

School board grapples with poor test scores

By JOE WILBUR
The Tattoo

Though more students are taking college level classes in the city's two high schools, the percentage who pass the Advanced Placement tests has been sinking fast.

To reduce the number who flunk the costly exam, the Board of Education may bar students with poor grades from taking it.

This means that students may take the AP course, but should they fail to maintain a mandated average, they will not receive UConn credit.

In the last two years, many more students are taking the college level courses — especially in history and English — but the number who score well on the end-of-the-year test hasn't changed.

"The 96-97 school year showed about 20 kids taking AP history," while 51 took it last year, said Michael Traverso, a history teacher at Bristol Eastern High School.

Traverso said that two years ago, 55 percent of his students scored high enough on the test

to earn academic credit from the University of Connecticut. But last year, only 17 percent did well enough to pass the history exam, he said.

"We've expanded the pool of kids taking the course considerably," Traverso said. "When you do that, it seems to me, it only makes sense that the scores would drop. You get kids that would otherwise not be taking the class, some kids that just can't do it."

The school board has three goals for the AP program that seem to be in direct conflict, Traverso said.

The goals are to hike the number of students taking the classes, raise test scores and save money on administering tests that students don't pass, he said.

One solution being considered by board members, said Traverso, is to require students have a minimum grade in the class in order to take an AP test and possibly get college credit. All AP students now take the test.

"We're still discussing

options," said Ann Clark, the school superintendent, "and still discussing the goals of a college level program." She would not elaborate.

"The goals and plans are still in discussion," agreed Dennis Siegmann, the science department chief for both high schools. "But when you talk about capping the average to take the test and to get the credit, you have to ask yourself what the object of the college level course is. Is it to have all of the kids do well and get high test scores, or is it to give them the real college experience?"

Advanced Placement courses allow city high school juniors and seniors to earn college credit.

Students taking AP courses must take a comprehensive final exam graded on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 the highest possible score. At least a 3 must be earned for UConn credit.

The test costs \$80 per student, with the schools footing the bill. Eastern is ranked 18th out of 160 state school systems in the percentage of students

taking an AP class. Central is 20th.

Nationally, about half the students taking AP tests get at least a 3 on them, statistics show.

"I think you have to keep class size down if your primary concern is high test scores," said Art Groth, head of the English departments at Eastern at Bristol Central High School. "However, I think that it should be a very challenging course, as it is for UConn credit, and not everyone is willing to accept the challenge."

"You can tell that there are kids that wouldn't really be in the classes," said Carolyn Choi, an Eastern junior, "some of the classes are difficult and they're just not interested in doing it."

"Maximizing participation shouldn't be a main goal," said Eastern junior Hayley Varhol. "While I think that a lot of people should have the chance to do it, the first priority should be the students that can and will do the work."

Varhol said many of the students with low scores don't do their homework or participate in class. That, she said, doesn't

mean that they don't know the material.

"In a real college course," said Varhol, "homework isn't the most important thing."

Siegmann said that not every student does well in college. Capping the scores necessary for credit, according to him, would have cut out many of the students who scored 3 and above last year.

According to department heads, history and English classes have been hit hardest by the rush to take AP classes.

More students are also taking AP government, where test scores are also down.

Science and math AP classes have not seen an increase in participation — and their scores haven't changed much.

"There are no more students taking the AP chemistry class this year than in the previous years," said Patrick Lang, an Eastern chemistry teacher.

Lang said that while he doesn't feel that the push to increase the number of students taking AP classes has hurt his course, the new block scheduling system

hurt.

"My scores dropped a little last year, but that was primarily because of the block, my getting used to teaching AP with the block," he said.

"The AP classes meet every day for 84 minutes now," Lang said. "In the old system we had double periods of 48 minutes. The AP students actually lost 12 minutes of class time in the block."

"Physics scores have been fine, and actually went up last year," said David Bittle, who teaches AP physics and calculus. He is also the advisor to Eastern's chapter of National Honor Society.

Bittle said some members of the honor society were frustrated with their AP scores last year.

College level classes draw kids together, Bittle said, encouraging them to function as a group, succeeding or failing together.

It's unclear when the board will issue any new policy about AP classes or tests.

But Traverso said students taking the courses this year won't be affected.

If you only had a brain, you'd see Oz

By AMANDA LEHMERT
The Tattoo

The ruby slippers have never been brighter.

This time around, all the magic and imagination of the digitally remastered classic, *The Wizard of Oz*, will capture audiences on the big screen.

And those slippers aren't the only surprise.

With the new computer technology, the true colors of the film come alive.

Munchkins, who normally dance around the screen in an obscure light, appear to pop out in truly magical hues.

