



# THE

# BEAR

## Student Newspaper

March 05, 2026 WBHS Volume 29 Issue 5  
900 W. Main St., West Branch, IA 52358

# WBCSD PHONE POLICY: ONE YEAR LATER UPDATE

Raelyn Wilcher  
Staff Writer

One year ago, the West Branch Community School District implemented its phone policy across all grades, where devices other than those provided by the school are not allowed during instructional time.

The district implemented the policy before Governor Reynolds signed the Iowa "phone ban" bill, HF 782. The students then had time to get used to the policy and the consequences that came with it if not followed.

"We began the policy before the law was enacted, during the 4th quarter of last school year [2024-2025], and the law went into effect on July 1 of last year," said Superintendent Dr. Marty Jimmerson.

At first, students did not like the change, and many parents had questions about the policy's consequences and how it would be implemented.

"I hope students realized that this policy was set in place to benefit them," Jimmerson said. "I'm sure there were and still are concerns about the policy and questions around why this was put in place, but this was a policy that we felt was in their best interest."

The effects of the phone policy across the district differed among the different grade levels.

The phone policy had the biggest impact on high schoolers. Before the policy took effect, phones often caused students to not pay as close attention or misuse their class time by being distracted by their phone.

High school principal Sara Oswald believes the policy has positively impacted students and staff.

"Students are more engaged in class, we see more student-to-student communication, and less online drama," said Oswald.

Cell phone violations have decreased immensely since the policy took effect last year during the fourth quarter. In the fall semester of the 2025-2026 school year, 44 cell phone violations occurred in the high school. The seniors had 15, the freshmen also had 15, the juniors had 11, and the sophomores had four.

The policy is not perfect, but it is working. High school English teacher Elizabeth Gallagher believes students seem to be more engaged with the class this way and are ready to go when the bell rings.

"I have always had a phone home. All kids put their phones in it when they first come into class, even if the bell has not rung. I have run my room this way for four years now," said Gallagher.

From a student perspective, many still don't like the policy, as they feel they should have control

of their property. Even with consequences, some students are still tempted to try to find a way to be on their phones.

WBHS science teacher Austin Curtiss said, "Some think there's a grey area right before leaving class, when waiting for the bell to ring, clustered by the door."

The policy states students cannot use phones during instructional time, even if work is completed early, or while waiting for the bell to ring. They must wait to check their phones until the passing time between classes or lunch.

At Hoover Elementary, cell phones are not a huge issue because the students there typically range from the ages of four to ten years old. Hoover houses preschool through fourth-grade students, and many of them don't own a smartphone.

Principal David Hlas believes smart watches have been a bigger issue than phones.

"I've maybe had a cell phone violation brought to me 3 times this school year," said Hlas. "Fewer students are bringing a device to school because they are worried about losing it or having it taken."

Middle school principal Brian Walthart believes the policy has made a positive impact at the middle school level and is also a good choice in the long run.

"There is no question in my mind

that this policy has helped with engagement, focus, and students personally interacting with one another," said Walthart.

"The students have been very respectful when a violation occurs, and follow the policy, turning their phone over to the applicable staff member."

Both Walthart and Hlas said they were happy with how the policy currently is and would not make any changes. At the high school level, though, since violations continue to occur, some changes have been considered by Oswald.

"If we were given a different setup, like lockers, I would like the phones to be put away all day," Oswald said.

Jimmerson said, "I think overall, it's had a positive impact in our schools. Staff have shared how they feel it's had a positive impact on students in their classrooms. We've also seen more students interacting with each other face to face instead of through phones, which research shows is a positive for students."

District-wide, the phone policy remains unchanged from implementation at the start of quarter four in 2025. Although students and their families faced a change due to the new state-wide law, the data shows the adjustment went well.

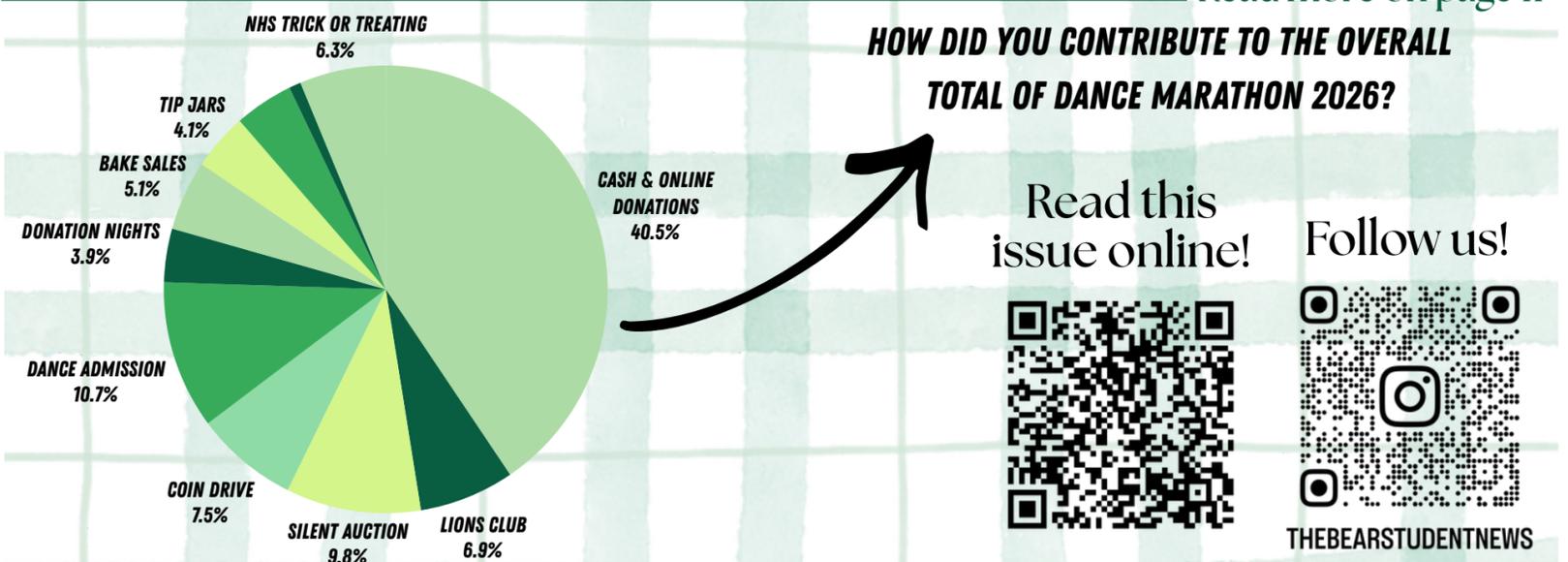
# 13<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL DANCE MARATHON RAISES OVER \$11,000



