

SPECIAL ★ REPORT

TIME



A WEEK IN THE LIFE OF A HIGH SCHOOL

What it's *really* like since Columbine

Junior Natalie Rodriguez,
senior Evan Russell and
sophomore Sara Story of
Webster Groves High School
near St. Louis, Mo.

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A large crowd of high school students is shown in a gymnasium, cheering enthusiastically with their arms raised. In the foreground, three girls are prominently featured, all with their mouths open in shouts or screams. The girl on the left wears a grey long-sleeved shirt, the middle girl wears a light blue crop top with a white sweater tied around her waist, and the girl on the right wears a dark blue shirt and light-colored pants. The background is filled with other students, some also cheering, creating a sense of a large-scale event or pep rally.

A WEEK IN THE LIFE OF A HIGH SCHOOL

By **NANCY GIBBS**

EVERYONE HAS A STORY FROM HIGH school, sketched out of memory and myth. The myth reflects the faith that we all have a chance to invent ourselves, and high school is the lab. We enter, still children, for this sweaty, four-year experiment, and if we are brave and lucky, we race out the big double doors that graduation flings open onto the rest of our life. Sometimes we don't even think to look back at the ones who got lost along the way.

The stakes are so high, the experience so searing that in retrospect we sometimes polish it up. These are the best of times; you'll remember your prom as long as you live. Tuesday pep rallies for Friday football games; band practice and the fall musical, Young Life and the Key Club and the astronomy class that met at midnight to watch the cradle moon rise. Even the pain looks poetic from a distance.

A WEEK IN THE LIFE OF A HIGH SCHOOL

MONDAY TUESDAY WEDNESDAY THURSDAY FRIDAY

The vast majority of our kids, the ones we love and never read about, make it through high school intact, without incident. They do the reading and sing in the choir and bug groceries after school and buy the class T-shirt and don't pierce anything below their ears. And yet everything that happens to them is huge. Everybody matters: the teacher who hoists students' ambitions up to meet their potential, or the one who just ignores whatever they say until they stop saying anything; the nurse who takes students into her home to keep them from falling apart; the classmate who teaches loyalty; the coach who instills some discipline. Sometimes the lessons inside the classroom are the least of it.

Look inside a high school, and you are looking in a mirror, under bright lights. How we treat our children, what they see and learn from us, tell us what is healthy and what is sick—and more about who we are than we may want to know. Dylan Klebold lives here, and so does Cassie Bernall, and they can't help showing us what's on their mind, because that's the nature of teenagers. So come in only if you want to learn. All they will give us is a glimpse, but even that may knock the wind out of us.

It is easy to understand, even before Columbine but certainly since, why the adults in a high school could conclude that their most important job was less to teach kids than just to keep them safe, hold their hands, feed them, shape them, show them right from wrong. In loco parentis is just the beginning. In loco all the rest of us as well. Politicians and reformers can talk all they want about standards and vouchers and academic performance, but the people on the front lines worry about a lot more than test scores.

"This place is like a town," says English teacher Minnie Phillips. "We have a jail, a hospital, a restaurant, a theater. We've got everything you need here ... but everyone goes home at night." And with luck, comes back the next morning.

"This place" is Webster Groves High School, which sits off the main street of a pretty town of old elms and deep porches, about 10 miles southwest of St. Louis, Mo., where, when people ask you where you went to school, they are not referring to college. That's just the way it is here; high school tugs hard and holds on; people graduate and come back and send their kids,

who graduate and do the same. This town of 23,000 is not as tony as nearby Clayton or Ladue; it has its mix of \$90,000 cottages and \$750,000 homes, young marrieds and old-line families and transient middle managers assigned to a stint in the St. Louis office who are looking for a comfortable place to settle and keep their kids on the track toward prosperity.

And yet this school, like every other school, is changing fast, by accident and design, because everything that touches it is changing too—the economy, family life, technology, race relations, values, expectations. TIME picked this school for the same reason marketing experts and sociologists like to wander this way when they are looking to take the country's temperature: the state of Missouri, especially the regions around St. Louis, are bellwether communities, not cutting edge, not lagging indicators, but the middle of the country, middle of the road, middle of the sky.

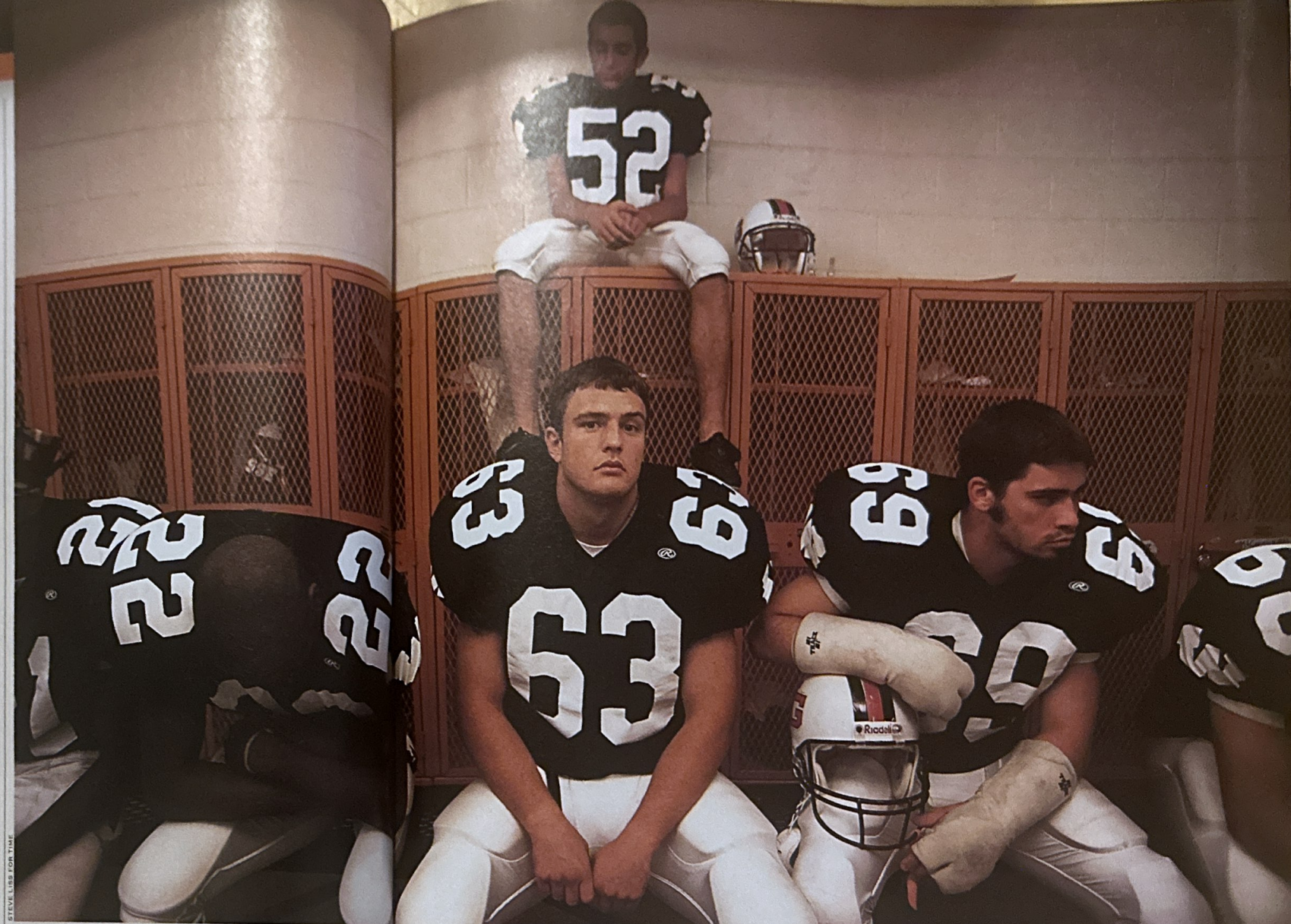
To study a school like this is to take an advanced course in compromise. Is it worth renouncing homework and offering credit for rock climbing if it keeps struggling kids in school and out of trouble, massages them through to graduation, maybe even a junior college? Is it worth letting kids work 30 hours a week after school, even if grades suffer and half a dozen are asleep in many a first-period class,

in the belief that this is training for the "real world"? Is it worth busing 161 black kids in from St. Louis, in a program that provides the school district where they go an extra \$2 million in state aid, if parents and some teachers quietly argue that because of busing, overall achievement has fallen? Is it worth turning the principal and her deputies into sentries, equipped at all times not with books or rulers but with walkie-talkies, if it keeps the lid from blowing off?

After Columbine, West Paducah and Conyers, some schools have turned into citadels, metal detectors at the doors, mesh backpacks required. Not Webster. The doors are open at dawn and left unguarded; 96% of the kids polled this fall by the student newspaper say they feel safe in school. They say the kids get along pretty well, races mix, jocks and geeks hang out together. And yet they will say, if you ask, "Littleton could happen here." Last spring, af-



THE PRINCIPAL For Pat Voss and her team, walkie-talkies serve as their electronic dragnet



FRIDAY-NIGHT JITTERS

If this season's winning streak continues, the players hope more fans will turn out to watch their games

ter Columbine, someone scrawled a bomb threat on the wall of a boys' bathroom. The marginal kids know they are being watched, very, very closely.

If there is a secret to running a school in post-Columbine America, it is to make sure the place keeps no secrets from you. Since schools are populated by adolescents—that eager, suspicious, alienated, hyperbolic cohort—this alone is a full-time job. "There are two directions that schools are going in: to improve the climate and build trust, or to have metal detectors and transparent lockers," says assistant principal John Raimondo.

Webster Groves has made a conscious decision to try to control the weather. The school would much rather prevent a disas-

ter than clean up after one—which means that a child who so much as murmurs a threat toward himself or a teacher or another student is immediately under the microscope. But still the tempests come. "Drinking is the biggest problem," says police captain Doug Jacobs, class of '59, "and the parents that allow it." A child from a prominent family has a beer-and-booze party in the backyard while Mom and Dad are not home. There is the boy who dived into drugs and death threats and knives last year after his good friend died, the boy's soft, slashed wrist a souvenir of his journey through grief. He keeps in his planner the business cards of the hospitals that have treated him.

Teachers, like parents, have always faced the tension between roots and wings: how to keep kids safe and grounded; how to let them stretch and fly. But after so many shocking headlines,

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MONDAY TUESDAY WEDNESDAY THURSDAY FRIDAY

THE CHEERLEADERS At their slumber party before the big pep rally, they eat nachos and popcorn and limbo to the sound of Respect

the adults are edgy and tempted to try to stamp out teenage rebellion and cruelty and popularity contests altogether. At a Webster pep rally, for the first time, individual team members are no longer introduced by name—to keep the cheering and booing from getting personal. Cheerleaders are picked by a panel of outside professionals, the football team rotates its captains so no one is favored, and anyone can show up for the Student Council meetings. Some students don't know who the senior-class president is. Adults "don't want to offend certain groups," says senior Lizzie Sprague, 17. "They are afraid [students] are going to go buy guns and kill everybody."



WEBSTER GROVES **AVERAGE AMERICAN**

NUMBER OF STUDENTS

1,325 **900-1,200**

SPENDING PER PUPIL

\$7,404 **\$6,950**

COMBINED SAT SCORES

1110 **1016**

PERCENTAGE WHO GO ON TO COLLEGE

78% **67%**

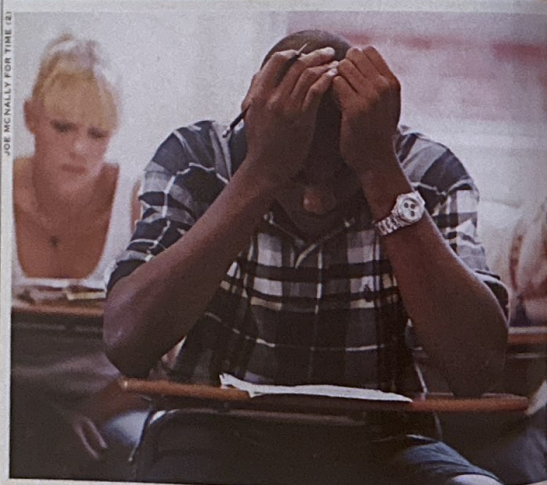
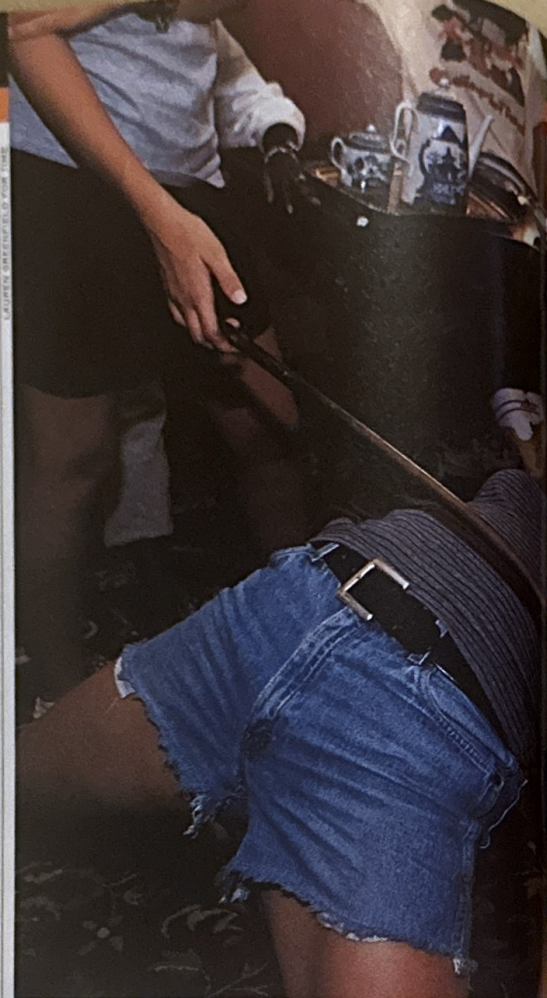
MEDIAN PRICE OF SINGLE-FAMILY HOUSE

\$140,100 **\$132,700**

(Sources: Webster Groves School District, Department of Education, RealtyNET, McLean Realtors, National Association of Realtors, ETS)

making plans for the weekend, and even those are subject to change at the last minute. They get jobs, not necessarily to save for college but to buy a \$400 leather jacket. So many kids skip their homework that most teachers stop assigning more than 15 minutes' worth: ask too much, push too hard, and the students will give up, drop out, become a menace to society. We have to strike a balance, the adults say. We have to be reasonable. We want them to enjoy themselves, have a certain freedom, before the world turns serious on them and there is no going back to 17.

There is an excellent education lurking here for the child with an inner flashlight. The best teachers arrive early and leave late and wrestle to make everything they teach mean something, and they all show up at the football game at the end of the week, their own kids in tow, cheering their students on and mixing and meddling with their lives in the bleachers. Walk down the halls, stop and listen in, and you can hear those moments of collision and discovery. "Some of you were complaining that the questions I was asking about *The Scarlet Letter* were making your brains hurt," says David Mendelson to his honors English class. "That is the goal." He is trying to take them to the point where their heads throb, because that is the point at which they learn. "If the question is easy, I have failed." Maybe high school is supposed to hurt some. That is also why we remember what happens here forever—all the triumphs and all the scars, all the effort to tell which is which.



FOOTBALL STAR Bobby Granderson goofed off for three years, until he realized that college coaches actually look at players' grades



PLAYACTING In drama class, students use "dance bags" and scarves as part of their exercises in movement control and expression. Webster is strong in the performing arts

Monday

THE AIR IS SWEET AND THE stars are out, the milky streetlamps still lit at 5:45. It would be a great morning to be fishing. The school doors are already open when principal Pat Voss pads up the front steps in her cranberry Goofy T shirt and heads for the main office. Nancy Giessmann is in the cafeteria making breakfast, Vron Murphy is in the office doing photocopying left from the night before. The flag next to the front steps is still flying at half-staff, in honor of the teacher who dropped dead in the hallway between periods two weeks ago.

Voss, universally known as P.V., climbs up to the windowless weight room above the gym for her morning workout: abdominal crunches in sets of 20, leg presses and toe raises, free weights for working her obliques. She's thinking about tonight's school-board meeting. A survey last year found that most people in town are happy with the schools—which she considers a challenge. "That could mean they're less willing to spend more to improve them."

The building is brick and stone, sprawling in all directions, additions stapled on here, an annex there, accidental courtyards created in between as the building grew to accommodate 1,300-plus kids and their growing appetites. Just two years ago, if you plugged in a computer, it might have blown out a circuit. The school has been rewired since then. Chief custodian Frank Schaffer is already inspecting the premises, moving back the picnic tables that the skateboarders clear out every weekend. He knows every inch of the place, from the mile of utility tunnels in the basement to the old attic that was once used as a rifle range. "This building is a living organism," he says. "It lives for the people inside it."

The first wave of students arrives at 6:55 a.m. Six buses from downtown St. Louis pull in bearing the "deseg" kids, most of whom head for the cafeteria. The band members have practice most days before school; drowsy musicians start stumbling onto the field across from the entrance. Jacob Myerson is upstairs in a dim hallway, sitting on the floor outside Room 319, some 40 minutes early for class, studying vocabulary words. *Histri-*

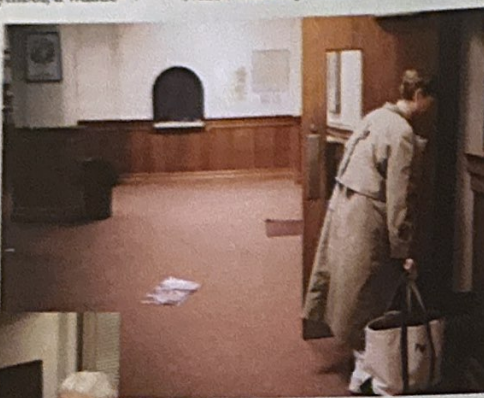
onic. Poignant. Unkempt. Loquacious. He wants to go to Princeton.

