of the above, and other, questions. By sharing their thought-provoking reflections, our authors hope to shed some light on the concerns of the student body, what the extent of these issues truly is, and how we may be able to enact change for the better.

While we heartily support the dialogue that our contributors are fostering, their perspectives are not necessarily shared by the JFKS IDEAS leadership.

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As with all our journals, we ask you to stop and think as you read, and consider how we as a school community can continue to improve. We also urge you to reflect on what you can do to make our school a more just and liberating space for all students.

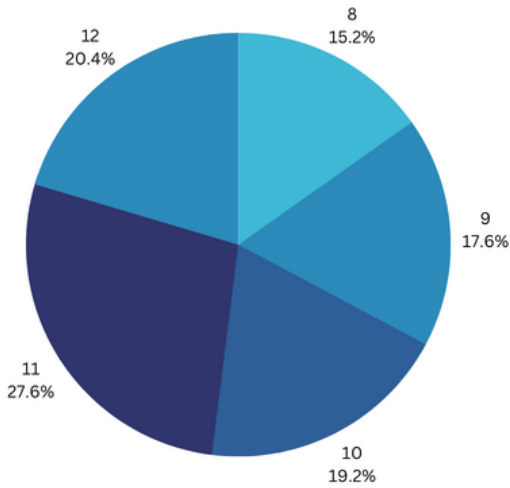
Yours,

Miuccia Kammerer, Editor-In-Chief  
Zarah-Louise Danziger, Layout Editor

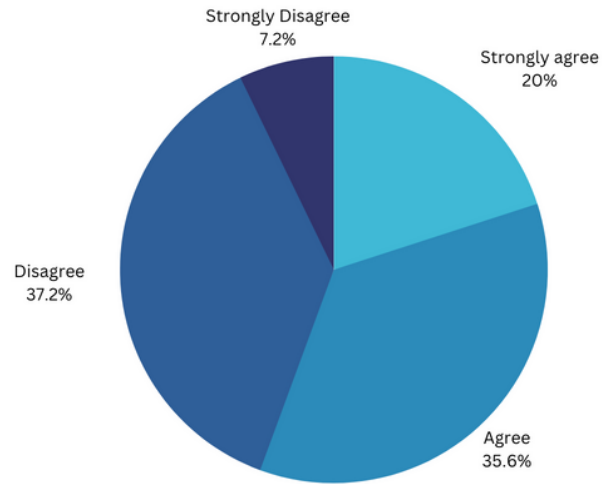
# Survey Results

We asked students in grades 7-12 about topics related to the improvement of JFKS culture and got **250** responses, about **27%** of the student body. Here are the results...

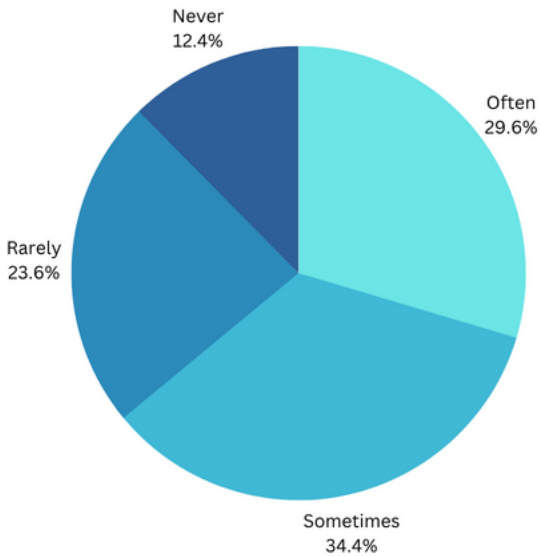
What grade are you currently in (school year 2023-24)?



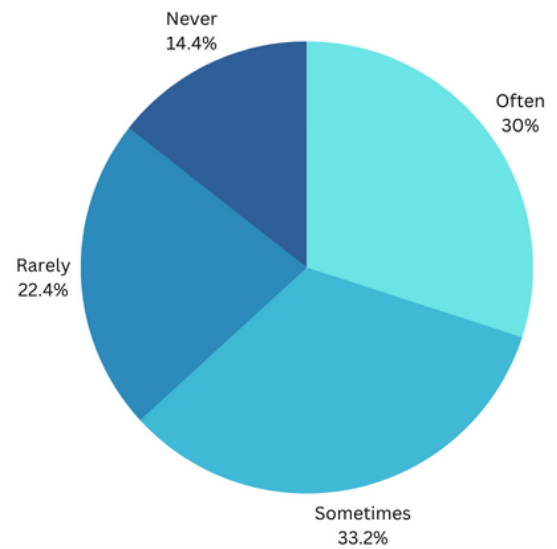
JFKS school culture actively promotes severe academic anxiety.



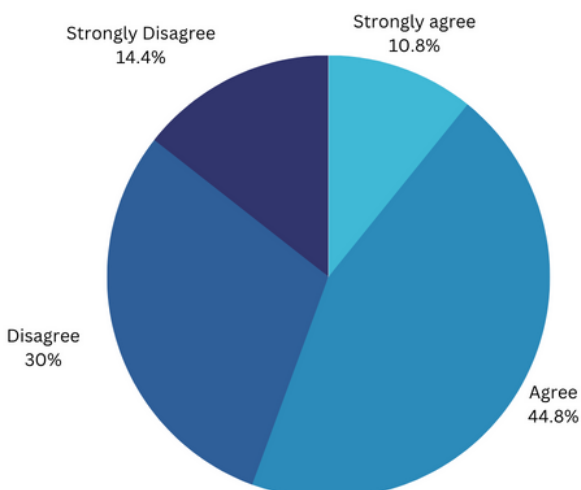
I experience severe anxiety about my academic success at JFKS.



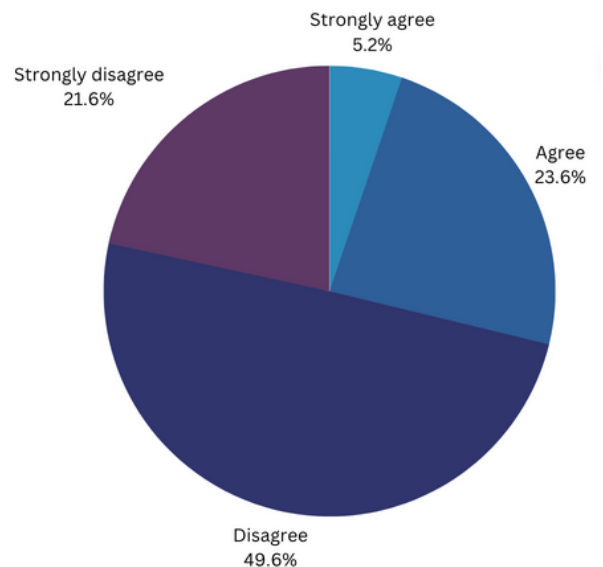
I experience burnout as a direct result of my academic work.



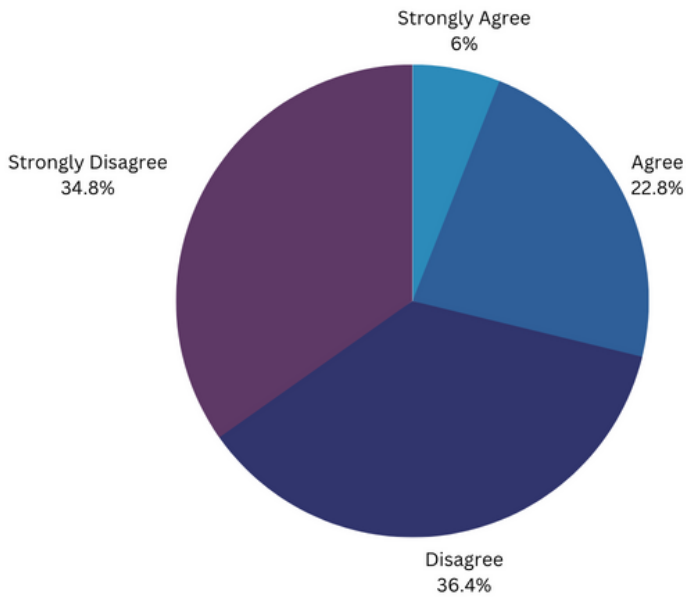
I am pressured by my family to succeed academically.



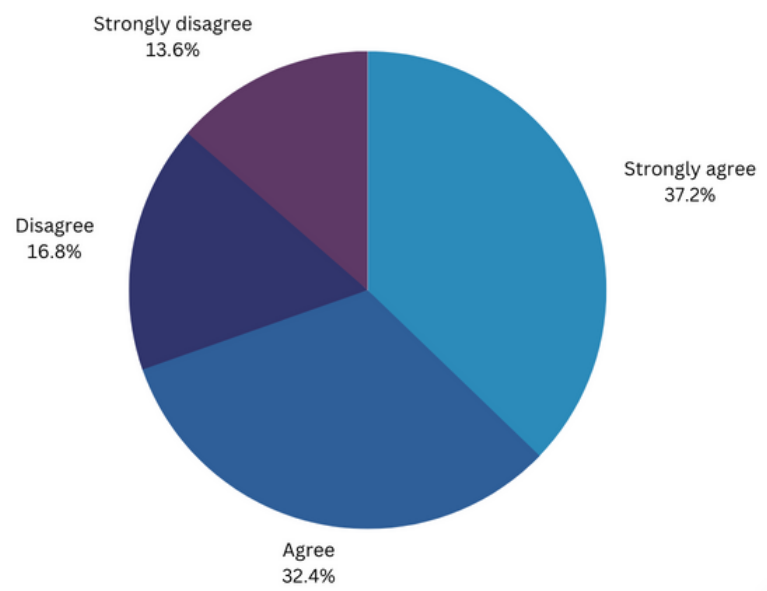
I am pressured by my friends to succeed academically.



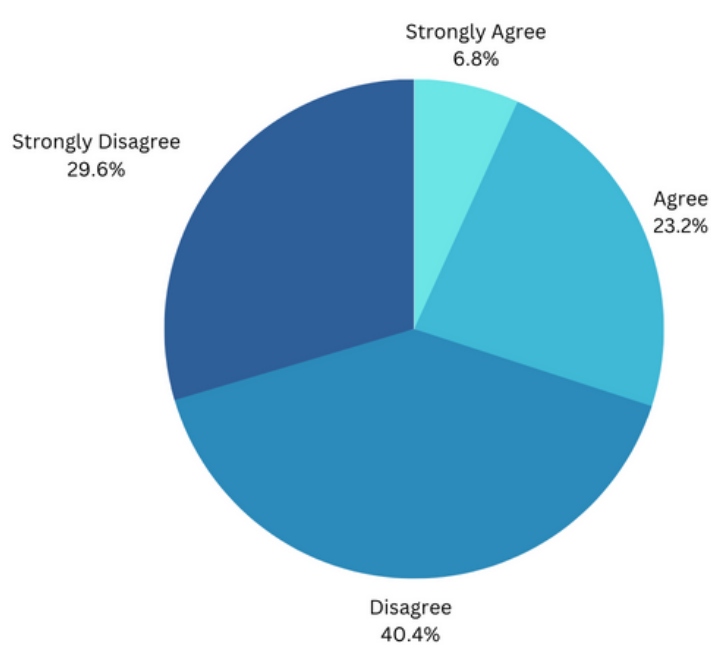
This term is outdated and unfair in its specification of a female parent.



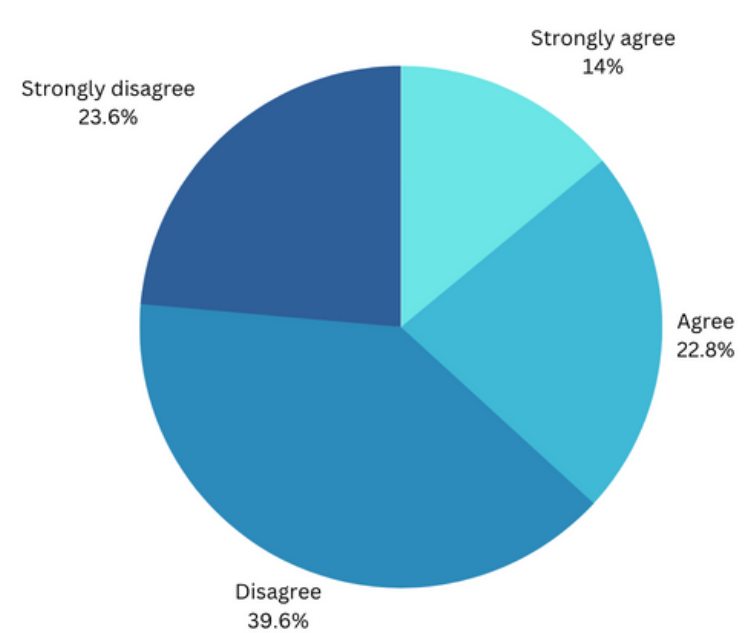
School dress codes tend to discriminate against girls and women.



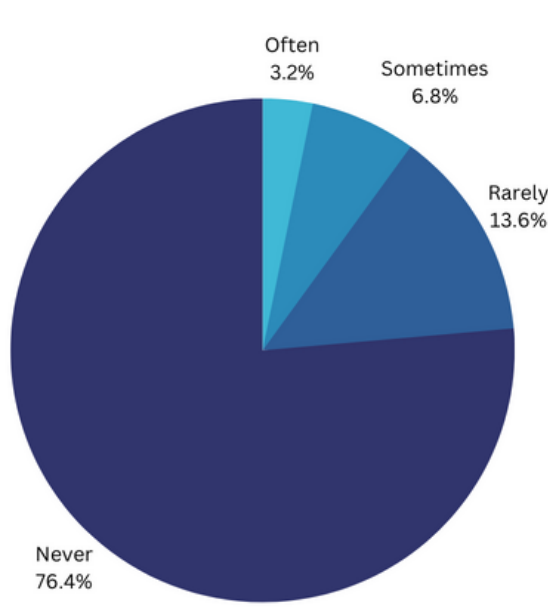
The Berlin history curriculum focuses almost exclusively on Europe. This is racist.



