

# THE LION'S ROAR

The Leffell School • April 2026

*Agora Seminars: Tls's New  
Humanities-Driven Electives*

*Read this and much more in this edition of The  
Lion's Roar!*



## Letter from the Editors

Hello. We are thrilled to publish our first edition as the new Editors-in-Chief of The Lion's Roar. In our new term, we are committed to producing quality articles that are thoroughly written and edited. We are proud to have a staff of hardworking, creative leaders.

This issue features some of our new initiatives, including deep-dive articles, fun features, and informative opinions. We have games, a focus on culture, and we are incredibly proud of all of the work that our staff and contributing members have put into this issue.

Please continue to check our Instagram (@tlroar) and website (tlroar.com) for new articles, and we hope you enjoy this issue! Sincerely,

*Dahlia Deener, Abby Kass & Abi Wiseman*

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## Editorial Policy

*The Lion's Roar* is a student-run newspaper, published periodically throughout the year, as well as continuously online. Student editors make content decisions, and the newspaper is considered a forum written by and for the students. It is, however, reviewed by the administration prior to printing, and the administration reserves the right to withhold from publication any articles it deems inappropriate.

Suggestions and comments are accepted and encouraged, and they can be made anonymously. Signed Letters for the Editor are also encouraged. *The Lion's Roar* reserves the right to edit letters for space or content in order to maintain our standards, and letters will not be considered for publication if deemed inappropriate or if unsigned.

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## Mission Statement

We aim for transparency.

We aim for objectivity.

We aim for accuracy.

We aim for timeliness.

And most importantly, we aim for truth, while maintaining the utmost respect for our school.

We promise to voice public opinion.

We promise not to skew information to our own interests, and we promise to uphold the same high standards for every article we publish.

We hope to establish our publication's role as the voice for the student body, and we look forward to continuing the legacy TLR has left through the years.

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## Beyond Assumptions: The Reality of TLS and Maria Regina's Differences

**By Dahlia Deener**

Our world is trained to see the differences in groups. To pinpoint what is wrong with a community simply because they live their lives slightly differently than we do. We no longer look for shared experiences, whether good or bad, but rather zoom in and highlight what makes us separate and therefore against each other. While this can be and is applied to numerous areas of our lives, TLS's relationship with our neighbors, Maria Regina High School, refutes this notion and really puts what we think our "differences" are into perspective.

TLS has always partnered with Maria Regina for various events, parking convenience, and their convenient Driver's Ed program for TLS students. However, in the past few years, this bond has grown stronger as our schools have supported each other through the hardest times of our respective religions. Maria Regina united with TLS after October 7th and showed their support to the Jewish community and our school. Just last year, a group of students and faculty walked across the street and joined Maria Regina in prayer after the death of Pope Francis. More recently, the Interfaith Club has been instituting events and programs with Maria Regina, with the sole purpose of bringing our different faiths together. These are all examples of the important and meaningful relationships between our Jewish and Catholic schools.

Although beautiful, one might initially think our schools work together in so many ways because our faiths are polar opposites. We often assume that this partnership exists because of the effort to mend our differences in religion and act as one. However, our schools' practices, and frankly, our religions' practices, are not as different as we may think. Both are rooted in the same core values and act on them in extremely similar ways.

While the obvious is true that both of our schools engage in prayer every day, we both have holidays that our schools take the time and effort to plan around and make engaging for the students. It is the minutiae that are so essential to revealing the hidden similarities between our schools and their practices.

When looking through Maria Regina's student-run newspaper, The Queens Banner: Voices of Charity, Stories of Truth, I uncovered their student-run podcast labeled Tiger Talk, where students discuss school events and "happenings". In Season 1, Episode 4, named "Chatting with Father Erik and Father Fred", they talk about the CAM (Capuchin Appalachian Mission), which is a week-long program of faith, service, and Gospel living. This program is rooted in the Catholic tradition and the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi to bring Christ's love to life through hands-on service, prayer, and community. Specifically, students are able to join five different ministries: Vacation Bible School, Outreach, Senior Ministry, Manual Labor, and Kitchen. One student described her time at the Outreach Ministry, where she handed out clothing, toiletries, and supplies to people in need. TLS students might recognize this kind of act of service from the tenth-grade Chesed Tiyul to Washington, DC. The juniors and seniors can especially attest to the kind of Tikun Olam (Repairing the World) we were able to actually enact in

D.C. through having conversations with and handing out supplies to people living on the streets. We were also able to use our voices and enact change through lobbying at the U.S. Capitol to each of our district's representatives. Every TLS student comes back from this trip knowing they have fulfilled a Jewish value of Chesed (Kindness) and Tikun Olam. Even though one is named CAM and the other a Tiyul, these overnight trips that our schools partake in demonstrate the utmost similarities between our faiths and practices that are often overlooked.

The Queens Banner also outlines the school's participation in the White Plains St. Patrick's Day Parade. St. Patrick's Day, honoring the Irish patron saint and the vibrant culture of the Irish, is a lively and spirited day for many Catholics across the world. The Queens Banner describes the day not just as a holiday, but as a party for an entire heritage to come together and celebrate. Although for a much different purpose, the similarity between the

St. Patrick's Day Parade and the Purim Parade in Israel is uncanny. The Purim Parade is a yearly event that happens in Israel to celebrate the saving of the Jewish people by Queen Esther from Haman. Both parades feature people singing and dancing with pride for their religion and heritage. Both holidays commemorate an important time in each respective religion's history that must be celebrated. At TLS, students come to school in costumes and enjoy a fun and rewarding day at school centered around Purim with the cancellation of classes. Our religions have our respective holidays, but our individual schools take this pride to a new level and celebrate with its students.

