

[Editorial]

The final word

Featherduster staff suggests changes to new policy

With a 99 percent attendance rate, it's easy to see that Westlake's new final exemption policy is proving effective in its goal to keep students in class. The policy, which was voted on by a committee of teachers and administrators, allows students who have an average of an 87 or above and three or fewer non-school-related absences, to be exempt from their finals. Freshmen can exempt from one, sophomores from two, juniors from three and seniors have the opportunity to exempt all their finals. But while this policy aims to benefit the student population as a whole, it brings up a number of significant problems which our staff hopes to address in this editorial.

Around school, there seems to be one recurring similarity among students—a lot of them are sick. Because of the three or fewer absences clause in the final exemption policy, more and more students are coming to school with the flu, strep throat, mononucleosis and other highly contagious diseases to avoid having any unexcused absences on their record. The students are ignoring their doctors' orders by forcing themselves to endure school rather than resting in bed and drinking plenty of fluids. Because of this, there seems to be more zombie-like students, dragging their limp bodies to class in an exhausted state of mind. The solution to this absence debacle? We feel it would be in the school's best interest to formulate an absences committee, consisting of 10-15 students and a supervisor

"I know the administration has to draw the line somewhere, but such a rigid policy isn't fair to those students whose absences are out of their control."

—senior Ellie Cooper

(similar to student court), whose job is to investigate each individual absence appeal. For example, if a student who had to miss a full week of school due to illness showed up with a note from a doctor that accounts for why they were unable to attend school, it would be the committee's job to verify the note's credibility with the physician, and then decide whether or not the absence should be counted against exemption.

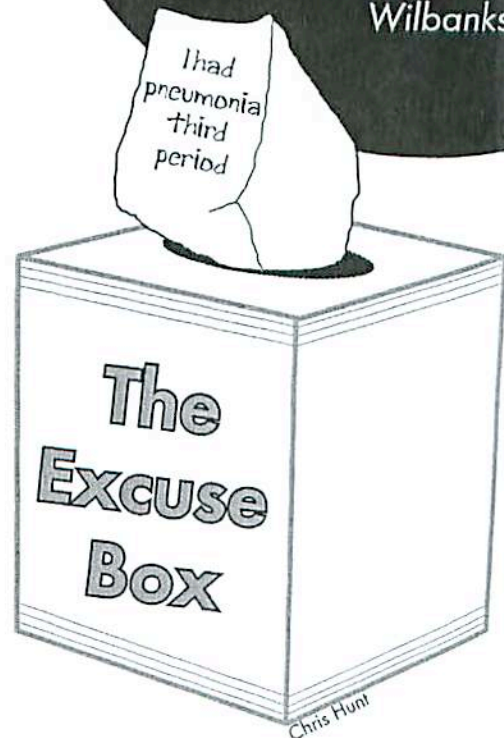
Absences are also a problem for students who participate in extracurricular sports, such as rowing, horseback riding and gymnastics. While the school sanctions several off-campus sports, even allowing students to earn their P.E. credit from them, any absence received because of the sport is counted against exemption. It doesn't make sense. If a student misses school to participate in a school-sanctioned sport and their coach writes an excuse note, the absence committee should investigate the case by calling the coach for confirmation.

Another issue with the finals exemption policy, is the common complaint that AP classes should have the cut-off grade lowered due to the difficulty of the class. While it is certainly outrageous to add in the 1.2 multiplier (which would make the minimum grade a 72.5 for AP students), we feel that it would be more than fair to move the cut down to an 84. After all, most core AP classes have at least twice as much work as regular classes and students who take all AP's have a significantly higher workload. We feel that by lowering the grade to an 84 for AP classes, the policy will be fairer to students across the board. We also think that it would be in the student's best interest to retain the former policy in which AP students who took the AP exam would have the right to exempt from that exam's final. This applies mainly to juniors who have four or more AP's, but only three possible exemptions.

In the end, however, we commend the committee for formulating this policy, because after all it is a privilege for students and we are indeed very thankful for it. But the school still needs to account for all the small problems that seem to appear along with it. We call on the committee to reconsider this

matter and retool this policy, in order to benefit the student body for the spring semester. By simply investigating student absences and lowering the minimum grade for AP students, we as a staff feel that the policy will be that much closer to excellence.

"I think that final exemptions should be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. People who are skipping class should have to take finals, but those who have legitimate excuses shouldn't have to suffer."
—junior Sarah Wilbanks



Chris Hunt