Student government members hold up the 2026 dance marathon fundraising total.

Left to right: Cassie Swisher, Grace Vincent, Caitlyn Harrison, Whitney Spratt, Lincoln Naber, Nolan Staker, Lynden MacGillivray, Addi Schultes, Maddie Neuburger, Saylee Gingerich, Lauren Keeler, Lexi Skay. Photo contributed by Harper Driscoll.

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# 2

# New Student Spotlights



March 05, 2026



**GABRIEL GARCIA**

**Q. What school did you attend before WBHS?**

A. Clear Creek Amana.

**Q. What grade are you in?**

A. Sophomore.

**Q. What's your favorite movie?**

A. Top Gun.

**Q. If you could try one hobby and be instantly good at it, what would it be?**

A. Drawing.

**Q. What do you think your spirit animal is?**

A. A Monkey.

**Q. What is one thing you didn't expect coming to a new school?**

A. Meeting new friends.

**Q. If you could only listen to one song for the rest of your life, what would it be?**

A. Suicide boys.

**Q. What school did you attend before WBHS?**

A. Roosevelt Middle School

**Q. What are you involved in, or would like to be involved in, in the future?**

A. I think art or choir.

**Q. What are some key differences between your old school and WBHS?**

A. There are more friendly people than at Roosevelt.

**Q. What's your favorite activity to do outside of class?**

A. Hang out with friends and finish my homework.

**Q. What is your favorite class currently or that you took last semester?**

A. I love marketing, I know more and understand it more than my other classes.

**Q. What is something not a lot of people know about you, but you wish they knew?**

A. I am a very quiet person but I am talkative if I know you more.



**SARA MWENYI**

**Q. What school did you attend before WBHS?**

A. Liberty High School.

**Q. What sports are you involved in?**

A. Softball and Volleyball.

**Q. What pushed you to come here?**

A. Better opportunities and having a family background here. It was a lot easier of a switch to make.

**Q. How do you like it so far?**

A. I really like it. The people were super welcoming.

**Q. What's the key difference between your old school and West Branch?**

A. West Branch is more hands on and helps with assignments. They are more flexible and lenient which helps benefit me as a student.



**MAYCIE HUGHES**

**Q. What school did you attend before WBHS?**

A. Solon.

**Q. What were some big pushes for you to come to West Branch?**

A. To play more sports and have better opportunities.

**Q. What are some key differences between your old school and now?**

A. There's a lot of welcoming people and the grading system is easier to understand.

**Q. Do you think it's a better fit for you overall and why?**

A. Yes, because I get more opportunities in other sports and I have made a lot of new friends.

**Q. What extra curricular activities will you be involved in?**

A. Football, baseball, basketball, soccer, and golf.

**Q. What's your favorite animal?**

A. Monkey.



**LUIS BUCKER**

**Q. What school did you attend before coming to WBHS?**

A. Healdsburg High School in California.

**Q. Are there any extracurriculars you're involved in?**

A. I'm not involved in extracurricular activities right now, but in the future I'd like to get involved in a sport.

**Q. What are some of your favorite classes so far?**

A. My favorite classes so far are Study hall, English and Photography.

**Q. What are some things you were nervous about coming into a new school?**

A. I didn't know if I would fit in here and I wouldn't have any friends.

**Q. What's a goal you have for this year?**

A. My goal to have for this year is to meet new people and make new friends. I also want to improve my English language.

**Q. What is your favorite thing to do outside of school?**

A. I like to spend time with my little brother and take him to the park.



**ANITA AMEMIX**



# Academics

March 05, 2026



## SPRING STUDENT TEACHERS REID AND ROTH Q&A

### MR. ROTH- MATH



**Q- What grade do you want to teach?**

A- High school 9-12.

**Q- Did you always want to be a teacher?**

A- Yeah I did, I got lucky I knew what I wanted to do.

**Q- Did you want to go to Iowa or did you want to go to another school?**

A- I wanted to go to Madison in Wisconsin.

**Q- What made you want to become a teacher?**

A- I had some great teachers in k-12. A lot of people are intimidated by math because it's hard. I want to help those kids understand. I just like helping people learn.

**Q- Is math your favorite subject?**

A- Music is but I do a lot of music on the side like, piano, I did show choir, I sing, it would be hard to have math on the side so I put music on the side.

**Q- Where are you from?**

A- I was born in Phoenix, I moved here when I was one.

**Q- What are 3 fun facts about you?**

A- I can do the splits, I love cats, I like black licorice.



### MR. REID- ENGLISH



**Q- What were your expectations going into teaching? Did you meet those expectations or are they being met?**

A- Just a job where I get to do something different and unique every single day.