In a more personal and relevant stance, The Queens Banner also features various students' opinions on their school's policy of skirt length. Many different students have varying opinions about the rule of mandatory skirt checks. The article even references a common phrase heard by faculty and administration: "Pull your skirt down!". An article published in 2023 about the dress code at TLS by a TLS alum opens with the number of times students have been told their shoulders, midriff, or thighs needed to be covered up. As both of our schools exist in a modern time of self-expression and identity, but are still rooted in each of our religious affiliations, the topic of uniforms and dress codes is a concern for students on both sides of Hartsdale Ave.

At first glance, Maria Regina High School and TLS have nothing in common. We are a Jewish Day School, they are a Catholic one. We study the Torah, they study the Christian Bible. However, when looked at more carefully, the similarities between not only Maria Regina and TLS, but Christianity and Judaism are ubiquitous. And although we don't collaborate because we both enforce a dresscode, it is important to note the small resemblance between our schools, so we don't assume we are partnered for our attempts to mend sole differences.

**At first glance, Maria Regina High School and TLS have nothing in common**

## **Under the Surface: Revealing the Roots of Academic Stress at TLS**

**By Lila Kahan**

Midway through the year, with no breaks after Pesach and motivation fading as finals quietly approach, stress is palpable everywhere. What's really driving your school stress? Is it your teachers, your parents, your peers, or is it internal?

New to a high school routine and adjusting to the rigor and expectations from teachers, first-year students are left stressed, feeling in over their heads. An anonymous freshman says, "The origin of my academic stress comes from my teachers, depending on which class, because my workload and the homework they assign can feel so overwhelming." Differences in workload and instructional approaches can make certain classes feel far more demanding than others. Pressure often builds not from a single source, but from the cumulative weight of assignments that begin to feel unmanageable.

Although measures have been taken to combat this, students often feel that assignments are constant and unpredictable, creating an uncomfortable sense of disorder. That lack of control is what often turns normal academic pressure into stress. The same student shared, "My tests can sometimes be last-minute, especially in history, which feels very annoying, especially if I have so many assignments that I have no other choice but to start studying only two nights before".

When it is necessary to ask for an extension, as long as it isn't abused, teachers are found to be lenient and understanding of the demands of students' lives. Regardless, this student still wished that, at the start of each week, every single assignment for that week was posted on the assignment center rather than having assignments posted as the week progresses, so that they could plan their time accordingly. When deadlines appear suddenly, even responsible students are forced into reactive habits like cramming. Over time, this cycle can make school feel like a constant emergency rather than a steady process of learning; the stress is not just about difficulty, but about timing and communication.

Additionally, this freshman student said that their homework load is around three hours per night, excluding their study time, which is usually over an hour. This student is frequently swamped with work, even without procrastination. When students feel like they are never "done", motivation drops, and school begins to feel like survival rather than growth. The anonymous student said, "I don't have that much time to relax after school, but sometimes I stay up extra late to make time for myself." Students, like anybody, need time to unwind, which is not accounted for when work is assigned. For students, decompressing on their phones, catching up with peers, watching a TV show, or even reading a book is essential to mental health (Paul Alan Arkin et al., 2025).

This same sense of constant pressure and lack of balance doesn't go away—it often intensifies as students move into their sophomore year. The sophomore slump sets in as college preparation looms, leaving students increasingly stressed about what lies ahead. Sophomore Ella Patchen feels that most of her stress comes from the workload assigned by her teachers, rather than the pressure they place on students. She emphasizes how supportive her teachers are and their willingness to offer extra help, but the amount of time she spends working each night often feels unsustainable. Patchen says, "I don't feel like all my teachers consider that we have nine different classes, and I don't have time to put all of my energy into one class". The workload issue is workload-wide, not a per-class problem. When each class carries its own set of expectations, the combined workload that students experience can quickly become overwhelming; the disconnect between individual classes and the student's full schedule intensifies stress.

Patchen believes that communication among teachers across departments should increase. Although the school has made efforts to improve coordination, she still experiences uneven workloads, with certain days' workloads far more demanding than others. At times, teachers may not fully be aware of a student's overall workload and may assign a full set of work for their class alone. Patchen also admits that she puts a lot of pressure on herself to work to the best of her ability on each assignment. Patchen states she works until eleven thirty each night on homework, and reports feeling sleep-deprived because of her heavy workload.

As academic demands continue to mount, the pressure peaks for many students in their junior year.

Junior year is often considered the most demanding stage of high school, as students juggle intense coursework while planning for their future, leaving many feeling burned out and just trying to keep up. Junior Alana Katzen says, "School can be very academically pressuring; specifically, before breaks, we get an extreme amount of homework." Although there is a testing schedule for departments before TLS breaks, the classes that choose.

# **What's really driving your school stress? Is it your teachers, your parents, your peers, or is it internal?**

# “Stress is partially structural and partially personal”

to administer assessments tend to align in the same week. Instead of looking forward to breaks, students feel buried in deadlines. Katzen said, “I also think my grade is very competitive, and it can feel like everyone is comparing their grades to each other, which creates a very stressful environment.” Stress has become both social and academic; when students constantly compare grades, performance starts to feel tied to self-worth, increasing anxiety and competition. Lastly, Katzen goes into depth about what she finds most challenging about the TLS structure: “Teachers should specifically focus on figuring out with their students how to balance the workload before vacations. We have two weeks where we have different schedules for each week of what tests we can have, and it usually does not work out. I think there needs to be a system that ensures students don’t feel too overwhelmed and stressed”. Even supportive teachers cannot fully fix structural scheduling issues, continuing the cycles of overwhelm. These patterns highlight the need for more consistent, school-wide coordination to ensure that academic expectations remain challenging without becoming unsustainable for students.