The tin man actually appears quite rusty, and Dorothy might just have a few freckles.

The depths of the Oz forest take on an enchanted blue tone, instead of its former fuzzy gray finish.

And, of course, the ruby slippers, while once dull representations of the gems

from which they were fashioned, now sparkle enough to fit the hype. Viewers get a clear picture of the great lengths to which the creators went to make *The Wizard of Oz* the success it was, and is today.

But, of course, with all this clarifying going on, some basic myths about the movie seemed to be whisked in out of the fog, as well.

For instance, the truth to the legend that a man hanging himself can be seen in the background just as Dorothy, the Tin Man, and the Scarecrow skip off to see the Wizard is revealed.

In this new version, viewers see a large bird flapping its wings frantically in the distance. Not a dead man in sight.

But that is the beauty of the technology. Not only do we get to see the film in all its glory, we also get to see all its idiosyncrasies.

Its hidden wonders and character flaws make the movie all the more appealing for the Oz veteran.

With all that going on, the laughter and gasps of the children in the audience is only half the fun.

Beyond stars

For the uninitiated, *The Tattoo's* rating system is as follows:

No Tattoo: Quite obviously, no tattoo is the best tattoo. Go see this right away.

Rose on the shoulder: Slightly tasteful, still not your best assertion of sophistication. You could do worse things with your Saturday night.

Reptile on the ankle: Cute but crude, wouldn't you rather read a book?

Spider in a prominent area: You'll wish you hadn't done it in an hour and a half, but if you need an excuse, you can always claim that you were intoxicated.

Ex-boyfriend's name on forehead: What were you thinking? Save your \$7.50.

A little about us

Hey, kids, we're back again and there's nowhere to hide.

The Tattoo, the award-winning page written by local teenagers, is published "occasional Mondays" in this fine newspaper. But this year, we're breaking all records and are filling your world with our fine prose at a rate of once a week.

Who knows? We plan to be back next week. We hope so. But savor this issue no matter what.

The Tattoo is for you — parents, teachers, even administrators, but most of all for our peers, the high school student body.

This page is a volunteer effort on the part of participating students and by our advisors, Press reporters Steve Collins and Jackie Majerus. We don't get paid, just the old journalistic satisfaction of "comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable."

If you don't get it, look it up.

We love to hear from you in readerland, by the way

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New librarian speaks volumes

By JOE WILBUR
The Tattoo

One of a wave of new staff at Bristol Eastern, Elaine Carmelich is the high school's new library media specialist, and, according to students and staff, she's bringing the library out of the dark.

"It's just so much more pleasant now," said Pamela Hayward, Eastern English teacher and Bristol's 97-98 teacher of the year. Hayward said that she spent little time in the library before this year.

"The library is much more accessible this year," said Dorothy Ammerman, an Eastern English teacher. Ammerman said the library should be a place students and teachers feel they can go to make use of materials or for curriculum assistance.

"She's very well qualified and is doing a wonderful job with the position," said V. Everett Lyons, Eastern's principal. "The students really seem to be responding to her."

"I love it. I really do," said Carmelich of her new position. "I just really enjoy interacting with the kids and helping them in any way I can."

Students say Carmelich is a big improvement over former school librarian Michael Leahy.

"It was terrible with Dr. Leahy," said senior Jessica Zarrella. "His official policy for library passes was that you had to gather into a giant line before the bell, make eye contact with him, and state your name, period and class number. In that order. God help you if you said your period first. Once he sent me to the back of the line because I didn't make eye contact."

Carmelich said she became a librarian because she loves to read and wanted to help others learn to love literature. She said she was aware coming into the position that students didn't see the library as a place they could come to freely. She wanted to change that.

Toward that end, Carmelich is welcoming students with study halls to visit the library, opening the previously restricted Internet consoles to any student in need, and personally assisting staff and students in research and curriculum development.

To make the library a more comfortable place, Carmelich said, she brought in sev-



Liz Tinker / The Tattoo

Elaine Carmelich, the new librarian at Bristol Eastern High School

eral plants, placing them about the library, and constructed a welcome banner for library students.

Suzanne Davis, library media assistant, said the change in atmosphere is palpable.

"You know what she does differently [than Leahy]? She listens. She really listens to the students," said Davis. "Paperwork is secondary to her. She'll stay late if it means helping out the students."

Davis said that she knew things were changing for the better when she saw Carmelich standing in the hall one morning. When asked what she was doing, Carmelich replied that she wanted to greet the students.

Every period since, said Davis, she's walked out to the hall and greeted the students as classes change.

