

2024 High School Better Newspaper Contest

The WNA's High School and Collegiate Better Newspaper Contest recognizes excellence in student journalism across the state. The contest is open to all active newspapers in high school and Wisconsin's public and private college campuses. The high school contest, drew 115 entries from 9 high schools and was judged by members of the Minnesota Press Association. Students received their awards March 7, 2025, at the WNA Convention Student Honors Luncheon at The Madison Concourse Hotel in Madison, Wisconsin.

General Excellence

Division AB

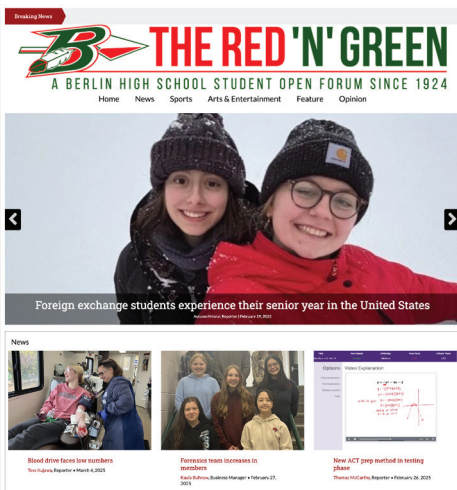
First Place: The Red 'n' Green Staff, *The Red 'n' Green*
 Judge's comments: The clear winner. As a group, the writers and reporters were the best. Many multi-sourced stories, using students and staff. Wide variety of topics covered. Outstanding.

Second Place: Purple Sage Staff, *Purple Sage*,

Judge's comments: Good variety of articles, focused on school activities and student achievements and less on pop culture reviews. Strong opinion pages.

Third Place: Cardinal Columns Staff, *Cardinal Columns*

Judge's comments: This paper made the greatest improvement from spring to fall. You are on the right track.



General Excellence, 1st place (Division AB)
The Red 'n' Green, Berlin



General Excellence, 2nd place (Division AB)
The Purple Sage, Waunakee



General Excellence, 3rd place (Division AB)
Cardinal Columns, Fond du Lac

Honorable Mention: Avianah Zarnowski, Ellie Scholtus, Eve Lazarski, *The Tosa Compass*, Judge's comments: Good articles on school activities and students. Would like to see more contributions.

General Reporting

Division A

First Place: Davin Yakey, *Wausau West High School*

Judge's comments: The survey is a great addition to this story! The combination of national research on trends, the survey, and interviews draws on many ways of exploring this issue. I appreciate the range of viewpoints and number of students interviewed. Comparing research on how phones affect students to students' perspectives on that question would have been interesting, as well.

Second Place: Dominick Praksti, *Purple Sage, Waunakee High School*
 Judge's comments: Fascinating issue. Dominick Praksti got a good, behind-the-scenes look at how this works, what schools do to cover and adapt, as well as ideas for broader solutions. It made me curious what other schools across the country are doing, and if any had ideas that could work in Waunakee.

Third Place: Tommy Thao, *Wausau West High School*

Judge's comments: Great choice of

subject and reporting opportunity in that visit to the capitol! Tommy Thao gives both a very high-level look at the history and the issue but also gets into individuals' personal experiences in detail, which is a very powerful combination and a holistic approach. Great photos! Some lines were a bit editorial.

Honorable Mention: Charles Andrew Cruz, *The Tosa Compass*
 Judge's comments: Great article! Well organized — Charles Andrew Cruz didn't just repeat what the interviewee said but synthesized it, pulled out salient points, and put it together in a logical format with a good mix of paraphrase and his own voice as well as quotes. Wonderful takeaways from the interview, and it's great having these different photos to help tell the story.

Division B

First Place: Autumn Nikolai, *The Red 'n' Green*
Second Place: Arianna McCormick, *The Red 'n' Green*
Third Place: Greyson Blaauw, *The Red 'n' Green*

Bad Reception
 Students not fans of phone bans
 Story By: Davin Yalkey

Phases have taken a central role in the modern era, especially within the academic setting. As of 2024, school policies on cell phones have been revisited, and some are implementing further steps on limitations.