Sophomore Dean Maggie Lloyd hears perspectives from both students and teachers, acting as a bridge between the two. Lloyd said, “At the beginning of the school year, when we heard concerns about stress and workload, the administrative team carefully reviewed the assignment calendar. We looked closely at how much time students appeared to need outside of school and whether there were common patterns among the students who felt most overwhelmed”. The teachers and administrators at our school seem to recognize patterns of student stress and are actively examining workload distribution. Their response suggests an effort to address concerns thoughtfully rather than dismiss them. The school has implemented a new guideline for teachers, requiring them to post all major assessments on Blackboard and our school website one week before they take place.

Additionally, students are not allowed to have more than two tests per day. When asked specifically about the frequency of cramming, Lloyd said, “Cramming definitely happens. Each student I’ve spoken with has a different reason for why it occurs, though there are also some common patterns we see. I’ve had many conversations with students about strategies for planning and managing their workload so it feels more manageable”. Stress is partially structural and partially personal, depending on how students manage their time. Stress doesn’t stem from a single source; rather, it reflects both the systems students are working within and the ways they respond to those demands. While policies, scheduling, and workload set the foundation, individual habits, expectations, and time management can either ease or intensify that pressure. When asked if she could pinpoint the reason students are stressed, Lloyd said, “There are definitely some patterns. We often see more stress in students who put a lot of pressure on themselves or have very full academic schedules, especially in courses with heavier workloads”. Internal expectations and perfectionism can intensify the demands of already demanding academic environments.

A poll conducted by the Interfaith club at TLS reported that the top three sources of academic stress, in increasing order, are: teachers, society, and students themselves. It is important to keep in mind that while external pressures from teachers and society play a role, students at TLS ultimately see themselves as the strongest source of stress. Internal pressure and high personal standards may even outweigh structural demands. Many students set expectations for themselves that go beyond what is required, pushing for perfection rather than completion. Over time, this self-imposed pressure can be more persistent than external demands, following students even when their workload temporarily lightens. Sometimes, stress becomes less about what is assigned and more about the standards students feel they must meet, especially within a culture that emphasizes highly competitive, “name-brand” colleges.

Oren Podietz, a junior and leader of the Interfaith Club, is working with Nadav Levine to develop a plan to reduce academic stress. They have proposed several ideas to address this issue in a more structured way. First, they suggested creating a committee of students and administrators to address workload concerns better. Second, they aim to advocate for a clearer expectation that teachers cover all necessary material before assigning major assessments. Third, they plan to formally present their collected data to school administrators and propose solutions such as providing stress-reducing fidgets and offering workshops focused on stress-management strategies. Finally, they hope to introduce “Recharge Nights”: these are designated evenings each semester intended to allow students to rest and reset. They hope to help create an environment where students feel supported and equipped with the tools to manage school-related stress better.

In the end, academic stress stems from a combination of workload, scheduling systems, peer competition, societal expectations, and personal pressure. Because it is both external and internal, reducing it will require changes in communication and structure, as well as healthier student mindsets

## Rachel Kirschbaum: Living the Language of Hebrew

**By Isaiah Yolkut**

TLS Hebrew teacher Rachel Kirschbaum does not talk about Hebrew as if it were a subject. She talks about it as if it were a bridge.

Kirschbaum is in her seventh year at TLS. “This is my Shmita year,” she jokes. “I should go on sabbatical next year.” She currently teaches Hebrew II, IV, and VII; “Well, it’s just a bunch of numbers when I say it, right?” but her reach as a teacher has extended far beyond TLS. Before TLS, she taught at Ramaz Middle School and the SAR Lower School, as well as a gap-year program in Israel. Over the years, she has taught almost every grade from second through twelfth.

“Second is great, I love the second graders. They’re so sweet. They draw you pictures and stuff.” She says this with the kind of affection that lets you know she keeps the drawings.

And yet, her own journey with Hebrew did not begin with the love she holds for it today. “I was not so into Hebrew at all as a teenager,” she admits. She tells the story she almost hesitated to share, the story of a senior-year deal with her Hebrew teacher. “She said, ‘Rachel, I have a deal for you. Don’t come to class, just come on test days and take the test, and that will be your grade,’ and I said, ‘Sounds great,’ and that’s what we did, and I took the test, and that was my grade.”

It feels incredibly unexpected to hear that now. Years later, she would move to Israel and live there for several years. Sometime after that, she would run into that same teacher in a supermarket. “...and I went up to her and said, ‘Do you remember me?’ She’s like, ‘Of course I remember you.’ And I said, ‘I’m so sorry for everything I did’ — and this is all in fluent Hebrew. And I told her my story, and she was so excited.”

There is something moving about that image. A former student standing in a supermarket aisle in Jerusalem, speaking to an old teacher with whom she once feuded, in a language that she once avoided. That transformation wasn’t just a personal anecdote, but the foundation of her teaching.

“A student can look at an Israeli teacher and wish that he or she could speak like that teacher, but they can never be reborn in Israel, right?” She pauses, then continues with a clear message. “But to see someone who is similar to them in their background, who was born here and was raised here, who could still achieve certain levels

in Hebrew and be proficient in Hebrew, I would hope that that would give some students hope...”

