

# ***The Trojan Voice***

**McDowell High School's  
Student Magazine**



**2024 - 2025  
Year in Review**

# Letter From the Editor

Welcome to a special edition of the Trojan Voice! Wow, what a year it has been! You may have noticed that during the 2024-25 school year, issues of the Trojan Voice were nowhere to be found around McDowell. Last year, we had to ultimately move our news team online due to staff decline. Luckily, we have found a way to bring our readers a June edition of our magazine: the Trojan End-of-Year Recap.

Our publishing team has been hard at work creating stories throughout the year to share with you online, at [www.mcdowellmedia.org](http://www.mcdowellmedia.org). We have published some of them here with topics ranging from the transformation of romance, to the price increase of cookies at McDowell. There are also some photo essays highlighting events during the school that you wouldn't have seen online.

Spring is always our competition season here at McDowell Media, with two major competitions we attend each year. In early April, we attended the PSPA state competition in State College, as well as the DMAC conference down in Pittsburgh. We took home eight awards from DMAC and two second place finishes at PSPA.

Additionally, there have been many exciting sporting events that have happened throughout the school year. Starting with football, all the way to baseball, our athletics department was never dull. In our magazine, you will take a journey back to the beginning of the year when football was in full swing. Then you will end up in the middle of winter when our basketball team went on a winning rampage, and you will conclude your thrilling journey to end up back in the present when the baseball season is at its peak.

After contributing to the McDowell Media Publishing Team for four years, I would like to take a moment to say thank you. If it wasn't for this opportunity to express my voice or creativity, I wouldn't be who I am today. Joining the media club has changed my life in many different ways. I've made new friends, competed in competitions, gotten closer to the student body and eventually grew to become a better version of myself. These accomplishments wouldn't be possible without my adviser, and teacher, Mrs. Weiss. Thank you Mrs. Weiss for believing in me and guiding me every step of the way, I will miss you through my journey to college. As for the staff, thank you for trusting me to assist you with your stories and thank you for being there for me. I will miss you all endlessly and I know you will continue making great content for our media team. Finally, to the readers. Thank you for sticking with us through this complicated change. It's been a bumpy ride, but we are glad to be able to provide you with this brand-new edition of our magazine to give you a recap on the school year.

That being said, take a moment to relax, sit back, and enjoy the final Trojan Voice for the 2024-25 school year. For more content, take a look at our website! [www.mcdowellmedia.org](http://www.mcdowellmedia.org)

P.S. Stanlee wants a magazine!!



*Emmaleigh Dorau*  
Emmaleigh Dorau  
Editor in Chief

## Our Staff

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Editor in Chief

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Managing Editor  
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Photographer

# Purchasing Pandemonium

## Fan Frustration with Digital Tickets

By Evelyn Hoover

Some could say athletic teams at any high school across America are the pinnacle of a school's pride and spirit. And nothing gets a school's spirit any higher than a greatly anticipated, rival vs. rival, high school athletic games such as football, basketball or even volleyball. Normally, students arrive at the game with their friends, dressed in their most outrageous school spirit inspired outfits, and head to the admissions booth to purchase their ticket with that extra five dollars they saved over the week.

Now imagine they show up and there isn't a ticket booth. Instead of fans standing with their money in hand, they stand with their phones out, ready to show the ticket taker a digital ticket they purchased online. Anyone without a digital ticket gets turned away.

This year, McDowell High School has made the decision to go from selling athletic event tickets at the gate, to selling digital tickets online with the use of the GoFan app or website. To some who were not aware of this change yet, this has raised concerns about technicality and ease of use.

According to the associate athletic director, Kevin Stoicovy, there were multiple reasons for the change. "It's a lot easier for accounting purposes. For the district, we're not handling as much cash, if any cash at all, so our accounting numbers are more on point. That also helps with liability and safety reasons. We don't have a bunch of cash that's just at the gates, so we're cashless in that regard, which enables us to be a bit safer with handling money," says Stoicovy.

But it seems the district did not account for their audience. Most people who attend large athletic games, like football, are students. Which means teens who range in age from 14-18 are attending these events.

On the site used to purchase tickets, GoFan, there are only two options for payment methods: credit or debit. Most kids ages 14-16 do not yet own a credit or debit card and in



order to attend a game, they would have to have their parents pay for their ticket online prior to leaving the house. Unless they purchase a season pass, these students would then have to ask their parents to pay for their ticket every single time

they want to attend a game. This makes students have to jump through an extra hoop to attend an event when last year they could just use that five dollars they already had.

The athletic department said there were other factors that went into the electronic ticketing decision. "It's really convenient for our fans to be able to buy

a ticket from wherever whenever. They could buy a ticket for a game the day of at the gate using our QR codes to scan and purchase right there on their phone, or they can purchase it weeks ahead of time on their phone and have it ready to go," Stoicovy says. The hope is that this would ease lines through the gates.

Technology is also an issue here too though. With everything going digital nowadays from fast food orders to amusement park tickets, it's easy to say everyone owns a cellular device. While this may feel true, it is not a fact. So without access to the internet, how else will sports fans be able to attend? Also, one big inhibitor is the "no screenshots permitted" rule stated on the GoFan app. If by chance, a student does not have phone service and cannot pull up their GoFan site, they would have to rely on a screenshot of the ticket. If a student is not permitted in with a screenshot, this creates a barrier for all students who may have technical difficulties with their device as well.

TICKETS  
PLEASE!



