



# The High School View

The High School View is staffed and prepared entirely by students from the Martha's Vineyard Regional High School, and published on their behalf by The Martha's Vineyard Times, with the generous assistance of the sponsors whose names appear below.

## Standardized testing: Pass or fail?

BY LIVIE JACOBS

(This is part one of a two-part series. Part two will appear in the Jan. 28 issue.)

Some see the increasing levels of standardized testing in American schools as a sort of tide upon which the learning of students will rise. Others see the unprecedented growth as a bureaucratic flood that will drown out creativity, innovation, and individuality.

Locally, in Island junior high and elementary grades last school year, there were a total of six weeks of PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) testing between March and the end of May.

However, according to some teachers and parents, extracurriculars in the junior and elementary schools may be getting pushed aside. Nancy Jephcote, a full-time elementary strings instructor since 2000, said, "Lesson scheduling has become

harder over the years. With the growth of academic testing and the threatened consequences of failure for students, teachers, and even schools, students and their families are given a clear mandate not to miss any academic class time. Many of our students come to lessons during recess for this reason!"

Tisbury School principal of five years John Custer said, "When I started teaching almost 20 years ago, the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) was in its infancy. Until two years ago, when we began a pilot PARCC test, administering MCAS had become pretty reliable and consistent in terms of the amount of testing. My sense is that while nobody necessarily looked forward to MCAS testing, it didn't feel too cumbersome or unreasonable. The PARCC test, which we fully implemented last year, did feel somewhat overwhelming in terms of time. Students in grades 3 to 8 took multiple tests in ELA

and Math during two different testing periods. While we were able to schedule it and administer it smoothly, it felt like too much time for students. Before the school year ended, PARCC announced that testing time would be reduced for 2015-16. This year, our students in grades 3 to 8 will take fewer tests, and all will take place during one testing window. I think that will be an improvement."

Deb Dunn, teacher at the Martha's Vineyard Public Charter School for 23 years, said, "My son just started doing 'test prep' in seventh grade once a week. This will likely continue up to PARCC testing dates, and possibly increase. This was not the

case at our school four or five years ago. Last year, the school spent over 19 days testing. The climate during testing is very serious. There is a celebration of scores that reach the 'expected' level, but I haven't felt any specific or overt push to increase scores." For many high school stu-

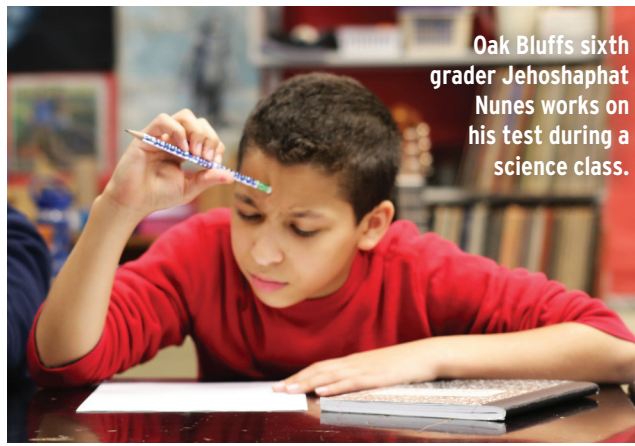
dent has passed the exam. Lyndsay Famariss, mother of two Island elementary schoolchildren, said, "I haven't noticed an increase in the amount of time spent preparing or taking the tests, but the tests certainly play a prominent role in each school year. One teacher

explained to my husband and me that she would spend about a month prior to the tests preparing the students. Another teacher spent more time, spreading out the preparation over many months. I felt that the latter method added to the students' nervousness, because there was so much tension and build-up prior to the tests. We made an effort at home to emphasize that these tests weren't such a big deal to us — that our children should do their best, but take it in stride."

Elijah Dunn, son of Ms.

Dunn and seventh grade Charter School student, said, "Usually we have an artist's program on Wednesdays, but until March, we spend the end of Wednesday afternoons practicing for PARCC instead. I don't see my peers becoming more anxious because of the tests. During prep we usually joke about how bad the wording of the questions are!"