Then, simply: “I want to show that it is attainable because I’m proof that it’s attainable.” That word, attainable, feels central to who she is. She is not interested in Hebrew as an abstract idea. She is interested in what it can become in a student’s life.

Her connection to Israel is extremely present. She lived there for several years, has a brother there, and of course, visits often. Her husband also lived there for many years, making Hebrew sneak in and out of household conversations. It’s woven into daily life.

In the classroom, she tries to bring that life in with her. “I love teaching anything. I really love teaching anything that’s actually happening right now in Israel,” she says. “I love teaching Hebrew when I can simultaneously expose kids to current Israeli culture, not just the old culture, but the current culture.”

For her, Hebrew is not just frozen in Tanakh (another one of her favorite subjects). It is sung on the radio. It is spoken in markets. It is celebrated every day.

When asked about teaching Hebrew in America and how it shapes Jewish identity, her answer is poetic.

“You could always talk to an Israeli in English. But it won’t be the same.” Then she offers a line that still lingers: “When you’re speaking Hebrew, you’re connecting on a Jewish level. You’re connecting on a spiritual level. You’re connecting on a level of shared roots and commonality. Whereas in English, it emphasizes differences. In Hebrew, it emphasizes what you have in common. And I think that’s very, very powerful to do.”

That belief shapes the way she teaches. She fills her classes with practice skits, attempting to simulate real-life situations. “We do a lot of skits in my class, which some kids love and some kids tolerate”; she insists on it, though, because language is to be lived. “But we do do a lot of skits, and I think that’s a really important part of language learning, which is trying to simulate certain situations.”

She’s made her imprint all around TLS, but especially in the Hebrew program. In her second year at TLS, she proposed mixing Hebrew levels across grades rather than limiting students to four class options per grade. Before, there were four levels per grade, and now there are more than ten

across the whole school. “We could offer a stronger program if we mixed the grades, because that way we could offer more than four levels to every student. And that would really allow students to grow.” She smiled, proud of her accomplishment. It was a logistical challenge, but the administration liked the idea and agreed to try. More than five years later, it remains a favorite feature of TLS among many students, allowing them to have options and learn with others they may not otherwise. “And I’m very proud of that, that that actually was instituted and that it’s working.” It’s not just working, it’s flourishing.

But perhaps the most beautiful moment of the conversation comes when she is asked what she hopes students will remember at the end of her class. “I want them to remember what they were like when they came in at the beginning of the year, compared to where they were at the end of the year.” Because, she explains, “very often at the end of the year, we forget where we started. There’s a progression. And recognizing that progression, I think, can be very empowering to a student.”

In a school environment that can so easily focus on grades and performances, she speaks instead about growth, empowerment, and remembering.

Before the interview ends, she shares her favorite Hebrew word, *ashkarah*, meaning actually, the way we would respond to something amazing, like, “Actually? Really?” And then she mentions the word *ivrit*. “I actually love the word *ivrit*. Just by the word itself says so much and reminds me why I love Hebrew.”

Kirschbaum, discussing a life lesson, closed with, “I would say that Hebrew isn’t necessary to forge a relationship with Israel, but it will enrich your relationship with Israel.” Hebrew isn’t a barrier, it’s an invitation.

Beyond the language itself, Rachel’s teaching is about possibility and growth. She shows her students that transformation is attainable and that effort can carry them farther than they imagine. She constantly reminds students that learning languages isn’t just about words, but about how those words open doors to understanding, community, and shared experience. In every skit, conversation, and carefully constructed lesson, Kirschbaum leaves her mark not just as a teacher of Hebrew but as a teacher of life.



# Teens Making A Difference: How Community Service Shapes Local Lives

**By Mia Canarick**

Across towns like Tenafly and Scarsdale, local teens are finding that volunteering isn't just about checking a box for school—it's about making a real difference in people's lives. From helping small children at Hebrew schools to supporting youth with disabilities, community service programs are giving students a chance to learn, grow, and connect with their neighborhoods.

Freshman Giselle Goldenberg volunteers at the Chabad of Tenafly Hebrew School, where she assists teachers with young children during Sunday programs. "I love doing mitzvot and making others' lives better," she said. Goldenberg's experience has taught her patience, communication skills, and how to relate to kids with different personalities. "Sometimes, the kids can be difficult to work with, so you really need to socialize with them in a kind and caring way," she added.

Similarly, sophomore Zachary Greenberg helps lead activities at JCC Mid-Westchester's Sunday Funday, a socialization program for youth ages 3–21 with and without disabilities. Greenberg supports group leaders, guides children through games and crafts, and adapts activities so everyone can participate. "Committing to show up almost every Sunday has strengthened my reliability and time management," Greenberg said, adding that volunteering has also helped him develop empathy and problem-solving skills.

While Goldenberg and Greenberg are two examples, teens have a wide array of community service opportunities in the area. Local organizations offer programs in education, healthcare, food distribution, environmental care, and more. Whether it's tutoring younger students, helping at food banks, or assisting with events for chil-

dren with special needs, the options are diverse and meaningful. Community service not only benefits the people being helped, but it also leaves a lasting impression on volunteers themselves. Programs like Sunday Funday and Hebrew school reduce isolation for families, foster inclusion, and create safer, more connected communities. "It helps the kids because we want to make sure they are happy with their day," Goldenberg noted. Greenberg agreed, emphasizing that volunteering "builds a culture of inclusion and awareness that extends beyond the program into schools and neighborhoods."

For students wondering where to volunteer, the advice is simple: start small and find a program that fits your interests. "Look for opportunities that are structured, impactful, and local," Greenberg suggested. Goldenberg added, "Bringing a friend or doing the program with a group from school can also make the first steps less intimidating."