Stoicovy says digital ticketing has been, "a move that's been happening across athletics in general."

Although, sometimes it's better to stick with an old method of something rather than changing just to keep with the times. Having a physical copy of a ticket has a nostalgic factor, too. Some students or parents may want to keep their tickets as a keepsake. And in this digital world, people may just enjoy getting to buy something in person instead of online like how most products or commodities are being sold today.

While ticket prices haven't changed this year, there is a new one dollar service fee that goes into the price of each ticket on the GoFan website. "So for instance, a varsity football ticket for an adult would cost \$6 right now. That's also what it cost last year. So it technically costs \$7 after you add that dollar fee to it," he says.

**"A move that's been happening across athletics in general."**

To help combat technical issues for the older Millcreek audience senior citizens aged 60 and older who live within the Millcreek Township School District may be eligible to apply for a gold card either at the Millcreek Township building or the Millcreek Education Center building on 26th street.

"If you get the gold card, you get free admission to all McDowell regular season events. You just flash your gold card at the gate and you're permitted in. That's another feature that the township has been doing for years, but it's something that we like to highlight even more now, because again, the move to all digital ticketing seems like a shock to some people, and certainly in the senior age group," he says.

Unfortunately, tickets will remain digital next year and most likely will continue to be sold digitally for years to come. In a world where everyday interaction and tasks are mostly controlled by technology, such as self-check-outs, online food orders, online shopping, self driving cars and more, it is a shame that even more physical interactions with other people such as simply buying a physical ticket, have been put in the past too.



# Unwrapping Winter Treats

By Emmaleigh Dorau

With thousands of dessert recipes on the internet, it’s overwhelming to find a perfect treat to ring in the holiday joy. Luckily, below you will find three delicious winter treats that are sure to make your sweet tooth smile.

The first treat is Peppermint Cheesecake. This dessert features a flaky, chocolate crust with a delicious peppermint filling.

## Peppermint Cheesecake

For the crust:

- 1 ½ cup Oreo cookies, finely crushed
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

For the filling:

- 1 pint heavy cream
- 1 lb cream cheese, room temperature
- 1 14-oz sweetened condensed milk
- 1 cup peppermint candy, finely crushed

Directions:

1. Crush cookies using a food processor, or using a bag and a rolling pin. Add the butter and mix until incorporated.
2. Press the mixture into a nine inch springform pan distributing it evenly. Tip: use a fork or the bottom of a flat measuring cup to smooth the crust out easily. Once pressed, set aside.
3. In a large bowl, whip the cream with an electric mixer until it holds a peak. This will be about two to three minutes. Set aside.
4. In a separate bowl, add the cream cheese into the bowl and mix for another two to three minutes. Add the sweetened condensed milk and mix well until fully incorporated with no lumps of cream cheese.
5. Add in the whipped cream and fold until fully combined with the mixture.
6. Stir in the crushed peppermints and pour the mixture into the crust. Cover and chill in the freezer for at least eight hours.
7. Remove cheesecake from the freezer 20 minutes before serving, and enjoy!



The next treat is a holiday twist on a classic peanut butter blossom. Chocolate Peppermint Blossoms have a chocolate base with a sweet peppermint Hershey kiss in the center.

### Peppermint Chocolate Blossoms

- ½ cup butter, room temperature
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ cup brown sugar
- 1 egg
- 1 egg yolk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 cups of flour
- ½ cup cocoa powder
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 - 3 Tablespoons of milk
- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- 1 bag candy cane kisses

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees
2. In a large bowl combine the flour (measure this and cocoa powder by spooning into a measuring cup and leveling off), cocoa powder, baking powder, and salt. Set aside.
3. Cream butter and both sugars together in the bowl of a stand mixer until fluffy. Mix in the egg, egg yolk, and vanilla until smooth. Add the dry ingredients a little at a time while mixing on low until combined. Mix in the milk until the mixture is smooth and the dough comes together.
4. Roll dough into one inch balls (about one tablespoon) and then roll in the 1/4 cup sugar. Place two inches apart on a baking sheet. Bake for ten minutes.
5. When done, immediately move cookies onto a cooling rack or plate. Let them cool for six minutes and then gently press the kisses into the top.



The final dessert on our list is a classic, but festive treat for any holiday. Sugar cookies are a sweet cookie with a royal icing finish. There is so much you can do to decorate your sugar cookies and a pro tip with royal icing is to make an outlining piping bag of frosting and then a fill bag with the same frosting that is a little runnier. Outline your shapes first and then fill. Once it dries they will level out and you shouldn’t be able to tell.

### Festive Sugar Cookies

For the cookies you will need:

- 2 cups sugar
- 1 ½ cups butter softened
- 4 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 5 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt

For the icing:

- 4 cups confectioner’s sugar
- 3 tablespoons of meringue powder
- 9 - 10 Tablespoons of room temperature
- Optional: food coloring



Directions:

1. Gather all ingredients.
2. Beat sugar and softened butter together in a large bowl with an electric mixer until smooth.
3. Beat in eggs and vanilla. Stir in flour, baking soda, and salt. Cover and chill dough for at least one hour or overnight.
4. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit and lightly dust a counter or table with flour. Roll out the dough until it is about ¼ to ½ inches thick.
5. Using festive cookie cutters, begin cutting your dough. Repeat step 4 until most of your dough is used.
6. Put cut out cookie dough on an ungreased baking sheet about one inch apart from each other.
7. Bake in the preheated oven until cookies are a light brown color. This will be around six or eight minutes.
8. While the cookies are baking, gather the ingredients needed to make the royal icing.
9. Pour confectioner’s sugar, meringue powder and nine tablespoons of water in a large bowl. Using a hand mixer or stand mixer, whisk together on high speed for one to two minutes. When lifting the whisk up off the icing, the icing should drizzle down and smooth out within five to ten seconds. If it’s too thick, beat in more water one tablespoon at a time.
10. If you choose to include food coloring, mix in the color of your choice until the frosting is the shade you desire. Once the cookies reach a light brown shade, take them out of the oven. Allow them to cool completely. Once cookies are completely cooled, decorate them with the icing. The icing should dry in about two hours.



