

THE LION'S ROAR

The Leffell School • June 2026

**Toddler to Twelfth: TLS Seniors
who Have, and Haven't Been
Here Since Kindergarten**

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



Letter from the Editors

Hello. We are thrilled to publish our second edition as the new Editors-in-Chief of The Lion's Roar. In our term, we are committed to producing quality articles that are thoroughly written and edited. This issue features some of our new initiatives, including deep-dive articles, fun features, and informative opinions. We have games, an advice column, 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

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.

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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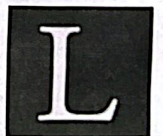
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From A to Rav Z

By Isaiah Yolkut

His name might not be Moshe, but he definitely knows what it's like to be a stranger in a strange land. Rav Yitzchak Zilbiger has lived in Jerusalem, London, Kansas, Maryland, and New York, built a life from scratch in each one, and taught over a thousand students. He organized two decades of Yom HaZikaron programming, swims four times a week, and reads Harlan Coben thrillers. He will also tell you, with complete sincerity, that it's not really about him.

Sitting across from him, I realized two things. First, I was in the presence of a man who thinks a lot, more than any of us ever could. But not in a simple way, but through experience and reflection. And second, getting him to compliment himself is roughly as easy as convincing him to stop teaching Tanakh.

Ask Rav Z. to introduce himself, and he does not simply state his name; he tells a story: "My full name is Yitzchak Zilbiger," he begins. "Yitzchak is the name I received when I was born. I was born on the second day of Sukkot, so the Ushpizin is Yitzchak." He pauses, smiling. "I hope I can continue to laugh like Yitzchak." Yitzchak, of course, means to laugh, and the name is rooted in the biblical patriarch Yitzchak for Sarah's laughter upon hearing she would bear a child at an old age. It is, as it turns out, an entirely appropriate name for this man.

Rav Z. was born and raised in Jerusalem, and of course grew up speaking Hebrew. He still speaks it at home with his wife, who is also Israeli. In 1989, the two of them packed up and moved to London with their young daughter, where they lived for six years inside what he remembers as a remarkably warm and close community. "The community in London back then was really, really amazing," he says. From London, the family moved to Overland Park, Kansas, which has a modest Jewish population of around five thousand. He had applied for the teaching job there by actual postal mail, back when that was how things worked. "Back in the days, there was no online," he explains, reminiscing fondly. "You applied to jobs by letters, by sensing, what they called in England, 'the post'." After about eight years in Kansas, the family made their way to Silver Spring, Maryland, for a year, "We got stuck on the way, metaphorically and physically," before arriving at TLS in 2006. He has now been here for 21 years. "I'm still here, it means I did something right". He definitely did.

Moving across continents sounds wonderful until you actually do it, and Rav Z. is serious about what reality demands. "When you go to a new country and want to establish a life, you need credit," he says. "Nobody just gives you a credit card. You have to open a bank account." Of course, he means it literally, and then immediately metaphorically. To create friends, to build a life, to become known somewhere that does not know you yet, all while holding on to who you are. There is a Hebrew song he loves that captures it: everywhere you go, you take yourself with you. "But on the other hand," he adds, "you take something from each place you've been." England gave him community. Israel gave him a background. Kansas gave him adventure. New York, he says, arrived "at the right time in our life." He smiles. "It's a journey, it's a story, you know. You create your own story, and I always say that you walk through a tunnel, but the light is at the back. We don't know where, and God laughs, but sometimes God smiles with you."

Before coming to this school, he taught the full range of Judaic studies. When he arrived here, he was asked what he wanted to focus on, and he chose Tanakh. He has been teaching it ever since, and the reason he gives is essentially literary. "Think about the dynamics in Tanakh, the characters, it's basically literature. It's literature, and I am a literature person."

His favorite story in all of Tanakh is the saga of Yoseph. Not just for the vastness of the narrative, which begins when Yoseph is seventeen and ends when he is one hundred and ten, but for one small, quiet moment within it: when Yoseph is sent to find his brothers and, wandering and lost, tells a stranger 'I am looking for my brothers'. "Metaphorically, where are they? This is one of my favorite statements in all of Tanakh. Where are you, my brothers? The idea of being open to each other. Where are you? Where are we?" He also

loves that the Yoseph story moves through time the way his favorite films do, folding into the present. "I also like movies that go back and forth, future and past, I guess maybe I'm getting old."

When asked what makes his teaching special, he goes quiet for a moment, genuinely uncomfortable, not because he lacks an answer but because talking about himself feels beside the point. Eventually, he offers, "At times, you need flexibility. At times, you bend a little bit, carefully. It's like Play-Doh. A little bit, you can shape it." And then, almost as a punchline: "Sometimes one plus one is three." He is describing the alchemy that happens when a student and a teacher meet each other with enough openness that something unexpected happens, when the text and the person create meaning together. And he is realistic about it too. Not everyone will connect. Not every lesson will show a spark. He thinks of teaching the way a farmer thinks of planting. "Maybe five years from now, you'll think: 'Oh, I remember that.' It's like a seed. It will go eventually."

Over 21 years at TLS, averaging 50 to 60 students a year, he estimates he has taught around a thousand students at this school alone. His hope for all of them is quietly ambitious: not that they remember him, but that they carry something forward from the content. "It's not about me," he says. "It's about the content."