By 6:45 a.m. Detective Dave Dreher has already been briefed by the Webster Groves police department about the weekend. "If no crimes were committed over the weekend, no juvenile matters, nobody arrested, nobody hurt, no traffic accidents, nobody locked up that I have to go interview, then that's a good morning. We're having a good morning." His loaded Smith & Wesson, his badge and his beeper are all hidden under his brown sports jacket, but he carries the school's ubiquitous power symbol, a walkie-talkie, and it will crackle and sputter plenty before the day is safely started.

Nurse Lynn Buss is preparing for the Monday flood. Her "clinic" is tucked away on the first floor of the pre-1935 extension that she calls "the North Forty" because of its remoteness. The first wave consists of girls who march straight into one

al that is under construction by some seniors. THE THINGS WE VALUE AND BELIEVE IN, it says in bright letters, with white clouds and smiling kids made of construction paper and all the students' names and thoughts pasted on in little fortune-cookie strips of revelation. DREAMS, says one. MIRACLES. LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT. ART. But lest anyone mistake this for a giant Hallmark card, there is much more here. LONELINESS. GREED. AN EYE FOR AN EYE. PARTIES. WEAKNESS. DRAGONS. ABSTINENCE. JUSTICE. WEALTH. PEOPLE CAN CHANGE.

Nurse Buss slips down to the cafeteria



MORNING WORKOUT Voss typically gets to school by 5:45 a.m. to distribute messages, work the phones and hit the weights

to haul back a bucket of ice. "My major cure," she notes. "When in doubt, put ice on it." She flushes an amorous couple from the girls' room in the back. "We were just talking," the boy protests. The kids are already lining up outside her office: one girl is there for iron pills to treat her anemia—a poor substitute, notes Buss, for what she really needs, which is a decent diet. Another has a bruised hand from a fight over the weekend; a boy wants Tylenol for a stomachache; she gives him baking soda and water.

A girl who forgot her inhaler is having an asthma attack. Buss draws her a glass of tap water and instructs her to gulp it down quickly; the shock of the intrusion, she says, often releases the asthmatic constriction. Part 2 of this home remedy is a shot of Diet Coke; the caffeine sometimes has a similar effect. Outside, the marching band is rehearsing the borrowed strains of *On Wisconsin*. Buss predicts, "By November I'll be able to walk out there and play it myself."

Senior Sarah Bradberry sits on the floor, reading *The Whipping Boy* for her children's literature class. She scribbles answers to questions printed on purple paper, homework she should have done over the weekend. The class, she says, is easy. All the students do is interpret books written at

third-grade levels. "I need the English credit to graduate," she says. Just down the hall, you see another kid, copying answers from one purple sheet to another.

Two kids wearing hats spot Detective Dreher in the hall and whip them off; this year there is a no-hat rule. "Thank you, gentlemen," he says. The school doesn't want anyone wearing anything that might identify them as a member of an exclusive group; last year, says an openly gay student, the kids who harassed him the most were known as the White Hatters, after their headgear. The administration also worried about kids' starting to wear gang colors.

Detective Dreher is treated with respect, even affection; he's been known to drive kids home at night or spring for a cab when they're stranded, call them in the morning to be sure they're up, use the office slim-jim to help them break into their cars when they lock the keys inside, throw in a job reference for a dropout at his brother-in-law's restaurant. At 7:50 his walkie-talkie erupts with a call from principal Voss; custodian Schaffer has discovered obscene graf-



WAKE-UP CALL Because it's so early in the morning, members of the marching band must struggle to keep step at practice

fiti in the parking lot and on the grass. Dreher can see them from where he's standing. After finding Schaffer and having a quick conference with Voss by walkie-talkie, Dreher gets a digital camera to record the writing—so he can see if it matches the work of any known culprits—before the custodian sets to work with his cleansers.

Walking counselor Bob Walker, balancing two boxes of Krispy Kreme doughnuts he's brought in for the school's secretaries, is on the move. He's a big man, ex-Navy, with a voice higher than you'd expect and clothes a size too small. It's his job to catch the smokers, the illegal parkers, the kids without hall

street behind the school is filled with cars. Seniors get first dibs on the few precious spaces in the lot as long as they're willing to pay \$45 a year, so underclassmen with cars must search for any spaces around the school. Those who do use the lot seem to have silently reached an agreement as to



SLEEPY IN ST. LOUIS Above, Sara Oheron, left, and David Wollaefer find it hard to get going in Mrs. Brewster's world-lit class

who will get to park in a particular space. "Rule No. 1 of the parking lot," says Walker: "Do not run over the fat man with the walkie-talkie."

By now there are more than 40 members of the marching band scattered on the field across from the school entrance. Like a flock of birds forming a flying pattern, the musicians sort into 10 parallel lines grouped by instrument. The flutes—17 girls and one boy—are on the far left, and the lower brass—all but one of them boys—are on the far right. They serenade the parked buses, the kids draped on the front steps. "It's a poor substitute for coffee," says a spectator as the tempo picks up. "This Sunday I'm gonna discreetly plant land mines all over that field." He pauses.

After scales and *On Wisconsin*, Dane Williams, the band's faculty leader, calls the members into the center of the field for a pep talk cum encounter session. Over the past couple of weeks the drum majors have been fighting, accusing each other of being bossy, and band members are beginning to take sides. Mr. Williams, in blue jeans and

an orange faded polo, tells the band that he knows what's going on and says, "I want you to think: Are you saying things to your peers that you might regret?"

Head librarian Grant Brady is in the library, with a problem. He has been wondering for a while now what to do with a book called *Long Road to Freedom: The Advocate History of the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, that is hidden under a stack of papers on a desk. He ordered the book based on catalog descriptions, thinking it would provide insight on gay politics. When the book arrived, however, he found that it included several frontal nude photos of men. He has never been told to get rid of a book, and he doesn't want to be a censor—but he would not have bought the book if he had known about the photos. He has not decided what to do.

On the roof, two young men sprint on their tiptoes across the asphalt, careful not to draw the attention of the band practicing across the street. "Stay low," one tells the other. "Get down." They are carrying the head of a female mannequin that



DETECTIVE DREHER The school's full-time police officer dresses like a banker but keeps a Smith & Wesson under that jacket

they've named Headrietta, which they borrowed from a Spanish teacher's closet. They reach the edge of the roof and count off spaces to a classroom below. They lie on their stomachs, leaning over the edge, and lower the head down the side of the building by a string tied to its blond hair. "Over to the left... Over to the left!" When they bang it against a third-floor window, several girls in a classroom scream. The pranksters giggle and scramble back across the roof and hustle down a ladder. They don't want to be late for the start of the next class period. After all, they are the teachers.

Brian Yates and Terry Verstraete are the class clowns among the faculty. Last year the pair, along with math teacher Eric

KEEPING PACE:
With school life moving at breakneck speed, studying doesn't always get done the night before

Dunn, climbed on the roof and aimed Super Soaker water guns at students on the sidewalk below. A woman who lives across the street called the police, saying kids were on the roof with guns. They saw a police officer circling the building and hurried down, just in time to be greeted by an assistant principal who radioed Pat Voss that he had captured the culprits.

"Students?" Voss asked. When he answered no, Voss hesitated before asking with a strained voice, "Faculty?"

None of the teachers was reprimanded, but students—and colleagues—won't soon let them forget. "We call them Pat's Children," says a teacher. Their practical jokes are nothing more than "humor interventions," they say. "We do it to relieve the stress," says Verstraete. "We like to keep things saucy."

—N.G.

7:10A.M. | SCHOOL SECURITY

Always on the lookout for signs of trouble

THE STUDENT HAD STUCK A straight pin through his tongue and casually worked it around in his mouth as he chatted with his teacher. When she persuaded him to remove it, he asked if she had a safety pin that he could put in its place. Then he asked what would happen to a student who threatened a teacher.

That chilling little drama took place last week, and now, 20 minutes before the opening bell, 10 fully caffeinated members of the Webster Groves staff, led by principal Voss, are discussing what to do about

it—beyond the temporary suspension the student received straightaway. The group comprises what the school calls a Safe Team. It includes all the student's teachers, a guidance counselor, the school's part-time social worker and its police liaison officer. The team's first concern is to get the troubled student the help he obviously needs. But there's another mission, and an undercurrent of worry that is new since Conyers and Columbine: any report of a threat, however veiled, is taken seriously and pounced upon immediately. Any Webster student who poses a danger to himself is considered a potential danger to others.

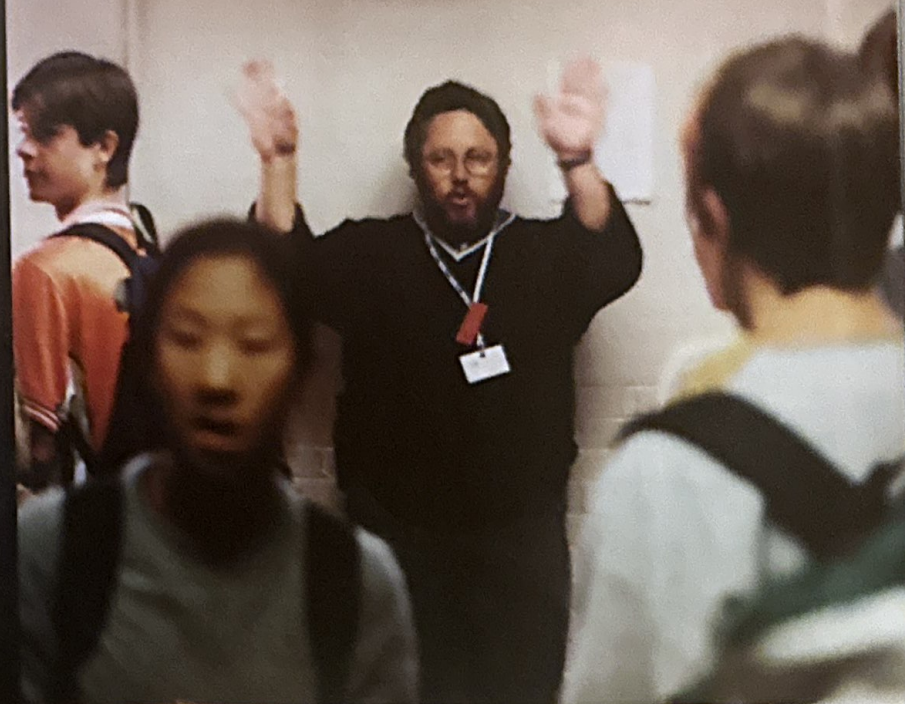
Over the summer Webster Groves administrators reviewed the school shootings of recent years—what they had in common, what warning signs were missed, what safety measures might have made a differ-

ence—and then formulated a new security strategy. They rejected the metal detectors and bomb-sniffing dogs routinely employed by many schools in favor of an aggressive program of prevention and early detection—not just of obvious threats and violence but also of anything that might lead that way, including petty conflicts among cliques. Says assistant principal Raimondo: "We're trying to pay more attention to kids on the front end." Teachers and support staff are instructed to alert administrators not only to overt discipline problems but also to subtler signs, like a sharp decline in a student's grades or a loss of interest in favorite activities. Says Raimondo: "It gives us 130 pairs of eyes."

In fact, the snoop-to-student ratio at Webster is quite high. Voss has selected 60 kids for her Principal's Student Leadership

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MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY



IN THE MORNING Sometimes the place seems like a police state, but after the spate of incidents in schools around the country, Webster Groves administrators are vigilant

Group, whose duties include reporting any incidents or smoldering resentments that might lead to trouble. Kids who look or act different at Webster know the walls have ears. Meanwhile, Voss and her assistants, walkie-talkies in hand, routinely roam the halls between classes. In order to avoid the appearance of a police state, it seems, Webster Groves has had to create a real one.

What keeps the place from feeling like North Korea, though, is the genuinely benevolent interest the school's adults take in the lives of their students—on and off campus. Teachers at Webster know a remarkable amount about which girl's parents are breaking up and which boy chafes at his big sister's accomplishments. And they get involved. Last year teachers noticed that one girl was suddenly doing poorly in school: she was often tardy, slept through class, didn't do her homework and dyed her hair wild colors. Counselors made a visit to the address listed as her home and found she was living there alone. Her grandmother had been there with her but was in the hospital, and the girl was estranged from her parents. She was using drugs and alcohol to "self-medicate" for depression.

Webster staff members get involved in other ways. One senior, a gifted poet who

won't graduate unless she can take some remedial courses across town, doesn't have a ride to those evening classes. So assistant principal George White drives her. White is also on a mission to help a new boy with Down syndrome. When White recently asked if he needed anything, the boy said softly, "Friends. I need friends."

That's the tone of the Safe Team meeting this morning about the boy with the pin in his tongue. The group reviews his record, which includes prior incidents of setting his pants on fire, threatening suicide and failing to take his medication. The news is not all bad. One teacher notes that "he participates in class, does his homework and wants to do well." Someone else reports that the boy "had a period last year when he talked about dropping out and getting a job." But the consensus is that if he could get back on track in school, it would be better for him—and for Webster Groves. "If he's out on the street," says Raimondo, "he could be more of a danger to himself and others." The meeting ends with an agreement to discuss the boy's problems further with his parents and his private psychiatrist—and to watch him closely when he returns to class.

—By Dan Goodgame

Conflict Mediation

8:20 A.M.

"I moved forward, and I almost hit somebody else, and I made them mad, so they flicked me the finger," says Christian Kirk. "I got mad 'cause I had to drive into another lane, so I gave him the finger," says Bryan Patterson, at right, foreground.

What makes this testimony interesting is that it reverses

what really happened. Last Thursday, Bryan nearly clipped Christian, who gave him the finger (which caused Bryan to follow him home and eventually to return with friends). But telling the other guy's side of the story is an integral part of assistant principal George White's seven-year-old conflict-mediation program.

Participating in mediation is not compulsory, but it can forestall a suspension, and mediators from the staff, or one of 65 selected students, conduct up to five a week. "The incidence

of fights is way down," says White. "They don't really want to hurt each other."

He asks Christian what concerns he should have had ("The girls in the car with me"). And for Bryan, how many could have got hurt ("Seven people"). He elicits pledges from each to avoid the other and to alert him if there's a problem:

"It's always better to talk man to man, isn't it?"

The two boys shake hands and (for now) come out not fighting.



mayor of a midsize city. She teaches some of the best kids in the school and some of the worst, but like many teachers, it's the ones in the middle she is concerned about. "In trying to be something for everybody, we're not doing an intensive job for any group," she says. "There's something noble about this mission, but it doesn't always serve students well."

This class includes kids on the cusp. About half say they plan to go to college. One already knows he wants to join the Army, become an MP, then be a cop. "Better be a crooked cop," a classmate advises him. "That's where the money is." One is great with computers. One says beer is his life. Many have some trouble with their writing skills. They say their dream classroom would have no desks, just couches.

Like many teachers, Phillips has enormous control over what gets taught in her classroom and yet admits she is constrained when it comes to standards and expectations, like assigning homework. She guesses about 15% in her class actually do it, which means she can't base Tuesday's class on readings that no one did the night before. Bright kids get bored; slow kids get lost; the kids in the middle muddle through. Her colleague Bob Hutcheson puts it this way: "I wonder if among their peers, there isn't a certain norm of mediocrity. And if they shoot for the middle, they'll always settle for less."

The pressure to prevent kids from getting discouraged and dropping out seeps through the very bricks of Webster Groves. To graduate, a student must earn 22 credits, with a semester course typically counting as half a credit. Communications skills (known elsewhere as English) is the only subject that requires three full credits (communications includes classes like public



BASIC DRAMA CLASS As part of the theater program, Webster students get a chance to try improvisational parts and playacting

speaking, journalism and even children's literature, a course with 30 students that involves close readings of Dr. Seuss). In history, science and math—the other "hard" subjects—students need only two full credits, the state minimum, to graduate. This means that responsible students can be finished with most of their core courses by the end of sophomore year.

It's no wonder that seniors fill their schedules with community campus (working a job for course credit), student assistant (run errands for your favorite teacher for course credit) and senior leadership seminar (a double-period, low-homework class, where the grade is based on showing up, having a positive attitude and participating in exercises ranging from rock climbing to community service at a homeless shelter.) "They don't care if you learn," says junior Steve Rois. "They only care if you pass."

The kids and the parents and the teachers all make the same case: there are superb teachers teaching challenging courses for talented kids. But if you are not highly motivated, it is easy to skate through school on a smile and a whim. "I have absolutely no homework. Just 10 minutes a night," boasts junior Ellen Williams. "None of my teachers believe in homework this year." Junior Adam Erickson says he does about 30 minutes a night. "I'd like to learn," he says, "and someday I want to be a teacher, but I don't want to learn right now." Instead, he works 30 hours a week at Einstein's Bros Bagels and is in the drama production. "I got a B+ on your test without even reading the book," he boasts to Phillips, "because I just got the gist of the book from class discussion."