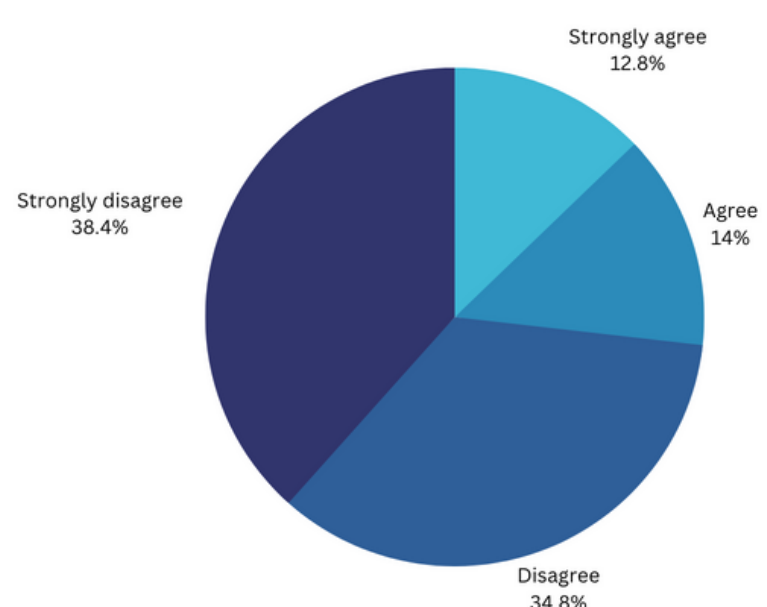
A student should be able to wear a string bikini to school if they want to.



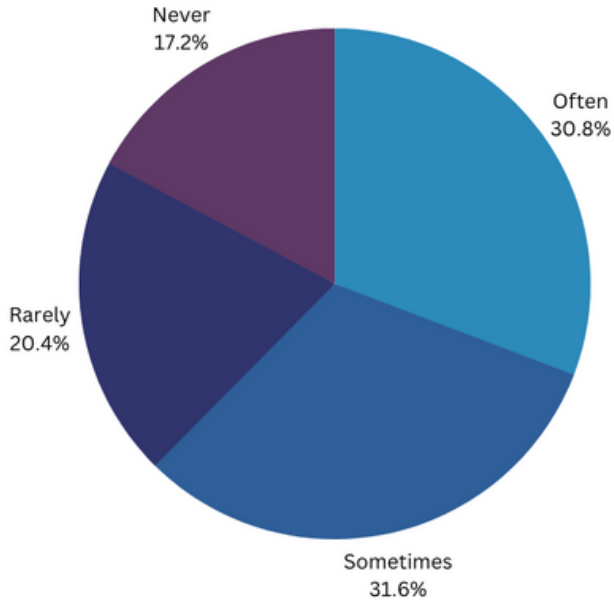
A JFKS faculty member has commented that my clothing is inappropriate.



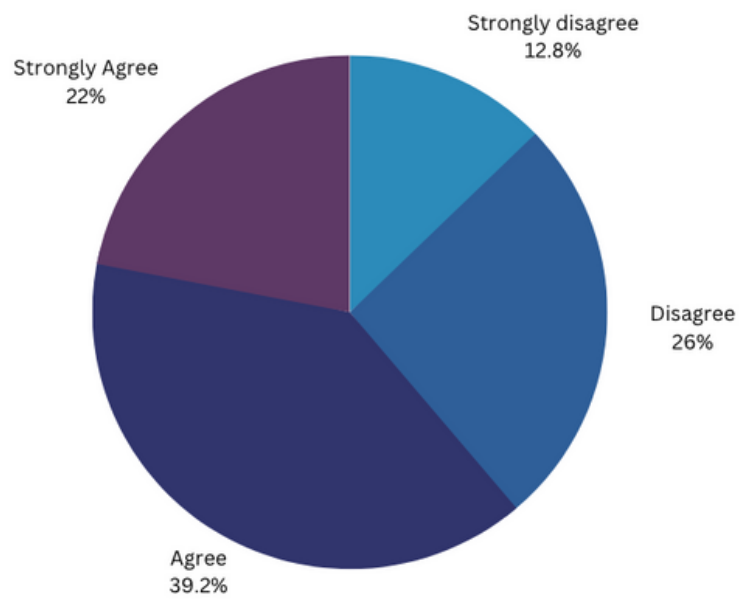
A teacher should be able to wear a string bikini to school if they want to.



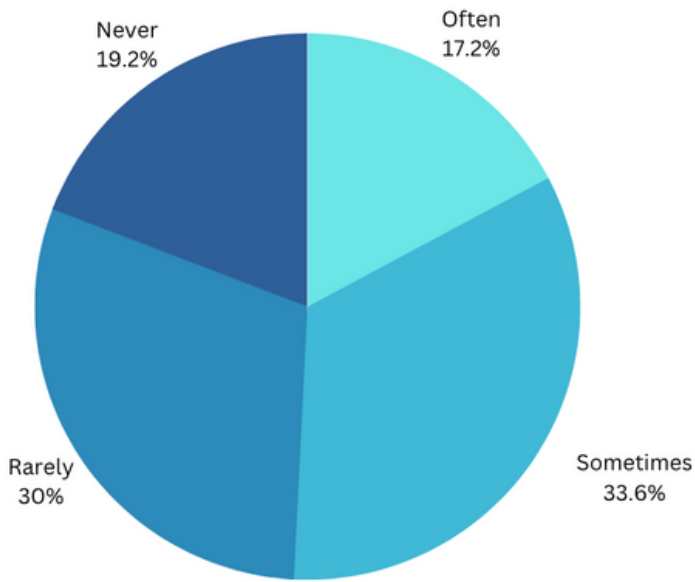
I've heard JFKS students make fun of conservative people.



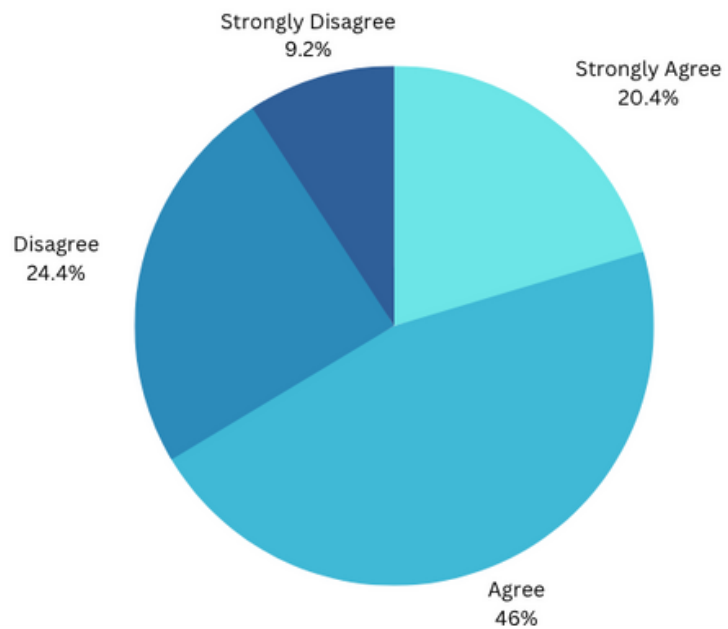
Sport classes should be segregated by gender in grades 7-12.



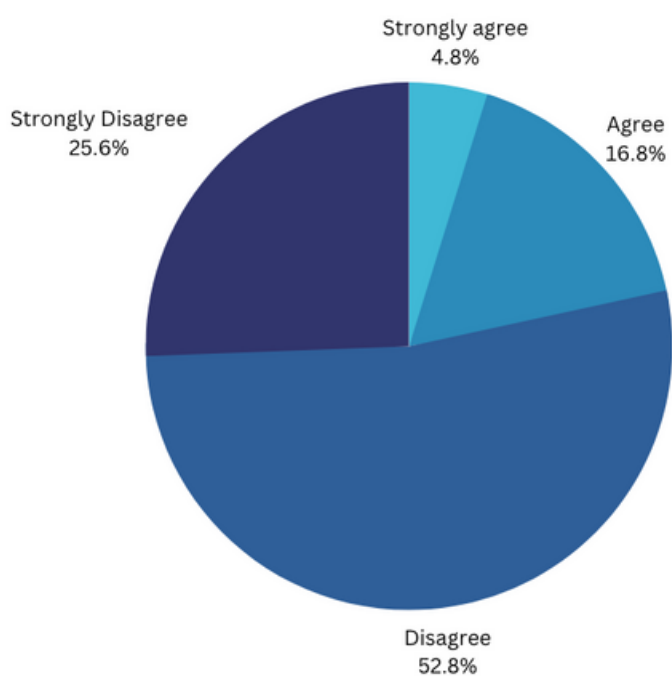
I've heard JFKS students make fun of religious people.



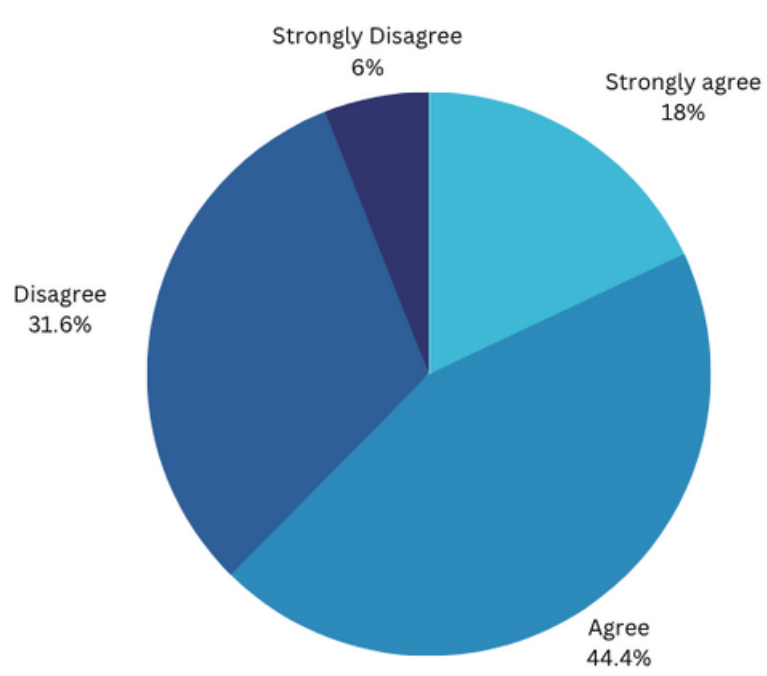
Teachers must include trigger warnings before showing certain videos or reading certain books in class.



Sport classes should be segregated by gender in grades 1-6.

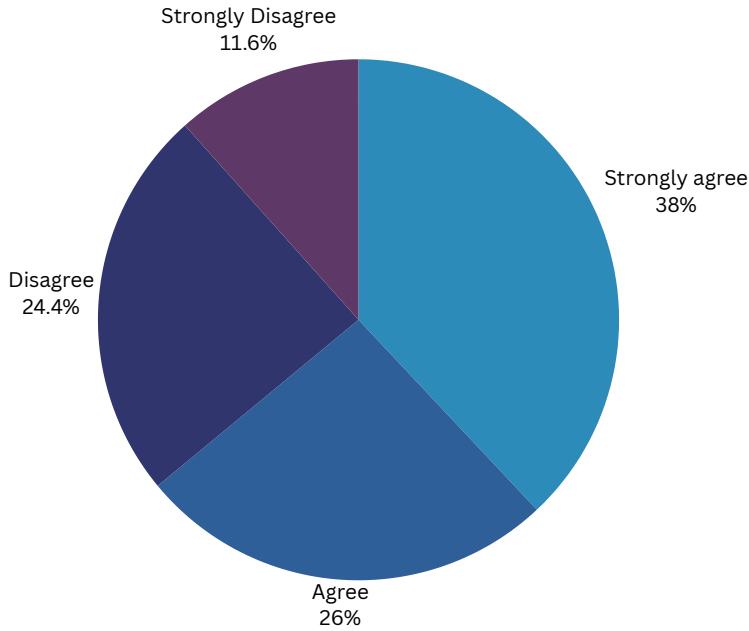


JFKS does not do enough to support students with learning challenges due to neurodivergence.

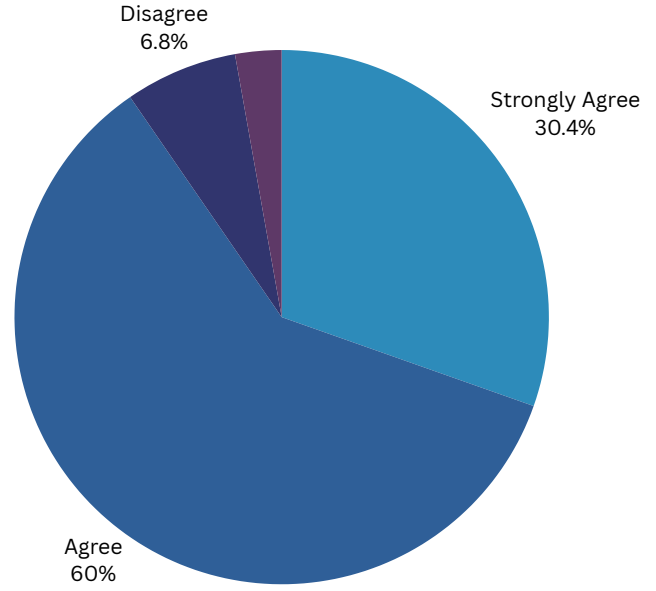




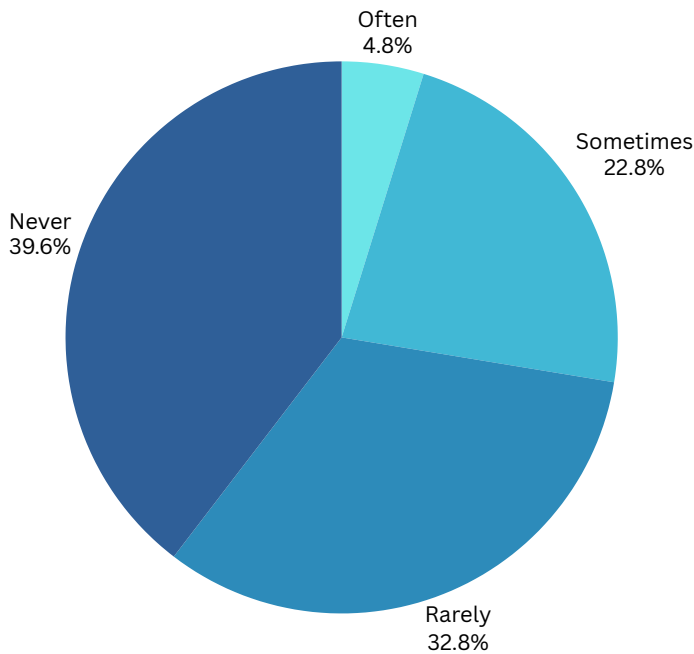
Grading activities in sport based on fixed scores is unjust and unreflective of differing body types.