Up until a few years ago, he also organized some of the school's Yom HaZikaron programming, a fact that he proves by showing me a neatly organized set of computer files covering each year from 2008 to 2024. The program brought together students and music in a carefully built ceremony marking Israel Memorial Day, setting the tone for the Yom Ha'atzmaut celebration that followed. "People left the room with tears," he says simply. "Tears of excitement. It was really a moment." He stopped organizing it two years ago for practical reasons. He has also served in the IDF, something he mentions briefly and with obvious pride. "It was a privilege to serve," he says, and clearly means it.

Outside of school, Rav Z. is a committed reader and a four-times-a-week swimmer. The reading skews to thrillers, specifically Harlan Coben, whose novels are set largely in New York and New Jersey and have mostly been adapted into movies and TV. "I recommend all of them," he says with the enthusiasm of a true fan. "Most of the stories happen in New Jersey, New York, and it's a thriller with real suspense." He has a rule about adaptations, too: "I like the movies after the book. This way I can put it all together." He also keeps a library of Hebrew commentaries, psychology, and a handful of English titles he recommends warmly, including Victor Frankl and a slim book called *Make Your Bed*. "Really short, but really powerful," he says. "Books that give you inspiration in the morning and say: today is the day."

At the end of the interview, when asked for a life lesson, Rav Z. does what he always does: he points outward instead of inward. He had received a piece of writing the night before that had stayed with him, and he read it aloud. "It is easy to forget how blessed we are to wake up, to eat well, to move our bodies, to care for others. Even the tired moments mean we are alive. Gratitude is found in the ordinary, and that is what makes life beautiful." He sat with it for a moment, deep in thought, and then gave his own wisdom. "To see beauty, you just need to open your eyes. Sometimes we don't see. Don't let your challenges block your view. Challenges come every moment, but you have a choice." Not an easy choice, he adds quickly. "Not easy, I know," he says. "But we have a choice."

After 21 years, roughly a thousand students, four countries, one serious swimming habit, one daughter, and four grandchildren, the amazing Rav Z. is still here, still teaching, still planting seeds of wisdom every day.

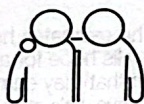
He hopes you remember the content, but something tells us at TLR that you'll also remember him.

The Failure to Launch: 11th and 8th Grade Buddy Program

By Talia Mittelman

If you were around at the beginning of the year, you might have heard a rumor of an 11th and 8th grade buddy program. You might also notice that we're nearing the end of the year, and there were only two events that happened in this program, both of which were before Thanksgiving. So what exactly happened? Could we see a resurgence of this program next year? What were the specific goals or challenges in attempting this program?

To recap: at the beginning of the year, juniors were sent an email to see who would be interested in engaging in a new 11th and 8th grade buddy system. If they were, they filled out a Google Form and were paired up with one, two, three, or, in some cases, four 8th graders. The 11th graders ran programming for the entire 8th grade with the intention for the 11th graders to schedule lunches with their buddies.



The main goals of the program were different for the two grades. For the middle schoolers, Rabbi Adam Cohen said, "It would be a nice thing if when these eighth graders enter the high school—or maybe even in their decision-making process about high school—there'd be familiarity between them and the students in the oldest grade."

As part of the 8th grade transition process to high school, this would serve as a way to build meaningful connections that could potentially translate to the 11th grade peer leaders the following year. In relation to peer leadership, a big focus of the program was to be inclusive and allow all the juniors to play a part in doing so. With these important goals, it's confusing to see how the program fizzled out.

Due to busy schedules, people were unable to devote enough time to ensure its success. "I think it's a sad reality, but teachers will sometimes, myself included, feel like we'll sacrifice the new thing because we get so caught up with our regular things that need to happen," said Cohen.

This also extended to the 8th graders and juniors. Both respective years are incredibly busy and demanding of the students. It can be hard to juggle all the responsibilities and regular coursework on top of a time-consuming program.

Apart from everyone being occupied, the programming that the juniors ran was not encouraging active conversation between the two grades. The first event consisted of Rosh Hashanah-inspired stations and activities for the entire eighth grade class. This proved to be hectic as students ran between stations in

the middle school gym. There was no room to chat one-on-one with the buddies and get to know them more personally. The other event took place shortly before Thanksgiving and had the juniors split into groups and visit eighth grade advisory classes for cookie jar making. While this activity was smaller and had more room for discussion, there was no way to facilitate conversation or get to know our personal buddies. After this activity, there were no more follow-ups or planned events.

Even though it didn't succeed this year, there's a chance it could improve and get planned before next year for the rising 11th graders. "I would love for us to try to do it again with more conversation," said Cohen. "Hopefully, they hope to try this again and learn from the mistakes of the trial run. If it does work, it could become a special tradition and open the doors to more interactions across grades."

Therefore, the TLS administration does not lose hope; there is a great possibility that there will be a similar program in the future, open to the incoming 8th and 11th graders.



The Phenomenon of Hand Games: The Past, Present, and Future

By Abi Wiseman

Rock, Paper, Scissors. Concentration 64. ABC, it's easy as 1, 2, 3. Lemonade Crunchy Ice. Quak Diddly Oso. Does anything ring a bell? For many, these games are deeply ingrained in childhood memories. If you notice, they all involve rhythm, clapping, memorization, and focus. But why were these games created? What is their history? Where do they come from?



To start with a classic, Concentration 64 evolved from African traditions over centuries. While the exact origin is unknown, the constant hand clapping links African traditions blended with European influences. This game was taught in schools to help students pass the time, boost memorization, and maintain concentration and focus.

