

To: Members of the Homework/Grading/Report Card Committee
From: Ann Carvill
Re: Committee Charge
Date: 1/27/09

INTRODUCTION

As president of the Board of Education, I have called for the formation of an ad hoc committee to study homework, grading, and report cards. I suggest having the committee meet for approximately 4 sessions and present written recommendations to the Program & Policy Committee of the BOE. At that point, the Program and Policy Committee will review the recommendations of the ad hoc committee and may choose to present policy recommendations to the full Board. Any possible Board-approved changes to policy – which may include regulations and/or exhibits - could be implemented for the 2009-10 school year.

It is worth noting that the work of this committee and the Program and Policy Committee is to offer recommendations to the members Board of Education. Both committees are advisory in nature. The BOE is the final arbiter of any changes to PCSD policy.

REASONS FOR THE FORMATION OF THE COMMITTEE

- The Program and Policy Committee of the Board of Education has had this topic on its agenda for some time and was waiting for an appropriate time to pursue research and study.
- The New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA) held its annual conference in October of 2008 and several members of the BOE attended a session led by Dr. Nicole Catapano entitled, "Aligning Policy with Sound Assessment and Grading Practices." She shed light on the need for Boards of Education to craft effective homework and grading policies and to have a report card that enables teachers to adhere to policy.
- Though there is considerable new research on effective homework and grading practices, the district has not evaluated its current policies in recent years.

CHARGE

The ad hoc committee is charged with submitting a report to Program & Policy - a sub-committee of the PCS Board of Education - on sound assessment and grading practices. Such practices should have their basis in research, common sense, a belief that grades should accurately reveal achievement, and a commitment to a positive school environment where instructors are seen as fair, objective, and professional. The Board of Education seeks to support a policy where grading is consistent, accurate, and meaningful- in the classroom, in each school, and among schools in the district - and where homework is used as a guide for instruction. To this end, the report should contain a proposed policy on homework, grading, and report cards. Any suggested regulations or exhibits should be included.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

The following is a draft list of essential questions to guide the committee's discussions. Further questions may be developed during the committee's deliberations.

1. What are the purposes of homework?
2. What are the purposes of grades?
3. Why is effective grading important?
4. Should routine homework be graded or assessed?
5. What is the difference between formative and summative assessment?
6. Should formative homework assignments be counted when computing report card grades?
7. How are formative homework assignments being evaluated at LA, AAK, and the HS?
8. Does the grading of formative homework assignments, and giving these grades significant weight in the overall average, lead to grade inflation? Deflation?
9. NYSED standards require that grades be a reflection of achievement or effort?
10. How do the elementary/middle school/high school report cards differ?
11. Should report cards have separate categories for effort and achievement? If so, how would report cards have to be changed and how should effort be recorded?
12. If routine homework is being graded and added into the quarterly average, does this mean mastery is being expected prior to study and preparation for an examination?
13. What are some possible reasons why a student is doing poorly on routine homework assignments or is not submitting assignments?
14. Should Regents scores be added in with class grades?
15. What are scaled scores? How do they differ from percentile scores?
16. Is there any way for a teacher to verify that homework was done independently?
17. Is it wrong to get help on homework from parents or higher achieving classmates?
18. Some students have well-educated parents while other students do not. Is this inequity likely to be reflected in the quality of the homework submitted? Do the advantaged, then, continue to be advantaged when formative homework assignments are graded?
19. In what way can grading and HW practices have an impact on the school climate?
20. Does NYSED Law prohibit giving an academic punishment for a behavioral problem?

MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION

- Meetings will be held in the LGIR at AAK.
- The committee will have approximately four meetings.
- A chairperson will be chosen.
- A secretary will be selected and minutes will be kept.
- Meetings will be open to the public.
- There will be time for public comment at the beginning of each meeting.
- The first meeting will be on February 5th at 2:30 pm.
- The second meeting must be on February 12th from 2:00 pm – 4:00 pm. Dr. Nicole Catapano will be our guest speaker. She is the Coordinator for Data Analysis at WSWHE BOCES.
- The group will set the dates and times for the remaining meetings.

GRADING & HOMEWORK

The Board of Education recognizes that grading, homework, make-up opportunities, report cards, and reporting practices in general – in each classroom, each school, and in the district - should be consistent, accurate, fair, meaningful, research-based, connected to school district policies, and tied to the NYS Learning Standards.

Grades must reflect achievement. Therefore, other important student characteristics such as attitude and effort should be reported separately.

The Board of Education believes that effective grading has a positive impact on the school climate and supports and encourages learning. Therefore, teachers are cautioned to avoid overloading students with excessively lengthy homework assignments or with overly brief and empty assignments. Planning homework assignments should be given as much care as the planning of any other aspect of a lesson.

Teachers and students should know the difference between formative and summative assignments/assessments. Formative assessments are designed to provide direction for improvement and/or adjustment to a program for individual students or for a whole class, ex. observation, quizzes, homework (usually), instructional questions, and initial drafts/attempts. Summative assessments are designed to provide information to be used in making judgments about a student's achievement at the end of a sequence of instruction, ex. final drafts/attempts, tests, exams, assignments, projects, and performances. Both summative and formative assignments should be evaluated. However, summative homework assignments should be scored and included in grades whereas formative homework assignments should be evaluated for accuracy and completeness.

Students are expected to complete assigned class work and homework as directed. **Incentives to do homework should be as evident in class as disincentives for not doing homework. Intrinsic motivation is the ultimate goal. The incentive for students to do formative homework is to practice in order to improve learning, which is linked to higher achievement on summative measures. The disincentive for students who do not do their formative homework assignments is to learn that not doing formative assignments is linked to lower performance on summative assessments.**

The Board of Education believes that parental support for students' homework is essential to making homework an integral part of the educational program. Parents are expected to encourage and monitor homework assignments and, to the extent possible, provide conditions that are conducive to their successful completion.

Students are also expected to meet behavioral expectations – such as participation, attitude, and effort.

Grading

The following guidelines will be observed:

- A. Grades will reflect student academic achievement.
- B. Grading will not be used for disciplinary purposes.
- C. Upon admission to school and at the beginning of each school year, students and their parents will be provided with information regarding grading practices. They will also be provided with information explaining how behavioral qualities will be evaluated **and reported**.
- D. Parents are to be informed regularly (at least 4 times per year) of their child's achievement and progress. Additionally, a parent portal will be available to parents so they can access, via computer, their child's grades and scores.
- E. The use of marks and symbols will be appropriately explained.
- F. The professional judgment of teachers is respected. Once a grade is **assigned, the principal may change the grade only after notification to the teacher of the reason for such a change.** ~~to a student by a teacher the grade may only be changed by a principal after notification to the teacher of the reason for such change.~~ Should a principal enforce a grade change, (s)he should be prepared to report the reasons for the change to the Superintendent of Schools and/or the Board of Education.
- G. A rating scale along with written comments will reflect student behavioral characteristics. Student behavior (effort, participation, adherence to class rules, etc.) is to be included on report cards with a 1 – 4 rating scale (4 =Excellent; 3=Satisfactory; 2 =varies between satisfactory and unsatisfactory; 1 =Unsatisfactory.) Teachers will include descriptive comments.
- H. Formative homework assignments will be assessed but it is recommended that they not be scored and included in grades. ~~—partially because it is impossible to know if the work was done independently.~~ If formative homework assignments are scored, they will not count more than 10% of a student's overall grade.
- I. Summative homework assignments should be scored and be considered when determining quarterly and yearly grades. **It is at the discretion of**

teachers to decide which summative assignments will be recorded and considered when determining grades.

- J. **Late/Incomplete/Unfinished Homework Assignments:** Teachers should strive to learn the reasons behind any lack of compliance by students and do what they can to address these reasons, **including offering support and/or disciplinary consequences, as appropriate. If formative assignments are to be graded, work submitted late may receive a reduced score. Formative assignments that are no longer relevant (i.e the summative assessment has already occurred) may receive a score of 50 (F) for work not submitted. Summative assignments submitted late may receive a score reduced by no more than 10% of the grade earned. For summative assessments there will be a point where the teacher needs to provide a grade after reasonable strategies have been employed. In these cases, summative assignments that are not submitted will receive a score of 50 (F).** ~~all strategies including extended deadlines have been exhausted. Consequences should be behavioral not academic for formative assignments. (For example, a student could be required to complete the work during a study hall.)~~
- K. Teachers will only give extra credit or bonus points if those tasks provide evidence that the extra work has resulted in a higher level of achievement.
- L. **Students should be explicitly taught how to avoid plagiarism. In most cases,** academic dishonesty will be addressed with behavioral consequences. Teachers will reassess and determine the actual level of achievement. **However, under certain circumstances, academic penalties may be assigned. In these cases, the teacher will consult with the building principal, who may then consider assigning the student a failing grade for the assignment.**
- M. Attendance will not be considered in grade determination unless otherwise regulated by State Education Department guidelines or college level expectations.
- N. **Because we recognize the value of students' ability to work with one another, group skills will be taught and assessed.** ~~Scores on group projects should have a minimal impact on a student's overall grade. Group projects should have an individual score included as part of the assessment.~~

- ~~O. Teachers will organize and report evidence of achievement by referring to the NYS Learning Standards~~ **When assignments are given, teachers will provide clear descriptions of achievement expectations, including rubrics and exemplars, when appropriate. When practicable, students will participate in the development of the assessment criteria.** ~~Teachers will provide clear descriptions of achievement expectations.~~
- P. Grades are to be assigned based on students' performance on preset standards – not on students' achievement compared to other students.
- Q. In determining a grade, teachers ~~should~~ **are encouraged to** consider various measures of central tendency (median, mode) – not just one measure of central tendency – the mean.
- R. Since learning is developmental and grows with time and repeated opportunities, when determining grades teachers ~~should~~ **are encouraged to emphasize** more recent achievement.
- S. Zeros will not be used in grade determination as a punishment or when evidence is missing. **A grade of 50 (F) will be assigned.**
- T. When a grade earned is below 50, teachers are encouraged to provide students an opportunity for reassessment. No grades below 50 will be recorded.**
- U. Information from formative assessment and practice should have a minimal impact when determining grades.
- V. Summative evidence will constitute 90% (or more) of a student's grade.
- ~~W. Students should be part of the grading process. Grades will be weighted for advanced-level courses.~~ There will be a testing schedule at the middle and secondary levels to ensure that students do not have more than two major locally-developed assessments on the same day.

Homework

The following guidelines will be observed:

- A. Student privacy is essential and, thus, students will not score one another's homework. ~~but~~ **However**, peer feedback and self assessment should be used frequently.
- B. For homework to be effective, students need to be able to reflect and practice in advance of being evaluated.

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- C. As much as is practicable, formative homework assignments should be reviewed on the day they are due.
- ~~D. Homework should be given only when it is needed and to whom it is needed.~~
Because not all learners may require the same amount of practice, teachers may exercise professional judgment when assigning homework to individual students.
- E. **When possible, homework should be differentiated.** ~~In order to support learning, homework should be differentiated.~~ Students should be given choices in types of homework assignments and amount of homework. (For example, a very high functioning student might need enrichment – not the routine assignment while a lower functioning student may benefit from choosing an assignment that is more compatible with his/her learning style.)
- F. It is not necessary for every formative and summative homework assignment to be collected by teachers; uncollected formative or summative homework should be reviewed in class under the guidance of the teacher and should be retained by students so they can see their strengths and errors, learn from them, and use the homework as a study tool.
- G. **When practicable**, formative homework assignments that are collected by teachers should be returned to students before the next assessment opportunity commences. The assignments should be returned with descriptive ~~comments~~ **feedback** that support learning.
- ~~H. Incentives to do homework should be as evident in class as disincentives for not doing homework. Extrinsic motivators (like a homework pass or the praise of the teacher) are unacceptable. However, intrinsic motivation is the ultimate goal. The incentive (for students to do formative homework) is to practice in order to improve learning – which is linked to higher achievement on summative measures. The disincentive (for students who do not comply with doing formative homework assignments) is to learn that not doing formative homework assignments is linked to lower performance on summative assessments. Teachers should provide clear descriptions of achievement expectations. This can be supported with use of a rubric that is based on achievement only and is shared with students. As much as possible, time should be given *in* school to begin homework assignments after a new lesson. This would give teachers ample time to allow for questions and ensure the students know how to accomplish the assignment.~~
- I. The right amount of homework assigned depends on the age and skills of the child. Generally, K-2 benefit from 10-20 minutes, 3-6 benefit from 30-60

minutes, and 7-9 benefit from more but the amount may vary from night to night. These amounts are across all subject areas.

Make-Ups: For Late, Missing, or Incomplete Assignments

With regards to make-ups, the following guidelines will be followed:

- A. **Students who are absent from class are expected to make-up work in a reasonable timeframe as determined by the teacher.** ~~Work, deemed important by the teacher and missed due to absence by the student, is expected to be made up in a reasonable timeframe – determined by the teacher. Both parents and students will be made aware of make up practices.~~
- B. Every effort will be made to provide students with the opportunity and assistance to make up all work missed as a result of absence from class. ~~It will be the responsibility of the Superintendent of Schools to determine the grade level at which students are expected to take the initiative to request makeup assignments.~~ **Teachers will determine which assignments may be sent home and teachers shall be available to render necessary assistance.** ~~When necessary and applicable, assignments may be sent home and teachers shall be available to render necessary assistance. Given the varying circumstances that may lead to students missing school and/or assignments, teachers are encouraged to be flexible, and use common sense and professional judgment in determining how to proceed. In grades 9,10,11 if a student fails English, social studies, or physical education, and does not successfully complete a makeup in a duly authorized summer school, the student must retake the same course again the following year. Exceptions to this rule may be made based on individual circumstances if authorized by the building principal.~~
- C. The following steps are recommended for dealing with late, missing, or incomplete assignments:

Teachers will...

 1. Assign an "I" (Incomplete) for assignments that are not complete or are not submitted.
 2. Communicate with students to determine the reason for the "I" – (Incomplete).
 3. Establish a time frame to makeup the assignment. ~~A reasonable timeframe will be established at the discretion of the teacher.~~

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4. Evaluate the student's work when it is submitted ~~—without academic penalty for lateness.~~ **No academic penalty will be assigned if the reason for the lateness is acceptable to the teacher. Otherwise, late work will be assessed a penalty of no more than 10% of the grade achieved.**
5. ~~Grade score the assignment— if it is summative. Evaluate the assignment— if it is formative. (See Homework Section A)~~ Assign a failing grade of 50% (applicable to grades 4-12) if the assignment is not submitted in the established timeframe.

Report Cards

The following guideline will be followed:

- A. Report cards should make it possible to separate achievement grades from behavioral ratings. The Superintendent of Schools will ensure that teachers can report academic achievement separately from behavioral characteristics. Academic achievement will be graded and behavioral qualities will be rated on a 1 – 4 scale with appropriate and descriptive comments.

Potsdam High School
Grade Distribution – 1st Quarter Marking Period

	2008-2009	% (approx)	2009-2010	% (approx)
0-64	168	5%	149	4.5%
65-70	178	5.3%	194	5.8%
71-79	401	12%	402	12%
80-89	1036	31%	1116	33.8%
90-100	1571	46.7%	1451	43.9%
Total Grades	3366		3312	

Potsdam High School
Grade Distribution – 2nd Quarter Marking Period

	2008-2009	% (approx)	2009-2010	% (approx)
0-64	245	7%	155	5%
65-70	186	6%	218	7%
71-79	343	10%	420	13%
80-89	942	29%	848	27%
90-100	1571	48%	1502	48%
Total Grades	3287		3143	

Potsdam High School
Student Contract for Incomplete Grade

Student's Name _____

Date _____

Course _____

Teacher _____

Summative Assignments that must be complete in order for a quarterly grade to be calculated:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Date by which the above work must be submitted _____

My plan to complete this work: _____

I understand that I need to complete the work listed above in order for my quarterly grade to be calculated. I also understand that each assignment not submitted by the above date will be assigned a score of 50.

Student's Signature

Date

*Please return this contract to the guidance office. A copy will be mailed home, and the original will be kept on file.

POTSDAM CENTRAL SCHOOLS

29 Leroy Street
Potsdam, NY 13676
(315) 265-2000

To: PCS Faculty & Staff

From: Patrick Brady
Superintendent of Schools

Date: July 16, 2009

Re: District Homework & Grading Policy

The purpose of this memo is to update you on the revision of the District's grading and homework policy. I know there is considerable interest in this process and the results which will impact instructional practices. First let me provide a brief background and then I will share the next steps in the process. One of the Board of Education goals in 2008-09 was to "review and propose revisions of the BOE homework policy." Initially, this was to be considered an APPR option for a group of teachers but the project did not come to fruition. As a result, a shared decision making committee was organized in January with its first meeting held on February 5th. Throughout the late winter and spring the committee perused research including the book, *Repair Kit for Grading* by Ken O'Connor. They were also guided by Dr. Nicole Catapano, Coordinator for Data Analysis at WSWHE BOCES who has presented at many conferences about effective homework and grading policies. Dr. Catapano spoke to the committee on 2/12 and was later available via teleconference to assist in our efforts. All of the meetings were open to interested parties and at times other teachers and administrators did join and provide input. The result of this work has been the creation of several recommendations to improve the District's homework and grading policies. The BOE Program & Policy Committee subsequently used these recommendations to draft a new grading and homework policy which was discussed at the Board of Education meeting on 7/7 with expected action by the Board on 8/11 and 8/25.

Though the policy will be official in advance of the 2009-10 school year, it will not be implemented until the 2010-11 school year because time will be needed for faculty to study the policy and determine its effect on individual or departmental grading and instructional practices. Upon doing so, the committee is confident there will be an understanding that these improvements are based on solid research, are not dissimilar to many existing procedures within the district, and are in the best interests of students. Beginning in September, more information will be provided and opportunities for further discussion will take place at faculty meetings and other venues of communication. Professional development will also be offered including workshops presented by Dr. Catapano in March, 2010. For further information, please visit the District website at www.potsdam.k12.ny.us.

POTSDAM CENTRAL SCHOOLS

29 Leroy Street
POTSDAM, NEW YORK 13676
(315) 265-2000

October 9, 2009

To the Editor:

In last week's edition of *North Country This Week*, a reader submitted an item to Sound Off regarding the Potsdam Central School District's newly revised homework and grading policy. While I am pleased that parents are aware that the Board of Education has recently adopted a new policy, the item contained some inaccurate information.

This policy does not suggest that homework is to be eliminated, either at Potsdam High School or in either of the other two school buildings. In fact the policy states, "Students are expected to complete assigned class work and homework as directed." Further, the policy goes on to outline a number of guidelines that teachers will observe as they assign and evaluate homework. For example, it is recommended that homework that is designed as practice be assessed but not graded. This is partially because it is impossible to know if the work was done independently. More importantly, most homework assignments are considered formative assessments. That is, the assignments allow both students and teachers to get a sense for what students know as well as what areas still require additional practice for mastery. When students are given opportunities to practice, with teachers providing meaningful feedback, the potential for learning is optimized.

We believe that grades should accurately reflect what students know and can do. Therefore, the policy suggests that we eliminate practices whereby factors other than academic achievement are included in a student's grade. For example, teachers will not reduce scores on work submitted late. Rather, they will provide additional support for the learner. Similarly, teachers will no longer use a score of zero in grade determination as a punishment or when evidence of learning is missing. Instead, students will receive an "Incomplete" until work is submitted. Finally, academic dishonesty will not be addressed with a failing grade. Rather, teachers will reassess and determine the actual level of achievement. In each of these cases, students' misbehavior will still be addressed but more appropriately through the Code of Conduct rather than using grades as punishment.

The new Homework and Grading policy states: "The Board of Education recognizes that grading, homework, make-up opportunities, report cards, and reporting practices in general – in each classroom, each school, and in the district – should be consistent, accurate, fair, meaningful, research-based, connected to school district policies, and tied to the NYS Learning Standards." By instituting this policy, the district hopes to formalize practices that are in the best interest of our students.

I urge parents and students alike to read the Homework and Grading policy in its entirety and ask questions about any aspects of the policy they find unclear. The policy can be found on the Potsdam Central School District's website www.potsdam.k12.ny.us. As always, parents of Potsdam High School students should feel free to call me (265-2000) or email me (jchambers@potsdam.k12.ny.us) with any questions or concerns they have about this or any other issue regarding their child's education.

Sincerely,

Joann Chambers
Potsdam High School Principal

To: PCS Faculty & Staff

From: Patrick Brady
Superintendent of Schools

Date: March 17, 2010

Re: Homework & Grading Policy

The Potsdam Central School District has always prided itself on having high expectations for students and on treating all students fairly. Last year, an ad hoc committee was formed to examine the district's homework policy to assess whether our current grading practices were aligned with these important tenets. The resulting policy was intended to insure that grading practices throughout the district were consistent, fair, meaningful, and, most importantly, an accurate reflection of student achievement.

