

## Eastern seniors dodge diploma disaster

By SUZANNE GREGORCZYK  
The Tattoo

Seniors at Bristol Eastern High School have put up with noise, dust and mysterious fumes all year, but they nearly faced the ultimate indignity: a graduation ceremony held at their arch rival.

Officials spoke recently of moving the ceremony to Bristol Central High School or elsewhere so construction work could get underway on the gym floor.

But thanks to a successful scramble by school and city officials last week, diplomas will get handed out at Eastern like always.

The problem arose because of the need to renovate both of Eastern's gyms, including the one where graduation ceremonies take place.

If both were turned over to the construction workers at the same time, officials said, there would be no place inside the school to hand out diplomas.

A panel overseeing the \$40 million construction project at the high schools explored the possibility of having Eastern's graduation at Central, Memorial Boulevard Middle School or in a large tent outside of Eastern.

"The graduation issue is something that weighed very heavily on the committee," said school business manager William Smyth.

He said that members of the panel agreed that none of Eastern's seniors would want to hold their graduation ceremony at their rival school.

Eastern Principal V. Everett Lyons said that having the ceremony outside in a tent would be too risky because of the threat bad weather might pose.

Lyons said he didn't want to plan on an outdoor ceremony.

"Then the committee said 'No, we're not going to do that,'" Smyth said.

Superintendent Ann Clark said, "We're in charge of this project, and we'll be having the graduation as usual in the gymnasium at Eastern."

"It was the recommendation of the administrators to turn over only one gym," Smyth said, and then let contractors have the main gym after graduation.



By fiddling with the construction schedule to allow graduation to go on as planned at Eastern, it means work on the large gym won't be completed until December — drawing out an already long construction process even further.

Plans call for the small gym

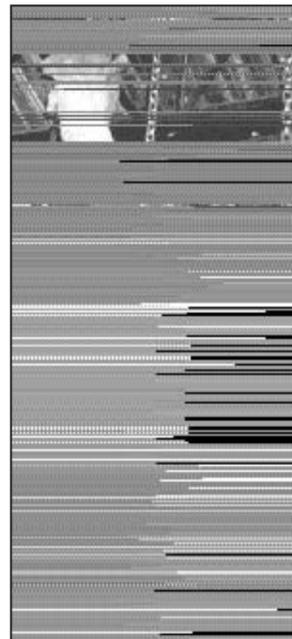
at Eastern to be handed over to contractors on April 2. It should be back in action by Oct. 10.

Work on the large gym will start July 7 and continue until Dec. 6, under the current timetable. It's getting a new floor, bleachers and more.

Officials said that they

don't expect any more problems like this to arise in the future.

"After they've done this they won't have to worry about it anymore, because they only do a renovation like this every 20 years or so," said city Councilman Ken Scott.



Suzanne Gregorczyk / The Tattoo  
Above left, a second floor hallway under construction at Bristol Eastern High School. Above right, construction worker Bob Orr works on the ceiling at BEHS last week.

## My escape: college at 16

By SHAINA ZURA  
The Tattoo

I felt trapped in high school. The cliques, unsatisfying choice of classes, lack of inspiration and creativity, and absence of freedom made me dread getting out of bed in the morning.

I used to think I didn't have a choice but to be there. I was wrong. By the time I was a sophomore I was in a desperate search for alternatives to high school. I was coming up with nothing. The only other path was to drop out, and that wasn't what I wanted. Then one day out of nowhere my chance arose.

My mother had heard someone talking about an early college. She retained only the name. Simon's Rock. Ten minutes after she told me I was on the Internet looking for it. As I read the information on the web site my heart beat faster and faster. This was my answer.

Simon's Rock College of Bard was founded upon the belief that 16 and 17 year olds are capable of college work. They accept students primarily out of 10th and 11th grade and enroll them in a college program. It is located in Great Barrington, Massachusetts.

At the end of two years, an AA degree is earned. At this point, most students transfer to regular colleges to continue their studies.

Basically, you get to skip the rest of high school and head to college.

Yes, that's right. I'm 16 and I'm in college. Explaining that is probably one of the most difficult things about being here.

Classes here are small and discussion oriented. Everyone is required to take certain core subjects, but are free to choose what classes they take to accomplish that. Freshmen meet with an advisor on a regular basis.

Dorm life is interesting, to say the least. To go from having mom and dad downstairs to having total freedom and being surrounded by your friends 24 hours a day is quite a jump.