**Q- If you could teach any other subject, what would it be?**

A- History or Science, specifically Astrology

**Q- Did you always know you wanted to go into teaching?**

A- No, first I wanted to be an actor then a dentist, then finally a teacher.

**Q- How did you settle on student teaching for Mrs. Gallagher?**

A- I was just assigned to Mrs. G

**Q- What is a fun fact about yourself?**

A- I got my head run over by a cyclist when I was 3 years old, with surprisingly no sustaining damage.

**Q- Where are you going to school?**

A- University of Iowa

**Q- What do you hope to accomplish at WBHS?**

A- I want to form connections with students and get the opportunity to see the wonderful things they create.



## MISLEADING HEADLINES MEET MEDIA LITERACY

Cassie Swisher  
Photography Editor

The American History class, junior course led by teacher Colby Vos, began a new, ongoing project over the last month and is set to continue for several more weeks as students complete a slideshow presentation on a news headline of their choice.

Presenting on a regular basis, each student selected a headline from recent news, then researched and found opposing perspectives on a left/right leaning political basis.

In an effort to push students to research, understand, and support their arguments in the everyday context, Vos created this assignment as a skill for students

to equip for the future.

“We live in a time where a lot of people see one thing and believe it to be true and this project forces you to look at a problem from multiple aspects to see what lines up and what doesn't.” Vos shared.

This project stands out for a multitude of reasons as students learn to have productive conversations on important, relevant and approaching issues today and build an evidence-based argument demonstrating awareness of the full picture in a world of misinformation and polarity.

While Vos continues the typical American History coursework during class time,

student workload will increase to finish their presentations in their own time and be presentation-ready on their set date.

After seeing some of the initial results, Vos stated that he would have liked to include a peer-conversational aspect to the project.

“I'm finding that a lot of the reflections share similar opinions but we live in a world that is very divisive and it's been interesting to see that students agree on more than they think they would, but they don't have a space to talk about it.” said Vos.

In an effort to create this space for students, the project will continue as each student brings their own headline and

research to class regularly each week.

“I want students to think for themselves and know why they think what they think.”

Vos's bold strokes to promote strength in student individuality as political and economic agendas are brought closer will continue as this evidence-based foundation of understanding is applied to real-world scenarios in and outside of the classroom.



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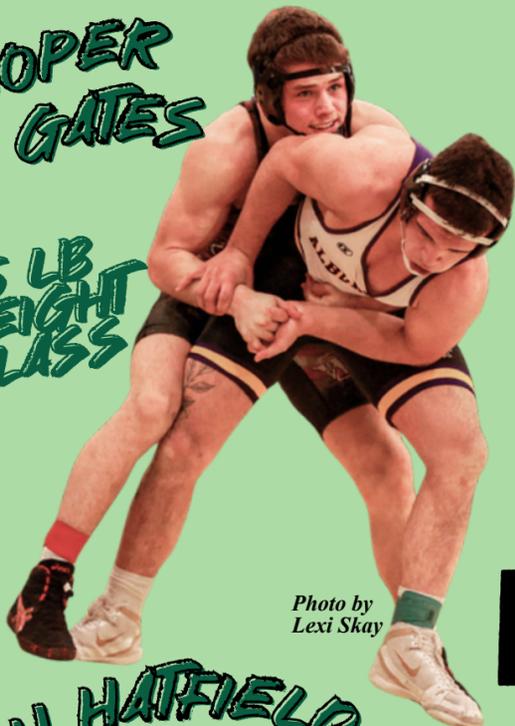


Photo by Lexi Skay

113 LB WEIGHT CLASS

ETHAN HUMPHREY

#3



Photo contributed by Ethan Humphrey

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#8

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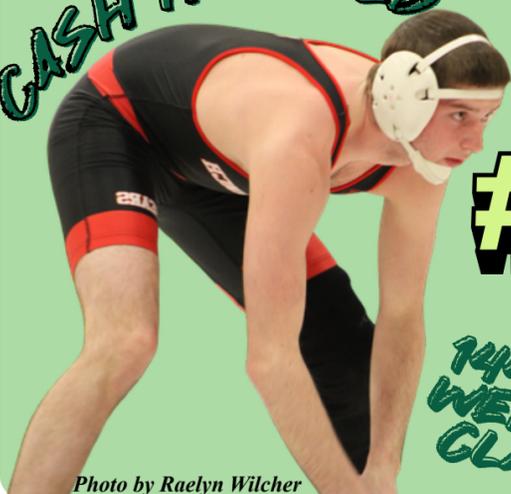


Photo by Raelyn Wilcher

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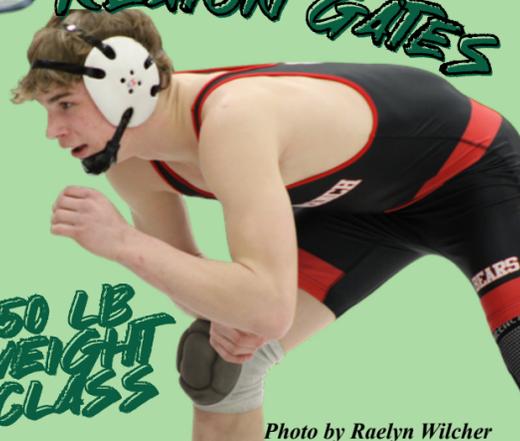


Photo by Raelyn Wilcher

### FIRST PHASE COMPLETE ON SOFTBALL/BASEBALL FIELDS

Cameron Waters  
Staff Writer

New lights arrived on Jan. 22 for the baseball and softball fields at WBHS. This is the first phase of upgrading the fields out of three phases.