Though the policy was adopted by the Board of Education in August, full implementation is not planned until the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year. This was to allow time for teachers and parents to study the policy and determine its effect on individual or departmental grading and instructional practices. In addition, much time was spent this year gathering feedback from both teachers and parents. Two parent meetings were held, one with Dr. Nicole Catapano available via teleconference. Dr. Catapano also provided a half-day training for teachers during Regents week in January and facilitated two additional after school sessions for teachers via teleconference. Potsdam Teacher Center Director Cassidy Mattimore facilitated a book group that together read and discussed Ken O'Connor's book, *A Repair Kit for Grading*. Finally, all of the principals devoted time in grade level, department, and faculty meetings to listen to teachers' concerns and ideas. That input was then shared with the Board of Education's program and policy committee and me.

As a result of this work, several changes to the original policy are being considered. The attached document reflects some of the proposed changes. Though there may still be some points in the policy with which you disagree, I hope you can also recognize the compromises that were made. I think the revisions reinforce the fact that assessing students in an inherently subjective process, and teachers' professional judgment is highly valued.

On Friday, March 19th, Dr. Nicole Catapano will be in the district to provide professional development in the areas of assessment and feedback. It is our hope that in providing this training, teachers will come to understand the underlying principles on which the specifics of the policy are based. Dr. Catapano's presentation will include deconstructing learning targets, selecting the best assessment method, developing technically sound rubrics, and providing feedback to support learning. She will also provide numerous examples of effective grading practices and will demonstrate how the district's homework and grading policy is directly related to these sound practices.

Change in public education is no easy task and we have had our challenges. However, I am convinced that revising our homework and grading policy is in the best interest of students. I want to thank all of you who have worked to develop this policy and engaged in the valuable discussions which have taken place in regard to improving student achievement and their learning environment.

Happy St. Patrick's Day

GRADING & HOMEWORK

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may receive a score reduced by no more than 10% of the grade earned. For summative work, there will be a point where the teacher needs to provide a grade after reasonable strategies have been employed. At this point, students will receive a grade of 50 for summative assignments.

- K. Teachers will only give extra credit or bonus points if those tasks provide evidence that the extra work has resulted in a higher level of achievement.
- L. Students should be explicitly taught how to avoid plagiarism. In most cases academic dishonesty will be addressed with behavioral consequences. Teachers will reassess and determine the actual level of achievement. However, under certain circumstances, academic penalties may be assigned. In these cases, the teachers will consult with the building principal, who may then consider assigning the student a failing grade for the assignment.
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Homework

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- B. For homework to be effective, students need to be able to reflect and practice in advance of being evaluated.
- C. As much as is practicable, formative homework assignments should be reviewed on the day they are due.
- D. Because not all learners may require the same amount of practice, teachers may exercise professional judgment when assigning homework to individual students.
- E. When possible, homework should be differentiated. Students should be given choices in types of homework assignments and amount of homework. (For example, a very high functioning student might need enrichment – not the routine assignment while a lower functioning student may benefit from choosing an assignment that is more compatible with his/her learning style.)
- F. It is not necessary for every formative and summative homework assignment to be collected by teachers; uncollected formative or summative homework should be reviewed in class under the guidance of the teacher and should be retained by students so they can see their strengths and errors, learn from them, and use the homework as a study tool.
- G. When practicable, formative homework assignments that are collected by teachers should be returned to students before the next assessment opportunity commences. The assignments should be returned with descriptive feedback that supports learning.
- H. As much as possible, time should be given *in* school to begin homework assignments after a new lesson. This would give teachers ample time to allow for questions and ensure the students know how to accomplish the assignment.
- I. The right amount of homework assigned depends on the age and skills of the child. Generally, K-2 benefit from 10-20 minutes, 3-6 benefit from 30-60 minutes, and 7-9 benefit from more but the amount may vary from night to night. These amounts are across all subject areas.

Make-Ups: For Late, Missing, or Incomplete Assignments

With regards to make-ups, the following guidelines will be followed:

- A. Students who are absent from class are expected to make-up work in a reasonable timeframe as determined by the teacher. Both parents and students will be made aware of make up practices.
- B. Every effort will be made to provide students with the opportunity and assistance to make up work missed as a result of absence from class. Teachers will determine which assignments must be completed. When necessary and applicable, assignments may be sent home and teachers shall be available to render necessary assistance. Given the varying circumstances that may lead to students missing school and/or assignments, teachers are encouraged to be flexible and use common sense and professional judgment in determining how to proceed.
- C. The following steps are recommended for dealing with late, missing, or incomplete summative assignments:

Teachers will...

- 1. Assign an "I" (Incomplete) for assignments that are not complete or for assignments not submitted.
- 2. Communicate with students to determine the reason for the "I" (incomplete).
- 3. Establish a reasonable time frame to makeup the assignment.
- 4. Evaluate the student's work when it is submitted. No academic penalty will be assigned if the reason for lateness is acceptable to the teacher. Otherwise, late work will be assessed a penalty of no more than 10% of the grade achieved.
- 5. Assign a failing grade of 50% (applicable to grades 4-12) if the assignment is not submitted in the established timeframe.

Report Cards

The following guideline will be followed:

- A. Report cards should make it possible to separate achievement grades from behavioral ratings. The Superintendent of Schools will ensure that teachers can report academic achievement separately from behavioral characteristics. Academic achievement will be graded and behavioral qualities will be rated on a 1 – 4 scale with appropriate and descriptive comments.

Ref: [A Repair Kit for Grading: 15 Fixes for Broken Grades](#) by Ken O'Connor (2007)

Homework and Grading Policy Feedback

English Department

Concern: Teachers are having a real hard time accepting that a student who commits flagrant plagiarism would be allowed to re-do the paper for full credit. Now, when there are misunderstandings or when a student has cited incorrectly, for example, teachers re-teach and allow students to resubmit the paper. Or, minor points are deducted for not following conventions. About once a year, however, there is a student who copies and pastes most of a paper from an internet source, even though English teachers have walked them through the process. The department feels this student should be given a zero – not as a punishment, but because that is the grade they earned. In some cases, students are given a separate grade for the process. Perhaps the policy should be different for different grade levels. By junior and senior years, students know better.

Possible Solution(s): The department would like to consider subscribing to Turnitin.com. Some area schools, including Massena and Norwood-Norfolk are currently using this resource. Students have to submit the paper before turning it in to the teachers. The system recognizes plagiarism and helps students to correct it before they turn it in. Joann obtained a price quote, and it would cost us \$1500 per year for every student in the high school to have an account. Joann will pursue a trial subscription and possible demonstration from the company. Joann also obtained a copy of a plagiarism policy developed by Colton-Pierrepont. The department would like to consider adopting a similar policy that addresses steps to help ensure students to not plagiarize their work, but also has a set of graduated consequences that are more serious for older students.

Concern: Assigning a 50% for work that is not done seems counterintuitive if we are striving to have grades accurately reflect achievement. Similarly, the policy that disallows any grade lower than 50 on the report card for the first two quarters seems to go against the rest of the grading policy.

Possible Solution(s): The department would like us to consider moving to a 4-point grading scale. Then, a zero could be assigned as a grade, when steps have been taken to help students complete work, but the student, ultimately, does not turn it in. The zero, however, would not have the devastating effect it would have in a 0-100 system. School tool does allow for the use of a 4-point scale.

Concern: By not reducing the grade of work submitted late, we may be sending mixed messages about the importance of student responsibility. There is also a sense that this part of the policy is unfair to the student who does his or her work on time.

Possible Solution(s): In the book *A Repair Kit for Grading*, Ken O'Connor suggests the following: "... as we make the transition from traditional to standards-based practices, it may be both acceptable and necessary to use small penalties that do not distort achievement or motivation..." One example given is reducing the grade to the lowest form at that letter. An A+ paper turned in late would earn an A-. Perhaps the homework and grading policy could be revised to allow for the reduction of grades with a limit imposed (one letter grade, 10 points, or 10% reduction).

Math Department

The department seems to be generally supportive of most aspects of the homework and grading policy. All members of the department are either not counting formative assessments or only counting as 10% of the average. An analysis of this year's first quarter math grades and last year's first quarter math grades revealed nearly identical scores in some course (Pre-Calculus and Geometry), and slightly depressed scores in others (Algebra and Algebra II/Trigonometry). It is difficult to know whether the shift can be attributed to the policy change. Algebra II/Trigonometry is a new course. The current 9th grade seems to have lower grades across the board.

Concern: The policy states: "In determining a grade, teachers should consider various measures of central tendency (median, mode) – not just one measure of central tendency (mean)." The group wondered if that meant that teachers had to do this or just that they can.

Possible Solution: Perhaps a simple rewording of this part of the policy would help. "In determining grades, teachers should use their professional judgment. If, in the teacher's professional judgment, the student's grade is not an accurate reflection of their achievement, the teacher should consider other measures of central tendency (median, mode)."

Concern: The policy states "academic dishonesty will be addressed with behavioral consequences." The department feels that the consequences should be severe and consistent.

Possible Solution: As was suggested by the English department, we may need to develop a building policy in regards to cheating and plagiarism. The Code of Conduct will also be reviewed and revised this year, so changes to the disciplinary consequences for cheating can be incorporated into that document. Note: there have been 0 disciplinary referrals for cheating this school year – possibly because many teachers are not grading homework.

Social Studies Department

Concern: Students are confused about the homework and grading policy. There are many misconceptions.

Possible Solution: Joann will plan to meet with each grade level after vacation to explain key components of the policy.

Concern: With formative assessments counting only 10%, students are much less likely to do it or to do it on time. This creates extra work for the teacher.

Possible Solution: If formative assessments count for only 10% of the grade, perhaps teachers should be allowed to assign a grade of 0 or reduce points for work submitted late. Neither would have a huge impact on the final grade but may be enough of a deterrent for those who might otherwise choose not to do the assignment at all.

Concern: Staff and students need help in understanding the difference between formative and summative assessments.

Possible Solution: Joann will share this feedback with Dr. Nicole Catapano so she can address this particular issue with staff when she is here in March. Homework that is designed to assess what students know and can do (versus homework designed as preparation or practice) absolutely should be graded.

Concern: Many students “need” homework grades to get through. There will be many more failures if homework is only counted 10%.

Possible Solution: As we begin implementing this policy, Joann is tracking grades to see if there is an impact. In comparing first quarter grades this year with first quarter grades last year, there are no significant differences.

However, not all teachers are yet implementing all aspects of the policy. It will be important to carefully examine the data as we move forward.

Concern: The policy states “Scores on group projects should have a minimal impact on a student’s overall grade. Group projects should have an individual score included as part of the assessment.” The ability to work with others is a 21st century skill that we should be teaching and assessing.

Possible Solution: We should be teaching and assessing these skills, perhaps using a rubric that spells out what it means to collaborate effectively. If these skills were taught, they could be graded using summative assessments. Perhaps the wording in the policy could be clarified so that it is clear that we can and should teach and assess group skills.

Science Department

The science department agrees with many of the suggestions offered by other departments. They are particularly interested in exploring the use of a four-point grading scale rather than the 0-100 scale. Another advantage of this system is that it will help students begin to assimilate to the college grading system. They are of the belief that high school grades should accurately reflect achievement so that students who are heading to college are better prepared for the college grading system. The group also had some questions about the use of extra credit. For example, they have offered extra credit for students who participate in the lab day at SUNY Potsdam. This is acceptable under the guidelines in the policy, but it would be good to offer alternative opportunities for students who are not able to participate in an activity outside of school.

Concern: Though the department seems to agree with assessing and reporting behaviors separately from academic achievement, they are very concerned about the management of this. With the student load most high school teachers have, assigning a single report card grade each marking period is already time-consuming enough. Having to attribute a second grade might be unmanageable. As teachers work very quickly to assign a behavioral grade, the grade itself might not be meaningful.

Possible Solution: Perhaps this is something that should be done at the elementary and middle school. Maybe we address behavior at the high school only through report card comments.

Concern: The department has had a lot of discussion about the best way to assess science labs. Most labs are formative in nature, but now lab grades comprise 10% - 30% of the student's grade.

Possible Solution: The department has been using lab quizzes to assess the skills and content taught through the labs. April is interested in developing lab assignments that would be summative in nature. For example, students would be given limited information and be asked to design an appropriate lab. The science department may need time for further curriculum development in this area.

Concern: Intrinsic motivation is the ultimate goal, per the policy. How do teachers help build the capacity for intrinsic motivation?

Possible Solution: Teachers need professional development in this area. Significant changes in our current instructional practices might be necessary in order to achieve this goal. For example, student choice is key as is relevance. How can teachers design learning activities that meet these needs while still covering the required content?

Concern: Like the English department, the science department feels it important that we send a strong message about plagiarism.

Possible Solution: We should look to develop a policy in regards to academic dishonesty. We also need to examine our own practices to be sure we aren't sending students mixed messages. For example, when students answer questions from the textbook, are we accepting responses copied directly from the text?

Concern: With a greater emphasis on summative assessment, teachers need professional development in developing alternative means of assessments so that we are using more than just tests and quizzes.

Possible Solution: Joann has already approached Cassidy about seeking professional development in this area. This would be a good area of focus for next school year.

Languages Other Than English Department

Concern: The LOTE Department agrees with some of the other departments that our treatment of students who cheat or plagiarism needs to be very serious. We don't have a lot of instances of cheating or plagiarism because students take the penalty of a zero very seriously. It is an effective deterrent.

Possible Solution: We need to develop a comprehensive academic dishonesty policy. Student Council is doing some preliminary work on this topic, but perhaps we need a committee of teachers to look at what other schools are doing and develop our own policy – with deterrents and consequences.

Concern: The policy does not establish a timeline for Incompletes. For the first quarter, we did not adhere strictly to the two-week timeframe.

Possible Solution: We need to get a better handle on students with chronic attendance problems, as these students are the majority of students who have Incompletes. In the two-weeks after the end of the marking period, many of them continued to miss a lot of school, making it very difficult to make up work.

Concern: Grades on summative assessments are generally lower because many students are not doing homework (or not doing it well). How do we encourage students to do homework, which is preparation for quizzes and tests?

Possible Solution: Some teachers use “test tickets” – review assignments that students must do prior to taking a test. At the middle school, some teachers send students to the Opportunity Room during a test if they have not completed the “ticket”. Then the student must take the test after school.

Concern: In a subject like Foreign Language, student participation is key. Teachers must be able to assess students' speaking skills.

Possible Solution: The policy does not preclude a teacher from assessing and grading student oral participation, but how they student will be assessed should be well defined using, perhaps, a rubric so that students know how they can earn a good score on this kind of assessment. Perhaps it should be called something other than participation to differentiate between the academic skill and the behavior.

Concern: Like the math department, the LOTE department questioned the part of the policy that indicated that teachers should use other measures of central tendency (median, mode) when determining students' grades.

Possible Solution: Reword this part of the policy. For example, "In determining grades, teachers should use their professional judgment. If, in the teacher's professional judgment, the student's grade is not an accurate reflection of their achievement, the teacher should consider other measures of central tendency (median, mode)."

Concern: Students frequently say they can't stay after school to complete work or to make up a quiz or a test because of sports practice or other activities.

Possible Solution: In the short term, communication with coaches/advisors is key. The principal or Dean of Students can facilitate this communication. Most coaches and advisors will be supportive of students staying after to work with teachers. In the long term, we could look at a required after school period. Many schools have a 9th period where teachers are required to stay and it is mandatory for some students to stay. This would need to be negotiated and we would have to change our athletic policy so that no practices could begin before the end of this period.

Art, Music, and P.E. Departments

These departments feel that much of the policy aligns with their current practice. The extra credit they give is for work done above and beyond what is expected (extra rather than instead of). In music and P.E., students can make-up classes or lessons they've missed.

Concern: In music, students need to be assessed not only on their individual performance, but also on their ability to produce as a group.

Possible Solution: Maybe eliminate the portion of the policy that states: "Scores on group projects should have a minimal impact on a student's overall grade." Keep the second sentence: "Group projects should have an individual score included as part of the assessment."

Concern: If grades are too rigorous in elective courses, students might choose not to take them.

Possible Solution: ???

Business, Technology, Family and Consumer Science Departments

Concern: Sometimes it is difficult to discern whether work done in class is formative or summative.

Possible Solution: This is an area for professional development.

Concern: If we don't use a zero, then the average students receive at progress report time is deceptive.

Possible Solution: Attributes in School Tool can be set so that missing assignments are calculated as zeroes. Teachers could also give an Incomplete at progress report time if assignments are missing.

Concern: Students need to be taught group skills and those skills need to be assessed.

Possible Solutions: These skills can be assessed. Perhaps we should develop a common rubric so that we have a consistent way of measuring students' mastery of skills.



Obama's Afghanistan Plan



Associated Press photo

Benjamin Stone

In a 1 December speech at West Point Military Academy, President Obama announced his new plan of action for Afghanistan, which harkens back to the successful strategies of the previous administration while providing a timeline for responsible withdrawal.

By 2010, as early as after Christmas, 30,000 additional troops will be deployed to Afghanistan and will join the 68,000 U.S. and 39,000 international forces already there. However, unlike the successful "Surge" strategy used in Iraq two years ago, this new deployment comes with a deadline. In his speech, President Obama said that the troops would all be withdrawn no later than July 2011.

"If I did not think that the security of the United States and the safety of the American people were at stake in Afghanistan, I would gladly order every single one of our troops home tomorrow," the President said at the most emotional moment of his otherwise stoic speech.

His new plan draws praise and criticism from both the right and the left. Republicans praise his commitment to winning the war in Afghanistan, but disapprove of his use of a deadline that Al Quaida and

the Taliban could easily take advantage of to dodge the U.S. presence.

Oppositely, the President's own party is displeased with his escalation of a war that has already cost billions of dollars and thousands of lives, but praise his foresight in setting a deadline for the return of troops and end of expensive wartime spending.

"I am painfully aware that this is politically unpopular. It's least popular in my own party. But that's not how I make decisions," Obama said in a pre-speech meeting with the press. He expressed that sending American servicemen and women to war is never popular or ideal.

Yet he did call upon the American people for unity on the issue and support for his plan. President Obama said in his speech, "It is easy to forget that when this war began, we were united—bound together by the fresh memory of a horrific attack... I refuse to accept the notion that we cannot summon that unity again."

Despite the merits and controversy over the "Obama Doctrine," there looms one foreboding dilemma Congress will need to solve by the year's end: funding.

The influx of 30,000 additional troops

is expected to cost approximately \$1,000 per soldier, per day. That leads to a total of \$30 million per day once all reinforcements are deployed. Liberal Democrats suggest creating a new tax to fund the increase, but this draws harsh rebuking from Republicans, who don't believe a new tax is appropriate when many Americans are fairsing poorly in the recession. Also, in his campaign for the presidency, Obama pledged not to raise taxes on the middle and lower classes.

Republicans and moderate Democrats counter that funds for the troops should be taken from other programs so as to not increase taxes or the deficit, but such cuts can be very politically unpopular. Also, the current plans for healthcare overhaul all cost near one trillion dollars, and many members of Congress feel pressure from their constituents to not spend more.

Nevertheless, President Obama's approval ratings upticked after his plan was announced, showing the American people support his decision. While the war has proven unpopular among Americans in recent years, the Obama Doctrine is a political success, at least for now.

Health Care Debate Heats Up

Dan Charlebois

In the midst of the "Great Recession," the United States has begun to tackle another formidable issue in the health care reform sector. This reform has not come without heated debate and aggressive opposition.

According to the Obama administration, the current Health care system lags in comparison to other developed nations and cannot provide adequate, affordable health care coverage to its citizens. HealthReform.gov tells of how if nothing is done there will be 10% more uninsured Americans in every state by 2019.

There are approximately 47 million Americans with no form of health insurance. President Obama has publicly declared this to be the single largest inhibitor for future growth in the United States' quality of life and economy.

In February of this year Obama stated, "I suffer no illusions that this will be an easy process. It will be hard. But I also know that nearly a century after Teddy Roosevelt first called for reform, the cost of our health care has weighed down our economy and the conscience of our nation long enough. So let there be no doubt: health care reform cannot wait, it must not wait, and it will not wait another year."

Obama was elected on the promise of change and has proposed a major overhaul of the entire system to benefit American citizens regardless of whether or not an individual has health insurance.

The current health care reform bill in the Senate (as of late November) was passed by a 60-39 vote on November 21st. By passing this first hurdle, the bill will be brought to the Senate floor for debate after Thanksgiving. This current bill comes with 979 billion dollar price tag over ten years according to the Congressional budget analysis.

Republicans have stated that the bill is going to raise taxes and is going to create a "massive and unsustainable debt." Democrats responded by showing that the bill would extend coverage to 94% of Americans and provide an alternative option by 2014 where Americans could shop for coverage through insurance exchanges.

Debate surrounding health care reform has not been absent in New York State. In New York, approximately 2.7 million residents are currently uninsured and 734,000 people are in nongroup insurance. HealthReform.gov attempts to show how New York citizens would be impacted for the better if reform was

passed as the bill would ensure consumer protections in the insurance market, create immediate options for people who can't get insurance today, ensure free preventive services, and support health coverage for early retirees.