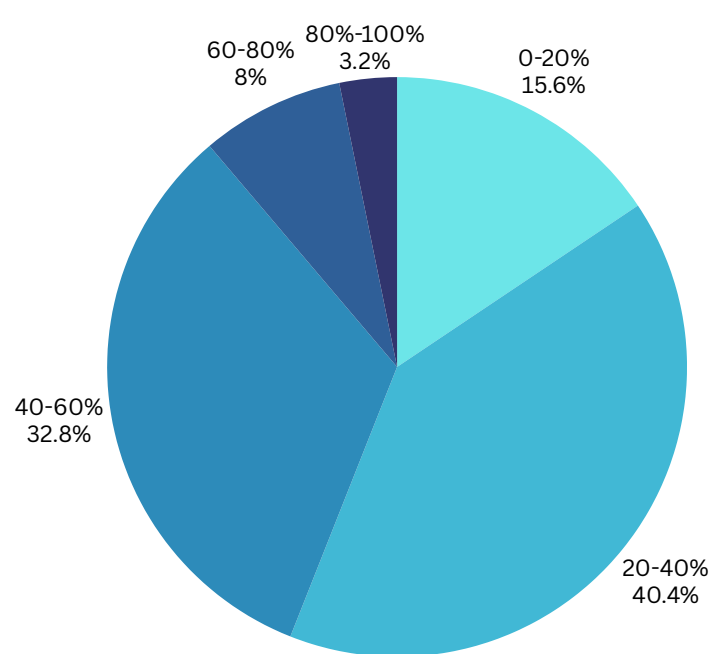
Heavily weighing oral participation grades is an opportunity to support students who struggle with written work.



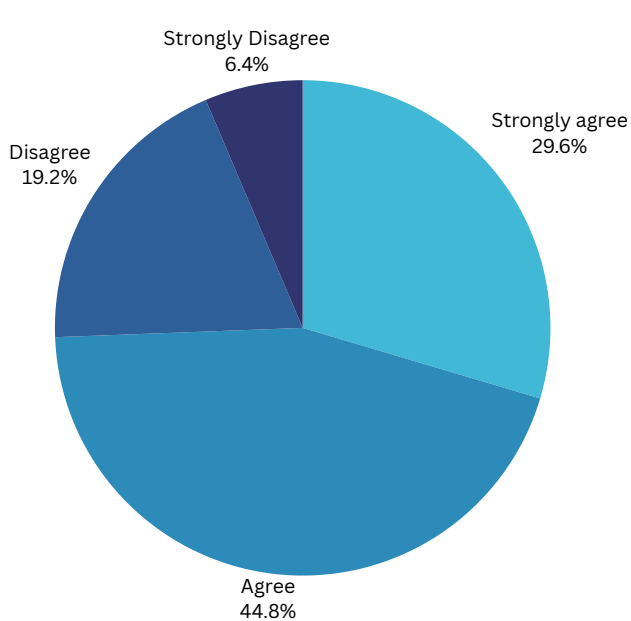
I have observed discrimination or bullying based on financial status at JFKS.



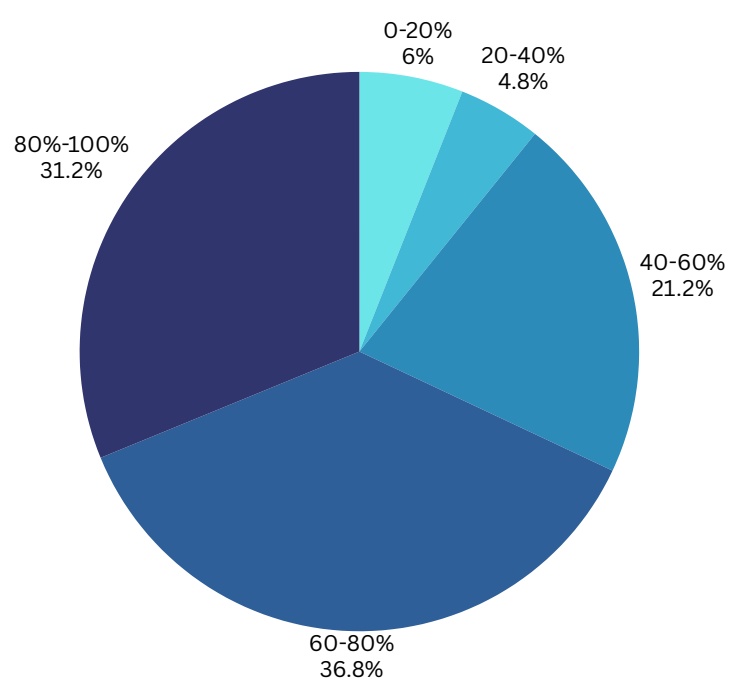
How much should class participation be weighted in math?



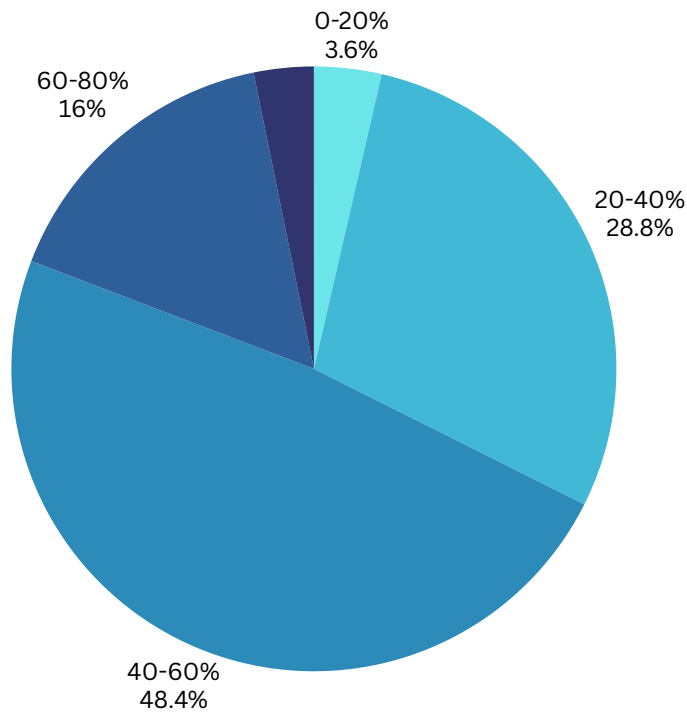
Heavily weighing oral participation grades disadvantages students who have quiet or reserved personalities or preferences.



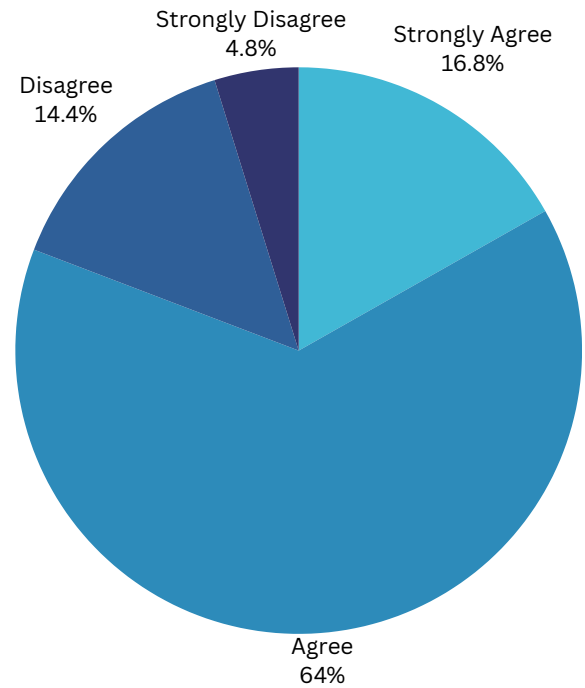
How much should class participation be weighted in sport?



How much should class participation be weighted in English/German language classes?



It's good to have certain schools designed for students that are highly academically motivated and capable, so long as there are other schools for students how have different motivations and abilities.



## JFKS Students Reflect...

Our survey offered students the opportunity to anonymously contribute their thoughts. Below are some of their insights (some edited for clarity):

- I believe that this school tends to make fun of people and make it hard for people who have different views. While Germany tends to be very liberal compared to other countries, we shouldn't be bullying people who are right oriented. A lot of people in this school make fun of people who have right-wing views. I've experienced and heard quite a few things about teachers assuming people's political point of view. It's unfair for people who don't believe the same thing as the majority.
- Despite recent political movements, many students still have a mindset that causes them to reject anyone that seems weird, uncool etc. to them. Calling this out and encouraging open-mindedness would be a good start. Additionally, clubs such as Feminist Initiative and Schule mit Courage are big steps in the right direction that deserve more attention. If students were more strongly encouraged to join at least one club, everyone would profit.
- People are getting too soft. It's embarrassing to see that "mother tongue" is a term that some people consider to be discriminatory. We're not learning to grow up here, we're learning to grow soft.

- I feel like the teachers could be more open to change their ways, especially if multiple people have talked to them about having problems with their teaching style. It's not really an insult, more a suggestion for improvement to take the stress off both the teachers' and students' shoulders. I think it is hard to fully appreciate learning if you're miserable when doing so.
  - The faculty should adjust their learning tactics depending on the student. If a student does not participate, the teacher should find something that the student is good at and use that to grade instead.
  - For the oral participation question; if it disadvantages people who have quiet personalities: some teachers allow students to submit written work for their oral grade, and get their credit from there. I think more teachers should do it like that to support all of their students
  - Participation should be weighted in a way that helps a struggling student, not to justify lowering a grade for a student.
  - Teachers need to actually listen to students, if they share a concern with them and need to do something about it. Otherwise the students won't feel heard.
  - The anxiety of people having to talk or present should be more considered, as well as personal problems that distract students' minds.
- Instead of focusing ONLY on what happened during devastating historical events (for example the Holocaust), we should hear more from victims/survivors or people who were affected and listen to their stories. It helps us students develop a deeper understanding and connection to the topic.
  - I think that JFKS should integrate more creative abilities into classes and maybe letting students vote on how they want to learn about certain topics.
  - Culture day for students to represent different cultures other than German/American and a space to learn about different cultures/ethnicities.
  - I think teachers should be more supportive towards students with learning disorders like ADHD or dyslexia.
  - Less homework- let teachers have a shared plan of when they assign big homework assignments so that teachers can see when students have a lot going on in other classes and can assign less unnecessary homework

# Survey Analysis

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by Miuccia Kammerer

At IDEAS and at JFKS as a whole, a strong focus of our mission is ensuring an equitable and enjoyable learning environment for all students, no matter their identity. Yet as we see reflected throughout this journal, there are still many problems to be addressed. Each member of our student body has different requirements that need to be met in order for them to thrive, and each person will have separate and often contradictory views on the efficacy of the school's efforts. IDEAS surveyed students in grade 7-10 on an array of topics we thought pertinent to the forward development of our school. A record number of you took the time to weigh in and give us your feedback, so thank you! Our substantial sample size can help to elucidate some of the priorities of the JFKS community.

In our modern world, more and more teens are facing mental health concerns, and school stress can be a powerful factor in this. When asked about their experiences, a perhaps unsurprising, yet still worrying majority (over 60%) of students claimed that they had encountered *severe* anxiety regarding their academic success

often or sometimes. Only 12,4% responded with the option of 'never'. In attempting to determine the possible roots of this stress, we wanted to consider external sources of pressure, such as family and friends. A total of roughly 54% of answers indicated feeling pressured by family, with friendships apparently contributing less to the issue. Though the issue of academic anxiety is by no means exclusive to JFKS, over 55% of respondents believed our school's culture to actively promote severe stress, with 20% strongly agreeing with this sentiment. Clearly, something must be done to prevent students feeling unhealthily pressured in such ways. A concept often mentioned as an attempt to reduce anxiety is the implementation of trigger warnings, short disclaimers alerting viewers that a certain piece of media contains sensitive information or themes. While the efficacy of these warnings is under debate, as discussed further in this journal, they are steadily growing much more prevalent and are lauded by many. The survey asked students to share their thoughts on the argument that teachers should have to include trigger warnings before covering certain books or videos in

in class. The overall consensus seemed largely positive with 46% of respondents agreeing with this proposal, and almost 21% strongly agreeing. This suggests that implementing such a rule would really benefit a large proportion of students.

An alarmingly large proportion of students (almost a quarter) also reported having been 'dress coded' or told their clothing was inappropriate; this is alarming because roughly 70% also agreed that school dress codes tend to discriminate against women and girls. The concept of a dress code, therefore, is not met with much enthusiasm. Nevertheless, when asked about an admittedly extreme example scenario (whether teachers and students should be permitted to wear a bikini to school if they wished), student thinking was greatly split, with an overall negative response, begging the question where exactly the line lies? Overall, our student body is divided over many of these questions, suggesting a level of complexity that warrants further investigation. Yet we can clearly see sparking discussion on a lot of these issues is of crucial importance to making our school a better place.

# Balancing Academic Achievement and Mental Health

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by James Simanowitz

School is difficult. Our school is difficult. While perhaps a hard truth, this is to be expected. At best, The Kennedy School's high academic expectations and standards push us to realize our full potential. At worst, JFK expectations and standards push us off a cliff in terms of mental health. But what creates this environment of anxiety at our school?