# McDowell Media Awards

## Students compete at two competitions



The Pennsylvania School Press Association (PSPA) sponsors high school journalism competitions for eight regions across the state. Students competed in one of these regional events on Oct. 23, 2024 at Penn State Behrend in categories ranging from writing and photography to editorial cartoons and video production. McDowell left the regional competition with nine first place winners who then competed at the state competition on April 1, in State College, Pa.

McDowell Media took home two second place finishes in the state competition. Congratulations to Seniors Eric McMahon and Jacob Tilburg and Sophomore Evan Freeman for their second place state awards.

**\* Ayo Danielle Adebayo (senior)**  
**- Literary Magazine Poetry**

**\* Molly Batkiewicz (sophomore) and Norah Luper (sophomore) - Feature News Package**

**\* Sarah Brosius (sophomore) - Broadcast Writing**

**\* Emmaleigh Dorau (senior) - Editorial/Opinion Writing**

**\* Evan Freeman (sophomore) - Editorial Cartoon**

**\* Stanlee Kleiner (junior)**  
**- Yearbook Spread Design**

**\* Harleigh Iarussi (junior)**  
**- Literary Magazine Poetry**

**\* Eric McMahon and Jacob Tilburg - (seniors) Broadcast News Package**



On Wed. Apr. 9, McDowell Media traveled to Robert Morris University to attend the annual Digital Media and Arts Consortium conference. We are proud to say that McDowell Media took home five best in category awards and two awards of excellence.

Additionally, the Founder's award for McDowell High School was awarded to Eric McMahon for his accomplishments and successes throughout his four years in the club.

**DMAC winners include:**

**Print/Layout Design**  
**Best in Category:**  
**Stanlee Kleiner (11)**

**News/Feature Photojournalism**  
**Best in Category:**  
**Alivia DeVies (11)**

**Editorial/Opinion Article**  
**Best in Category:**  
**Evelyn Hoover (11)**

**Hard News Article**  
**Best in Category:**  
**Emmaleigh Dorau (12)**

**Feature News Package**  
**Best in Category:**  
**Jacob Tilburg (12) and**  
**Eric McMahon (12)**

**Feature Article**  
**Award of Excellence:**  
**McKenzie Pauli (11)**

**Animation**  
**Award of Excellence:**  
**Amara Dougherty (10)**





# SMALL SCREEN ROMANCE

The turn of the 21st century has turned off acts of romance  
by Evelyn Hoover

Romance has drastically changed since the turn of the 21st century. In fact, social media seems to be a major contributor to making love seem stale or overdramatized nowadays. Now that we have access to so many different forms of communication through social media, it is so much easier to portray romance in the most unrealistic, unoriginal or unattainable ways.

Social media has opened a huge black hole of internet connectedness that seems easier for teens to bond with strangers behind the screen than in person. So many people use dating apps to find a “perfect match” rather than actually meeting someone incredible in person. Dating apps advertise that a simple swipe right could lead to your future partner for life, but deeper personal interaction has been replaced by surface level media interactions.

Anyone can put on a fake face on their profile and seem interesting online, but once two people are finally together in person after talking through a phone the entire time, it becomes difficult to come up with conversation on the spot. This is where social media interferes with the practice of romance.

It seems flowers and chocolate have been replaced by likes and followers.

Snapchat, for example, is where most relationships between teenagers start – and end – relatively quickly. Someone may add you and start sending you quick “snaps,” and from there, a connection starts. You may start snapping this person with quick, witty, one-lined conversations, and find them quite attractive, but you don’t fully know this person. Gen Z has started labeling this as a “talking stage,” except this label is misgiving.

It’s not talking, at least not technically. Being able to communicate over the phone gives a person time to perfect their reply. You can’t put a person on the spot. They are able to think before they respond, edit it or even use A.I. You don’t have the advantage of knowing what this person is actually like or how they really act.

Other new terms have also been introduced into the online world of romance. Terms like “situationship,” “soft launch” and “rosters” are all new terms used by Gen Z to describe their relationship statuses. Using these terms to describe connections between two people has seriously downgraded the practice of romance.

Referring to someone as a “talking stage” or “situationship” swaps a living, breathing, emotion

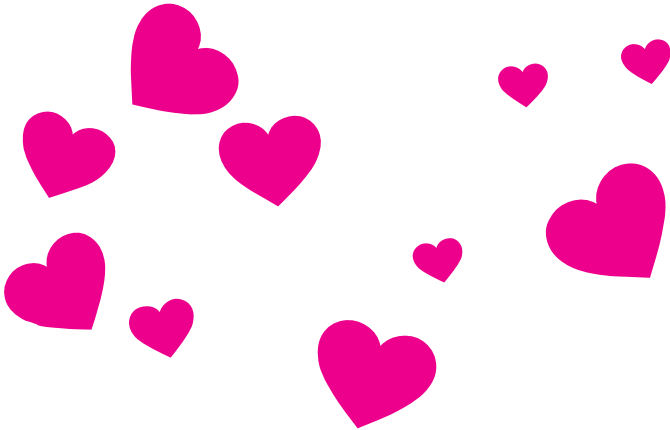
feeling human, for someone, like a phone, that you can pick up and put down whenever you’d like.

