



The High School View

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Out with the present, in with the past

By Kaela Vecchia-Zeitz

Four principals. Three years. The Martha's Vineyard Regional High School has been struggling with stability at the helm for quite some time now. In early August, just one month before the beginning of the present school year, that instability continued with the resignation of former high school principal Gil Traverso. To help keep the school moving forward, interim principal Peg Regan decided to make a comeback.

Ms. Regan is thrilled to be walking the school's halls once again. She said, "I retired after my ninth year of being principal, always feeling like I cut myself short by not finishing out 10 years, and now I've come back to do that."

Ms. Regan is not the only one who is happy that she's returned. History teacher

Corinne Kurtz said, "The atmosphere of the school is less punitive with Ms. Regan back. I tend to gravitate toward female leaders more than male leaders. She acknowledges inequity and tries her best to deal with it. She's pro-teacher and pro-student without seeing the two as separate entities."

English teacher Bill McCarthy is also relieved to have a familiar face back at the helm. He said, "Peg's leadership is so competent, and so present to the needs of the school. Peg has given us the leisure to reach out and get a good replacement going forward. We can now make a thoughtful decision about our next principal."

The process for choosing Ms. Regan's replacement is one that is going to involve students, teachers, parents, and the Island community. Senior Samantha Hargy said,

"The fact that we have had four different principals in our three years means that the students haven't been



Principal Regan greets senior Zachary Bresnick on Monday morning as he enters the high school.

able to create a strong bond with any one principal. I feel as though in high school it is important to be able to con-

nect to the principal and for the principal to show that he or she cares about the student body. This can affect how the students act toward each other and toward other teachers. If they don't respect the principal they won't respect

look for someone who remembers what it's like to be in high school. For someone who really loves the student body and loves teaching. A high school principal should be an inspired teacher, a person who loves teaching more than administrat-

ing. That way we have someone who knows how hard the teachers are working. We need someone who lets teachers have their breathing room." Along with a person that understands the MVRHS community, the administration, staff, and students want someone that also understands the Island community. Ms. Regan said, "MVRHS is a community high school, and we need a principal who understands and supports that.

Martha's Vineyard is such a community-based place, and the upcoming principal has to be accountable. He or she is going to run into parents and students at the grocery store, and someone who embraces that is what this high school needs."

Junior Lucy Ulyatt is aiming for a future principal who shares qualities with Gil Traverso, but is able to stay for a longer period of time. She said, "We need someone that creates more opportunities for staff and students to mingle and to not have such a strict barrier between the two. The administration especially needs to be more positively involved with the students."

Ms. Regan reflected on her past years as MVRHS principal, and how the future of the high school coincides with that. She said, "I've been able to watch students grow up and become parents. I've seen a generation flourish, and the school needs its future principal to be someone who values that." **HSV**

Learning limits questioned

By Olivia Jacobs

The 2015-2016 school year ushered in new academic policies, among them a controversial limit on Advanced Placement (AP) courses. AP classes offer students a chance to receive college credit while still in high school. The new limit only applies to the senior class, and dictates a student take no more than three AP courses. For current seniors applying to college, the limit will not affect their chances of getting in. Transcripts will note the limit in order to level the playing field.

Peg Regan, interim principal, said, "The limit was put in place to prevent the senior class 'race to the top' from becoming so stressful that kids make themselves ill, physically and emotionally. We set up the game of academics here, and the rules are the weighting system and

course levels, both of which create the GPA (grade point average) system. In a game, you're trying to get as many points as possible, and students know how to score in the game. However, it's not fair to set up a game that no one can win, and that's the problem with the college-bound race to the top."

Senior Jared Livingston believes the limit should not continue. He said, "The AP limit, as it is, functions to prevent students from overworking themselves. While I understand the stress associated with these courses, students attempting to take them should know what they're getting into, and when to stop. High school is supposed to prepare students for college and for the world in general. When we get out into the world, no one is going to be preventing us from doing too much — we have to make

those calls for ourselves."

Olsen Houghton, who teaches AP US History, said, "In AP US History, if you do the job well, you're spending one to three hours on assignments each class. If you have three AP classes, you're theoretically spending 10 hours on homework each night. I've watched students take six or seven AP classes and they can barely speak because they're so overwhelmed. Many students take AP classes because it will look good on college applications, and that's the nature of the pressure we have created. This building is where you should develop the skills on how to learn, and how to hone those skills instead of just seeing high school as a stepping stone to the next level."

An expert on teen stress, school adjustment counselor Amy Lilavois said, "16-year-olds taking college-level courses on top of sports, clubs, and in some cases, employment, have little time for simply being a kid. The courses certainly add to the

stress, but they aren't the sole cause of it. Nationwide, levels of adolescent anxiety are at an all-time high."

Jared, on his personal experience, said, "When I realized that I wouldn't be able to take all five of the AP courses I wanted this year [calculus, physics, English, music theory, and European history], I went to my guidance counselor, and later Principal Reagan, to inquire about getting around the restriction. Eventually, I was allowed to take the extra AP classes, but not for AP credit."

Mike McCarthy, director of guidance, said, "Every rule has exceptions. No rule is hard and fast. The hard part about it is that some students are exhausting their curriculum in multiple areas, and their only next step is an AP class. If a student has taken honors earth science, honors biology, honors chemistry, and honors physics, and they want to keep taking science courses, what do you do with that kid? Tell them they can't take an AP? We have to make it fair to all

students, and making exceptions is hard because we have a weighted grade system."

Mr. Houghton considered the limit's exceptions: "There are occasionally brilliant and motivated students who probably could handle over three APs, but if it's allowed, then you're going to have a lot of kids doing it for the wrong reasons. On the other hand, is it our role as a public institution to make these decisions for individuals?"

Discussing another motive for students taking advanced classes, Principal Regan said, "There's a tremendous amount of money available to those who do well at MVRHS — especially with the new MVYouth scholarship. This adds to the pressure put on students, because the game is rigged against those who don't take the highest-level courses."

The future of the limit isn't set in stone, but is certainly being discussed. Mr. McCarthy said, "This is the first time we're seeing this policy in practice, and now that it is, we

have to re-evaluate it and then make decisions. This school year, we've had discussions with the administration and various committees, as well as input from students."

Principal Regan said, "Next year, we're looking at making a policy instead of a rule. There would be ways to get past the policy, but permission from a department chair or a letter of recommendation would be needed. Parents would also be involved around the emotional and social toll of taking so many AP courses. We're going to look at the rule on more of a case-by-case basis." **HSV**

Fundraiser for medical expenses

For Olivia Hart
a 2011 MVRHS graduate
October 24
6-10 pm at the
Seafood Shanty.

Proceeds will go toward
hospital bills.

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