There are a few key factors. For one thing, teachers have a vast range of different, often inconsistent expectations, making it burdensome to understand what is expected of us. Uncertainty increases anxiety. This combines with the immense pressure some parents put on their kids and the flood of insane teenage achievements displayed on social

media to create an anxiety cocktail. Our most ambitious students often feel pressure to achieve perfect grades and maintain an impressive list of extracurriculars, all while being too young (and busy) to really manage it all. Students like this often live extremely stressful lives or at some point just burn out. Stress and burnout have real effects; they make students unhappier, unhealthier, and more likely to lash out. Addressing this problem is complicated because, although depression and anxiety have reached all-time highs in this generation, academic issues are intertwined with social media, the pandemic, eco-anxiety, and many other factors. This makes finding a solution, particularly a structural one, difficult, given that any scaling

back of academics comes at a cost. One strategy is to decrease the difficulty of tasks rather than reducing the number of them. Another strategy is to create a shared language around stress and anxiety. Our school is already taking positive steps with the topics covered in the new advisory period. However, many students need to take steps in our personal lives to make sure we take time out of our schedules to take care of ourselves. In short, we need to recognize as individuals, as a school, and as a society that while academic achievements can make us happy, the pursuit of academic success can, at a certain point, undermine our pursuit of happiness. We should all create conversations to find this balance in our lives.



Illustrated by Zarah-Louise Danziger

# Is JFKS Meant for All?

# Or Just the Academically Motivated?

By James Simanowitz

Recently, I gave a group of students visiting from Taiwan a tour around JFKS. I was surprised by an observation I heard again and again from students and teachers alike: “JFKS seems really high-pressure”. Coming from a group of students coming from Taiwan, whose education system is reputed for being extremely difficult, this was shocking. But they are right. JFKS is a tough school. Sure, there are tougher schools out there, but we have a very conspicuous culture of academic rigor.

Our middle school students balance dozens of different courses. Most Diploma students take more than three AP courses a year. Some bear these academic burdens better than others. We have a robust extracurricular program with lots of student engagement. Some may ride the wave of these curricular and extracurricular opportunities,

others are pulled under. For some, the system works and pushes us to ever higher achievement, but for others it is crushing. The expectations are simply too much for some, but JFKS is supposed to be a place for all. Or is it?

The fundamental question here is whether JFKS is or should be just for the academically driven. Is this meant to be a school for the brightest young minds in Berlin, those talented and industrious enough to keep up with high-level courses?

Or is our school more about a German-American community that welcomes students with a diverse range of abilities and degrees of motivation? Do we prioritize excellence over inclusion? Should we?

These are questions as difficult as

they are subjective. I am of the opinion that our school has academics covered. We have opportunities for students to go to college and discover their passions, which are the primary duties JFKS has towards developing professionally, personally, and financially successful individuals. However, school is about more than just preparing us for academic and professional success; we also need to foster our school’s stated commitment to a strong social democracy. To do this, we need to foster bonds and prioritize happiness over cold, hard academics.

We can not succumb to an ideology of “Keep up or keep out.” So maybe our school should lighten up the academic load. Maybe we keep things as they are. But we must keep in mind that JFKS was founded to bring people together, regardless of different abilities. It should be our duty to further foster that history and that legacy.

# Combating the Stress Plague: Integrating SEL at JFK

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By Robyn Merchant

It's early. Too early to pretend to be functioning properly, many would say, but regardless, it's a school day, and children of all walks of life crowd the hallways, stepping on one another's toes as they push an array of buzzing emotions and thoughts to the backs of their minds to focus on the day's lessons. The typical school environment contains many aspects which make emotional navigation difficult for all of us: upcoming deadlines, crowded schedules, convoluted social dynamics, and a tireless stream of other stressors. For this reason, the teaching of social and emotional learning (SEL) in schools is insanely important. Developing minds need to be able to understand and cope with the stress they experience daily. Although our school has improved in recent years regarding its emotional support for students, students still convey a sense of helplessness in managing stress levels. This emphasizes how essential integration of SEL is to allow students to succeed not only academically, but also socially and emotionally.

The modern social and emotional learning movement began in the 1960s, since which it has evolved. SEL can mean different things to

different critics and different advocates. For the purposes of this article, I conducted interviews with grade eleven & twelve students and teachers that focused on self awareness, social skills, and relationship skills. What follows is a combination of my experiences and my interviews.

While often being overlooked, self-awareness and self-management play essential roles to student success. Every JFK student will recall at some point in their educational journey supporting a friend experiencing burn-outs, zone-outs, stress-outs or engaging in behaviors such as negative self-talk or polarized thinking. These displays of displaced emotion are exactly the target of an SEL program since it's impossible to focus on academic excellence if one's mind is preoccupied with stress. Being able to break down a situation to what it truly is and place the proper amount of importance on it so that one does not exhaust themselves is part of what two of the core aspects of SEL, self-awareness and self-management, aim to develop. The ability to properly perceive situations in a healthy manner and be able to cope with these stressors until one can handle them is vital. A significant lack of emphasis on

stress management plagues our school. Perhaps the new SEL educational and social environments provided by JFKS will help students to develop a language around coping with stress and anxiety.

Social skills are a difficult topic to address. How can a social skills program work in our current school system? A lack of community was a primary response for an aspect JFKS would need to improve upon in order to foster the development of social skills. Several students I interviewed noted that our school lacks a driving communal force, such as the "school spirit" exhibited by many American schools. Although it wasn't observed that the majority of students have a negative relationship with the school, school pride and community are aspects of our campus that could be further developed in the coming years. In a school environment without a stable sense of community, students feel that the development of necessary social skills is unnatural or forced. These skills, however, are incredibly important; the ability to display empathy, express boundaries, and communicate are unarguably vital. To the extent to which a sense of community is lacking--and thus undermining



efforts towards the development of social skills--JFKS would be wise to consider how to further foster community ties that support all students.

These students interviewed tended to agree that at this current point in time, JFKS has not done enough to promote the skills necessary to deal with the school stress. The majority of people interviewed also reported they weren't aware of what social & emotional learning is at our school. This isn't to say our school doesn't support its students, but the systems currently in place succeed at supporting students who need it through accommodations, designated counselors (or other support staff meant for students to confide in) and providing locations on school campus grounds one

may go too to seek support. JFKS has made bounds in recent years to support the emotional needs of the student population, however, these improvements should not overshadow the possibilities an inspection of our school through an SEL-centered lens could have. Students who don't believe talking about their issue would help, or who don't believe their issue to be "big enough" to bring to a counselor could benefit from the self-reflection and coping skills developed in SEL programs. Students who find difficulty trusting and confiding in authority figures should be able to learn how to independently manage their stress if that's the route they choose. The students currently

enrolled at JFKS have a right to a community where they may learn how to function in social environments alongside their peers, and although our school is mostly safe and secure and one should not dismiss the blessing that is, there are improvements that should be made to promote skills necessary to living in the socially and emotionally exhausting world.

In order to promote the skill sets offered by the integration of SEL, the vital next step would be a genuine reflection on the school community. Our existing environment would learn a lot and be undoubtedly benefited by the careful consideration of incorporating SEL components to JFKS classrooms.

# Gender, Family, and Reputation Matter!

## Becoming Conscious of Teacher Bias

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by Teresa Daehne and Lizzy Luegger

Prejudice is a problematic and pressing topic. You read about it in articles, see it in films, and have maybe even experienced it yourself. It pops up in all types of different ways: through gender, reputation, race, etc. But have you carefully considered that it could be happening at our school? And not just that, but that it's happening all the time too? Well, it is. And it's being spoken about much less than it ought to be.

When school becomes a place where you feel judged and uncomfortable, when it should be a place where you feel safe enough to express your thoughts freely and be yourself, a big problem has weaseled its way into the heart of JFK. This article pinpoints the main types of prejudice seen in classrooms and discusses how it affects students' abilities to learn effectively and comfortably. Are classroom biases hindering students' educational experience and is teacher prejudice a more significant issue than we appreciate?

Let's be blunt. Teachers often favor the female students. Girls are

often perceived as organized, quiet, and sweet, whereas boys are messy and loud. These stereotypical behaviors are often internalized and present in the subconscious mind of the teachers and sometimes even the student body. Even though some teachers would deny it, it becomes very evident when it comes to grading and punishing students. An example of sexist bias at schools would be a male student who is trying his hardest to achieve academic triumph yet is unsuccessful, the teacher does not acknowledge the effort that was put in but merely sees the bad grade and judges based on the failures. This scenario is the sad truth of various students at JFKS. Some teachers see no use in supporting the students in achieving their academic goals because they have the classic stereotype of a lazy or disorganized boy (who may or may not "grow out of it"). Too often teachers give up on "just a boy who does not care about his education". We can all admit that we have judged someone based on this gender bias, yet it still is unjust to judge a student based on his

academic achievements and instead look behind the grades on the paper. Look at the whole person and what is going on in his personal life. Maybe he is struggling, yet really wants to try. It does not aid him if his own teacher does not believe in him. When a student dares to stop believing in himself and his academic performance, the teacher is supposed to be the person to build him up again, encourage him, and be the pillar in this situation.

Many people would want to believe that you are in control of your reputation and how teachers see you, but this is not the truth. We are referring to the sibling-related family prejudice that many pupils experience. Numerous members of the same family have the opportunity to attend JFKS, which is a privilege. But isn't it often the case that teachers evaluate you based on your siblings' prior behavior? This might have both positive and harmful effects. At JFKS, this older sibling bias is highly prevalent and causes a whole new set of issues for students. For instance, if a teacher had a positive

relationship with an older sibling, it provides them an unfair edge over the other students in the class. They will also be more favorably treated than the others, despite the fact that they had done nothing to earn the teacher's positive impression of them. However, if the relationship with an older sibling was primarily unfavorable, they will be compelled to tread carefully for the remainder of the school year and will need to put in twice as much effort to discredit the teachers' prejudice. They must study with the fear of getting reprimanded for something trivial, effectively being punished for the misdeeds of their sibling. To the contrary, the younger sibling of the model student gets every classroom advantage. It goes without saying that not all teachers are like this, but enough of them are for it to warrant discussion. When teachers and pupils hear that "dreaded " identical surname to the disruptive child they had before on the first day of school, they shouldn't automatically fall back on bias but

rather should base their assessments of one another on their own personal experiences. Much of this bias is unconscious. First, give the students a chance. Don't assume anything. Get to know the child. We're not here to endure the repercussions of anything that happened because of a sibling; we're here to learn.

Imagine you've battled with school your entire life and have always been a lousy student. Your teachers and peers are aware of this. For the duration of your academic career, it has been your reputation. You then decide you want to change. Or perhaps you believed you could, but gave up because teachers had once more put you in a box and predetermined your future. "You're a poor student," they say, "always have been and always will be." This brings us to our next type of prejudice: presumption. In essence, this occurs when a student's academic performance is subpar, which causes teachers to instantly assume that they are poor students and refrain from even attempting to

assist them or provide them with a chance to improve. There is always a "dumb kid" or a "troubled kid" in every class, but nobody ever considers what that child might actually be capable of if prejudice against them didn't exist. Kids grow and evolve. But their reputations in our small community follow them from grade to grade. Don't deny somebody a chance because you think you know them. Let everyone start fresh.

JFKS is not unique in these matters. But, like all schools, JFKS needs to stop to assess how inclusive and accepting we are. We are not saying that all teachers demonstrate these behaviors, but too many do, probably unconsciously. . We are aware that things are not going to change overnight, but we are calling attention to the topic so that changes in attitude can be made. School should be a place where all feel comfortable in their own skin, no matter their gender, family, or reputation. We all deserve to feel safe and appreciated. That is what school really is all about.

# “Mother Tongue” - Still?

by Maya Tabachnikoff

The term “mother tongue” seems self-explanatory. It refers to the language a person grew up speaking, is best at and most comfortable in – which is the language their mother spoke. Right?

Well, not entirely. Some people know their father’s language or the language of their home country, which may not be their parents’ country of origin, at a higher level. Others never learn the language of their mother for any of myriad possible reasons. Is the term outdated? Offensive, even?

One could argue that the term does not need to be understood quite so literally. A mother tongue is not necessarily the language of one’s mother—that much is clear. For instance, a child brought up by their father in Russia with no contact to their Finnish mother would have Russian as their mother tongue, although it is not literally the language of their mother. Moreover, the language can still be close and familiar to a person, like a mother is; a more metaphorical interpretation of the phrase. Similar to the term “home country,” which does not have to mean the country where one’s

home currently is, “mother tongue” can be taken to mean a person’s dominant or childhood language without requiring any ties to a mother.

But if the term no longer suits its meaning, why continue using it? There are alternatives such as the more accurate “native language” for the language of one’s home country and “first language” for the language of one’s upbringing. Should these words replace the not-always-applicable “mother tongue”?

JFKS is in a unique predicament as a bilingual school. Currently, students’ classes are labeled “Mother Tongue” for their stronger language or the language of their birth country and “Partner Tongue” for the presumably less proficient other language. These terms are particularly present in elementary school. In my opinion, these terms, just as much as “native tongue” and “first language”, are just fine, but their antonyms are problematic. If the term “mother tongue” were replaced, it would make sense to change the term “partner tongue” to match its opposite. However, this may be counter productive. Switching .....

“Partner Tongue” to “Foreign Language,” the opposite of native language, distances the young students from the language they are meant to be learning. In addition, many kids speak both languages fairly well, meaning that neither is truly a foreign language and the phrase is plain inaccurate. The issues continue with “second language”: that language is being called lesser, of lower priority. Perhaps the best solution would be to mix and match phrases. For example, “Native Tongue” and “Partner Tongue” could be the new names of language classes. Since it is well suited, the phrase “Partner Tongue” could remain while “Mother Tongue” is replaced with a more precise, less gender-affiliated phrase. In the end, I believe that, as long as the terminology points out that one language is dominant—regardless of any relation to the speaker’s mother—while the other language is still valuable, the terms are serving their purpose. “Mother Tongue” are simply not the best suited words for the task, not when phrases like “Native Tongue” have essentially the same meaning without making assumptions.

