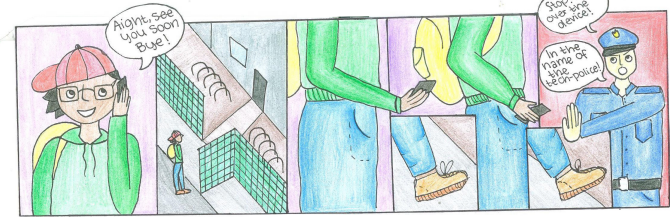


MUCKRAKER

THE INDEPENDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY SCHOOL STUDENT NEWSPAPER

EVERYTHING WRONG WITH THE EMD POLICY

Note: The majority of articles in this issue are opinion pieces, and we have chosen not to label each.



It is no surprise that the students at JFKS were disgruntled about the new EMD policy instituted by the school conference at the beginning of this school year, banning students from electronic media device (EMD) usage during school, except when used during class and in the library for academic purposes. And, frankly, they had good reason to be upset; this policy is simply misguided and a step in the wrong direction for our school.

The overarching issue regarding the phone policy so far is that it is as a whole too strict and largely misunderstood, and the resulting shoddy enforcement causes students to question the validity and fairness of the EMD policy in place. More specifically, I am referring to the unclear nature of the rules and the resounding disagreement among staff. It's no secret to students that most of their teachers do not enforce these rules; many have even expressed disagreement with the EMD policy to students, saying they prefer just telling a student to put their phone away if it becomes a problem. On the other hand, there are many teachers who have been taking devices away before 8:00 all year despite the rules sent out clearly stating that the policy only applied during school time, meaning somehow a large number of faculty members haven't

read through the policy they created and approved.

Of course, this begs the question: if the educators at this school, who spend more time with actual students than anyone else, find the phone policy too extreme and/or don't follow guidelines themselves, how can the administration justify imposing them upon the students? It seems clear that a policy with such selective enforcement would likely be exercised unfairly and subjectively upon students. In truth, many students see the policy as a joke now, since getting caught by someone who actually enforces the rules is a minimal risk. We see that nobody cares, and, since we often need to use our phones to contact our parents and classmates, read messages from our teachers, and organize our busy lives, we still use our phones—just a little more discreetly than before.

With this, we have reached the larger problem: the EMD policy doesn't really promote responsible usage. The school acknowledged this as a possible concern when laying out the rules, but has so far failed to address the problem. Students (and parents) were told that media education to promote productive and responsible EMD interaction would become a focus this year, but no clear steps have been taken to legitimize this claim... unless you count showing the film *Screenagers*, which just about every student would agree did not educate us about responsible EMD use so much as warn vaguely that they were hazardous. If the school really feels that it is setting students up for real-world responsibility, as it claims to be, the fact that 11th and 12th grade students are regulated by the same policy as 7th-10th graders (with the ex-

ception of the Slounge) is also problematic. Students tend to agree it was a shame to see seventh graders so absorbed in their phones, and in that sense understand where the phone policy came from. Upperclassmen, though, are expected to conduct themselves more like adults—we don't have homeroom teachers, we don't need substitutes to watch over us, and we are expected by our families and teachers to be largely independent people. This expectation cannot coexist with the idea that we aren't mature enough to focus in school if our phones are in sight.

The fact is that this policy has failed to reconcile two truths of the digital age—we don't want to depend on our devices, but we can't live our current lives without them. The EMD policy was said to be up for reconsideration after a year of trial, and thus I urge the school conference to rethink this policy. The most logical step forward in facing this predicament would be to institute an EMD policy which acknowledges phone use as possibly helpful, focused more on educating students about responsible usage and less on policing them. Many schools simply regulate the internet, for example, directing students away from social media. Why haven't we tried that? Couldn't we at least allow a warning before a student's phone is taken, or permit usage of devices for academic purposes throughout the school? Some say that students would get around this, or take advantage of it. To them I say: of course we will have to be conscious of students evading the rules moving forward, but at least we will be *moving forward*, instead of harkening back to an offline adolescence which no longer exists. Liliana Walker

THE

MUCKRAKER

Speaks

Many students at JFKS likely have noticed we, at the Muckraker, failed to publish this year, up until this issue; our 20 year tradition of student journalism taking one of its longest ever breaks. Some significant changes have since been made, as can be seen just looking at this paper. Thus, we've been thinking about our big problems and how we can make them better—as a newspaper, as a school, and as a community. In this issue, we're identifying several sources of strain upon students at JFKS and reflecting on problems which run deep in our community. Plus, we're considering how we as a community should be interfacing with these struggles to move forward intelligently, as we hope the Muckraker is now set to do. We hope you find our complaints relatable and our suggestions insightful. Beyond that, determining our school's culture is up to you, the members of the JFKS community.