There is also some confusion when it comes to “dating.” While some use the term to describe the act of going on dates, others use it to refer to actually being in a relationship. This gets even more confusing if there was never a date to begin with, only talking through the phone and snapping back and forth. Teenagers seem to prefer the quicker and easier way of starting a relationship than taking it slow and enjoying the small romantic steps that lead to an eventual commitment. Confusion then starts on both sides of a relationship as to what stage they are in.

Communication is one key factor of making a relationship work. For example, staying mad at a partner who has no idea what is troubling you gets the relationship nowhere and only causes more turmoil. It can cause trust issues on both sides, too.

A more noticeable problem in modern relationships is lack of effort. I’m not saying that in order to preserve a relationship you need to perform a grand gesture, but in order to make your partner feel known and loved, you should dedicate time and effort to them and their interests. It could be as simple as taking them somewhere you know they enjoy or remembering their favorite type of snack. Even hand-made gifts hold just as much value to a person because it shows a relationship level of interest.

It is important to remember that antiquated forms of love weren’t always as perfect as older generations and movies make them out to be, but old romance still held the title for being the most heartwarming and sincere. It is worrying to see just how much the prospect of love and relationships have changed in this era. It is my hope that these new-gen relationships will find their way back to flowers, poems and chocolate even if it’s through live streams, texts and snaps.



## The Gen-Z Dating Dictionary

**Talking Stage** / *tock-eng stayj* / *n*  
Communicating, commonly through social media, with intention of getting to know a potential romantic interest.

**Situationship** / *sit-chu-ay-tion-ship* / *n*  
A non-comital form of dating, that takes place before being in an established relationship.

**Soft Launch** / *soft-lontch* / *v*  
Subtly hinting at your relationship status, without explicitly saying it.

**Roster** / *rah-str* / *n*  
Seeing or talking to multiple romantic interests without expecting exclusivity or commitment.

# Social--- Distancing----- from-----

By: Mckenzie Pauli

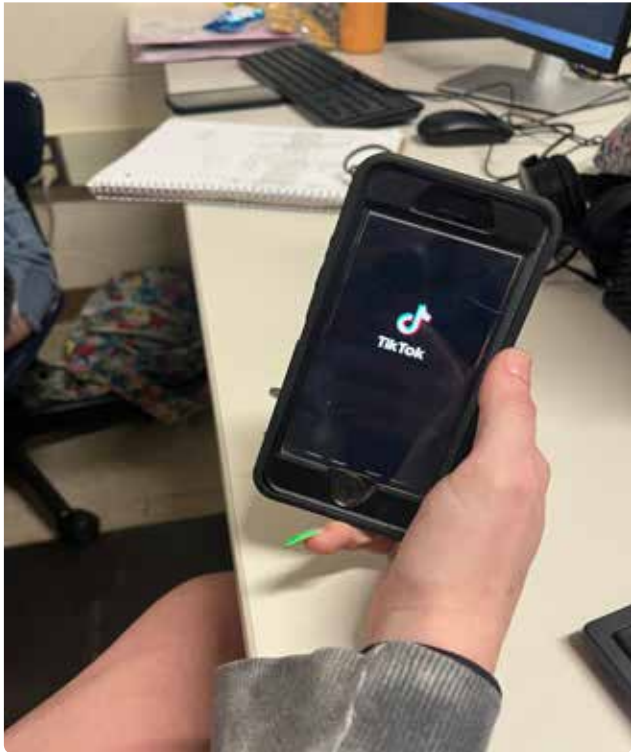
My first interaction with social media was in fourth grade. I went on my mom's phone and downloaded the app Musically. Back then I would've never guessed that dancing and lip syncing would lead to a seven-year addiction where social media would slowly affect my mental health.

I had talked about getting off social media before, but I was never committed to it. I'd get off of the platform for an hour and feel so disconnected and uninformed that I'd be back on it within the hour. Being on it made me feel upset but also comforted. I could sit on my phone scrolling and think about nothing, but also seeing certain things made me feel upset and unhappy.

And I am not alone.

According to MayoClinic.org, the average 12- to 15-year-old spends almost three hours a day on social media being exposed to unhealthy, negative content. Whether it's hateful comments or constantly comparing themselves to others, another study in England showed that teens who went onto social media three times a day, experienced poor mental health risks.

So, on Jan. 1, I decided to delete every social media platform I had on my phone. I told myself that I would remain off of it for two weeks and see how I felt. My parents supported me; my dad was my biggest supporter. "The best part was listening to you process it and talk about it, and how you were feeling," said



Jason Pauli.

At first I had an immense amount of anxiety and fear running through me. I was worried none of my friends would even attempt to contact me. This is a concern shared by 58% of teenaged girls according to a survey by pewresearch.org because those surveyed said it would be hard for them to give up social media.

My dad, Jason Pauli, who had gotten off social media as well, brought up a good point. He said that if these people were actually my friends and cared to talk to me, they would find a way to reach me. He found that this experiment shows someone who their real friends are.