This country has seen debate before but many have noticed the severity in the attacks from both the far left and right. At one point it was even being stated that President Obama wanted to create a "death panel" to decide whether or not seniors would be euthanized. Obama responded to this claim by calling it "ridiculous" and asking why he of all people would want to kill your grandparents.

Despite Obama's promises of reaching across the aisle and involving Democrats and Republicans, the current legislation regarding health care reform has passed through the House and Senate solely on the Democrat majority vote. It seems like the health care debate will only grow more heated and polarize more of the nation in the coming months.

Upon their return to the Senate after Thanksgiving, Senators will begin to go through the bill line by line in a hope that either the bill will be shutdown or that the bill will be enacted to law and better the health care quality for all Americans.

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- And more!

NY Senate Turns Down Gay Marriage Bill

Corina Simonelli

On December 2nd, the New York Senate voted down a bill that would have given marriage rights to homosexuals. This would have placed New York among five other states to pass such a measure. However, the highly publicized bill lost in a 24-38 decision. It was several votes short of the 32 necessary to pass. Many attribute this wider than expected margin to political vulnerability on the part of the senators.

"This is the worse example of political cowardice I've ever seen," said Democratic Senator Kevin S Parker. Governor Patterson, a champion for gay rights, was in agreement with Parker.

"I think that there were political

forces that in some respects intimidated some of those who voted," Patterson reasoned. "I think if there'd actually been a conscience vote we'd be celebrating marriage equality right now"

However, gay rights activists are staying optimistic. Alan van Capelle, executive director of the Empire State Pride Agenda, believes senators who didn't follow through with verbal support will face political repercussions. As major financial contributors gay rights groups now know which senators will help advance their agenda. The soonest the topic can be reevaluated is in 2011, when a new legislature will be elected.

PTSA Homework Policy Meeting

Brenna Rice

On November 17th, members of the PTSA held a meeting to present and discuss the new Homework Policy. Present were members of the Homework Policy committee, members of the Board of Education, teachers, students, members of the administration, and parents.

The evening started with a powerpoint presentation by Superintendent Mr. Brady, who presented the highlights of the policy and its formation. The policy was passed in August of 2009, but will not be implemented until the 2010-2011 school year. This is so teachers may get time for training.

Mr. Brady said Potsdam Central has been the frontrunner in homework policies in the area, and is proud that we are paving the way, stating "what we're doing here is we're questioning the system."

It was said that policies such as this were already present in the Potsdam school district. Mr. Brady said the Board, whose "responsibility is to set such policies," combined them into one. When asked if teachers are expected to follow policies passed by the Board, Mr. Brady said, "Absolutely."

A shared decision making committee was formed and met from late winter of last year into this past summer. On the transparency of the policy's creation, Mr. Brady said it was a very open process.

Meeting dates were announced and all members of the school community were welcome.

The next steps in this process are to continue discussion, track grades, examine teacher experimentation, have a training session for teachers in March, and analyze secondary report cards for the 2010-2011 school year.

Questions were asked about the validity of the committee's research, the base of which was *A Repair Kit for Grading* by Ken O'Conner. Mr. Brady said the committee looked at other research, but did not focus on other studies. Committee member Ann Carvill presented a stack of over twenty-seven sources used in addition to O'Conner's work.

Many questions addressed teachers' implementation of the policy, and it was clear that there has been confusion. For example, contrary to what many teachers and students currently believe, participation is allowed to be graded, as it can be seen as an assessment. Also surprising was that extra credit is allowed, as long as it is legitimate and shows extended learning. Moreover, it was pointed out that homework is indeed being counted.

The meeting ended optimistically. High school principal, Mrs. Chambers, said it will be an "ongoing agenda item" and there is room for change in the policy.

CSEA Protests Contract



Corina Simonelli photo

Corina Simonelli

Tuesday December 8th's school board meeting was packed. It was full with all the people of a school: administration, bus drivers, secretaries, janitors, students, and teachers. The cause of the crowd was a protest by the Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA).

As a group, the CSEA includes Potsdam Central School's bus drivers, custodial staff, clerical staff, food service workers, nurses, and teachers' aids and assistants. The issue being debated was the premiums paid on health insurance.

Workers of the CSEA pay 15% toward their premiums while teachers contribute only 2%. As a result of this controversy,

an estimated 115 employees have been working without a contract since June. Social Studies teachers Phil Foisy and Steve Kmack were among those showing the support for the CSEA protest.

"It's one union and another union—strength of union people working together," said Mr. Foisy "Gatherings like this show support and encourage the progress."

CSEA members were appreciative of the many teachers who attended. "It's really awesome," said bus monitor and food service worker Lisa Foster. "The support means a lot."

When the board meeting got to the "public comment" section of the evening, local CSEA union leader Trudy White spoke to the board about the union's concerns. "We are here asking for fairness—nothing more, nothing less," said White.

Union Vice President Dale Kingsley also spoke, ending with a heartfelt "shame on you" to the board. After his words the room emptied, leaving solemn faced board members and a sharp reminder of the many important positions which CSEA members fill. The next step for the CSEA workers will occur on January 6th when a mediator will speak with both groups—the union and the Board.

Opinion

What is Fair Grading and Has PCS Achieved it?

Brenna Rice

PCS Press recently sat down with Dr. Nicole Catapano, Coordinator for Data Analysis from the WSWHE BOCES, who advised the Homework Policy committee during the policy's creation.

PCS Press: What was your role in the creation of the PCS Homework Policy?

Dr. Nicole Catapano: I was brought in as an assessment consultant to review assessment practices and how they connect to grading, so I wasn't necessarily consulting on the design of the policy but more on the concepts that were part of the conversation and the building of the policy.

PCSP: Can you describe what an assessment consultant does?

NC: For my job, I work for a BOCES, and in my role I work with school districts in analyzing and understanding all sorts of data, including assessments, so part of my role is working with the school districts in understanding what the purpose of assessment is and how it can be used in the classroom.

PCSP: Have you ever worked on creating homework policies before?

NC: I've worked on the concept of grading practices and how they relate to assessments, but Potsdam was the first district that was looking from a policy perspective.

PCSP: Are you familiar with *A Repair Kit for Grading: 15 Fixes for Broken Grades* by Ken O'Connor?

NC: Yes, that book usually serves as the starting point for most of the school districts that I work with. Regarding effective grading practices, Ken O'Connor's *Repair Kit* book is very succinct and is a good place to start these conversations, and oftentimes the conversations lead to other resources depending on the needs of the district, so I am very familiar with the book.

PCSP: Did you bring the book to the committee or were they already using it?

NC: I referenced the book at a presentation I did at the NYS School Boards Association convention, and some Potsdam staff were in attendance and I believe they got the book after my conference presentation.

PCSP: Do you suggest any other research for them to use?

NC: As an outsider to the process I am not well versed about all the resources that they used, but there are many different resources, books and articles about grading practices. I know that I shared many of those tools and resources with folks who attended my sessions, and when I went to Potsdam shared some

information with them. How much of that they used in their conversations, I am not sure. There are several well known books and articles that are available about the topic.

PCSP: Would you recommend using Ken O'Connor's book as an effective way to create the policy, or should there be other sources?

NC: I think the guidelines that the policy addresses and how it relates to the book sets up the process nicely. I think where most folks and most districts take the next steps in how they implement these practices often lead to additional resources, so I am not surprised that book formed the concept, but I would project that the implementation phase would require additional resources.

PCSP: What is your personal research methodology?

NC: With any initiative that school districts embark on, it is important for them to see whether or not initiatives have the assurance to be effective in different situations. There are a lot of research articles and articles that attempt research. Part of my role with school districts is making sure their research is sound, and that they are taking a look at the research findings and how they would relate back to different initiatives. I think with the grading practices, homework practices, there isn't as much research on that topic as there are some other topics like reading interventions, but I think using the research that does exist does help to shape an understanding of what folks will expect from the type of work. I do believe in using the research that is available, but also making sure the research is sound, before using it to inform any decisions in a school district.

PCSP: Is there a certain timeline in research that schools should be using, does research expire?

NC: Good research holds up to the test of time. There are quality research studies that have been done, in education and psychology which is my background, dating back to the early twentieth century, and then applications of those findings have evolved over time. I think in a lot of the education research, so much of it is current that looking at a variety of research from different points in time is useful for the conversation. I think one of the challenges is that the research is pretty new across the board for a lot of these initiatives, so getting a good cross section of what is available, might be more helpful than trying to look for things that are of a particular timeframe.

So that I think that is limited. Obviously there are current studies that are more relevant than some of the older studies, but I wouldn't necessarily throw them out because they're older—I would use them in conjunction with other information that is available.

PCSP: Did you feel the creation of the Homework Policy was an open process for students, parents, and teachers?

NC: The aspect of the policy work that I was involved in was at the *ad hoc* committee. The only thing I can speak to is that for the *ad hoc* committee, they did have representation from each of the different groups and how each of those representatives were represented by those individuals and how that was shared back to those groups. I wasn't part of the process. I can speak to having stakeholders and having a cross section of those individuals as an important part of the process, and in every district we have worked we do emphasize that each group should have representation and involvement in the conversation whether it is about policy, implications, or report card format. Having that cross section is helpful for the implementation for any of the changes and/or revisions.

PCSP: Do you have any suggestions on how to obtain that cross section; is there a norm that you use?

NC: I don't know if there is a hard and fast rule of how many should be part of that group, sometimes it depends on the size of the district and sometimes how far reaching the initiative is.

PCSP: Any there any modifications that you feel should be made to the policy?

NC: At this point, because it is a draft format and the discussions are still being made, I would have to say probably very little. That doesn't mean modifications won't happen. At some point I think with any policy, things are subject to revision. At this point I wouldn't see too much to change.

PCSP: You will be meeting back up with the committee in March; what will happen then?

NC: My role is to follow up in March regarding any questions that folks have about assessment practices and how they relate to grading practices. The details of the day haven't been outlined yet, I believe that the district is having discussions with the staff. In March, I will pick up the questions and concerns and resources that they might need.

PCSP: Do you feel the policy affects all students fairly as it is right now?

NC: I think the policy is one thing; the

implementation of the policy is where the fair issue comes in. Effective grading practices are helpful for all students. The policy as it is written would address student needs, making sure the information about the students is accurate about their achievement—but the implementation could impact whether or not the policy is effective.

PCSP: Do you usually see problems with implementation?

NC: I think that with any initiative that a classroom or district takes on, there will always be some concerns on implementation, there will always be some bumps in the road; having a conversation on those obstacles or barriers helps to smooth the implementation.

PCSP: What do you feel the purpose of homework is?

NC: Interestingly enough, there are several different purposes of homework. The US Department of Education summarizes them pretty nicely in their homework tips for parents. They summarize it as use for review, preparing students for practice of skills, for application of knowledge or skills, or extension of the knowledge and skills that students have gained in the classroom. It can take any one of those roads, and there is a role for any one of those roads. Some students might need more practice than others, but the concept of it being used for practice is the most prevalent purpose for homework that we see when we work with school districts.

PCSP: What do you feel the purpose of assessment is?

NC: Assessment can take a variety of purposes, anything from diagnosing students' strengths and weaknesses prior to instruction, to gauging progress and obtaining knowledge and skills throughout instruction, to ultimately saying if students have mastered the content or the skills at the end of instruction. So the purpose of assessment could take one of those three, and an assessment tool might be used at every step in that process to see where students are now and where they need to be and whether or not the students are making progress to that end goal.

PCSP: Is it possible to create a blanket policy for all students? How much wiggle room should there be?

NC: When it comes to sound grading practices and being accurate, that isn't really content or subject specific. Assessment may vary in how the evidence is collected and what students know and what they do, but the application of grades around what they know and what they should do should be a consistent approach so that anyone who is reading the grades and learning what students skills are can have an understanding and a level of confidence that those accurately reflect student's knowledge, skills and ability. While the implementation and the appearance of those assessments that build the grade might be different depending on the subject area, the accuracy of the grade is paramount. Accuracy is the main obstacle when assessments and grading are done appropriately. If grades are not accurate, the wrong decisions could be made about those students. To prevent the wrong decisions being made we have to make sure we have accurate information.

PCSP: How would you define sound grading practices and accurate information?

NC: Accurate information would go back to the purpose the grade, and that is to communicate to others what students know and can do regarding achievement in the NYS learning standards. Making sure those grades reflect that purpose would be the critical piece and that is the sound grading practices and how that connects back to assessments.

PCSP: Regarding no zero policies, is assigning a minimum grade preferable to giving a zero, or is there a middle ground?

NC: Oftentimes, when we see zeros applied, they're done on formative work, which should not necessarily be getting a grade anyway. Formative assessments really are to help guide instruction and to help students gauge their progress towards mastery of skills. So many times when we see zeros applied, they are applied where they should not be given in the first place, but from the statistical

Continued on pg. 3

Mast Head

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Brenna Rice

Opinion Editor:
Brenna Rice

Features Editor:
Corina Simonelli

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Madeline Stevens

Photography:
Hui Yang

Business/Ad Manager:
Arian Mahmoodi

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Opinion

Fair Grading continued from pg. 2

standpoint will have a larger impact on a grade than if a minimum failing was applied. If you are looking at the score being reflective of knowledge, skills, and ability, the zero is saying there is a complete absence of all knowledge, skills and ability, which is not accurate. The use of a zero often has negative impact on accuracy for many reasons and also it has a negative impact on students' motivation to participate in the learning process. The minimum failing grade may not necessarily be accurate either. There are some concerns with either approach. I don't know necessarily that I can say a particular number is in place, I think it's a matter of what would be an accurate reflection of what the student knows and can do and that would be the most appropriate metric. I couldn't necessarily give it a cut score at this point.

PCSP: Can you elaborate on why formative assignments shouldn't always necessarily be given grades?

NC: Formative assessments occur while students are still learning, and the formative assessment process allows students to not be successful and still have intervention and reflect and make those improvements prior to getting that summative assessment of whether or not they've mastered the content of the course. The formative assessment being graded is premature, as the learning has not been evolved to where it needs to be yet. On the formative assessment side, giving feedback is critical—giving that kind of feedback of where the student is now and how revisions would lead to a higher score later on. Students need that opportunity to get some guidance and coaching along the way, prior to a grade being assigned, and oftentimes those formative assignments come in the form of homework where students aren't expected to have full mastery of the skills. A grade would be inappropriate while the

students are still in the learning process.

PCSP: What happens to students who don't test well?

NC: When it comes to summative assessments, they don't necessarily have to be a test—there are many forms of assessments that could be summative in nature, from a test to a project to a presentation, even portfolios could be summative at times. There are a lot of different ways students could show they've mastered the content, and it is important for classes to consider multiple measures to make sure that students who don't test well can still exhibit that they have the knowledge, skills, and abilities related to the course content. There are large scale assessments required for accountability purposes, but at a classroom level, that's where we need to multiple measures to see where students are and whether or not they've attained the skills we've been working on.

PCSP: Is it possible to attain fair grading without creating a set standard on print?

NC: I think that is at the district's discretion. Referencing the New York State school board website and their policy work, some schools have grading policies, some don't; some have homework policies, some don't; some have combinations of them. So, it's really at the district's discretion of whether or not they feel a policy is need to make the priorities move forward in the district.

PCSP: What's your overall view of Potsdam's treatment of grading in comparison to other schools?

NC: Looking at the policy that they've developed and the conversations that I had during that development process about assessments and grading, they really have an understanding about the role of assessment and how it impacts grading. It is exciting to see that they have that understanding and they're connecting it to what's happening in the

classroom. A lot of other school districts around the state are having the same conversations about their current processes and what might need to be revised to make sure the grades represent what districts want them to represent about students' abilities and competencies. I could say that Potsdam really did have the lead in having the conversation and putting things in the policy, having things in writing, as opposed to other districts that might have just elements in writing. Most comprehensive policy approach to the topic that I've seen.

PCSP: Is there anything you'd like to add?

NC: I think when it comes to any effective grading practices, and particularly involving homework, it's really important to have all the different stakeholder groups on the same page, and especially have the student involvement piece—whether it's part of a policy or everyday practice, students should be involved in the assessment and grading practice. The purpose of doing assessments and anything that we do in schools is focusing on the students and making sure students are successful. From the lens that I bring in, those assessments are only as good as being able to be accurate about what students are learning in the classroom and that those grades should be an accurate reflection of that. If we lose that quality along the way, it's going to have a negative impact on students, and I don't think anyone wants that. Any initiatives regarding grading homework assessments really need to have students involved in the process, and I'm happy to see that Potsdam did involve students during their policy development stage and I look forward to seeing how students are involved during the exploration of the policy this year, and as the policy is implemented in the next year.

Letters to the Editor

More on the Homework Policy: Change Needs to Come

To the editor,

There have been many recent talks about the new homework and grading policy at Potsdam Central School, and with my previous *PCS Press* editorial, I am no stranger to the negative side of this debate. However, despite my justified criticisms of the new policy, I was given a new, cautious optimism towards the policy after a recent PTSA meeting where Mr. Brady, Superintendent of Schools, answered questions and heard concerns from parents, students, and teachers regarding the new policy. Many issues regarding the policy were addressed, others were not, however, the student body I represented there should be reassured that this policy may not be as hopeless as it seems.

Firstly, is the new policy research based? The administration quickly attempted to address this issue before any questions were asked. First, Mr. Brady defended Ken O'Connor's *A Repair Kit for Grading: 15 Fixes for Broken Grades*, the primary resource for the new policy and the only reference cited on the policy. Also, former Board of Education (BOE) President Ann Carvill stated that she had a folder "eight inches thick" of resources used to help create the policy. The primary qualms I previously raised with O'Connor's book are that its resources are outdated and he inserts his own personal opinion as research. After the meeting, these two qualms stand reinforced. Not only are these two claims valid, they are supported by the fact that *A Repair Kit for Grading* has not been peer-reviewed, has had no longitudinal studies, and is not accepted by the greater education community as being valid research. This evidence, presented by a Clarkson University communications instructor, was given credence by several SUNY Potsdam Professors and education researchers in attendance at the meeting. Thus the issue of research basis is still up to debate. I have not looked through Mrs. Carvill's eight inch folder, and chances are the references there are perfectly fine. However, the primary resource of the policy, the only one cited, is bunk.

On to a more optimistic note, a huge misconception of the policy shifting PCS education towards tests is false. This was very good to hear, since test-based education has been decried throughout the education world since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Though the language of the policy is vague and nebulous, a concern raised at the meeting, it seeks to have teachers assess knowledge through not just written tests, but also summative homework, projects, experiments, oral exams, etc. The administration stated that this misconception arose from teachers not implementing the policy properly or fully, and that issues such as this would be worked out this year. However, the administration acknowledged that in their efforts to pass the policy in a very short time frame, and in their perceived lack of communication with the teachers, they did not provide adequate time, training, or resources to teachers for successful use of these new practices before the start of this school year. They pledge to help teachers be successful now. This should be cause for optimism for us students, since now not only the teachers but also the administra-

tion is working for our benefit.

Another concern educators and parents at the meeting expressed was the validity of a "top-down" mandate, a policy created by the administration and forced upon the teachers. While Mr. Brady acknowledged this concern, he expressed the administration's willingness to work with teachers throughout the year to make changes and adjustments to the policy so it will best suit the needs of all the students and teachers of PCS. When confronted with a recent Student Council poll that found 95% of Potsdam High School teachers not to feel they had a voice in the policy's creation, Mr. Brady expressed this new, open attitude and cited the "many" opportunities for the teachers to be involved with the policy's creation. Clearly, based on the statistic, the latter of these is quite untrue since if ample and adequate opportunity was afforded, the teachers would not be almost unanimously negative. The new atmosphere of openness and cooperation is heartening, though. Teachers, the student body is calling on you to express openly your views and concerns with the policy for all of our benefit. The administration has open ears.

Lastly, and very importantly, how is this policy going to affect students? A recent Student Council poll found 62% of students feel the policy has negatively affected their grades and many thought the policy is unfair. However, since the vast majority of students have not read the policy at all or only read parts, there is much misconception floating around. First, homework does still count, and must be completed on time. The policy's language regarding late assignments and the infamous "50% for no work" clause was openly challenged by many at the PTSA meeting and saw no significant defense from the administration. Therefore, I would anticipate this portion of the policy could likely be changed if enough student, teacher, and parent voices cry out against its lack of research basis and educational soundness. Also, for the many students who are great learners and poor test-takers, hopefully the administration will hold up its end of the deal and help teachers implement other forms of assessment so students can continue to succeed. Student Council is working actively to foster a positive environment between students and the administration with regards to this policy, so if any students have questions, comments, or concerns about the policy, please bring them to Student Council through our biweekly meetings. Bring your parents on board and let them know your concerns so they can directly lobby the administration to make the necessary changes to the policy they openly expressed they are willing to make. Furthermore, be informed. The new policy is on the school's website, take the time to read it, analyze how it will affect you, and if you have any problems with it or things you would like to commend, please do so. Lack of communication has caused numerous problems with the policy since it was conceived; now is our opportunity to communicate and build a better school.

