



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.

New program to aid incoming freshmen

By EmmaJean Holley

Whether it's towering seniors or teetering textbooks, it's not uncommon for an incoming freshman to experience various sources of anxiety. Fortunately, a new program, to be implemented at the start of the next school year, will address such concerns—and more. In the new program, some teachers will be reshuffled and a new class will be launched to put freshman in a better position to navigate the challenges of high school.

"We want to recognize that freshmen are different from other high school grade levels," said principal Steven Nixon. "They have different needs because they're new and have just made one of the scariest transitions they've had to face. Once the newness of being in a high school wears off, the next step is things like organization, time management, and how to juggle academics with extracurricular activities and life in general."

Indeed, the stereotypical fears around getting crammed into lockers by upperclassmen quickly dissipate once students acclimate to high school, admits freshman guidance counselor John Fiorito. "In general, freshmen love it here," he said. "They stop worrying about scary seniors and stolen lunch money pretty quickly. The bigger challenges are the things they'll be expected to learn and do effectively over the next four years and for the rest of their lives."

Possessing certain skills can better prepare students for the inevitable slings and arrows of adolescence, but are often not formerly taught and simply assumed. "The most important skills lie in higher order thinking – always have, always will," said David Faber, science teacher at the Edgartown Elementary School. In the past, Mr. Faber has assigned research papers to his classes to groom them for the rigors of a high school. "Analysis, critical thinking, problem solving, public speaking – these are important skills," he said.

"Because of the different curriculums and core values at each of the elementary schools, discrepancies in retained skills often challenge students. We have six sending towns, and all the teachers from all the schools cover different concepts in different depths. Depending on the coverage, sometimes students don't fully grasp the concepts – that's the nature of the beast," said high school guid-

ance director Mike McCarthy. "We just want everyone on the same page when it comes to basic skills and expectations."

Among the changes brought about by the program, two teachers have been assigned from each core academic department, creating a group of educators from whom every freshman will be taught next year. "This is to reduce the number of people in contact with students," said Mr. McCarthy. "We're aiming to create a better support staff with greater accessibility." For students who may be struggling, this innovation aims to

few—will be the primary focus of the first half of the semester. The second half will impart a component of practical life skills, like applying for jobs and balancing a checkbook, which aims to smooth the journey into confident and capable adulthood.

"We've drawn from a wide range of sources when designing this class," said photography teacher Christopher Baer, who will teach the academic component of the class. "There's been a tremendous amount of input from teachers, students, and parents that has helped us establish a common



PHOTO BY EVA FABER

Edgartown Elementary School eighth graders Lee Heyman (left) and Samantha Hargy prepare at their school for a transition into high school in the fall.

identify and deal with challenges sooner and more effectively. "Individual attention is definitely enhanced in a concentrated group setting," said Mr. McCarthy.

In addition to limiting to potentially overwhelming pool of new teachers, the program will also align the expectations of each class through teacher collaboration. "All of the freshman teachers will have a common planning period where they will have the opportunity to meet and discuss interdisciplinary concepts together," said Dr. Nixon. This is to establish a baseline for teachers off of which to build, with the central goal of fairness and consistency in mind for elements like class structure, policy enforcement, and after school availability.

Another aspect of the program will include a semester-long course that every freshman will be enrolled in. Academic skills like note-taking, writing research papers, creating PowerPoint presentations, and public speaking—to name a

base of skills we want to teach before moving forward. We've looked at data from past years and have spoken with a number of graduates, which has given us a lot of enlightenment into the areas we need to develop."

Looking back on four years of high school, senior Haley Hewson reflects on the value of such a program. "You learn a lot of these things just by tackling them head-on as you go through high school, but it would have beneficial to have all those skills before I really needed them. Having the basic skills to communicate effectively on paper isn't just important for getting passing grades in high school – it's what you'll be evaluated on for the rest of your life," she said. "I think that helping freshmen by giving them that set of skills early on will help them a lot when it comes time to write research papers and scholarship essays. And considering how money savvy we're expected to be nowadays, I would have consid-

ered it extremely helpful to learn things like personal financing."

Senior Celia Mercier agreed. "I remember as freshman feeling so overwhelmed with the sudden responsibility of high school," she said. "If there had been a resource like this available to me then, I would have loved it."

"I think that we should always be

striving toward improvement. Right now, with how much the world's changing, things like education and technology are drastically different than they were even six years ago. It's so important to keep pace and to remain in a perpetual state of progression," said Mr. McCarthy. "Never be stagnant."

French students say "Salut!" to Quebec

By Lily Bick

Exploring a new city, especially one in which a person does not know the language is scary. But last week 23 students from the regional high school braved Quebec City under the guidance of French teacher Pierre Bonneau. With their French-English phrasebooks, students and their four chaperones improved their French while learning about the history and culture of Quebec.

After a 12-hour bus ride into Canada, the class arrived in Quebec City. Said junior Emerson Hazell, "I was really excited. When I found out that Mr. Bonneau was going I knew I had to go."

On their first night, the group was taken through Quebec City as part of a Ghost Tour. With the tour, they were taught about past executions, superstitions, and battles. The tour revealed the dark side of Quebec City. They also visited the highest waterfall in Quebec, Montmorency Falls, and had lunch at the top of the falls. They saw the Notre-Dame Basilica-Cathedral, the Martello Tower, and several museums. They also went to a Sugar Shack. A sugar shack is a traditional maple-syrup maker. There, the group learned about the process of making maple syrup, the history of maple syrup, and ate a traditional Quebec meal of eggs, ham and crepes—all doused

in maple syrup.

The group also learned about the Huron tribe, which originated near the Ontario River. They learned about Huron culture, eating Wapiti, a traditional Huron dish of elk. For a more authentic experience of the city, the group went to Les Galeries de la Capitale, a shopping mall with an ice rink and roller coaster.

Different students appreciated different aspects of the trip. Junior Vincent Carlomagno enjoyed the waterfall and the diverse foods, although trying elk made him sick. Junior Leah Casey said, "I'm thankful for the whole thing, but my favorites were making real friends, dancing the hoedown, and acting in a play." The group went to an interactive theater play where they were chosen from the audience to act.

Last year Mr. Bonneau went with some French students to France, but this year he decided to take a smaller trip. "Last year we had a trip that was based on covering a lot of different areas. Now, we had one town so it was more in depth," he said. "French is a lot more than France."

Students on the trip have taken anywhere

from 1 to 3 years of French language classes. Mr. Bonneau is a native French speaker; he grew up in Montreal. "The trip made me realize how accessible all this is, I hope that students realize too and take advantage of it."

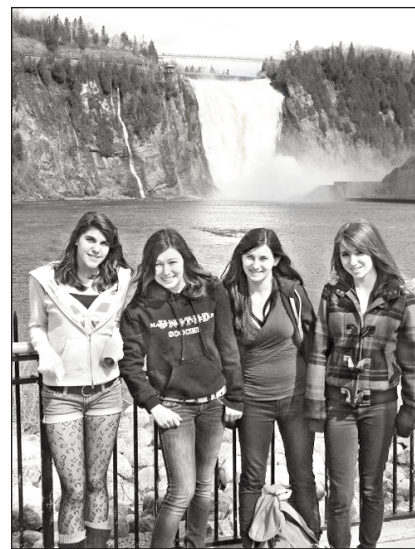


PHOTO BY LISA BONNEAU

(Left to right) Sophomores Amber Bettencourt, Sadie Dix, and juniors Lauren Dostal and Leah Casey pose in front of the Montmorency Falls, the highest waterfall in Quebec.