Usage of personal cell phones has been restricted while in academic settings for years for a variety of reasons. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF), a San Francisco-based, non-profit organization focused on health policy, 91% of phones were banned in schools back in 2009, with that number falling to 66% in 2015, then rising to 76% in 2021. Currently, West's policy on cell phones is that their use is not permitted in classrooms unless permission is given by that teacher.

"I think overall our society, students, probably adults as well, all have a different degree of dependence on our phones, and I think depending on how we use them there are a wide range of consequences for that," principal Jeb Steckbauer said.

The Pew research center cited that, as of 2024, 98% of Americans own a cellphone of some kind. This was an exact match to data from a school wide survey sent out to West students in November that stated 98.4% owned a cell phone.

"In an ideal world it would be great to have everyone leave their phones at home," Steckbauer said. "They come to school and essentially have a phone ban at school. I truly think that we would probably see some great benefits from that. I think that we would engage with one another a little bit more than we have been instead of sitting in the commons and looking at our phones, maybe we would be talking to each other."

Most phones are banned in open labs during unstructured labs, but the commons are still a place for students to use their phones in various ways.

Only 17.3% of students agreed that there could be benefits associated with a total ban, but when asked if they thought a ban might improve student grades, 53% said they might improve "a bit." The same number thought social interactions might improve.

"I don't think that [a total phone ban] is a really, we need that communication tool for a lot of different things, safety being one, rides after school, communication with parents, there are so many different things," Steckbauer said.

There are pros and cons to each side, however the individuals most heavily affected by the issue are the students themselves.

"I know what I use it for, but I do not know what other people do," junior Thalia Bickford said. "Sometimes, I use it to take a minute from school, or use it to help with my schoolwork. I know other students use it for not paying attention in class."

There are 1,477 students at West, but not all of them use their phones for the same things. According to the survey results, 91.3% of students use their cell phones for school-related functions like checking Canvas, Infinite Campus, or their schedule. But 84.7% also said they use their phones for texting. Social media was used on phones by 65.2% of students, while 42.2% used them for games.

Do you think restrictions on phone usage at school would improve students overall?

no effect	27.8%
negative affect	55.8%
yes	3.8%
might improve a bit	13.6%

General Reporting, 1st place (Division A)
Wausau West High School

Public Affairs Reporting

Division AB

First Place: Damarius Twitty-Montgomery, Kasjyen Richardson, *The Tosa Compass*
Second Place: Carlyne Diogo, *The Tosa Compass*
Third Place: Arianna McCormick, *The Red 'n' Green*
Honorable Mention: Avianah Zarnowski, Ellie Scholtus, Eve Lazarski, Journey Love Taylor, *The Tosa Compass*

In-Depth Reporting

Division A

First Place: Katie Vang, *Cardinal Columns*
 Judge's comments: Strong personal lead, nice blend of local and expert sources and good use of an infographic. I would have included a source in more sections, such as the third paragraph. And be careful to avoid generalizing, such as the sixth paragraph.
Second Place: Addy Benzinger, *Cardinal Columns*
 Judge's comments: Using a student's personal story at the beginning

Berlin installs new playground

Autumn Nikolai, Reporter
 October 22, 2024

Berlin Elementary School opened their new playground on Sep. 27.

"During COVID the federal government gave a lot of grants and distribution money across the country to help support schools during and after school. They call this money ESSER. The ESSER funds are federal funds that have to be used by the end of September of 2024," superintendent Dr. Emmett Durtschi said.

The ESSER funds mostly helped the school purchase cleaning supplies during covid and help with any extra cost that came.

"The school district had over \$2,500,000 of those funds. We used most of these funds for cleaning supplies, masks, and ventilation purposes during covid but more recently we've used up some of that money for new music equipment. Some staffing but we also had some money available for other projects," Durtschi said. "I looked for items that were higher ticket items that were helping students that also we could use these funds for so that the taxpayers wouldn't be asked for money later on."

A playground should be updated or completely redone at least every 20-30 years. According to Miracle.com. The old playground equipment was about 25-30 years old, so it was not up to code anymore and needed to be completely replaced.

"Most of the structures that are used on the playground are well past their usable life. Some of the pieces were unsafe and people noticed that some of the slides were blocked off by plywood or there were cracked pieces," Durtschi said. "Also, some of the playground equipment pieces were no longer up to code, so they were past their usable life."

The playground was completely funded by the ESSER funds, the total cost of the playground was a little under \$500,000.



