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The Official Student Newspaper of Boston Latin Academy

Volume #21

The Fall/Winter Issue

Issue #1

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### It's Time to 'Hang Up' on Strict Cell Phone Culture at BLA

By Ella Verinder, '25

“Put that phone away!” This phrase, whether said seriously or in jest, flooded the halls in the early days of this school year as the cell phone policy took full effect.

This wasn't the first time that BLA has had a cell phone policy, and technically, with the exception of lunch and studies, the policy we have now is the same as it was last year. However, it's obvious that the way the policy is being enforced this year is much more uniform and strict than years passed. After years of trying, BLA has finally been effective at getting kids off of their phones. And I hate it.

I know this sounds like it's shaping up to be a screenager rant because I'm mad I can't go on TikTok in class and I know that that kind of rant is the exact reason that we

need a strict cell phone policy. So I want to make it clear that my problem with the cell phone policy is rooted in the logic surrounding the policy, not the content.

When the admin first announced the updated cell phone policy, they sent out resources “in regards to the impact of cell phones on student learning.” This, however, is far from an accurate description of what they provided. Other than one article that mentioned teachers saying phones are distracting and another covering a not-yet-implemented ban in LA, the majority of resources sent out were focused on teen mental health and how phones make us stressed and sad.

I'm not here to argue with that. A combination of research and personal experience has taught me

that cell phones are at least not helping anyone's mental health. But when admin act like they care about and are solving mental illness with their cell phone policy, they reduce very real mental health struggles to our use of technology for a few hours a day. That's invalidating to students, myself included, who have spent years trying to figure out the root of our mental illness. The cell phone policy isn't going to cure my depression and it's harmful for administrators to imply that it could.

But without the mental health conversation, there are still obvious benefits to not having phones in schools, mainly that such a policy reduces distractions and helps academic performance. This has even been echoed by students who've said they

understand a ban in classrooms and described the policy as “helpful for locking in.”

This lack of distraction is again a benefit in theory, but it will not give students long-term time management skills. Because college and work don't have cell phone policies that threaten to take your phone away; they have failing grades and pay docks for people who can't manage their technology responsibly. Instead of being strictly told to never have their phones out, students should have a cell phone policy that helps them figure out their own technology usage and the natural consequences of that usage going wrong so they can be prepared for the real-world situations they'll face later in life.

Herein lies my biggest problem with the cell phone policy: it's built around an infantilizing understanding of students that doesn't take in our input and doesn't trust us to manage our time or resources. One senior put it perfectly: “I'm annoyed. Not because of the policy... it's the way [staff] are acting as if our lives are gonna be over 'cause we don't have our phones.” They then went on to describe having to do writing assignments and discussions about being affected by the policy, which I've experienced and been annoyed with as well. Because at the end of the day, I can handle not having my phone in school. I know when I need to focus on taking notes in

class or doing homework in a study, but that's something I've learned from my own experience and judgment. A policy like we have now, one that says students can't use their instincts to make good choices, is nothing but condescending.

I know this article won't magically repeal the cell phone policy and I don't intend for it to. But I want to make it clear to everyone in the school that students can make their own decisions about when to use their phones and that if those decisions lead to a bad grade or being pulled aside by a teacher, that's a consequence that will stick way more than having their phone taken for the third time that week. I'm encouraging every adult at the school to trust students and let them make mistakes to learn from. And for students, learn from your mistakes and make choices wisely. I believe every kid in this school could learn how to manage their technology in a way that best serves them. They just need the opportunity to practice.

### **Next Stop: Disfunction**

By Biruk Meyer, '26

Taking the T recently has seemed to be particularly frustrating and annoying, even more so than usual, with shutdowns and delays that persist for months and months. According

to Boston. Gov, the recent T shutdowns have been attributed to the Track Improvement Program, a year long plan created in order to alleviate 191 speed restrictions. The program is supposed to repair and replace the tracks on all four major train lines. The Red, Green, Orange, and Blue Lines will or have been shut down periodically until the end of the year. The delays and shutdowns have had a profound effect on the way that people commute; this extends to students commuting to school.

To better understand the impact of transportation disruptions, I asked students across all the grades at BLA what train lines they took, and how long their commute to school was to get to school. According to the survey that I conducted amongst students of all grades at BLA; about 55% of the students take the T or the bus to school. The other 45% of the students were driving or were being driven to school. When it came to the commute time of the students who took the T and the bus 23% had a commute under 30 minutes, 28% under an hour, and 18% of the students had a commute of 1-2 hours. While the commute time might not seem considerable when depicted on a data table, it is important to remember that students have to wake up, get ready for school, eat breakfast and shower and then try to navigate the public transportation to get to school on time.

Meanwhile, in a recent change of school policies, tardiness is being addressed much more harshly through implementing school discipline such as detention and meetings with administrators. The revised tardy policy states that 5 unexcused tardies in a term when students arrive between 7:20 A.M. to 8 A.M. will result in a detention. A single unexcused tardy (lack of excuse letter) between 8:00-9:00 will result in a detention with repeated offenses leading to harsher repercussions. While the new policy happening during the Track Improvement Program may or may not be a coincidence, it still shows the schools disregard for the unforeseeable nature of the T.