# Stigmatizing Sexuality: The Power of Language

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by Clemens Schmid

Do you often hear phrases like: "... is gay" and "you're so gay"? I hear them almost every day at school. These phrases are toxic and hateful, as they imply that being gay is bad or embarrassing, which it is not. I don't believe that most of these students necessarily have anything against gay people. Yet the social stigma such exclamations create leads to gay students at JFKS not feeling able to live or express themselves as freely as their straight friends.

Sexuality is something you are born with, not something you consciously select. And even if it were a choice, it still wouldn't be a legitimate reason to stigmatize a group of people. While JFKS does

not seem to have a culture of gay hatred, I worry that if we keep making jokes or remarks about homosexual people and letting them slide without repercussions, then the door to a culture of hate is still open.

What I think is so sad about this is that over the years, gay people have fought for their rights; for social acceptance.

And yet even today, even in a free democratic country, and even in a school like JFKS, people openly make jokes and openly use "gay" as an

insult. Is this what JFKS students stand for?

No, obviously not. We should not stand for social stigma and cheap "humor". Yet this is what some students are moving towards. It is the dangerous path we are going down. So let's all strive towards fixing the issue, let's strive to stop those who make remarks like this respectfully and yet harshly enough for them to understand that their exclusionary behavior is unacceptable.

# Counting the Cost: The Silent Impact of Financial Discrimination in Education

by Ophelia Reuter

“Education is a basic human right that works to raise men and women out of poverty, level inequalities and ensure sustainable development” states the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Yet we see millions of children worldwide that are still out of school for several reasons. While we are working on ensuring basic education for all, we need to regard the inequalities that students face within the educational system. Here too, there are hundreds of aspects to cover. One in particular affects more families than you’d think- financial discrimination.

Take JFKS for example:

How many trips or events have you done with this school? Did you go to Rostock with the MUN program? Did you go to Austria on the ski trip? Did you have prom, 6th grade dance, a Hartz trip?

While we can talk about the privileges our school has in comparison to other schools, we can’t forget that financial gaps

exist between the students of our school as well. Some may not be able to finance these trips and events and, while there are financial plans set up by the school, many families don’t claim these due to the stigma surrounding such financial aid. If you’ve started looking into AP or SAT testing, you’ve probably noticed the three digit number on the application document. These “advanced” forms of education also act as an exclusion for students who are financially limited.

Socioeconomic inequalities and discrimination are prevalent in practically all aspects of society. In education however, they are much more noticeable, both in the short- and long-term. Lower income families frequently find less opportunities for education, often leading to a lack in quality of education. This doesn’t just mean they can’t afford an AP test- it can have much more drastic effects in the future. Lower quality education can mean that further education isn’t an option, which could lead to less job opportunities, which could then lead to an endless cycle of socioeconomic disparities.

An issue posed in the US is that students go to school in their school

district in which they live and pay taxes, meaning financially strained districts will consequently have financially strained schools. This may present itself in an undersupply of textbooks, technology, etc. Lifelong learning opportunities can be severely impacted through these inequalities.

While we wait for the leaders of this world to finally prioritize the generations of the future, there are other up-and-coming solutions. The recent rise in the use of artificial intelligence in education, for instance, has sparked a big debate. Many people, including teachers and parents, are critical of AI, voicing the reasonable concerns that AI can be used for cheating and hinder any learning. However, AI poses many opportunities in school systems. It can be a financially viable option for students that need personalised learning experiences. This can close learning disadvantages without necessitating further financial drain. Using AI in schools can also prepare students for the digital world, seeing as jobs in the future will inevitably require a certain degree of tech knowledge.

Amidst many paths towards a solution though, the fact of the

matter is that money is hindering the way of far too many students. Economic well-being should not dictate the outcome of young lives and we should be fighting for a

more equal school system. The root of inequality in general is this discrimination that people face from day one.

Equality in job opportunities can only exist if equality in education exists.



Illustrated by Zarah-Louise Danziger

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# A Critical View of Split Gender Sport Classes

by Carmen Williams

From bilingualism to BERMUN to our funky campus design, JFKS is different. While many aspects of our uniqueness are positive and should not be taken for granted, others seem... strange. JFKS sometimes feels endearingly retro-what with its brick buildings, chalkboards, and a library teeming with the legacy of the U.S. military presence. These things are special, but one thing is not: the fact that from 5th to 10th grade, our sport classes are separated between boys and girls.

## WHY? WHAT FOR?

The segregation of gender in physical education at JFK is sexist, old fashioned, and highly problematic. Sport is one of the most crucial subjects taught in schools. In a post-pandemic and increasingly online world it is of utmost importance that JFKS students learn to take care of their bodies, and to enjoy doing so. In a time where we are faced with a teenage mental health crisis, there is perhaps no better remedy than physical activity, which has been proven to not only benefit students' physical well-being but also their self-esteem and emotional well-being. In fact, the groups which are most damaged by gender segregated sports--trans, non-binary, and female students--are among those who would most benefit from physical activities.

These are obvious facts, and yet the segregated sport curriculum at our school does not support this notion. Often, when discussing gender inequality or stereotypes, I find myself saying that they have been taught from a very young age; I am referring to society's indirect implicit messages about gender norms. Hear me now, at JFKS gender stereotypes are literally taught from a very young age in the classroom. It does not begin in 5th grade when the good ole' gender split happens, it is the moment an entrance class student sets foot on the nice, somewhat new, cushy track and sees the boys running laps on one end of the field and the girls stretching on the other.

"But Carmen!" I hear some people say, "wouldn't separating boys and girls give girls a safer and less shameful environment to learn in?" I have a short and sweet response: no. What gives girls and young women a safe environment to learn in is addressing male behavior and giving students a heterogeneous (and by this I mean mixed gender) space to learn to understand and respect one another in. Sport class is not just meant to teach physical activity but also teamwork, respect, and sportspersonship.

**Especially since the pandemic, JFKS has been wrestling with how to**

**revive our community. What better way to build community than to have homeroom classes doing sport together?**

Look, I hate to break it to you, but JFKS is not built to train elite professional athletes. JFKS is built for ALL students who deserve time to move their bodies after being confined to chairs from 8 to 3. The federation for Women's Sports explains it perfectly, asserting that "physical education is instructional, and there is no justification for sex segregation in programs in which the purpose is instructional." Light competition makes sport class fun, but never in a school sport class is or should the competition be so fierce as to dictate a separate gender class.

"But Carmen!" you may interject, "what if it's simply that girls and boys have different skill levels in sports on a physical level?" - to which I have a few responses. The first one is that this difference in physicality is not notable enough in recreational school sports to require a split curriculum. In fact, the physical attributes which differentiate sexes are far and few compared to the physical differences within sexes. Development during adolescence is so diverse that at no point can it be



said definitively that girls are 'X' thing and boys are 'Y', because they are all developing into different people at different rates.

In addition, this claim assumes an expectation that classes are separated by biological sex, which does not allow room for transgender students' participation in a way which affirms their identity. Another response to this argument is that in every class to ever exist in school there are going to be differences in skill, and the best teachers are trained to manage this in such a way where all students have the chance to learn and flourish to the best of their abilities. If gender segregated sports are about skill level then please separate sport classes by skill level. I have every reason to believe that like many great coaches and sport teachers I have had, JFKS has sport teachers who can manage a class with varied skills and abilities.

Another huge flaw in gender segregated sports is the message our school is sending to LGBTQ+ students. There is no option for non-binary students at our school regarding our sport classes.

**The message the sports department is sending right now is that there are two genders, and they will be separate. I look forward to the day when sports can just be for people.**

Everyone of any ability deserves to feel the joy and reward that can come from physical activity, so why is our sports department neglecting non-binary students? I have had the privilege of being in both the girls and boys sports class at different times in my life, as well as

participating in mixed sports classes at and outside of JFKS. Switching sport classes is a very public and often exposing action for transgender students, especially during periods of questioning one's identity. When I ran into issues regarding sport class and my transness I felt like I was the burden, like my existence was the reason behind my struggle to be accepted- not the organization of the class itself.

**It is not hard to be transgender or non-binary in sports, it is hard to be in a sport class which does not accept your identity.**

The issue is not a transgender issue but an issue with the system which does not leave room for gender diverse students.

But it is not only gender diverse students who are harmed by the message that split sport classes send, it is all students. Because if split classes encourage a set gender binary, then not only will non-binary and trans students have to grapple with feeling abnormal, cisgender students will have every reason to expect them to be uncomfortable. If, as a cisgender student, you see trans and non-binary students switching or struggling with class, then this view of gender diverse experiences becomes normalized as well. This harms students of any gender's ability to know how to address and include gender diverse people in sports because there is not an accepting sport program at our school to model such. And while I am grateful that for the most part switching sport classes is an option for trans students at JFKS, none of the publicity and potential conflict

that ensues from class transfer would take place if classes were mixed to begin with.

**Mixed classes provide a safe environment for gender diverse students to thrive and not have to feel pressured to make a choice between two options which do not honor their identity.**

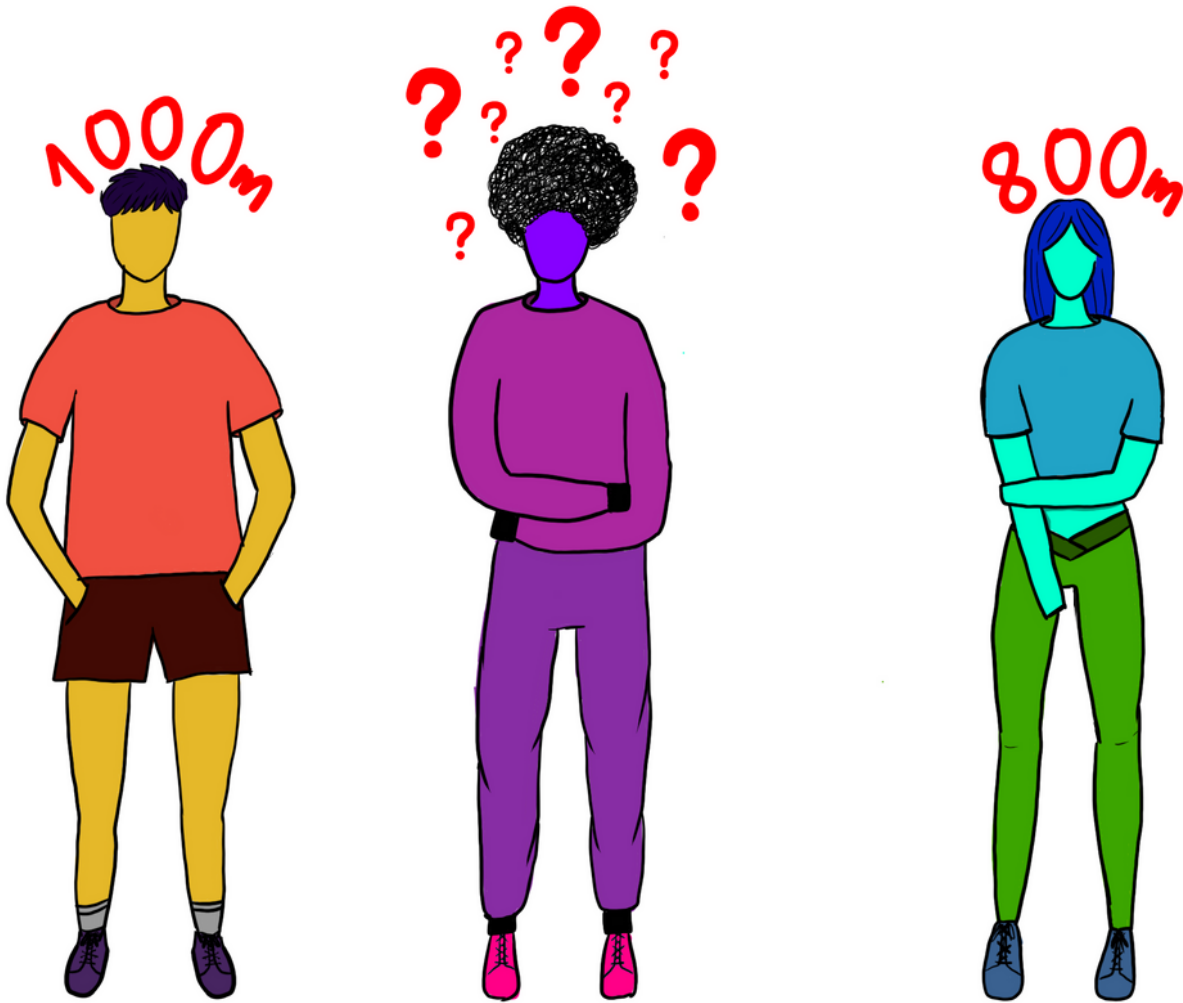
Tradition also has no place in this issue. It is indeed true that for a long time, many Berlin schools have separated sport classes by gender, but that is no grounds for its continuation. Keeping gender segregated sports because "it's just how it is" is a dangerous and foolish argument, and if JFKS wishes to call itself a modern and accepting institution then it needs to demolish its system of binary gender separation. The issues which may motivate separation by gender in sports such as bodily self consciousness, physical capability, and different approaches to sports are rooted in sexism and they discriminate against trans and non-binary students. The issues above are not solved by split classes but rather exacerbated. Segregated sport classes push the narrative of female weakness, it promoted gender intolerance, and it reinforces a gender binary system which exposes and damages both LGBTQ+ students and cisgender students. Creating space for gender diversity is one step of many for forming an accepting community at JFKS.

Every day, we sit, all genders, together in a classroom. We debate and discuss tough topics. We have survived a pandemic and are trying to find our place in a digital world

together. All genders. We stress, we learn, together. And yet we have to be separate to do pushups and

throw dodgeballs and run. I urge the school administration and sports department to combine sport

classes in the interests of gender equity and inclusion.