On Sep. 27 the construction for the new playground was finished. On Oct. 1 the Berlin Area School District opened the playground for the kids and public to use. "The playground is open to the public so anyone can use it as long as it's not getting mistreated," superintendent Dr. Emmett Durtschi said.

made this more engaging, and good use of local data and an infographic. But I would have liked to see a source for your definition of academic validation, and be careful to avoid editorializing and making sweeping claims without data to back it up.

Third Place: Avianah Zarnowski, Jennifer Liang, Ellie Scholtus, *The Tosa Compass*

Judge's comments: Kudos on the quick turnaround and comments from several seniors, but I would have liked to see more enterprise and originality. I especially liked the 70-pound suitcase section. I would have led with that and included more unique details like that one.

Division B

First Place: Autumn Nikolai, *The Red 'n' Green*

Judge's comments: Important topic and one of the most in-depth entries. The survey also was an interesting addition. A more localized, less generic lead might have drawn more readers into the story. Also be careful not to use generalized claims - like at the

ALL EYES ON YOU

HOW PERFORMANCE ANXIETY AFFECTS MUSICIANS AND LEARNING HOW TO OVERCOME IT

by KATIE VANG

Senior Emma Newell has been playing and performing cello for eight years but still gets that deep anxious feeling every time.

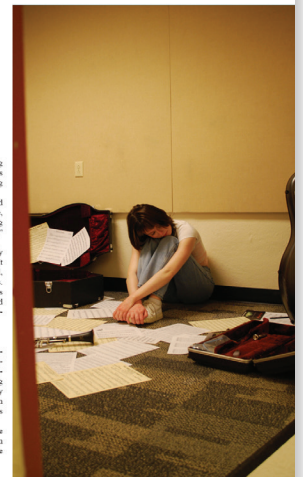
"I feel very consistent, it's kind of like you're asked in front of everyone, like there's just something embarrassing about you, and everyone's staring at you," she said.

Performance anxiety is commonly experienced by musicians everywhere. It ranges in severity based on the individual, and happens for many different reasons. Performance anxiety can limit musicians and bar them from their full potential, and overcoming it can be a crucial part in a performer's musical career.

What Is It?

Performance anxiety can be described as "a type of anxiety or strong, excessive feeling of fear or worry that is related to being able to accomplish something specific," according to an article by Ashley Oliver (TheWellHealed). Anxiety within the performing arts can also be known as stage fright.

Though people who experience Music Performance Anxiety (MPA) can often feel alone, it's a common struggle



General Reporting, 1st place (Division B)
Red 'N' Green, Berlin

In-Depth Reporting, 1st place (Division A)
Cardinal Columns, Fond du Lac

beginning of the fifth paragraph and the ninth paragraph - unless you have data to back them up or can attribute the claim to an expert.

Second Place: Thomas McCarthy, *The Red 'n' Green*

Judge's comments: Engaging lead and well researched. But avoid inserting opinions like "this makes sense" and "doesn't help in the democratic process" unless they are in a quote. Getting the perspective of another student or two also could have improved this story.

Third Place: Kayla Buhrow, *The Red 'n' Green*

Judge's comments: This entry stood out because it's about a challenge

specific to your school and had all local first-person sources. I would have liked to hear from some students in the classes. And be careful not to editorialize like you did at the end.

Feature Story

Division AB

First Place: Arianna McCormick, *The Red 'n' Green*

Judge's comments: Excellent story with good sourcing. Interviews were interesting and background on surrogacy well done.

Second Place: Brady Doyle, *Cardinal Columns*

Judge's comments: The entrepreneurial spirit is alive in this story of a hard-working former student. Great read.

Third Place: Cole Roerdink, *Wausau West High School*

Judge's comments: Wonderful subject for a story. The people behind the scenes who are often overlooked, yet can have such a big impact on all of us.

Sports Story

Division A

First Place: Logan Clark, *Cardinal Columns*

Judges comments: This story uses an interesting feature of an athlete — "she is busy" — and nicely weaves it into a feature about her career. There also are two strong quotes that add to the story as well. Well done!