Next, ABC, it's easy as 1, 2, 3 originates from a song by the Jackson 5. This R&B hit during the 1970s became the epitome of schoolyard culture. While the lyrics from the song do not remain the same, children adapted the words into a rhythmic and fast-paced game, chan-

neling focus and memorization. Additionally, this game includes cultural significance. It highlights "black folk games" that transformed African American pop culture into lasting playground traditions. Other hand games that are involved with these ties include Miss Mary Mack or Lemonade Crunchy Ice.

Third is the go-to game for boredom! Quak Diddly Oso is an elimination game, and while there is no one origin, it evolved as part of folklore centuries ago. This game has no single author; rather, it was passed down orally and contributes to the reason why there are so many variations of the lyrics. This game was part of a larger collection of family games known as the "Stella Ella Ola."



An all-time favorite but lesser-known game is the Avocado Game. While played in pairs, the game evolved originally from American and Canadian elementary playgrounds. This game was most popular during the 2000s and experienced a surge in popularity on social media

platforms such as YouTube and TikTok. Finally, the best for last, Rock, Paper, Scissors. This global sensation is not only one of the most popular hand games we know of today, but also one of the oldest, originating 2000 years ago in ancient China. Originally called Shoushiling, the game first appeared in the book Wuzazu during the Ming Dynasty. The different hand motions of rock, paper, and scissors are different today, however. Before, the hand motions represented different animals that were prominent in Chinese culture. The modern hand signs we know of today emerged during the 17th century in Japan. It then spread to the west during the 19th and 20th centuries and became involved in English literature, newspapers, and then the quick decision game we know of today.



Ultimately, while some kids may just think they are having fun or passing time with their friends, they are actually keeping traditions thousands of years old alive, one clap at a time.

Toddler to Twelfth: TLS Seniors who Have, and Haven't Been Here Since Kindergarten

By Abby Kass

There are a plethora of ways in which TLS differs from the traditional U.S. education system; the most obvious being that we're a Jewish day school, not a secular public school. But one often-overlooked point is that many students at TLS have been going to school with the same people since they were, if not in kindergarten, then in early elementary grades. This poses both pros and cons: on the one hand, it can create a stronger grade unity, but can also foster exclusion of those who come to TLS later in their student career. This article takes these varying opinions into account from the perspective of both those who have, and haven't, been at TLS since kindergarten. Is a difference really felt?

Senior Kate Glick, who has been at TLS since kindergarten, hasn't necessarily seen exclusion of people who have joined the grade later, especially for those who joined in freshman year. She pointed out, "I guess it depends on grades, but for my grade, there were so many new kids, so I think it was kind of hard for anyone to just want to stay within their Leffell kindergarten friend group."

Senior Harry Lackowitz, who has also been at TLS since kindergarten, feels similarly to Glick that fitting into the grade is circumstantial.



"I feel like it depends on the person," Lackowitz said. "I've seen some kids fit right in immediately, and then other kids take a little longer to find their crew. But I feel like by the end, everyone finds their friends."

Although Glick hasn't seen exclusion, she understands the implications that going to school with the same people for so long can have.

"I think it was harder for me to get closer with people, just because I hadn't built new relationships like that my whole life," Glick said. "I definitely do think I don't know how to interact with people as well as my public school friends, and there's definitely a different level of anxiety about it." Lackowitz similarly mentioned that being at TLS since kindergarten has perhaps put his friendship-making abilities at a slight disadvantage.

Although Glick worries about these possible ramifications, she is especially concerned with making non-Jewish friends at college. "I'm more worried about the fact that I'm in such a Jewish bubble, and now I'm about to have friends who know nothing about Judaism," Glick said.

Senior Netta Pack, who joined TLS in 9th grade, felt some of the difficulties of entering a K-12

school in the middle, but also appreciates what TLS does to foster inclusion.

"As a freshman coming from public school, it was intimidating because you see everyone else in their own friend groups, and everyone else that had just gone on their eighth-grade Israel trip together and bonded, and it kind of felt like I was on the outskirts because of that," Pack said. "They also do make a huge effort to include you and make you feel more welcome into that circle, but you definitely have to put yourself out there."

Pack elaborates: "as you get older, and as you kind of learn the dynamics of your own grade, and also the dynamics of the school, hanging out with people outside of school, I don't feel any of those struggles at all."

Although a difference may be felt at first, TLS students point out that even the students who enter the grade after kindergarten can acclimate. By the time they are seniors, the grade feels united as one.



The Extra Credit Debate: Rewarding Effort or Encouraging Shortcuts?

By Daniella Raich

In schools across the country, the policy on extra credit for exams remains a topic of ongoing debate between teachers and students alike. Should extra credit be allowed? If so, what form should it take? Recent interviews with several educators at TLS reveal a range of perspectives on the benefits and drawbacks of this practice.

Ms. Mager, Chair of the math department at TLS, supports the idea of bonus questions on tests but within limits. "If we had more class time in which to give a longer test," she explained, "I would like the idea of putting a bonus question on the test because I think it could be more of a challenge question that gets kids thinking." According to Mager, such questions could serve as an engaging way for students who finish early to focus on the material further without simply being given extra points they didn't earn.

However, Mager is cautious about larger extra credit assignments that might reward students who neglect regular coursework. "I don't think there should be an extra credit project that just creates points for someone, because I think then you're rewarding the idea of students not doing what is expected of them in the first place, which in my opinion, sends the wrong message," Mager said. She

also noted the heavy workload many students face and warned against extra credit assignments that could detract from responsibilities in a variety of classes.

