

20 Dragon Tales 24

The Official Student Newspaper of Boston Latin Academy

Volume #20

The Winter Issue

Issue #1

News

p. 1 Bathroom repairs at BLA cause delays.

p. 3 Leadership controversy.

p. 4 Snack Prices Inflated?

Opinion

p. 6 Boston: a racist city?

Entertainment

p. 5 Curtis Chin shares his art and experience.

p. 6 Winter Mode.

Confusion Sends New Bathroom Policies Right Down the Drain

By Ella Verinder, '25, and Megan Tran, '25

On October 5th, the BLA community exploded in outrage. After someone from the administration team had given a paper about the school's pass policy to seemingly every teacher, students started buzzing over what was a new (or at least newly enforced) policy. The supposed fact that students wouldn't be allowed to use the bathroom in the first or last ten minutes of class was immediately controversial, even more so when coupled with the idea that the bathrooms would be locked in this time period. Students immediately took to social media, protesting these rules and saying it was unfair for the school to police student bathroom usage. Then, after a couple of days, everyone went silent. The

petitions were down, the bathrooms were unlocked, and the students were calm. This got me wondering what exactly had happened on that day those yellow papers got handed out. And why had it all been resolved so quickly?

The most controversial aspect of the policy, locked bathrooms, has been said by admin to be a pure myth. Ms. Carvalho, the assistant head of school, said that the school bathrooms are never locked during the school day. There may have been bathroom monitors outside discouraging students from going in in the first or last ten minutes of class, but the doors always remained unlocked and there were no physical restrictions keeping kids from getting in.



(Closed first floor boy's bathroom)

There are many other aspects of the policy that have made students upset and many of these are more unclear. The first and last ten minutes rule, for example, seems to be a genuine policy.

However, it seems to be increasingly unenforced, and, as Ms. Carvalho explained, it's ultimately up to the individual

teacher's discretion. The amount of time allocated to students to be out of the room, a suggested five minutes but a practiced range of five to fifteen, is equally unclear. When polled, students themselves were unsure of both when during a class they could leave for the bathroom (or other needs such as water) and for how long they could be out of the classroom. Many students also expressed confusion on the rules for the number of students who can be in a bathroom at a time, saying that, in their personal experiences, they've noticed a number from 4-8 people being allowed in, often seemingly arbitrarily.

Whatever the bathroom policy is, students seem to have a set interpretation of it and this is an interpretation they take issue with. Junior Jillian Nguyen described the policy as "the ten minute thing" and said she doesn't like it because she sees it as putting unfair limits on the way students can use their bodies. Another interviewed student echoed this sentiment, adding that it's especially harmful to have bathrooms closed at the beginning and end of classes because that forces students to leave at the time that is normally the most learning heavy. Teachers

have taken issue with this as well, the student said.

Among all the confusion around the pass and bathroom policy, students being upset seems to be the only throughline, with the renovations happening to the school bathrooms presenting even more complications. Trying to find a usable bathroom has become a "quest," as one junior described it. The limited time period that students have to endure when doing this causes many to consider it as completely unfair and unnecessary by a lot of the student body. Whether they want a return to last year when policies were just as confusing but also less enforced, or a completely new system is unclear.

But not everyone is feeling so pessimistic about the state of bathrooms at BLA. Mr. Frost, a special education and math teacher, says that while he agrees that some parts of the rules, namely the granting of students only five minutes to leave the class, are very limiting, he also believes that BLA admin are reasonable and will make whatever changes need to be made to make the system better. There have been no stated changes to the policy at

the time of writing this, but it is likely that the flexible enforcement is a symbol of the rule's flexibility. Frost also says that some rules, like the monitors outside of bathrooms, are annoying but necessary. He's witnessed firsthand kids who will start fights in bathrooms or damage the property and, while these acts are few and far between, he believes it is reasonable to have bathroom monitors trying to prevent them from happening at all. He acknowledges it's unfortunate overprotection for the students who follow rules but is necessary for the protection of the school.