Volunteering can also teach life lessons that go beyond the classroom. Both Goldenberg and Greenberg shared stories of personal growth, from building trust with children to learning how to adapt to challenges. "Even if my career is not directly in social services, I plan to stay involved in volunteer work and use what I've learned about inclusion and commitment to guide my leadership style," Greenberg said.

Every hour volunteers give helps build a community that is more inclusive, compassionate, and connected, proving that even small acts can make a big difference.

## Balancing Both Worlds: Teachers' Perspectives on Sending Their Children to TLS

**By Ranit Berman**

Imagine this: you are walking to your next class, singing along to the music in your head, walking with your friends, and enjoying your time. All of a sudden, you look across the hall and see one of your parents. This might be something that you could never even imagine happening, but for some, it's a constant reality. Your first reaction might be negative, but would it really be so bad? For a number of faculty at TLS, it might even be a great experience. Unlike the students who may have mixed opinions, it seems as though the overall experience for teachers is positive. Many teachers expressed appreciation for being able to see their children in school, whether for convenience reasons or the sheer treasure of having more time together. "The best part is getting to see them more than previously", TLS math teacher Rachel Messinger said. "They spend so much time at school that it is an extra opportunity to get to see them even in passing or for a few minutes".

Similarly, for TLS Talmud teacher Lisa Bennet, there is also an important convenience factor that comes with having her children in the same building. "Figuring out if you're going home with this, that, or the other person,

it's easier to just grab them in the hallway, especially now that there are no cellphones", Bennett said. "Us faculty families, we've really got a strategic advantage in terms of planning rides...you can't just text that you are getting a ride with so and so, you've got to just grab them in the hallway, so that piece is definitely advantageous".

Not only do teachers value the practicality of having their children in the same building, but some teachers stated how much they learn from being a parent at the school and how that aspect has impacted the way that they interact with those around them. "I think it's been beneficial for me, and I have a super unique perspective." Ninth-grade dean Scott Kornberg said. "I know a lot of information about the school. I understand how it works internally, but as a parent, I also know how it works, so I'm able to share perspectives with families ... I can guide them both as a parent and also as a teacher in school".

In addition, one benefit of working in the same school as your children is that you can learn from their experiences and use that information to enhance your teaching styles. "I think that my experience as a parent has given me lessons and taught me things that I can then

bring into the classroom that I, throughout the years, have found to be especially helpful for students to hear from the teachers", Messinger said.

While some teachers find academic benefits in having their child at TLS, others see the benefits on a personal level. Balancing being a part of the faculty as well as a parent in the school can be difficult; however, it is important to Kornberg that families feel comfortable interacting with him both inside and outside of school settings. "I made it very clear to the parents that my personal life and my professional life are very different", Kornberg said. "I wanted the kids and the families to trust that, regardless of the fact that I swim in the same pond as them, they should feel comfortable and empowered to still come to me, to use me as a resource, and to not feel uncomfortable sharing things with me that they would with any other CAS teacher, at that time, in order to get to ensure that their kids got everything they needed in order to be successful".

In the end, sending your children to the school where you work might not sound right for every family, but many find this structure beneficial to their teaching and everyday routines.

## Backrooms of Leffell: Inside TLS's Most Overlooked Spaces

**By Nili Kriegel**

Behind the classrooms and crowded hallways of TLS, there are spaces students pass every day without a second thought, rooms that quietly hold their own stories, atmospheres, and memories.

As juniors who have spent years getting to know the building inside and out, these students offer especially credible perspectives on the school's hidden rooms. Their reflections reveal a nuanced side of these often overlooked spaces.

Inside the Media Center is a room that junior Hailey FioRito describes as "kind of like a fishbowl with curtains." Known by students as the VCR (Video Conference Room), it's a space that feels both visible and tucked away at the same time. "It's this little private spot that people are always curious about", she describes.

Despite its size, the room leaves a strong impression. FioRito describes a memorable experience from a lockdown drill taking place in the VCR. She recalls feeling "claustrophobic but safe" during the drill.

A very different energy fills the Board Room, described by junior Ella Dulitz as a place

where "people actually get stuff done." Completed with a square table surrounded by chairs and a smartboard, the room feels purposeful from the moment you walk in. "You feel very focused, like you are in a real meeting", she explains.

That sense of structure helps students concentrate. "When I was working there, I felt really productive," Dulitz describes. The environment encourages focus, making it different from other rooms in the building. "There's no other room like it; it really helps you sit down and focus," she adds.

In the cafeteria, another room sits tucked away: the PDR (Private Dining Room), which junior Alex Abramson describes as "a glass room with tables in the middle that hosts events during certain times of the day." Unlike traditional classrooms, it is not used constantly, which gives it a special role. "It's used for clubs and specific activities, such as Tanya Club and pickling", he explains.



Abramson describes the distinct atmosphere of this room. "It's kind of separate from everything, so it can be really quiet." At the same time, its visibility invites connections. "People can see what's going on and join in, so it feels inclusive to everyone." Over time, it has hosted a wide range of activities and gatherings, making it a flexible and welcoming space within the building.

Then there is the Scuttlebutt room, a space that junior Maayan Yolcut describes as both creative and meaningful. "It's a place where you can really open your mind and be creative", she explains.

More than anything, Yolcut describes the history this room carries. "So many students have come through here, found their interests, and had important experiences", she said. Though it may not always stand out at first glance, it holds a special place in the TLS community. "It's one of those rooms that people might overlook, but it actually holds a lot of significance."