What's In The Box?

Jonas Complains Abt Ethics

The hut outside the school which students have been speculating about is in fact for the campus security team, which students may have noticed the school has had on campus more frequently. According to Mr. Krupski, it is a temporary station that was requested by the security team as a spot to "hang out" during their breaks, because it is too cold outside. It will soon be moved closer to the green building as

We are told that our morals shape who we are. This is reiterated by our friends and family, but especially by our school system. While the idea of ethics class may be a good one, a place where you learn how to form your own opinions and morals and decide what's right and wrong, schools often seem to miss the mark when it comes to this subject. In this respect, our school isn't much different. The biggest, most glaringly obvious problem with ethics class, anywhere, not just at JFK, is that a teacher must stay unbiased and not try to impose their opinions on their students. This is incredibly hard to do. Teachers must help each kid reach their own conclusions and be a guide in that maturation process. Because of this, teachers often try to avoid teaching ethics class in any manner which could lead to controversy. Ethics becomes a subject full of landmines the teacher is trying to avoid and a group of students which can't really do much with

Continued on Page 2

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Instructing Compassion: Subversive Bigotry at JFKS And How to Stop It

Compassion is an important element for the advancement of progress and peaceful coexistence, especially in a school, where the rapid personal development of adolescence clashes with the ideological wild west of the internet. Our JFKS community’s responsibilities include teaching students how we should treat others, lessons which come from our parents, our teachers, and our school’s philosophy. In reality, though, several hateful incidents have revealed to our community that this supposed status quo of tolerance is a lot less steadfast at JFKS than it should be. Evidently, the relentless, often tone-deaf preaching-to-the-choir mentality associated with instructing compassion isn’t working for everybody. The population of our school is mostly white, heterosexual, cisgender, and either Christian or Atheist. In all of these cases, the relationship of the vast majority to a small minority makes possible a power dynamic which allows bigoted language to go largely unchecked, with the only ones doing the checking being those affected. Here lies the unfulfilled responsibility of the student body: students that are part of the majority need to take a more active role in denouncing bigotry — whether it affects them or not.

The Myth of Detox Diets

Today’s society is constantly influenced by social media, and much of Generation Z uses it as their primary news outlet. Young people are incredibly susceptible to what they read online, and social media influencers capitalize on selling Tummy Teas, Hair Gummies, and Detox diets to their young audiences. The reality of this setup is very malicious—Fad diet trends bring the unrealistic promise of fast weight loss and an improved lifestyle to consumers. While these trends may lead to this eventual outcome, the lack of instant gratification that most people face when they haven’t lost the promised 10 pounds in under a month is usually detrimental to a productive mindset. A more specific diet that has a record of being ineffective and overall unpleasant is the Detox diet. The diet consists of juice cleanses and smoothies, it allows for clean but limited eating, which in itself doesn’t seem like a valid diet, relying on only the nutrients and energy from juices has short-lived effects. The Detox diet aims to rid the body of toxins—this, in theory, is a nice idea, if our body didn’t already naturally do this process on its own accord. Nurse Practitioner Karen Fleming states: “The body does not store toxic substances in the colon that lead to ill health and need to be cleaned out. This is a myth. The only time you need to clean out your colon is before a colonoscopy exam.” Not only is it true that the body does not need an outside substance to remove excess toxins and chemicals, but there is also no proof that this diet leads to weight loss! The reason people are so attracted to this fad is under the false pretenses that it will magically activate the weight loss they desire. The diet is usually done in intervals of 3 to 7 days; while the consumer may see some weight loss within that time span, the outcome is only short-lived.