Second Place: Oskar Miorslaw, Felix Bucaro, *The Tosa Compass*



A BERLIN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT OPEN FORUM SINCE 1924

Home News Sports Arts & Entertainment Feature Opinion

Feature Showcase

Schommer serves as surrogate for another family

Arianna McCormick, Reporter
May 16, 2024



Courtesy of Kurt Schommer

Jacqueline Schommer, spouse of Assistant Principal Kurt Schommer, decided in February, 2023 to sign up to be a surrogate for another family unable to have their own child. She met this family through a surrogacy agency, and in April, 2024 she gave birth to a baby boy for them.

"I love helping people," Jacqueline said. "I heard their story and immediately wanted to help them. Of course there were times being pregnant was challenging, but overall it went really well."

The intended mother, whose name we are withholding at her request, chose to have a child through

Berlin Plymouth 58 73
Feb 21 / Boys Basketball

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Miller tapped as next girls basketball coach

Katie Lechton, Sports Editor
October 31, 2024



The Amherst Girl's Basketball team will be under a new head coach for the 2024-25 season as Adam Miller was chosen as the new head coach of the Falcons. This comes after the resignation of former head coach Brandon Trzebiatowski.

Feature Story, 1st Place (Division AB)
Red 'N' Green, Berlin

Sports Story, 1st place (Division B)
TALON, Amherst

Judge's comments: This Q&A does a nice job of introducing readers to someone of importance. Lots of really interesting questions asked (and answered) here. My nit-pick is that I would like to see his "resume" to explain who you are talking to and why. But an enjoyable read!

Third Place: Ariyana Rhodes, *The Tosa Compass*

Judge's comments: This could be a very "dry" story, but the author has made sure it is not. Clever lede, and quotes from the athletes involved helped make this interesting. I would have liked to have heard from another athlete or two, but that also is a nit-pick. Good work!

Honorable Mention: Grace Huggenvik, *Wausau West High School*

Judge's comments: The lede is interesting, and there are quotes that back up the lede ... but they are too "low" in the story. The info about the family history is important, but it is too "high" in the story. It's a feature about Ella at the Games, and that info & quotes need to be higher. But there is too much good work done here to be ignored.

Division B

First Place: Katie Lechton, *TALON*

Judge's comments: Good overview of having a coach resign and bringing in his replacement. I would have like a little more detailed background of the new coach (where did he coach previously?), but this was a nicely rounded story.

Second Place: Tess Kujawa, *The Red 'n' Green*

Judge's comments: I liked the number of interesting voices in the story, and the explanation of how this season's improvement came about. But I also would have liked some detail as to results: times and places would have helped fill this

story out. But a nice overview of the final meet of the season.

Third Place: Greyson Blaauw, *The Red 'n' Green*

Judge's comments: There's a solid blend between facts about the team and voices on the team talking about the season. There was some repetition between lead-ins to quotes and the quotes themselves, but solid work overall.

Honorable Mention: Will Lecy, *The Viking Voice*

Judge's comments: I think it's best when opinion columns have a strong opinion with backing evidence. I would have liked to hear the write explain "how" Wembanyama will change the game instead of hinting at it (wing span, etc.). But solid column.

Editorial Writing

Division AB

First Place: Addison Dama, *Purple Sage*

New law requires class rank for applicants in WI

Addison Dama
Staff Writer

Last month Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers signed a bill into law guaranteeing admission to all Wisconsin Universities for certain Wisconsin students based on class rank.

Starting with the Class of 2025, UW-Madison will be required to accept the top 5% of every Wisconsin high school graduating class; all other public universities and technical colleges in the Wisconsin system must admit the top 10% of the graduating class. Gov. Evers says that this "Wisconsin Guarantee" is an effort to keep Wisconsin's top students in the state and will encourage more students to remain in Wisconsin after graduation to help address the state's labor shortage.

The impact the Wisconsin Guarantee will have on admissions for UW campuses is yet to be seen. I personally believe that every application should be judged on its overall merit and that GPA quotas for admissions can oversimplify a complicated selection process. Regardless, some believe that this new requirement should not significantly affect most Wisconsin students'

admission chances as most applicants in the top percentiles of their class are already being accepted to Wisconsin universities. For reference, 5% of the current junior class at Waunakee High School -the first class this bill will affect- is 17 students. Arguably, almost all of these students would have been admitted regardless of the bill. Even so, under the new bill, if you're in the top 5% or 10% you may be able to rest a little easier. If you're not, there's no need to panic. The bill also offers no incentives for those accepted to remain in the state, as it offers no increased financial aid.