Benjamin Stone
Class of 2010

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Features

Movie Reviews

Brenna Rice

New Moon

4/10 stars



Everyone's favourite sparkly vampire is back in the sequel to last year's hit *Twilight*. After Bella (the always blinking Kristin Stewart of *Into the Wild* and *Adventureland*) cuts her finger on wrapping paper (since when is wrapping paper strong enough to induce a serious paper cut?) and Edward's more human-appreciating brother tries to suck her blood, Edward (played by Robert Pattinson of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* and *How to Be*) does what he thinks is best for her, no matter how much it pains him, and takes his family and leaves her behind. Being unable to function without a man in her life, Bella goes through several months of severe depression (shown by Bella sitting on her bed, the camera circling around her, month names popping to the screen with each completed revolution—how poetic?). But when she decides to take hold of her life and regain consciousness and visits childhood friend Jacob Black (played by Taylor Lautner of *Shark Boy and Lava Girl*—maybe *Twilight*), everything changes.

The acting of most of the cast is horrendous, the best of the worst being Taylor Lautner, who is actually pretty decent as the friendly teenage mutant werewolf (and the removal of the wig—and shirt—was overly welcome). Kristin Stewart revives her excessive blinking, gasping, and lip-biting practices and is horrible as the overly dependent heroine. Robert Pattinson, not present for much of the movie, is only mildly bad, doing his best with the one-dimensional character he's been given, looking pale, angry, and brooding for 99% of the movie. The best moments of the movie tend to come from side characters: Bella's father (played by Billy Burke of *Gilmore Girls*) is good as the humorous and quietly loving father, and Bella's friends are good at being normal teenagers—but then again, anyone looks normal next to Bella, who is inhumanly dumb and awkward.

Based on the atrocious but adored teen

novels by Stephenie Meyer, the source material for this series isn't exactly of the highest quality. Most of the cast does their best with the material (and by most I mean everyone save Kristin Stewart, who acts this way in every movie), but simply cannot make up for the vomit-inducing cheesiness and absurdity of the plot. However, being a teenage girl, I did enjoy the movie, and it does provide laughs (the majority of which being unintentional). It'll cater to its intended audience well, but everyone else is better off staying away—really, really far away.

Fantastic Mr. Fox

8/10 stars



A fox with an insatiable desire for thievery is the dysfunctional father in Wes Anderson's latest flick. Mr. Fox (voiced with great charm by George Clooney of *Syriana* and *Burn After Reading*), who loves nothing more than the rush lent to him through stealing from local farmers, settles down when Mrs. Fox (voiced by Meryl Streep of *The Hours* and *The Devil Wears Prada*) tells him she's pregnant. Fast forward twelve fox years and he's living underground with his wife and son, Ash (voiced hilariously by Jason Schwartzman, of *Rushmore* and *Marie Antoinette*), and nephew Kristofferson (voiced by the director's brother, Eric Anderson), feeling unsatisfied and poor. So, naturally, he moves into a tree—not just any tree, but one located dangerously close to the three meanest and nastiest farmers in town.

Wes Anderson, who also directed *Rushmore* and *The Royal Tenenbaums*, has a signature style of colour and indie-feeling music that is vibrantly alive in *Mr. Fox*. The screenplay, written by Anderson and Noah Baumbach (the pair also co-wrote *The Life Aquatic with Steven Zissou*) is filled with wit and smart humour. The characters are endearing and hilarious, and the soundtrack is classic Wes Anderson. *Mr. Fox* is an excellent addition to the Anderson files.

Student Council Updates

Benjamin Stone, Student Council President

Student Council has been active in doing its job to represent the student body as the school year progresses. Much has been accomplished since the last issue of the *PCS Press*, and much more is left to be done. All are welcome to attend meetings and let their voices be heard. Meetings are every other Thursday after school; listen to the announcements for dates.

Student Council Survey results:

Student Council recently conducted two surveys, one of students, and one of teachers, about the new homework and grading policy.

Student Survey: Ninety students surveyed at random, anonymously, in Lunch A and Lunch C.

Question 1: Have you noticed a change in homework and grading at PCS?

Yes: 70.0%
No: 5.5%
Unsure: 5.6%
Freshman: 18.9%

Question 2: Have you read the new policy?

Yes, completely: 6.7%
Yes, parts: 43.3%
No: 46.7%
Haven't heard of it: 3.3%

Question 3: How do you believe the new policy has affected you?

Positively: 21.1%
Negatively: 52.2%
No effect: 26.7%

Question 4: How do you believe the new policy has affected your grades?

Positively: 20.0%
Negatively: 62.2%
No effect: 17.8%

Question 5: The homework and grading policy is fair.

Strongly agree: 11.1%
Agree: 17.8%
(Agree total: 28.9%)
No opinion: 21.1%
Disagree: 26.7%
Strongly disagree: 23.3%
(Disagree total: 50.0%)

Teacher Survey: Seventeen teachers surveyed at random, anonymously, from all departments of the High School.

Question 1: Have you read the Policy?

Yes: 64.7%
No: 0.0%
Partially: 35.3%

Question 2: Has implementing the Policy required you to change the way you go about homework and grading?

Yes: 58.8%
No: 5.9%
Somewhat: 35.3%

Question 3: Has the change been positive, negative, or neutral in your opinion?

Positive: 5.9%
Negative: 47.1%
Neutral: 17.6%
Both negative and positive: 23.5%
Too early to tell: 5.9%

Question 4: You had a voice in the creation of this Policy.

Strongly Agree: 0.0%
Agree: 5.9%
(Agree total: 5.9%)
No opinion: 0.0%
Disagree: 23.5%
Strongly Disagree: 70.6%
(Disagree total: 94.1%)

Upcoming events:

A committee has been formed to evaluate and revise the school's Academic Integrity and Plagiarism Policy. If you are interested in giving your opinion on how academic dishonesty and plagiarism should be handled, come to Student Council to voice your opinion.

Mrs. Chambers recently attended a leadership conference in Albany geared towards student councils, and has given us some great suggestions for ways to improve our functioning and the school atmosphere. Possibilities include monthly spirit days, music over the PA between classes, flex room representatives, and much more, so listen to the announcements and read this column for more information in the future.

Thanks:

Student Council would like to offer thanks to Mrs. Chambers for graciously extending senior privileges to the senior class unprecedentedly early. We were made aware of an AP Government survey which found senior privileges to be unequivocally supported by the school community, and are grateful for Mrs. Chambers' willingness to listen to student concerns.

Even if you can't make it to Student Council meetings, we still want to hear what you have to say. Find us on Facebook, or email us at pscouncil@gmail.com.

Don't forget to visit the Roxy Movie Theatre for all your movie watching needs!
(315) 265-9630
jscinemas.com

Village Diner Review

Frances Clark and Hui Yang

The Village Diner can be great restaurant—when one gets the chance to dine there. It is closed by two o'clock every day of the week. Hui and I found this out the hard way. School and the desire to sleep in on the weekends make it nearly impossible to eat there. But if you're good and rise early or bad and cut school, then you can have a delicious meal there.

Hui and I arrived at the diner around noon on a Sunday. The place was packed with a diverse group of people—college students, older people, etc. We decided to order breakfast foods since, after all, we had just woken up. Hui asked for

an omelet with cheese and ham and I ordered a waffle, specifying that I wanted whipped cream. The food did not take long to arrive. However, quality was slightly sacrificed for speed. Hui's omelet was not fully cooked and my waffle had the smallest amount of whip cream imaginable and strawberries that appeared to have been frozen for ten years and then put into a microwave.

Despite these small misfortunes, the food was otherwise good. We ate this meal at least two weeks ago, so I can't pinpoint specific reasons I enjoyed it, but you'll have to take my word for it.

Village Diner

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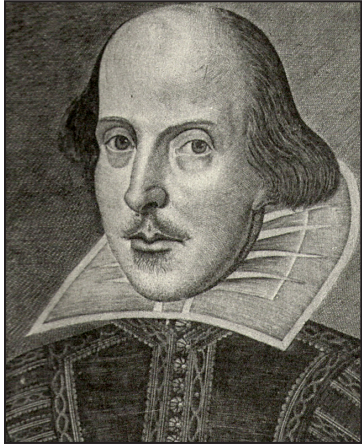
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Features

Books with Billy

The Truth About Swine Flu



This is me. You are welcome to swoon.

Brenna Rice

In which everyone's favourite playwright William "Billy Shakes" Shakespeare reviews classic novels (penned in less poetic language).

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee
I love birds. I don't love books about killing them. 0/10 stars.

1984 by George Orwell
The eighties were a great time for me: Ladies galore, big hair, colourful eye shadow. I loved it. Who died and made Orwell king? 0/10 stars.

The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald
Tragedies really aren't my thing. 0/10 stars.

The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck
Interesting ending... very interesting. 0/10 stars

A Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens
Papa D really wasn't at his best with this one—or ever, for that matter. 0/10 stars.

Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck
Love dem rabbits, not da book. 0/10 stars.

Great Expectations by Charles Dickens
Who actually read this? Not me. 0/10 stars.

Slaughter-House Five by Kurt Vonnegut
I feel like KuVo was in a more than slightly altered state when he wrote this. Don't do drugs, kids. 0/10 stars.

Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen
Too girly for this man's man. 0/10 stars.

A Clockwork Orange by Anthony Burgess
If the average high schooler can't work to understand my language, and it's English, why should I try to read something written in some weird Russian hybrid? 0/10 stars.

Atlas Shrugged by Ayn Rand
This thing was huge. 0/10 stars.

The Awakening by Kate Chopin
I certainly wasn't awake while reading this. 0/10 stars.

The House of Mirth by Edith Wharton
Is mirth a drug? No? 0/10 stars.

The Pearl by John Steinbeck
What is it with JStein and dead babies? 0/10 stars

On the Road by Jack Kerouac
Someone get this dude a plane ticket. 0/10 stars.

The Elephant Man by Christine Sparks
Is he an elephant or a man? 0/10 stars.

As I Lay Dying by William Faulker
Real men die standing up. 0/10 stars.

The Tempest by William Shakespeare
REPRESENT. 10/10 stars.



George Morris photo

George Morris

It has recently come to the attention of the PCS Press Staff that there are many, many unfounded rumours floating around about the scourge of schools, H1N1. To put these many blatant lies to rest, the almighty editors (who I might add possess an uncanny ability to force people to meet the deadline) assigned me, George W. Morris, to get to the bottom of this hog with my (not so) legendary investigative abilities. During my search for answers I scoured across the world, from Mexico to Canton to Siberia. I am happy to report that I have uncovered the truths, including the ones no big media corporation would reveal, about the menace to our peaceful school life. For convenience, I have listed a few of the most common myths about Swine Flu and the truths behind these myths.

Myth: You can die from Swine Flu.
Truth: Actually this myth is true. In fact

every single person who has ever had H1N1 has already died or will die in the foreseeable future. In other words, it is 100% fatal.

Myth: The symptoms of Swine Flu are just really the same as regular flu symptoms, just worse.

Truth: This myth is partially correct but lacks one important detail: EVERYTHING is a symptom of H1N1: Stubbed toe, headache, cough, cancer, death, life, homework, pigs, emotions, internal bleeding, broken bones, religion—all caused by H1N1. A good rule of thumb is if you start feeling anything, and I mean anything, you should start writing your will.

Myth: I'm fine as long as long as I've been vaccinated.

Truth: NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!
Whatever you do don't get vaccinated. The vaccine is H1N1. That's like saying

I'm in Calculus, I don't have to do my pre-Calc. Just please don't do it for all our sakes.

Myth: Swine Flu came from pigs.

Truth: This is completely wrong and could not be any farther from the truth. H1N1 was created by the Chinese as another one of their half-baked attempts at destroying the righteous and holy United States of America. Fortunately for us, anything made in China is made of plastic and probably contains illegal date-rage drugs. So, it will probably be banned from the shores of America any day now.

Myth: There will never be another pandemic like this one.

Truth: Again, this is an incorrect assumption. I have it on good authority that the boys in the Pentagon are cooking up something 100 times worse just for a little "population control," shall we say, in China.

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Features

Game Reviews

Assassins Creed 2

Chris Chambers

For those people who did not play the first game, let me catch you up on the story line: In the game you play as Desmond Miles, an ex-assassin turned bartender. Desmond's parents were teaching him the art of being an assassin when he ran away from home when he was sixteen. After hiding out for nine years he is finally found by a company known as Abstergo. He is being used by them to help them find the Templar treasure. They put him into a machine called the Animus. This machine can interpret genetic memories allowing the person in the machine to control their ancestor and his actions. Desmond's first ancestor is Altair, a master assassin during the Crusades. Throughout the game Desmond learns that the history he was taught all his life is a lie. Templars and Assassins have clashed in every time period throughout history. At the end, he learns that Abstergo is a Templar owned company seeking world domination.

In this game, Desmond escapes Abstergo with Lucy, an assassin that helped Desmond throughout the first game. Lucy takes you to a safe house in which she and two other assassins have built a newer version of the animus. They tell you that in order to thwart the Templars plans to take over the world Desmond must go into the animus and follow another of his ancestors. Ezio Auditore, a wealthy seventeen year old Italian that lived in 1476.

The game starts out running errands for your family, such as collecting feathers for your little brother. Then your easy life is suddenly ripped from you when your family is accused of treason, tried and publicly hanged. Ezio suddenly has a calling in life, to exact revenge on the people that killed his family. These murders send him on a wild journey across the entire country and almost two decades of his life.

When I first put the game in I had very high expectations and I was definitely not disappointed at all. The graphics in this game are nothing short of amazing. The first city that you have to explore is the city of Florence. This sprawling

province has so much diversity in it that you will be amazed by the textures of the roofs and even the water. The game spans so many different areas that you master moving through one province without being detected but in the next one you may have to do it completely differently. Another bonus of this game is that the missions vary greatly, unlike the first game. This is great because we all got bored beating up the same town crier or eavesdropping on guards in the first one.

Despite such great pros there are a few cons that are still present in this game that should have been worked out. The first one is that you always had more health than you would ever use. This is still present but they do make it harder to get a full health bar. The second thing that is still present is the same game physics. Most of the problems with the physics are amusing, and few and far between. The first glitch that I noticed was that Ezio would sometimes change directions in mid air. Another glitch that I have only seen once is when you assassinate five guards before the first hits the ground, the first one you killed will fly up into the air very quickly and quite violently.

This game is a very good game that will take the average player about 18-22 hours to complete. I give this game an 8.5/10. If you want to live through Ezio's story go out and buy Assassins Creed 2 available now for XBOX 360, PlayStation 3, and PC.

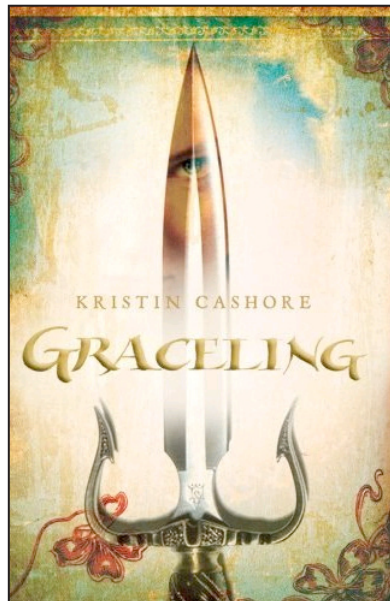
Modern Warfare 2

Thomas Hamberger

Modern Warfare 2 is a sequel that was highly anticipated and highly controversial. The game itself is very well designed and the story is truly breath taking.

The only part that truly seems to raise problems is the level with the airport scene that depicts a massacre of civilians by a group of terrorists. Even though this depicts something that can happen in real life, the designers realized how horrific this was and allowed you the option of skipping it. The point is that this is what happens when you give the wrong people guns. This game is very realistic in its scenario and is well thought out and researched in what would happen and how our country would react.

On Fire for *Fire*



Madeline Stevens

In her stunning debut novel, *Graceling*, author Kristin Cashore brought us Katsa, a young woman of extraordinary power and will who possessed none of the biological or stereotypical weaknesses associated with femininity—and in her just-released second book, she returns as magnificently as ever with a new heroine by the name of Fire, who suffers many of those weaknesses a hundred times over (she can't help but inspire lust and contempt in men, she often finds herself attacked and injured, and that time of the month is downright calamitous), but manages to wrest control of her own destiny despite them.

In a country barren and war-threatened, Fire is the last human "monster," the only remaining person with the ability to reach out and control the minds of those around her. Cursed apart by this ability and the stunning beauty that comes with it, Fire is unable to hide her nature, and is set apart to be loved or hated by all who behold her, and those who don't desire her body or her blood want her power. Her monstrousness inspires fear in everyone—including herself.

It was Katsa who wondered, "When a

monster stopped behaving like a monster, did it stop being a monster? Did it become something else?" This question remains a central theme in Cashore's work, and Fire does fight to throw off the label she's been given by her birth; indeed, she at times seems less monstrous than her supposedly more human counterparts, who loathe her but wish to make use of her powers in interrogating enemies of the realm, a task that Fire balks at.

Hated and adored, afraid of herself and of becoming the true monster that her father was, struggling with the balance between the rights of individual men and women and the greater good, Fire is an easy character to fall in love with, possessing the same vulnerable strength that so endeared readers to Cashore's first heroine. Throughout all of Fire's suffering and her triumphs, as she struggles with everything from a father's legacy to love and war to the fact that she is the last of her kind, Cashore crafts a masterful tale that tackles the big issues in life without turning depressing or preachy. Five stars all the way, and many wishes for a third book soon.

Locked Doors and Senior Privileges

Alicia Forbes

For those of you who have noticed, the doors now close after eight in our school, only leaving the front doors open so students can check in when late. It is an interesting policy that is clearly still in testing. Seniors who are about to receive privileges may end up getting the wrong end of the stick due to parking in the back and now having to walk to the front entrance. The school has been said to want to install a buzzer system in the back doors so that returning seniors can buzz the office and then the office can look through a video camera and see the senior and allow them in.

On the Locked Doors

Mrs. Chambers

When the district began planning the renovation project several years ago, many potential projects were identified in each of the three school buildings. As the Superintendent and Board of Education began looking at each of these areas, those items that directly impacted the safety and security of students became top priorities. Installing card readers in several of the exterior doors in the district was an important step towards insuring student safety. Potsdam is a very safe community, and we don't like to think that bad things can happen here. Unfortunately, the times in which we live demand a heightened attention to security. Now, once the school day is underway, we can monitor the comings and goings of all visitors because the main door is the only one in which visitors can enter.

Certainly this added security feature could also present an inconvenience for students and staff. For example, students who return to school after an appointment, or after enjoying senior privileges, will have to re-enter the building via the front door. Parking in the gym parking lot and walking along the sidewalk in front of the building will provide students the quickest means of entering the building. There has been discussion of installing a video camera with a buzzer system at one of the back entrances. At this time, it is not certain whether or not that will occur.

AFI Concert Review



Rukan Khondker

AFI with opening band, Gallows—Roseland Ballroom, NYC 11/13/09

I think that by now most people have caught on that when I'm not at school I'm usually somewhere, normally within a four-hundred mile radius of Potsdam, at a concert. I went to see AFI with Gallows on Friday, November 13th, and it was fabulous. Opening bands are usually never up my alley, but it's polite to watch, so that's what I do. Gallows is one of those bands. They're a "hardcore" (I refuse to call them punk) band from London, but the front man was more interested in orchestrating circle pits in the crowd than actually playing. Circle pits are basically grown men, and sometimes women, skipping around in circles and pushing each other around. Frank Carter of Gallows was repeatedly telling the crowd to spread out and "make the biggest circle pit New York has ever seen," which was obviously not going to happen, but they tried. Their music wasn't really my taste, but they knew how to play, and that's more than you can say for some other bands. The only song of theirs I was familiar with was their cover of Black Flag's "Nervous Breakdown."

AFI shows are always interesting

because there's that juxtaposition of older fans in attendance that would only be happy if they played solely songs from their 1995 album *Answer That and Stay Fashionable*, and the teenage fans that jumped on the bandwagon with their 2006 album *December Underground*, which featured "Miss Murder." They opened with "Torch Song," one of my personal favourites from the newest album *Crash Love*. (Go pick a copy up! It's fantastic.) Following that they played "Girls Not Grey," a hit from *Sing the Sorrow*. AFI has a knack for constructing setlists to make both types of fans that were described above happy, and I've got to commend them for that. There was a mix of rarities from early albums and fan favourites from the recent ones.

Frontman, Davey Havok is so fabulous that you can't help but love him. He wore a gold, sparkly suit and his signature rhinestone studded in-ear monitors. The rest of the band was dressed less flashy, but that didn't take away from the overall polished look and sound of the band. They knew what they were doing, and I suppose that's why they continue to sell out shows almost twenty years after their formation.

Dear Allie: Advice Column

Dear Allie,

I'm looking for a part-time job, but don't want to work in a fast food place. What are some good job options for a student?

Dear Unemployed,

Jobs are not easy to find with so many college students in the area, however, here are the five good and common jobs for high school students and good and bad aspects of the jobs you may have never considered before:

Landscaping: lawn mowing, raking leaves, or shoveling snow. People would rather pay a teen than a company or an actual landscaper.

