



# 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.

## Prospective principals visit

BY DANIELLE HOPKINS

An open discussion with the two candidates for the regional high school principal position was held at the school on January 14 and 15, allowing the voices of both students and staff to be heard. Candidates Ms. Sara Dingley and Mr. David Williams toured the school on separate days, and were introduced to the school community.

Ms. Dingley is the current principal of Westchester Square Academy of New York City, and former assistant headmaster of The Brooklyn Latin School. She has dreamed about living on the Island ever since she came as a kid in the '70s.

"One of the biggest attractions of the job here is getting to live here," Ms. Dingley said. "But I love being a principal no matter where I am, whether it's the Bronx, Brooklyn, or Martha's Vineyard. The role of being a principal is challenging

and I love that challenge. Principalship here is especially exciting because it's a new place, a new school with new faces to learn, and a new community." If given the job, Ms. Dingley's family would move to the Island. She has two young children; one is starting kindergarten.

Mr. Williams is a former principal of York Middle School in York, Maine and former assistant principal of Newmarket High School in Newmarket, N.H. Mr. Williams had planned to take a year off to spend more time with his children, but a friend of his, an Island resident, saw an ad for the position opening at the high school. Mr. Williams knew that he could not pass up the opportunity.

"I got to learn a little bit more about the Island, and the more I talked to people, the more I fell in love with it," Mr. Williams said.

Ms. Dingley helped establish the school she currently works at, as part of a New Leaders for New Schools, a

program based in New York. "I started the school from scratch," she said. "The hardest part of a new place is getting to know the people and



Left, principal candidate David Williams speaks to students and faculty on Thursday, January 14 in the library conference room. Sara Dingley does the same on January 15.

building their trust."

The day before, Mr. Williams had said, "I have a firm belief that the princi-

pal is the principle teacher. If you're going to provide instructional leadership you have to be able to do it by example."

Senior Lee Hayman toured both candidates around the school. "I liked them both. They both asked questions

the students themselves than test scores — someone who wants to know what we're planning in student council and who goes to the field hockey and football games."

When Mr. Williams was working in Maine, the state legislature mandated



PHOTO BY ALI BARLETT

the regional high school, but there are parts of it that he does support.

"I'm a strong advocate of the underlying teaching practices that accompany [proficiency-based learning]. I believe it represents the best in what we know in educational research today. That's what I want to bring to the school," Mr. Williams said.

Both candidates were pleasantly surprised with how much our school already has to offer. Ms. Dingley was especially pleased with our performing arts department. When asked about department funding, she said, "Every department should have equitable funding. However, depending on the budget, it makes sense for departments requiring more equipment to receive more funding."

Student Samantha Hargy said, of the search, "I don't want someone who will come into our school and make a million changes trying to improve it. We have a great school and we really don't need to change much. What we do need is a leader." HSV

## Standardized testing: Pass or fail?

BY LIVIE JACOBS

This is the second of a two-part series.

When he spoke about standardized testing at his school, Tisbury School principal John Custer said, "I am aware of individuals who do struggle with academic anxiety. I have heard that it has grown at the high school level, unfortunately. I also know that high schools are responding to this and supporting students better. At the elementary and middle school level, it is less of an issue. We are fortunate on this Island to have small schools where we can get to know children well, and also have solid partnerships with parents. That helps support healthy students." He went on, "I have two children, and there

are times when I recognize behaviors in them that show stress. While we care about children and their well-being, there is research that suggests failure teaches children important lessons about life. Parents and educators both want to support children to be successful. Because students are different, there is not a one-size-fits-all approach."

Deb Dunn, a teacher at the Martha's Vineyard Public Charter School for 23 years, discussed the effect testing has on children's mental health. "I do see that the testing causes anxiety for children starting in about third grade. As much as the schools try to normalize it, taking standardized tests is not normal," she said. "There are few to no other experiences in our lives when we are asked to

work on such a task for such a long period of time. Yes, there are times in life when most adults have to take tests — a driving license, perhaps for a job interview, and of course in academia. But I can't think of any other situation where it's part of the norm."

Elementary string instructor Ms. Jephcote wondered about the bigger picture for music students and increased amounts of standardized testing. "Are they held up as exemplary students for what they are doing, or are they scrutinized for being less dedicated to their more important subjects and missing valuable academic class time?" she asked.

Mother of two Island elementary school children, Ms. Famariss said, "I feel very lucky that my children have teachers who are so

dedicated to their education and to developing their skills as lifelong learners. In my opinion, the standardized tests don't contribute to either of these goals."

West Tisbury School principal Donna Lowell-Bettencourt said, "Because the testing is based on the standards we teach, we are technically teaching students content and skills that will be required in testing at all times."

Mr. Custer discussed the use of school time for testing: "We have not needed to cut time from the unified arts at the Tisbury School. The Island is fortunate to have communities that value education — all aspects of it."

Ms. Dunn said, "For these standardized tests, kids feel an intense pressure to perform. And whether or not they've been told, many see it as a measure of how smart they are, and whether they are worthy or not. It is utterly

exhausting. Some have cried. Some have not been able to sleep. Some refuse to come to school. The pressure it puts on children is, in my opinion, absurd and unnecessary. Childhood is a time to play. There are thousands of studies that show how integral play, music, art, and other creative and physical endeavors are to brain development, social development, problem solving, and success in life."

Ms. Jephcote noted, "Some years of the 90s, there were 250 students in elementary strings. We certainly could not schedule that many lessons now. While these numbers ebb and flow for a variety of reasons, testing certainly contributes. Math class time has doubled over the last 15 years. Language arts time has increased similarly. There are 22 students on a waiting list to join the program simply because we cannot schedule them."

Ms. Lowell-Bettencourt said, "Although standardized tests are a measurement tool that have been used to judge schools for their effectiveness, focusing solely on these tests is not a healthy way to measure any school. With my staff, I analyze the data from these tests along with data from other assessments of student growth and achievement in far more areas to identify areas where we can improve."

Ms. Dunn concluded, "It would be adequate to have students take standardized tests one or two times in their school career — perhaps in fourth or fifth grade, and again in eighth or ninth — or 10th grade. Beyond that, the testing is excessive and has proven nothing. Our world standing academically as a nation has not changed in all the years we've been testing. Doesn't that tell us something?" HSV

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