Although the T delays are expected to be significantly reduced after the Track Improvement Program was completed, the shutdowns and delays do highlight a relevant problem that persists. Balancing tardiness policies with the reality of commuting. The creation of a stricter tardy policy may add unnecessary stress to students and not address the real issue of public transport. The school and the school system as a whole are not at fault for how the public transport system operates but they are responsible for how they treat tardiness and it needs to be better.

### **In da Clurb, We All Fam**

By Johnson Tran, '27

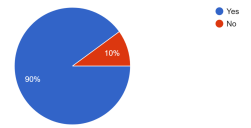
As we know it, Boston Latin Academy is a preparatory

school, setting up students for success and a majority of students enrolled at BLA wish to get into their "dream" college. Clubs play a major part in this, as the clubs a student participates in can significantly reflect their character, as involvement in various activities during and after school offers insight into their interests and traits.

They also have the advantages of exploring interests, opportunities, and social networks, though participating in clubs can present issues. Some advantages of clubs would be interest, opportunities and social networks, with potential challenges including time, location, and commitment. The clubs a student participates in can significantly reflect their character, as involvement in various activities during and after school offers insight into their interests and traits.

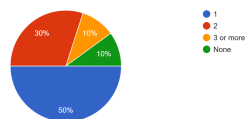
Despite this, recent survey data on student involvement in extracurricular activities provides insights that offer helpful guidance toward increasing engagement and addressing challenges at Boston Latin Academy. Among key findings from the survey are strengths and areas for growth regarding current opportunities. The answers from the questionnaire reveal that a significant number of students participate in clubs and most of them are sophomores and juniors.

Have you ever declined to participate in a club activity?  
10 responses



However, 50% participate in only one club, while 30% participate in two clubs, and only 10% participate in three and above, followed by another 10% not participating in any kind of club activities whatsoever. It was originally thought that a majority of students had not participated in clubs, which wasn't entirely false. An impressive 90% of respondents reported that they had refused at one time or another to participate in club activities. The reasons were scheduling conflicts (88.9%), lack of interest in the activity (66.7%), not hearing about the activity in time (33.3%) and being too busy with other commitments (22.2%). Scheduling conflicts were the most concerning issue among students and, had these clubs been better scheduled during free time periods, it would have led to more club involvement.

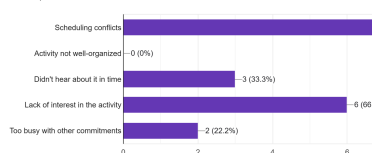
Do you take part in any clubs?  
10 responses



The results from this survey bring such recommendations for improvement targeting scheduling conflicts, communication, and flexibility are the most major concerns to be

looked after for increasing the participation of students in extracurricular activities at BLA. Some solutions to these issues may be more push and support toward clubs as there is not enough dedication in resources for students to start clubs with help from teachers and also by having more dedicated spaces for these clubs instead of having the reliance on teachers rooms for use of clubs. There is not necessarily a lack of clubs, but the quality and effort currently being placed. This way, BLA will be able to work toward an inclusive environment for student involvement.

If yes, what are the main reasons? (Select all that apply)  
9 responses



## Saving the World, One Binder at a Time

By Betty Nguyen, '25

As we approach the middle of the school year, we reach a time not only for students to cram for exams, but also to celebrate their accomplishments, including an accomplishment our school has seen in becoming more sustainable. This brings us to the Reusable Binder Initiative, in which students can purchase used binders for reduced prices.

Every year, 27 million tons of plastic are tossed, and countless binders—still in usable

condition—end up in the trash and contribute to overflowing landfills. But what if those binders could have a second life? By collecting old binders at the end of the year, we can refurbish and resell them at a discounted price for the next school year, which is an initiative BLA does now. This simple practice reduces waste, saves resources, and helps your wallet.

This initiative reflects our school's commitment to reducing waste and fostering eco-conscious habits among students. It's a way to make a difference without requiring major sacrifices—just thoughtful action.

When looking for new binders and finding ways to get rid of them, you can stop by room 342 where you can purchase gently used binders for a fraction of the cost of buying new ones. Not only will you save money, but you'll also be contributing to a greener school.

Every action we take, no matter how small, contributes to the health of our planet. By reusing materials like binders, we conserve the energy and resources required to manufacture new products. We also minimize pollution caused by waste disposal and production.

Not only can you contribute to environmental justice through BLA's Reusable Binder initiative, but you can take other simple steps such as using reusable

water bottles or even volunteering for environmental causes that you are passionate about.

So, as you gather your materials for this year, think twice before tossing your binders. Together, we can create a cycle of reuse that benefits everyone—and the planet.

Let's make sustainability a staple in our school culture.

## September is a Month for Culture

By Genevieve Ndwiga, '28

Hispanic Heritage Month is a time from September 15 to October 15, where Hispanic and Latinx people can celebrate and be proud of their lineage. Boston Latin Academy always takes extra steps to make sure that their students feel accepted in the school's environment, such as hanging flags from Latin American countries in every corner of the first floor hallway, as well as hosting a special potluck for everyone to attend with their families. Our school also makes it a priority to provide advice for current students, by inviting Hispanic and Latinx BLA alumni to share their experiences with the youth at our school through the annual speakers series.