It's still not obvious what happened on October 5th or what the BLA bathroom policy is now. But the school, even with all of the frustration, seems to be universally hopeful that the bathroom policy can improve. Students say they like the new bathrooms and would feel accommodated by them if they just had more time. This, combined with the administration's perceived flexibility, provides hope that BLA can clarify its bathroom policy into something that gives us the fair and safe school environment we all deserve.

BLA Staff Vote and Student Voice

By Jillian Tran, '24

On June 9, 2023, BLA staff voted "no confidence" in Mr. Smith. The measure passed with 85% of the staff voting against Mr. Smith's leadership.

A 'vote of no confidence' is a way for an organization to express concern about a leader. While a vote of no confidence can be used as justification for being fired, it is

not required that a leader lose their position because of a vote of no confidence.

Being the principal of Latin Academy is Mr. Smith's first time running a school. Since becoming head of BLA, Principal Smith strongly believes that our school has great potential in its students and teachers. He strives to make BLA better, making decisions on how to make the school accessible for everyone and creating opportunities for students to attend established colleges.

However, following multiple issues from staff and various safety concerns for the past two years, BLA educators did not have confidence in its administration. Physics teacher Mr. Ebsiu says, "Throughout last year, there was a long period of time where we did not have a lot of meetings scheduled. There were a lot of repeated issues from the staff and we were given answers that didn't lead to things getting better."

There have been many similar complaints from staff and families.

The vote has affected students as well, leaving them confused and concerned about their future at BLA. Senior Grace Maldonado says, "This all just caused a tension in the school. There is no connection with the staff or students." In addition to the vote, students were also troubled with various issues since returning from the pandemic. With multiple

changes being made, students adapted to new schedules, new administration, new rules, new teachers, and the grading system. Maldonado says, "Our school seems to have lost that sense of BLA pride and that great connection everyone had, and you can't get that back if you keep undermining teachers and not giving students and families the explanation they deserve."

While students like Maldonado expressed concern about leadership and the direction of the school, others were not so concerned. A BLA Senior, who requested to be anonymous, explained that "[she] didn't think it (the vote) affected students but that getting reliable information about the matter was difficult: "We (students) are just going by what everyone else is saying." Ultimately though, this student couldn't help but notice the frustrations teachers were feeling last spring.

Although there has been conflict between the administration and teachers, both parties do not let these complications interrupt their work. Teachers such as Mr. Ebsiu, have worked with students to give them a voice, taking time out of class to address students' concerns and to accommodate any problems they might have that disrupt their learning. However, students feel it is difficult to communicate to adults within BLA, not getting the full support that they need and not being able to have a full

conversation about the issues at hand due to the sensitive nature of the matter.

Mr. Smith's leadership comes on the heels of significant change at BLA. His first year at the school was the return from online learning. The new admissions policy, which moved away from the ISEE as the sole entrance requirement in favor of an evolving portfolio that has come to include grades and scores on MAP tests, was only in place for one year prior to Mr. Smith taking over leadership at Latin Academy. An anonymous BLA teacher, when asked about the new leadership and what could have led to problems in the past two years, responded: "a changed registrar, changed classes and schedule, and bad luck in timing."

Given the change in school leadership and culture and demand for more accountability from administration, the same teacher went on to explain that in order for the school to maintain its prestigious standing, there should be a focus on "more choice, a stronger student government presence, [and] more voice to students."

There have been many implementations by leadership in the BLA community to strengthen the confidence from staff. Principal Smith has been reflecting on the vote and receiving advice from a mentor to become a better leader. He has been more present in

hallways, creating functional schedules, and hosting meetings after school. Smith explained that new staff have been added to address “culture and safety” and that these moves have led to “quieter hallways, [and] more responsive[ness] when things are taking place.”

Mr. Smith is making an effort to maintain BLA’s prestige through the many additions in staff, rules, and expectations. Although there is a common goal of restoring our school’s reputation, an anonymous student believes, “the goal is good, but the methods aren’t.”

As BLA changes, these additions can both hurt and help the school and its students. There needs to be an opening of discourse with families about the effectiveness of these decisions made by the administration and the actions to achieve our common goal.

Inflation Bursts the Bubble for Everyone

By Betty Nguyen ‘25

In the hustle and grind of life in high school, there is something that is causing the prices of our beloved snacks, favorite technology, and clothing to increase: inflation.