Mr. Kogut, high school science teacher at TLS, offers another take on bonus questions, sharing his background on the matter. "My experience with bonus questions when I was in another school was often giving a question that was a fun, one-minute gag kind of a question just to lower the tension of the experience of an exam a little bit and put in something fun with low stakes," he said. This approach, Kogut believes, can ease students' anxiety during an exam and help the students' mental focus if they are struggling.

Still, Kogut emphasized that students should primarily be responsible for their learning throughout the semester. "It's really the student's responsibility to take ownership of their learning to achieve the goals they have," he stated.

Meanwhile, high school principal Mr. Bas-sin highlighted the core rationale behind the current strict policy of prohibiting extra credit projects or questions. "Grades are designed to demonstrate in shorthand a student's overall academic achievement, not their potential, not how hard they work, but what

they were actually able to achieve," he clarified. That said, he later acknowledged that teachers may occasionally exercise discretion in unique situations where a student's grade on an assignment might not reflect their usual performance due to exceptional circumstances.

So why does the policy on extra credit remain? Each of the points made by these educators indicate a desire for fairness and accountability. This will encourage students to prioritize consistent effort rather than relying on bonus points to salvage their grades late in the term.

Even with the consensus made among faculty, students still tend to be upset by the lack of extra credit options. While some may feel frustrated, teachers like Ms. Mager believe that learning to manage responsibility and hard work without shortcuts is an important life skill. Schools are working to try to find the right mix of challenge, fairness, and workload when dealing with this issue.

As faculty and staff look ahead in our education system, finding a middle ground that motivates students, preserves grading integrity, and respects their workload remains a key challenge in the ongoing conversation about extra credit.

Hallway Psychology: The Personalities Behind TLS Offices

By Dahlia Deener

Have you ever felt a little bit on edge taking that turn into the Chairs' office when just across the hallway is the cozy Deanery? Have you ever wondered why you always have to use the phone outside the upstairs faculty office when you can always pop into 106 (the downstairs faculty office) to ask a five-minute question? There are, without a doubt, "vibes" in the various spaces TLS students go to meet with their teachers. "Collaborative, busy, and hard-working" are the words Mr. Eichten, Chair of the English Department and representative of the Chairs' office, would use to describe his space. "Comfortable, supportive, fun" are the words Ms. Samel, English teacher and representative of 106, would use to describe her space. A variety of TLS teachers and staff try to explain how they, and how they think students, view their office.

Eichten labels the Chairs' office as a supportive environment that constantly welcomes guests. He even speaks to the type of conversation that often takes place in his tight but welcoming space. "Professional things that involve students," Eichten says. "It's like a 'what happens in Vegas' sort of thing."

Students tend to creep into the Chairs' office before asking a question, making sure they are allowed to come in at the time they do. This routine doesn't come out of nowhere; rather, it is rooted in the sense of professionalism and privacy in that office. Of course, every teacher has confidential conversations in their offices, but Eichten explains why the Chairs' office might come with that type of feeling even more.

"When I was working in room 106, I found it difficult to get personal space. I would often have to find other locations in the school in order to get work done," Eichten claims.

The open vibe of 106 isn't just felt among students, but other faculty and staff admit the friendly atmosphere that comes with the English and History faculty filled office.

"Sometimes we might be a little too social, but if anyone needs coverage or if something comes up in someone's personal life, everyone else quickly volunteers to help out," Samel says.

The door of 106 stays open just like the teachers who work there. I bet you didn't even know the phone beside the office worked. "I don't really notice students using that phone outside the office," Samel admits. However, the common rule still stands. "Really, we're supposed to try to keep kids out."

Although it may seem like you can just waltz in, make sure to peek in or knock next time

you want to enter 106. Samel continues to describe 106 with joy, explaining the office pranks and supportive energy that the faculty brings each day. She even compares herself and her fellow coworkers to her students.

"We get overwhelmed by having a lot of work. We get stressed when we're trying to do too many things or there are too many demands on us," Samel says. "We're not that different from students."

Perhaps the relatability or conversational and joking environment is what is so attractive to students who pass 106 every forty-seven minutes.

What may feel like the opposite vibe is right upstairs. Although the source of incredible teachers and staff, the upstairs faculty office looms a vibe of intensity that just isn't had in 106. Mr. Mond, high school Tanakh and Philosophy teacher, describes his office from the inside and outside.

"I think the room itself is cheerful enough," Mond says.

Although not described with as much glee as Samel, Mond does mention the perks of sharing a room with his fellow Tanakh department.

"The Tanakh teachers always have great Tanakh discussions," Mond says. "Someone will have some great insight, and it's really interesting to have discussions."

Although lacking the office pranks, the upstairs office is constantly buzzing with biblical discussions; I would expect nothing less from the outstanding Tanakh department. In addition to the row of Tanakh teachers, the upstairs office also holds the conference room, a unique feature that teachers take advantage of to meet with students, take a phone call, or even just sit quietly. However, Mond describes a secret challenge of the room that most students might not know.

"It's a secret competition between teachers to try and get in there first. It's a common trick," Mond says. "Whoever gets in there first gets to determine what it is."

The secret rivalry in the upstairs office definitely translates right outside the door. I have witnessed, and experienced, standing awkwardly outside the office, clutching the phone to my ear, hoping someone will walk by and ask who I need to speak with. Mond admits that teachers encounter the same sort of ordeal with the phone.

"Do the teachers have an obligation to get people to open the door?" Mond questions. "I think no. But I do feel a little bad about [it] if the student did try the phone before they

went [inside the office]. On the other hand, you're a teacher. You're in the middle of your work."