Illustrated by Zarah-Louise Danziger

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# Dueling Perspectives on Class Participation

by Brooks Beckley and Justin Böhlen

In classes ranging from English, math, and the sciences, class participation is an important part of one's grade. In most 11th and 12th grade classes, as well as many classes in the Mittelstufe, class participation is graded as 30% of the total grade. Oral participation is one of the most substantial parts of our grades. But to what degree should our grades rely on our oral participation?

## **Weighing Class Participation More**

Oral participation is essential in not only developing students academically, but also socially. The 30% of your grade might not give everyone an incentive to participate, but the educational benefits cannot be disputed when it comes to learning. According to Oxford Learning, oral participation improves teamwork, critical thinking, retention of information, and increases engagement in a classroom. All of these benefits are indicators for the reason that oral participation should be 30% of our grade.

Oral participation is integral to learning for even the quiet students. Hearing other people's opinions and being able to refute them helps every student in the classroom form their own. Even if something false is said, it will be corrected by a teacher or student and every student in the class sees

what mistakes to avoid through an oral interaction. New opinions can be formed. Memorable interactions are created. Learning happens.

Oral participation not only helps with retaining information, it develops critical thinking. Critical thinking is one the most important parts of developing as a human being and that is what schools aim to teach us. Thinking critically is what makes our society a better place and the only way it can develop. The best way to develop critical thinking is in a classroom setting bouncing ideas off one another. This also helps students form their own opinions, especially in class discussions.

Lastly I would like to move away from the academic side of the discussion and talk about the personal benefits that oral participation has on young and developing students. According to Oxford Learning, oral participation boosts confidence in students and improves communication with all people and from every walk of life. It also gives quiet kids the opportunity to also speak up and vocalize their opinions in a safe environment.

Oral participation being graded at 30% supports the oral and "hand on" learners, simultaneously the quiet kids have an outlet to develop themselves socially and it does not

fully take away from their grade. Having oral participation being such a large portion of the grade develops students in something other than pure academics and that is why it is so important to have this aspect of school be emphasized.

## **Weighing Class Participation Less**

The grading of oral participation has a multitude of problems that need to be addressed before counting it as such a high percentage of our grades. Although the incentive of grading oral participation could push quieter students to speak up, it often does not. Instead, it risks biased grading and discrimination.

According to a 2009 article in *Perspectives on History*, a publication by the American Historical Association, only 40% of students surveyed in a sample of 100 students said that graded participation encourages participation. Personally, I haven't been motivated to participate in class even with a heavy weight on a grade. As a result of this, my grades have been significantly impacted.

Those with social anxiety and mental health issues are even less motivated to participate or are too anxious to participate. By grading class participation at 30%, those students are significantly impacted.

Oral participation is not graded in a standardized fashion. Therefore, as the grading is subject to the teacher's opinion, it is prone to bias and possible discrimination. This bias can be detrimental to the academic performance of students who are, for whatever reason, disfavored by a teacher. We all know that conscious and unconscious teacher bias very much exists.

Oral participation advantages more talkative students, who can easily "bullshit" their way through a class discussion. In my experience, many students simply participate to get a good grade. They lack actual interest in the discussion and make superficial comments which get graded often at the same level as more fruitful contributions.

Grading oral participation as 30% of the total grade significantly disadvantages quieter students who learn in different ways and encourages non-genuine engagement. Written assignments and non-oral forms of participation in class are less discriminatory forms of assessment. It is time we rethink class participation and shift to a better method of performance in class.

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# JFK Support of Students with ADHD: Signs of Hope

by Julius Schmidt    Illustrated by Julius Schmidt

Despite facing challenges in funding and understanding of learning disorders compared to United States public schools, the John F Kennedy School in Berlin has added new positions and new policies to support students with learning disorders such as Dyslexia or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). However, the JFKS administration is still far from being content with the support available.

JFKS has added new support measures within the last ten years, looking to follow American special education plans. Students still face stigmatization of learning disorders and the school still struggles to develop enough resources.

From 2010 to 2019 the German government has increased spending per pupil by 12%. This allows for schools in Germany to fund additional student support. Eight years ago, JFKS hired Andrea Rathke to fill the new position of Learning Support Facilitator. In addition to other staff hires, August saw the hiring of Derek Getschow to fill another new position of Student Services Coordinator. This has been in an effort to expand on the comparatively little accommodations that JFKS offers.

“I personally get extra time and some other smaller things,” 11th grader diagnosed with ADHD Jayden Kraus said.

However, since starting at JFKS, Rathke has worked to introduce a range of accommodations for disorders such as Dyslexia and ADHD that didn't exist at the school.

“When I think back initially, in terms of looking at accommodations for dyslexia and all of that, there were really hardly any kind of foundations [at JFKS],” Rathke said.

In addition to Rathke's expertise, Getschow has taught and been a student support administrator across multiple grade levels in multiple regions in the United States. He has worked on implementing new policies that try to prepare teachers with individual accommodation plans before the school year even starts.

Former chemistry teacher, now a school counselor, Myriah Day works alongside Getschow and the administration to develop and implement new ideas to the school.

“We really made a goal this year to make sure that teachers had [accommodation plans] before the school year started so they knew how to plan their lessons,” Day said.

Prior to this school year, teachers would meet three to four weeks into the school year to talk about accommodations for students. The new policy has been a group effort and caused struggle for the support staff. Getschow believes this is what

needs to be done in order to help students.

“Getting the information to the teachers was a big chore in and of itself,” Getschow said, “but it's there, it's all done, and that's been amazing.”

Although JFKS has worked on improving accommodations and support for students with Dyslexia and ADHD, other special needs aren't as focused on. A document provided by Day titled “Definition of Terms and Typical Accommodations for Students with Special Needs - JFKS High School” shows 12 different accommodations for ADHD and ADS while listing only four accommodations for students with Sensory Processing Disorder and only 6, half of what ADHD has, for Visual Impairment, and Auditory Processing Disorder.

“JFKS has ample accommodations for ADHD, I'm not sure about other disorders though,” Kraus said. While JFKS does not provide equal support to different disorders, Getschow tries to mirror American public education because of their attention to learning disorders, shown by their special education departments and accommodation plans such as a 504 plan which tries to ensure students are receiving the support they need based on a multitude of different disorders and needs.

Because of the size of their GDP, the United States is able to provide

more funding for support resources to schools in order to help accommodate learning disorders.

Germany's education budget is 7% of its GDP while the United States' is only 3.4% of its GDP. However, 7% of Germany's GDP is around 267.7 billion U.S. dollars while the United States' 3.4% of its GDP amounts to over 794.7 billions U.S. dollars. Of course, Germany and the United States are both federal systems in which funding of and policies about education are made primary at the state, as opposed to the national level of government.

Despite lower amounts of funding to education, and therefore less resources available to be spent on learning support, JFKS tries to be a model for the Berlin education scene in accommodating students.

"We are pretty much on the forefront in coming to the field compared to what I kind of noticed in interactions with networking in the field with other speakers in Berlin," Rathke said.

In addition to the funding difference in Germany compared to the United States, stigma and understanding of disorders is lacking in German schools.

"There has also been a difference in

the culture here between the German system from the American side," Rathke said.

Because only 4.4% of German adolescents are diagnosed with ADHD, compared to the U.S.'s 13.6% of adolescents, typically Germany falls behind in taking an active role in supporting special needs such as ADHD.

"[The German side of JFKS] has not been as forthcoming and progressive as you would have on the American side," Rathke said.

In addressing how JFKS has tried to increase support for students who need accommodation, stigma has been a large factor that JFKS is focusing on.

"Especially when you're young and you're in school, the emphasis is on your classes. Your subjects, your grades. And that's not a measure of how smart you are. It's not a measure of how successful you can be," Getschow said.

Getschow also stressed how students can be singled out with having accommodations and feel ashamed of their support. Changing the outlook on disorders is a big step in making support a more effective aspect in JFKS education.

"I think the stigma has definitely gotten better, but I do still see it," Rathke said.

On top of battling stigmas, JFKS also struggles to keep up with the volume of students who need support.

"The student ratio has risen incredibly over the last two or three years from where we had 20 students to now we are at 100 [students with accommodations in grades 7-12]," Rathke said.

Additionally, managing support and rigor of education remains part of the administration's struggle and a part of stigmas.

"My observation is that there's a thinking that if we offer these accommodations, there's no rigor," Day said.

Nevertheless, JFKS is still far from being in a position they would like to be in compared to systems that deal with special needs more successfully. The administration remains working on improving support for students that need accommodation.

"There's things that we're able to offer in the United States education system that we're not able to offer here," Getschow said, "yet."

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- "Definition of Terms and Typical Accommodations for Students with Special Needs - JFKS High School" paper given to teachers provided to me by Myriah Day
- Myriah Day, former teacher and secondary school counselor
- Andrea Rathke, Learning Support Facilitator
- Derek Getschow, Student Services Coordinator

# Dress Codes?

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by Carmen Williams

“Students must be neatly dressed in clothing appropriate for an EC-Grade 12, multicultural, school environment. Clothing must not distract from the school being a serious and respectful learning environment.” Behold: the JFKS dress code, found on page 8 of the JFKS High School Student Handbook. So, let's unpack. “Neatly dressed”. . . in what manner? And what can one deem appropriate for a “multicultural school environment” populated by ages 4 to adult? What clothing is distracting, and what clothing does one consider respectful and serious? Is this all just a matter of opinion? And what are the repercussions for not adhering to this code? Am I the only one who feels like this is very vague?

Perhaps the vagueness is a good thing. Indeed, the dress code leaves room for self expression and does not include the sexist rhetoric that plagues many school dress codes: I applaud its lack of gender-specific rules and open-endedness because, in theory, these would allow students to express themselves in whatever way feels comfortable to them. In addition, the school dress code is free of the hair styling restrictions which disproportionately target youth of color and boys with long hair.

There is a controversy as to whether or not the code should

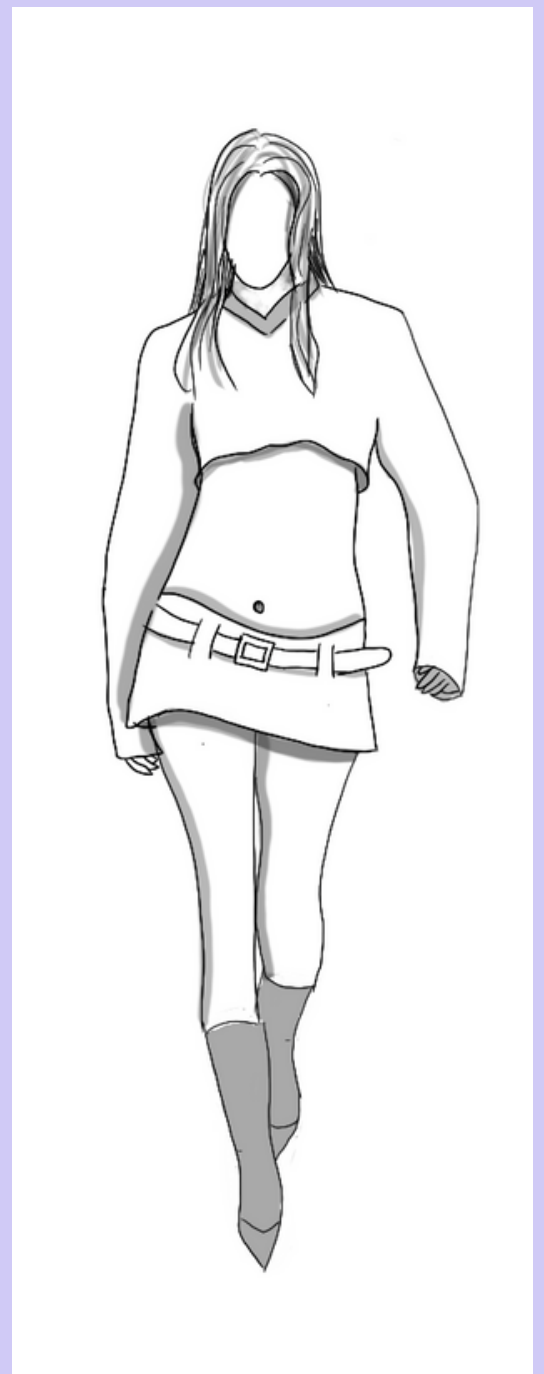
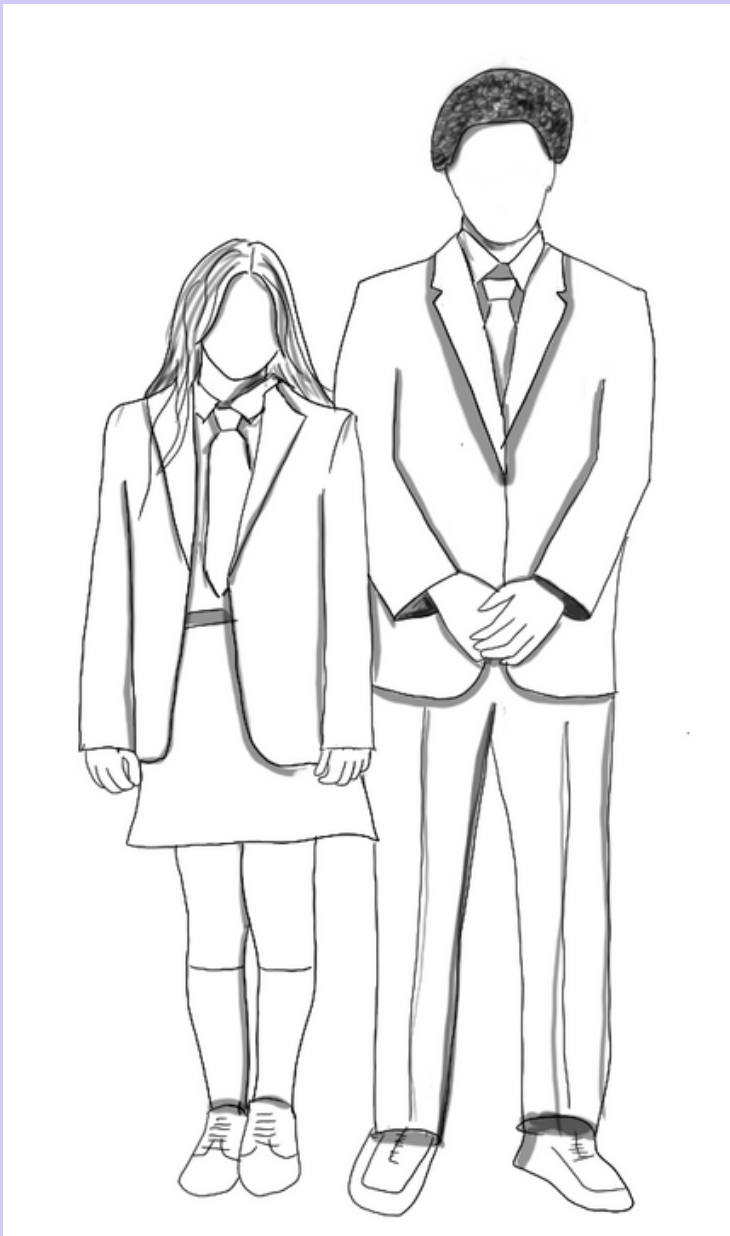
exist at all. For example, its specification of clothing suited for a multicultural environment implies that clothing with discriminatory or inappropriate language or branding — such as clothing with references to drugs, sexual behavior, and racially or religiously provocative language — can be addressed. Another useful aspect of the dress code is that if someone is wearing something ludicrous (think “inflatable T-Rex costume” levels of ludicrousness) then it can be handled properly.