During this time, multiple different classes from each grade file into the auditorium and take their seats while the former students prepare to share their stories and the details of their current careers. While the group of

alumni speak, there is also an opportunity for students to receive advice from them and ask important questions about the things they have experienced at both school and jobs. These speakers share negative things about how they have faced prejudice and racism because of their heritage, but also the positive things like feeling welcome within their community.

It's important for these alumni to speak and inspire students at BLA because of how determined they all were to have a good education and start a good career, despite all of the prejudice and racism that still exists in this country and is directed towards Hispanic and Latinx people. Students at BLA might have even faced these struggles themselves, and this is part of the reason why it is so important to our school to give Hispanic and Latinx students a strong community that offers support and advice. All of these former BLA students have accomplished amazing things, and it should be a priority to motivate current students to achieve their goals in the same way that the school's alumni have.

### **We need You! To sign Up for the Library**

By Burdensky Precois, '25

For the past two years, volunteering at our school's library has given me a front-row view of its everyday challenges, especially during peak periods. My primary responsibility—managing visitor check-ins—sounds simple, but

every shift starts the same way: a crowd of students lined up, waiting to sign in. This scene becomes increasingly chaotic as the school year progresses and the library gets busier. While we have systems in place, they're frequently overwhelmed by students who haven't pre-registered.

Ms. Estrada, one of our senior librarians, captures the issue perfectly: "Pre-registering benefits everyone—those who sign up get quick, preferential access, and it keeps the library organized." From my experience, I know how much this little step can improve the entire system. When students reserve their spots ahead of time, they just scan their IDs and go straight in, freeing up library staff and volunteers like me to focus on more impactful work, like helping students access loaner Chromebooks or sleeping. However, when we're overloaded by walk-ins, that focus shifts and the library loses some of its calm, organized feel.

I've seen how frustrated students get when they're waiting to get in just to have a quiet place to study. It's made me a huge advocate for pre-registering, which takes only a moment and has a big impact on everyone's library experience. Next time you head to the library, make sure you sign up first. It's a small step that keeps this shared space efficient and accessible.

### **Toxic Miracle: The Peril of PFAS and Other Everyday Chemicals**

By Jacob Krass, '30

In the 1930s, a substance was accidentally created that would change the world. One man, Roy Plunkett, was working as a research chemist for DuPont, a company that manufactures chemicals. He was trying to create a coolant gas better than the currently existing one. When he opened a container of gas, something happened that would reshape the way their company functioned forever. From the gas, a new substance had emerged—a slippery substance that was packed into the sides and bottom of the container. When he examined it more closely, he realized the significance of his discovery. Called Polytetrafluoroethylene, or PTFE, the substance was a fluorocarbon, a bond of multiple carbon and fluorine molecules. This gave it stability, as well as the ability to be hydrophobic, meaning it was able to touch large amounts of water and substances containing water without getting wet.

DuPont trademarked the chemical, and began to work with it to utilize its unique physical properties. Marketing it as the product-name "Teflon", they mass-produced the substance, using its water-resistant properties to create remarkably effective products like coatings for valves of pipes containing hazardous chemicals. Teflon, being very good at performing functions that required durable substances, was popular in that department. Because of its success, by the late 1940s, several tons of PTFE were being produced per year. Another company, 3M, began their production of PFAS, a processing agent of PTFE. Soon it had then expanded even to the cookware

industry. Pans coated with Teflon were created, and the nonstick pans became extremely popular. Teflon took the market by storm. As its success grew, it was implemented in other products as well, like grease-resistant food containers. PFAS and Teflon's ability to perform so many functions revolutionized the way things were done, and made things a lot easier.

But possibly the usefulness of this chemical was what made it so deadly. Both PFAS and Teflon are dangerous chemicals. PFAS especially, which is used to process Teflon and by extension shows up in every Teflon product, is linked to numerous health effects. Some of the main health effects are increased risk of cancer, increased cholesterol levels, decreased vaccine effect in children, and changes in liver enzymes. These, by themselves, are not terrible things because they are not intended to be consumed, and if that plan had worked, PFAS and Teflon would not have been a problem. Except it didn't work. The use of PFAS in so many products caused it to migrate into drinking water and food. One example is the nonstick pans that sold so well. These pans aren't toxic in theory, but when heated to certain temperatures, the coating can come off, going into the food being cooked. This causes the chemicals in the coating to enter the system of whoever is consuming the product. And now someone has those dangerous substances in them. This is just one example of how PFAS and Teflon can contaminate something. They can also enter drinking water, air, and even the environment.

Teflon and PFAS are not biodegradable, with a boiling point above 300 degrees fahrenheit. They're virtually indestructible and extremely harmful to human health, as well as the environment they leak into. They might be a solution to many problems, but they also create a lot. PFAS and Teflon might seem like a miracle—an extremely efficient and versatile individual solution to many problems. However, they're just as bad as they are good.



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