Mond explains the multitude of vibes experienced in the upstairs office. From greeting Morah Irit every day with her cart of papers and laptops, to having cross-department friendships like himself and Ms. Sayles, the upstairs office is less intimidating than most students think.

Just down the hall is the place where students either feel the most safe, or print the most stuff: the high school Deanery. Mr. Kornberg, Dean of the 9th grade, offers unique insight into the vibes of the Deanery as someone who worked for years in the Chairs' office.

"So there's definitely a different vibe," Kornberg says. "On one hand, I really miss the camaraderie of being in an office with other people. But on the other hand, it's very nice to have my own space."

Not only is it nice to have his own space, but Kornberg took the liberty of making his office feel like a home for students who want to have a safe spot in school.

"It's a place where people feel comfortable to share their thoughts and feelings," Kornberg says. "Maybe take a rest when they need it to kind of reset, but also feel like they can seek advice and counsel."

Kornberg even pinpoints the thing that makes students so comfortable going to the Deanery.

"It's okay to lead with humor and empathy. I think that's kind of a big part of what we're doing," Kornberg explains. "We are constantly working to make things better."

Then, Kornberg says the most relatable statement of all. The words that almost all students feel every day, forgetting that others are doing the same. "We try."

The differences between the downstairs office, upstairs office, Chairs' office, and Deanery are uncanny. But the real question is, do students let their preconceived notions about the various faculty spaces allow them to use the offices differently based on their reputations? When asked how often students come into their respective offices on a daily basis on a scale from 1-10, Eichten, Samel, Mond, and Kornberg provide surprising answers that serve as an indicator of each of their respective offices' vibes.

"Seven," Eichten says. "Four," Samel claims. "Nine," Mond explains. And lastly, "ten," Kornberg admits.

Postseason Uncertainty: Impact on Section 1 Proposal

By Teddy Zaberto

Playing local opponents, competing throughout the regular season, and working toward postseason opportunities, TLS athletes participate in Section 1 athletics as part of the larger New York high school sports system. However, a current proposal being discussed in Section 1 could change what that experience looks like for TLS and other non-public schools in the section. The proposal would allow TLS to continue competing during the regular season, but would remove the school from the traditional Section 1 postseason path.

Teams would still be able to play the same local opponents and compete in their normal games throughout the season. However, the biggest change would come after the regular season ends.

"Section 1 is considering a proposal that would allow Leffell to continue competing in the NYSPHSAA during the regular season, meaning our teams would still play the same local

opponents and maintain our full schedules," TLS athletics director Scott D'Ottavio said. "However, the proposal would also remove Leffell from postseason eligibility, preventing our student athletes from participating in Section 1 playoffs, regional competitions, and state tournaments."

For TLS athletes, postseason competition is an important part of the high school sports experience. Playoffs allow teams to compete for championships after the regular season and test themselves against other high-level teams. If the proposal is adopted, TLS teams could still have strong seasons, but they would not be able to continue into Section 1 playoffs or championship competitions.

"If adopted, this change would significantly impact our athletes' opportunities to compete for championships and experience postseason play, a meaningful part of high school athletics. It's a big part of the high school experi-

ence," D'Ottavio said.

The proposal would affect student athletes across TLS's athletic program. While teams would still be able to practice, play games, and compete during the regular season, the removal of postseason play would change what teams are working toward. For many athletes, the possibility of reaching the playoffs is a major goal during the season.

Families and students may hear about the proposal and assume that TLS would no longer be able to compete in Section 1 at all. However, the proposal being discussed would not remove TLS from regular-season competition. Instead, it would prevent TLS and other non-public schools from participating in the traditional Section 1 postseason, though affected schools would reportedly have the option to compete in a separate non-public postseason tournament. This means TLS sports teams' playoff opportunities would look different from

those of public schools in Section 1.

"Families should understand that the proposal being discussed in Section 1 would allow Leffell teams to keep playing their full regular-season schedules, but it would take away their ability to compete in the postseason," D'Ottavio said. "That means our athletes could work hard all season, succeed against their opponents, and still be barred from playoffs and championship opportunities."

For now, the proposal is still part of an ongoing discussion within Section 1. Ultimately, the decision is about more than just logistics; it could change what teams are working toward throughout the season and how athletes understand the rewards of their hard work. While TLS would still remain active in regular-season athletics, the proposal raises important questions about competition and the role postseason play has in the high school sports experience.

9th Grade Student Recap: An Overview of the Transition to High School

By Simone Schwartzbard and Nava Friedland

As the school year wraps up, and new students begin to enroll, the freshmen recap their first year of high school.

After completing middle school, Freshman Victoria Hirsch says the transition was easy, both socially and academically. "They prepared us for the amount of work we have. I felt ready," Hirsch says. "Also, the finals at the end of the [eighth grade] year were a good way to have an idea of what high school finals would be like."

Hirsch explains she felt confident throughout freshman year in all classes and the transition between grades went well. Additionally, although she feels greatly connected to new students who also joined this year, it took a while to become close. Hirsch says the only thing that could make the transition smoother would be "more social events at the beginning of the year to help integrate the grade".

Freshman Jacob Gold, who previously attended a public school, says the academic change was difficult in the Jewish subjects, and he had trouble integrating socially with the students who had attended TLS from a young age.

"My teachers prepared me for the secular classes but not the Jewish classes," Gold says. He later explains that because he came from public school, he expected it to be a difficult transition, but going to a Sunday school for Hebrew helped.