Together, these spaces reveal something important: the character of a school is not just built in its main classrooms or busiest hallways. Rather, it lives in the smaller, maybe overlooked places that students spend their time in. Each of these rooms allows students to find focus, creativity, and connection, making them a meaningful part of the



## Securely It Can't Be That Bad: A focus on securely and

### By Talia Mittelman

In certain classes this year, students are using a new productive technology initiative called Securely. This program is a way to minimize distractions and maximize productivity while still allowing students to use computers for in-class schoolwork. The way it works is that TLS adds it as a Chrome extension for every student, and the teacher has control over the computers while class is in session. The teacher can control how many tabs can be open at once, what websites can be visited, when screens can be on or off, and more.

Spearheaded by the IT department wanting to try Securely in the high school, Judaic Studies teacher Ariel Simon volunteered to use it in his classes. "This is a standard in the middle school. In the entire middle school, every teacher has access to it," said Simon. Securely's features and capabilities are a way for students to use computers in the classroom without it becoming too much of a distraction. The features it offers give the teacher full control over devices during class time.

Along with Securely, Simon uses an online textbook through the website Kami. Before,

Simon would give paper packets to each student. However, COVID hit, and he sought to find an online alternative. He started with Adobe Acrobat, but not every student could download the app. Eventually, Simon discovered Kami and found it more efficient and environmentally friendly. With students returning to classrooms, Simon found computers to be more of a distraction than a tool. Simon said, "I have noticed that over the past two or three years, it's been very hard for me to keep students focused on classwork when they are signed on to their computers while in class." On the verge of going back to paper, Simon was connected with Securely.

In addition to both Securely and Kami, students have to use school-issued Chromebooks. The sole reason for this is that the majority of MacBook users can use other apps and platforms besides their school browser during the day. However, the Chromebooks only contain the school account and, as a result, give full access to the teacher using the software.

Students who experience Securely have mixed reactions. Some find it helpful for their focus and productivity in class. Oth-

ers don't appreciate their lack of control over the device. Regaining control of their school accounts only happens after the teacher turns off the class session. However, if the teacher were to forget, all tabs would be blocked, and students would be unable to access the school website, their email, or assignments. This is especially difficult for students who still use personal Chromebooks outside of the classroom. "I would need to go to IT after every class we had to get Securely turned off," said junior Ruth Katz. She was particularly affected by the few times Securely was forgotten to be turned off or accidentally turned on. Upon not being able to access important schoolwork, Katz said, "I fell very behind on my homework and had to ask some teachers for an extension."

There are many pros and cons for the use of Securely and Kami in the classroom and, right now, the future of both of them is unclear. If Simon continues with Kami, he is the only teacher to do so. It is the platform that works best with his curriculum and classroom rules. However, Securely was spearheaded by the IT department for a trial this year. This means it could be used in other classrooms in the future. I guess we'll

## *Agora Seminars: TLS's New Humanities-Driven Electives*

### By Dahlia Deener

Many students and faculty at TLS will take pride in either learning from or initiating classes such as E-Squared, Computer Science, Independent Science Research, or Leffell Space. These classes often bring out the best in students, as they are able to develop a niche set of skills that foster their interests. Many students claim that such programs, offering expertise in the STEM department, have helped them in college and beyond in their professional lives.

While these signature programs are important and worthy of taking pride in, they only strengthen the skills of those interested in studying STEM during and after high school. History Department Chair Harry Shontz has worked to remedy this narrow focus of study with Agora Seminars: these classes are centered around the humanities and are set to pilot in the fall of 2026.

Agora, the Greek word for "gathering place" or "assembly", was the central place for thought and activity in ancient Athens. Serving as a hub for intellectual thought, Agora became the place where citizens gathered daily to exchange ideas and discuss various areas of study. TLS is taking this idea and transforming it into rigorous classes that dive deep into areas such as constitutional law, international relations, political philosophy,

comparative government, Jewish law, ethics in business, finance, medicine, and other fields, and the literature of law, politics, and power. These classes will work to broaden critical thinking and analytical skills for students interested in the humanities.

"One of the things that we've been very proud of in recent years is we've developed these signature programs that allow students to utilize their creativity, to work in teams", Head of School Dr. Michael Kay says. "But they've all been science-based. We've never created an opportunity in the humanities for people more interested in history or literature."

Dr. Kay explains that the courses hope to teach students more about research, debate, and analytical skills that they wouldn't necessarily obtain from these types of science-based classes. One of the specific classes will even feature someone who has done their own research and become an expert in the Jewish and Biblical influence on the U.S. Constitution to help teach the seminar. The aim is to introduce students to the specific set of skills and expertise that are central to these humanities-driven courses. "We're looking at orienting a lot of the courses and coursework around real-world, application-based work", Shontz says. He explains that the classes will be "doing the kind of work that the professional in the field

would be doing." The teachers will "introduce it [the class] with these fake scenarios, international hypothetical crisis scenarios of what do you do when you're a diplomat and you've been alerted there's a satellite .... Do you reach out to the UN, do you shut it down, how do you act". These are the types of interactive, real-world experiences students of Agora can expect.

When asked about the specific classes and how they will function, Shontz explains that the seminars won't run the same way a conventional history or English class is. They won't have traditional assessments, but rather tangible, real-world application projects that will be rooted in the class's focus. He also describes the culminating project that the courses will work towards: it will function similar to a WISE project that seniors take on after returning from LVN.

TLS has spent years investing time and money into its programs that output science-based skills and awards that are important to honor. However, if you are someone who doesn't necessarily want to learn the language of Python, or construct a model airplane, or even code a button, TLS's new Agora Seminars is a phenomenal start to your interests in the humanities.