Local grocery or clothes store: there are many grocery stores in Potsdam, including little stores on main and market street to offer jobs.

Tutor: the perfect job if you're considering being a teacher, or if you excel at one or more of your school subjects. Talk to the guidance counselors or librarian about the possibility.

Restaurant employee: be a server, bus-boy, cook, or a host at one of your favourite restaurants.

Movie theatre: work at the Roxy theatre. It's right in town and not a whole lot of work. Hours will always be predictable.

Dear Allie,

How do I know if someone likes me

that way?

Dear Unsure,

This is a frustrating advice topic, especially being a teen myself, but the only way you can really tell is if your gut says "YES." If you have a feeling that someone is crushing on you, but can't really put your finger on why, then your gut is probably right. There is no definite way to know exactly how someone feels for you, unless the person comes right out and tells you, but as you get older the signs become more apparent.

Dear Allie,

I'm new to this school this year and I'm having a hard time making new friends here. Is there any ways I can easily make new friends without seeming too desperate?

Dear Newbie,

Be confident without being pushy or cocky, try smiling and laughing, it's an easy way to look confident even when you're really not. Make good eye contact and smile at someone you think looks like someone you would get along with, it's a great conversation starter and it makes you look friendly and approachable. Another good tip is to join clubs or sports; it's the easiest and best way to meet new people and to have people around with some of the same interests as you.

Dear Allie,

I haven't been the best student in the past, and I want to show my friends and my parents I'm not dumb and show that I am more responsible than they think. How can I do this without putting too much pressure on myself?

Dear Failing,

I was the same way in the beginning of high school, and now I'm an honours student—believe me if I can do it, you can do it. But first things first, don't be putting pressure on yourself if it's not for you. If you want to prove anything, prove it for you. Impressing peers and family is just icing on the cake.

Here are some tips to improve your grades and motivation:

Ask questions in class, at least one every day, it shows you at least care and want to learn.

Don't be afraid to answer questions even if you're not sure if it's correct—E for effort.

Write notes! They definitely help especially for tests.

Do your homework and prioritize from most important to least important. Studying always sounds lame, but when you study you'll have more confidence taking a test and you won't be nearly as stressed.

Ask your teacher how you're doing every couple of weeks and ask them for tips on how to improve.

**Congratulations to Spencer Neaton and Joe Bartlett!
They both answered that the alien had been captured by
Mr. Roberts, and will each receive a free movie ticket.**

Features

Homeschool: The Great Debate

Hannah Gingrich

There is a war going on.

It is under the radar, and it is homeschooling vs. public schooling. From my experience, I've noticed that both parties do not think highly of each other, and as a result, many on each side are misinformed about the other.

Recently, I have become aware of the many misconceptions that have arisen about homeschooling. I have been asked countless times, "What was it like when you were homeschooled?" and "Why would you leave? I would give anything to be homeschooled. It sounds like heaven." I loved being taught at home, but I want to make it clear that I have the same feelings about public school. There are benefits and disadvantages to both forms of education, and I feel that certain things need to be addressed.

There appears to me much confusion about what homeschoolers do during the school day. The popular idea seems to be that they lie around, answering a few questions out of their textbooks, and then returning to the earlier practice of vegging. This is quite untrue: most homeschoolers have a strict schedule full of schoolwork. This usually entails an entire lesson of math a day, a section or two of history and science, plus questions, an essay, reading part of a book, and some sort of elective, such as foreign language, typing, or sewing. If this is not completed, the offending student is usually heckled and hassled by their teacher for the remainder of the day. Bear in mind that for a homeschooled student, a school day means all day: picture getting personally reminded by your math teacher that you haven't finished your homework—twelve times a day, every day, until you do it. It gets annoying.

There's also the issue of learning from a textbook. It's happened to the majority of us: we weren't in school that day, and we missed math class. The homework was on a new subject that they learned in class, and we had no clue what we were

supposed to be doing. So what did we do? We attempted to figure it out from the textbook. And what happened? We found it confusing, and we immediately asked the teacher about it and hoped that wouldn't happen again for awhile. This is what homeschoolers do every day, and not just for math. Of course Mom (or Dad) can help them, but it gets tedious to ask about every little thing. So, to an extent, homeschoolers learn to teach themselves.

Also, opportunities like choir and organized sports are significantly harder to come by. Naturally, they exist, but rather than having the school administration send out an announcement about Canta Sera auditions, homeschooling families have to scour the newspaper for advertisements concerning choirs and taekwon do classes among other things. This is not to say that kids educated at home do not have these opportunities, or that they aren't able to form social skills. I am merely pointing out that they are much harder to find and participate in.

Homeschoolers are also subject to copious amounts of ridicule and questioning that accompany their educational style. Many people do not believe that people who have not had formal training can adequately teach their children. This is completely false. People serious about educating their children themselves will have gone to college, and can certainly teach their children up to at least eighth grade.

I am not trying to say that homeschoolers have it much harder than public schooled kids do. I only felt that it was necessary to point out that homeschooling is not waking up at 10 am. (I had to be up by 8), or spending the entire day in pajamas. I would definitely pick public school as the more difficult of the two. However, so far I've had far more fun in my two and a quarter years of public school than I had in my four years of homeschooling. I thoroughly enjoy

spending time with my friends and being in a social setting.

I am also not trying to say that one of these is better than the other, in fact, I'm arguing for the opposite. I think the reason that there are two different ways to educate people is because one is right for some, and one is right for others. Some people are compatible with both. There are benefits and downsides to both. It seems like this should be obvious, but it appears that the administration of public schools and some radical homeschooling families do not see it.

If the freshmen all left to become homeschooled tomorrow, they would be fine socially; they've had eight years to make friends. But they'd soon find that they wouldn't be allowed to participate in school sports, and that they'd be put down by some people who have been misinformed about how homeschooling works. However, if they were having difficulty fitting in and learning at the public school's pace, then homeschooling would be a good choice for them.

At the risk of sounding like a medicine commercial, homeschooling is not for everyone. At home, there are many distractions that stop schoolwork from being completed. Some people can't handle sticking to their work ethic if their parents don't enforce it. They usually end up undereducated and, as a result, give the rest of the homeschooled population a bad rap.

In conclusion, what I'm trying to say is this: There is no one right way. Public school works. Homeschooling works. Neither one has a 100% success rate. There are always people who drop out of high school before graduating. I'd go so far as to say it's inevitable. But there is no doubt that brilliant minds come out of both. I would also encourage members of both parties to do their research about the other side. It would save me a lot of trouble.

Senior Spotlight

Kanika Misra

Kayla Maroney

Q: How many colleges have you or are you planning on applying to?

A: At least five.

Q: Is there anything in particular you want to major in or are you undecided at this point?

A: I've always wanted to be in the medical field. Either that, or something to do with Biology. I've always loved Biology.

Q: What school is your first choice?

What made you decide on it?

A: My first choice is UVM. I chose UVM because it had a great medical program. It's beautiful in Burlington and I know my way around there very well.

Q: Do you plan on doing any extracurricular activities when you get there such as sports or clubs?

A: If by extracurricular you mean joining a sorority, then yes. Also, I'll probably do swimming.

Q: What do you think you will miss most about high school?

A: I'll miss seeing certain people everyday that I may never see again. I'll also miss having everyone know who I am and knowing everything about everyone. I don't really know what else to say, I could keep listing things, but for obvious lack of space, I'll leave it at that.

Tess Curry

Q: How many colleges have you or are you planning on applying to?

A: One college early decision, and four back up schools

Q: Is there anything in particular you want to major in or are you undecided at this point?

A: Undecided for the most part, something along the lines of animal science or mathematics. I would also like to minor in music.

Q: What school is your first choice?

What made you decide on it?

A: William and Mary. This school has run through my family, from my uncles and aunts to both my brothers and cousin. Also, the campus is beautiful and located directly next to Colonial Williamsburg.

Q: Do you plan on doing any extracurricular activities when you get there such as sports or clubs?

A: Because sports at William & Mary are D1 and would take up most of my educational time, I am planning on playing club soccer. I also am planning on being involved with the music programs, focusing on flute and voice.

Q: What do you think you will miss most about high school?

A: I will miss being able to be involved in three varsity sports, all the music extracurricular activities, and still being in advanced courses. But most of all, I will miss my friends since I will be going so far away.

Corina Simonelli

Q: How many colleges have you or are you planning on applying to?

A: Currently around eight.

Q: Is there anything in particular you want to major in or are you undecided at this point?

A: Right now I'm most interested in international relations and political science, possibly with a pre-law concentration.

Q: What school is your first choice?

What made you decide on it?

A: I don't have a first choice as of right now. I especially like Colgate, Cornell, and Boston College because of their academic merit and campuses.

Q: Do you plan on doing any extracurricular activities when you get there such as sports or clubs?

A: Yes, I plan on doing intramural sports such as tennis and possibly softball. Also, I would like to participate in political activist groups and, if time grants, whatever else sounds cool. Oh, and definitely ultimate Frisbee!

Q: What do you think you will miss most about high school?

A: I'll miss the close-knit community where I have teachers and friends always looking out for me. I'll also miss wearing orange and blue, dominating the competition, and being a stoner.

TJ Rimmer

Q: How many colleges have you or are you planning on applying to?

A: Six.

Q: Is there anything in particular you want to major in or are you undecided at this point?

A: I'm going for chemical engineering.

Q: What school is your first choice?

What made you decide on it?

A: I actually haven't decided yet, and I probably won't decide until I get accepted

Q: Do you plan on doing any extracurricular activities when you get there such as sports or clubs?

A: I'll probably play some club soccer, but other than that the curriculum for chemical engineering is going to be wicked intense so I probably won't have a ton of time

Q: What do you think you will miss most about high school?

A: I'm not sure... at first I'm sure it will be the fact that I won't see all my friends but I know that won't last too long.

John Bresett

Q: How many colleges have you or are you planning on applying to?

A: So far, seven.

Q: Is there anything in particular you want to major in or are you undecided at this point?

A: Well, I'm going undecided for a bit. I'm leaning towards something like teaching, psychology, or being a cop.

Q: What school is your first choice?

What made you decide on it?

A: Oswego and Potsdam were my first choices. I was interested in both because they have my majors and they have some of sports I would like to try out for and things like that. They are both division three.

Q: Do you plan on doing any extracurricular activities when you get there such as sports or clubs?

A: I'd like to maybe run in college just to stay in shape and things. Or, I'd like to wrestle or run XC in college. All the colleges I've applied to have at least a XC team so I think it would be cool to run at least in college—even just to stay in shape.

Q: What do you think you will miss most about high school?

A: I will miss friends I've become close to, sports, and some classes that I've had. I've had an overall good time in high school and had some good memories!

What's in a Hat?

Mike Burns

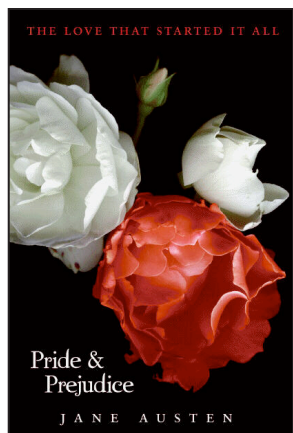
Denizens of Hatville, hear me! That which makes you what you are is being slowly eroded. That's right, self-identity is a thing of the past. Why should we allow personal expression anyway? Look where it got people... freedom, harmony, and intelligent communication. But, friends, this is not for today's youth. As we are all aware, there exists a better system; a system in which you can think whatever you want, as long as it's acceptable, and you can have your car be any colour, as long as it's black.

Socialism is the system of the future, even in education. We must all CONFORM. There is danger in excelling past mediocrity and being unique. On this, the experts all agree (some notables include Josef Stalin, Pol Pot, and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad). Shakespeare might pose the question, "What's in a hat?" and the answer stands in clear view. Your head, epicenter of thought and the genesis of new ideas, retention of information, and ability to reason. Therefore, I make the following appeal to that reason: giving up any form of personal expression is a step in the direction of being controlled.

Enjoy the revolution, sheeple. Big Brother is always watching.

Twilight: A Rant

Brenna Rice



I walked into Borders the other day and my soul died a little. Shirts with Edward Cullen's angry face adorning the front, games with the *Twilight* trio's dead stares, and book upon book holding the dreaded movie-tie-in covers were everywhere. The worst of the worst? The books Bella reads in the series (I know what you're thinking, *She can read?* But the answer is yes, and she occupies her time with such classics as *Romeo and Juliet* and *Wuther-*

ing Heights) have suffered makeovers—much to my chagrin, they've been given *Twilightish* covers.

Twilight has taken over the world.

It's easy to get sucked into the world of vampire romance—I became obsessed when I first read the books, devouring them in two days and spending the following two weeks scouring the internet for interviews with Robert Pattinson. But the day eventually comes when you're re-reading the series (for the five thousandth time) and you say to yourself, "Man, this is awful."

Let me share with you just a few of the many vomit-inducing *Twilight* quotes: "He was both dazzling and dazzled." "He lay perfectly still in the grass, his shirt open over his sculpted, incandescent chest, his scintillating arms bare."

Scintillating. Well, someone used a thesaurus.

"He leaned in slowly, the beeping noise accelerated wildly before his lips even touched me. But when they did, though with the most gentle of pressure, the beeping stopped altogether."

Too bad it didn't actually stop altogether—perhaps then we wouldn't have this series to see absolutely everywhere.

High School Horrors

Rosa Desmond



Meet the New Leuth

Bonnie Smyth

Mr. Nick Leuthauser is a new teacher at the High School this year. He teaches Industrial Arts courses. Before he accepted the job, Mr. Leuthauser was completing his master's degree in Oswego. He was also teaching a drafting course while a grad assistant of technology. The courses he teaches include Design Drawing for Production, Principles of Engineering, Energy Systems, and Residential Structures. Mr. Leuthauser says he likes all the courses he teaches and each is very

unique. He also says Design Drawing for Production is "more hands on paper and design," while Residential Structures is "more hands on." For the future, Mr. Leuthauser would like to incorporate a few more courses into the Industrial Arts curriculum. He would like to include wood working or a metals course and a small engine repair course. So far Mr. Leuthauser says he has been having fun, but is very busy. He can not find anything he does not like about teaching yet.

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Sports

Girls Soccer Wins

Kanika Misra

The Potsdam girl's soccer team clenched the Class B Section X title for the third year in a row, previously defeating both Gouverneur and Canton in the championship. This year the girls were able to take on both of these old competitors while defending their champion title. They first took on the Gouverneur Lady Wildcats, the number four seed. By halftime the 'Stoners were able to clench a 2-0 lead and there was no turning back from there. Continuing their strong first half, the girls came out and scored four more goals to advance to the final game against the Canton Bears.

For the second year in a row, Potsdam faced Canton in the championship match. A highly anticipated game with both teams out for revenge proved to be a good one. Potsdam had defeated Canton early in the season but Canton was able to retaliate with a win on their home field. The Lady Bears took the early lead in the first three minutes of the game, but Potsdam was able to answer back with a goal from Ali Fayette. At halftime, the score remained a draw at 1-1. Both teams played hard the second half to win that title. As the minutes ticked down, the Potsdam girls finished the game. A scramble in front of the net and a rebound from a shot by Lia Davis led to a goal off of the head of senior captain, Tess Curry. The Potsdam Lady Sandstoners defended their title and defeated Canton... once again.

Ballin'

Corina Simonelli

The winter season had started out strongly for the Stoners most ballin' teams. The boys varsity basketball team has emerged victorious in all their brawls so far. After finishing last season with seventeen wins, they have a lot to work towards.

"We're returning all five starters and had a lot of gym time over the summer," said third year starter junior Zac Adams "Our goal is to win the state championship" "We better win it all," agreed teammate junior John Coleman

After taking the Section 10 championship last year, the girls varsity team has similar sentiments.

"A lot of people think we are going to do very well this season," said senior Kanika Misra "We have potential to go even farther than last year," junior and second year starter Tess Hazen added.

My Sister Went to Harvard and Now She's a Hooker

George Morris

And no, I'm not talking about prostitution! I'm talking about the great, the dazzling, the stupendous, the magnificent, and the outrageous new, yet classical, trend that is sweeping the nation. Ladies and gentleman I am talking about the future of American (and hopefully Potsdamian) sports as we know it. Of course I am referring to Rugby, the real (wo)man's sport.

I recently travelled with my family to see my sister partake in this grand battle of titans. From the second they started playing I was captivated by the majestic movements of the players and the awe inspiring level of physical fitness required. They raged against each other all over the field using moves and techniques that a football player, or any other sportsman for that matter, could only marvel at. Immediately after the conclusion of the game, which my sister's team won 237 to 0, I knew it was my duty to spread the wonders of God, a synonym for Rugby, to the rest of fair Potsdam.

Now as a fellow north country man I am painfully aware of how little news, with the notable exception of the *PCS Press*, we really get up here. So I understand if some of our readers don't know much about the Glorious Sport. Throughout the course of this article I hope to rectify that by summarizing all I know about the Sport of Kings in excruciating detail. Following the suit, I believe the first order of business should be explaining the rules. The rules are perhaps the greatest part of Rugby and they all follow one basic principle: Win. To this effect there are a few rules. First, the

Player Spotlight: Rachel Johnson

Kanika Misra

Player: Rachel Johnson

Team: Girl's Varsity Basketball

Grade: 11

Position: Forward

Q: When did you first start playing basketball?

Rachel: I've played ever since third grade.

Q: What got you into the sport or why did you want to begin playing?

Rachel: My brother and sister got me into it since they played too.

Q: What do you look forward to most during basketball season?

Rachel: The home games definitely. They are the most exciting and everyone gets really pumped. It's a really good feeling to win the big games on that court.

Q: Do you want to or think you will continue to play after high school?

Rachel: I don't think I will, but it would be pretty cool.



Megan Charleston photo

Boys Soccer Wins

Kanika Misra

The second-seeded Potsdam boy's soccer team faced the first-seeded Ogdensburg Blue Devils. Having been previously defeated by the Devils twice over the regular season, the boys came out for vengeance. At the start of the first half, the boys came out strong as Scott Bartenstein knocked the first goal into the back of the net. Potsdam was able to keep their lead throughout the rest of the half. Unfortunately, OFA answered Potsdam's first half goal at the start of the second half. The regulation time ended at a 1-1 tie, as did the two overtime extensions. The Class B champions would be determined by a shootout. Out of the five shooters, both Seth Adams and TJ Rimmer were able to seal their win with their penalty kick goals. Congratulations to both 'Stoner soccer teams on their great seasons!

ball must be brought to the opponent's Tryline (endzone) to score. Second, after one team scores the other team then kicks the ball back to the team that just scored. Third, the ball cannot be thrown backwards. Fourth, the field extends indefinitely to the sides. Fifth, you don't talk about Fight Club (Rugby). Finally, there are no other rules.

The fact that there are very few rules and, by extension, limits on the game have led a select few ignorant persons to believe that Rugby is nothing more a backyard brawl. Before I refute that misguided belief I will say this, Rugby is not for the faint of heart. In my sister's game they had a total of 88 players between the two teams rushed to the hospital due to severe injuries. Luckily, the local hospital was informed of the upcoming game and reserved their intensive care unit for the Rugby players—but I digress. Rugby is a fair and equitable sport with no downside. It teaches players the ideas of honour, justice, hope, unnecessary roughness, and terrorism. Each and everyone one of those is essential to being a good American and, by extension, a good human being. Thus I plan to propose, and hope the rest of the student body will support me, that Rugby be immediately added to our roster of sports here at Potsdam. As I am sure that our esteemed and always well informed Board of Education will see the merits behind such a proposal and instantly throw their full support behind it. So I can safely say that we can expect the new team in no more than two weeks time. I hope to see you all on the Rugby field.

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Obama Wins Nobel Peace Prize



Associated Press photo

Frances Clark

President Barack Obama received the Nobel Peace Prize on October 9, 2009. However, with the prize has come much controversy over whether or not Obama deserved it. Critics of the decision believe it was too political and that Obama has not accomplished enough to deserve the highly esteemed award. Others, however, support the decision for Obama's "extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples," as put by Norwegian Nobel Committee's chairman, Thorbjorn Jagland. Obama was nominated for the award just two weeks after his inauguration, leading many to question the basis for his qualification for the prize. The months leading up to the presentation of the award yielded no ground-breaking quest for peace on Nobel Prize winning scale. People remembered previous winners such as Nelson Mandela, Albert Schweitzer, Martin Luther King, and Mikhail S. Gor-

batchev and how they toiled with complex problems, enduring hardships all the while, for the simple concept of peace. To some, Obama's accomplishments did not measure up to those of these great men.

According, however, that is not to say Obama has not made strides for peace. He reversed Bush's policy of installing anti-ballistic missile defenses in Poland and the Czech-Republic, thereby making the U.S. appear less militarily aggressive and improving relations with Russia. He brought the Israelis and the Palestinians back to the negotiating table. He has improved U.S. foreign relations by portraying the United States as a nation that is willing to consult and compromise with other nations, restoring the U.S.'s good reputation—a reputation that had been severely damaged by the last administration.