"So here's a teenager going through the same or very similar withdrawal symptoms that I did," Jason Pauli said.

Once I pressed every delete button on social media, I felt relieved. I no longer felt like I needed to post things or keep streaks. I started to find myself more involved with what was going on around me. I reached out to some of my friends' via text message and started helping around the house more.

One of the most frequent ongoing questions I kept getting asked was, "What about our streaks?" referring to Snapchat. I began wondering why these streaks meant so much to my friends when they were just nonsense pictures of a ceiling or half of their face. One of my friends who was most upset about losing our streaks, Cadence Waychoff, explained what streaks mean to her. "I get attached to streaks because it's a daily reminder of friendship. You're creating something

# --Social Media

together with your friend everyday without having to be physical-ly with them," she said.

Streaks to me, however, are just non-sense. Throughout this time when I wasn't on social media I noticed that some of my friends, who I'd normally keep streaks with, didn't reach out to me at all. It was like streaks were their way of texting, which it really isn't.



"Kids will bond easily with people they talk to online, but they don't really know them. It's all just long distance, chatting or snap-chatting, but no real conversation," said McDowell guidance coun-selor Cindy DiBucci.

When I was still on so-cial media, my screen time would be up to almost five hours a day and about 15 hours a week. Jason Pauli said that if people are spending five hours on social media a day, then they're not spending five hours doing something way more beneficial for them. "They're doing something where they're just staring at a screen," he said.

Social media is also prone to negativity and bullying. It's not real. "Instagram is a perfect perspective from ev-eryone," Waychoff said. "The things people post on Insta-gram are not their real lives. It's not very genuine." Teens tend to follow influ-encers who post about their lives and tell their viewers how per-fect it is, making the consumers believe their lives need to be that same way.

Jason Pauli believes people use social media for attention, which he noticed about his own habits when he gave it up. "It was differ-ent not having a place to go spout off about something whether it's serious or funny, and then seeking to get some attention through it," he said.

If someone posts a picture or video and they get 50 or 100 likes, it makes them feel happy. A constant habit of this feeds into their brains and if one post doesn't blow up, they become upset. "If you post a picture and you get negative comments, people take that to heart and it hurts their self es-teem and self image," DiBucci said.

And if the post is in the form of bullying, it spreads so fast. "All of it is negative, in regards to rumors and inappropriateness that can travel to lots of people in a second. And that's a problem, it's really easy to bully someone through social media," DiBucci said.



"They're doing something where they're just staring at a screen."

I have since re-turned to the world of social media, after my two week experiment armed with new knowl-edge of how the platforms and their addictions affect my mental health. I am better able to leave the drama behind and feel happier and less angry or upset about posts. I have re-placed so many hours of scroll-ing with health-ier options like weightlifting and face to face interactions with friends and family. Social distancing from social media proved to be a positive step toward my teenage health that I now know I can do again in the future.





# The Dance Drought

Are school dances swaying into the past?

By Evelyn Hoover  
Photos By Eric McMahon

In the world of reality, high school dances of the past were nights to get together with friends, dress formally, and have fun dancing with a date or an interesting someone you have been eyeing all night. And thanks to classic high school movies, in the back of every teen's mind is the inevitable slow dance.

It's safe to say that most of us have been waiting to go to a high school dance such as homecoming or prom since we were middle schoolers, when the most exciting part of a "dance" involved a snack table and a bounce house. High school dances upped the ante. Formal dresses and high heels, dress pants and a tie, dim lights and the chance to dance close to a crush when the slow song comes on.

In recent years, however, it seems all of the excitement has faded away and going to dances just isn't considered fun or cool anymore to many teenagers. One factor contributing to this boredom may be the music being played.

Hearing Miley Cyrus's, "Party in The USA," three times every dance isn't exactly the most riveting experience for everyone. On the contrary, some genres of music make it difficult or awkward to dance to, such as rap. In a survey of 99 students, over half of them reported that they did not enjoy the music played at dances and would prefer another genre. Others commented that

the music was too loud or just inappropriate.

A lot of students who do actually end up attending these events only stay for a short while anyways. They may spend money on a dress or suit and go out to dinner, but only stay for thirty minutes to an hour.

With how few dances are actually held by high schools nowadays, it would make sense for teenagers to make the most of their high school years and participate in the classic high school rituals like going to prom, for instance. However, this just isn't the pattern anymore. In that same survey of 99 students, only 35 reported that they actually stay until the end of the dance.

It seems that the long-awaited tradition of "slow dances" has died down over the years. DJs tend to only play one "slow song" if any and it is usually the very last song of the night.

Growing up watching movies like 10 Things I Hate About You, Sixteen Candles, and Grease had made me one of those people who were longing for the idea of dancing with that one true love. Movies have always romanticised these kinds of picture perfect moments and I was yet another one of those expectant girls waiting for her own moment. I remember being a middle schooler and being so excited for the possibility to slow dance with someone, but disappointingly, even this year's homecoming did not feature any slow songs.

"Those special moments in the movies will be nothing more than fiction and fantasy."