One thing the Wisconsin Guarantee will change, however, is the requirement that Wisconsin high schools develop a class rank system. The bill will require all Wisconsin High Schools with 15 or more students to calculate a class rank based solely on GPA. The bill, however, does not specify how schools are to calculate GPA. Currently, Waunakee High School does not publish an official class rank and GPA is unweighted. An unweighted GPA means that course rigor isn't factored into the score. The concern with unweighted GPAs is that they effectively punish students

for taking more challenging classes. Arguably, the more difficult the classes you take the harder it is to get a high GPA. Class rank determined by an unweighted GPA would only add to this issue, especially now with the Wisconsin Guarantee. Moreover, the high school will need to determine what criteria will be used in the likely event of a tie.

That is the problem with quotas when determining who gets admitted into a university or technical college; it oversimplifies a complicated person and application into nothing more than their GPA. This bill doesn't allow admissions to take into account the complex factors that can impact a person's GPA, such as personal circumstances, extra-curricular activities, or work commitments. In the normal admissions process, numerous factors are analyzed, GPA being just one, such as standardized test scores, extracurricular activities, volunteer work, job experience, and personal essays. Each of these factors combined provides a more holistic view of the applicant. Now all of that has been reduced to just one number. Of course, as with any new law, the true impact will not be known until it goes into effect.

Judge's comments: This editorial speaks to a new law that has a direct impact on students' future, and is well worth their time to read. Good job!

Second Place: Arianna McCormick, *The Red 'n' Green*

Judge's comments: This editorial praises the school and community for stepping up to help a staff member with cancer. The details justify the praise.

Third Place: Arianna McCormick, *The Red 'n' Green*

Judge's comments: This editorial addressed the most impactful school-related issue in the competition. More specifics on possible cuts and the tax impact would have improved it. Still, it was important.

Honorable Mention: Ivana Northrop, *The Viking Voice*

Judge's comments: Social media can be a major issue for some, and this editorial offers good advice on how to deal with it. Nice.

Editorial Writing, 1st Place (Division AB)

Purple Sage, Waunakee

Column Writing

Divison AB

First Place: Peighton Frederick, *Wausau West High School*

Judge's comments: Readers know immediately the focus of column. Points made succinctly. Well written

Second Place: Ava Hamann, *Wausau West High School*

Judge's comments: Writer brings readers into her personal journey in theater. Relaxed writing style, easy to read.

Third Place: Austin Edwards, *The*

Spartan Spin

Judge's comments: Column paints a great picture of the student and his interest in film industry.

Honorable Mention: Natalie Schultz, *The Spartan Spin*

Judge's comments: It's easy to profile someone with a single interview. Writer gets high marks for including several voices in her story of a teacher and coach.

News/Feature Photography

Divison AB

First Place: Avianah Zarnowski, Ellie Scholtus, *The Tosa Compass*

Judge's comments: I love how the package shows not just the candidate, but shows the impact with impressive images of the crowd.

Second Place: Kabao Lor, *The Tosa Compass*

Judge's comments: While there was some repetition among photos, the images did tell a story.

Third Place: Colin Norland, *Purple Sage*

Judge's comments: Good overall technical quality, but the images tended to focus on candidates only and not those who are there as voters or supporters.

Honorable Mention: Markel Fletcher, Mi'kell Bishop-Vance, *The Tosa Compass*

Judge's comments: While the lighting was not perfect, I loved how the photographer found different views with action.

Sports Photography

Divison AB

First Place: Mi'kell Bishop-Vance, *The Tosa Compass*

Second Place: Olivia Prendergast, *The Spartan Spin*

Third Place: Olivia Prendergast, *The Spartan Spin*

Honorable Mention: Brendan Farrell, *The Spartan Spin*

Infographic/Illustration

Divison AB

First Place: Gretta Saunders, *Cardinal Columns*

Judge's comments: Nice infographics on this article. I would have put the graphics on the front page of the article. Very eye

Safety First

State officials meet with West students to discuss security concerns

For many of us, school safety is constantly on our minds. We often see dangerous situations, such as armed intruders, on the news. There's always that lingering thought of, "What if it was us?" Wausau West has recently implemented more safety features, however, all of them come from the perspective of adults. What about the students? What about our thoughts? Those are the questions that sent two government officials around the state.