But what even is inflation? It’s a buzzword we hear often; it’s where

your hard-earned dollar’s value is constantly changing and seems like it’s doing gymnastics. It is both simple and very complex, but it’s when there is an increase in prices of goods and services over time and the value of your dollar is changing. It’s the reason why the bag of chips you’ve just bought has put a dent in your wallet and the outfit you’ve been keeping your eye on seems to be gradually steering away from your grasp.

The United States experienced low inflation before 2020, but due to an increase in the ratio of job vacancies to unemployment, inflation is increasing. Even though we don’t enjoy paying more for our items, inflation is quite normal as long as it stays around 2%. COVID-19 has also contributed to inflation via stimulus checks. Stimulus checks were beneficial to many citizens

and there was a drop in the poverty rate from 11.8 to 9.1 percent. However, it was found that this stimulus may have raised inflation by 3 percent by the end of 2021.

At Boston Latin Academy, in our middle school years, we had to buy the lovely gym T-shirts. Boston Latin Academy’s Assistant Head of School, Ms. Nguyen explained “the shirts used to be \$5, but are now raised to \$7, but still want to keep prices low for families. The school wants to figure out a way to charge families less, but isn’t sure how it can be done.” Inflation is affecting the prices of many goods

and services. Inflation is changing the way many families can afford things and is greatly impacting the way we spend our money for our needs and wants.

The purpose of inflation is to raise prices so that the demand for goods and services decreases, which would lower inflation rates. However, inflation can have a negative impact on families who are having difficulty with their financial situations. Boston Latin Academy Junior Florie Donna, said, “the rise in prices is making things more difficult for...”

(continued on page 5)



low-income families. Many aren’t able to afford basic necessities or gifts for the holiday season and there should be more resources offered to help families who are struggling.” With more resources, it can alleviate the stress many are experiencing with the surge in prices. Resources may include food stamps and organizations or

workplaces raising funds for those who are struggling financially.

Understanding inflation can be applied to many areas of your life and impacts everyone. Whether it's budgeting, or substituting your snack choices for other things, being aware of inflation can help you make informed decisions regarding your finances.

Curtis Chin Talks Writing

By Biruk Meyer '26

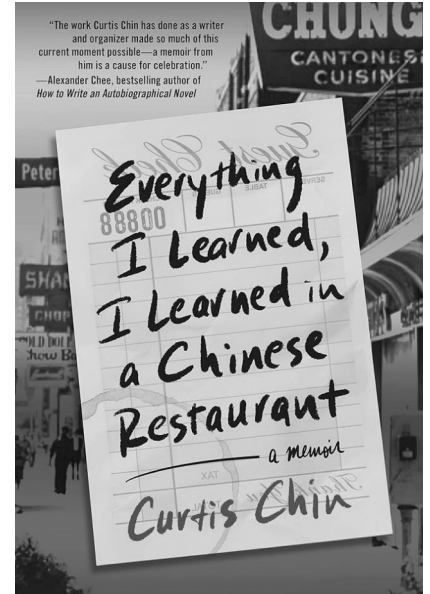
Asian American writer Curtis Chin was born in 1965 and raised in Detroit. According to him, growing up in his family-run restaurant was an essential aspect of his identity, since he was exposed to people from many different backgrounds. Following college, he co-founded the Asian American Writers' Workshop, located in New York City, and served as the U.S. Ambassador to the Asian Development Bank while George W. Bush and Barack Obama were in office. He became the trustee of World Education Services of New York and is also a fellow at the Milken Institute Asia Summit. He also recently unveiled his new book, *Everything I Learned, I Learned in Chinese: A Memoir* which delves into his life as a gay, Asian American.

Curtis Chin came to BLA in October and allowed students to have a Q&A with him. He showed

us his biographical film *Dear Corky*, a short movie dedicated to his friend, Corky Lee, who devoted his life to photography in Asian communities. The biographical film highlights how Lee strived to show others the side of Asian communities that they do not. Chin hopes that his book, *Everything I Learned, I Learned in a Chinese Restaurant: A Memoir*, will bring people together the same way that Chinese restaurants have the ability to bring people together from different racial, ethnic, religious, and political backgrounds. Originally, he said that he had planned for his book to be a comedy but after having editors encourage him to write about more serious topics relevant to marginalized audiences, he decided to change the focus of his book. Some of these topics included racism against him and his family.