Scott Toma and Jake Stenberg are working together to focus more on making an impact during the game for players. They then hope to focus on making a better and more fun experience for the fans watching.

Stenburg said, "It will take 15,000 grand to fully fund phase two. Softball players will start a fundraiser with more details to come closer to the season. We are also asking big companies to help through donations."

The second phase is new

netting and the start of the fielding work.

This is scheduled at the beginning of March when the frost melts.

Working on the outfield involves scraping out all the dirt in the field. Using a laser grinder to make sure the whole field is the same level with no holes. In the infield, they are adding sprinklers to make sure the sand does not become too dry. In addition, they will make sure to more accurately line up the bases and poles.

The third phase is adding the new locker rooms to the softball field and changing the current softball concessions to a different place. Baseball will not update its concessions yet. Phase three will not happen until later in the year when they have more money.

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# WBHS Alumn Feature

March 05, 2026

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## 2008 WBHS GRADUATE, FULLER, ATTENDS 2026 OLYMPICS

Sydney Nash  
Staff Writer

Libby Fuller, a 2008 WBHS graduate poses with her husband in front of the Olympic rings.



**Q: What led or prompted you to attend the 2026 Winter Olympics?**

*A: We currently live in Rome, Italy, and we figured we were the closest we might ever be to an Olympics (just a 3 hour train ride).*

**Q: Would you consider going again if possible and was it difficult to get to go?**

*A: I would definitely go again if I'm able to. Since we currently live in Italy it wasn't very difficult to go, though we did purposefully go at the start of the Olympics because my work gets very busy in February and March.*

**Q: What activities were you involved in at West Branch? (sports, newspaper, FFA, etc.)**

*A: Band and Jazz Band, Cross Country (although this was technically at City High, but done through WB's program with them), Speech Team, Drama Club, Editor-in-Chief of The Bear, Student Government, Bear Leadership Team, volunteer at Hoover Elementary.*

**Q: What classes were your favorite at WBHS and did they lead you to picking the career you have now?**

*A: I actually really enjoyed a lot of my classes, but probably some of my favorites were math related. Which certainly did help lead me to accounting for both my degree and my career.*

**Q: Where are you staying while at the Olympics?**

*A: My husband and I stayed in a short-term rental on the northwest side of Milan. It was well connected to public transportation, and decently priced (especially since we watched the prices for hotels increase each day!).*

**Q: How would you describe the experience compared to what we see on television?**

*A: I don't think you can really replicate the feeling of being there in person. Similar to going to a concert, a football game, or any other live event, the energy at the Olympics is unmatched.*

**Q: What was your favorite part of your time at the Olympics?**

*A: The opening ceremony was definitely fantastic! We also really enjoyed going to the National Olympic Committee Houses (NOC Houses or "culture houses") that are sponsored by different countries. They give you a chance to experience a little bit of that country's culture during some of your free time. We enjoyed getting to learn about other countries, watch some of the competitions on big screens, and eat delicious food!*

**Q: What year did you graduate from West Branch?**

*A: 2008*

**Q: What have you been doing since you graduated? (work/career, travel, life, etc.)**

*A: I got my undergraduate degree (BBA in Accounting and Finance, BS in Economics) from the University of Iowa, as well as my Master of Accountancy from the University of Iowa. I then moved to Houston, Texas, and started working for the public accounting firm PwC. During our time in Houston my husband and I adopted two dogs (Snoopy and Mila, both miniature dachshunds). Through my work we then had the opportunity to move to Rome in 2024, so we packed the pups up, sold our house, and set off on our new adventure! We'll be here through July 2027, and we're absolutely loving our time in Italy!*



Libby Fuller and husband holding their dogs, posing for a picture in front of the Roman Colosseum.

**Q: What's an accomplishment you are most proud of post graduation?**

*A: I think I would say my work with animal rescues in Houston, especially as a foster. We have fostered a total of 113 dogs so far, and only had one "foster fail" that we adopted! We've helped all breeds, all sizes, all ages (including a litter of puppies that we helped birth!). I'm really proud that we were able to be a stepping stone for so many dogs to have a new beginning.*

**Q: What was your favorite memory from high school?**

*A: I'm not sure I have a specific favorite memory, I would say just generally the time I was able to spend with amazing friends was my favorite. The fact that I have lifelong friendships from my time in West Branch is something I really cherish.*

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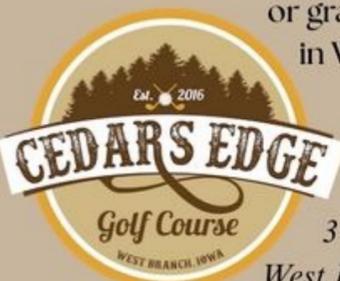
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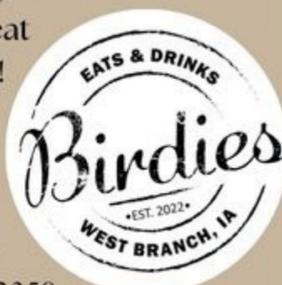
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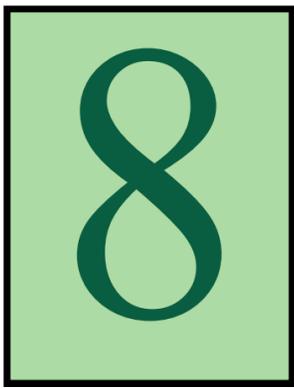
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# Reviews



March 05, 2026

## HOW WELL DOES THE IRON LUNG MOVIE HOLD UP TO THE GAME?

**Evan Highly**  
*Design Editor*

The new movie Iron Lung, produced by Mark Fischbach, hit theatres on Jan 30, 2026. Chloe Kleinmeyer and I attended the film together, my own personal goal was to rate it based on how closely it followed the source material.