"Look, I'm sure all our teachers would like to challenge kids more," argues assistant principal Jon Clark. "But if you give

some of our lower-level kids a lot of homework, they aren't going to do it. And if they don't do it, they'll fail. And then they'll quit. We don't want that. We think these kids are better off in school than out on the streets. They're safe here, and they can learn in class even if they aren't doing homework." There is even a financial incentive. The school received an extra \$150,000 last year from Missouri's "A-Plus Schools" program,

whose primary goal is to reduce the dropout rate. Webster stands to receive the same amount for the next two years if it continues its progress.

The period is almost over, and Phillips is pressing the kids about the traditions around sweet-potato pie. And finally, just before the bell, she has the class precisely where she was heading all along: "There's a kind of sweetness surrounding it, and when I went to eat the other night in downtown St. Louis, what was I doing? I was returning to my roots, and I want you to remember about your roots when reading the story." The bell rings, and they all move on.

—N.G.

10:36 A.M. | FIRST LUNCH

The tribes of Webster

THE SLIGHTLY RAISED AREA DUE north of the entrance to the cafeteria is home to the Double '00 Hoes (the name's an inside joke—they define themselves by not sleeping around). All seniors, friends since sixth grade, mainly but not exclusively blond, involved in every sport, play and leadership group the school has, they are called "the Clique" by outsiders, who admit that the "Hoes" own the school. Most of them skip the school cheeseburgers and unpack a brown bag of fat-free Yoplait, a Nutri-Grain cereal bar, some carrots or an apple. Sometimes they splurge on an Otis Spunkmeyer cookie, which they divide among about 20 of them.

Today they are doing their regular Monday autopsy of the weekend, trying to figure out whether someone was wearing a thong under her toga at a party last Friday. When talk turns to college, most admit they haven't a clue where they're applying.

Lunchtime is the atomic age, when all

7:30 A.M. | ENGLISH CLASS

Do you reach for the sky, or just get by?

MINNIE PHILLIPS IS BRACING FOR her first-period 10th-grade English students. She always has them at 7:30 a.m., a launch time that is an insult to the teenage metabolism.

"Would you please turn to page 23 in your vocabulary workbook?"

A groan. "Can't we just sleep instead?" Phillips runs through some words—*usage*, *brandish*, *staid*—before getting down to business, a discussion of Eugenia Collier's short story *Sweet Potato Pie*. "What's unusual about this title?" No one bites, so she answers her own question. "It has pie! Now how many of you have not had sweet-potato pie?"

Only a few raise their hands. "What's wrong with you all?" smirks Ebony Ingram. "Look, it's all the white boys." Two of the parents promised Phillips last week at parents' night that they would send in a pie for this morning's class; neither seems to have remembered.

Phillips tells the class of a restaurant she went to over the weekend that served the pie, as well as ham hocks, collard greens and smothered beef stew. "And what do all these things have in common?" The white students are still stumped when Robert Givens chimes in. "No offense to my Caucasian friends, but sounds to me like you were eating black foods," he says.

"Well, they're soul food," Phillips says. And with that the class starts spitting out associations, and she is at the board writing: tradition, culture, grandmother, filling, ample. Now everyone is paying attention.

Phillips, a sharecropper's daughter, is one of those magical teachers whom you could imagine in a hundred roles: talk-show host, prison warden, poet laureate,



MASTER TEACHER Minnie Phillips was one of the first black students in her previously white high school; she graduated at 16, finished college at 19, then came to teach at Webster

Only a Bus Ride Away

9:10 A.M.

Three senior girls are gathered in the high school's "college center," a sort of one-stop shop for information about colleges that's stacked high with brochures and paraphernalia. Here a representative from Bradley University in Illinois is answering their questions about class size, dorm life, sports and admissions requirements, when Jenny Kettler pops a crucial query: "Can you bring a car to campus?" Answer: no, not as a freshman. But, the rep adds, "the good news is that there's a bus from St. Louis 365 days a year." The girls exhale a collective "Phew!" Says one: "That means we can come home whenever we want."

A WEEK IN THE LIFE OF A HIGH SCHOOL

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UN-CLIQUE-ING Maybe the trauma of losing four schoolmates last year is bringing the kids together

the groups split up and fan out, cluster at their tables or flee the school to the parking lot and the fast-food joints beyond, or settle into their regular spot in the school cafeteria, where everyone has a secret and nothing is hidden.

The most remarkable thing about the social warfare of Webster Groves is that there isn't much. There are clubs and tribes, unwritten dress codes and anxious social climbers who admit to their fear of being seen talking to the wrong person. And yet there is something almost diverse about the divisions: "It's very cliquish here," says junior Lauren Bell, "but each group is actually very mixed—it's not all the jocks, all the preps, all the punks, and I like that." Lauren sometimes considers herself an outsider, albeit a straight-A, cheerleading one. "You become a target, not really for looking different, but for thinking different from other people," she says, "like not caring about being popular. That is really asking for it."



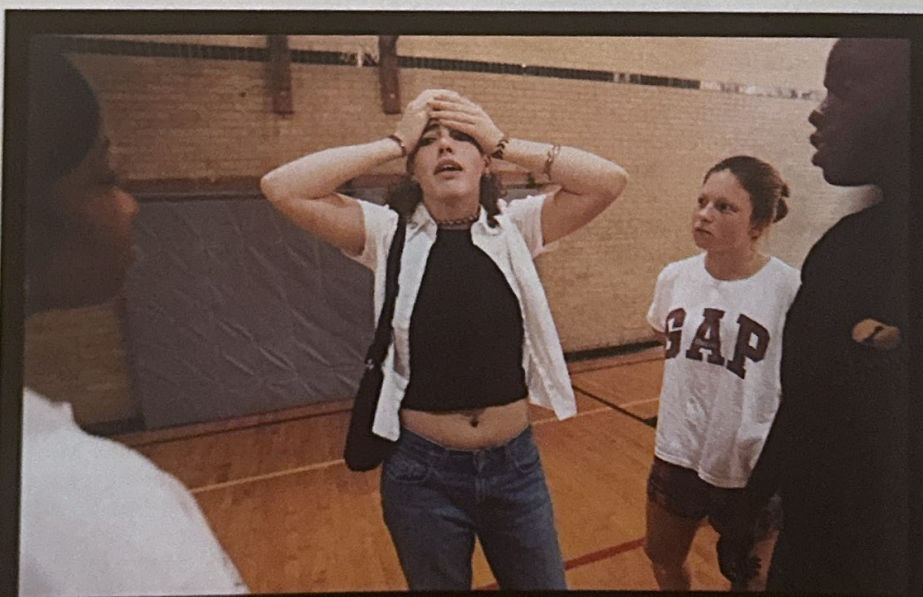
BOB SACHA FOR TIME

Kids will point to money, more than race or looks or athletic ability, as the Great Divider. The guy with the coolest car does indeed get all the girls, but he's not the popular jock. He's a husky kid whom everyone calls the Commander, and the girls hang out at his house after school. "The girls love him," laments one jock. At some schools the

rumor is that athletes get special treatment, that they are able to slide by in their work or their conduct because even the teachers treat them like stars. To a degree, some Webster jocks take advantage of their status, but others argue that expectations are actually higher for them. "Teachers look at you differently when you play a sport," says soccer player Bo Biggs. "They want us to be role models." When he is late with an assignment or fools around in class, the response is, typically, "You're supposed to be a leader at this school. I expect more from you." Not all the high-profile athletes seem to feel the pressure, though. Karl Odenwald III, the fair-haired varsity quarterback, argues that "it's not as big a deal as people make it out to be." As for being a role model, "I don't go helping elderly people across the street."

Among the girls, the In sport is softball. Sarah Miller, whose friends call her the Doctor because she's an A student in all the hard classes, was awkward and unathletic as a freshman and learned that "the way to become part of the In crowd was to join a sport." Two of Sarah's best friends are Lisa Gilbert, a drum major in the band who may be valedictorian, and Ben Hudson, a black senior with a 2.9 GPA who works two jobs to help pay the bills at home.

Sarah sits near the soda machines, where she can watch the whole pageant roll by. On her far left are the "scared freshmen boys, the ones who haven't really come into their own yet." At the next table are some African-American boys, and next to them is a table of preppy sophomore and junior girls. To her far right sit the seniors.



LAUREN GREENFIELD FOR TIME

1:30 P.M.

"Well I'm off the team," sighs sophomore Stacy Thrasher, emerging from cheerleading coach Gloria Smith's office, tears threatening her mascara-thick eyes. As other girls gather around, Stacy raises her T shirt, exposing a dime-size stone nestled inside her belly button. Coach

Smith, who spied the stone last week, ruled that body piercings are a health hazard and gave her the weekend to decide whether to take it out—or leave the squad. Stacy reckons she's got more invested in the navel ring than in being a cheerleader. "It's, like, my decision," she says, "even though it affects everyone on the team."

divided into the In crowd and the "in-between" crowd. ("They get to talk on the phone with the In crowd but are not invited to their parties.")

Despite being in calculus and advanced physics, Sarah distinguishes herself from "the computer children" or "the technology twerps." While she rarely drinks alcohol, her friends do; she's the permanent designated driver. Last Saturday one of her friends was reeling at a party, having drunk eight Purple Hooters. When the friend tried to leave, Sarah blocked the door. The next morning, between massive heaves, Sarah's friend said, "I'm sorry."

If there is almost a tenderness in evidence among many of the students, maybe less goading and cruelty than people have come to expect from this age, there are a couple of possible reasons. Many of these kids have known one another since grade school, and grown up in a tolerant time. Maybe Columbine taught them something. Maybe small-town, Midwestern kids are just nicer.

Or maybe it has to do with the fact that in the past year, four of their schoolmates and one of their favorite teachers have died ... —N.G.

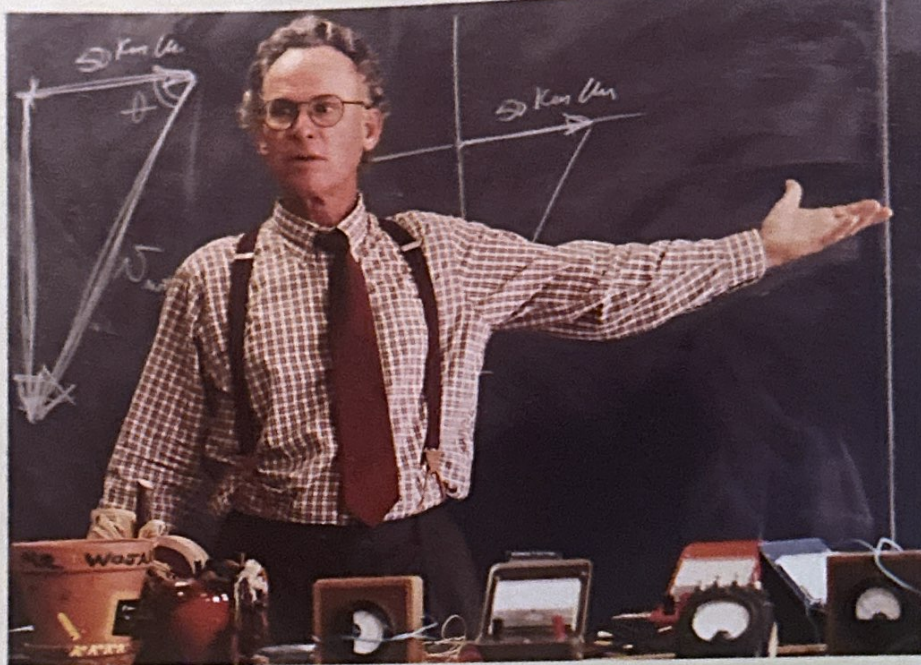
7:30 P.M. | SCHOOL FINANCE

The high price of civic pride

THE WEBSTER GROVES BOARD OF Education is convening in the one-story school-district building tucked into the shadow of the high school. Had out-of-town visitors driven to that meeting by way of Elm Street, with its lovingly restored Victorian homes valued at as much as \$700,000, they might have assumed that the board's major task this evening was figuring out how best to invest all those tax revenues that must roll in from such a prosperous community. They would be wrong.

In fact, the Webster Groves public schools are facing a \$1.2 million deficit in their \$30 million annual operating budget, 80% of which goes to salaries and benefits. And the district faces millions of dollars in

deferred repairs on the high school building, which dates from 1907. A close inspection of Webster Groves beyond its wealthiest avenues reveals the reasons for the deficit. To the north and south are neighborhoods of modest, well-kept homes that sell for less than \$200,000 and bring in lower tax revenues. In short supply anywhere in town are land parcels given over to commercial or industrial taxpayers—testament to Webster's determination to pre-



TIGHT MONEY Average salaries for Webster Groves teachers such as Phillip Wojak (physics) are lower than the county average

serve its residential character, and a big reason why property-tax revenue is relatively low and taxes are relatively high. "We missed the boat in the '50s and '60s, when we had a chance to annex some adjoining communities and develop them commercially," says Brian McLain, who runs a Webster real estate agency.

The main issue before the board this evening is how to sell voters on even higher taxes. The superintendent, Bill Gussner, wants to ask residents in April for approval to borrow some \$10 million, by issuing new bonds, to repair leaky roofs and antiquated heating systems. But he also wants to collect more than 50¢ per \$100 valuation in new tax levies, most of which would go to raise the pay of the district's 292 teachers.

There is not much difference of opinion in Webster Groves over whether teachers deserve more money. At \$42,400, their average pay is slightly lower than the St. Louis County average. But it's notably below that of peer schools in some other suburbs in the county, which are luring some of the best teachers and prospects away from Webster. Just a month ago, a 14-day job action, in

which teachers refused to participate in after-school activities to protest their pay scale, ended with a tentative agreement that earmarks \$5 million more for teacher salaries over the next three years.

Webster Groves' taxes, which are three-quarters of the school's budget, are not that out of line with those of neighboring districts like Kirkwood or Clayton. (A 58-year-old, 5-bedroom home sold recently for \$289,000 has an annual

property tax of \$2,800. But because of the community's historic resistance to commercial development, and thus the limited options for raising new revenues, the board has little choice but to count on the district's voters to see them through to fiscal equilibrium.

To help with that effort, the board has recruited Rod Wright, president of Attitude Research, a St. Louis polling firm that specializes in school finance votes. Fortunately for Webster, he has kids in local schools and donates his time.

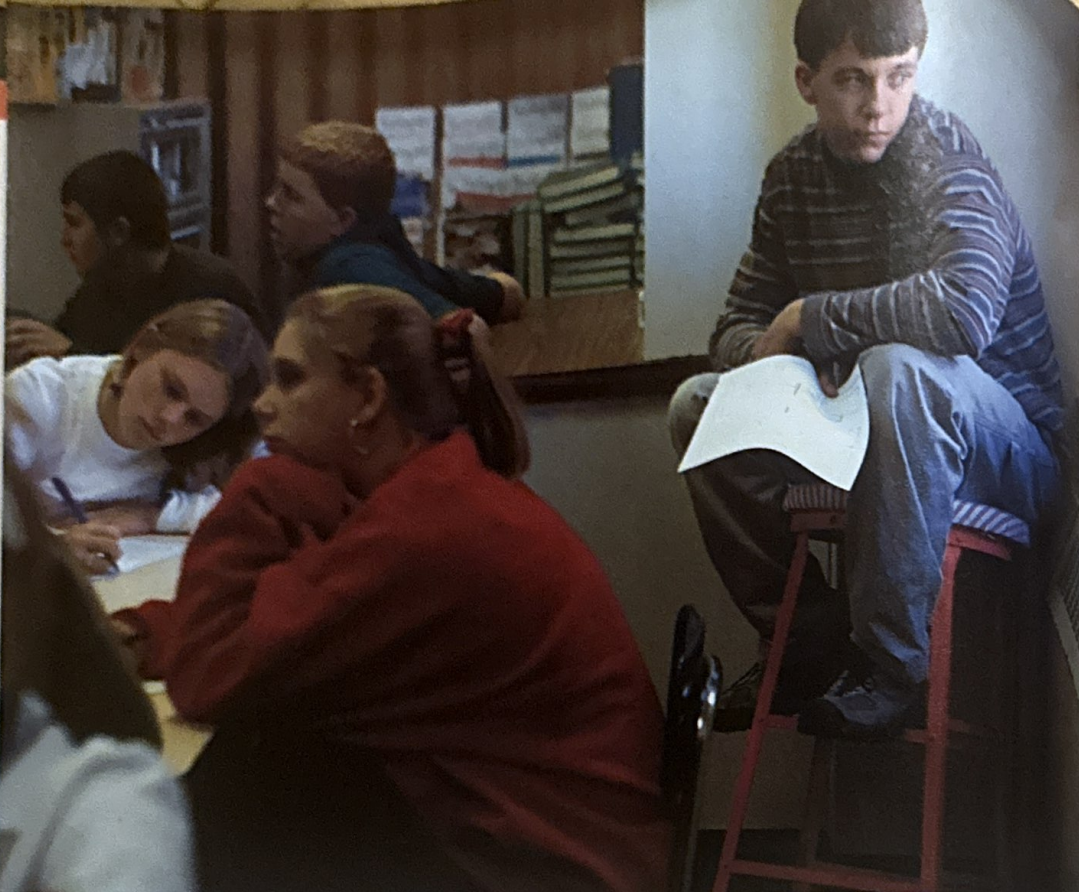
The goal, he advises the board, "is to get people to vote their emotions and aspirations—and not their pocketbooks."

As if to confirm that observation, one of a handful of parents attending the meeting, Peter Bakker, who has four daughters in the system, rises to urge the board not to settle for a tax increase that would only raise teacher's salaries slightly, but instead to "make Webster one of the best."