## The Admission Vision: A Deep Dive Into TLS Admissions

### By Abby Kass

Especially in the high school, TLS students constantly worry about college admissions; what activities and classes they should be in, who they should be making connections with, and what types of grades they should be getting. But instead of focusing on where to go from TLS, let's back up: have you wondered what it takes to get into TLS? What does the admissions process look like, and what qualities are looked for in a prospective student?

Jackie Grosser, a former TLS student and current high school director of admissions, explains that in both the high school and the middle school, the admissions team looks for qualities that will mutually benefit TLS and the student's experience at TLS.

"We're looking for the right fit for the school and that the school is the right fit for each individual student," Grosser said. "Every human being is made up of a million different puzzle pieces... so we're looking for kids that are excited to be in a Jewish school whose puzzle pieces work into our bigger picture."

Ryan Finkelstein, another former TLS student and, newly, middle school director of admissions, adds that TLS's priority is for every student to feel adequately supported.

"What I've learned, which is actually kind of beautiful, is that the school doesn't want you to come in and not succeed," Finkelstein said. "So if you're a student that we think is going to come into the school and struggle with some major aspect, such as managing a dual curriculum, and it's going to be a hard and unenjoyable experience based on what we can offer, then we don't want that distress for your child. It's not that we don't want you to come to the school, it's that we want to prioritize each individual's needs and the last thing we want is for your child to struggle."

Once families establish that TLS is the right fit for them, the high school admissions cycle includes an open house, tours with families, a formal application, shadowing current students, and coordination with various administrators. In the middle school, the cycle differs slightly; for example, there isn't an open house, and parents are more involved in the process.

"We do a parent interview separate from a student interview in the middle school," Grosser said. "Where students are developmentally, it's appropriate to partner with parents right from the beginning."

An important aspect of the admissions process, specifically at TLS, is the coordination with other Jewish day schools in the area. The close proximity of numerous Jewish day schools in the area can pose a challenge to admissions, but the various admissions teams have a way to circumvent that.

"We are part of a consortium of other Jewish day schools, so we have this partnership in that we are all supportive of one another," Grosser said. "There's a calendar for open houses so we all don't schedule around schools that are in our immediate catchment area. We all send our admissions letters on the same day, so there's no 'oh I got from this school first'. It's a really nice idea that we're all working together, even though we're all also working for Jewish students in our institutions."

Both Grosser and Finkelstein have had previous professional positions unrelated to admissions, but their shared love of the school as alumni has fostered their appreciation for their current work. "It's just so easy to talk about the place that I loved then and love now", Grosser said.

Commenting on the highs and lows of her current work, Grosser mentions that there is, of course, disappointment, but it would be a

disservice not to discuss the satisfaction that comes with the admissions process.

"I love seeing the final product of a class," Grosser said. "I love seeing when the class is formed and at graduation, when I can look on this stage and say 'wow, I remember interviewing that kid in eighth grade' or 'they were so nervous about this and look at them now'. The challenge is always the sadness when a family ultimately makes a different educational choice."

Shifting gears slightly, given that TLS is a K-12 school, admissions can't be discussed without mentioning the lower school admissions as well. Although seemingly far away (both physically and mentally) from the high school bubble, the admissions process in the lower school is symbolic of the foundational values on which TLS was built. Diana Schutt, another TLS alumna, and director of lower school admissions, emphasizes this in the way that she explains how involved the community can be in the admissions process. From inter-parent discussions between prospective and current families, to lower school students acting as classroom ambassadors and greeting visiting families, everyone truly plays a part.

"What seems to be the most compelling part of young families' decisions these days is 'what community am I going to feel a real connection with?' Schutt said. "We are offering that unique opportunity to be part of a lifelong community. "

In terms of the actual admission of students, Schutt focuses on how well the child will be able to acclimate and function in a school setting. Even for struggling students, she mentions that TLS has great infrastructure in place to reflect the pledges made during the admissions process: to provide an excellent Jewish educational experience.

"Collaborative learning is emphasized... We also enable our students to feel fearless enough to explore and think critically by giving them open-ended challenges and validating every thought and attempt. There are no mistakes- just learning and growth," Schutt said. "Our teachers are child specialists: people who really can see a child for who they are and communicate that to the child, [so] that our students are known as their strengths, feel seen, loved, liked, and are motivated to learn."

As an alumna, Schutt feels similarly to Grosser and Finkelstein: bringing people into the community she has and continues to cherish is such a gift. "This isn't a job for our admissions team," Schutt said. "We're just sharing with others what we've experienced ourselves. I'm talking about my family and second home".

Although the "buzz", as Schutt calls it, surrounding lower school admissions is so rewarding, there is another aspect of the job that she feels is unmatched.

"I've had the honor of welcoming families where it truly felt like joining our school was a gift that could change the trajectory of their lives," Schutt said. "It felt like a real mitzvah—connecting them with a community that would embrace, support, and guide them."

From high school admission all the way down to lower school admission, the value of Jewish education is prevalent, and the main motivator, throughout, as Grosser puts perfectly: "Our mission is to educate as many Jewish kids as we can, [and] that is the most beautiful mission I think we can have."