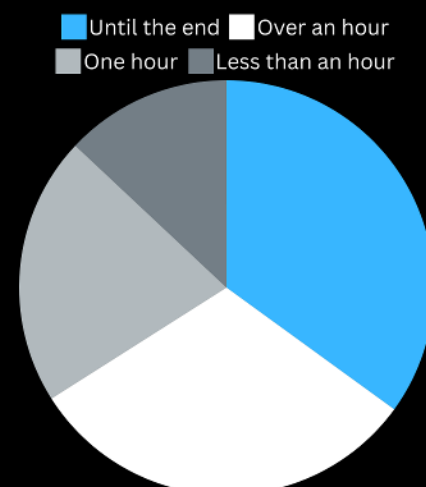
In multiple responses to whether or not surveyors liked slow dances, many students answered that they thought they were boring, gross, or awkward. Over half of all surveyors said they did not even look forward to the idea of slow dances. This then poses the question of just how much certain traditions have changed.

There are definitely a handful of traditions that have changed over time and been modernized. For example, boys don't necessarily have to be the ones to ask out their date and girls now have the more common opportunity to ask out guys first. Also, teens don't have to have dates in order to go. Most people just go with a platonic date or with a group of friends and have just as much, if not more fun without a date.

But although some traditions have changed, the main event has seemed to lose its luster. There are plenty of suitable "slow dance songs" that DJ's could play, but for some reason, choose not to. That also may be the reason that teenagers dislike slow dances. They may not have had a good experience, or no experience at all.

In some instances, DJ's take song recommendations from students, which leaves the song genres up to them. Perhaps letting the DJ take full control would eliminate the problem of unwieldy songs, but eliminating the prospect of slow songs altogether would extract the true experience of dances from hopeful, excited students.

The high school ritual of dances has always been about being connected with friends or your significant other and having fun and having that special moment. If school dances are truly becoming a drab, that only means those connections will be lost and those special moments in the movies will be nothing more than fiction and fantasy.



In a survey of 99 students, only 35% reported that they actually stay until the end of the dance.





# C is For Cost Increase

Cookie prices jump in the new year

By Emmaleigh Dorau

As of the new year, large cookies at McDowell High School have increased by \$1, making the cost of a large cookie more than a school entree.

A lunch at McDowell High School costs \$2.70, but usually leaves students hungry. To combat their hunger, students purchase extra items, or a la carte items, from the cafeteria, such as cookies or chips. As of 2025, the large cookie price is now \$3 and the small cookies increased by \$0.10 making them \$0.85 each.

Aubri Aimes, a senior at McDowell High School is one of the students affected by the sudden price increase of large cookies. "I don't buy cookies as much anymore, even though I really want them everyday. I've started to restrict myself on how much I buy them because the big cookie is now more expensive than my lunch," she said.

The price increase occurred the first day back from winter break without warning to students. "The cookie price caught me off guard when I checked my Infinite Campus because I saw I had spent \$3 on a cookie, I got confused," Aimes said.

Melinda Taylor, the Food Service Director at Aramark, says the cookies have increased in price based on the cost to receive and bake them. "The cost of any a la carte item that we serve is influenced directly by what it costs our company to purchase an a la carte item," Taylor said. "We have received many questions about why they have increased."

According to the CBS News price tracker, common ingredients in cookies, such as flour, sugar, and eggs have all increased significantly since 2019. Eggs have seen the greatest price increase, sitting at 160% growth, then sugar with 70% and flour with 32%.

The Avian Flu outbreak is also contributing to the jump in egg prices. Wal-Mart was selling a dozen eggs for \$8 this week and they are selling out quickly due to low supply and high demand.

McDowell students would like to see the price return to \$2. "The price should decrease because cookies should not be more expensive than a school lunch. A big cookie used to cost \$1.25 my freshman year, and seeing it increase over double the amount is concerning," Aimes said.

Since the increase in cookie prices, there have been other price increases. Drinks, such as Vitamin Water, now cost \$4 instead of \$3.

Some students have wondered whether other a la carte items in the cafeteria, such as chips or parfaits, plan to increase in price. "There are no more planned increases of any a la carte items for this school year," Taylor said.

# Trojan Day Highlights





# The Road to McDowell Team 63

Photos and story by Michael Zelenak

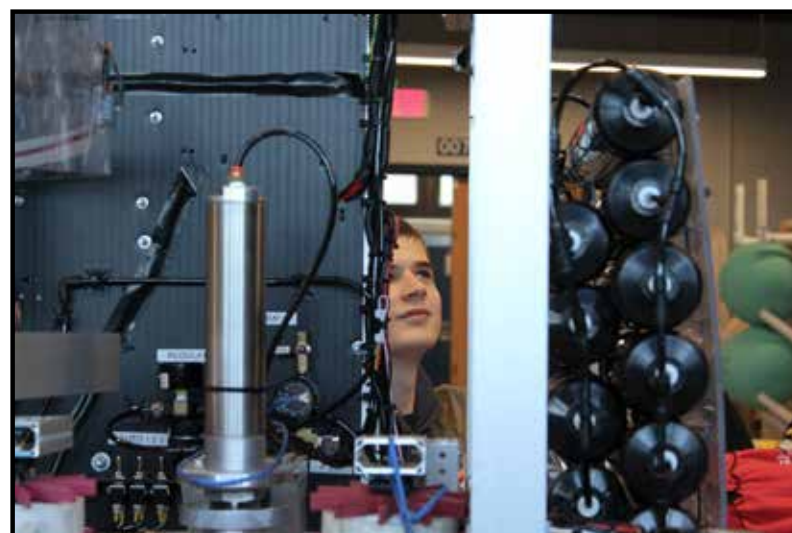
The Road to Robotics is a journey that requires a lot of hard work, long hours, and dedication. McDowell Robotics (Team 63) went into the 2025 First Robotics season enthusiastically after taking a break the year before to try out RoboBots, a different competition. This year, the team came in third place in the For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology competition, otherwise known as FIRST.