That is becoming tougher and tougher to do, acknowledge Wright and others close to the school-financing issue. Caught in the nationwide movement to induce equity in school funding (state aid is capped at 1992-93 levels), the district is also hampered because Missouri requires a supermajority 4-out-of-7 vote on all school bond proposals. Then there are the unfunded government mandates, like the Americans with Disabilities Act, which forced Webster Groves to spend more than \$1 million in the past three years on compliance.

Still, Wright is optimistic. "The city has a history of backing these things when they're needed," he says. We benefit from having a population capable of paying higher taxes. In a lot of other places, people have a hard time making ends meet."

—By Barrett Seaman



Tuesday

7:33 A.M. | THE AUTO SHOP

Among the engines, lessons about life

SENIOR JOE BRUSSEL, WITH HIS PURPLE Burton backpack slung over his right shoulder, cell phone clipped to his tan cargo shorts, strolls into Frank Mandernach's advanced auto-mechanics class—late but relaxed. The rest of the class is already in the lab room, watching a student take apart a 1987 truck engine. Joe makes eye contact with Mandernach, settles into a chair out of sight of most of his classmates and pulls out a notebook. "Sometimes Mandernach just lets us get organized," he says. For the rest of the period, Joe stays to himself, his mind far away from cars and engines. Mandernach keeps an eye on Joe, but today he's decided to give the boy some space.

The auto shop at Webster Groves, once

IN ANOTHER WORLD While his classmates are busy taking notes in English class, senior Joe Brussel's mind drifts elsewhere

seen as the dumping ground for bottom-end students, is more popular than ever, and most students taking shop today aren't interested in becoming mechanics or engineers. Students of all abilities—mostly boys but a growing number of girls too—flock to this faraway corner of the school in search of less structure and more responsibility, a place where they get to move around and use their hands. "In a lot of classes, it's 'Do this' or 'Do that,'" says Joe, "but in auto shop you know what you need to do when you come in here, so you get it done yourself."

Three large garage doors lead into the shop, which even when empty, looks like a fully functioning engine and detail center. Just inside, propped on cement blocks, is a rusted, formerly red 1979 Jeep Cherokee, used to teach bodywork. In the back of the shop, huge wooden slabs, stained by oil and grease, lie on top of old gym lockers, creating the lab space where students learn engine anatomy. All sorts of auto parts fill the shelves and remaining floor space. "All this stuff is just tools," says Mandernach, looking around his shop, "tools to motivate kids."

Three years ago, Mandernach, as Joe's freshman-year academic lab instructor, saw Joe the way his other teachers did—angry, ready to fight even at the slightest challenge, and irresponsible. "He had a small-man problem," says Mandernach. Joe weighed only 80 lbs. in his freshman year, and even now, with short brown hair, smooth face and dimples, he looks more like a freshman than a senior. "Joey's such a sweet kid," says his mother Debbie Deimeke, who divorced Joe's father when Joe was six, "but inside he's got all this pent-up anger."

It took a year of fighting on a near daily basis, but Joe finally found in Mandernach a man he could trust. He took Mandernach's power technology class in his sophomore year and thrived. Junior year he arranged his schedule to be with Mandernach for a remarkable three hours a day: in auto lab, auto mechanics and as a student assistant. His academic teachers began to see less antagonism. Joe was finally getting his high school life under control.

Then, on July 25, 1998, Joe's 18-year-old sister Erica was killed by a drunk driver.

During the first school day after his sister's death, Joe came to the auto shop. Mandernach, unprompted, said, "If you need

A WEEK IN THE LIFE OF A HIGH SCHOOL

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somebody to just listen, I'm always here." Joe wasn't talking much to anybody, but sometimes he came in and told Mandernach that he needed some time. Joe would sit in his car, and Mandernach, if he could get class coverage, would slip out and check on him.

Joe spent his time in the shop working on his grandmother's busted boat engine. But the grief was taking a toll. After a few months, Joe started to miss school regularly, and he fell far behind in his classes. A top player on Webster's red-hot hockey team, he started fighting with his teammates. He was absent so many times he didn't get the 2.5 credits he needed to be eligible to play hockey this year.

The start of this year, though, was different. "Last year I didn't want to be here," says Joe. "But this year is not so bad. I like it. I've changed." His grades are up, he's doing his homework, and he's been absent only once. He's been coming to hockey practice, hoping that an appeal to the eligibility board will let him rejoin the team. Faye Walker, the Suspension Lady, who saw Joe as a "terror" his freshman year, sees real growth: "Now he knows where he wants to go and who he wants to be." It's Joe's last year in auto shop, and Mandernach doesn't mind letting him tune out every now and then. He, more than anyone, knows how far Joe has come.

—By Andrew Goldstein

9:40 A.M. | U.S. STUDIES

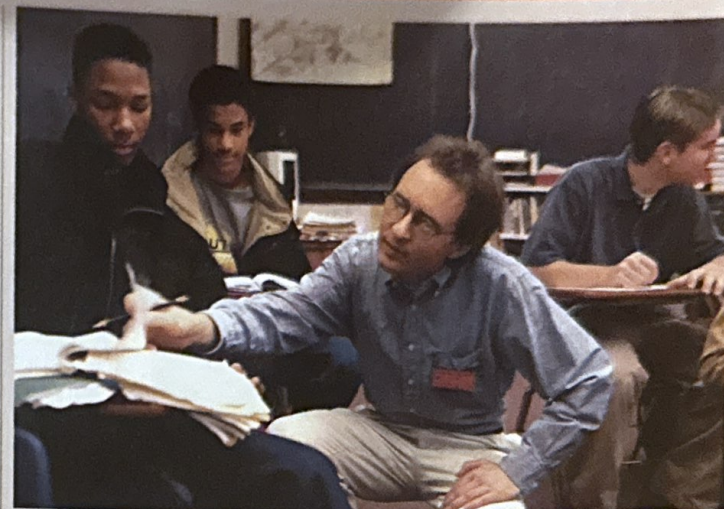
Hester Prynne, meet Muhammad Ali

THE TOPIC IS HAWTHORNE'S *THE Scarlet Letter*. Even the avid students in this honors U.S. studies class are drowsy. They have just watched a jolly but interminable student video about the colonial South, and English teacher David Mendelson sympathizes with their plight: "I feel like my brain has been sandpapered."

If so, it has attained a fine finish. Over the next 50 minutes, Mendelson, a gangly man with a Dead Poets passion, alights on the distinctions between the Puritan, Enlightenment and Romantic mind-sets; Pascal's wager over the existence of God; his (Mendelson's) sister; the unreliable narrator; and, of course, Muhammad Ali.

"For those of you who are still awake, let me offer you a slight bit of extra credit. In their treatment of Hester, the villagers of Boston are showing what historical tendency that I told you about on the very first day of class?" Hands raise. "I think I will let Erica take it."

"The Knights of the Round Table, how they glorified their past?" suggests the girl tentatively. "Not bad, Erica. However, I



OLD SCHOOL In an age obsessed with computers, says David Mendelson, "my concern is teaching critical-thinking skills"

will not write her name down." A protesting murmur arises at this denial of credit. Mendelson responds delightedly: "Do you think I'm some sort of a slut?" Another student takes a shot: "How you love the people who have conquered you?" Again the teacher demurs. "I'm talking about how the villagers at first reject Hester, but later on their opinion changes. Carl?" Carl, seemingly asleep in the back of the class, asks, "You talking about Muhammad Ali?" Mendelson, a carnivore spotting its prey: "What does the villagers' treatment of Hester have to do with our treatment of Muhammad Ali?"

"Well, I guess he was different at first, but later on they realized what he did, how it was good..." A girl named Ellen picks up: "Once people prove they can win, they're all glorified." "Close," prods Mendelson. Another girl administers the coup de grace: "Muhammad Ali, the farther he got into Parkinson's—now he's harmless, and so they're not afraid of him anymore. He's like a Hester now that she's a good girl." Mendelson, triumphant: "Once an enemy of society has been defeated, we can embrace them and call her cute little Hester, cute little Muhammad Ali. They don't pose a threat. You know what Joe Frazier said about Muhammad Ali? When he saw him lighting the Olympic torch, he said they should have pushed him in. People thought Frazier was being callous about Ali's suffering. But Joe Frazier respects Muhammad Ali as a warrior. You can't condescend to him; he's not a puppy or something. Show some respect."

The class nods knowingly. Hester and

Ali, Ali and Hester. Whether in years to come they will share Mendelson's disdain for the easy sentimentality, they at least stand a chance of recognizing it.

He turns to his grade book. "I need a sturdier implement to add all this extra credit."

—David Van Biema

9:40 A.M. | SENIOR SEMINAR

And what was that about college?

HOW MANY OF YOU ARE NOT PLANNING on going to college?" asks David Cady to the 61 seniors in his senior leadership seminar. No hands go up. Cady, who plans on having his class begin to fill out college applications next week, knows this is the first discussion of college many of these seniors have had this year. "How many have taken either the SAT or the ACT?" Fewer than half raise their hands. "How many of you have been to our career library?" Five hands go up.

Cady knows he's got a lot of work to do. A goal of his class, he says, is to help students make more informed decisions as they leave high school. "We're trying to help kids get their act together," says Cady. "We want to help them prepare for the next step in their lives." This includes not just college but also "alternative enrichment" options. At last week's open house, Cady told parents he thinks too many kids go to college for no particular reason, then drop out. He wants kids to know there are alternatives, such as hiking the Appalachian Trail or joining AmeriCorps.

Up at the blackboard, Cady divides four-year colleges into three groups: competitive colleges, including those in the Ivy League;

less competitive ones, among which he includes the private, local St. Louis and Washington universities; and state universities, such as Missouri and Truman State. "You need to have a conversation with your parents about what you can afford," Cady tells them. So, next to his competitive and less competitive lists, he writes \$30,000. "And this would be just for tuition." Next to Truman State, he writes \$5,000 and calls it "the best value in Missouri." At Truman, he adds, "you'll find Missouri people. If you go to a competitive college like an Ivy League school, you'll probably be with elitist people."

Later in the week Cady plans to have the class play the "decision game" to help the students explore both college and non-college possibilities.

—A.G.

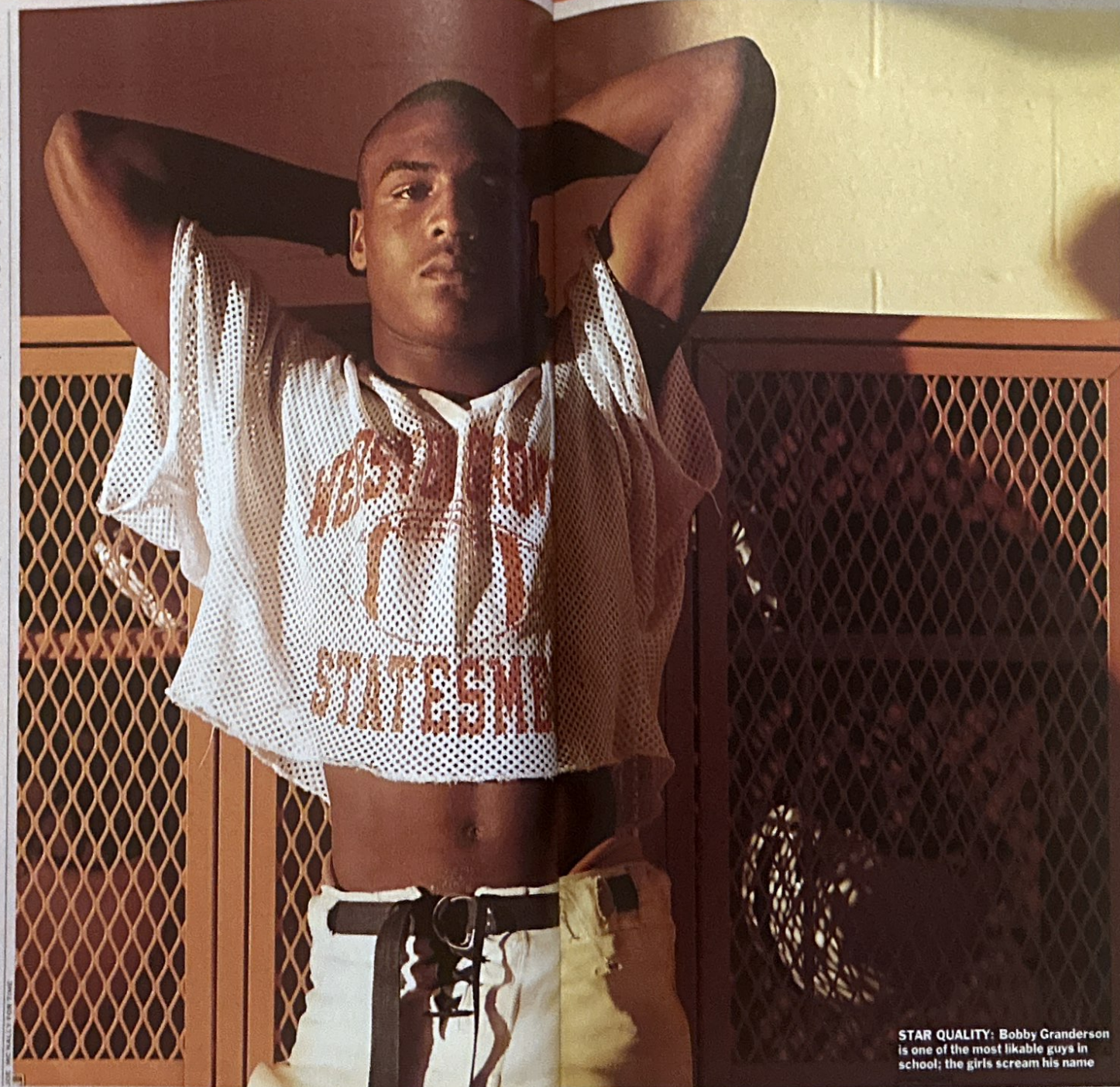
11:10 A.M. | SCHOOL SPIRIT

All our heroes are created equal

*On with Webster. On with Webster.
Fight on for your fame.
Fight, Statesmen, fight,
And you will win the game.*
—W.G.H.S. fight song

THE BLEACHERS VIBRATE, AND THE floors shake under the feet of 1,200 stomping, screaming kids crammed into the gym for a late-morning pep rally. They're celebrating the first winning football season in years—and the more immediate promise of an early release from school on this perfect fall afternoon. It is at once a moment of old-fashioned ebullience for students and unspoken, post-Columbine worry for teachers and staff. Principal Voss paces the floor with her walkie-talkie. Scores of teachers and student monitors are assigned sections of the gym, alert to everything from fights to the booing of freshmen, a long-standing tradition that has been banned this year as part of the campaign against factionalism. Also gone is the ritual of announcing entire team rosters during the pep rally. Administrators don't want to turn an otherwise popular jock into a target of the disaffected. Says Cliff Ice, the new football coach: "We don't want the players to be perceived around the school as something special."

Yet there's a limit to the school's influence. Key Club and Math Club have no pep rally, and student athletes are still celebrities among their peers. They're the ones who bring the parents to the stands on Friday nights. They get their names in the newspaper and get more pictures in the



STAR QUALITY: Bobby Granderson is one of the most likable guys in school; the girls scream his name

yearbook. Nearly every Thanksgiving since 1907, Turkey Day has capped the football season for Webster and nearby Kirkwood, drawing 7,000 fans and a large local TV audience for what's billed as the oldest high school football rivalry west of the Mississippi. (Webster leads, with 46 wins to Kirkwood's 33.)

Though the school may have stopped naming all the players in the pep rally, there are still raucous introductions for the few who are called to the floor for today's toilet-paper race, in which the players mummify their coaches. Among the loudest cheers are those for one football player, Bobby Granderson.

He's 18, a senior known as Bee Gee. He grew up in North Webster, the district's predominantly black neighborhood. His father is a supermarket produce manager; his stepmother works at a department store. Bobby once worked at the Gap after school, but with chiseled good looks and at 6 ft. 2 in. and 195 lbs., he looked as if he should be posing in the clothing chain's ads, not restocking its shelves. He has an ability to seduce both kids and adults. When he works as an aide in the principal's office, visitors often just stare at him.

Bobby carries his charm onto the floor of the gym as he passes out a rose to each member of the girls' softball team, whose coach has recently died. Then he strolls over to principal Voss and hands her a bouquet. When the pep rally ends and school is dismissed early for the day, Bobby passes a freshman sitting on the steps outside. He says, "Hey," and waves. To be recognized by a jock like Bobby is a big deal to the kid, who beams. It is part of Bobby's charm. It brings him fame. Bobby climbs into a friend's Oldsmobile, with a large speaker blaring rap music in the backseat. They're going to a drive-in for chili dogs and draft root beer. As the car pulls away from the school, Bobby reaches under his seat and lights a Marlboro. You gotta do more than play football to be cool nowadays. Unfortunately, he knows it.

—By Timothy Roche

12:45 P.M. | FACULTY MEETING

Always preparing for the worst

TWO STUDENTS APPROACH AN ASSISTANT principal and say a girl has brought a gun to school because she wants to scare a boy who continues to sexually harass her. The girl is in a class on the third floor, the student who may have been harassing her is not in this class, and the bell to change classes will ring in 15 minutes. What do you do?

The pep rally is over, and about 90 of Webster's teachers and administrators are in the library, talking about two of the school's top priorities: keeping students in school—and keeping them alive. The "girl with a gun" scenario is part of an exercise in crisis management—and is based on an incident that happened at the school five years ago. Teachers split into groups of nine to draft a response to various emergencies.

"A phone caller says a bomb will explode somewhere in the school at 10 a.m. It is now 9:30. The person calling sounded like a teenage male, and it sounded as if two other teens were laughing in the background. The caller hung up before giving any other information. There is a trace on the call, and police are investigating. This investigation will take more than half an hour."

