

Zachary May: Testimony

I am currently a senior at School Without Walls, and over the past three years, I have repeatedly told the same joke to people unfamiliar with it: soon, if it is not repaired, my school will literally have no walls. The structure would be insufficient even if it wasn't deteriorating. Without a PA system, communication consists of countless sheets of paper attached to doors and students running between classrooms. This school uses the "city as a classroom", partially because the building can't provide several basic functions. We have no auditorium, no science labs, no gym, not even a cafeteria. For our larger assemblies, GW lets us use one of its auditoriums. The library is the size of a single classroom, and the ceiling leaks after storms.

I was the student who took the photos for the slideshow, and I am not the only or first person who has taken photos of the school's flaws. Students, having seen other photographers do the same, barely noticed me and probably didn't expect any significant improvements to result from my picture-taking. Last year, after a piece of ceiling fell on a student, photographs were taken of the classroom. As a result, the ceiling was replastered, and it still leaks. Teachers I spoke to knew exactly what needed to be photographed. One of my past teachers mentioned a particularly large wall of fungus in another classroom and stated that she would be unable to teach in that classroom if it were her own.

Every student at School Without Walls is affected by the deterioration of the building, and they each have several stories about it. Over the course of four years, each student spends time in almost all of the classrooms, and every single room has at least one visible flaw, ranging from fungus-covered walls to large holes in the ceiling. For example, leaking is a consistent issue after rain. Several times I have seen buckets and

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trash cans placed in classrooms and the library to contain the water. In history class last year, several of the desks, which have concave seats, were found one morning containing pools of water. This year, the pencil sharpener from a neighboring math classroom can be heard clearly through the wall in my American government class.

Despite the building it is housed in, School Without Walls is a fantastic school. The students produce some of the highest SAT and PSAT scores in DC Public Schools. Above all, School Without Walls is a college preparatory school. Every year, most, if not all seniors, apply to and are accepted into colleges and universities across the nation. In the later months of the school year, a bulletin board in the hallway becomes congested with students' multiple acceptance letters. Furthermore, several upperclassmen are allowed to take college course at GW, which gives a special advantage to our students. The school curriculum also prepares students for college education; for example, a significant portion of the reading material for my American literature course at GW was already taught to my in 10th grade. School Without Walls is an exemplary school whose students deserve a school building that aids their education.