everything is collapsing, but slowly & quietly.
Running on Empty
Exposing how burnout has affected students and staff in the past year

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I wake up in the morning, and I’m exhausted,” junior David Ciorba began, listing the classes, sports and extracurricular activities that lie ahead. Ciorba’s day can start as early as 5:30 a.m. with a workout, then to school by 7 a.m. where he will stay until 5 p.m., having finished diving or wrestling practice. Ciorba’s first moment of spare time—spent playing Animal Crossing or relaxing with his little brother—begins at 9:30 p.m., 16 hours after the first (or second, or third) alarm of the morning. And although this is David Ciorba’s story, the harsh reality is that it’s eerily similar to many Ladue students.

“With creative burnout, it’s just me and the water,” sophomore MJ Bezant said. “I go out swimming any chance I get, and it feels like it’s still the water. It’s relaxing.”

You feel like you’re on a treadmill and the school year is a marathon. It’s like a sprint but you just have to keep going and going and going.”

Allyson Levine | Teacher

ACADEMIC BURNOUT
Although Ladue boasts academic excellence and acceptances from elite colleges, the price paid is steep, when students try to maintain their grades, play sports, participate in clubs and apply to colleges all at once, they stretch themselves so thin they snap.

“On one hand, sometimes I do appreciate the competitive culture within Ladue since it really can push you to achieve more,” freshman Josh Pan said. “But at the same time, it can be stressful and tiring. Competing creates a lot of stress to do well.”

EXTRACURRICULAR BURNOUT
The narrative of what a high schooler should be has changed. In order to decrease the pressure on test scores and grades, institutions moved towards holistic reviews of candidates. But inadvertently, this ended up manufacturing formulation specialists. To what students should be spending free time doing in order to offer colleges a differentiated display of their potentials.

“In sports, specifically, there’s a motivation to specialize,” Ciorba said. “But as someone who likes to do a lot of different stuff, I don’t really want to specialize in just one sport, so I’m diving and wrestling. That’s pretty difficult because it takes a lot of time. In both seasons, there comes a point where practice feels like it’s five hours long, because I’m just ready to go and things get really repetitive. If my goals aren’t always met, I feel super down. A lot of times, I can’t really enjoy the same things that I might have enjoyed prior.”

CREATIVE BURNOUT
Eileen Suarez, like most seniors, has been swept up in the college application process. She seeks acceptance into an art school, which means that her applications—as well as her burnout—looks a lot different.

“For me, burnout from schoolwork is a lot easier to deal with,” Suarez said. “Especially because I can stop doing the homework and just talk to my teachers. With creative burnout, it’s just me and my own expectations. Around middle school, there was a certain period in my life that I just stopped drawing for, like three to four years. And even though a lot of people would tell me, ‘wow, you’re so good,’ you should be spending an artist or ‘you should do art when you grow up,’ I wanted to tell them [that] I don’t have it in me anymore. My hands could move and physically I could draw, but I still couldn’t make art.”

EDUCATOR BURNOUT
Balancing student well-being, academic skill gaps, curriculum requirements and their own needs post-pandemic has exacerbated stress levels among teachers. Since 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. is dedicated to school, chemistry and A.P. chemistry teacher Alyson Levine is just one of dozens who find it difficult to maintain a balance between their work and personal life.

“The school year is a lot easier to deal with,” Levine said. “Especially because I can stop doing the homework and just talk to my teachers. But at the same time, it can be stressful and tiring. Competing creates a lot of stress to do well.”

Beyond Burnout
“Students are feeling like they can’t adjust, they might be used to going out 100 miles an hour, but really they need to slow down a bit,” Welton said. “Students should know their warning signs and make sure that when they see those warning signs, they [can] veer off and [get] support from a counselor, friends or parents.”

Welton emphasizes that asking for assistance is never a sign of weakness, but the opposite. Being honest enough to recognize the limits of what’s feasible is incredibly difficult in the modern day busy culture, but it remains a crucial step towards building stronger mentalities.

“I try to breathe,” sophomore MJ Bezant said. “I go outside and get some fresh air before races or listen to music.”

It’s an outlet, it’s a good way to calm you down before you’re about to jump into the water.”

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BALANCING BURNOUT

Looking at common causes, symptoms and treatments of burnout in students

Student burnout rates during COVID-19

- **71%** in April 2021
- **40%** in August 2020

Students spend **17.5 HOURS** on homework a week, enough to watch the entire “Harry Potter” Series

**56%** of students say homework is a primary stress source

**87%** of students say education causes anxiety and stress

**THE BASICS**

**CAUSES**

**INDICATORS**

**PHYSICAL**
- Frequent headaches
- Change in sleeping and eating habits

**EMOTIONAL**
- Loss of motivation
- Lack of satisfaction with accomplishments

**BEHAVIORAL**
- Procrastination
- Withdrawing from responsibilities

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

**The Trevor Project**
- Mental health services for LGBTQ+ youth
- Trevor Lifeline: 1-866-488-7386
- Trevor Text: START to 678-678

**WashU’s Psychological Service Center**
- Low-cost or free mental health treatment
- Call and set up: 314-935-6555

**Calm**
- Breathing and meditation sessions
- Helps reduce anxiety and stress
- Users can download in app store

**Happify**
- Games and activities developed by scientists
- Specialized in positive psychology and cognitive behavior

**Head When You Need It**
- Search for local health clinics and therapists in price range
- Listings for mental health, social services and substance abuse

**Headspace**
- Meditation app with access to guided lessons
- Helps users decompress and maintain a healthy balance in life

Sources: healthline, understood, help guide, Harvard business review, ADA, Ohio state

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1. Find the source of the burnout
2. Take time to do things you enjoy
3. Reduce work load
4. Reorganize schedule
5. Incorporate in the long run
I suffer with finding motivation or meaning in everything.

Exhausted all the time, unmotivated.

I feel physically and mentally exhausted.

I'm so mentally exhausted and I'm at the point where I'm breaking down, crying every night.

Everything is foggy and seems like a blur.

I don't remember anything outside of school. It's the only thing in my life.

I know I should, but I can't find it in myself to care about much of anything anymore.

I'm very little motivation to get out of bed.

Always have work to do.

Collapsing.

I feel like I'm failing at life.

Showing up to school is an accomplishment.

I can't keep up.

Can't focus, I got a math quiz.

School makes me burned out.

I have no time for friends, family or a social life.

I'm the point where.

It is hard to get out of bed in the mornings.

At this point I am solely trying to get by. When I get home, I drop my backpack at the door and don't pick it up until leaving for school the next day.

I am exhausted.

I feel very overwhelmed.

I use up so little energy at school with all the things that happen. I get home, I feel mentally and emotionally exhausted.

I feel mentally and emotionally exhausted.

Burnout = Stress because you still want to succeed, but have no motivation.

Put very minimal effort in assignments.

Exhausted.

When everything is passing by so quickly and you can't do everything you have to do & you're running out of time.

Endless

Drowning

Lack of energy

Coffee.

Anxiety attacks

Exhaustion

No motivation

Senioritis

I am very overwhelmed + there is an immense amount of pressure to succeed in everything.