Socially, Gold says he now feels integrated within the grade but it took a while to get comfortable. "Everyone's known each other for so long so it's hard to get caught up with them," Gold says. "I used to have 700 kids in my grade, and there were barely any new boys this year." Gold explains that going from such a large grade to a smaller one of just 57 kids, and being one of two new boys, becoming close with others in the grade was a struggle at first.

From a different perspective, freshman Sydney Brown previously attended a Jewish private school. First coming to TLS, Brown noticed

the difference in the school environment. "High school is very different compared to middle school because students have more freedom, but there is also more work."

"I don't feel that my teachers properly prepared me for high school," Brown said. She further discussed how the levels of each class are a bit different from her old school. "I don't think that academically there was a big change in any subject, but everything is more advanced."

Brown commented on the difference in the size of her old grade compared to now, since her old school was much smaller with only 30 kids in a grade. She says, "school has been a big change socially because in middle school, I had a very small grade."

Brown agreed that having other new kids come this year was very helpful with allowing her to adapt to the new environment. Brown said, "I have felt connected to other new students who joined this year."

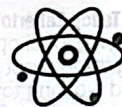
Living in New Jersey, it takes Brown about 45 minutes to get to school. However, getting to Westchester on the weekends has been a big hassle. She mentions, "for me, I think that the most difficult part of the transition was that I now go to school in a different state."

Brown elaborates on what could make the general transition smoother. "I think the school could keep the first week more relaxed to make the transition smoother for students in the upcoming years." Because there is typically a Shabbaton and heavy workload right away the first week, it was harder to adjust.

Although this year was difficult at first for some of the freshmen to adapt to the new environment, by the end, they felt as if they had been at the school from the very start. As the current freshmen move up to sophomore year, we hope they will continue to feel like a valued member of TLS's larger kehilah while simultaneously strengthening their academic studies.

features

Choose Your Own Adventure: Senior Science Edition



By Ranit Berman

Senior year is full of crazy events, but one thing that everyone gets to choose, and have some control over, is which science elective to take. Unlike the past three years of their lives, when they have been required to take biology, chemistry, and physics, seniors have the option to choose which elective they want to take. There are five options to choose from, three of which are honors: Anatomy & Physiology, Chemistry II*, and Physics II, and two of which are grade level: Forensic Science and Environmental Science. Having the ability to choose which course to take enables seniors to either dive deeper into a topic that they are passionate about or learn about something new that might interest them. As Forensic Science teacher Arianna Gagnon said, "You're about to go off to college. Having the ability to choose what type of sciences you want to explore, or really within any subject, a sub-topic exploration is key to you figuring out what you would possibly want to pursue further or not pursue further when you go to college." Understandably, though, it can be quite difficult to decide which class is right for you. If you are feeling like you might be in this boat, take the following quiz and keep reading to learn more about each option:

What is your spirit animal?

- a. A mole
- b. Dexter
- c. A tarantula
- d. A tardigrade
- e. A polar bear



What is your favorite hobby?

- a. Blowing things up
- b. Online sleuthing
- c. Running
- d. Music
- e. Gardening

If you had a superpower, what would it be?

- a. Blowing things up
- b. The ability to read minds
- c. Super strength
- d. The ability to move the planet
- e. The ability to reverse climate change

If you had a time machine or were able to transport anywhere in the world right now, where would you go?

- a. Princeton to meet Einstein
- b. To the Louvre to learn more about and reenact the Louvre heist
- c. Leonardo da Vinci's laboratory
- d. The border between France and Switzerland
- e. Current Iceland

What do your choices mean?:

If you chose mostly a's, you should take

Honors Chemistry III! Honors Chemistry II is an honors-level course, where students will reinforce their knowledge on critical topics from their sophomore year chemistry class, and tackle next-level topics such as rates of reaction, equilibrium, and acids and bases. Students in Honors Chemistry II are required to participate in many labs throughout the semester, including one about determining the acidity of different fruit juices, which Honors Chemistry II and Environmental Science teacher Vivian Nadasdi describes as being a definite "crowd pleaser"! Similar to all honors sciences offered at TLS, this course utilizes a college-level textbook in which students will read material for homework, and later review in class. If you either enjoyed taking chemistry during sophomore year, wanted to push yourself to take an engaging, honors-level course during senior year, or are interested in pursuing a career in chemistry in the future, this class might just be the one for you.

If you chose mostly b's, you should take Forensic Science! Forensic Science is a grade-level course where students will begin by learning a basic background of forensics as well as its history and implementation in social justice. Students will then delve into the ethics of forensic science before moving on to learn about crime scene investigation and even studying a handful of specific cases. This course comes with many hands-on labs and projects, including the fan favorite blood typing lab and the end-of-semester shoe box crime scene project. For those of you interested in digging for clues and investigating scenarios, consider taking Forensic Science. "I do think forensics is a really easy choice to make for anybody who's not willing to or wanting to pursue science in the future," Gagnon said. "It's an intersection of science and social justice."

If you chose mostly c's, you should take Honors Anatomy and Physiology! Honors Anatomy and Physiology is an intense honors-level course where students will have the opportunity to learn about the systems of the human body. Students will work over the summer to learn about the basic organization of the human body, so that once school begins in the fall, they are able to use their background knowledge to study more about specific body systems such as the integumentary, respiratory, and digestive systems. Similar to other science classes, Honors Anatomy and Physiology includes many different labs, the most famous of which being the pig dissection at the end of the semester. "It's an ongoing process of learning," said Honors Anatomy and Physiology teacher Aaron Kogut. "We

spend about three weeks on that [pig dissection], and we could easily spend another

month. Students really like the hands-on nature of it, and relating to the systems that we've learned at this point is a really exciting connection that they have....they can also compare each other's dissections and see how there is variety, and that not everything is so cookie-cutter." If you might be interested in studying in the medical field and are capable of learning material at a faster pace, consider learning more about Anatomy and Physiology.