I live in an all girls dorm, primarily of freshman. I have a roommate, as do all freshmen. Pretty much every college stereotype is applicable here, from loud music to socks on doorknobs.

The workload is not too bad, but it's certainly more than high school. I have a few hours of class each day, and at least the same of homework, projects, and papers. Its just a matter of balancing work time with other things.

I have absolutely no regrets about leaving high school and coming to Simon's Rock. I was never a cheerleader, nor was I going to be. I wasn't going to go to prom. I wasn't looking forward to being a senior, or even a junior. I didn't like the entire atmosphere of it.

However, Simon's Rock is not a school for everyone. It is definitely not for those who are just looking to get out of high school. You need a motivation to get somewhere, not just to get away from somewhere.

This student body is the most interesting and creative bunch I have ever seen. Because this is an alternative school, it draws a specific type of kids. There is lots of hair dye, piercing, vegetarianism, veganism, political activism, and opinions.

Of course, everything has a downside. With all of this comes a certain arrogance. Kids tend to let it go to their heads that they're doing something special.

Also, the school is very small. There are approximately 350 students, most of which are freshman and sophomores.

There are very few secrets on campus. Because of the so-called "rumor mill" everyone knows everything about you.

Also, the fact that the town is so small and so boring leaves kids with time on their hands. Most fill it with drinking and drugs.

Not having to deal with parents searching for bloodshot eyes and odorous breath also adds to that.

Another negative aspect of this school is that it creates a tight-knit community that is unlike the real world. Thus, we tend to lose sight of reality. We are rarely even aware of current events.

But I think dealing with those things is worth it for the opportunity I've been given.

Being here now is the smartest thing I've ever done.

## We love reader feedback

Written by local high school students, *The Tattoo* appears in the *Press* on occasional Mondays. Any questions or comments about it should be directed to its volunteer advisors, veteran *Press* reporters Jackie Majerus and Steve Collins. They can be reached at 589-5316.

Keep watching the *Press*, because more great editions of *The Tattoo* are in the works. To get e-mail notice of upcoming issues, drop us a line at SteveJackie@prodigy.net

## Dropout age could be raised

By JEN RAJOTTE  
The Tattoo

Dropping out of school may get tougher soon if one state senator gets his way.

Sen. Thomas Upson, a Waterbury Republican, proposed a bill this year that would change the age at which students can legally drop out from 16 to 18 years old — a measure that would have barred Bristol's senator from quitting high school early had it been in place years ago.

"If they had made me stay in school until I was 18, it probably would have been bad for me," said state Sen. Tom Colapietro, a Terryville Democrat who represents Bristol.

Colapietro said that when he was a kid approaching 16, he wanted to drop out and started missing school a lot. He eventually quit going to classes entirely with the intention of getting a job.

When the job didn't work out, Colapietro said, he joined the armed forces and got his high school diploma there.

No one really could have made him stay in school,

Colapietro said.

But Upson said that because teenagers are minors at 16, they still need help to follow the right track.

"When you're sixteen years old, you aren't responsible enough to decide something with this much weight. A teenager can't decide what is best to do with their lives until they have reached adult hood — 18 years of age," Upson said.

Alison Munn, a freshman at Bristol Eastern High School, said that although Upson's bill would not concern her personally, she can see the logic behind it.

"I know that the dropout rate is something that a lot of people are worried about," she said. "But there are going to be kids that either are going to come to class and just goof around or are going to find ways to skip class anyway."

"I don't see how they can keep kids in school if they really don't want to be there," Munn said.

"People who don't want to be

in school but are forced to make it miserable for the rest of us," said Eastern freshman Tina Michaud. "It's hard to work in that environment."

get all that they can from school while they still have the chance."

"Too many people regret the reckless decisions they made when they were 16 and decided

to drop out. Our goal is to try to prevent that," he said.

Although there are many programs geared

towards the adults who want a second chance to get an education, Upson said it is his goal to have every child get the best education that they can — the first time around.

Colapietro said, though, that he is "not crazy about the idea" Upson is pushing.

He said kids will skip anyway, no matter what anyone does.

"Even if we make them stay in school, we can't make them study, do their homework or even learn," Colapietro said.

Upson's measure "won't accomplish anything," he said. "This won't make them stay in school. If they really don't want to be there, they won't go. It's that simple."