According to Nutritional expert Bernard Dixon, these cleanses can actually “backfire causing weight gain or malnutrition.” Due to the restrictions of the diet and the lack of nutrition and energy in these smoothies, the consumer is suffering from an insufficient diet. When the customer realizes they may have gained the weight back from this diet, it can leave them feeling discouraged and unmotivated to proceed in maintaining a healthy lifestyle. So, overall, juice and smoothie cleanses are diets that should

In turn, the school should be teaching students to take on that responsibility, because when they don’t, bigoted language is able to become a subversively accepted part of everyday conversation. Subversive acceptance is similar to removing weeds from a flowerbed. If you do so regularly, they never become an issue. If you don’t devote the necessary attention to the weeds, though, they’ll multiply until you have lost control of them. In the same way, bigoted language that is widely seen as unacceptable can become accepted if it manages to evade criticism for long enough, often disguising itself as humour. When this happens, the minority which the language is attacking often no longer feels comfortable objecting to its use. Thus, the vocal majority no longer views this language as hurtful towards the minority, using the lack of criticism as proof. This is a general criticism of our community, and each situation is different, but although bigotry can never be fully removed from any society, there are several steps the administration can and should be taking to radically improve the situation at JFKS. In the interest of constructive criticism, here are a few:

not be promoted or encouraged. There is no scientific evidence that they reap any health benefits whatsoever. It’s a waste of time and money, and is even potentially harmful to those who participate. These diets can serve as an important reminder to students—online endorsement doesn’t translate into real-life effectiveness, and a celebrity endorsement means nothing, really, especially if that celebrity has no clear knowledge of the subject. Brooke Betten

A Brief Reflection on Bathroom Vandalism

Most JFK students have heard about the disturbing racist and anti-semitic graffiti which a student was recently removed from the school for writing on the bathroom stalls. Especially after the anti-semitic media scandal our administration was heavily criticized for, I was glad to see that the school’s administration has done fairly well handling this incident, informing the community of the incident and taking immediate action in response to it. Nevertheless, I’d like to disabuse faculty and students of the notion that this problem is superficial— it’s not so easily resolved as getting rid of the students who get caught expressing bigoted beliefs. Bathroom graffiti is not new to our school, and upon reviewing old issues of the Muckraker it has become clear that incidents of bigoted vandalism have been going on for many years, as they have been written about in the Muckraker. The following is a quote from a March 2006 issue about bathroom vandalism: “The exorbitant increase of vandalism... was made up of racist, sexist and personally insulting comments... In short, this is not your average “Suzy Loves Billy”... but extremely hateful, large, and destructive graffiti.”

To students and staff members alike, this should serve as a reminder that removing a student from school doesn’t solve the problems which helped to instigate their behavior. While the students responsible for hateful incidents in recent memory have been punished, little noticeable proactive change has been made by any administrative bodies, and these complaints from 14 years ago being echoed today goes to show how failing to address a problem like this will just allow it to fester. The an-

1. Create mandatory seminars. Instructing compassion can no longer be an ethics class afterthought, but needs to take a permanent position in students’ schedules. Just one or two seminars per semester on sensitivity and standing up for peers could make a difference.
2. Do not preach or punish: educate. Too often students feel that they’re being unfairly punished or talked down to when discussing compassion, which only leads to them becoming more grounded in their use of bigoted language.
3. Don’t only teach what is wrong, teach why it’s wrong and who it affects. Forbidding a list of slurs and offensive stereotypes doesn’t necessarily make people less inclined to use them, and many students likely don’t understand the impact their language can have, even when they say they’re joking. Discuss the background of certain words and stereotypes and why they aren’t tolerated at our school or in our community. Furthermore, give minority students a platform to share their experiences and an environment in which they feel comfortable doing so. June Gromis

tisemitic writing discussed is not the only hateful and/or obscene vandalism in the bathrooms, and new edgelords with provocative jokes seem to pop up every time the stalls are repainted (see below). the The Student Council’s 2019 “Schule Ohne Rassismus” campaign failed spectacularly, with very few student signatures, and this seems to have extinguished any motivation among them to work toward solving the problem. The younger students learn ethics for only 45 minutes a week, and the instruction focuses more on debating abstract ethical quandries than discussing moral behavior as an adolescent in a diverse community—this class should be real ethics in a student’s life, not practice for MUN. One notable success so far has been establishment of the IDEAs Club, but this group is not equipped to be teaching our whole school tolerance.