A team in the northeast corner has been assigned the bomb threat, which actually happened more than a year ago. The school was evacuated, but search dogs found no bomb. Police did, however, catch the boys who called in the threat, one a Webster student, who was expelled. It gets the teachers talking about security in general—and Columbine in particular. "The bombs at Columbine were planted beforehand, at night, when there wouldn't be any witnesses," says Ken Winingham, who teaches psychology. "Our school is wide open at night. If you want to plant a bomb here, you can." But the team can't agree on any new restrictions on access. They suggest the school install a caller-ID system, but principal Voss says it would cost "a full teacher's salary for a year."

Instead, this very day, phone technicians are installing equipment that will make it easier to trace calls coming in to Webster High. Earlier in the day, Voss asked the school's maintenance chief, Frank Schaffer, to post two employees on the roof whenever the school has a crisis evacuation or drill. "I'm worried about that situation in Jonesboro, where the kids with guns shot the other kids as they were leaving the building for a fire drill," she said. "It would be good to have someone on the roof to make sure it's safe to leave."

As for the other preoccupation, keeping students in school, the teachers know how much pressure the administration is under. Last year Webster Groves received \$150,000 in extra funds from Missouri's A-Plus pro-



4:15 P.M.
After the pep rally and a staff meeting, teachers take on the girls' junior-varsity softball team. At the bottom of the fifth inning, a cold front sweeps across the Midwest almost as suddenly as a pick-off to first base. Wind gusts shower spectators in

the bleachers with sand as the faculty gets carried away with itself. "Our team plays softball," faculty members chant. "Your team needs Geritol." It sounds funny coming from teachers spoken to kids. But, hey, the teachers earn their bragging rights. They win, 9-4.

gram, whose top goal is to reduce the dropout rate. Webster's rate has declined from 3.9% to 1.3% over the past five years, but needs to stay down to keep the state funds flowing. So the school has compiled a list of 150 students considered highly "at risk" of quitting, and is targeting them for extra attention. Everyone agrees that this effort is admirable—and necessary, given the school's \$1.2 million budget deficit. But there is no discussion here of teachers' private complaints: that one result of the focus on keeping 150 kids from dropping out is a lowering of standards and expectations, not only for them but for all the other 1,180 students.

—D.G.

1:20 P.M. | AT THE PARTY

Never too young for a beer buzz or a smoke

WITH SCHOOL OUT EARLY, ABOUT 50 kids gather in the backyard of the home of a sophomore. There's talk of a keg in the basement, and a steady stream of hopefuls goes downstairs to check it out. They return, disappointed that there's no keg but sporting Cokes spiked with bourbon. There's more smoke in the air than in a New York City bar, and not all of it

comes from cigarettes. In a corner of the yard, three kids are smoking marijuana.

The timing of this Tuesday bash is unusual, but the scene isn't. Student parties are a weekend staple in Webster Groves, and along with them come the vices all parents dread. Only a fraction of the students experiment with Ecstasy or LSD, but they do drink. "Basically, a lot of people think there's nothing else to do but drink," says senior Adam Wise.

Outside the realm of adult supervision, the kids have set their own standards for acceptable drinking behavior. A student who says his father is an alcoholic doesn't worry about his own drinking because "I don't drink when others don't drink. If you drink by yourself, that's different." He has no problem finding drinking buddies. Even without a fake ID, it's not hard to get cigarettes or a six-pack. "Everybody has older siblings, and everybody has older friends, so they can go and get it for them," says Detective Dave Dreher.

The police are quick to break up teen parties in Webster. The last time this sophomore threw a party, the police showed up twice, and there's concern they will show up today if guests drink out in the open. Even worse, under an ordinance passed last year, parents can be held responsible for their kids' hospitality. As part of a crackdown, adults whose children throw unsupervised parties

are issued a warning letter by police. A second offense can mean a summons and a fine.

The school has little control over what students do off campus. But because tobacco smoke can disguise marijuana and is a threat to safety and health, Webster Groves High is smoke-free. "Only six years ago, we allowed smoking right on campus," says assistant principal John Raimondo. Before the days of walkie-talkies, says sophomore Justin Mahley, his brothers' friends smoked bong bowls of marijuana in the courtyard. But, he says, "they don't let anything slide anymore."

Lunch is one of the few outlets left. A senior who has smoked almost daily since freshman year keeps a bong in his car, which has marijuana seeds scattered all

sel, was killed by a drunk driver—haven't stopped students from putting themselves at risk. "Sometimes it makes more sense when you're really drunk to get into a car with someone who isn't as drunk," says a sophomore. After a party last Saturday night, that's exactly what she did. "I think a lot of times people are more concerned with having fun than their safety," she says.

With many parents working, it is hard for them to monitor their children. Unless they forbid their kids to go out with friends, parents must rely on trust. "I feel that if [my son] hasn't learned the proper values by 16, then we haven't done our job," says a mother. Sometimes it is easier to simply avoid a confrontation. "Usually my parents ask me where I'm going, and I say, 'Out,'"



CHEERS: Whether or not there's school or work, friends let friends drink beer

over it. During the 27 minutes he has to drive to Burger King and back, he gets high. "It makes school more interesting," he says. He notes that he's lost his ambition over the years, though he doesn't know why.

Booze, however, is Webster's bogeyman. "The majority of kids go out and go drinking and then go home," says Raimondo. "It puts them at risk for auto accidents and bad choices." Every two years the school stages a brutally realistic drunk-driving accident for 11th- and 12th-graders. Right outside, two cars are smashed together, and five "bloodied" students are put inside. Two of them are said to be dead at the scene, and a third must be extricated by firemen wielding metal cutters while a helicopter stands by. The scene always has a chilling effect on students.

But it lasts for only a short time. Even the real-life deaths in the past two years of four students—one of whom, Erica Brus-

says a senior. "If they keep badgering me, I say I'm going out to get drunk. They think it's very funny, but I'm not joking with them."

—By Flora Tartakovsky

5:30 P.M. | ON THE JOB

Taking care of business?

AS WEBSTER GROVES SENIOR ROB Greenhaw reaches the Hollywood Video cash register, he recognizes classmate Elizabeth Kirkpatrick, fancied up in her white-ruffled tuxedo shirt, black patterned vest, and bow tie. Rob hands his video selection to Elizabeth, who scans it in, smiles and asks mischievously, "Simon Birch?" Rob, defensive, replies, "It's supposed to be good."

Once the school day ends, Webster

Groves Statesmen choose their videos, their meals, their gas and their clothes carefully, because they know the chances are good they will be served by a schoolmate. These days being 16 in Webster Groves typically means a car and a job, moving up to 40 hours a week at work into the already delicate balance of school, friends and family. Some students work to save for college or to help their parents pay the bills, but most do it for cars, insurance and clothes. "Working lets me establish my independence," says senior Nick McCormick, who, somewhere between varsity-football practice and homework, makes pizza at Cecil Whittaker's three nights a week. "And I'm saving up to buy a car." Teachers and parents here recognize the value of introducing kids to the "real world," but with pay-

checks competing with grades and late-night shifts rivaling term-paper deadlines, more and more students are asking, How many hours are too many?

Not seeing any more customers, Elizabeth grabs an armful of freshly returned cassettes and begins to stow them. "Putting the videos away is so monotonous," she says. But she is making \$5.90 an hour and claims her work here "is really easy." Between Hollywood Video and nearby Kraus Farms Equestrian Center, where she teaches horseback riding, Elizabeth works 40 hours a week. This year she plans to earn \$14,400—nearly what her mother makes as a bank teller.

Most weekdays, Elizabeth starts work at 3 p.m. and is finished by 8. On Saturdays she puts in 11 hours at Kraus Farms, a job she keeps as much to ride

horses as to earn extra cash. Sunday is her "hell day": she starts at Kraus Farms at 8 a.m., teaches until 5 p.m., grabs some food, drives to Hollywood Video and works there from 6 until 11 p.m. "I'm sure I'm sacrificing my health," Elizabeth says, "but I'm actually doing better in school than I ever have."

Other student workers aren't so responsible. "Too many times I've had kids come in to school at 10:30 a.m. saying they had to close up at work the night before," says assistant principal Clark. "Students," he says, "find it harder to say no to their boss than to the school." Take, for example, Darrin Cayton, a senior who is desperately trying to turn his life around after wasting his first three years of high school. Darrin realizes he wants to go to college, so he's working hard in his classes, hoping to do well enough to get into Webster University. But Darrin also works at McDonald's 30 to 40 hours a week. "I need the money to do the things I want

A WEEK IN THE LIFE OF A HIGH SCHOOL

MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY



to do," he explains. "But I'm always tired."

Fatigue and missed assignments aren't the worst of it, either, says Faye Walker, a teacher at Webster for 23 years. "Too many kids are missing that quality time," she says. "When the parent gets home, the child goes to work. When the child gets home, the parents are asleep. Kids can work and get good grades, but when do you see each other?"

Clark is looking for an answer. He sits on a committee of teachers, students, parents, community leaders and local employers that is developing a "School First" contract. The details are still in the works, but the hope is that businesses that sign on will employ students for no more than 20 hours a week (Clark would like the limit to be 16) and will not let students work past 11 p.m. on school nights. Clark also wants employers to assign each student a "workplace mentor"—someone at work, maybe even the boss, who looks after the student's academic life, makes sure he or she is going to school on time and is making good grades, and who can help a student get reduced hours if need be. The initial response of business people has been positive, and Clark hopes School First will happen by the end of the year.

Elizabeth manages her 40 hours a week quite nicely. She's getting A's in all her classes; she keeps Friday nights free for her boyfriend, who, she says, "is my social life." And most Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday nights, Elizabeth, her parents and her 12-year-old brother Conner find time to eat together as a family.

Elizabeth did have to sacrifice varsity field hockey. And earning so much money made her, at least for a while, rethink her college choices. While she once saw Mer-

WORKING GIRL At \$5.90 an hour, it will take Elizabeth Kirkpatrick only 220 hours at Hollywood Video to buy that \$1,300 stereo

amec Community College as the "slacker way out," she actually considered spending two years of college there in order to continue teaching horseback riding. Her mother convinced her otherwise.

It's 8 p.m. Elizabeth hangs up her vest and bow tie. She's already finished her homework, so after dinner with her family, she plans to go to a friend's to watch movies and play video games. She's not sure what she would have done all day if she hadn't spent it working at Hollywood Video. —A.G.

11:59 P.M. | THE LONGEST DAY

Being an overachiever means little time for sleep

MORE THAN 19 HOURS AFTER IT began, senior Anne Zager's school day is still going strong. She has been on the move since a 4:45 a.m. cross-country practice. She only just got home from a 2½-hour drama rehearsal at school. Now she's crouched over the kitchen table, learning about cell mitochondria for a fast-approaching test. "I don't think it's physically possible for me to go to bed before midnight," she says.

Every day is a physical—and mental—marathon for students like Anne. With a 4.325 GPA, a lead role in the fall musical, a load of honors courses and spots on the varsity cross-country and soccer teams, Anne is booked solid. She is so strapped for free time

that she has to "check her schedule" before penciling in time for her equally overextended friends. This afternoon six of them met for lunch and went thrift-store shopping. But an hour into the outing, people started peeling off for other commitments.

Most of these seniors have a room of their own at school: No. 216. Anne and many of her friends are members of the school's selective Pegasus program, an accelerated English class with about 25 students per grade. To be admitted, candidates send in a portfolio prior to their freshman year; entries range from stamp collections to Boy Scout badges to Anne's video of one of her theater performances. Since theirs is a four-year course of study, the Pegasites, as they are known, often travel in a pack. You'll more likely find them rehashing the National Honor Society barbecue than last weekend's parties. "It can be a very bright and interesting group," says its co-coordinator Bob Hutcheson. "But it's a group with its own set of problems, like when failure is getting just an 80 on a test."

Pegasite intensity spikes at college-application time. The Zagers' dining room has been turned into a college war room, draped from top to bottom with brochures from schools like Syracuse University and the University of Colorado at Boulder and a poster-size chart drawn by Anne that lists 14 schools broken down into 22 categories such as class size and distance from home. Nearby sits a CD-ROM SAT study aid, Emergency Prep.

Anne's parents are worried she'll burn out before her high school graduation. "Her mind is so strong, I don't think her body can keep up," says her father Ron. This was literally true for fellow Pegasite Amy Cook, who edits the school newspaper, has a 4.08 GPA and works 12 hours a week at a nursing home. By the middle of last year she was developing an ulcer that her doctor attributed to school stress. ("The doctor told us, 'Congratulations, I think you've got a budding college professor on your hands,'" recalls her father.) Now taking medicine for her stomach, Amy has scaled back on some activities and traded in her daily three cups of coffee for tea. Her parents ask that she log four hours a week of relaxation in front of the TV.

BOB SACHA FOR TIME



CHORUS LINE Anne makes room for rehearsals in her busy class schedule

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|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Does an unreasonable fear of embarrassment cause you to avoid most social interaction? | Yes ☐ | No ☐ |
| 2. Is the anxiety you feel around people so intense it sometimes feels like a panic attack? | ☐ | ☐ |
| 3. Has this overwhelming anxiety significantly impaired your work or social life? | ☐ | ☐ |

Answering these questions and discussing them with your doctor can help determine if you suffer from social anxiety disorder. Lesser degrees of social anxiety usually do not require medication.



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TUESDAY, 8:00 P.M.

In the pouring rain, Mary Hendel and her son Chris, 17, arrive at the St. Louis Bread Co. for their weekly date. Mary is an executive with the Bank of America. While munching on sandwiches, they spend the next hour chatting about

school, work and the latest gossip. Chris says he's been talking to his dad, who has been divorced from Mary for 16 years, about going to college out West. Mary ponders the idea for a moment. If Chris moves far away, she'll have to figure out a new way to touch base.

Even Anne's whirlwind energy has its limits. She recently quit her job at the Gap. She has never really been on a date. "I just don't have the time," she says. Mostly, though, she just skimps on sleep, surviving on less than six hours most nights.

But the biggest effect of Anne's rapid-fire existence may be felt next fall. "For college," she confides, "I might want someplace a little less difficult." —By Jodie Morse

Wednesday

6:15 A.M. | THE EARLY BUS

Race and class at a suburban school

MOST OF HIS CLASSMATES ARE still asleep as 15-year-old Jonathan Robinson stands on a dark street corner on the north side of St. Louis, Mo., waiting for Miss Judy's yellow school bus. Even before the bus arrives, he sees his mother in her Ford station wagon, pulling over on her way to work. She rolls down the window and waves a \$5 bill—lunch money. Jonathan leans in and kisses her goodbye. Minutes later he boards the bus for the half-hour trek to Webster Groves.

Jonathan is what is known as a vrs kid, or voluntary transfer student. In the early 1970s, under a court-ordered desegregation plan, Webster opened its doors to youngsters from the inner city. Today black students account for about a quarter of the 1,300-plus student body, with 161 of them, or 12%, bused in from the city.

Jonathan's mom Robin Norice, 38, an IRS tax examiner, has had her son in the program since the fourth grade because, she says, "I want him to have the same educational experience as whites"—one of higher quality than he would get in the inner city. Jonathan's neighborhood friends often taunt him for being too good to simply walk the six blocks to Roosevelt High. But "all they do there is fight every day," he says. "You've got to worry about the gangs and what color you're wearing." He appreciates Webster's relative safety and its pride in racial diversity. Indeed, long before the 1970s desegregation, Webster Groves boasted an integrated community. Most blacks reside in Rock Hill, a part of town settled by freed slaves, whose businesses, churches and schools spawned a thriving black middle class.

Look in on the high school, and you'll see a real-life Benetton ad in which whites and blacks joke and gossip easily between classes, study together in the library and date one another. Jonathan counts among his best friends three white guys in his choir class. "Blacks and whites mix in real well together here," he says. Sally Roth, a white senior, agrees. "Race doesn't really matter

here," she says. "I've dated black guys, and so have just about all my friends."

Listen closely, though, and you can hear undercurrents of tension: black kids complaining about being misunderstood by white teachers and singled out as troublemakers; black parents worrying that their children are held to lower academic standards; white teachers whispering about undisciplined, unmotivated black students.

ON THIS MORNING, AS JONATHAN BOARDS the bus, his hands dangle, free of books or homework. He says he completed his assignments at school the day before, a story that frustrates his mother, given his 2.0 grade-point average. "I always tell him, 'You've already got two strikes against you: you're black, and you're male. The only thing that's going to get you where you want to go in life is an education.'"

It's not as if Jonathan is a slacker; at home he cleans, cooks and takes care of his three younger siblings when his mom and stepdad are working. During Jonathan's freshman and sophomore years, Norice says, "he was playing football and basketball, was in show choir and concert choir, rehearsing for a play and working part time stripping furniture. He was overwhelmed. The commute was wearing him down. But he's cut his schedule down, and is really doing better."

Jonathan is known as a good cook and wants one day to be a chef. But he doesn't see much connection between that dream and his schoolwork. And he often seems distracted by fights with his dad, venting to his friend Kristina Betts during the bus ride that "I'm too old for him to try to chastise me now."