If the prize was not given solely in recognition of Obama's accomplishments, what could be the other reasons? Some

believe it was presented to Obama in part to insult Bush and his administration. Many think it was meant to call Obama to action, to urge him to turn the ideals he presents in his rousing speeches into realities. Some who believe these alternate motives for the decision are upset and feel that the Nobel Prize has been devalued, since it has always been seen as a symbol of hard, long work and sacrifice for peace.

Still, many people are satisfied with the decision to award Obama the prize. Furthermore, he has handled the surprising and slightly awkward circumstance very well. It has been announced that the 1.4 million dollars that accompanies the prize will be given to charity. He accepted the prize with humility.

He stated, "I do not view it as a recognition of my own accomplishments, but rather as an affirmation of American leadership on behalf of aspirations held by people in all nations."

President Obama Wants to Extend School Year



Hannah Gingrich

Yang photo

Because foreign children have consistently outscored American children on academic tests, President Obama has suggested that the United States modify the school year to include more time in the classroom.

The American school calendar was designed to allow children to assist with the farm chores in the evenings and during the summer. Today, Obama argues, the economy is not based on agriculture. Therefore, students should be able to remain in school for longer hours.

"We can no longer afford an academic calendar designed when America was a nation of farmers who needed their children at home plowing the land at the end of each day," Obama said.

"Despite resources that are unmatched anywhere in the world, we have let our grades slip, our schools crumble, our teacher quality fall short, and other nations outpace us. In 8th grade math, we've fallen to 9th place. Singapore's

middle-schoolers outperform ours three to one. Just a third of our 13- and 14-year olds can read as well as they should."

According to Obama, American children need to spend more time in school if they're going to have any chance of beating out foreign children for jobs and paychecks.

Education Secretary Arne Duncan says that because children in other countries spend more time in school, American children should do the same. According to Duncan, students go to school for 25 to 30 percent longer in foreign countries. However, although kids in other countries have more school days, they do not necessarily spend more time in school.

Libby Quaid, an AP Education writer, states that American children have 1,146 instructional hours per year. Intriguingly, kids in the Asian countries notorious for outperforming the U.S. on math and science tests have less. In Singapore, they have 903; Taiwan has 1,050, Japan 1,005

and Hong Kong 1,013. However, Taiwan, Japan, and Hong Kong all have school years 10 to 21 days longer than the U.S.

Obama proposes a variety of solutions to what he believes is a serious problem: One, to lengthen the school day, or two, to extend the school year.

"I know longer school days and school years are not wildly popular ideas," he said. "Not in my family, and probably not in yours. But the challenges of a new century demand more time in the classroom. If they can do that in South Korea, we can do it right here in the United States of America," said the president.

He also suggests that better teachers should receive more pay, declaring that, "It is time to start rewarding good teachers and stop making excuses for bad ones." Obama believes that rewarding good teachers with more money will make a difference. This proposal is adamantly opposed by teachers unions.

In this issue:

- Restaurant reviews
- Movie reviews
- Homework policy
- Flex
- Teacher interview
- Homecoming game
- Pep rally
- Album review

Cold Trip to Cranberry Lake

Brenna Rice

On September 30th, advanced photo classes and biology classes were able to go to Cranberry Lake for a day of science and art. Despite the awful weather- snow, rain, and forty degree temperatures, those who attended generally had a good time (or had more fun than in classes). In between huddling for warmth and hiding beneath

umbrellas, science groups traveled to different presentations to learn about such things as water quality. Photo students took a hike through the woods and took pictures. The day came to a close with a lunch on the beach. Overall a successful and educating (albeit freezing) day.



Allott photo

Homecoming Court

- King:** Logan Atkinson
- Queen:** Amanda Smith
- Prince:** John Coleman
- Princess:** Cassie Grace
- Duke:** Sam Miller
- Duchess:** Keely Rice
- Count:** Dustin LaValley
- Countess:** Gina LaMastro



VanElls photo

Senior Superlatives

- Best Buddies (girls):** Beth Sheperd and Ashley Rose
- Best Buddies (guys):** Taylor Salisbury and TC Hamberger
- Best All Around:** Tess Curry and Paul Buchanan
- Best Dressed:** Justine Nichols and Andrew Matott
- Most Likely To Succeed:** Maddie Ball and Ben Stone
- Most Artistic:** Danielle Foisy and Casey Dillon
- Most Athletic:** Olivia Lee and Ryan Mousaw
- Nicest Eyes:** Alycia Matott and Matt Smith
- Tallest Guy/Shortest Girl:** AJ Jandreau and Courtney Kilgore
- Class Clowns:** Lisa Lyman and Kris Weems
- Teacher's Pet:** Crystal Myler and Mike Ellis

- Most Likely to Get Lost in a Room with One Exit:** Chelsie Baxter and L.J. Kelly
- Most Changed Since Ninth Grade:** Julia Everson and Austin Belleau
- Most School Spirit:** Mara Jerome and Greg Burkum
- Most Musical:** Kate Waters and Evan Drummater
- Most Likely to Be Seen at a Party:** Natalie Carranza and Rishi Thakur
- Class Flirts:** Kayla Maroney and Tyler Adams
- Friendliest:** Megan Burke and Seth Hinman
- Most Unpredictable:** Kaitlin Murray and Andy Rorick
- Most Memorable:** Liz Laraby and John Bresett
- Most Outgoing:** Krisha Rice and Chris Reece
- Most Shy:** Courtney Smith and Tyler Willmart

Spirit Week Success



Rice photo

Potsdam Stoners once again showed their infallible spirit. The 2009 Spirit Week featured togas, twins, rednecks, hippies, and of course, orange and blue! The week culminated with a win for the football team and a great homecoming dance.

Opinion

Homework Policy: Fixing the Broken or a Broken Fix?

Benjamin Stone

Has anyone noticed a change in homework grading? Do you find that homework is counted differently, if at all by teachers this year? Along with the trend of change at Potsdam High School in recent years, the School Board has drafted a new Homework and Grading Policy, Draft Policy 4710, to be put into effect next year. The school has been experimenting with its implementation this year, however, and its use has affected many classes that I, as well as the rest of the student body, are taking. For this reason, I felt it necessary to critically review the Policy, to evaluate its benefits and pitfalls from the perspective of a student. I will do my best to separate fact from speculation, truth from hearsay, to find whether Draft Policy 4710 truly lives up to its goal to be "consistent, accurate, fair, meaningful, research-based, connected to school district policies, and tied to the NYS Learning Standards." I will refer extensively back to these goals in the evaluation. All quotes are from the Policy, unless otherwise stated.

The distinction between formative and summative assignments is a key part of the Policy. A formative assignment is "...designed to provide direction for improvement and/or adjustment to a program for individual students or for a whole class..." In more familiar terms, it is an assignment designed to teach or reinforce a concept, not to test knowledge. A summative assignment is "...designed to provide information to be used in making judgments about a student's achievement at the end of a sequence of instruction..." More simply, an assignment testing knowledge of an area previously taught. The policy states that summative assignments are to be graded, while formative assignments should not.

This may seem boring and tedious, but the distinction between formative and summative assignments is important. It lives up to the "fair, meaningful, research-based" aspect of the Policy's goal. But what if the distinction cannot be made, what if the distinction is unclear? In the case of a math class the distinction may be very clear, when students are either learning a new concept or being tested on what they have learned. What about an English or Social Studies class where the knowledge is cumulative and conceptual, not clear-cut and conclusive? Anyone who has taken an English class can easily see that in most cases there is little difference between learning and testing, between developing a concept and test-

ing that concept. One needs only to ask an English teacher to see this. (Curious, was a PCS English teacher on the Policy's committee?) Learning is achieved through assessment, so where does one draw the line between graded and ungraded assignments? Before the Policy, that responsibility remained with the teacher, who is trained to make that distinction. Now it is forced, implemented by an outside force unaware of the workings of each individual classroom and therefore much less fit to judge every classroom's needs.

"There are more pitfalls in the Policy than only its failure to meet the needs of all subject areas, it also falls far short of its lofty goal to be 'fair.'"

There are more pitfalls in the Policy than only its failure to meet the needs of all subject areas, it also falls far short of its lofty goal to be "fair." *Part H* of the Grading section of the Policy states: "Work submitted late will generally not receive a reduced score. Teachers will provide support for the learner." It then elaborates this in a later section dedicated to it. In brief it states that missing, incomplete, or late assignments will be deemed "Incomplete" and after the teacher "communicates" with the student and a "reasonable timeframe" is established for the work to be completed, if the student submits the work late, the work is to be evaluated "without academic penalty for lateness." When I first read this section I had to do a double take. Did I read this section correctly? A student can fail to be responsible, not turn in work, and be expected to be babied by the teacher to get it done, and after turning it in after the due date could receive full credit? I fail to see the logic, the fairness in this. It is most certainly not fair that a student who completes his work on time, showing responsibility and knowledge of the subject matter contained in the assignment would receive the same, or potentially lower grade than someone who slacks off, shows no responsibility, and does not demonstrate adequate knowledge of the subject matter of the assignment. Then that irresponsible student would not

even have to accept responsibility for his underachievement, rather can place that responsibility on the teacher to baby him along. In this way, the Policy fails to be "accurate" as well, seeing that it cannot accurately reflect the underachievement of a slothful student who elects not to complete homework as assigned. This part of the Policy contradicts its own *Part A* of the Grading section, "Grades will reflect academic achievement." So much for the "consistent" goal, too.

The Policy's lack of accuracy does not end there. *Part R* of Grading: "Zeros will not be used in grade determination as a punishment or when evidence is missing." A very open-ended statement, *Part R* is defined later in the policy: "Assign a failing grade of 50% (applicable to grades 4-12) if the assignment is not submitted in the established timeframe." Again, I was dumbfounded. Credit for no work? Something for nothing? This is like going into a bank, opening an account, and being able to withdraw \$50 without ever making a deposit! First, is this "fair?" No, it is not fair to those who complete the assignment and receive credit for doing it (something for something), most especially those who struggle with the assignment and after completing it score less than 50%. Second, is it "accurate?" Again, no. If grades are supposed to "reflect academic achievement," how is it possible for someone to be given 50% when he has shown an achievement of 0%? It does not accurately reflect a student's achievement to award credit when nothing has been achieved. I can understand the motive behind not giving a zero grade, that students ought to be helped to learn, not punished by education, but by the Policy's own specifications grades must reflect achievement. If zeros cannot be given for zero achievement, the Policy must either contradict itself, or fail to be "...consistent, accurate, [and] fair..."

As of now, the Policy that strives to be "consistent, accurate, fair, meaningful, research-based, connected to school district policies, and tied to the NYS Learning Standards," is not consistent, accurate, or fair. I will not contest the Policy has great meaning. For many PCS teachers it has great meaning; it means completely undoing decades of tried, tested, and true teaching strategies yielding successful, productive, and wholesome results and instead substituting this new educational doctrine imposed upon them. As for "research-based," that is also up for contention.

I was fortunate enough to gain access to the book on which the Policy was based, *A Repair Kit for Grading: 15 Fixes for*

Broken Grades by Ken O'Connor, published in 2007. Now, for the Policy to be "research-based" it ought to be based on research, as in a study or studies conducted by one or more researchers on the subject of grading. Sadly, this is not the case and yet again, the Policy falls far short of its intention. Ken O'Connor is not a researcher, he is an educational consultant who works as a presenter for such companies as the American Entertainment International Speakers Bureau. His book is not research. Research is (according to the *Random House Dictionary*) "diligent and systematic inquiry or investigation into a subject in order to discover or revise facts, theories, applications, etc." After reading as little as a few of *A Repair Kit for Grading's* 125 pages, one realizes that it does not at all fit that definition. Surely, O'Connor's book is based upon research, though much of the research on which his book is based dates from a decade ago or more. He has plenty of parenthetical references and a lengthy list of works cited, but his book does not present that research objectively and diligently, let alone take into account the outdated nature of his sources. He even uses his own teaching experience and anecdotal references from other teachers he knows to support his points, and does so without the credible citation needed to make such points even remotely valid. He draws conclusions from the other titles he cites, thus going beyond the point of research and into the realm of education politics. His book does not show what is wrong so that a district might fix it, his book tells a district how to fix a problem it may or may not have, placing his subjective opinion above the objective facts. Therefore, unless the Board of Education were to go a step further and actually read the outdated references O'Connor cites and draw their own conclusions based upon research, the Policy cannot be called "research-based."

I must be fair. There are many very positive, logical elements of Draft Policy 4710, and I would be saddened if such positive aspects were to be thought of as negative simply because they are part of the Policy.

Weighted averages for advanced, difficult classes is mandated by the policy, as well as provisions for transparency in grading, regular informing of parents, and a more strictly enforced testing schedule. These things and others are all very strong, logical points put forth by the Policy, which are supported not only by the opinions of Ken O'Connor, but also by many other credible researchers in the field. Yet the fact that the Policy contains these things cannot overshadow its grave inadequacy to meet even its own goals, its severe flaws that prevent it from making the positive change deemed necessary by its creation. Its creation alone begs the question: "Why?"

"I have my doubts as to if grades really are 'broke' at Potsdam Central School."

Why was this policy created? Were a committee, time, resources, and a book on fixing grades really necessary? Most have heard the expression "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." I have my doubts as to if grades really are 'broke' at Potsdam Central School. Public information from a February Board of Education meeting states that PCS Students score the highest in the region on the SAT and more Potsdam students challenge AP exams than any other school in the area. My own class, the class of 2010 has 14 students with an average above 95 and the class of 2011 has even more. According to the New York State Education Department, PCS dropout rates are much lower than the average, PCS is in good standing in and has met or exceeded all State requirements for education, and PCS students score well above the majority of New York public schools in all areas of standardized testing. If New

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Mast Head

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Brenna Rice

Opinion Editor:
Brenna Rice

Features and News Editor:
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Opinion

Broken Fix continued from pg. 3

York has some of the highest educational standards in the country and PCS meets or exceeds them in every way, what is there to fix? If grading were truly broken, and students' academic achievement was being negatively affected by inaccurate measure, how could one explain PCS's superior achievement on standardized tests?

“Not only does the new Homework and Grading Policy not live up to its own goals, its very purpose is negligible, if not completely false...”

Of course, I am neither an expert nor a researcher. I do not even attempt to pretend I am an expert or researcher. My opinion is not to be credited as research, such as with the opinion of Ken O'Connor. To me, and I feel to many others as well, this Policy is equivalent to performing surgery on an ailment treatable by antibiotic, like tearing the building down to repair a dead wall outlet. Not only does the new Homework and Grading Policy not live up to its own goals, its very purpose is negligible, if not completely false; its sole source of research-basis is not actually valid research. The students, faculty, and parents of the Potsdam Central School district must ask themselves: “Is A Repair Kit needed for Grading at PCS?” Perhaps the Board of Education ought to reconsider that question as well, could even conduct research to find out the answer.

Mrs. Chambers on the Homework Policy

Brenna Rice



Yang photo

PCS Press recently sat down with Mrs. Chambers to discuss the homework policy. Here is an outline of how it will affect students.

PCS Press: Why was the homework policy created?

Mrs. Chambers: Well, actually there had always been a homework and grading board policy, and all board policies are regularly reviewed. Last year a group of board members and the Superintendent attended a conference with a very dynamic speaker who really had some different ideas about grading and making grades more authentic. So the idea came back that there would be a committee that would review the current policy and see if it was aligned with what current research was saying.
PCS Press: Prior to the creation of this policy, how was homework treated?
MC: I think homework was treated in a lot of different ways, which was one of the reasons the policy came about, trying to set some parameters and have some consistency- between buildings, between grade levels, between subject areas. Some teachers gave lots of homework, some gave no homework or little homework, some graded it, some didn't,

some gave a check mark a check plus and some gave a number grade. So, it was different in just about every classroom.
PCS Press: How will the homework policy affect students?

MC: Well, I think it's going to affect students in a lot of ways, some very good and some difficult. And I've actually had a few students speak to me about that. One of the big changes will be that homework, which really is practice, will not necessarily receive a grade. For some students, this will be very good because it will be a chance to correct their mistakes, to actually learn the material before the actual assessment, which would be a quiz or a test. There are some students that are very worried about that because they are used to getting good grades on homework, and they are afraid that if the grades are based only on the assessment, their grades will go down. There are many aspects to the policy, for example, the policy suggests that a student would not receive a zero for the assignment is missing or late. Instead, they would get an 'I' for insufficient evidence or incomplete and the teacher will work with that student to make sure the work gets done. Sometimes I find that

students take the zero as an easy way out- 'Just give me the zero.' This way, we're really holding students accountable. And I'm not sure how that is exactly going to work yet. Teachers have a lot of questions, 'How will we find the time to do that? Can we keep students after school?' But, I think it's got a lot of potential to hold students accountable.
PCS Press: How were students, parents, and teachers represented on the committee?
MC: There were, I believe, two parents. There were two teachers, two administrators, a board member, and two students on the committee.
PCS Press: What was the time span in which the policy was drafted?
MC: I think the committee met for the first time in January, 2009 and the draft policy was finished by the end of the school year and was approved by the BOE in July. So the policy has been passed, though there was an understanding that there would be an implementation phase, that there was a lot of learning to be done, a lot of research to be shared, a lot of details to be figured out this year. So although the policy is in place, full enforcement of the policy will not begin until next September.

cess with completing the assignment. So I'm thinking it may be things like holding a kid after school. I just read about a high school that actually had Saturday morning school, for students who go way beyond the deadline, and still haven't done their work. Parents have to buy in of course, but they could come in on a Saturday, have a tutor there, and get the assignment done. Eventually though there probably will be a deadline, because school comes to an end each quarter and we can't have these incompletes hanging out forever, but I don't think you'll see the typical ten points off a day that's been pretty common in the past.
PCS Press: “Grades are to be assigned based on students' performance on preset standards, not on students' achievement compared to other students. What are the preset standards and how were they crafted?”
MC: The standards would come from the New York State learning standards. And I think what this aspect of the policy is really talking about is letting students know upfront what they need to do to get a good grade. Most students are very familiar with rubrics- it's something that's become very popular in the last ten years. And that's what we're talking about with preset standards, so it's no longer a mystery to students what you have to do to get a certain grade, but we're going to set that standard out in advance so everybody knows what they need to do to earn the grade.
PCS Press: How will tests count versus homework?

C: Well, again, it's the difference between formative assessment and summative assessment. Someone told me a great way to know the difference: When the cook tastes the soup, that's formative assessment, and when they're serving it to their customers, that's summative assessment. So the intent of the policy is that when the student is still learning, that we wouldn't necessarily grade those assignments, because it's still practice. But when it gets to that final assessment, whether essay, project, or exam, then that would be considered summative and the teacher would grade it.

“Grade fog is a term thrown around; when you have too many extra-credit things added on, it's hard to know what that student really knows about the subject.”

PCS Press: How have behaviour and homework grades been separated?

MC: That's one of the details we haven't completely figured out yet, but the policy suggests that the grades should reflect what the students know and can do, and things like being late for class or cheating on an assignment shouldn't affect the grade; we should handle that behaviour separately. I was an elementary principal, and the report cards there are very descriptive. Students receive one grade for achievement and there's a second area where teachers can report on students' behaviour, and it's very accurate information. High school and middle school report cards melt all that into one grade, and it's very hard for those you're reporting that grade to, like a teacher or a college. A student who has high academics, but poor citizenship, might have the same grade as a model student who really has a hard time on his tests. So this is an attempt so separate the two.
PCS Press: How has extra credit been changed?

MC: The policy suggests that extra credit is allowed, but it should be for the demonstration of additional learning. Teachers do crazy things some time to motivate students, and students can earn credit sometimes for things that aren't related to learning- for dressing a certain way, for going to an activity outside of school. And again, that distorts what the grade really is. Grade fog is a term thrown around; when you have too many extra-credit things added on, it's hard to know what that student really knows about the subject. So I don't think you'll see extra credit go away; I've heard teachers talk about extra credit for enrichment- if the student is going above and beyond learning, then there may be some extra credit there, but it won't be for some of these more random things that teachers sometimes do.
PCS Press: How will late homework be treated?

MC: The policy suggests that students should do homework and turn it in on time. The first question is whether we will grade the homework at all. If the homework is designed as practice, if it's called formative assessment or assessment while the student is learning, it wouldn't necessarily be graded. If it's summative, that is something that's going to demonstrate learning, than it would be graded. And rather than just taking off points, which is just addressing a behaviour, the policy suggests that we deal with the behaviour separately and find a way to help that child have suc-

“The policy suggests that students should do homework and to turn it in on time. The first question is whether we will grade the homework at all.”

PCS Press: Regarding the testing schedule to be implemented in middle and secondary schools, will it be effective? It's largely ignored by teachers in the high school.