FIRST is a tournament-style competition where teams build robots to complete specific tasks, with each year being different. In each match, three different teams form an “alliance” to compete against another, and the alliance that gathers the most points wins.

Team 63 was hard at work preparing for the Greater Pittsburgh Regional over three months. The following photos show what the team was up to during what is known as the “build season.”



(above middle) Team Mentor Jim Perkins works with students to put parts on the robot.  
(above) Fire Chief Jerry DeRosa wires the robot while finishing touches are being put on in the background.



(above middle) Senior Brian Allamen and Team Mentor Stan Kalicky take inspiration from past generations. (above) Senior Adam Chludzinski looks at the final product with all the components working for the first time.

# Robotics Builds ‘Stan the Man’

(left) Members of the robotics team cut out pieces of the field, so the drive team can practice on a mock up of the actual competition field.



(above) Senior Connor Hamilton uses a Haas vertical mill (left) in McDowell’s manufacturing lab to custom make robot parts.



(above middle) Senior Ty Mak and Senior Nick Berarducci develop the code to make the robot’s parts move.  
(left) Ty Mak, double checks that the robot is rule compliant with Team Mentors Caleb Sanford and Tom Albert.



# The Final

## Team 63 Returns to the



(above) Jacob Baniewicz and Connor Hamilton, members of the drive team, control the robot during a match, assisted by the drive team coach Stan Kalicky.

(right) McDowell Robotic's robot "Stan the Man" gets ready to score a piece of coral on the reef during the competition.



All the hard work and weeks of planning, building, prototyping and strategizing come down to this: the 2025 Greater Pittsburgh Regional. McDowell High School's Team 63 had a rocky start at the competition, but found its stride as the competition went on. After being chose by another team during the alliance selection process, McDowell went on to bring home the best performance they have seen in a long time. Team 63 returned to Erie with 3rd place overall.

# Destination

## FIRST Competition Ring



(left) All the teams that participate in the Greater Pittsburgh Regional FIRST Robotics competition create workspaces called pits where they can work on their robots between matches.

(right) The McDowell Robotics team (in blue) watches the robot they spent the three months building as it battles to collect points at the FIRST Robotics Competition.



(left) Students troubleshoot issues at the competition's test field in the pit. (above) Without the help of these mentors who volunteer their time to help team 63 throughout the season, McDowell Robotics would not be what it is today.



# Stepping Off The Pressure Plate

Teens commonly face the pressure of extracurriculars

By Evelyn Hoover

When I was younger, my dad would always ask me: “You aren’t a quitter, are you?”

At that time, I liked to believe that I was no quitter, and I could pull through anything. However, looking back on all of the sports I’ve done over the years, it appears that I am, in fact, a quitter. From gymnastics to soccer, soccer to cheerleading, and cheerleading to volleyball, my outcome had been the same for all of them. I no longer participate. All of them left me going home feeling exhausted, excluded and disregarded.

However, looking around it appears that I am not the only one. High school sports today take competition to the next level, a much higher level than in past years. This forces teenagers to up their competitiveness or be shunned for not fully dedicating all of their time to the team and working towards a victory. In reality, some teens really just do not have the time and must set aside their love of sport for other responsibilities. These could be family obligations, work, hobbies, or other clubs and sports.

One such student, Gavin Lavery, a junior at McDowell High School, participated in wrestling for nine years. Unfortunately, he had left the mat this year.

Lavery said he quit last season due to financial reasons such as paying bills and other monetary responsibilities. Although, he says that if he had the time, he never would have quit.

Ambitious high school students don’t have much time to set aside for themselves. They have to balance school work with part time jobs and somehow have to squeeze sports into their schedules, too. It is exhausting to constantly strive to meet outside expectations, but teenagers cannot choose to quit their jobs nor can they stop going

to school. So, they tend to give up sports – something that actually could help relieve some of the stress of those jobs and schoolwork.

For some students “sports” take the form of academic-related teams such as the Speech & Debate Team. My participation on this team over the last two years has unfortunately had the same effect on myself, though. This season, I have found it incredibly difficult to find the time and motivation to fully dedicate myself to my team and event. Although I’d tried the best I could, I couldn’t help but feel as though both my teammates and coach were disappointed in me.



Once in high school, sports and academic teams aren’t flexible towards teenager’s responsibilities and schedules. Team members have to compete for their spot to stay on the team, and if you miss practice, competitions or games, you might as well just cozy up on the bench for the rest of the season.

There is a point where athletes do give up. They try the best they can to

stick with it for as long as they can, but there is no longer anything left for them to enjoy. When an athlete finally realizes that, they leave. Hopefully they go on to do bigger and better things but in my experience, I will always long to play the sport I used to love.

Surprisingly, volleyball was the only sport I would be excited to go to practice for. This was a major shift from soccer or cheerleading, where I had to drag my feet and convince myself I actually liked going. I wanted to be the very best I could. I wanted to stand out in the spotlight of the court. Most of all, I wanted to be someone that my teammates and coach could depend on.

Feeling out of place in a sport is the worst feeling in the world. Kids may love the sport and enjoy playing it, but it can get lonely without anyone to call a friend. It is much harder to make friends in high school than in younger years, when you could bond over your favorite TV show or toys.