Created and produced by David Szymanski, the game Iron Lung takes place in the far future where humanity has already colonized space. Due to a mysterious event known as the "Quiet Rapture" all stars and known habitable planets disappear without a trace, leaving only those on space stations alive. In hopes of ensuring the survival of humanity, the player is sent down to what was thought to be a lifeless moon. The reason why they send you down to this desolate moon is that it holds an ocean of human blood. They believe that the blood ocean holds resources to sustain human life.

Although the Iron Lung movie does not follow the game completely, I was pleased with the direction they took with it. Within the game, you are a convict and are sent down into the ocean with the deal of gaining freedom if successful. The game never gives you a background to the character you play or a reason why the character is a convict, but the movie adaptation is not the same. Within the movie, we learn the character's name is Simon, and the reason they became a convict was due to their involvement in the destruction of a space shuttle.

Similarly to the game, the movie follows the plot of taking photographs of ten points of interest.

In the game, you have to navigate the ocean with only coordinates from the Iron Lung due to the pressure of the ocean being too much for windows. In both the game and the movie, Simon navigates to the first point and takes a photo of a skeleton. Unlike the game, Simon is brought back up to review his findings.

Rating this movie based on how well it followed the source material, I would rate it a four out of five. Although it did stray away from the main plot of the game, I was not mad about it. The movie was able to do something unique with the story they were given and answer questions that were left unanswered by the game. The movie felt like it gave more depth to the original story of the game without it being an exact copy of the game. I believe the reason that many video game movie adaptations fall short is that they try to go a different route that does not make sense at all from the perspective of the game.

The movie begins to stray away from the game when Simon is sent back down to retrieve the skeleton. While this is happening, Simon finds an audio log that reveals that he is not the first person to be put in the Iron Lung.

In the game, it's known that there were others, but the movie took a different approach by withholding that information. Simon continues with his task to pick up the skeleton when he is told to ram into it. By doing this, Simon is knocked out and his connection with his commander is broken. The movie completely stops following the objective that it shared with the game, and goes down a completely different path.

In the movie, Simon reawakens from the accident and tries to get back to the mission by repairing the Iron Lung, but struggles due to hallucinations. Once Simon was able to repair the Iron Lung, he came across what appears to be a wrecked submarine labeled the SM-8. Within the game, the Iron Lung is also known as the SM-8, but the movie separates the Iron Lung and the SM-8 as two different things.

In the movie, Simon tries to access the black box of the SM-8, but is stopped due to not having the necessary information to log in. Simon's hallucinations only worsen as he begins to hear a woman's voice through the intercom. The woman is talking frantically and is begging Simon to rescue her. The woman obsessively talks about a mysterious light beneath the ocean. Their conversation ends when the woman gives Simon her location.

Simon follows the coordinates given by the woman, but while doing this, the Iron Lung catches photos of something alive and moving. In the game, you catch glimpses of what is to be a monster. As you progress, the monster follows you up to the last point of interest. Once you capture the photo, the game ends with the monster killing you.

In the movie, Simon begins to realize he is hallucinating when the woman says his name, information that Simon never gave out. Simon realizes that the wiring to the intercom is severed, and he has been talking to nobody. This causes Simon to have a vision and black out.

In time, Simon wakes up again and discovers that his connection with the commander is found; despite this, Simon is still hesitant about whether the commander is real. This quickly goes away once he realizes that the wiring to the intercom was actually still intact despite his hallucinations.

After confirming that the commander is a real person, Simon relays the information that he found. The commander, whose name is revealed to be Ava, tells Simon to recover the data of the SM-8, and in return, she will personally rescue him from the Iron Lung. Simon reaches the SM-8 and downloads the information. Blood and other organic material begin to fill the Iron Lung, and Simon realizes that Ava cannot save him. Despite this, Ava pleads for him to protect the SM-8 data because it's their only chance at saving humanity. Communication with Ava is cut off to what is speculated to be the monster that was

following Simon. Ultimately destroying Ava's submarine.

Simon retrieves the black box of the Iron Lung due to holding the data of the SM-8, and wraps a life vest around it. Like the game, the movie ends the same way through the destruction of the Iron Lung. Within the movie, the only thing left from the destruction is the black box floating at the top of the blood ocean.

The movie Iron Lung is different because it is able to go a different direction while still holding true to



the game. I really recommend this movie and hope to see more adaptations by Mark Fischbach.



Students Chloe Kleinmeyer and Evan Highly pose in front of Iron Lung poster. Photos taken by Kleinmeyer and Highly.

## IRON LUNG FROM AN INEXPERIENCED PERSPECTIVE

**Chloe Kleinmeyer**  
*Staff Writer*



I went to the Sycamore Mall theater on Feb 9, 2026, to watch the movie Iron Lung, based off of a video game. I was invited by my close friend Evan Highly. Highly has played the game and is a big fan of the franchise. I on the other hand have never indulged in the media whatsoever. When Highly invited me, I was completely on board. I love new experiences and I love watching new movies.

I went into the theater with no expectations at all. All I knew about this movie beforehand was that it was going to be scary. But, most people I spoke to about it said that it wouldn't be that bad. So naturally, I believed them. A movie created by a YouTuber couldn't be that scary. Or so I thought.

My overall opinion about this movie is that it was unsettling. I found myself on the edge of my seat the entire time. Most people would see this as an engaging experience, but I saw it as uncomfortable. I prefer a movie with a more structured plot. This could definitely be me just not knowing the lore, but I felt like I never knew what was truly going on. I kept asking Highly what the point of the scene was. For me, that's not a great experience. Sometimes confusion sparks the mind, but sometimes it can also just be boring. Another topic I'd like to cover is the length of the movie. I thought the length was alright, but there are a few points I want to make.