In an interview with Alisa Chang, host of *All Things Considered*, Chin says: "You know, there were challenges moving out to the suburbs. We did face a lot of discrimination, which I talk about in the book; not just passive microaggression but also actually violent physical stuff, and vandalism to our house." This interview truly illustrated how there are obviously still issues of racial discrimination and issues of systemic oppression. His visit allowed students such as myself to see a glimpse into how a career in film or journalism could look and

he offered insightful views on the current climate of political polarization in the U.S.



BLA's Chilly Events

By Ziggy Gal-Or, '29

As BLA is entering "Winter mode" and with the challenges of heaters and cold temperatures to get to school, there is still a lot to be excited about, and some less exciting things. These things include but are not limited to: Winter break, Winter sports, and Winter MAP. In this interview, we sat down with Ms. Manchester, an assistant head of BLA, and who middle schoolers receive their phones from. Join us as we learn more about BLA in winter mode:

There is a lot to take in about the school, but here is the lay-down:

The Winter Wonderland is a free event on Wednesday, December 20th, 2023 in the lower cafeteria from 2:00–3:30 for 7th and 8th graders where there is food, games, dancing, and so much more. This is an event to celebrate the middle schoolers having their first or second winter break. It is also the first middle school event. If you are in middle school, your homeroom teacher should have gone over it and Ms. Manchester has sent out emails with the flier.

Another 7th grade event is a preview: The teachers are planning an overnight trip to

Thompson Island for community building! The details are not finalized at all, but most likely will be happening this spring.

Something happened around six months later, in the new school year 2024-2025. This is also where new 7th graders join our school community and our seniors leave us. These potential new 7th graders have come to the school once at the time of me writing this article, and I am quite excited about this. This is because not only will I not be the youngest anymore, but I will also meet new and younger students and potentially have more leadership opportunities.

Something more recent, however, is the winter sports. These sports include basketball, with Mr. Bunker as the coach for the boy's team and Mr. Dever for the girl's team. There is also swimming, ice

hockey, wrestling, and indoor track with Mr. Leussler as the coach. These sports are a great way to get involved. Unfortunately, neither Ms. Manchester nor I know the other coaches, and I believe it might be too late to join for most sports, but you can still support the teams by going to their events and cheering them on and/or helping them fundraise.

Next, I want to talk about something a lot of students, including me, might not understand: the B schedule. In case you didn't know, BLA has 2 schedules, the A schedule and the B schedule, otherwise known as extended homeroom. The things that will happen when there is a B schedule mostly consist of surveys, community building, or tests.

And finally, events. A quote from a parent says: "I went to both BLA and BLS for back-to-school day and BLA was much more organized." So how does BLA plan these events? These come from Ms. White, the student council, and all of our faculty.

I am most excited about the winter wonderland. What are you most excited about?

A Love Letter to My City

By Ben Barros, '24

Dear Bostonians,

Are we racist? Now before you answer that, think about what racism can be. Racism is defined in many ways. Leftists see racism as acts of systemic prejudice where minorities (mostly individuals of African, Middle Eastern, Asian, or Latino descent) are marginalized by the oppressive caste (mostly individuals of European descent).

(continued on page 7)

Right-wingers view racism as something of the past that white, upper-class, liberal arts millennials bring up to virtue signal social credit by the same minority groups their ancestors were racist against. Now, the question still stands: how do most Bostonians view racism?

Imagine it's Boston in the 1940s. Future black icon, Malcolm X, is living with his elder half-sister, Ella, in the neighborhood of Roxbury. Entranced by the criminal underworld of the city, Malcolm Little would soon grow up to be an inmate of Charlestown State Prison, after being betrayed by his white lover at the time. Malcolm X would use his time in Charlestown State Prison to educate himself about Islam, as well as the derogatory ways that whites would treat their black counterparts.