Ms. Jephcote cited recent evidence of such testing issues. She said, "Last year was particularly difficult. We had to cancel our annual String Jamboree orchestra field trip because the sponsoring Cape schools had scheduled it on a Vineyard PARCC testing week. It was pretty well impossible for them not to do so, since it is an event that takes place in the spring. Our string program is regional, so our all-Island orchestra attendance was erratic during all of March, April, and May. I heard that the band also had this problem. After the testing was finally over, many students were too exhausted and unfocused to learn much of anything else during the school year." **HSV**



Oak Bluffs sixth grader Jehoshaphat Nunes works on his test during a science class.

PHOTO BY MOLLY HOUGHTON

students, testing revolves around the SATs, which are offered year-round, and Advanced Placement (AP) tests in May. Students elect to take AP courses knowing they will be required to take the College Board's test as a measure of their knowledge and perhaps for credit in college. A score of 3 or above indicates a stu-

dent who is prepared for college-level work. The latter method added to the students' nervousness, because there was so much tension and build-up prior to the tests. We made an effort at home to emphasize that these tests weren't such a big deal to us — that our children should do their best, but take it in stride."

## New perspectives in an old city

BY KAELA VECCHIA-ZEITZ

Boston is generally thought to be filled with American history. But the regional high school's Advanced Placement Modern European (APME) History and AP Literature classes decided to dig a little deeper — back to the times of this nation's European mother countries.

History teacher Leigh Fairchild-Coppoletti said, "I planned the Boston trip because the city is, in many ways, a child of the European Enlightenment. Throughout the city, architecture, art, and memorials reflect Renaissance and Enlightenment-era values. I hope students gained a deeper understanding about ways the past is infused in our present."

Recently, 10 seniors and three teachers toured Boston. The first stop was the New England Holocaust Memo-



PHOTO COURTESY OF LEIGH FAIRCHILD-COPPOLETTI

From left: Seniors Salem DeGeofrey, Connor Downing, Isabelle Crawford, Ben Davey, Emma Riemer, and Sarah Chickering observe the Holocaust Memorial in Boston on Friday, Jan. 8.

rial, where six dome-like structures represent the 6 million Jewish lives that were lost. As the students walked

through each structure, they observed a life-size timeline with quotes from Holocaust survivors. The glass sides of the structures rose into the sky, etched with endless rows of numbers used to replace

the prisoners' names. The second stop was the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. The APME history

students were assigned to find 10 paintings that reflected the five themes of the class's curriculum — Interaction of Europe and the World, Poverty and Prosperity, Objective Knowledge and Subjective Visions, States and Other Institutions of Power, and Individual and Society. The literature students focused more specifically on finding art that correlated with Shakespeare's "King Lear."

"My favorite part of the trip was being at the Gardner Museum, where students had time to explore the rooms of the former private residence," said Ms. Fairchild-Coppoletti.

Senior Benjamin Davey said, "Visiting museums always makes learning easier for me, personally. Being able to reinforce what we already knew about the five themes of APME through the artwork of the time pe-

riods was really beneficial, and gave me references to use on our upcoming test."

After the Gardner, students took a European walking tour. Along the way they stopped at the Old State House, the King's Chapel, Old Corner Bookstore Building, the Omni Parker House Hotel, the Irish Potato Famine Monument, the Massachusetts State House, Boston Common, and the Public Garden, Trinity Church, and the Boston Public Library.

"Considering academic ideas outside of the classroom offers opportunities for context that make the ideas more meaningful. Seeing the hotel where the young Ho Chi Minh once baked bread and where Charles Dickens gave his first public reading of 'A Christmas Carol' connects us more personally to the people who shaped our world and the timeless lessons

their stories impart," said Ms. Fairchild-Coppoletti.

Ben said, "I always learn better hands-on. When they happen correctly, field trips can improve academic performance and knowledge. We are free to take in the sights and paintings without worrying about constant notes or a test halfway through."

To end the day with a little irony, the field trip went to an Ethiopian restaurant — Ethiopia being the first African nation to ward off European colonization.

Ben said, "My favorite non-academic part of the trip was the Ethiopian dinner. I know that sounds weird considering we were on a modern European field trip, but I think that the intellectual conversations we had as a group, outside of the classroom setting, were more valuable than a museum visit." **HSV**

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