Since our school caught bad press for anti-semitic bullying, many members of the JFK community have made the school out to be a martyr, disproportionately attacked by the news media. In reality, though, we are supposed to be a model for international schools, yet we can’t even keep minority students from being attacked online and on campus, and we aren’t working hard enough to solve that. Are we going to try to change how our school handles these insensitivity issues, or are we just going to passively wait until another unexcusable act occurs, then denounce and apologize for it again? Liliana Walker

The Box, Continued From First Page

a permanent station. The faculty is also working on getting cameras outside the buildings, as was promised last year. The cameras will not record, but they will be filming live footage so the security team can monitor who is coming on and off campus. The school is also working on better lighting outside near the sport hall so people feel safer walking around the back of the school when it’s dark outside. They’re even hoping to get higher fences around campus to prevent people from being able to hop over them. The school knows it won’t be able to have particularly high-tech or thorough security anytime in the near future, but they are taking strides to make the campus safer. Brooke Betten

Troubles with the Sport Department

One of the school’s departments that has faced heavy criticism is the sports department. As a mandatory subject, Sport is often hated by students who find the class frustrating and unfair, as they are graded on physical ability on a standardized rubric that doesn’t take a number of factors into account. And the grades matter, especially in the Oberstufe. Both Abitur and Diploma students are required to take one sport course per semester that counts into their GPA, though Abitur students have the option of nullifying the scores of 2/4 of the semesters. The fact that sport grades can make it harder for you to accel academically merely because you were born with the wrong genes can be disheartening, and many students are not content with the handling of this affair.

Furthermore, disrespect and sexism are rampant in the sports department, coming from both teachers and students. Students not performing well are often mocked by classmates, especially in the younger grade levels. Instead of intervening, many teachers simply take on a “hustle!” approach which does not help at all. Many students do not like sport for the simple reason that they feel like they are not respected because of their performance in the class, and that creates for a toxic environment. Along with this, sexism is also commonplace within the classes. The massive difference between the male and female grading rubric is sexist not only because boys who may not be at a significant advantage must do more work for the same grade, but also because the rubric expects less of female students. These are significant issues that cannot remain unaddressed for any longer

To be fair, our school administration does not have full jurisdiction over these problems. The senate and german government usually provide the grading rubrics and regulations for the sport courses which create for many of these issues. It is important however to see that there is a true toxic nature to the sport classes at our school right now, and we as students, along with the administration, have a responsibility to ensure that the sport courses remain respectful and inclusive.

Jakob Reuter

Communication Issues in the Oberstufe

Despite the fact that as high school continues, those in the Abitur track and those in the Diploma track seem to grow apart, there seems to be at least one mutual point of agreement. This point is that there is a serious communication issue between administration students. Common questions that often remain unanswered include: is (blank subject) recognized in certain countries? Do we have to take (blank subject)? Will taking (blank subject) help me in my future academic career? These, among similar questions, continue to drive students in the Oberstufe crazy and can lead to messed up schedules or serious academic consequences.

This is a problem, but the inconvenient solution is that we all need to assume more responsibility. Whilst there is a problem with transparency between certain administrators and students, many students have a tendency to push things like registering for classes off to the last minute. This leads to problems and unanswered questions. Many stu-

Transgender Acceptance Matters—Here’s Why

Nearly 40% of transgender adolescents have attempted suicide. Being transgender isn’t about a choice that someone makes, it is about the way that they feel - an uncontrollable and unchangeable one. Most transgender people experience gender dysphoria, a persistent feeling that one’s biological sex doesn’t match their identity. This is something traumatizing for most trans adolescents, as there is scientific proof that male and female brains differ in their structure. Being transgender is about so much more than simply “boy body, girl identity” or vice versa. It is about not being able to live comfortably, and dysphoria interfering with social situations, school, and leading a normal life. Intentional misgendering adds to the general pressure that trans people face. Objects will always stand in the way of transgender people, but there is a simple to take away the social aspect of trans struggles—support trans adolescents.

The percentage of trans teenagers who have attempted suicide, 13.7% is almost three times as high as the rate of those whose gender identity matches with their birth certificate (cisgender people). Being transgender means having a different gender identity than the one assigned at birth, your biological sex. It also means receiving more discrimination and bullying from your fellow students. 34.6% of trans high school students from 10 U.S. states reported having been bullied at school, in comparison to 14.7% and 20.7% of males and females, respectively. Discrimination and rejection are major suicide risk factors. The 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey found that trans adults who experienced mistreatment in places such as education and employment, disapproval of their gender identity, and religious rejection including processes such as conversion therapy, had a prevalence of past-year suicide attempts twice as high as that

dents in the diploma program, for example, were not aware that diploma students were able to take a non-AP English course in the 11th grade. This confusion resulted in many taking a course that they have little interest in, and they are now suffering the consequences. Oftentimes, there are also disagreements on such matters between students, as no one knows the exact answer. As students, we have a certain responsibility to ensure that we are informed about our academics and make intelligent choices based on the provided information.