But the fact is that the grey areas of the dress code enable its enforcement to be just as patchy. Instead of, as it states, making sure clothing suits the JFKS school environment and does not distract from learning, the dress code is simply enforced by teachers at their own leisure. It is noteworthy that the dress code has no restrictions on cropped clothes, necklines, or fit. So why is it that these aspects of dress still seem to fall into some sort of “no-fly” zone among teachers? Ask yourself this honest question: have you ever seen a guy be “dress coded: at JFKS? If- like me in my 5 years at this school- your answer is no, then you know that there is something to be discussed.

The fact is that the majority of dress code enforcement at our school, like at many other schools, seems to be targeting and

sexualizing female students. Here is an example: a female student wears a cropped tank top exposing their midriff. The teacher tells them to cover up because it is “distracting” their classmates. Why should the female student have to be held accountable for their classmates' behavior? When female students are told to cover up or change because the teacher deems their clothing “disruptive” it sets a dangerous precedent. It reinforces the message that female students are responsible for their male counterparts' behavior, and that it's their responsibility to keep their fellow students' thoughts “clean”. The enforcement of the dress codes plays into the outdated notion that males cannot control their impulses and therefore females have to dress modestly.

In an atmosphere where students are learning skills to prepare them for adulthood, teachers should respect their students' maturity and freedom to choose their own outfits. If, for some reason, classmates are being “distracted” by clothing, it is not the student who is wearing it who needs to change, but rather those who are disrespectful enough to point it out. Shaming and censoring female student attire is inappropriate, it's often sexist, and it shames young women who have every right to express themselves.





# Our School - Fair To Everyone?

by Emmeline Rubi Muschner

Schools are meant to be a learning environment equally accessible to everyone. JFKS prides itself in being very welcoming to various cultures, languages, and religions. Anyone is supposed to feel welcome and supported. That is the general idea, but it looks a bit different in real life.

I got lucky and was one of the very few who got to join JFKS in first grade. I was so excited. School was going fine, I had a lot of friends, everyone was nice. I am now in 11th grade. This has been my school since the beginning and I am very happy to go here.

I got lucky and was one of the very few who got to join JFKS in first grade. I was so excited. School was going fine, I had a lot of friends, everyone was nice. I am now in 11th grade. This has been my school since the beginning and I am very happy to go here.

But for a couple of years I have had a hearing problem. Doctors diagnosed me with an ear tumor in 2020 and since then I have had three surgeries and missed loads of school. To say that was a difficult time would be an understatement. I had a horrible time keeping up in classes because of everything I missed and my friends got annoyed when I asked them for worksheets the fifth time that week because the teachers would not give them to me. I understand that we, as high

school students, are old enough to take responsibility for our own learning and missed work, but at some point I almost missed half a school year and the work was unbearable. This led to even more stress which led to more problems with my health, which led to missing more class. I was stuck in a cycle of stress and poor health.

Then teachers and my doctors suggested I just stop getting grades for the year and afterwards just repeat a grade. At this point, I was so stressed out that I felt like that might help. But I felt like I was failing myself. No one was giving me the support I needed, instead everyone told me it was okay to fail. Fail what? I had done nothing wrong and it still seemed to be my fault. I felt like a year of my life was taken away from me.

When my report card came, we all were pleasantly surprised. Despite not being able to attend half of my classes that semester, my worst grade was a 3-. Repeating a grade became completely out of the question. After a while the stress died down and so did most of the health troubles. I was able to give myself the healing environment I needed. Sadly, my ear was still not working like it did before. That was when a hearing aid was suggested.

The first time I put on a hearing aid, I cried for joy. Losing a sense, even just partially, impacts your life

in such a drastic way and I was so glad to get that back. Going back to school, I was so excited to show off to my friends. Many friends and even teachers were so supportive. They congratulated me, complimented me, and made me feel good about myself. But I was confused by the mean comments. Some people felt the need to give me weird looks or call me disabled. When I cried that time, it was not joy.

Something else that irritated me was the fact that so many teachers did not know about my hearing problem until I showed up with a hearing aid. I had assumed the school had informed them. I wondered if that was somehow my responsibility. The teachers that did not know were mainly very supportive though and asked me if I wanted to sit more towards the front or what they could do to help me. I didn't feel the need to be moved now with my hearing aid getting me almost back to the level of normality.

After having a hearing aid for half a year, I went half deaf again. The results of an MRI scan showed my tumor had returned. Another surgery was scheduled. This surgery was before summer break. We were waiting for my ear to heal from the surgery before giving it back the hearing aid. Until then, I was without one. The problem with that

is that I do not want to ask my teachers to change their seating schedule for me in particular. I feel uncomfortable and do not want to be a burden. This leads to me sitting further back in class than I should, which gets really annoying at times when I have to read my teachers lips because I cannot hear a word they are saying.

I had my first appointment for getting a hearing aid in October. I was very nervous but also excited. Hearing is everything to me, music is my life and I am thrilled I can experience that in full volume again. Even though it will still take me some time to get used to it, everything is going well. This experience has shown me that

JFKS might have the right intentions of creating an equal learning environment for everyone, but it often fails at being adequately communicative and supportive. There are a lot of kids at this school like me, who have invisible disabilities. We suffer quietly. We don't always get the support we deserve. JFKS can and should work harder to support all students.

# 10 Accomplishments of our Student Support Services Team

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**The JFK Student Support Services Team has been hard at work. Just see what they have accomplished since 2020!**

## **1. JFK Care Corner**

A place where students can come pick up needed supplies that might have been forgotten at home. All students can come to Haus Reil to grab a school item, period care products, deodorant, or sport clothes to help get through the day.

## **2. Advisory Lessons**

To address the surveyed needs of students in school, the student services team has developed lessons for 7th-10th graders that aligns with the International School Counseling standards and to address the demand for more mental wellness in education at JFK. Currently, students have an hour lesson approximately twice a month with one of the student services educators. Some topics covered are: goal setting, stress management, test anxiety, organizational skills, healthy relationships, career awareness, and sex abuse prevention.

## **3. Mittelhof**

Mittelhof provides a space for students to be in a learning community with one another. They also work to educate students with engaging clubs and activities (e.g. Garden Club, Ceramics, etc.). They also support students to build skills in democratic education through Klassenrat.

## **4. Lerncoaches**

The newly initiated Student Lerncoach Team (SLC) is readily available to assist any students who may be interested to find out more about learning skills; this may include any of the following:

- how to set proper learning goals
- organize yourself
- be more focused and task orientated
- motivate yourself
- learning techniques
- concentration skills
- time and stress management

The team is available for support in room B214 Monday-Thursday from 3 - 4pm. Please pop by for a chat to discuss your needs or simply send an email to [lerncoaches@jfkbsberlin.org](mailto:lerncoaches@jfkbsberlin.org).

## **5. Most Accommodation Plans are Now Bilingual**

To ensure that students are able to receive and fully understand the accommodations they are entitled to receiving in school, most of the accommodation plans have been provided in German and English.

## **6. Student Services Coordinator**

Students that receive accommodations are more closely monitored to make sure they are making progress on their goals and have equitable, appropriate access to a high-quality education.

## **7. Meetings with every 6th grade student**

To aid students in their transition to high school, every 6th grade student has a brief 5-8 minute interview. During this interview, the middle school counselor has a chance to get to know each student to help identify strengths, needs, and understand the roles of the student services in the high school.

## **8. Schulsozialarbeit**

Due to the increased need for more socio-educational support in schools triggered by the consequences of the corona pandemic, the state of Berlin has created additional school social work positions in the last two years with the aim that every school can fill at least one school social worker position. At JFK, we are fortunate to have one social worker, who works collaboratively with school counselors and pedagogical educator to support all students, families, and staff.

## **9. College Search/Application Workshops**

Weekly workshops were started in the spring to support juniors and seniors taking a gap year with the application process. Topics included Studying in the U.K., Studying in the Netherlands, Studying in the United States, and Writing Personal Statements/College Essays.

## **10. Tutor list digitized**

Due to the increased needs of tutors and in collaboration with the National Honor Society, the list of available tutors has been digitized to make it more accessible.

## **IDEAS applauds the tireless efforts of our Student Support Team**

School Social Worker - Jenny Rieck

Pedagogical Assistance - Christine Boehm-Wirt

American Liaison/Learning Support - Andrea Rathke

Middle School Counselor - Myriah Day

High School Counselor - Randel Kelly

Registrar - Alaina Mack

Student Services Coordinator - Derek Getschow

Special Education Teacher - Maike Groth

Special Education Support - Matt Baildon

Mittelhof Staff - Aneel Schneeweiss, Hyunjung Kleinschmidt-Choi, and Damiano Montano



# The Trouble of Teaching With Trigger Warnings

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By Miles Ehrlich

For something that is meant to help avoid distress, trigger warnings have elicited a certain cultural stress over the past few years. The reasoning behind trigger warnings is intuitive; by warning someone susceptible to traumatic content about a distressing subject, an author, filmmaker, or teacher can prevent psychologically distressing their audience, some of whom may be sensitive to particular topics. Considering their widespread adoption throughout the past decade, it then seems reasonable to assume that they have benefited victims of trauma. But increasingly, concerns regarding their usefulness seem to overshadow their intended purpose, and scarcely without reason. Meant to limit distress, trigger warnings have expanded to a classification of any problematic content, acting as more of a label than a warning. Consequently, trigger warnings have spread the notion that encountering any offensive or challenging information is psychologically detrimental, even though it rarely elicits such post-traumatic distress. When their use enters the classroom, teachers and students alike should use warnings sparingly and cautiously, to ensure the success of their intended effect.

The origin of trigger warnings lies in online feminist spaces in the

2000's. Many women especially wanted to create a safer space through warnings of explicit mention of violence and abuse, issues very much present in their and other people's lives. As public awareness for post-traumatic distress from these factors increased, so too did the use of trigger warnings in progressive circles, both online and within activist groups.

By the 2010's, many academic institutions acted on requests to use content warnings in course material. Despite their popularity though, many educators and administrators have had doubts about the effectiveness of trigger warnings in academic settings. At Cornell for instance, Richard Friedman, who ran the university's student mental health program for decades, began noticing a "sense of being harmed by things that were unfamiliar and uncomfortable", with language becoming inflated compared to actual harm done to students (Filipovic). He noticed that students became upset at statements and content they found difficult or simply disagreed with. This shift was particularly noticeable throughout the same time period that trigger warnings were widely implemented at the university.

Furthermore, much research on the effectiveness of trigger warnings has

concluded that the warnings have little effect at best, and can amplify feelings of distress at worst. One Harvard meta-analysis of dozens of studies even judged that they were "fruitless" and that "trigger warnings should not be used as a mental-health tool" (Bridgland). Considering the actual efficacy of content warnings, a widespread adoption of them in classrooms is clearly not a solution.

In spite of this, I do not want to paint the image of a completely failed social awareness measure.

**While their usefulness is clearly limited, we should not aim to abolish trigger warnings.**

We live in a time of unprecedentedly poor mental health, especially among teenagers, and keeping an open toolkit for approaching trauma is essential ("Child and Adolescent Mental Health". Focusing on the failure of trigger warnings and accusing them of "coddling" people distracts from the actual intended purpose of content warnings. For instance, in 2021, the Globe Theatre in London began listing trigger warnings of death and suicide for performances of "Romeo and Juliet" (Nachiappan). Not only did many think it was unnecessary, it also resulted in increasing negative

sentiment to any and all use of such warnings. The fact is that trigger warnings are intended to create emotional safety for those who have experienced trauma. If anything, constantly using them for any challenging or uncomfortable situation simply de-emphasizes the distress that genuinely graphic content explicitly describing traumatic incidents can still cause. Furthermore, in a classroom setting, a selective and cautious use of trigger warnings by no means prevents difficult and challenging, even disturbing content from being discussed or covered in class. If their use is restricted to descriptively or visually graphic depictions of violence and abuse, of the kind that can actually trigger post-traumatic stress, not just

ideologically uncomfortable subjects like inequality or sexism, it simply serves to provide those that may benefit from it the option to skip over extreme and explicit examples that may be too much to handle.

The use of trigger warnings is not, and should not be trivial. They act as an extension of our perception of and language used to describe challenging situations.

**Using trigger warnings broadly for uncomfortable material without careful consideration leads to them having negligible benefit and can disincentivise critical engagement with difficult content.**

In an academic environment, such engagement is essential to prepare students for a difficult world that does not care for their emotional well-being. But that doesn't mean that schools can't care, either. Carefully placing a trigger warning before a graphic text, image, or video that supplements a curriculum without being absolutely necessary, won't coddle students into avoiding all such material, but gives those that have truly suffered the ability to opt out of it that time. When creating institutional policies can be complicated, teachers can still use common sense to add them for rare extreme cases, or just as any other requested accommodation for students that have suffered through trauma. Ultimately, the use of trigger warnings by teachers in an academic setting should come from a cautious and careful concern for students' wellbeing.