**'Even if we make them stay in school, we can't make them study.'**  
Sen. Tom Colapietro

According to Upson, the purpose of his bill is to encourage students and parents to stress the importance of going to class and getting an education.

"By making strict regulations and attendance policies, the consequences of skipping school will be much higher, and hopefully more people will take their education more seriously," he said.

By making a law requiring children to attend school until the age of 18, Upson said he hopes that most families will have their kids attend school more regularly.

"Getting an education in our society is very important," Upson said. "Our kids need to

## Can you say 'smoke and fumes' in Italian?

Friday, March 12, 1999

There I was in study hall, thinking about how I would kill to be in Reese Witherspoon's position in her new movie, with the slight buzzing from the construction in the background, when all of a sudden my daydreaming was interrupted by a construction worker with a strong accent.

"Have any of you seen any loose wires around here?" he asked the half-sleeping class.

"Well, there is a wire hanging from the ceiling by the music hallway," I replied.

"Oh, that's nothing," he said. "Anyone else? ... OK, thank you."

As I tried to go back to daydreaming, I couldn't help thinking to myself: "Since when are wires hanging from the ceiling not a hazard?"

Well, there goes this construction again, proving another hazard wrong. And I thought loose wires and asbestos were hazardous. Silly me. Oh well, I wonder when the lunch bell is gonna ring.

— Irene Sitilides, freshman, Bristol Central

Monday, March 15, 1999

So, they opened up the "refinished" hallways. Believe it or not, I was actually expecting to see some improvement! Silly me.

I was disappointed to see that some of

### Life under construction

hang light fixtures from. There aren't even WALLS in one of the rooms, only a huge partition to separate the classes.

Believe me, it's hard enough to concentrate on what your own teacher is saying without having to listen to someone else's lesson, as well.

— Natalie Minor, freshman, Bristol Eastern

Wednesday, March 17, 1999

Today I was on my way to my science class, which happens to be on the second-floor, when I saw a woman going down the hall looking rather lost. I slowed down to see if I could be of any help.

Woman: "Excuse me, could you tell me how to get to the other classes on this floor?"

Me: "Well, all the connector hallways are closed down, so you have to go all the way down to the basement, across this hall and back up the stairs."

Woman: "Huh?"

the floors still had no tiles; there were no new lockers, they were simply painted over; there were no ceilings, only a few tiles scattered here and there to

Me:(sigh) "Hold on, I'll walk you there, I know it's confusing."

— Suzanne Gregorczyk, freshman, Bristol Central

Wednesday, March 24, 1999

Italian test. There are no rules. He says there are no rules. You just have to KNOW. An electrical cracking from the PA system"

"Um, students and teachers, you may notice some smoking in the area of room 127. We've just asked them to stop welding and we will properly vent the area. No need for concern."

Next to me, the blonde in the Grateful Dead t-shirt halts her struggle with the subject/verb agreement long enough to grumble.

She: "Yeah, sure. It's chemical. I was there, man. It was all over the place. 'Properly vent the area?' Nobody gives a damn."

Italian teacher: "In Italian, Gina."

Me: "I do. I give a damn. There are damns to be given."

Teacher: "In Italiano, Guiseppe."

She: "Well, what are you going to do about it?"

Teacher: "In Italiano, Gina."

Me (to teacher): "How do you say 'hold my breath and weep' in Italiano?"

— Joe Wilbur, junior, Bristol Eastern

## Tattoo writers collect journalism awards

*The Tattoo's* stellar student journalists have done it again. The Scholastic Press Association recently handed out four writing awards to members of *The Tattoo*.

They captured prizes in the news feature, first-person essay, review and opinion categories.

The winners were Joe Wilbur, a junior at Bristol Eastern High School; Shaina Zura, a first year student at Simon's Rock College of Bard in Great Barrington, Mass.; and two Bristol Central High School seniors, Amanda Lehmert and Collin Seguin.

Seguin won in the first-person essay he penned on the diffi-

culties of securing a driver's license.

Zura won in the news feature category for her piece on the marketing of plastic milk bottles.

Lehmer captured the prize for her review of the re-release of "The Wizard of Oz."

Wilbur won for an opinion piece he wrote on the president's sex scandal.

The winning stories, along with many other *Tattoo* pieces, can be seen on the Internet at: [http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/Majerus\\_Collins](http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/Majerus_Collins)