During the 1950s, Martin Luther King Jr. met his future wife, Coretta Scott King while she was a student at the New England Conservatory of Music and after

he graduated, Martin Luther King Jr, held a rally of 20,000 Bostonians in 1965. Two of the most important black men of all time set foot and had their lives influenced by the political landscape of Boston. So why does this never get talked about?

It might have to do with the fact that, statistically speaking, Boston isn't a city with much racial equity. Statisticians have come up with a new form of collecting data on racial equity called the "Racial Equity Index," a graph that was featured in an article of The National Equity Atlas. The Racial Equity Index analyzes the 150 largest metropolitan regions of the country and gives them a score on how inclusive they are. The Trenton-Ewing area of New Jersey receives the lowest inclusion score, which is 23. The Ocala area of Florida receives the highest inclusion score, which is 83. Guess what Boston scored? A 59. Not bad, but not good either.

Statistics might give you a data-based perspective, but they don't give you the full narrative. As a Boston resident, I do have some shortcomings since both of my parents are immigrants. Still, I would never say that I, as a black Bostonian, have ever experienced a racist hate crime and or been the recipient of truly racist rhetoric, but my father, Benvindo, has. Growing up as an immigrant child in the 1970s was difficult for my father. He had racist slurs shouted at him and watched his Puerto

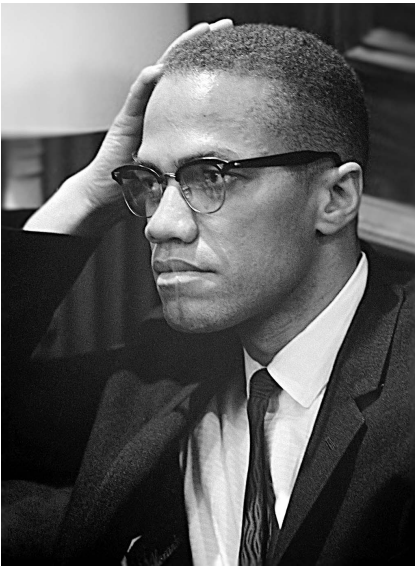
Rican and black friends get into brawls with white children who had a problem with these kids of color being in "their neighborhood." Despite this oppressive situation, my father also experienced academic success at Madison Park Vocational School. This academic prowess developed into him receiving a scholarship, which helped him graduate from the University of Massachusetts, Boston in 1982.

Hearing a black Bostonian receiving a break in life by being gifted with an academic scholarship might seem rare, but it's par for the course, since the average GPA of a Black Bostonian high schooler is higher than the national average of their peers. Speaking of peers, let's just have a 'roll call' of amazing accomplishments by people of color from Boston that should be just as well known as Harvard, MIT, or the Duck Boats. We were the hometown of Crispus Attucks (1723-1770), one of the first American patriots who died at the hands of the British in the Boston Massacre. We were the hometown of musical talents like Donna Summer (1948 - 2012) and Gang Starr front man, Guru (1961-2010), who were pioneers in their respective fields of disco and rap. We were the hometown of famous poet, Phyllis Wheatley (c. 1753 -1784), who pioneered the African American perspective in literature.

Boston, to many people's surprise, is not some one horse town. We're

a place of culture. Sometimes that culture can incorporate some negative features, like racist sports fans, but it can also incorporate some positive features, like housing black activists. Don't judge a book by its cover and don't judge a city by news headlines. If you truly want a Boston experience, how about you stroll the streets of it and don't let the opinions of others persuade you otherwise? That is all.

Sincerely, Ben Barros



A mural of Nelson Mandela near Nubian Square



Malcolm X, who lived in the Roxbury neighborhood during his teen years



Singer Donna Summer, who was born and raised in Boston. She also attended Jeremiah E. Burke High School.

Comedian Patrice O'Neal, who was born and raised in Boston.



Dragon Tales is Proudly Made by

<p>Editor in Chief Jillian Tran, '24</p>	<p>Managing Editors Ella Verinder, '25 Betty Nguyen, '25 Ben Barros, '24 Megan Tran, '25 Biruk Meyer, '26</p>	<p>Production Directors Phaedra Sanon, '25</p>	<p>Staff Writers Ziggy Gal-Or, '29</p>	<p>Publisher/Advisor Mr. Erich Mueller</p>
---	--	---	---	---