# Play Connections!

PHONES	BOOTS	PAJAMAS	SLIPPERS
HULU	UNKOSHER FOOD	SITTING	AI
PEOPLE OPTED OUT	TALKING	DOING HOMEWORK	DRINKS
NOT HAVING A SIDDUR	GAMES	NETFLIX	FIDGETS



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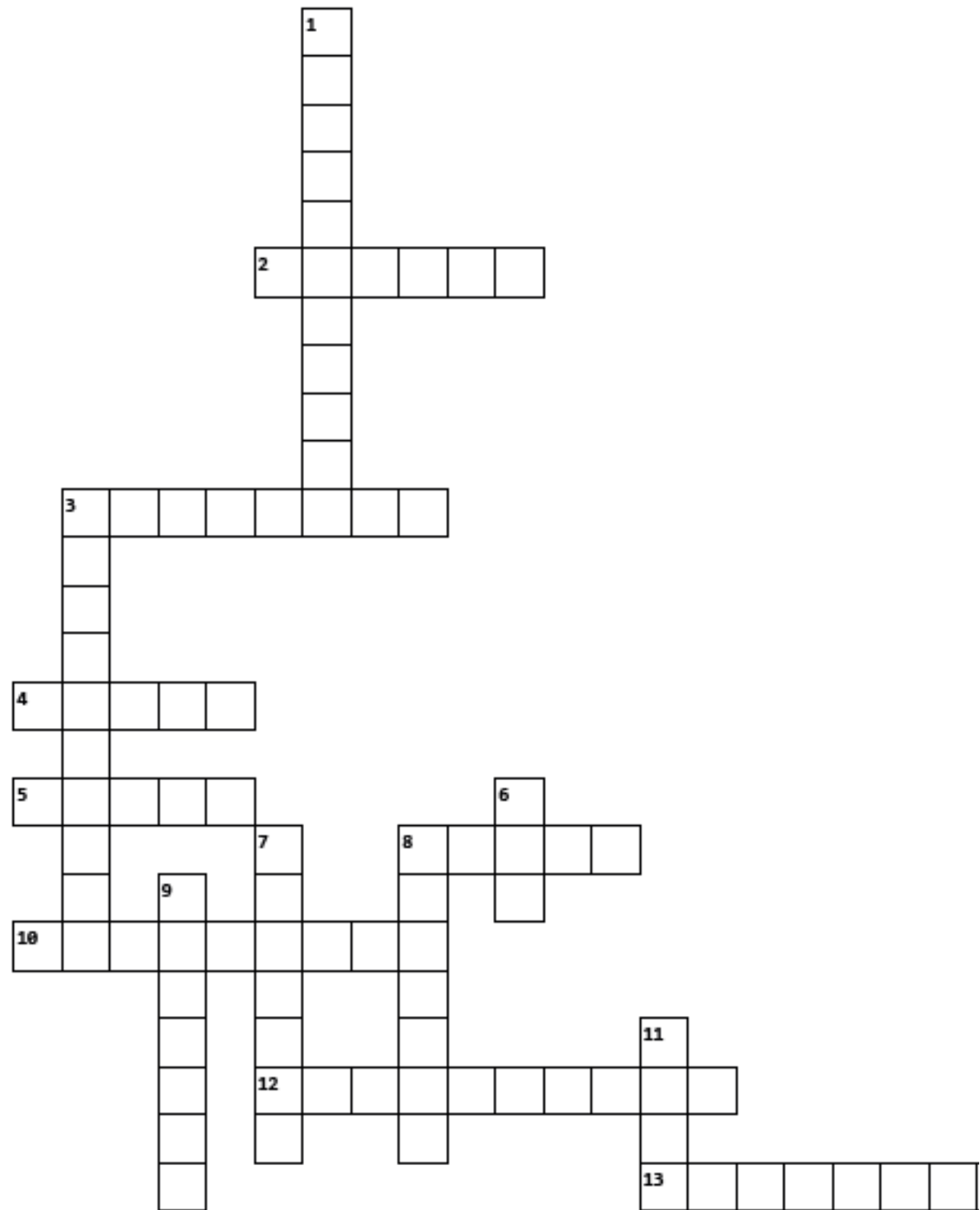
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# Try a Crossword!



**Across**

- 2.** Hyper-fixation fidget
- 3.** Tab to check grades
- 4.** Dress-up day
- 5.** The grade problem-solvers
- 8.** Favorite lunch
- 10.** Website I never leave
- 12.** Best block
- 13.** Time for fun (and, literally, community)

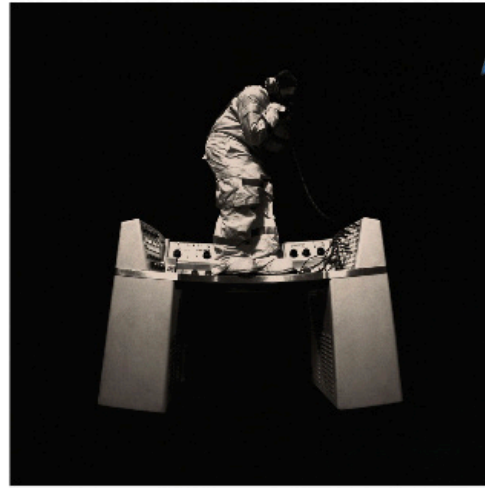
**Down**

- 1.** Where to log hours
- 3.** Fix-my-hair day
- 6.** Carpeted room
- 7.** 9:03-9:43
- 8.** Least-favorite lunch
- 9.** The hechsher man
- 11.** Is it \_\_\_ 1 or 2?

# TLS's Top 4 Songs



**DtMF** 2025  
BAD BUNNY



**E85** 2026  
DONTOLIVER



**Babydoll** 2018  
DOMINIC FIKE



**Risk It All** 2026  
BRUNO MARS



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Check out our website at [TLRoar.com](http://TLRoar.com),  
or scan this QR code!