The duration of the movie is over two hours, and for me, that's too much. Especially if we don't reach the climax until the last half hour. I felt like I was just waiting for this big event, that didn't really meet my expectations when it actually came. Maybe that's just a flaw on my end, but again, that's up to interpretation of the viewer. Do you want to watch a movie that makes you wait for something you can't even name?

Do I recommend this movie to someone who doesn't know the game? Well, that depends. If you really enjoy being confused and scared, then sure. I just feel like the writers could have explained more on what was happening.

Maybe I'm inexperienced with the plot, or maybe my opinions don't match the majority of other peoples, but I felt this movie could have been made more efficiently for the viewer. If I wanted to wait for a huge event to happen, I would have just played the game. I understand that the whole point of the movie is that it's based on a game, but there are people out there who don't have time to play a game all the way through.

Sometimes I just want to see a movie about said game instead. To me, that's the whole point of making the movie: to create a shortened version of what goes on in the game.

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# Reviews

March 05, 2026



## NCIS; CHANGES THROUGH THE YEARS REVIEW

CRIME SCENE DO NOT CROSS

Connor Davidson  
Staff Writer

NCIS is about a team of special agents that catch serial killers and snipers that are dangerous. The NCIS team inspects the dead body at the crime scene, if there is one. The medical examiners will do an autopsy on the dead body at the morgue room to decide how the person killed them. This team comes together at the crime scene to make sure everything is safe and nothing gets in the way like killers and dead bodies. They have to interrogate people in the police station to see if they did it.

This team also does forensic science like DNA or fingerprints to help solve the crime. One more thing the special agents have to do is to go to the courtroom and give testimony. NCIS originally starred Mark Harmon who played Leroy Jethro Gibbs. The actor who played Catlin Todd was Sasha Alexander. The actor who played Tony DiNozzo was Michael Weatherly. The actor who played Abby Sciuto was Pauley Perrette. The actor who played Donald "Ducky" Mallard was David McCallum. My personal favorite characters are Gibbs, Tony, and Kate.

There have been some changes over the years with additions and departures. Over the years of NCIS, there have been 11 departures and 13 additions to the NCIS cast. In season 2, we

saw the addition of Sean Murray as Agent Timothy McGee which was a great addition. We also saw the departure of Sasha Alexander at the end of season 2 in which her character, Kate, got killed at the end of the season finale. In season 3, we saw the additions of Cote de Pablo as Agent Ziva David and Lauren Holly as Director Jenny Shepard.

No changes were made for Season 4 as everything was the same. In season 5, we saw the departure of Lauren Holly in which Director Shepard got murdered at the end of the season.

In season 6, we saw the addition of Rocky Carroll as Director Leon Vance who maintained that serious nature of the show. Seasons 7, 8, and 9 were the same cast throughout all three

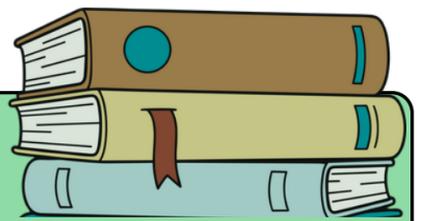
seasons. In season 19, we saw the shocking departure of Mark Harmon but there is no explanation as to why he left. We also saw the additions of Katrina Law as Agent Jessica Knight and Gary Cole as Agent Alden Parker who now leads the team. The cast was the same in season 20.

David McCallum unfortunately passed away before season 21 so therefore Ducky also dies during the second episode of the season. This was a huge cast with plenty of charm that made people watch the show every week.

In my opinion, I think NCIS is a great show that solves every case a week. It really gets my attention and my family's attention whenever something new arrives.

This show will always get into people's lives for years to come.

## CASSIE'S CORNER: BOOK REVIEWS



### ROMANCE

#### Better than the Movies by Lynn Painter

Cassie Swisher  
Photography Editor



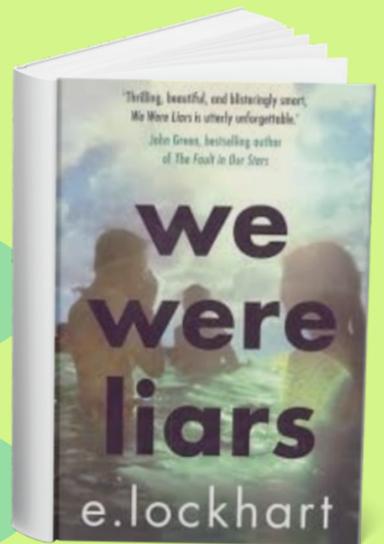
Years after her mother passed away, Liz Buxbaum is now a main character in her own right. Her floral dresses, reliable red lipstick, and brand new flats are just her style, regardless of how "out there" they are. Being my favorite book, I may be pushed towards bias as I write this. However, I consider myself a sponge for all things romantic and heartfelt, so when I read this book for the first time, giggling out loud is an understatement. I'm talking full feet kicking, laughing, and blushing, that's how invested I was. This book takes the emotional rollercoasters of teenage love and mixes it with the fabulous character designs of Liz Buxbaum and Wes Bennett to create a beautiful and witty love story. It shows that normal, teenage experiences like walking to class, going to a basketball game, and attending prom can be some of the most substantial and important moments that all add up to why you can say you love someone.