Eight West students, including myself, were offered the opportunity to speak with State Attorney General, Josh Kaul, and School Safety Executive Director, Trish Kiplin, on Thursday, November 21st. I was joined by seniors Bridgette Baumgardt, Brahm Bina, Emilio Garduno, Brady McFadden, Ella Schmelling, Breana Weisenberger, and junior Will Zastrow. When West principal Jeb Steckbauer first offered this opportunity to the AP Government class students, we were all hesitant. However, I am thrilled I overcame that and participated in this student panel.

I had never spoken to somebody with such an important role in government, so I was a bit nervous. The officials made the environment so open and friendly that I felt comfortable voicing my unease. Sitting in the West Career Center with our chairs in a circle, the conversation flowed well. We covered a range of topics from what our fears are, what West could be doing better, and what West has been doing well. Not only was the conversation about typical school safety, but it was also about how West makes people feel included.

All of us voiced several concerns, from the possibility of weapons being brought to school to how easily, in theory, unknown people could enter the school. Kaul and Kiplin listened to our thoughts, even going further and asking us to go more in-depth to learn more about the issues.

Despite our worries, the participating students think that West has been doing well regarding school safety. We all thought the new main office doors and commons buzz-in system relieved some of our concerns regarding the lack of secure entrances. Additionally, Kiplin was happy with how well West handles drills, ranging from simple fire drills every month to the less common ALICE (Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate) active intruder drills.

While they didn't participate in the discussion, Wausau School District interim superintendent Cale Bushman, Steckbauer, and assistant principal Curt Richardt listened in. Later, when I spoke with Steckbauer, he said that he intends to take our feedback and look into ways to improve Wausau West's safety.

I deeply appreciate how Kaul and Kiplin took time out of their schedules to speak with students around the state. Gathering the opinions of those who are truly affected by the issue at hand is a pivotal part of increasing safety in schools. It's incredibly devastating that we live in a society where active intruders are so common that specific drills and meetings with state government officials need to exist. I am honored to have my voice heard and appreciate how they are making the effort to hear how students feel in their everyday school environments.

Circle Up

Wausau West students met with State Attorney General Josh Kaul and School Safety Executive Director Trish Kiplin on Nov. 21. Kaul and Kiplin organized the meeting where students voiced concerns and discussed current safety protocols.

Photo by Grace Huggenik



Column By:
Peighton
Frederick



Design: Peighton Frederick
08

Column Writing, 1st Place (Division AB)
Wausau West High School

catching and easy to read.

Second Place: Katie Vang, *Cardinal Columns*

Judge's comments: I love the post it notes. It draws your attention to the infographics. Easy to read and not cluttered.

Third Place: Tess Kujawa, *The Red 'n' Green*

Judge's comments: Too much information making it hard to read. Sometimes less is better. Everything else was reader-friendly.

Best Use of Multimedia/Website

Division AB

First Place: Avianah Zarnowski, Ellie Scholtus, Eve Lazarski, *The Tosa Compass*

Judge's comments: This was a full-frontal assault using all forms of multimedia to keep students engaged. Well done.

Second Place: Amarri Monk, Iyonna Small, *The Tosa Compass*

Judge's comments: Very close second. Wonderful look at behind the scenes of competitive cheer team.

Third Place: Nolan Bird, Marcus Madsen, *The Spartan Spin*
Good use of infographics to explain the election.

Honorable Mention: Avianah Zarnowski, Ellie Scholtus, Eve Lazarski, *The Tosa Compass*
Great site with lots of info for students.



Instagram

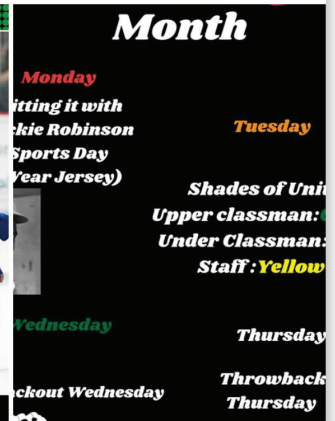
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POSTS REELS TAGGED



Infographic/Illustration, 1st Place (Division AB)
Cardinal Columns, Fond du Lac

Column Writing, 1st Place (Division AB)
The Clarion, Madison College