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# Ideological Diversity at JFKS: A Safe Space for All?

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by Yuxian Chin and Nathalia Hansell

Education fundamentally shapes who we become as people. However, in an inclusive and diverse school such as JFKS, do we rightfully carry out the responsibilities of giving students a welcoming platform to express themselves freely? Our community consists of an intricate web of competing ideas and mindsets. This diversity should be supported. While we see JFKS as evolving in the right direction, in this critique, we explore where JFKS still fails to navigate the diverse expression of opinions, being more exclusive than inclusive.

We as a school have generalized our image of inclusivity to the point of it being a facade trying to hinder people from seeing our outright flaws as a community. For example, racism, something we have and will continue to attempt to combat, has not been combated head-on. Our school has created a “closed door” way of handling occurrences of racism, where it is never truly addressed and always covered up. This not only protects the perpetrator by shielding them from social backlash, but also perpetuates the idea that our school has little to no incidents of racism. JFKS has created this illusion that racism is solved, but without any evidence to ever prove it. Unless one considers the

“Schule ohne Rassismus, Schule mit Courage” title our school hangs onto so proudly as evidence, our school has not adequately confronted racism. Not even close. This commitment to being an inclusive school without racism feels like a facade covering naivete and plain ignorance. As a way to rightfully hold the title of being a school without racism, we must have open conversations, where incidents are not simply covered up but rather addressed in a way so that everyone understands that there are consequences for outright wrong actions.

In today’s polarized society, ideological differences have become major sources of tension, even here at the Kennedy School. The predominantly liberal sentiment among faculty and students is often at odds with the conservative opinions that may not be as vocal or visible, but dismissed or ridiculed by their classmates who call them out for their religious beliefs not being inclusive and accepting of diverse viewpoints and lifestyles. But by doing so, these liberals and progressives are guilty of being just as judgmental and intolerant as the religious and conservative students they oppose. For example, strongly religious students attending JFKS are often intimidated or too afraid and

uncomfortable with sharing their beliefs and values (just [listen to this podcast](#) with religious kids at JFKS for evidence). I myself am guilty of being dismissive at times of people and classmates whose views I don't agree with. As individuals and as a school, we can do more to be ideologically inclusive. Part of the problem at JFKS stems from demographics. JFKS boasts about having a diverse student body with a wide range of backgrounds, beliefs, and values, but is that really true? According to the US Department of State, “enrollment during the 2023-24 school year is approximately 1588. Of the total 729 were Americans, 851 were Germans, and 8 were third-country nationals.” We reject anyone who is not German or American. JFKS is overwhelmingly white and Protestant.

The irony is that this white Protestant majority is the minority when it comes to ideologies. The majority aligns with a very liberal perspective, even if they come from conservative families. Then there are students who themselves are religious and/or embrace conservative values. The friction between these two ideologies can lead to tension when discussing topics like LGBTQ+ rights, abortion, or religion.

While liberal perspectives are

valuable, the dominant ideology can sometimes stifle dissenting voices instead of fostering productive dialogue. Some liberal students and faculty members may unintentionally create barriers by dismissing or ridiculing

conservative viewpoints instead of building bridges. In the face of ideological differences, it's crucial to promote a safe environment that fosters dialogue, understanding, and empathy across the ideological spectrum.

In closing, we would like to pose the question to you: do you see JFKS as a safe and empowering place for all students of diverse ideologies to express themselves freely, both in the classroom and in the hallways?



# Abi/Diploma & German/English:

## Does JFKS Tip the Scale or Promote Equality?

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By Josie Riemer and Kai Ablang

### Part I, Josie Riemer

If you ask someone what makes our school different from other schools in Berlin, what would they say? Most likely, they would mention our commitment to bilingualism. Our ability to offer both a German and an American curriculum is unique. The pinnacle of these curricula is the high school Diploma and the *Abitur*. Both programs offer students opportunities to develop important life skills, become independent thinkers, and become lifelong learners. But balancing these programs can be a difficult task. Many challenges with bilingual education at JFKS concern the disparities between the Diploma and *Abitur* programs.

One major issue is the lack of information given to families. Many students don't know when their grades start counting towards their *Abschluss* and what opportunities they have in each program until 10th grade. Even in the *Oberstufe* there are many important misconceptions about the two programs, a common one being that Diploma students are only able to study in the United States with their *Abschluss*. In order to properly prepare students for the *Oberstufe* and the options open to them, it is crucial to inform students and parents early and often about the opportunities JFKS

offers. Every year transition meetings are held for parents of students moving into the next grade level. These meetings are great opportunities to give parents the most important points about the two different *Oberstufe* tracks and to provide parents with resources to help them explain the options to their child. One is left to wonder how misinformation persists despite this.

Not only is misinformation or lack of information an issue at our school, but the priority placed on *Abitur* students is as well. Being a school in Germany, we are required to follow German public school regulations, so grade 7-10 curricula are geared almost exclusively towards *Abi* students. For instance, my 10th grade chemistry class was explicit that little of the organic chemistry we would learn that year would be relevant to AP Chemistry class in 11th grade. It is unreasonable to suggest that these classes have less benefit for Diploma students. But it isn't unreasonable to expect that more measures can be taken by teachers to better prepare all students for the two equally important paths offered at our school. One option would be to offer all students an extra packet that is specifically tailored with required information they will need for a future class

in the Diploma program. Another option would be to create alternative assignments or projects that encompass some required skills Diploma students will need. Both of these can help prepare Diploma students for their *Oberstufe* classes. Ultimately, it's an equity issue.

Additionally, an important way to prepare students for the *Oberstufe* is teaching terminology in math and sciences in both languages. This helps prepare students no matter what program they choose and makes for an easier adjustment period if a student's language of instruction changes. This effort is already being made by many teachers and should continue to be reinforced because the more students can understand terminology in both languages, the easier it is for them to also grasp concepts in both languages. This extra information has the possibility of overwhelming students, but when reviewed and used often in class, students will benefit from this method.

Another major problem with the bilingual concept at our school is the rather strong stigma against the Diploma program as a whole. The U.S. diploma is often seen as one for American students wanting to only study in the U.S. and/or less intelligent German-speaking students who aren't able to do the

Abitur. Despite being relatively widespread in our school, this is patently false. A Diploma student can use their U.S. diploma in many countries around the world, including Germany, just like an Abitur student can. Diploma students are certainly not any less

## Part II, Kai Ablang

JFKS is a multicultural, multilingual school, known for its focus on languages. But to what extent do we provide a multilingual social space for students? I am a bilingual Diploma student who's decided to take a deeper dive into the social atmosphere at JFKS, to see just how well the school's bilingual ideals function as a social-academic system.

The system is obviously built to be bilingual, however the admission is slightly different from what I expected. German students trying to join the school are required to speak

German at a native level, and German as a secondary language, with the same skill set as their fellow students, depending on the grade they join. For American students, similar concepts apply, with the school expecting them to speak English at a native level, however, they are not required to speak German at the time of admission. This doesn't necessarily have to be a critique at the school's decision making but I do find it

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intelligent than Abitur students. These misconceptions have a negative impact on how Diploma students are viewed as well as the amount of students choosing to enter the Diploma program. The best way to combat this would be to develop a dialogue that informs

interesting, as the majority of casual conversations are in English, in part due to the majority of admitted students being guaranteed to speak the language. It is also the case that most extracurricular activities at JFKS are conducted primarily in English, such as music, sports, MUN, IDEAS, etc.

What I also find fascinating, is that

while English is spoken more commonly by a large number of the student body, when it comes to the discussion concerning Abi vs. Diploma, Abi is always seen as the more common "default and obvious" option. This might be due to a multitude of factors, but mainly it is because the school and the community as a whole much more strongly pushes the Abitur over the Diploma program. As

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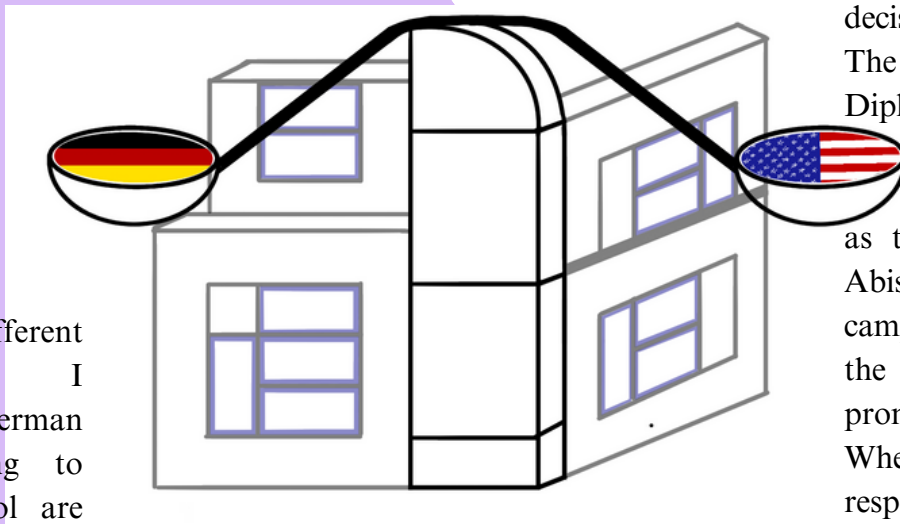
students and parents without prejudice to ensure that fewer negative and uninformed speculations are spread.

Overall the changes mentioned above would improve bilingualism and make our school a more inclusive environment for all.

Josie discussed, Abi is not just seen as the default option, but many students see the Diploma as inferior. My German friends gave me weird looks and criticized my decision to pursue my Diploma. But now, a few months into their program, many of them complain regularly about the Abi program and some express regret over their decision.

The social gap between Abitur and Diploma is due to even the school promoting the Abitur far more than the as the Abi alternative. Such events as Abistreich are celebrated across the campus, with barely any hype for the Diploma activities, such as prom or graduation.

When it comes to showing equal respect for Abitur and Diploma programs, the school really isn't doing a bad job overall. However, there are many known cases of Abi teachers openly disrespecting the Diploma program. That should stop. But the bigger problem is the misinformation and disinformation, mostly perpetuated by students and parents. Based on this misinformation, there is a palpable sense of anti-Diploma bias, which is unfounded and unwelcome.



# Not So Hypothetical Scenarios

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IDEAS urges you to consider what should be done when...

- In math class a ninth-grader says, “I don't have anything against trans kids, I just think it's kinda weird.” The whole class hears it. What should the teacher do? Does it matter if there is a trans kid in the class?
- A tenth-grade student draws a swastika on a JFK bathroom stall. They get caught. What should the punishment be?
- A group of eighth-grade boys are calling each other “homos” and “queers”, while laughing and pushing each other around. Who at the school, if anyone, is obligated to stop them?
- You hear a girl say to her classmate and friend, “oh my God, you're so retarded. Just shut up.” Should you say something? Must you?
- You are playing basketball with your friends. A Black girl misses a shot badly. Her Asian friend jokes, “I thought your people were better than that.” She jokes back, “yeah, I thought your people were better at math until I sat next to you in math.” Both laugh. Should you say something? If a teacher hears this, should they say something?
- You witness two close friends, one Jewish-American and one German-American. The German-American makes a Holocaust joke. Both laugh. Should you say something? If a teacher hears this, should they say something?
- Should a student be able to wear a shirt that bears the slogan “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free?” Can a teacher?
- A girl comes to school in a string bikini. Should she be allowed to attend class? Does it matter what grade she is in? What if it's a boy? What if it's a teacher? Is there indeed such a thing as “distracting” attire that should be prohibited?
- A ninth-grade boy shakes hand with his African-American friend and says, “sup my n\*\*ga.” His friend says, “sup my whiteboy”. You witness this. These are your friends. Should you say something? Must you say something?
- In light of the school policy to forbid clothing that “disrupts” learning, can a student wear a “Black Lives Matter” T-Shirt? What about “White Lives Matter” to school? What about a “F\*\*k the Police” T-Shirt?

Please consider what you would do and what you would want others to do in these scenarios. What would you want teachers and administrators to do? Discuss these examples with your friends, family, and teachers.

If you want to learn more about how to engage with these very real scenarios, IDEAS might urge you to check out the Southern Poverty Law Center's call to [Speak Up: Responding to Everyday Bigotry](#).

Of course, we discuss these scenarios at our meetings during lunch on Mondays in B209. Come on by!

# Lots Happening in IDEAS. Join Us!

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As always, the IDEAS Club has a lot going on. We always try to create and deliver two **lessons** per month. In September we held a sweet lesson about Rosh Hashanah in grade 3. Then we explored Yom Kippur with a grade 11 class, including the problem of religious expression in a secular environment as well as the idea of forgiveness.

In October we shared lessons in three elementary school classes about how to build nurturing, empathic friendships and, by contrast, how to avoid toxic friendships. In November we are the complicated history of Thanksgiving.

The podcast is rolling! A recent episode it our discussion with four Ukrainian students. Another focuses on social media's role in encouraging young kids to grow up fast. And another episode explores how we should interface with older media (especially films) that are historically significant but do not comport with our contemporary values.

We are always seeking more **student engagement** in IDEAS. We are especially seeking grade **9 and 10** student participation. So if you are reading this and care about the IDEAS mission, please pop into **B209 any Monday at lunch!** You'll be sure to be part of a meaningful conversation.

## CREDITS

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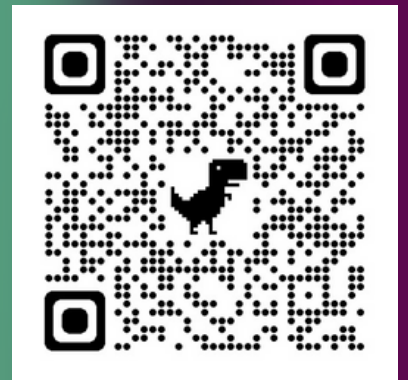
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