While I tried to get involved the best I could, nothing could really change how my teammates felt about me though. This is an experience that, sadly, many other kids go through when it comes to clubs and activities.

For Lavery and some of his teammates, a change in coaching staff turned them away from their sport.

Even if a coach only wants the best for his/her team, sometimes they may come off as unapproachable, unfair, or mean.

While it’s hard to say that everyone should be included in sports no matter how good or bad they are, I know it is important for a team to be the best they can. Working towards improvement is something that every athlete should do.

However, if a player is at the best level they can be at and they are still being kept from playing, then that player becomes discouraged and worn out every time they show up. This is a classic example of favoritism that many coaches, both athletic and academic, sadly use.



**“...because sports aren’t everything, but they were everything at the time.”**

Just like me, these students may think of themselves as quitters, but in retrospect, quitting something is not a bad thing if it is what is best for you and your mental and physical health.

Still, It is heartbreaking to see a student quit an activity that they really do love, especially if they dedicated years of their life to it. It is especially heartbreaking to that person as well. Lavery stated that he hated not doing his sport anymore.

“It was a great sport, I love doing it, but it was just a decision that I had to do so I could actually go somewhere, because sports aren’t everything, but they were everything at the time,” he said.

Although some teenagers get over it and realize what is best for them, some will still long for that experience, and that is perfectly normal. On the flip side, some may never want to look back, and that is okay too. No matter what a person’s experience is like, something can always be taken from an experience like this. Quitting does not always mean giving up. For some, it means a new beginning.





# Trojans Are Buzzing on the Ice

by Dillon Martin

The Trojans have started to gain some momentum by getting some clutch wins as of late. There have been a lot of ups and downs but the team is still grinding it out. With a strong start as of late under their belt, the team is building the energy needed to keep the wins coming in the early stretch of the season. The McDowell hockey team's goal is to make the playoffs to go on and win a Pennsylvania State A championship.

McDowell has scored 18 goals over the last 5 games and gave up 15 goals over this stretch. The Trojans have victories over Beaver, Kiski and Plum. The top point leader for the Trojans is Junior Harrison Parra. He leads the team with 9 points with 6 goals and 3 assists. Senior Wendell Natividad and Junior Dylan Payne have 6 points with 4 goals and 2 assists each. Senior Jacob Baniewicz follows with 1 goal and 3 assists for a total of 4 points.

The beginning of the season, the top teams such as Quaker Valley, Chartiers Valley (2), Shaler and Blackhawk defeated the Trojans. The team was struggling putting the puck behind the net while scoring only 6 goals in the 5 games

they lost. Junior Dylan Graham got injured in a game against Shaler which was a huge blow to the team because he is one of the most hard working players on the team. His absence made a huge impact on the Trojans game because it sent them back.

The Trojans started to turn it around and got their first victory against a decent Beaver team by a score of 4-1. They out shot the Wildcats 32-31 with goals coming from Nathan Hanel, Harrison Parra (2), and Alec Coon. McDowell got 3 penalties for too many men on the ice, Diaz Bojkic for holding, and Noah Roberts for roughing. This was a huge win because it gave the Trojans confidence for the rest of the season.

McDowell secured an easy victory over the Kiski Cavaliers with a score of 8-1. They scored their last 7 goals in the third period with Dylan Payne scoring three, Wendell Natividad, Harrison Parra, Brendan Margraves, James Finn all scoring once. Wendell scored the lone goal in the first. They obliterated the Cavaliers in shots with 46 and Kiski only getting 15 on net. This win for the Trojans was not difficult but showed that they can destroy some of the weaker teams.

The recent win was a thrilling one against the Plum Mustangs with a final score of 3-2. Scorers of the game were Harrison Parra, Wendell Natividad, and Dylan Payne. The Mustangs outshot the Trojans 27-26 but the McDowell defense kept the puck out of the net. Plum got a total of 44 penalty minutes on 10 infractions which gave the Trojans opportunities to score. The Trojans scored a buzzer beater goal, Dylan Graham and Dylan Payne kept whacking away and Payne tucked it in to give the Trojans the win.

The Trojans have some humongous games coming up that have huge playoff implications on the line. In the next upcoming games, the Trojans face off against the Montour Spartans, Meadville Bulldogs, and the Greensburg Salem Golden Lions.

This Tuesday McDowell hosts the Montour Spartans at 8 PM at Lecom Sports Park. The Spartans record currently is 4-2, Aiden Moskovitz currently leads the team in points with 7 goals and 15 assists for a total of 22 points. Thomas Barefoot follows with 12 goals and 9 assists for 21 points. Montour's goalie Ethan Diiani has 5 stars under his belt and has 3 wins. The Spartans starting goalie has a 4.82 goals against average and a .835% save percentage.

The team has been jelling well with each other which is huge for the team's success. Freshman Cam Tennant has been brought up to the first line with Harrison Parra and Wendell Natividad. Senior Evan Stachera got brought down to the third line with James Finn and Ethan Sutherland. This change might benefit the Trojans because it gives the third line more speed. The first line will benefit the most because they will be able to move the puck better.

The powerplay for McDowell has recently changed with Harrison Parra being at the top with Alec Coon being on the side. We will see if this move will pan out for the Trojans for the rest of the season.

Come watch the Trojans next home game on Tuesday December 3rd at 8 pm at Lecom Sports Park.