Counselor Thomasina Hassler says many black students' grades suffer because of family problems or responsibilities at home that distract from studies. To make her point, she brandishes a ranking of last



TRIP TO THE SUBURBS Miss Judy's bus arrives at dawn to whisk Jonathan out of North St. Louis to Webster Groves High



EARLY TO RISE: From the inner-city streets of St. Louis, this "voluntary transfer student" learns the first sacrifice—sleep

year's 267 seniors; of the 34 who graduated with a 4.0 or better GPA, none was black. Searching the list for the highest-ranking black student, she runs her finger down the second page to No. 59, Tanya Hoard, who graduated with a 3.67 average. Hassler, who is black, wishes there were more like Hoard and thinks both black and white teachers at Webster must work harder to address the academic needs of African-American students. "The stuff about racial differences is built into American culture and is not particular to one place. It starts well before the kids get to high school. If there is not a high expectation and a channeling of a kid's interests, the kid will fall behind. If you go to our advanced classes you'll find only one or two black kids. Why? Because early on, these kids were not given the confidence or expectations to break through barriers."

Middle-class blacks who live in Webster



FRIENDS 4EVER Chrissy Bates, left, gives Blythe Debenport a big hug after the class of '00 senior photo is taken

Groves and have strong role models tend to score higher—but can still feel isolated. By third period, senior Paya Rhodes, 18, is in her advanced-calculus class, sitting beside the only other black student. Rhodes has a 3.6 GPA, and in most of her advanced classes, she's the only black. Paya used to take pride

in that status and in her family's record of excellence at Webster Groves. Her oldest brother maintained a 4.0 for four straight years; another went on to Washington University. Her mother and a third brother are also Webster grads, and her younger sister is following her on the honors track.

But last year a seemingly innocent bit of history homework left Paya feeling bitter and alone. The assignment was for students to write anonymous essays about their views on racism and whether they themselves might be racist. Days later, when the teacher read some of the essays aloud, Rhodes couldn't believe what she heard. One paper, she recalls, described black kids as "loud, obnoxious show-offs." Another depicted blacks as inferior. As usual, Paya was the only black student in the class. "I felt real uncomfortable and out of place," she recalls. "These were people I talked to and worked in groups with. I had no idea some of them didn't like black people."

Even Sally Roth, whose best friend is black, admits that amid Webster's relative racial harmony, there are unsettling contradictions, which she experienced first-hand

while dating a black guy at school. When she would visit her boyfriend at his home, some of the "popular white kids" at school would "make these rude comments about me going to Little Africa, Hershey Hill or Browntown. They were his friends too. It really pissed me off that they would say that behind his back." When Sally's black friends came to visit, new neighbors blamed them, without evidence, for a recent burglary in the neighborhood, according to Sally's mother Rebecca Roth, who graduated from Webster in 1976.

The VTS kids, at least, would have had an ironclad alibi: the bus that sweeps them nonstop back to St. Louis immediately after school each day. As the final bell rings and Jonathan strolls with his friends into the afternoon sun, he says once again that he completed his homework in class. His hands swing freely at his side. —By Ron Stodghill

3:30 P.M. | MENTAL HEALTH

On down days, try talking to a teacher

WE'VE GOT FRIES!" SQUEALS sophomore Leigh Jacobson, tearing into her family's living room with a Dairy Queen bag in hand and her sister Elizabeth in tow. The two girls can't stop giggling (about a cute boy), and Leigh rushes over to give her dog Annie a big nuzzle. "Lately," she reports, "I've been having a string of good days."

Her afternoons haven't always been so carefree. About a year ago, Leigh began feeling "down in the dumps." A diligent student, she stopped doing her homework and, instead, slept or cried away her evenings. She drifted from her childhood friends and started hanging out with an older crowd. "It

was total detachment," recalls her mother Joan. "We'd keep wondering if the old Leigh was still in there." And nothing—not favorite activities like shopping at the mall or sessions with a therapist—would coax her out.

Then last January, Leigh remembers sitting in algebra class and thinking: "Today is not a good day." That afternoon she swallowed 40 pills—20 aspirin and 20 Tylenol—and was hospitalized for eight days. After having clinical depression diagnosed, she was put on the antidepressant Effexor, among other medications. "Now, instead of the peaks and valleys," she says, "I just feel small waves of emotion. Things are a lot smoother."

OUT OF STEP, 2:20 P.M. The outcasts, known as the Church Step Dirties, can be found on the front steps of the Christ Lutheran Church, across the street from school, where they feed their nicotine

habits after the last bell rings. "Some kids could be a little more open to the social boundaries," says Heather Corey. "Some of them won't give people the time of day because of what their friends might think."



As many as 20% of Leigh's Webster Groves classmates currently take prescription medication to treat depression and other psychiatric disorders, according to the school's social worker, Pat Ferrugia. Nationally, an estimated 1 in 20 children and adolescents suffers from depression. While doctors have long dispensed drugs like Ritalin to children and adolescents, teen prescriptions for antidepressants such as Prozac, Zoloft and Paxil have grown rapidly in recent years.

Accordingly, schools minister more and more to the mental health of their student bodies. At Webster Groves each student is assigned to one of the school's six



ON THE UPSWING: Today was a good day for Leigh and her dog Paint

guidance counselors, who keeps tabs on them for all four years. But it's those closest to students—teachers, coaches and even peers—who serve as the primary mental-health detectors. Teachers receive a checklist of the signs of adolescent depression, ranging from "lack of concentration" to "crying spells" all the way to "thoughts or plans of suicide." If a student matches the profile, teachers alert a 16-member team, led by Ferrugia, that intervenes by contacting other teachers and parents.

But Ferrugia works at the school only three days a week, and each counselor, in addition to doubling as a college adviser, must monitor more than 200 charges. Regardless of the resources pinch, there will always be some troubled kids who simply escape notice. "I call them the wallpaper kids," says nurse Buss, "those kids who will be carrying big loads, but they're so quiet nobody notices."

Some at Webster, students included, are worried that the number of kids on medication is too high. "I'm definitely seeing overmedicated students where the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing," says Buss. So some simply stop taking their medication, without consulting a parent or doctor. Senior Zach Wood took himself off Paxil last spring because, he says, "I couldn't just sit on the couch and have happy pills make me feel better." Ferrugia has an even greater concern: because many seriously depressed teens at Webster get their medication directly from their primary-care physician, they never spend any time on the psychiatrist's couch talking out their issues.

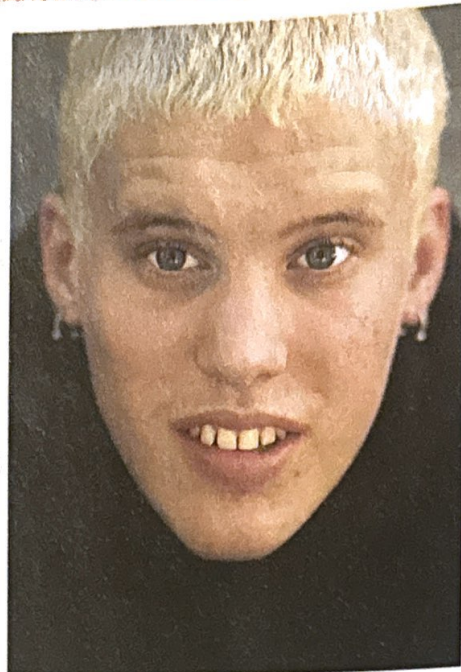
In August, Leigh stopped seeing her psychiatrist. ("He made me wallow in myself," she says.) Though her grades and disposition have perked up with her medication, she still has her share of down days. What then? Instead of confiding in a doctor, she now finds solace elsewhere: "In my teachers," she says. —J.M.

6:30 P.M. | MATT'S HOUSE

Trying to help a self-destructive teen

I'M LUCKY I HAVEN'T HAD A NERVOUS breakdown," says Janet Gewinner as she looks on while her 17-year-old son Matt leaves for hockey practice. She reminds him to take the medication in the kitchen. For him it is a life-and-death issue.

Matt was a relatively well-adjusted teen until the summer of 1998, when his close friend Jeremy DeNeal died in a car accident. "There was no one to get me through Jeremy's funeral, so I had to do it alone," says



CRYING OUT Matt Gewinner continues to battle depression after his friend's death

Matt. "In school I started making comments like 'I'm going to kill myself' ... I turned to heavy drugs so I'd be numb."

Psychiatrists determined that Matt was suffering from both manic and severe depression. His daily medication is a cocktail that includes Celexa, lithium, Risperidal, vitamin E and caffeine. Because it left him so exhausted, Janet—an insurance analyst who divorced Matt's father six years ago—cut trazodone from the mix. She keeps most of the medicine hidden because she fears that Matt may try to overdose.

He's tried to kill himself before. In April, Janet found a suicide note from Matt, along with the songs that he wanted played at his funeral. He was hospitalized and released a few days later. When his girlfriend's parents wouldn't let him see her because he was acting unstable, Matt threatened to kill them, but instead slit his wrists. The police came, and once again he was hospitalized. Shortly afterward, Matt overdosed on cold medication.

A student with Matt's history naturally worries school administrators. The week before, Matt says, he asked his Latin teacher, "What happens if you make a threat to kill a teacher? Do you get suspended or expelled?" He says he likes to play mind games and was just curious, but school officials were quick to take action. They immediately called Matt's psychiatrist and his mother and asked his teachers to keep an eye on him. An administrator told him, Matt says, "If I threaten anyone or make any 'I'm going to kill myself' statements, I would be suspended with no questions asked until I could get a doctor's note."

The school's reaction angers Janet. "I

think they're trying to take too much control," she says. "I think they're going to look for anything they can, and if they can get him out of school, they'll be relieved. If the situation at Littleton never happened, things would be a lot different now." Matt complains that the school targets students who stand out. "They don't talk to the preppy kids. They flag the kids that are Goth and wear black."

Just before Matt leaves this evening, he pulls out a planner complete with pictures of his deceased friends, business cards of the hospitals he has stayed in and other painful memorabilia. "It's part of my life," says Matt. "I'll show this to my kids." —F.T.

7:00 P.M. | FAITH

Students for Christ

GAPPED, AMERICAN EAGLED AND Abercrombie & Fitch to the teeth, teens emerge from cars packed four to a seat, flirting and yelling, heading for the back of senior Katie Sonderman's tidy white house on Greeley Avenue. Within half an hour, the 24-ft. by 26-ft. Sonderman family room contains—just barely—about one-ninth of the Webster Groves High School student body. Suddenly an overhead projector flips on, two amplified acoustic guitars chime in and 160 youthful voices scream, "Here's a story! It's sad but true! About a girl that I once knew! ... Keep away from Runaround Sue!"

It is ebullient; it is deafening. "It's bigger than band," says Herm Adams, who convened it. "It's the largest group in the school." Actually, not in the school. One of the peculiarities of life in Webster Groves is that in a community in which Catholicism is the largest Christian denomination, and in a school that has no on-campus prayer groups, the most important weekday social event is Club, the entry level of a national Evangelical group called Young Life.

For 59 years, Young Life has specialized in gathering "unchurched" teens back into the religious fold; officially nondenominational, Young Life has a strong Evangelical Protestant base. Wednesday-night Club is its accessible first level; the second is Camp, a \$500, one-week stay at a Young Life facility. The third is Campaigners, a small group that convenes at the Adams' home Fridays at 6 a.m. for prayer, fellowship and mutual exhortation: to bring new kids to Club. Of tonight's hearty choristers, Adams estimates, 120 will end up trying Camp. Of those, he predicts, "probably 70% will give their life to Christ."

The young crowd roars through *Brown-Eyed Girl*, *The Lion Sleeps Tonight* and



LOW-KEY RELIGION: Many teens attend Club as much for the songs and the socializing as for the preaching

other oldies that seem suspended in amber. "Yeah, they seem corny," says a sophomore. "But everybody's singing them, and that makes it fun, even though it's corny."

Adams rises, holding a laptop computer. "We want to do two things here," he announces. "One, we want to have a lot of fun, and, two, we're gonna answer some of the most serious and fundamental things about life." He gestures to the computer. "You look at this, and you realize it's a fairly complex piece of equipment. We recognize that someone fairly intelligent designed it. Our bodies and souls are far more complex than this is... The Bible says God created heaven and earth and created us. What do you guys believe? That is the starting point for us."

Most students, teachers and Webster High parents support Young Life. "It's incredibly cool," enthuses Beth Perez, a Campaigners member. "It just shows kids, at a very early age, why they are here and what God has planned for them and how great their lives can be." Her mother Susan Perez, a lapsed Catholic, speaks for many parents who, if they fail to match their children's fervor, are extremely grateful for the program's fruits. "If your teenager is going to be tied to some sort of group; if she comes

out of it saying I don't drink, I don't smoke pot, I don't do this or that because I'm a Christian... well, that's O.K.," she says.

Campaigners do tend to be good students, well grounded, chaste and drug-free, although backsliding on drinking is not unknown. Through Campaigners, Club and their own considerable charisma, Herm and his wife Terri exert a major and wholesome influence on the entire student body. "I believe Young Life is a force in the school," says Herm. "I think it's increased school spirit."

Still, not everybody is enthused. Some students who have not been to Club deride it as a cult. Mary Beth Carosello, a former student-body president who is studying at the University of Missouri, attended both Club and Camp but became disenchanted. "When you're a freshman, you see older kids who are so into Young Life and so into Terri and Herm, and you think, Wouldn't it be fun to be friends with them? And then you get in there, and they're really Christian [meaning Evangelical]. I came to feel, why do we need this hard-core group with such an important place in our high school?"

James Jenkins is more comfortable with the group's role. Young Life is overwhelmingly white, but Jenkins, who is African

American, is returning tonight to his second Club. A promising pitcher and the junior-varsity quarterback, he buses in from St. Louis' South Side. James has a younger brother and sister, and had an older brother Anthony Morris. "But he died. Some guys robbed and killed him." It happened three days after James' birthday. "I was 15," he says. (He still is.) He was 14, he says, when his father died. When Adams promises to talk about "some of the most serious and fundamental things in life," James is listening. "Now if my pastor [at St. Louis Christian Center in the city] preaches about something, and I don't really understand what it means," he says, "I could go to Young Life for an answer."

It is 8:30, and Herm brings his mini-sermon to a quick close. There is a scuffle and a muted shout, and the horde empties almost instantaneously into the fleet of cars. Out the open windows you can hear strains of September's inescapable novelty hit, Lou Bega's mildly salacious *Mambo No. 5*: "A little bit of Monica in my life/ A little bit of Erica by my side... / A little bit of Sandra in the sun/ A little bit of Mary all night-long." The kids sing along. But not as loudly as they did in Club.

—D.V.B.

A WEEK IN THE LIFE OF A HIGH SCHOOL

MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY



7:01 P.M. | **HOME AND AWAY**

A football star dangles on the edge of manhood

JUST HOME FROM FOOTBALL PRACTICE, Bobby Granderson perches on a stool in his family's kitchen. Normally he shaves his own head, but tonight his dad Bobby Sr. is running the electric razor. It's an awkward moment; this is the most the two of them have spoken in weeks without throwing a gibe. His father compliments Bobby's handling of the clippers. He's been trying to talk his son into going to trade school or perhaps opening a barbershop with him. The remark hits a nerve, but Bobby hides it. Will his dad ever understand him?

At 18, Bobby is at an inflection point that will largely determine the course of his life. Right now he's got athletic talent and fame, and everyone wishes him well. But will he build on that, or will he peak as a senior in high school? He has applied to join the Navy, but still hopes for a football scholarship to college. One problem: his GPA is 1.6, and he has only seven months to pull that up to a 2.0 to be eligible for college sports and, more important, to get enough English credits to graduate. Another is that until this year, no one gave him knowledgeable advice on how to go about winning an athletic scholarship.

Bobby gets a lot of tough love at home.

As suave and polite as he seems to outsiders, he has "two personalities," says his stepmother Willie. "He's a con artist." His parents kicked him out of the house in August, trying to scare him after he came home drunk at 5 a.m. Later his father told him to do something, and Bobby refused. "I got tired of hearing what he wasn't going to do," says Bobby Sr., who smacked him with a stick, hurting his feelings more than anything. Bobby walked to a gas station and called police, who sided with his dad.

His parents lock their bedroom because Bobby "borrows" money, CDs—even shoes. He ignores his 1 a.m. curfew and regularly loses keys, coats and wallets. He goes to school mostly to see the girls and skips class as he pleases. Last year he had 109 tardies.

When Bobby was in elementary and middle school, his grades were above average. But even in kindergarten, his teacher wrote in his report card, "Bobby is an energetic and social child... He wants to have friends and does have them, but it's something that causes him to worry." Now his friends worry his parents. He seldom introduces them to his friends, many of whom are white and come from affluent families. "He thinks we're country bumpkins," says Bobby Sr. "This young man lives in a fantasy world. He wants to be rich."

His parents are so concerned that they recently fell on their knees and prayed, "Good Lord, show us something." Their answer came in the mail. The Navy sent a letter saying Bobby had failed his physi-

FAMILY FEUD Bobby's parents never miss his games. Tonight his father helps him get ready by shaving his head

cal; urine tests detected marijuana. Bobby wanted the test kept secret, but Coach Ice found out anyway. Ice tried to talk to him and Bobby walked out. When he went back to apologize yesterday, the coach shut the door, telling him he knew and reminding him that the team depends on him as a leader. "He's a walking time bomb," says Mark Eason, who runs a youth basketball program and has watched Bobby grow up. "When I see him, he's so polite. He's so nice. But inside, he's crying."

Sweeping the kitchen floor after his haircut, Bobby pays no attention to the clock. It's almost time for a meeting for players and parents at school on the complicated rules for NCAA eligibility. Bobby has got half a dozen introductory letters from college coaches, but it's too early for offers. Will he attend tonight's meeting? "Nah," he says.

He's betting he can impress college recruiters on the football field. A tight end, he prides himself on making the blocks that lead to touchdowns, but Coach Ice wants him to catch the ball. His big hands are made of glass, and he has yet to catch a touchdown pass. But this Friday night, he hopes to get his chance to dance in the end zone.