If you chose mostly d's, you should take Honors Physics III! Honors Physics II is an honors-level course that includes topics such as relativity, quantum physics, nuclear physics, particle physics, and if there is time at the end of the semester, even astrophysics. Students consolidate their learning by doing labs of each topic, one of which is a lab to represent Rutherford's gold foil experiment. In this lab, students roll marbles around a piece of wood, representing the nucleus, and need to examine the way the marbles deflect to see if they can figure out the shape of the wooden nucleus. While students will often have reading assignments in their college-level textbook, Honors Physics II teacher Scott Boulding also provides the students with engaging graphic novels to solidify their understanding of each topic. Are you interested in learning more about Einstein's theories of relativity, time dilation, radioactive decay, or the life cycle of stars? Or are you curious to know how the universe began, how it's developed over time, and how it may possibly end one day? If so, Honors Physics II might just be the right class for you.

If you chose mostly e's, you should take Environmental Science! Environmental Science is a grade-level course that discusses many environmental topics; from the hydrosphere and water systems to the atmosphere and its different layers, this class truly covers a lot. Over the course of the semester, Environmental Science students become familiar with the structures of both freshwater and saltwater systems, as well as problems faced by these systems, such as water pollution, biomagnification, coral bleaching, and solutions that we can use to remedy these problems. -



They also learn about air pollution, climate change, the greenhouse effect, the ozone layer, and much more. Nadasdi describes the water pollution lab as both her favorite lab to teach and the students' favorite lab to participate in. "I have students bring in water from various areas," said Nadasdi. "I also bring water from the Bronx River, and various ponds, and I have the students test it for various things such as dissolved oxygen, phosphate levels, chloride levels, and nitrate levels." Nadasdi also explains how the course doesn't follow a textbook, but the students will be required to read many articles throughout the semester. All in all, if you

are interested in a highly experiential course with many different topics of discussion, or if you just really want to read *The Lorax* at the beginning of the year, think about signing up for Environmental Science this coming fall.

In the end, no matter which elective you choose to take, you will end up with an opportunity to learn more about a topic that you are interested in, or to learn something new altogether. "I think the experience is beneficial," said Boulding. "It can expose you to science subjects that you wouldn't have otherwise considered or thought about." So, whether you choose to learn about the layers

of your skin, the water cycle, or even how the world works, your adventure awaits!

*This article was written before 2026-2027 courses were announced. Please note that Honors Chemistry II will not be offered for seniors in the fall.



A Grade is Not Enough

By Ella Levi

It's finals season. Desks disappear beneath towers of flashcards and annotated packets. Planners become mosaics of color-coded deadlines. Sleep is traded for review sessions and practice problems worked until the margins of the paper blur together. Then comes the exam itself: an exam for hours in a silent room, where weeks of effort are compressed into a single performance. You leave drained but hopeful that all your work amounted to something measurable. Days later, a number appears on the website. No rubric. No comments. No indication of what you misunderstood, where your reasoning faltered, or what you did well. Just a number, sitting there in isolation, expected to speak for itself.

For an assessment that can make up 10-20% of your course grade, that feels remarkably incomplete. But this issue extends far beyond academic curiosity. It touches something TLS holds much larger: its values. We speak about integrity, diligence, and growth. These principles are woven into the culture of the school, shaping how students are expected to approach their classes, commitments, and relationships. Yet, when students bring those same values into the most consequential assessments of the year, the response they often receive is silence. A final grade without feedback is not transparency; it is a verdict without an explanation.

A grade alone tells students almost nothing about how to improve. According to Bulut et al. in

their 2019 study *Effects of Digital Score Reporting and Feedback on Students' Learning in Higher Education*, published in *Frontiers in Education*, exam feedback is associated with improvements of up to a full letter grade, and 97% of students reported that they would actively use feedback to prepare for future assessments. Students are not asking to argue over points or negotiate grades; they are asking to learn and improve.

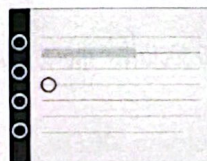
Ironically, finals, the assessments weighted most heavily, are often the ones students learn the least from. Weeks of preparation culminate in an experience students are never allowed to revisit. There is something deeply counterproductive about that. The exam is designed to measure understanding, by its very structure, detached from the process of understanding itself. Students move on carrying the same blind spots they had before because no one ever showed them where the gaps were.

This absence of feedback also carries a quieter psychological cost. There is something profoundly discouraging about investing

enormous effort into work that is returned only as a statistic. It subtly teaches students that process does not matter, but rather, only the outcome. Meaningful growth has never lived solely in outcomes. It lives in the margin notes beside an essay paragraph. In the circled equation, with a brief explanation beside it. In the teacher's comment that says, "Your argument was compelling until this point, where the logic broke down." Those moments are where education becomes transformative rather than transactional. Without them, students are evaluated, but they are not taught.

Of course, there are legitimate concerns surrounding the return of finals. Exam security matters. Teachers should not have to re-write entire assessments each year because questions circulate between grades. But these concerns are not impossible obstacles; they are logistical challenges with logical solutions. Rubrics and score breakdowns can be shared without releasing full exams. Departments can create alternate versions of assessments. The problem is not feasibility, but whether transparency is being treated as a priority.