### MYSTERY

#### We Were Liars by E. Lockhart

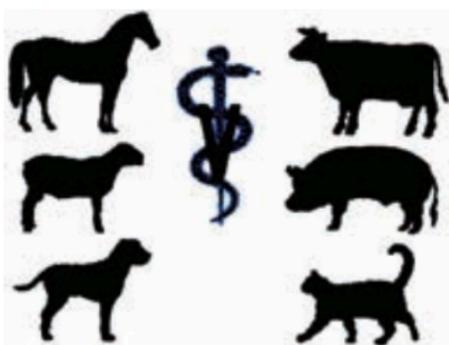
Cassie Swisher  
Photography Editor

Following a tragic accident resulting in Cadence Sinclair developing amnesia, she returns to an island in an effort to uncover what happened that resulted in the memory loss. With the help of her family, Johnny, Gat, and Mirren, this book expertly walks the path of loss and mourning. When I read this book, there wasn't a single plot twist where I didn't have tears streaming down my face, full-on ugly crying. The travesties that occurred on that island, the Sinclairs' summer home, are unfathomable. Not one character in the book is without hundreds of layers of complexity, which is what makes this hit so close to home- it's realistic and painfully sharp in terms of describing the genuine, human emotions we all experience. The entire Sinclair family has contradictory and heartfelt moments mirroring ones we've all been in. The best way I can summarize this book is to say that unstable families built on years of animosity and spite will only come crumbling down in the end.



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# 10

## Student Interest



March 05, 2026

### ART CLUB HOSTS FIRST ART SHOW AT HOOVER HOUSE

**Chloe Kleinmeyer**  
*Staff Writer*

The West Branch High School art club teamed up with the Hoover House to host an art show in downtown West Branch. There were two parts to this show, which included the art club members showing art, and live music playing in the room beside the display.

**Club advisor and WBHS art teacher, Lukas Jordan, said, "This event gave the opportunity for students to display their work and skills to the public."**

The show allowed students the opportunity to create art and display it for the public.

They could make pieces specifically for the event, or they could show previous projects. Students could also sell their pieces for a set price of their choice.

Whatever they earned, they could keep. The art club also received donations from people who attended the event. These donations will go to future projects and new supplies.

A few months before the event took place, Hoover House owner John Proeller reached out to Jordan. Proeller informed Jordan of his plan to hold an art show that would feature art from the students at West Branch.

The process of setting up involved planning time,

arrangement, and who would be attending. A few art club members teamed up with Proeller to renovate the space and get it ready for the

event. They arranged the space based on an estimated number of people who might attend. The space needed to accommodate not only the art, but also to allow people to stay and listen to the music being performed.

Art club members Chloe Kleinmeyer, Kendra Rarick, Evan Highly, and Ethan Highly were all very involved in the process of getting the space ready for the event.

While the students not only wanted to make a profit, they also wanted to show their art in a

new way. The art show being in a unique venue allowed the students to experience showing art in a new environment that is more similar to a gallery experience in a bigger city.

**Art club president Evan Highly said, "This is my first time ever doing anything like this. It was a great opportunity to grow a platform for myself."**

The students felt the venue had a professional environment because of the band & setting.

The art club is so incredibly grateful for this experience, and they cannot wait to hold many more shows like this one.



Sophomores Kendra Rarick and Chloe Kleinmeyer set up for the art show on Thursday, Feb. 12, 2026. Photos contributed by Lukas Jordan



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# Clubs & Orgs

March 05, 2026

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## CHRISTOPHER JIVE & THE UPTOWN 45 WINS GRAND CHAMPION TITLE AT MOUNT PLEASANT

**Evan Highly**  
*Design Editor*

Christopher Jive and the Uptown 45 won grand champion at the Mount Pleasant Music Emotion competition for the first time since 2014. The group traveled there on Feb. 7, 2026 for one of their toughest competitions of the season.

Choir director Christopher Reed initially came in hoping to make finals, and felt thrilled when he found out CJU45 not only made finals but also won grand champion.

Typically in a show choir competition, groups will perform during the day until every group is finished. Based on how well the group performs, they have a

chance at another performance in the finals. The daytime performance brought a challenge in the form of a costume mishap. Panic arose after the realization that all of the shirts and socks for performers had been left back in West Branch at the school. Luckily, the costumes were able to be recovered at the last minute.

Despite the hiccup with the costumes, CJU45 still competed. After returning from the critique with a judge, the show choir found out they placed second out of 14 groups. The reveal of CJU45 placing second in the daytime performances inspired the group to work harder for finals. The difference between first and second place being ten points only put the show choir in perspective of winning. Ending day time

performances with awards, CJU45 won first place in the 2A divisions as well as best crew. Daytime awards ended with the schools receiving their placement in finals, CJU45 being one of them.

Her first time being in crew, Junior, Madeline Eulloqui, said she felt great when the best crew got announced,

“I started screaming and was very excited for the award. It was a very special moment for me and the crew.” said Eulloqui.

After performing in finals, CJU45 headed down to get situated for awards. In the reveal of what placements each howchoir earned, CJU45 won best choreography for the night and the ultimate prize of grand champion. After the announcement of CJU45 winning grand champion Mr. Reed

said, “Complete disbelief, not because I don't think we were good enough, just the idea of getting all the judges to agree for us to win is hard.”

Although CJU45 won grand champion at Mount Pleasant, Reed still looks to the future for an upcoming competition at Pella on Feb. 21 and Central Lee on Feb. 28.

“If we make finals, I think we could have the potential of making anywhere between 6th and 2nd place.” said Reed.

Reed also discussed his thoughts on how the group would place at Central Lee.

“I think we should have a good chance at winning our performance center, and getting first place. But again, we need to take care of business.” Reed said.



CJU45 celebrates being nominated for finals at the Pella Dutch competition two weeks prior to the Mount Pleasant Grand Champion win. This step helped build confidence for the group before the Mount Pleasant competition.