—T.R.

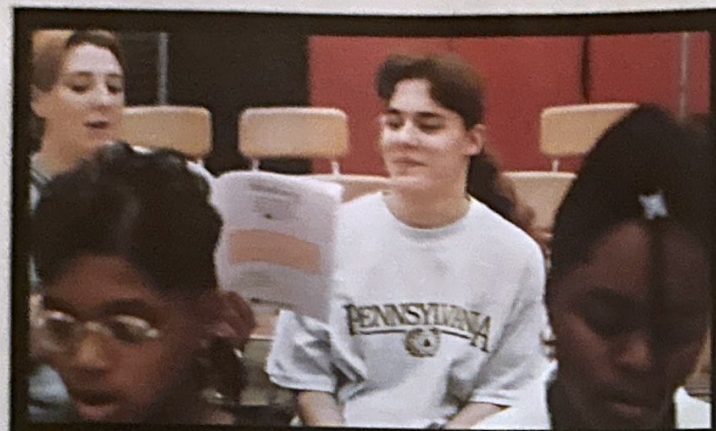
Thursday

8:30 A.M. | **CAFETERIA LADY**

Paying for breakfast with a \$100 bill

WITH THE SCENT OF BACON still in the air, Nancy Giessmann, 62, has just cleared the last remnants of breakfast when it is time to get ready for lunch. Any anthropologist studying the tribes of a U.S. high school would envy the observation post Giessmann has manned for the past 19 years behind the cafeteria steam table. She has watched students' tastes shift from meat loaf to pizza and from nice skirts to shorts with panties hanging out—"If they even wore panties," Giessmann sniffs. She knows that most students these days earn spending money at part-time jobs, but she also knows to call the school detective "when I see kids with their wallets full of \$50 and \$100 bills to pay for a 70¢ breakfast. It's usually drug money."

—By Stacy Perman



12:10 P.M.

Wicki Boren's Chorale course is vocalizing. The students sight-read: "This I know, I will go to the lands that call to me..." Next they all harmonize prettily on Windsong.

All that is, except for Aimee Decoster. Aimee, 16, does not sing. She is autistic and has a speech impairment. Over the years her mother has fought hard for her "inclusion" (once called

mainstreaming) in regular classes, which may one day help her toward independent employment. At first it is hard to tell whether she makes anything at all of the music. But toward the end, Aimee signs impulsively to Boren, who turns to Aimee's aide Hannah Wooderson for the translation: "This song makes me want to throw up! Play Windsong again!" Everyone laughs, Aimee included.

3:30 P.M. | THE BASEMENT

The Church Step Dirties find refuge

AS THEY DO MOST AFTERNOONS, THE social refugees of Webster Groves find sanctuary underground—in Gene Clifford's basement, a dim cavern that reeks of cigarettes. Here, 16-year-old Gene and his friends have created a study hall—cum-social center. Posters of Pink Floyd, The X-Files and Tori Amos line the walls. Encyclopedias, dictionaries and classics fill the bookshelves. A computer with Internet access lights up the corner. The room is a cocoon, protected from the rest of the student body, from which they feel alienated. "Here I have ready access to all of my friends," says Gene. "And it's not the Crestwood Mall, where I have to deal with people who don't like me without even knowing me."

At school, these kids are known as the Church Step Dirties because they convene after school on the steps of the Christ Lutheran Church, smoking Camels. At Webster, their perceived bad fashion, bad family, bad hygiene or bad attitude evokes disdain from many classmates. "A lot of people look down at us and write us off because of what we look like," says Gene. "They don't even know us."

In Webster's social pecking order, these

Drop the Chalupa!

10:31:00 Bell rings. Justin Mahley races out, ignoring several students on the way. "You just gotta go if you wanna get there fast," he says.

10:34:20 Justin and friends jump into the '89 Jeep Wrangler with oversize TSL tires, top down, and head toward Taco Bell, 2.5 miles away.

10:35:35 Cigarettes lit.

10:36:28 "Son of a bitch, my hair!" screams Mary-Kate Cullinane as they gather speed on Big Bend Boulevard.

10:39:04 Turn onto Watson Road. "Once you get on this," says Justin, "you're cool because you get to go 40."

10:41:27 Park at Taco Bell.

10:43:20 All orders in; \$11.99 for four people.

10:45:40 Lunch arrives.

10:51:40 Tacos eaten; head to Jeep.

10:53:01 "All right, Tommy, let me hear your speakers!" The backseat vibrates to the band 311's base line.

11:01:58 Back in school, 8 minutes early.

kids are rock bottom. "We are definitely the outsiders," says junior Adam White, 16. "Not a whole lot of the 'popular' people give us the time of day"—a generalization confirmed by popular senior Adam Wise: "I don't know how to put it... but they don't fit in."

Yet the Dirties "like how they have an identity," observes Webster social studies teacher Jenni Wilson. With it comes a home in Gene's basement and a surrogate parent in Gene's divorced mom, Eileen Stewart, 42, a former computer consultant. Thirteen of the Dirties come to her house five days a week for an informal study program. She knows their class schedules and their family situations. They call her "Mom." But Mom has rules in her basement: no disrespect, cursing, drugs or sex. Their real parents must know where they are, and they must do their homework. Stewart keeps the basement open until 10 on weeknights, midnight on weekends. "They can study here and hang out and be O.K.," she says.

This afternoon, while their classmates are shopping or playing sports, Darrin Cayton, 17, and Gene are in the basement, smoking and riffing on their guitars. Heather Corey, 16, is on the couch, studying. After flunking four classes last semester, Heather has made straight A's this fall, in part through some serious book cracking in Stewart's basement. That probably won't help her make the social A-list at school, but it might do her some good in the years to come. —S.P.

11:00 P.M. | SOFTBALL

Remembering five who died

SEVENTEEN ONLY COMES ONCE in a lifetime! Don't it just fly by wild and free...? Tim McGraw's voice rings out from a boom box perched on an aluminum grandstand, behind a well-worn softball diamond. Beth Perez, 17, is playing catch and humming along, until she sees the yellow sign hanging from the chain-link backstop: WE LOVE YOU MR. AVERBUCH!

Her expression changes, and she wings the ball straight into the fencing. "I'm tired of crying," she mutters. "I'm sick of going to funerals. I'm sick of having to cope with everything and see my friends in pain." Her Webster Groves Stateswomen are preparing for a 4:15 game against Kirkwood High School. Only death keeps getting in the way.

Many people's first education in mortality comes during high school. But at Webster Groves, in other ways so typical, the lesson has been extraordinarily harsh. The class of 2000 has been especially hard hit. And no group here has borne as much grief as the women's softball team.

On the first day of school last year, Miss Voss came on the p.a. with shocking news.

Three Webster teens had died during the summer. Incoming junior Katy Orf, her classmates later learned, had perished in a head-on collision in Pennsylvania. A week later, Erica Brussel, whose brother was a junior, died similarly on route 55. And then on Aug. 3, junior Joe Grosberg was found in the Mississippi River. Joe had been well known as his class's biggest flirt.

"Katy's funeral was hardest for me because she lived right next to me, in my backyard," says Beth, the softball team's shortstop and co-captain. "But I knew Joe since sixth grade, on the bus. He'd make me play with his earlobe."

"Make you?" asks Becca Dunn, the centerfielder.

"It was soft, and he would fall asleep," protests Beth.

"He said my path was straight and his was crooked and he was gonna try and knock me off mine," recalls Becca.

"I don't think Miss Voss should have come on the p.a.," says Jenny Kettler, the rightfielder, absently.

"We were like 16 years old," says Becca. "You had to tell us things."

The next day Miss Voss had to tell them more. Overnight, Jeremy DeNeal had run into a wall at the juncture of routes

A TOUGH SEASON Co-captains Beth Perez and Julie Duenke after a game. Their team grew together as a result of adversity

70 and 270. Jeremy had known everybody and done everything; partied with the partiers, prayed at Young Life, worked in the school office. Meg Kassabaum, a reserve third baseman, looks up. "The whole school went silent," she remembers. Then it fell apart. One girl cried so hard in her car that she had an accident of her own.

"People said we were cursed," says Meg. "All anybody could ask was, Why is this happening to us? And, Who's next?"

"You don't want to ask it," agrees Becca. "But you ask it anyway."

School counselors were swamped, especially the plainspoken 58-year-old who doubled as softball coach. "Mr. Averbuch told me, 'If I was in Jeremy's position, I would want you guys to be celebrating the good things I did in my life rather than mourning,'" says Stephanie Murray, a pitcher.

The girls fall silent for a moment. "He'd call me at home if I didn't go see him one day," says Beth. "He'd say he was just making sure I was O.K."

"He was the first coach I had who told me, you're a great softball player, and you're gonna be able to do it," says Meg.

Ben Averbuch had joined the faculty as a guidance counselor in 1990. Even teens not officially assigned to him sought out his advice and comfort, and he was recognized as the adviser most concerned about college placement. Averbuch took over the girls' fast-pitch softball team. It needed a boost. "The program was kind of pathetic," says coach Bob Berndt. "And that was on good days." Averbuch groomed two fine pitchers and became especially close to the '00 seniors. On Monday two weeks ago, the team was at 5 and 5. Beth was at home dressing for a 4:15 game.

"A friend of my mom's knocked on the door, and I answered it, and she said, 'What are you doing?' And I said, 'I'm getting ready for my game.' And she said, 'Well, you're not gonna have a game.'" Averbuch had suffered a massive stroke in the English department hall three hours earlier.

"I've had dreams with Joe and Kate and Jeremy," says Becca.

"I've had dreams with Averbuch," says Beth. "One started at a game, but then I was standing in the hallway when he had his attack. It was like I was glued." She pauses. "He used to tell me, 'I'll find you scholarships, I'll get you in a school you'll love. Don't worry, I'll take care of it.' And now..."



Jewish custom does not include flowers at a burial. But the casket at Ben Averbuch's made an exception, and one by one, the softball team dropped yellow roses into his grave. "I think his family was amazed at how many people were there," says Meg.

Immediately after the death, people asked Bob Bernoff if the Staten women were canceling the rest of their schedule. "Coach wouldn't want us to," he replied. But some things did change. After warming up and just before breaking out of their huddle, the girls now recite a Hail Mary. Then they yell, "Averbuch, pray for us!"

Becca has considered the appropriateness of this. "I wanted him to be in heaven so much," she says. "But I didn't know for sure. But I was reading the Bible—Romans 10. And it explained that God asks the Jews to come live with him based on faith. He chooses who he wants to be in heaven. So you just think Mr. Averbuch is in heaven." And the girls play with him in mind.

"He was definitely that kind of guy," says Meg. "You know we're winning it for him."

Tonight, they lose. Heartbreakingly. Silly errors leave them down 5-4 in the last inning, with one out. Beth singles, and steals her way to third. Then, on a sacrifice fly, she streaks for home—trying too hard. Tagged out, she lies in the dirt, face down, for at least 10 seconds.

But then she rises. The field clears, and the two teams line up to shake hands. Beth is at the head of the line.

From somewhere, she summons a smile.

—D.V.B.

6:00 P.M. | TEEN ROMANCE

Many find friendship and sex without dating

WERE IT NOT FOR HIS LOVE of Rollerblading and her occasional pigtailed, Peter Vision and Sally Roth would do a good imitation of a suburban married couple. She does the laundry; he does the dishes. Tonight he's in the oak-trimmed kitchen making grilled cheese sandwiches for dinner, before they settle down in front of *The Simpsons* to eat and do homework. They have known each other since sixth grade, been a couple for one year, and when Peter's parents are out of town, like this week, they move in together. Sally's mother approves. But Sally has some doubts about this advanced-placement course in commitment. "If you spend too much time with somebody, it gets old," she says. "I missed home. When you don't spend too

much time together, it gets to be more fun when you do see them."

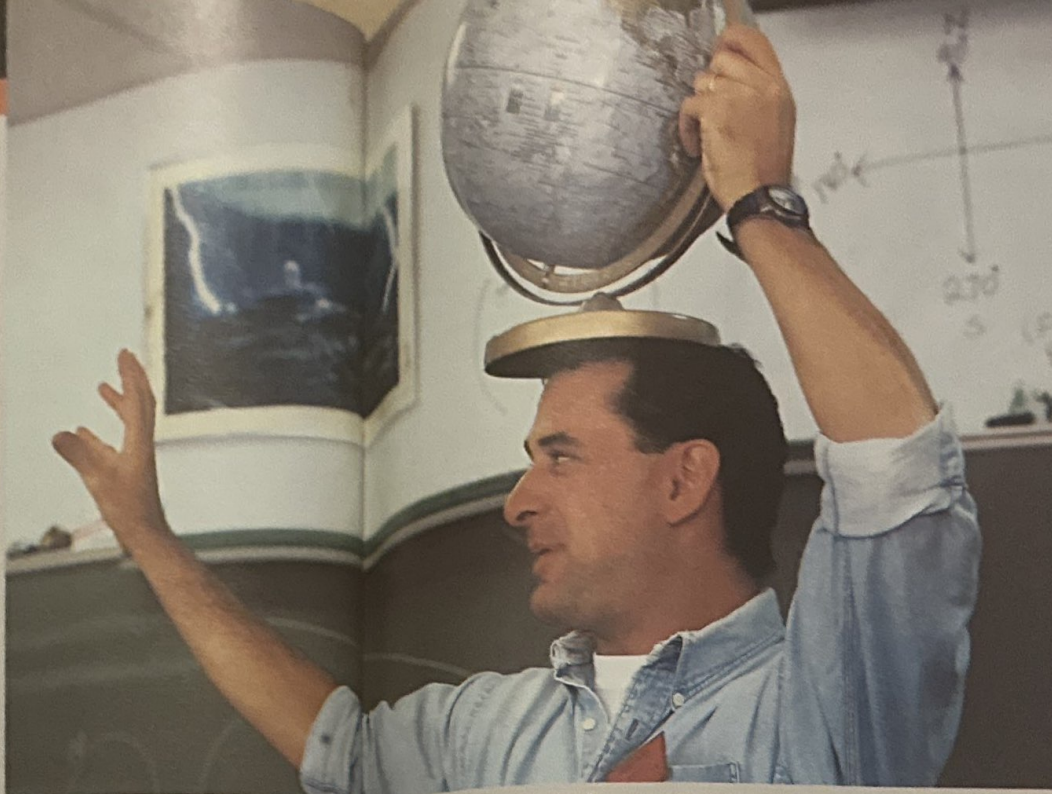
Could this pass for a date in Webster Groves? "No," says Sally. "It's just hanging out." When she and Peter do venture out, it's usually in a crowd. This baffles parents whose lessons in courtship were one-on-one. "If you have a date, you go meet him with everybody else," says parent Kay Johnson. "They never go out to the movies, but that's so much fun and I just don't get it." For the students, grabbing dinner and a movie as a first date is unusual. "If a guy asked me out to dinner," says senior Gale Cammon, "I wouldn't know what to say. That would be so formal." She has been dating her boyfriend for 2½ years. They started out as friends.

That's the standard path to romance, a reflection of a communion between boys and girls who treat each other as pals. Most of the students here have known one another since elementary school, and close friendships often lead to relationships. At parties where couples are present, one is hard pressed to figure out who is with whom. "People are very casual. Mainly we'll go out and do something together, including people who are a couple and people who are just friends," says junior Leslie Chicoineau. As a result, the line between friend and romantic interest often becomes blurred. "There are a lot of people who hook up for a one-night fling and just go back to being friends," says Gale. It's not hard, since "they pretty much know what they're getting into when it happens."

They also don't feel pressed to do more than they're ready for. In a survey by the student newspaper last year, half the seniors said they were sexually active, but students say there's no pressure to lose one's virginity. "People don't make fun of virgins at all," says junior James Wetton. "It's kind of respected." Even among the "Dive Team," a group of six upper-class males whose name has nothing to do with swimming, half the members say they have never had sex.

Their standards for virginity, though, are generous. Almost all the students, for example, take a Clintonian approach to oral sex. "You can't get a girl pregnant by having oral sex," says Peter. "In Webster, in St. Louis, oral sex is not sex. It's just foreplay."

Although there were 10 pregnancies and 20 sexually transmitted diseases reported to the school nurse last year, the students do take precautions—and some feel comfortable talking to their parents about sex. "I told [my mom] the first time I had sex. She wasn't mad at all," says Sally. "She was excited for me and told me to be careful and all." Peter isn't as open with his parents. "They pretty much think that that's none of their business just as long as I'm being careful and using protection," he says. Once, though, his mom offered to buy condoms for him.



YOUNG LOVE After a long day, Elizabeth Kirkpatrick spends some quality time with live-in boyfriend Patrick Marin

If that's too embarrassing, he can turn to his friend's mother. She keeps a stockpile handy for the kids, diligently replenishing it once a month. She might be pleased to know that students are having protected sex no matter where they are. Building supervisor Frank Schaffer says that every so often his crews find used condoms in the corridors, stairways or the attic above Roberts Gym. "At least they're using them," he says.

Sally and Gale have discussed what will happen to their relationships after graduation. Sally plans to move to Los Angeles for design school, while Peter will stay in Missouri. They'll probably have to split. "What are you going to do?" Sally asks. Gale shrugs. She could always try dating.

—F.T.

10:52 P.M. | ASTRONOMY

A teacher who will stay forever young

BRIAN YATES POINTS TO THE DARK sky, hardly able to contain himself as he recites the names of the stars and the planets. Over there is Andromeda, the chained lady. There's Pegasus, the winged horse—and the Northern Cross, Vega and Jupiter! "Get over it, Yates," yells one of the students who, for 50 extra-credit points, have come to the playground to

watch the moon rise. "Never," replies Yates.