The students do not take all of the blame, though. The administration must also work towards the goal of clarity, as contradicting statements and confusing and unclear parent evenings are not sufficient to establish this transparency. Juniors are thrown into a completely new environment and have just one week to choose what classes to keep and what classes to drop, and that is simply not enough time. Because of the momentum of certain courses, especially AP and LK, students have a completely different impression of a course within the first week then after the first semester. Personally, I have encountered many students, abitur and diploma, that regret taking certain courses because they realized after a few weeks that it was not fit for them, but they are now stuck with them. This is a problem when these subjects have such a massive impact on our GPAs and general academic success. In conclusion, students need to act more maturely in planning their high school experiences, but the Oberstufe administrators should also work harder to help students (and extend the class drop period!).

Jakob Reuter

of trans adults who didn’t encounter such prejudice.

Not actively discriminating against trans people isn’t enough, though—acceptance plays a big role here, too. Trans youth aged 15 to 21 who were able to use their chosen name with friends, at school, at work, and at home experienced a 65% decrease in suicide attempts and 71% less symptoms of severe depression overall compared to those who couldn’t use their chosen name in the four aforementioned areas.

Transphobia, prejudice based on the fact that someone is transgender, is a problem at our school. Students purposefully misuse pronouns and names (a key component when it comes to acceptance), explicitly deny the gender identity of trans students, and ridicule the fact that trans students’ gender identities don’t align with their biological sex. While they may not be intending to hurt the other person, they are. Using someone’s preferred pronoun and name isn’t furthering their “illusion,” it’s helping them. Of course, unintentional misuse of these is natural. It’s obvious that we’ll forget the fact that someone has a different name and/or different pronouns now, but it is not acceptable for someone to, even without malicious intentions, continuously act intolerant towards their transgender peers because of their gender identity. Our actions have consequences; misgendering someone contributes to increasing depression and suicidality, and students and faculty at JFKS need to do what’s right by supporting trans students’ gender identities in every way they can.

That’s the facts and logic for you. Checkmate, oppressed Bencil Sharpening gamers.

Nico Hammer and Noah Beere

International Muck: Coronavirus

People everywhere are panicking as the new coronavirus spreads rapidly throughout Germany and the World. The usual opinions one encounters is either irrational panic or a calm and downplaying approach. Both of these are not prudent, as the coronavirus is a problem that will have an effect on the world and by extension us, but it will not be the end of the world or civil society. However, the most important fact about the coronavirus is that it is not an excuse to be xenophobic or sinophobic. The fear that took hold as a result of the medias exaggeration of the issue and the manipulative depiction of “Chinese culture” as the culprit of the disease. People making snarky comments such as “what did they expect if they eat bats” and “it’s their own fault for not being hygienic” are not just problematic but blatantly racist. For those who believe the above comments to be exaggerations, they are taken word for word from students of JFK. This is obviously problematic, and it is a trend that is growing globally. According to outlets such as the Independent and Al Jazeera people of Asian descent have been experiencing growing amounts of intolerance based on the fear of coronavirus. Fear is always present during times of crisis like this, and the media is only aiding this process, but we must stay calm and make sure that our fears are not manifested in hatred as they so often are. Intolerance is not acceptable and xenophobia is not helpful for solving this problem, it merely makes the international situation worse. By allowing this process to occur, we are creating a toxic environment for everyone, and that is unacceptable.

Jakob Reuter

Gender-Neutral Bathrooms

A new idea that is being discussed currently within the administration and the student council is the plan to implement gender-neutral bathrooms for those who would feel more comfortable using such a bathroom. This idea seems to have originated from the IDEAS club and seeks to make the school a more inclusive environment. While a good idea and something we should strive for, the logistics of this will be difficult and there is a possibility of this plan not coming to fruition if the SC and administration do not see sufficient demand for this.