Carmelich is a graduate of Southern Connecticut State University. There, in her "mid-thirties," she earned her masters in library science, a goal she had postponed for years for various reasons.

In her free time, said Carmelich, she does a lot of reading, mostly women authors like Barbara Kingsolver, Elizabeth

Berg and Amy Tan.

Carmelich held library positions in several other school systems, including New Hartford and Clinton, CT, before spotting the job in the newspaper in early July. After an interview by a council consisting of Eastern administrators, teachers, parents and students, Carmelich won the position.

Learning that Eastern operates on a block scheduling system didn't intimidate her at all, said Carmelich. "I think the block, with 84 minutes as opposed to 45, allows more time for productive library research."

After the renovations, the library will be moved to the first floor and opened to the general public in the evenings.

Of the construction and future plans, Carmelich said, "I look around and I say: 'Well, the computers aren't fancy, and there's no carpet, but the students and staff are warm and friendly, and I'm excited that I'll have a new library, really get to plan it from the ground up.' I think opening it to the public is wonderful. It sends the right message."

Mind over (construction) matter

Tuesday, Oct. 20, 1998

Due to the fact that an overwhelming majority of past construction journal entries have had extremely negative connotations with somewhat cynical undertones, I have resolved to bring attention to the finer points of Bristol Eastern's current renovations.

A thrilling attribute of our renovations is the daily mob of students that engulf the minuscule capacity of the halls. Isn't it a nice change of pace to converse with your neighbor while only inches from their face? It gives a whole new meaning to the phrase 'too close for comfort.'

I don't even have to move, quite convenient actually. I just float along in the midst of a cattle herd signaled by the ringing of monotonous bells. Moooo... Also, what all the fuss about the construction noises? They don't bother me, I actually find them quite invigorating, especially while taking a test. The answers seem to resound ever so clearly in the recesses of my mind, or maybe that's just the jackhammering. Yes, I'd say they're almost musical.

Who knows? Among the construction workers there may be the next Mozart: bang-whap-korf-rat-tat. Well, there you have it. Renovations can be fun! Flexibility, people. Flexibility!

— Chantelle Garzone, sophomore, Bristol Eastern High School

Tuesday, Oct. 27, 1998

I have always thought it a cruel joke to give false hope. The English teachers have been informed they will have their rooms returned to them by Christmas. I highly doubt this is in their future. In addition, the lack of insulation, ceiling, and tiles has made Eastern incredibly cold.

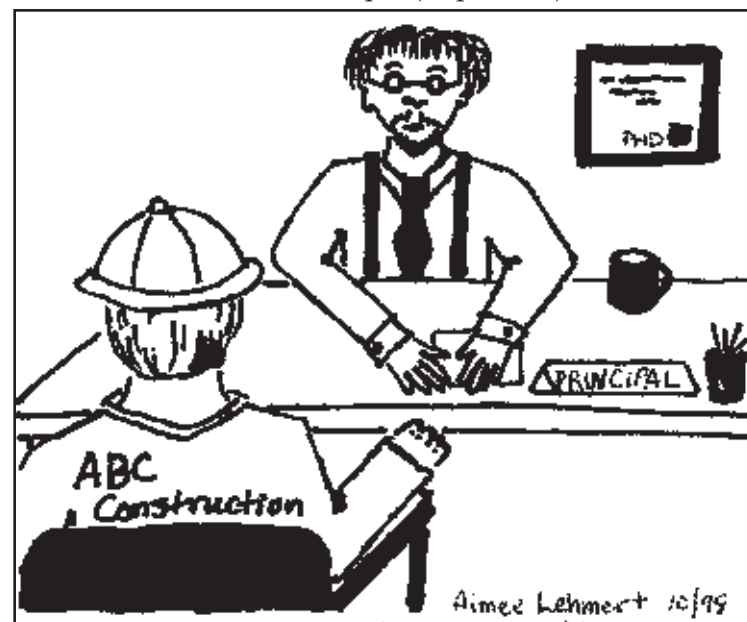
The main problem with this is administration doesn't allow jackets to be worn in the building. Of course, God forbid they turn the heat up a notch. (It might waste tax money!)

— Merissa Mastropiero, junior, Bristol Eastern

Wednesday, Oct. 28, 1998

You know how you're walking down the hall and the bell rings for the start of class, and you're almost there, and you are tardy? It hasn't happened to me yet, but it might because of artificial walls blocking some hallways. I think they should at least reduce the size of the walls, and put a wall going down both sides of the hallways so you can at least use all of them.

— Joe Aparo, sophomore, Bristol Central



Aimee Lehmert / The Tattoo

"This says that you have been disruptive in class again."