



WESTHILL STUDENT SECTION at an away game in 2019.
Photo via Westhill's School Website.

What Happened to School Spirit?

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Bleed purple, sweat gold. Westhill. The Vikings all know what we are, but what is being done to show it? School spirit has been on a rapid decline over the years, especially after COVID. Westhill has faced a complete turn around in the traditional sense of school pride.

COVID had a detrimental impact on the attendance for school events and the Westhill community. Pre-COVID, homecoming was the biggest fundraiser for prom, usually maxing out attendance at 500 to 600. This year's homecoming only had 200 attendees.

Even the most recent proms have been just for show, with most students paying for a ticket and leaving promptly after arriving.

School sports are also facing an unfortunate decline in attendance. Most sports teams lack an audience for support during their games, especially football.

"Back when I was a kid in the '70s, we had a lot more attendance at football games. Like, they were popular. People would go to those. And notice now, football attendance has trailed off," said Lynn Tyrell, a faculty member.

Typical pride for most schools would be

found in their football teams, and yet it is notably less popular than other sports. Basketball and volleyball seem to have recently taken on the role of rallying Vikings for regular games. The most attended games tend to be the city rivalries, which is currently a 3-3 tie with Stamford High for the City Cup.

The last two years have had Black Knights victories, and this year is looking the same with an 8 point deficit for the Vikings.

Spirit weeks and pep rallies follow suit. While there is moderate participation, most students and teachers feel that there isn't a lot of excitement surrounding any of them. A common opinion was that most students find it embarrassing to participate, but the ones that do typically enjoy it. "I did. I don't really think that [anybody] dressed up for that," said Justin Vargas ('28).

Opinions about the themes have gone around the student bodies, viewed negatively and positively. The themes, however, have not changed drastically from the themes Seniors had freshman year.

So, the problem seems to be obvious: students simply do not want to participate. The most

common solution? Incentivizing. Both students and teachers alike feel as though more students would participate in spirit weeks and pep rallies if they were offered free swag, gift cards, or some sort of prize for participating in school events.

"I think incentivizing people is always a really great thing. Maybe, you know, if you, we have the spirit week and best dress, get some kind of gift card or, right? Just kind of, ideas to make people really extrinsic," said Carley Grant, a science teacher and Junior class advisor.

Another student posed a different angle on why students aren't more involved in things like cultural events or school dances: there's simply not enough promotion or awareness around them.

"Have a specific day where it's not, like, crowded or students have to do something. Just a specific day with time, so people can get prepared to do it if they want to participate," said Keyli Castro ('28).

Likening this to the lip dub; most assemblies and events are planned during class time or on an off campus site, with little prior promotion. "Most of the time you hear about it from people

and the students, not announcements and stuff," said Gio Gulashvilli ('27), suggesting that if the school were to put more effort and creativity into broadcasting events, there could possibly be more attendance.

There is also a significant part of Westhill athletic culture that disappeared post COVID. Captain's Council and Purple Pack are some of the highlights of Westhill history, and yet, they are missing in today's community.

Captain's Council had captains from each sport come together to rally students and support each other's teams, facilitating intersport connectivity. Purple Pack consisted of spirit representatives to bring energy and pack the stands for every game.

In the past years, however, there has been a notable absence or lack of interest for both. Westhill could also just not live up to expectations. Most Stamford-native seniors went into high school thinking that they'd be able to paint their own parking spots, pull senior pranks, and go all out for the lip dub. All of these have drastically changed throughout the years.

"The culture of this

school spirit in the more advanced school environment, just isn't there. It's definitely getting worse, and in terms of like, just spirit weeks and stuff like that, feeling real pride for your school just isn't there," said Ms. Grant. As most kids come into Westhill from the surrounding middle schools, they tend to not bring in the excitement of school pride.

However, Westhill does have its positives, specifically among the students.

"It's different from the country I come from, but, from what I know from movies and stuff, it's kind of different. No locker shoving, no bullying," said Gulashvilli. Although school spirit might be a struggle for the Vikings, respect between students is successfully facilitated.

As the 1993 yearbook shows, the Vikings have always had an "unstoppable spirit". So, as we bid farewell to the original Westhill building and class of '26, we are left with the hopes that the future classes and new school can bring back Viking pride once and for all.