At times, it's hard to tell whether Yates, physics and astronomy teacher and chair of the science department, is a member of the faculty or still a kid. He often tells students how much he's craving an RC Cola or a Moon Pie or a Slim Jim. He allows them to drink bottled water in class and speak up without raising their hands. But he's best known for his antics—shooting chalk through a plastic tube, or dropping a huge chemistry book on the floor for its startling effect. It's a formula that works, creating an environment that engages students. When one called him a mean old a--hole in class, he corrected him calmly. "That's mean old bastard to you."

Yates teaches in the same third-floor classroom where he once studied geometry. He was raised a short bike ride from the school, graduating in 1985. He moved to Colorado and Texas but returned after marrying, so that he could raise his two children in Webster's small-town atmosphere—and see his students at the pizza parlor or the Krispy Kreme. He doesn't mind when they stop by his house, or hide outside his back door to blast him with water balloons. "I would never teach in a school where I didn't live," he says.

At the start of every school year, he gives students a letter in which he tells them that he wants to help them excel, but

GOING THE DISTANCE Brian Yates, science teacher, mentor and confidant, brings the world, and the universe, into the classroom

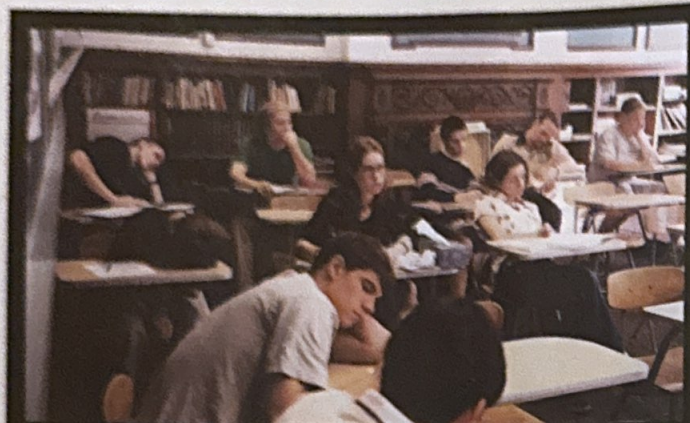
that the real work is up to them. When he talks about his teaching philosophy, he turns serious. "It's not about the answers you get; it's about the questions you ask," says Yates. "I want them to be curious."

While the kids sometimes seem to diss him in class, Yates sees them as simply being comfortable enough to be themselves. At times they stay after class for advice, a measure of his influence. One afternoon in the counseling office, he saw Patrick Velten, a senior who plays soccer and is the kicker on the varsity football team, looking up colleges. Yates says the teen couldn't pronounce. Knowing Pat's grades, Yates suggested, gently, that he consider the Navy or the Coast Guard and discuss it with his father. The next day, Pat stopped by to say he'd looked into the Coast Guard, even talked to a recruiter. He said he was thinking of being a Coast Guard spokesman. Less gently, Yates told Pat he didn't think quickly enough on his feet for that job. Pat wasn't offended; he just laughed and said, "If I go into the Coast Guard, I'm going to get one of those big Coast Guard tattoos on my arm." Yates smiled his boyish grin and said, "If you go to Havana, will you bring me back some cigars?"

At 33 and after nearly a decade of teaching, Yates is worried about going stale. Before school started, he trashed much of the material he had gathered over the years. He makes himself do the same homework he assigns his students. At least two or three times a semester, he invites his astronomy classes to watch meteor showers, or to count planets or, like tonight, to see the moon rise.

The first time he invited the kids to a vacant field, the police showed up to investigate; Yates had forgotten to tell them that he'd be there. Now he limits his excursions to school-district property. Not all the nearly 60 kids here are his students. His outings are not only fun; they are an excuse to stay out late. (Those in his classes must bring written permission from their parents to get the extra-credit points.) Nicole Lopez, a 16-year-old junior who has Yates for fifth period, listens to his every word. "He does what no other teacher does," she says. Besides the kids, several parents have also come to watch. At 11:21, a sliver of moon finally peaks in the east above a stand of trees. "Mission accomplished," declares Yates. The students begin to drive away, but one remains behind, watching Yates pack up. The boy's father is getting married this weekend, he confides, and he's been happy for him—until now. Yates knows this senior comes from a troubled family and stays to listen, though his own wife is home waiting for him in a warm bed.

—T.R.



8:25 A.M.
In Martin Milstead's A.P. history class, not everyone is listening. Four students have their head down. One is in the front row, slumped over asleep, yet Milstead, a

veteran of 35 years of teaching, is undeterred. He puts on a slide of the slavery population and how it rose. He asks if anyone has questions. Anybody? Anybody?

along pretty good and making friends. I went to a party with a bunch of girls and we stayed out late. I walked one home and kissed her good night. But I've never really had what I'd call a serious kiss with a girl. That was pretty much it.

"Then I went back on medication. I don't really like it. I used to be able to joke and laugh, but it slows down my reaction to things. And it killed my appetite, so I don't usually eat at lunch. I go off somewhere by myself rather than sitting at lunch not eating and looking strange."

—R.S.

6 P.M. | FOOTBALL GAME

Come on, everybody, clap your hands

FRIDAY NIGHT, FOOTBALL NIGHT, feels more like June than October. You expect to see some leftover fireflies, the air is so warm. The kids are still in shorts, the scoreboard is twinkling, the week is finally over. Everyone is coming to the game.

The varsity cheerleaders, 14 strong tonight, do their pregame psych-up at Natalie Rodriguez's house in North Webster. Destiny's Child blares on the CD player, and between trips to the bulging buffet table, two black girls teach the others how to get down to the music. Junior Sarah Budzinski gets a plate of cake smashed in her face in early celebration of her 17th birthday tomorrow. After dinner, Natalie's mom braids their hair, brown and blond alike, into cornrows. "Whenever my mom used to braid my hair," says senior Ann Barnes, "she'd say the more it hurts, the prettier it is." A minute later, her light, silky hair in Ms. Rodriguez's firm hands, Ann

spend a lot of time reading books, science fiction and horror. I guess I could talk to them about school or current events, but I wouldn't know what to say beyond that. My mom wants me to date more, to go to the prom and stuff. She says she'll rent me a limo. She's worried that I'm not socially active and stuff."

"I'm on Adderall, and I see a therapist. I used to be on Ritalin. I've been on medication since the third grade. I don't like what the medication does to me. About four years ago I stopped taking my Ritalin. I'd get the pills and then throw them away. I started being wild. I liked how I felt because I didn't have to be courteous, and getting in trouble didn't bother me like it used to. I was getting

all, a sense of humor. While the kids downstairs eat cheese fries, half a dozen science teachers gather in the third-floor faculty lounge over leftovers from home. These 27 min. are more like a sanity break. When they enter the lounge, they get to be adults. They talk about everything from weekend plans to the lack of staff parking to the difference between sweet potatoes and yams.

When the conversation gets juicy, they shut the glass door, as when Kathleen Ahern, who teaches chemistry, confided her suspicion that a student has cheated. This brings a buzz of advice from her colleagues, who, despite what the kids

think, know when cheating is going on. "We're not stupid," says Mike Abegg.

To be a teacher in the 1990s, they say, means to have one's authority challenged daily. It's not just the kids who talk back. Some students curse at them; others don't bother to come to class on time. Teachers may send them to the office to be reprimanded, but the kids usually return the next day with a grudge. Some teachers, they say, don't even bother to assign homework because the students won't do it and will flunk the class. And if teachers have high fail rates, school administrators come down on them.

As jaded as they may

sound, the science teachers say they love their jobs.

Several, like Margaret Skouby, who teaches concept physics, worked as chemical engineers or had other jobs in the private sector before coming here. At Webster they generally have the freedom to teach the way they want. Teachers must meet minimums in the school's curriculum but are not required to write out lesson plans. They measure the rewards in bits. Just as the lunch bell rang yesterday, longtime physics teacher Phillip Wojak rushed into the lounge, almost too excited to speak. A former student had published a textbook—and cited him in the dedication.

—T.R.



turns beet red, clenches her teeth and yells out, "OOOUUCHHHH!"

Just after 6, more than an hour before kickoff, the team is in the locker room, and the mood stinks. The players seem distracted, off balance. Behind closed doors, Bobby Granderson and wide receiver Chuck Walker are brutal to their teammates. "You better get your minds straight," Chuck says, his voice growing louder. "We won last week. We're doing good. But you're walking around like you're lost." By the time Coach Ice comes in, the players are quiet. He didn't like all the stupid mistakes in last week's game. "It's nice to be home," he says. "Just remember, we don't give away anything at our own house."

By now the stands are filling, as the teams line up to sing the National Anthem. Emmanuel Simmons, a lineman, takes one last shot from his asthma inhaler. Quarterback Karl Odenwald makes passing motions with his arm. As the announcer names the starters in tonight's game, the fans in the stadium scream for Bobby.

Clap your hands, everybody, the cheerleaders chant, and fluff their pom-poms.

Everybody clap your hands.
We're W.G. going all the way.

The best in the land.

Ten seconds into the game, Webster scores. Senior Patrick Hunt is up in the stands, giving science teacher Marty Walter a hard time. She could pass for a student herself, but to him she's still Mrs. Walter, and it's weird to see her here, out of the box, not talking in that biology voice. "It'll be easier after you graduate," she tells him. "What," he says, "like, we're going to be friends with you guys?" and she laughs and

THE PEP BAND Music to boost the spirits of a moody football team. It must have helped: Webster blew out Northwest 61-14

says, "Nah, we don't want you as friends either," and you realize these are the teachers who are your friends for life.

Math teacher Eric Dunn has been wearing a Webster football jersey all day. No. 13, a walking ad for his student Karl Odenwald. Peter and Sally, her hair in pig-tails, arrive together and sit in the very front. Mr. Wingham strolls by with his 14-year-old, who looks like an escapee from a Caravaggio painting. Sally starts playing



12:40 P.M.

"I'm a little scared," admits senior Emily Carlton, picking up trash outside St. Patrick's Center, a homeless shelter, as part of Webster's Senior Leadership Seminar. The last time she was on this side of St. Louis, she was told to hide her belongings and to never be alone. "We don't see a lot of this stuff in

with the child, getting in touch with her inner mom. Mr. Yates is with his two children and wife, Webster class of '85, and his in-laws, who were homecoming king and queen back in 1960.

The teachers are here in force, and the parents, little brothers and sisters, a baby dressed in tiger colors. Alums come back to watch their children play. And as the first half unrolls, they are playing if not well, then at least successfully.

The game is big and sloppy and wonderful to watch. With Northwest ahead 14-13, Karl makes a fine pass to Bobby, but the ball squirts through his hands. On the next play, Webster's Rodney Trevino catches a pass and scores. On the next series, Bobby, now playing defense, is determined to make up for his bobbled pass. He hammers a Northwest player, causing him to fumble. Webster's Raken Stamps recovers the ball and runs it into the end zone. Score: 27-14.

Nurse Lynn Buss and her husband, who have put three football-player sons through Webster Groves, wince whenever someone takes a good hit. She knows them by name and by injury. "Look, Matt Koch is playing," she points out. "He had an injured vertebra last year." She erupts when junior Jerry Bailey scores. "Hey, that guy was in my clinic at 4 yesterday pretending he was sick! That little stinker."

Detective Dave Dreher's sport jacket and slacks are gone. Tonight he's in uniform, badge and gun plainly visible, working the parking lots. "Oh, high school days," he sighs as he orbits the stadium grounds. "Hey, what's your name, and

Webster," she says. "It's a small town." Classmate Shekinah Holemon, who lives in downtown St. Louis, is also here picking up garbage. Seven years ago, Shekinah spent four months in a shelter like this one. Shekinah keeps this to herself, but gets frustrated sometimes. "They don't understand what it's like not to have anything," she says.

A Long Dispute Boils Over

2:30 P.M.

"What are you going to do about this?" demands a Webster Groves mom of Detective Dreher, who's in a crowd of students across the street from the school. The mom's now out of her minivan and, between obscenities, tells Dreher that her son was just punched by another boy. His response: "I may have to arrest 'em both and lock 'em both up."

So Dreher escorts the two students—and the mom—back into the school and places them in separate rooms for a "cooling-off period." After that, assistant principal John Raimondo invites all parties into his office for a closed-door session to hear both sides of the story. A consensus emerges: the fight has been stewing since the summer, and it finally popped when one student allegedly spit on the other's locker.

Both sides are summoned down to the police station for a 5:30 p.m. meeting. There, no one is arrested or locked up, but the boys are simply instructed to settle their differences once and for all—with Officer Robert Nash presiding.



1:10 P.M.
Against her pale skin, the contrast of Mali Pursell's tight black dress is striking, as are her blue hair and spiral contacts. She has come into her own as a senior this year, but she remembers how hard it was being a freshman and all alone. Even now, she says, "I feel like the ones who will talk to me are doing it just to be cool—to say, 'Look, I'm talking to the weird girl.'"

where do I know you from?" Dreher asks a kid lurking outside the field. "I think you know me from getting into trouble, little things," the boy says sheepishly.

It's bigger things that have Dreher worried tonight. Just a few blocks away, a neighbor spotted a gun being passed to two white males in a Chrysler Le Baron. Though there's nothing to link the incident to Webster Groves High, he's scouring the parking lot for the car.

Faye Walker, Suspension Lady, patrols the sidelines in a white Statesmen T shirt, walkie-talkie in hand. "Don't make me work too hard!" she yells at a group of sophomores who have overfilled their section of stands and are climbing over the security bar. "You know," she says, "there are some people who came out here to see the game." But not many. The crowd is carbonated, all noisy and fizzed, relieved, distracted. Kids are focused on planning the postgame show: "Are you going to be at Rob's?" "How do you get there?" "Are his parents home?" One student is walking up to all the girls. He has a lilac ribbon pinned on that says KISS ME, IT'S MY BIRTHDAY. One girl says that it's not his birthday, but everyone obliges him anyway.

Matt Gewinner sits by himself. He says he's been thinking about his own death. Presently a girl sits down next to him and asks him what's up. He tells her that he's bummed. "Don't be bummed!" she says in a bubbly voice. She gives him a hug.

At half time Webster is way ahead, 48-14. As the players jog off the field, a girl screams, "Bobby! Bobby!" But Bobby doesn't hear her. He still hasn't got his touchdown. In the locker room, Coach Ice throws cold water on them. "I don't want to be happy beating a bad football team by four touchdowns. If we play a good team, we can't do crap like this. I want to play good football all the time."

When half time is over, Principal Voss corrals kids back into the stands. "There are parents and alums who are always here, always in the same seats," she says. Then she pauses, looking out over the field. "The kids always say they can't wait to get away from here," she remarks, with the knowing tone of one who has seen generations seep through her school, "but they always end up coming back."

Town-council member Charles Schneider graduated in 1967, and he knows how much has changed since then. The stands used to be packed for home games. "Now, so many things compete for their time," he says. "People watch so much TV now, or they go off somewhere in their car. When I was a kid, we stayed close to home in our parties, our socializing. Now it's common for kids to drive a long way, to go down-

town. I went there maybe once when I was a teenager."

*We ain't scared, we ain't cocky.
Gonna ride over you like a Kawasaki.
Hey, zoom, zoom.*

Senior Zach Wood is still trying to get his head around the prospect of his dad's wedding tomorrow. At this point he says he's "cool with it." He is sitting with a friend who is trying to convince him that he should not take next year off. "College is good. Go to college," she implores. He tells her, "I'm going to junior college because I have no idea what I want to do, and I refuse to pay a four-year college tuition when I could pay a fraction of that and figure out what I want to do."

Beth Perez is on a date tonight, sort of.



VICTORY: An exhilarated Webster team converges in a blur of helmets and high-fives

She's wearing gray slacks and a black shirt that shows a little midriff, with black dress sandals. A boy spills cookie crumbs down her cleavage, to her disgust. She's got one eye on the game and one on a junior soccer player whom she kissed at a party last weekend. They spent the first part of the game sitting with their friends; then, after half time, they find a spot of their own. However, since everybody knows everybody here, she ends up very near a party including Mrs. Walter, the biology teacher. A discussion of flatulence, led mostly by the adults, ensues.

We are (clap, clap) Web-ster (clap, clap).
The second half is crushing, merciless. Webster scores again and again. Finally, finally, Beth's swain puts his arm around

her. But time has been ticking down. Just as he does it, defensive back Carl Whitaker intercepts and runs from his own 10 all the way down the field and scores as the clock runs out. Beth leaps up and screams, and the boy's arm slides off—for now. Webster wins 61-14. The crowd whoops, the cheerleaders kick, parents, including Bobby's, run out onto the field to grab their smelly kids and hug them.

The crowd pours out the gates into the parking lots, into the night. A few players linger, savoring the sheer size of the win. When the last of the stadium lights goes out, Bobby leaves with his friends, once again without that touchdown. Karl, the quarterback, rides home in his parents' van. Three taxis arrive to take home the

vrs kids who play on the team but live in St. Louis.

At 10:30 p.m. the field is empty, and the last students are spilling out of the parking lot, windows down and music blaring. Principal Voss huddles in the center of the parking lot with assistants Clark, Raimondo and White, and Detective Dreher. "You almost work 24 hours a day at this job," says John Raimondo. "I've been going since 6 this morning." For her part, P.V.'s school day started at 5:45, "but it's pretty normal for me to leave this late on a Friday."

"Good weekend, John," she says, and makes her benedictions. And as they climb into their cars, one by one, the walkie-talkies are finally turned off.

—N.G.