MC: The schedule has been in place for a long time. It's my job to enforce that, and I only know that there have been violations of it if students tell me, so I guess I would really rely on the students to help police that and let me know if teachers are violating that. It's very hard to keep track of every classroom. I think students need to let me know, because the intent there was to really give students time to prepare when they have an important test coming up, and when we give them three or four tests on the same day, students just can't adequately prepare.
PCS Press: How does the new policy fit into New York State education standards?
MC: I think it actually fits very well, because the grades will more accurately reflect what students are able to do and what they know. They will be perfectly aligned with the standards, whereas now it's hard to tell- when a student gets a ninety in the course, does that mean they know ninety percent of the standards for that class, or are these other things all factored in?
PCS Press: What does the statement “homework should be given only when it is needed and to whom it is needed” mean?
MC: Well if we go back to that idea of practice, there are students who probably knew the content before they walked in the room, and there are students who could probably practice it a few times and master it, and there are students who need lots and lots of practice. So

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Features

Movie Reviews: Spaghetti, Wild Things, and White Collar Criminals

Brenna Rice

The Informant!



Mark Whitacre is sitting in a comfortable office, making hundreds of thousands of dollars developing lysine when he decides to tattle to the FBI about his bosses' illegal price-fixing. This comedy biopic details his journey from informant to small-time Madoff. Matt Damon (*Good Will Hunting*, the *Bourne* series) dons a stache and thirty extra pounds to play the role of Whitacre- someone constantly making you think is this guy real? He is either the most genuine and kind man on the face of the planet, or the most insane. Through legal battles of the first half, he seems to be the former- just wants to help the government out, stop corruption. And he's adopted, so how could the guy be bad? By the second half you've found out that not only has he lied about his adoption, but he's lied about everything else- including millions (two, or five... maybe nine, perhaps eleven with interest- Whitacre isn't too sure) of dollars in fraud.

Damon is incredible playing Whitacre, who calls himself "0014" because he is twice as smart as 007. Damon delves entirely into the role, treating each and every line as a feast to say. Through the random voice-overs discussing the stripes and polar bears ("Polar bears cover their noses before they pounce on a seal. How do polar bears know their noses are black? Did they look in the water one day, see their reflection and say, 'Man, I'd be invisible if it wasn't for that thing.'") his character seems completely harmless- how could anyone bad think such sporadic, simple things? He just wants to help out, do the right thing and be a biochemist. Through his strong performance as a loving father and husband, he seems noble and courageous. Through the entire movie, he seems the victim. First his company uses him-- disgraceful, he just wanted to be a scientist! Then the government has abused him for facts and tossed him to the dogs-- how could they? Forged checks come into existence, he's hit with a briefcase, no one will listen to him, he cannot work in cooperation with the government anymore, and on and on. Finally the viewer must ask what is going on here?

What is going on is the story of a man who lied, lied lied- a man with a seemingly Lenny-esque innocence, who ends up going to prison for having stolen millions of dollars.

Damon is surrounded by a phenomenal cast, each character just as misled and con-

fused as the viewer. Joel McHale (famed for *The Soup*) and Scott Bakula (*Star Trek*, *American Beauty*) are particularly good as the FBI agents who get caught in the mess of lies, playing sympathy and frustration all too well. Steven Soderbergh combines the suave of his *Oceans* series and the legality of his Erin Brockovich to conceive this masterly crafted black comedy. The humour is perfectly placed, the music enhances the confusion by tenfold with the occasional James Bondish theme, mixed in with some Austin Powers and folksy tunes. Everything works in this political, satirical, serious, hilarious legal comedy, coming together almost as well as Whitacre's adoption story. 8/ 10 stars.

Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs



When there is little food but little fish to eat, and the economy is crashing as the rest of the world, having realized sardines are pretty gross, has stopped buying from the little island, what is there to do but keep on eating sardines? Flint Lockwood is a wannabe Tesla who creates his best invention yet to save his town from an eternity of salty fish.

Flint creates a machine capable of turning water into any food you can think of, from ice cream to BLTs to pizza- he simply alters the amino acids in the food DNA (structures coincidentally similar to the outside appearance of the food). But not only is Flint an inventor, he's clumsy and overexcited. When he accidentally rockets his new creation into the sky, lodging it within the clouds, all food breaks loose as hamburgers begin falling. Can he save the town he loves, while earning the respect of his father? Can he get the girl, a weather-reporter equally as geeky as him? Will his town survive the abundance of food once the DNA becomes overly mutated and gigantic spaghetti tornadoes beginning crashing to the ground?

Of course it will- this is a kids' movie about giant food. But the ride there is a fun one. With Andy Samberg, Bill Hader, and Anna Faris, the voices are enthusiastic and fun. With the giant food, based on the children's book of the same title by Judi and RonBarrett (a book I read every day in second grade), the story is memorable. 7/ 10 stars.

Where the Wild Things Are



The story everyone loved growing up, *Where the Wild Things Are* is based on the beloved childrens book by Maurice Sendak. Max (played by new talent Max Records) is a little boy who feels misunderstood at home: His mother (who is the highlight of the movie, played by the ever fantastic Catherine Keener of *Capote* and *Being John Malkovich*) is dating and his sister is in high school and not playing with him anymore, but hanging out with boys. Following a fight with his mother that results in his biting her, Max decides to run away, clad in the animal costume he wears like a second skin, and by chance

comes across a mysterious ship which carries him to a land filled with wild things.

Forget the playful and innocent story of the book- screenwriter David Eggers (who is actually the screenwriter of only one other movie, *Away We Go*, and is usually writing books, like *What is the What* and *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*) and director Spike Jonze (*Adaptation*, *Being John Malkovich*) twist the childlike tale into a dark glimpse into the cycle of growing up. The story pulls a complete 180: Light is low, rocks are thrown, and an arm is ripped violently off. But never fear, the rumpous does occur, and it is set to brilliant music by Karen O and the Kids, who did the soundtrack, one which captures the innocence of childhood in ways the movie does not. And with that in the background and the title in your mind, it's hard to watch this movie and not be completely thrown off. It feels like a kid movie wrapped in an adult movie's body.

But if you go in expecting something completely different from anything you imagined, a movie full of screaming wild things, a fake viking king, and dirt clump fights-- *Where the Wild Things Are* most certainly delivers. Spike Jonze is known for making bizarre movies that throw the mind off, and this is no exception. 8/ 10 stars.

Advice Column

Q: I'm a freshman and my biggest question has to do with sex. I'm unsure about when your ready to take that step, and some of my friends already have and some of my other friends would say no way. But I don't know where I stand.

A: Dear unsure,

Everyone has their own opinions about sex and people are not always ready at the same time or age. However, if you're questioning if you're ready or not, then my guess is you're probably not. It's something you should be absolutely positive about. If you do choose to take that next step in your life or relationship, be sure to be careful and protect yourself. Another good idea would be to talk to your health teacher to get a better understanding on how to protect yourself, and you should probably think about informing at least one of your parents, but if not, just make sure you know you're ready and to know exactly how to prevent pregnancy and STDs. Another thing, make sure you know and trust your partner.

Q: I need help on time management. I struggled with it my freshman year but this year I'm really unorganized and it's already affecting my grades. How do I make time for all my home-

Continued on pg. 5

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First Crush Review

Thomas Hamberger



When I went to do my review of the First Crush Bistro, it was raining out. The temperature was cold and it all seemed to lead into the wonderful warmth I found within the Bistro. The First Crush staff was wonderful in making sure that I was taken care of and never left an empty dish on my table. The Tortes Three Bean soup was a delicious starter to the meal and the decisions in the main course were hard to pick since everything sounded wonderful. In the end my, predatory side got a hold of me and I went for the beef medallions in a Diablo Hollandaise sauce that went magnificently with the asparagus and mashed potatoes. In the end, the item that sent it all over the edge was the Lava Cake that brought the entire meal to a delicious and sad end.

Features

Advice Column

Advice continued from pg. 4
work and extra curricular activities?

A: Dear Unorganized,

I think that most people are struggling with the same thing you are and even as a senior, I still have a hard time fitting everything into a tight schedule. My biggest help is my agenda, I can fill out the things I need to do in the morning and tests and quizzes I have that day, and I can write down the things I have to get done after school and at what time. I also make sure that when things are do a week from today, I don't wait to get started on it. You'll notice having things done early gives you more time next week to get other things done. Another good tip is to write down all your priorities and list them from most important to least important so you don't stress over the small things.

Q: How can I get on my teacher's good side while it's still early in the year? I'm always concerned of what my teacher's think of me.

A: Dear concerned,

Most people usually wonder what their teachers think of them, its totally normal. The only thing you can really do are the basics like getting your homework done on time, studying for tests, and being a good team player when working with others. Believe it or not, teachers notice which students work hard rather than the students who just wing it, and sometimes give their good students chances to make up on tests and homework assignments they didn't do so hot on. A lot of teachers in the school are also coaches and club supervisors, so if your interested in a club or sport it would be a good idea to sign up.

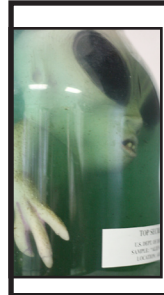
Tip of the day: You should sign up for clubs and sports, or even community service, it looks great on your college applications!

Kings of Leon Concert

Dan Charlebois
September 17, 2009
Scotiabank Place Ottawa ON

Myself and two friends of mine were privileged enough to go to the Kings of Leon concert in Ottawa on the 17th of September. We arrived and stood in line with about two hundred other people for most likely an hour and came home that Thursday night around two in the morning, but it turns out it was well worth it.

The opening band (Glasvegas) was decent but nothing really special. In fact, hardly anyone had taken their seats when they began to perform and their sound was somewhat muddy. All 11,200 people in the arena burst into hysterics as the main act came out. They immediately started with a trippy play of "Closer" complete with amazing neon green lights that shot into the audience. They probably played around twenty of their best songs, including, but not limited to "I Want You," "Use Somebody," "Revelry," "Ragoo," "Arizona," "Manhattan," "Cold Desert," "On Call," "17," and "Revelry." Fan favorites were definitely "Sex on Fire" and "I Want You," which had everyone in the arena singing and dancing. Through the entire show an amazing light setup only complimented the singing which honestly sounded as good if not better than the music straight off the CDs or online albums. Overall, the Kings of Leon concert was nothing short of an awesome experience that struck every sense. Also, we saw some truly funny moments that could only happen in Canada along with the show.



What teacher captured this alien? For an awesome prize, answer by emailing: potsdampress@gmail.com

Humour Section

High School From a Senior's Point of View

George Morris

It's funny, the minute I walked into the school this year I knew something was different but I just couldn't put my figure on what it was. Was it the atrocious green paint? Nope, that's still there. Could it be the new asbestos-free air? No, that wasn't it either. Maybe it was the fact that I could no longer see some of my favorite teachers because they had retired? No, that still wasn't it (long live the Leuthauser dynasty!). Where could this troubling feeling possibly be coming from? Then, it hit me. I am a senior now, an important person, first among unequals. I had struggle my way up through the High School hierarchy, starting out as a Non-Person (freshman). Then, moving up to being an Unwise Fool (sophomore) and then finally achieving the rank of almost a senior but not (junior). Sorry juniors, you're really not all that important in the grand scale of life. But that was all behind me now

and as I strode through the hallways as if I owned them, for in reality I now do, I graciously rewarded the underclassman with my mere presence. Whenever I saw a lesser being, which was disturbingly often (why haven't they learned to move out of our line of sight yet?), I felt a nigh uncontrollable urge to commit many ridiculously funny acts of hazing-- and yes, freshman do fit in lockers quite easily. And just when I thought nothing else could possibly change it hit me like a freight train. The dreaded illness, the ravager of college applicants, the bane of seniors world-round: senioritis. Wait a minute. I've had senioritis since the end of last year, so this is nothing new, but I'll attempt to describe it in detail for those lesser beings mentioned earlier. Whenever I attempt to do homework or read a book or study for that suicidally hard AP Bio test next period, my body begins to seize up and my brain starts

rapidly firing out ideas about what else I could be doing that might actually be sort of fun. Of course I do try to resist those negative impulses but, alas, I am weak and often give. Oh what a devious disease!

Well my friends and other people who may choose to read this (yes I'm talking to all three of you), this is senior life in a nutshell. Before I finish off this woefully short piece of writing I think I'll leave those lesser beings with a few tips for not annoying us all-powerful gods. Number one, don't talk to us. Number two, don't look at us. Number three, don't think that just because we might have accidentally said a few brief words in your general direction that we know you exist. Number four, if we do decide to speak to you, for whatever reason, always answer as best you can then follow number one. Finally, number five, we do except all manner of cash, credit and checks. Yes, it's good to be a Senior.

PCS Student Council Updates

Benjamin Stone

PCS is in full swing again for 2009-2010, and so is Student Council! Again, we would like to welcome all high school students to come to meetings. There is no requirement for membership, and all grade levels are welcome. Student Council typically meets in Mr. Foisy's room, 754, every other Thursday after school. Join us to make a difference!

Some things Student Council has done already this year: Elected officers, worked with Mrs. Chambers to allow students to use their lockers during study hall, installed a new vending machine by the gym, financed this issue of the PCS Press, delegated students to represent us on vari-

ous high school committees, and worked with Ms. Carrier to change the library's policy of signing up before first period. Now students need only to sign out of study hall at a time the library is open. See the schedules posted around the school.

Things we are working towards that YOU can be a part of: drafting a new school policy on Academic Integrity and Plagiarism, working with the Tech department to display announcements, school sporting events, and photos from school activities on the cafeteria television.

Even if you can't make it to Stu-

dent Council meetings, we still want to hear what you have to say. Find us on Facebook, or email us at pscouncil@gmail.com. Or contact an officer: President- Benjamin Stone; Vice-President- Crystal Myler; Treasurer- Justine Nichols; Secretary- Olivia Lee; Communications-- Corina Simonelli and Lawrence Hazen.

Email

pscouncil@gmail.com

to voice your concerns.

Interview with Mrs. Brousseau

Hannah Gingrich

PCS Press: Where did you last work?

Mrs. Brousseau: Massena High School.

PCSP: What grade did you teach?

MB: I taught twelfth grade last year.

PCSP: What classes in twelfth grade?

MB: English 4. But I have taught ninth grade. I've taught tenth grade.

PCSP: What's your favorite grade to teach?

MB: Twelfth grade.

PCSP: Why?

MB: I don't know, maybe because I'm getting them ready for college, and the outside world. And life skills, that kind of thing. I like going to the college fairs, things like that.

PCSP: What classes do you teach here?

MB: Ninth and twelfth.

PCSP: What do you like best about teaching?

MB: Why I became a teacher- I don't know. I think everything you say sounds corny. I really do. If you say, "to inspire kids," people are going to think you're corny. Even though it's true. I sounds corny. No matter what you say, it sounds corny.

PCSP: Why did you pick high school to teach?

MB: I know what I like as opposed to little people. I think, because, they're not too young, not too old. I like preparing them before they're adults. I think it's such a good age. I can't quite put my finger on it, you know what I'm saying? I like right before they're adults. I just like that age group. I don't know why. I've always had such a good reporum- I was a mentor coordinator at my school too. And I had some students that came in with really big difficulties with school. They hated coming to school. So, I kind of matched them up with some kids who liked school, and we all got together and planned these activities for them. And, for some reason, I have this really good way with kids at this age! Maybe it's because I'm a mom; I have four kids. I always tell kids that

not only do I like what I teach, I like who I teach. So, it just seems to be this nice marriage thing, so it worked out for me. I used to be a nurse, too, for fifteen years. And with nursing came this teaching aspect, you know. It wasn't the sickness part that I liked, but it was the teaching part, it was teaching people, like people who were diabetic, teaching them how to give themselves insulin and all that, and that was the part of nursing that I liked. It was the teaching part. So I thought- it's not the blood and guts stuff that I like, it's the teaching part! And so, when it came time for me to have a little time off to raise my family, I took some time to reflect and I thought, "You know? I really want to go back to school and teach." And, my husband said, "Really?" And I said, "Yeah, I think I'm going to do that." And that's where this whole teaching thing came from. A lot of people would come to me and say, "Well, why not teach science, or nursing?" There wasn't a really big need for people to be nursing teachers! It's really kind of a pinpointed kind of job. I was always reading, because I had a ton of kids, I have four kids, so I was always reading, and I love to read, so it was this natural fit for me to teach literature and English. It's not like people go around saying "I can't wait to teach sentence structure!"

PCSP: Do you have a favourite book?

MB: I do. Well, I have a lot of favourite books. Well, I have a lot of different books for a lot of different reasons. I have ones I don't like too, isn't that terrible? Let me tell you what I like. Let me give you a little list; a synopsis. I like *To Kill A Mockingbird*. I just love that book. I could quote it all day. "It's not time to worry yet." It's just such a good life lesson, I say it all the time to kids, "It's not time to worry yet." Doesn't he say that? Atticus says that, "It's not time to worry yet." I'm going to say that because it has such great quotes in it. They're just life lessons, and you can apply them to everything. "It's not time to worry yet." Let's say *To Kill A Mockingbird*.

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Kate

Shoutout

Album Review: The Resistance by Muse

Rukan Khondker

The English rock trio known as Muse is obviously going in a very different direction with their fifth studio release, *The Resistance*, released on September 15, 2009. Muse is known for their climactic, powerful sound, combined with Matthew Bellamy's falsetto and driving guitar riffs. The *Resistance* opens with their first single, "Uprising" which features Bellamy's voice sounding particularly deep and sexy, a contrast from previous singles like "Supermassive Black Hole." The following songs "Resistance" and "Undisclosed Desires" have a sound similar to The Killers, with heavy synth and piano.

"United States of Eurasia" is one of the gems of the album, with its start as a pretty, piano driven piece. Two minutes into the song, it transitions into a lively song, very reminiscent of Queen, with Arabian hooks, overlaying vocal harmonies, and just a general "epic" sound.

My two favorites on the album are "I Belong to You [Mon Coeur S'ouvre a ta Voix]" and "MK Ultra." "MK Ultra" seems to be a common favorite, but with the bone crunching metal guitar contrasting with the smooth texture of Matthew Bellamy's voice, it creates a fresh sound that I really love.

"I Belong to You" is a half French piece that's piano driven and extremely catchy. Bellamy's voice is the focus of the piece. He truly has a knack for contrasting sounds in his vocals, piano playing, and guitar that work perfectly. The most interesting part of this song however, would be the piano that interludes into the French portion of the song. It sounds perfectly French, almost like Debussy.

The portion of the album that is getting a lot of talk is the thirteen minute long cross between space rock and a symphony, "Exogenesis Symphony" parts one, two and three. (Overture, Cross-Pollination and Redemption.) Matthew Bellamy arranges

the orchestral elements himself. It reminds me of driving alone at night. Of course, I wouldn't know, but were I able to drive at night, alone, this is what I would listen to. The Radiohead influence is very evident in the entire album, but mainly in the "Overture." "Cross Pollination", however, feels almost like Rachmaninoff or Brahms.

And last, but not least, "Redemption" is a gorgeous piece of music, with delicate piano and strings; it paints a picture in my mind the way Dario Marianelli's film scores do. Once again, Bellamy's light vocals compliment it beautifully.

Overall, "The Resistance" by Muse is one of the best albums I've heard in very long time. It has classical influence, a total new sound for Muse, but also has "Unnatural Selection" and "Guiding Light" - a couple bones that Muse had to throw to satisfy their previous fans. If you're looking for new music or even if you're not - I'd recommend giving this one a try. You won't regret it.

Features

Scoopuccino's: More Than Just Desserts

Hui Yang and Frances Clark

Scoopuccino's is well known for its variety of tasty desserts and ice creams, but how's their actual food? That is the question we set out to answer. We entered the restaurant and passed the counter of sweets, reluctantly, and decided to sit in the back next the luxurious looking couches.

Hui: Okay, let's start.

Frances: We're at Scoops and already the chair is annoying the crap out of me.

Hui: Its 4:01PM... I'm gonna check to see what time... somebody is going to come serve us.

Frances: It'll take a while.

Hui: Last time I was here... it took forever so who knows.

Frances: Yeah... but this is a new slate, we're not gonna think about the other times we were here. It all depends on this one eating session.

Hui: There's only like 3 tables full...

Frances: We must look like sketches looking at everyone.

Hui: Okay, our waitress is coming, I think.

The waitress comes at this point and gives us our menu.

Hui: OOOH! Can we get... uhhh, POUTINE?!

Frances: What's the wedge? Surrounded by... it actually sounds really good.

Hui: THE WEDGE.

Frances: There's a lot of salads here...

Hui: There's a lot of variety of stuff... burger, burgers, sandwiches, seafood,

chicken, pasta...

Frances: Pulled pork? I always thought it was pooled pork...

Hui: Pull... PULLED PORK.

Frances: Pooooled pork... (Attempts to correct herself.)

Hui: No... I can't find their drinks. I'm guessing they have regular soda stuff. What are you getting?

We decided to order the Florentine Pasta (cream sauce with artichoke, lemon, pine nuts, spinach, and capers), Chuck Norris Burger (4oz burger, bacon, grilled onion, Swiss cheese, BBQ and garlic mayo), poutine (white potato fries with beef gravy and cheese curds), a Pepsi and ice tea.

Hui: So it's 4:25 PM and we got our poutine! It looks delicious and smells delicious.

Frances: I'm eating the fries, um, the poutine. It's really really good.



Yang photo

Hui: Don't eat too much yet.