TLS asks students to care deeply about their learning and to work hard. That expectation should be mutual. Students who devote themselves to the most demanding assessments of the year deserve more than silence after the fact. So here is the ask: bring back the finals, share the feedback, and walk students through their mistakes and successes. A grade may tell a student where they landed, but feedback is what tells them where they can go next. And isn't that the entire purpose of education in the first place?



TLS Advice Column

How can I get better at Hebrew?

Watch Israeli TV! Practice speaking at home!



Best vending machine snack?

Depends on if you like salty or sweet more. For salty, any of the potato chip flavors — regular, salt and vinegar, jalapeño — are good. For sweet, candy like Twix or M&M's will never do you wrong.

How do I balance school AND a social life?

I totally get the struggle! While balancing it all can be tough, it's important to remember: you can't be perfect. Striving for perfection in every area will only make you burn out. Also, everything ebbs and flows — sometimes your academic life is more demanding, at other times, it's your social life.

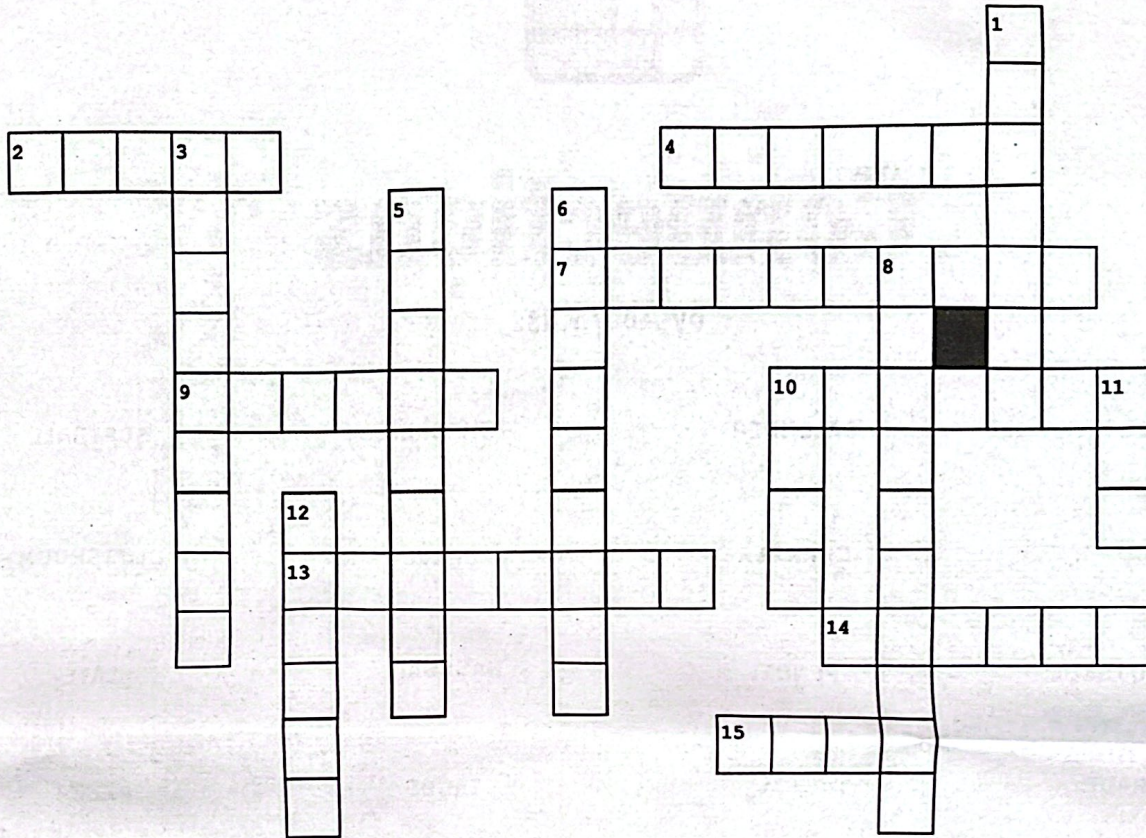
You have to work with what you have. If there is some leeway in your academic life, take the opportunity to socialize more, and vice versa.

How do I convince teachers to go outside?

Point out how well behaved you've been in class and give examples. Next, talk about how productive you'll be outside and how you haven't been able to go outside all day. Note that it's so nice out, and what a great opportunity it is to get some sunshine.

Crossword
By Natalie Rosen

SUMMER!

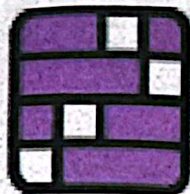


Across

- 2. Ken's job
- 4. A red consequence
- 7. Summer job with a LinkedIn payoff
- 9. Fluff + Crunch + Sweet + Campfire
- 10. Late night resulting in ringing ears
- 13. Are we there yet?
- 14. Passport necessary, sleep not so much
- 15. Good place to kayak or jetski

Down

- 1. You can't not smell like smoke
- 3. Person pretending to know what is going on
- 5. Red suit, high chair, hot sun
- 6. How you know it's July 4th
- 8. Stylish sun protectant
- 10. Where "home" has bunk beds
- 11. Gift from the sun
- 12. Ocean adventure on a floating hotel



Connections

By Abby Kass

SHELLS	CALENDER	CHICKEN	SOFTBALL
FOOD	CHARGER	DRIVE	CLASSROOM
TO GO OUTSIDE	PENCIL	BASEBALL	LATE
9TH GRADE	EMAIL	TACOS	PIZZA

_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
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