It would be a real shame to see this project failing, which is why, if you support it, you should talk to your student council representatives to have them support the plan in order for it to succeed. Furthermore, many have concerns about the necessity of these gender-neutral bathrooms. Some believe the project to be unnecessary, as most people at JFK feel comfortable using the binary bathrooms. While this argument makes sense on the surface, we have to remember that the bathrooms are not just for this generation of JFK students, but for all those to come, making it a worthwhile investment. Furthermore, studies show that the potential psychological harm of using a bathroom of a gender you don't identify with is grand, and we have a responsibility to prevent this at all costs. This is not as radical an idea as it may seem, in fact, more and more schools in the US and Germany are adding a gender-neutral option for their students. Overall, the results seem to be positive; students are supportive of the programs and those who feel more comfortable using the bathrooms feel more included. This project is deserving of our support and we truly hope that it will be implemented, as we need to provide a more inclusive environment, and this would be a permanent step in the right direction. Jakob Reuter

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Circulation: 250

We are an independent student newspaper. The opinions expressed here in no way reflect those of the John F. Kennedy School.

Ethics, Continued From First Page

the instructions provided. As a student who has been through four years of ethics at JFK, I can say that this cautiousness, while probably intended to serve us well, hinders classes from being truly engaging, because the topics and controversial issues that make the subject matter interesting just aren't discussed.

Additionally, one of the biggest controversies surrounding ethics is the grading of the class. Nobody can objectively say that an opinion is right or wrong or that something is important or unimportant, but sadly, this does happen. Teachers often say that grading is based on the quantity and quality of contributions. While the quantity may be objective, the quality is certainly subjective, and therein lies the problem. Teachers give grades based on subjective beliefs, and while this may not only happen in ethics, it seems to happen here a lot more than in other classes. But before fingers are pointed at teachers for their grading systems however, keep in mind that although teachers decide how to implement these, the curriculum and department make the systems that are used. When asked about the relationship between the curriculum, the department, and the teachers, a student stated: "The curriculum and department hold a sizable amount of power when it comes to how the subject is taught. This of course does not excuse the teachers from their duties, after all, it is they who teach. A big change has to come from the department while the teachers must adjust and change their teaching styles." The need for grading often ruins the experience of a class which could enrich our lives so much more if it were an open space without grades. If this were the case, students wouldn't have to focus their attention on pleasing the teacher in order to get that 1+, but speak their mind openly, or at least as openly as possible in a school environment.

The curriculum is one of the key issues when it comes to the perceived dislike of the subject. It seems that many students find the class uninteresting and unengaging. Of course it is unrealistic to change the entire subject to fit our wishes, but, to all teachers reading this, you do have the power to prioritize and to some degree add certain parts to the curriculum. Deciding what topics are interesting and engaging and prioritizing these may engage students and make them care more about the subject. Teachers

Attention Epidemic

Admin hear my urgent plea:
Ban books from this facility
Books are a scourge upon this campus
Hidden reading while teachers task us
Instead of soaking in the sun
Kids line the library one by one
Yes, some books we may need to learn
But all the fun ones? Let em burn!
Recreational reading stuffs the brain
Stupid students, what a pain!
They don't remember Faulkner, Golding
All they know is J. K. Rowling!
An epidemic while they squint:
Monster headaches from small print
Among teachers it is popular,
Reading while they monitor!
So admin please hear my appeal
If you ban it we will heal,
Once you remove this freakish yearning
Students will return to learning!
June Gromis

need to focus on and engage their students more, especially since we only have ethics once, or at most twice a week. The department has to change the way teachers approach the lesson plans. For example, discussing with a class on what they wish would come up during the year and taking these wishes into account could be an incredible tool for getting students more interested and involved in the class.

If one were to go out into the hallway and ask students if they enjoy ethics class because of the quality and content, most would say no. We have gotten to the point that interviewees state that ethics class in 7th-10th grade has "discouraged them from taking Philosophy in 11th and 12th grade" and that the majority of students can't take the class seriously anymore, even if they would like to. To the JFKS ethics department, don't let this be your legacy. Implement changes to the teaching and grading styles and to the curriculum. Get students interested in the subject by engaging them. And to all students who don't enjoy the subject, honestly, I don't blame you. It is flawed and to some degree broken, but this doesn't mean it can't be mended, and hopefully this will happen soon. Jonas Dills

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