We pause to photograph the food and maybe scare the waitress.

Hui: Go for it.

Frances: Oh my god. Okay.

Hui: So, I'm gonna test this out.

Frances: This is the cheese?

Hui: The cheese curd. We're supposed to eat with a fork?

Frances: It doesn't taste that fattening.

Hui: Trust me, it is.

Frances: I mean, I'm sure it is. But the last poutine I had tasted a lot thicker.

Hui: It's amazing with the cheese and gravy together.

Frances: It has more of a sophisticated taste.

Hui: It's not a very sophisticated food. It is poutine. It's very well done.

Frances: Ooh, the cheese is weird.

Hui: What's weird about it?

Frances: I dunno, it's kind of slippery. I'm being very judgmental.

Hui: Cheese curds, fresh ones, are sometimes supposed to be squeaky.

Frances: Do you want ketchup?

Hui: We can try it with ketchup. I love how she gave us plates and we're not using them. How is it with the ketchup?

Frances: It's good, it's really good.

Hui: With the ketchup?

Frances: Wow, I didn't mean to take that much cheese.

Hui: Just go for it.

Frances: Mmmm, that is really weird!

Hui: The ketchup?

Frances: Like with the cheese, it's all like... it is good. So I suggest ketchup with it.

At this point we decided that even though the poutine was very good, the high cost for a mediocre portion was not as satisfactory as we would have hoped.

Hui: So, our food just arrived three minutes ago. It's 4:41. The burger looks huge so I'm gonna take a second and test Fran's pasta. The sauce is creamy... the flavor is light.

Frances: I know what you mean. Do you think the consistency of the cream is good?

Hui: I think it's a little watery.

Frances: Me too. It could be a bit thicker.

Hui: The sauce... I can really taste the lemon in it. It's pretty good but it's really lemony, a little watery but it looks really good. Smells really good.

Frances: I think the artichoke is really sour. The pine nuts are a really good idea though.

Hui: I think the flavor just needs to be stronger.

Frances: Yeah, taste the pine nut with the artichoke, it tastes really weird. Like really different tastes.

Hui: Really? Let me see it. In a bad way? Yeah, it's a little strange.

Frances: I think it's the artichoke. The whole thing is really sour. Maybe that's what you're tasting instead of the lemon? The artichoke juices?

Hui: Yeah, it's either that or lemon that's giving it its sour taste. Is it too sour?

Frances: Yeah.

Hui: The burger looks really juicy. I'm gonna cut it in half for you. You gonna take the first bite?

Frances: Hmm...

Hui: Oh oh, I don't like that expression on your face.

Frances: Maybe it's because I don't eat beef a lot.

Hui: I'm gonna take off this caked layer of mayonnaise first.



Yang photo

Frances: I'm not the one to judge it.

Hui: Okay, fine. Usually I like burgers. Well, I usually don't eat burgers often but I do like burgers. Very messy.

Frances: Hmhmhm.

Hui: It's not bad. Let's see.

Frances: Yeah, it's just at first, I was a little confused because the onions were spilling and I didn't know what it was.

Hui: It's well cooked. Bacon looks really good. It's really good and these home fries taste pretty good too. Okay, I'll put ketchup on the side for you.

We decided the pasta was good at first, but grew sickening after a couple more bites. The sauce was just not thick enough. The pine nuts tasted like the smell of pine cones, it doesn't taste like you're eating food. The spinach was a pathetic attempt to make the pasta look appetizing by adding color. The burger is pretty good. It was really filling, thick and feels like you're eating 5000 calories in one bite and lives up to its name.

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Opinion

Chambers continued from pg. 3

if we're giving every student an identical assignment, that doesn't make sense. **PCSP: How will differences between learning the humanities and the sciences and mathematics be distinguished?**

MC: I don't know the answer to that yet; I think that's one of the things we'll figure out this year. When I think of examples from the homework policy, math always comes to mind because it fits so perfectly with this policy, and I know most of the math teachers this year are trying out the aspect where they're not grading homework-they're assigning homework; they're giving feedback on homework, which is really important; they're going over it in class, which is really important too; but they aren't actually recording the grades for homework, they're only counting the quizzes and tests. For the English teacher, that might be a little trickier, because the homework is often preparation for the day- you're asked to read a certain part of a novel, for example. If kids don't do that, then your whole lesson plan is gone. So I think that's one of the things we'll do this year, each department is going to have to figure out what it means for them. In some departments, there isn't much homework right now because the class is hands-on. The policy suggests that we shouldn't be giving a grade for participation, but some areas like physical education, music, and art, participation is being assessed. So this year will be a time for each department to really figure out what it means for them.

PCSP: How will expectations vary for individual students?

MC: Well, in an ideal world, we would be differentiating for every student. And I was a teacher myself for seventeen years and know that that's always the ideal, but it's very difficult. If you have preset standards and you are flexible in your assignments and giving students choices, then you can vary for individual students, but it's very challenging to do. And even teachers who are committed to differentiating instruction find this one of the most difficult parts of being a teacher.

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Homework Policy: Will it Work?

Danny Charlebois

I thought I would never see the day but it is official, homework does not count anymore in many (but not all) classes. This is of course a generalization and every class seems to now have a different (often confusing) policy concerning homework such as homework counting less, homework not counting at all, some homework being collected and others not being collected, and homework being eliminated altogether. I feel the reaction from students has been mixed but generally tends to lead towards the question "then why do it?". This is usually answered with "for practice" or "to better your knowledge on such and such".

"The administration seems to think that the students who do not do the homework will fail tests/quizzes and learn that they MUST study and do the homework in order to get the grades they want."

I can certainly see how this should seem to work in theory but I am skeptical on how much use it will be. The administration seems to think that the students who do not do the homework will fail tests/quizzes and learn that they MUST study and do the homework in order to get the grades they want. However, I do believe there are some students who will not care and fail altogether. Perhaps only time will tell but I can tell you it is strange to be doing homework and have that tiny thought in the back of your head asking "if it is not worth a grade, then why do it?"

School Thoughts on Flex

Brenna Rice

The need to get up ten minutes earlier was one of the more painful changes made to the school this year. It happened so that homeroom could be deleted from the day, and twenty-minutes of what is virtually homeroom, but called flex, added after first period (with announcements now after first period). Towards the end of last school year, the general opinion didn't look too highly upon this schedule change. Now that we've experienced it for five weeks, how have thoughts changed?

- Of those surveyed, the majority of freshmen like flex, the majority of sophomores like flex, the majority of juniors do not like flex, the majority of seniors like flex, and all teachers like flex.

- Of those surveyed, the majority of freshmen feel it is not a productive use of their time, the majority of sophomores feel it is a productive use of their time, the majority of juniors feel it is not a productive use of their time, the majority of seniors feel it is a productive use of their time.

- Of those surveyed, thoughts on having announcements before first period are pretty decided- with a combined majority throughout the grade levels preferring before.

- Of those surveyed, the majority of freshmen do not understand flex, the majority of tenth graders understand flex, the majority of eleventh graders understand flex, the majority of seniors understand flex, and all teachers understand flex.

- Of those surveyed, during flex, freshmen are most likely to do homework, nothing, or talk; sophomores are most likely to do homework during flex; the majority of juniors are most likely to do homework or nothing; the majority of seniors are most likely to do homework; the majority of teachers are most likely to plan for the day and see students.

Of those surveyed, while the majority of most grades like flex, comments as to why typically say due to the ability to socialize during flex. One freshman answered

"absolutely nothing" to what he or she does, "no" to understanding flex, "no" to using time productively during flex, but "yes" to liking flex because "We screw around." Another freshman had answers almost identical as the aforementioned person, and liked flex because "we mingle with our peeps." So while the majority may like it, the majority also put that it was not a productive use of their time, but simply like it because they can talk. I focus on freshmen because one of the benefits of flex was to have freshman guidance to help freshmen acclimate to high school- and only a few people mentioned that program as a reason for liking flex, and most still do not understand it.

While the majority of people said they understand flex, no two answers were identical as to why: some felt it was for scheduling reasons; many to make time for freshman guidance (and all upperclassmen who put this felt that an illegitimate reason, one person stating "We were freshmen once and got along just fine"); some were more humorous, one person said "Not really, because I call it homeroom. What is this flex you speak of? Does it taste good?" Moreover, it is interesting that the majority of freshmen do not understand flex, when they are the class there is an actual program during the time for.

Suggestions for flex include moving it to before first period, feeling it was merely an extended homeroom. Some feel that transition into a working day was quite useful. Some like flex but do not like having just four minutes to get to class. One teacher note addressed the fact that it is difficult to know for sure if students have arrived at the destination they signed out to.

All in all, it seems the school has grown to like the previously hated flex, but feels it could use some improvements.

How do you feel
about flex?

Email your thoughts to:
potsdampress@gmail.com

Letters to the Editor: Sandstoners Speak

To the Editor:

The freshman advisory program is a good way to get freshmen introduced into high school. The only problem with it is how well prepared it started. Since then the people in the program have adapted well and turned it into a well working machine. This being the first year, it is going to have some problems but so far all the teams are doing well. The freshman seem to be adjusting to high school well and aren't shy anymore when partaking in activities.

Thomas Hamberger '10

To the Editor:

I am still not entirely sure about the new schedule and Flex opportunities presented to us this year. I do understand the reasoning behind Flex, to present the option for freshmen students to be a part of the Leadership program, and to provide time for students to get in touch with teachers, run errands... etc. However, I feel as if Flex is a double-sided sword, full of many new rules and regulations that cut back on our time and energy. For one, signing out

of Flex has become increasingly complicated and difficult for me. I have heard of the new locker policy and I don't appreciate it, as a person who has far too many classes and too little time to reach any of them. I have become increasingly late to my classes, and I have stated many times that four minutes in-between class is just not plausible. I know the administration cannot alter the bus schedule because of numerous restrictions placed upon them, but that should not justify what is impossible for many students. At the beginning of this year I was also a member of the Leadership Organization. I dropped the program because I felt that it truly was a schedule conflict for me in my senior year, but also because the program, in my opinion, was not thought out, or executed with efficiency. As a person with little time on my hands, I need to know what I am doing every day and where I'm going. I don't have the means to run around the building trying to figure out where I'm supposed to be. I also feel, quite frankly, that freshmen cannot express themselves freely in a classroom with a teacher and twenty of their peers. That's for outside of school, and it does not coincide with their education. I

know it's worked well in other schools, but my general feeling from the freshmen was that they did not want to be there, and if they're not willing to be guided, than they should be spending their twenty minutes on something that benefits them. I am not trying to criticize the school and what it has done. Many of the new policies were done out of consideration for the students. In practice, these new policies may be doing just as much harm as good. Which is why a time should be called to adjust and reconsider changes made. Every change made has had an effect, and it is just as important to watch and control those effects, as it is to have made the change in the first place. It would be irresponsible not to do so, and it is our duty as student to voice our concerns, so we can make our education run as smoothly as possible.

Katja McCall '10

To the Editor:

My name is Shannon Smith and I am a freshman this school year. I recently

talked with a staff member about a survey that was posted out at flex period about flex period. On my school schedule, flex is called "Freshman Advisory."

In my freshmen advisory group, we have participated in quite a few activities with student leaders and the freshmen students. Activities like "mum ball," visiting different areas of the school, and being introduced to high school faculty and staff. When the student leaders are not available to come, we use flex period as an extra study hall, so in a way it is very beneficial to my freshmen class.

I hope that flex does not get cut from our daily schedules because for students that struggle with their daily classes and subjects can get help with it at the learning center during flex or go to see a teacher during flex period.


I also think that Potsdam High School should keep flex for the next couple of years because I think that it would be very helpful to the new freshmen each year, because it is very helpful to me.

Shannon Smith '13

Opinions-
we all have
them. Share
yours with
the school
through a
letter to the
editor!

Email:
potsdampress@
gmail.com

**Breakfast
Anytime**



**Village
DINER**

BREAKFAST - LUNCH - DAILY SPECIALS

Market Square Mall - Depot St. - Potsdam
7 DAYS 7-2

**Flapjack
Attack**

Certified Omeletologists on duty!

Sports

Homecoming Game Scores



Yang photo

Kanika Misra

The previously annual pep rally was once again revived this year as the Varsity Club hosted the pump-up event of the season. The student body gathered in the gymnasium to recognize the high school athletes and show some pride for Potsdam High School. It was a sight as ridiculous blue and orange outfits filled each section of the bleachers as the grades separated. The cheerleaders got each section going as they began with a Potsdam cheer, which, of course, the senior class displayed the most enthusiasm towards. Afterwards, two senior members of the Varsity Club led the rally and recognized each member of the fall varsity sports teams. As each team cheered, the school got ready to watch their football boys as they would compete in the homecoming game hours later.

The homecoming game in which the Potsdam Sandstoners faced the SLC Larries was highly anticipated throughout the week. The packed bleachers despite the cold wind and unwavering rain

reflected the student body's commitment as the seven o'clock game commenced. Despite nerves the Stoners were able to pull away from the Larries quickly and held a double-digit lead before the end of the first quarter. The homecoming game, which was also the team's senior game, ended in a substantial victory. Seniors honored at the game were Paul Buchanan, Chris Burkett, Greg Burkum, Jason Clark, Dan Hourihan, Alex Jandreau, Shane McHenry, Aaron Mitchell, Ryan Mousaw, and Kris Weems. The boys closed out their last game on the PCS turf with a 49-0 win.

Unfortunately, the tailgating and bonfire provided by the senior class were canceled due to the unfavorable weather. However, as the winter season rolls around, seniors will once again be holding tailgating to make up for the unfortunate cancellation. Rumors of a re-scheduled bonfire are also in circulation, but nothing definite has been scheduled at the moment.

Cross Country Senior Meet Success



Yang photo



Yang photo



Yang photo

Girls Volleyball Wins



Yang photo

Girls Swim Undeclared Season



Yang photo



Yang photo



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THE INSTITUTE for Learning Centered Education NEWSLETTER

TOPIC: Most Systems of Reporting Student Grades are Out-Dated

Date: January 27, 2010 Newsletter Edition: Volume 11, Issue 4

To the Editor

I want to commend the Potsdam School District on its new policy involving grading and homework.

The way most schools in the country report student progress is antiquated and, I believe, we will wonder 20 years from now how we ever allowed such reporting practices to exist.

Doesn't a parent need to know what skills and concepts a child has mastered as well as what information the child knows? Doesn't a university or prospective employer need this information?

When a numerical or letter grade on a report card is weighted to include homework, behavior, tardiness to school (or handing in assignments), and/or effort, a student can get an A or B without necessarily having mastered important skills, concepts or information. Conversely, a student who has mastered certain important skills or concepts and who knows relevant information inside-out may receive a C for failure to turn in homework on time, for being absent many times or for being a discipline problem.

What does it mean to get an 85, or a B in English? Five students can have completely different strengths and weaknesses in reading, comprehension, writing, grammar and spelling and yet all can receive an 85 on a report card. How do we know what they really know and can do?

By no means am I suggesting that schools ignore tardiness, behavioral problems, failure to do homework, or the degree of effort a student either does or does not put forth. Each of these needs to be assessed and there needs to be significant consequences for students who are lax in any of these areas. But there also needs to be a qualitative measurement that tells parents, employers and universities exactly what skills, concepts and information a student has mastered regardless of the student's performance in these other areas.

Isn't this the way the real world works? Perhaps some of you who will admit to being a little older will remember Albert Belle, a major league baseball player from 1989 through 2000. Belle had all-star statistics almost every year – high batting average, homerun slugger, more than 100 RBIs. These were the performance assessment statistics that were available to any team considering him as a free agent or as someone to seek in a trade.

Albert Belle was also considered a cancer in the locker room, gave the finger to fans if he felt like it, and might not give his best effort if he wasn't motivated to do so.

My point is that Belle's batting average wasn't reduced because of his behavioral problems or attitude. But any team considering him had access to his qualitative statistics and also had access to separate reports which included evaluation of his attitude, effort, and willingness to work as part of a team. Often teams would not want him because of these factors despite his excellent statistics.

Shouldn't it be the same with students? Don't we need to know what a student knows, understands and can do, regardless of other factors such as attitude, homework reliability, ability to work with others, etc? Yes, we also need to know about these other behavioral factors, but not in a grade that combines them with the students' ability.

On occasion, high school teachers can be heard to ask, "How did that student ever make it to high school without knowing this or without knowing that?" It happens because a student can make it through every grade level if he behaves, makes an effort and knows a reasonable amount of the curriculum – even if that student has not learned aspects of the curriculum that are essential to success at higher grade levels and in life. Perhaps if that student had received a qualitative assessment of what he knew and didn't know in the early grades, it might have been possible to offer him the support and tutoring in his weak areas that would have enabled him to master the important concepts and skills that became insurmountable hurdles in the later grades.

It is time our schools across the nation joined the real world. Schools need to report separately, their assessments of what a student can actually demonstrate from how a student behaves, puts forth effort, and performs in other aspects of life. University admissions departments and prospective employers need to know what parts of the curriculum students have mastered as well as whether the student has behavioral or attitudinal problems.

I congratulate Potsdam on taking a major step in the right direction with its new policy. Others will follow!

Sincerely,

**Don Mesibov, Director
Institute for Learning Centered Education**

Please know that your work in the field of education is as meaningful to our society as anything anyone can possibly do. Thank you for caring about the future of our children!!!!

Feel welcome to forward this message to a friend or colleague. If you know someone who would like to be put on the list, please send a message to Don Mesibov at dmesibov@twcny.rr.com. Requests to be dropped from this list will also be honored.

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The Institute is currently registering teams for the 2010 summer constructivist conference, July 19-23, at St. Lawrence University, Canton, New York. Don't miss the opportunity for this unique conference that models the constructivist behaviors that teachers are using increasingly in the classroom. Check out the website of The Institute for Learning Centered Education: www.learnercentered.org or, e-mail a request for information.

The Institute for Learning Centered Education NEWSLETTER

TOPIC: **Reporting Grades**

Date: February 15, 2010 Newsletter Edition: Volume 11, Issue 7

The newsletter on recording and reporting grades received as much feedback as any newsletter I've written. I'm going to share some of the comments to demonstrate that the problem is widespread. Soon, I will present my own proposal for addressing the issue of recording and reporting grades. Here is the feedback:

- I enjoyed the last newsletter on grading. I have always wondered why schools put so much emphasis on keeping track of what students don't know. Banks don't keep track of the money I don't have. I agree that it is time to assess our assessment system.
- This is one area that schools need to visit and set as a high priority. I cannot agree more with your thoughts in your letter to the editor. Glad it was published. Nice job!
- I totally agree that mastering the academic skills and attaining social behavioral goals are different and should be evaluated in different sections of a report card. The elementary school where I worked produced a document that did this four years ago after a lengthy and, at times, painful process. I believe it gives parents a much more accurate picture of their child's progress at school. I commend Potsdam's achievement.
- This is great!! I would like to use this letter in my class-is this OK?
- Thank you for the update on Potsdam's report card project. I agree it's time to do something state/nation wide. Students come to me in 9th and 10th grade, unable to complete basic math computations and/or with poor writing skills. If I knew a student's strengths and weaknesses before he/she entered my room, I could modify lessons and activities accordingly.
- Wow, Don! What a letter! Thank you!
- I just finished reading Volume 11 on grading and I agree with you that we need to record and report student progress better. I like using an IEP to report student progress; if every child could have that kind of reporting, then we all would know what a child knows and can do.

- How can we possibly get the powers that be to take on this approach to grading? I am SO much about this approach to reporting student progress. We talk about this in the lunch room. The amount of technology it would take to have kids take an assessment and then translate that into a standards-based report card would be minimal! And yet, where is this technology? Parents could see exact strengths and weaknesses. I think much of the problem is that grades have become almost a status symbol. 'My kid got straight A's.' Or 'Come on Johnny! What's happening with you? You need to bring your D's up to C's.'

Here's another thing about our current grading system that baffles me. My high schoolers can get an F on one assignment, an A+ on the next, and have an F average in the class! How can this be you ask? If a kid doesn't turn in an assignment, she earns a zero. Average zero and 100 and you get 50 or F. This means that a kid must earn 3 100's for every F or zero in order to bring her grade up to a C! Ridiculous!! That is totally unfair. Their argument is that if a kid gets a zero, then she deserves to have a bad grade or something like that. Yes, I agree. She deserves a bad grade on THAT assignment, but it's one mistake. It shouldn't count as 3 mistakes!!

I no longer grade with percents like this, but when I did, I would never give a kid lower than 50 on any assignment, even if he failed to turn in the work. This way, F's counted as only ONE F instead of 3. I have much more to say, as I'm sure you could have written pages to the editor yourself. Once again, your newsletter got me going. I'll stop now. ;)

- I agree whole-heartedly, Don. Nice work! Thank you.

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Please know that your work in the field of education is as meaningful to our society as anything anyone can possibly do. Thank you for caring about the future of our children!!!!

Feel welcome to forward this message to a friend or colleague. If you know someone who would like to be put on the list, please send a message to Don Mesibov at dmesibov@twcny.rr.com. Requests to be dropped from this list will also be honored.

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