Photo by Anthony Heitzman

### (Dance marathon story continued from page 1)

**Wyatt Chapman**  
*Writing Editor*

The WBHS Student Government raised \$11,654.02 in the thirteenth annual Dance Marathon, surpassing their \$8,000 goal by over \$3,000. They raised a little over \$4,000 more than the 2025 total of \$7,513.82.

West Branch and 37 other Iowan schools, whether that's high, middle, or elementary, host mini dance marathons. Each mini dance marathon feeds into the big University of Iowa Dance Marathon, which raised a total of \$1,695,270.32 at their event on Feb 7. The WBHS student government had their own group goal of \$3,000, which they met

and fed their overall total.

One step to help fund the total amount raised, included Trivia Night. Student Government hosted the competition on Feb. 4 and raised a total of \$100 for \$3 per person.

Texas Roadhouse hosted a fundraiser where ten percent of funds went toward the WB Dance Marathon. Texas Roadhouse added \$186 to the total, only if the party said that they were there for WB Dance Marathon.

“Ultimately, our motto became ‘You never know until you try.’ This meant that we said yes to everything, even if it would only contribute a small amount to the total,” said junior committee head Cassie Swisher. Tori Vikel helped organize a bake sale in Tipton and

student government also held bake sales at Christmas Past and home basketball games.

Similar to Texas Roadhouse, student government also got Coralville business, Jersey Mikes to host a dine out night. On Jan. 13, if ordering from Jersey Mikes, fifty percent of the sale proceeds went to Dance Marathon!

Throughout the week of Dance Marathon, students raised awareness for different cancers by wearing different colors. Students wore pink on Tuesday, for breast cancer awareness, purple on Wednesday for pancreatic cancer awareness, dark blue on Thursday for rectal cancer awareness, and white on Friday for lung cancer awareness.

Student Government fundraised

during lunch periods too. Middle and high school students could pay one dollar to put their handprint on the FTK posters. FTK meaning “For the kids,” West Branch’s motto for their Dance Marathon.

A bit of snow blew in on Friday, Feb. 20 causing West Branch to have a late start. Even with the delay, the University of Iowa still sent a guest speaker, Liz Pearson, for students to listen to during Instructional Support time. She shared her story about what Dance Marathon actually does for kids with cancer so WBHS students realized exactly what their money went towards.

Finally, Friday night the student government hosted the actual dance. Students danced from 8-11 P.M. in the Bear Den for the kids.

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# Clubs & Orgs



March 05, 2026

## TWENTY-FIVE WBHS STUDENTS TO COMPETE AT SKILLSUSA STATE



Photo by Caitlyn Harrison

25 WBHS students will compete at the SkillsUSA State Leadership and Skills Conference on March 5-6 in Des Moines, Iowa, at the Iowa State Fairgrounds. These students are prepared to compete in a variety of events that will test their technical skills and career readiness.

Teams/events are as follows:

Welding Fabrication Team 1 - Keaton Gates, Mason Pedersen, and Cooper Hartz

Welding Fabrication Team 2 - Reese Gingerich, Clay Gates, and Ethan Humphrey

Individual Welding - Lillian Waters

Quiz Bowl Team 1 - Mason Vargason, Dillan Schenkel, Kyler Donohoe, Maksim Fernandez, Caeson Gingerich, Hudson Wolfe, and Landon Shimon

Quiz Bowl Team 2 - Arik Marsh, James Haack, Levi Rodgers, Jonah Halter, Julian Garcia, Marc Batres, and Carter Thompson

Additive Manufacturing - Hunter Hamer and Halia Gade

Job Interview - Preston Mayhew

Automobile Maintenance and Light Repair - Draven Ladehoff

## STUDENT GOVERNMENT SEEKS SECOND CHANCE AT PRESTIGIOUS AWARD

Anthony Heitzman  
Business Editor

In April of 2025, WBHS Student Government won the National Gold Council of Excellence Award, being one of only eight schools in the state to receive the award.

The National Council of Excellence Award is given out by the National Association of Student Councils to recognize councils that, "Maintain strong year-round programs and work to improve their schools and communities through their leadership activities."

Councils are not able to

simply win the award by filling out a form or writing an essay but must instead go through a long application process and demonstrate that they have met a long list of criteria for the award.

During the first step of the application process, councils must complete a portfolio documenting evidence that they have met the criteria for the award, such as having a set of bylaws, organizing school activities, and conducting elections. After completing this portfolio, they then must present it to their school's principal, who then must approve the portfolio and write a letter of

recommendation as part of the application. After meeting with the principal, the council's advisor must then complete an online application in which they must include two letters of recommendation from themselves and the school's principal as well as examples and proof of having met all the necessary criteria. For the Gold Council of Excellence award, councils must also meet an additional 26 requirements in addition to the 22 basic requirements.

After the application deadline, typically in February, councils must wait another two months to

hear back while the decision is made. The number of councils that can win the award is not limited and all councils that meet the necessary criteria are able to win the award. Winners will then be notified in April and be given a plaque, an official certificate, and a custom press release.

WBHS Student Government feels pride in winning the award for the first time and has expressed confidence in their ability to win the NCOE for the second year in a row, Advisor Abby Noelck said, "I feel extremely confident ... the officer team and I feel assured that we meet the award criteria"

## Green Bandana Project

The WBHS Student Government is officially a part of the Green Bandanna Project!

Unfamiliar with this project? Heres where you can learn!

The Green Bandana is a project to raise awareness for suicide. Everyone who is part of the project will wear a green bandanna. The bandanna symbolizes being someone who is always open to talk with peers about mental health.

If you are interested in participating, be on the look-out for more information!

Green Bandana Project QR code:

To speak with the suicide hotline, Please call 988!



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