

ABCs don't make the grade

By MERRISSA MASTROPIERO
The Tattoo

When high school report cards are handed out soon, not a single student is going to get an 'A.'

Nobody's going to get an 'F' either.

Instead, thanks to a new computer software system at Bristol Central and Bristol Eastern high schools, students will get number grades instead of the traditional letters.

School officials junked the old computer system in favor of a new one that can keep track of schedules, grades, attendance and more.

Grades on the new report cards — which can't be forged like the old ones — will show up as a number from 0 to 100. They will make calculating grade point averages simpler.

But it will make it impossible for students to fudge their grades to parents. They won't get away any longer with saying their 'B' was an 86 when it was really an 83.

The school has long used numbers to evaluate students' work but it traditionally translated them into letter grades for report cards.

Students and teachers have varying opinions on the change, which Eastern's governance council approved last year.

Central's governance council preferred the old system, said Paul Castolene, a vice principal at the school. He said it seemed "sort of ridiculous" to have numeric grades in the grade book and on transcripts and letter grades on report cards.

"We're still learning things,"

Castolene said. "We'll see how it goes when semester grades come out."

Michael Rogers, head of Eastern's governance council last year, said teachers did have concerns about giving 59s, 69s, 79s and 89s.

"Evaluation is a tough thing anyway," Rogers said.

Teachers would have to decide personally for each student whether to mark the grade

idea. It lets you know where you are."

Matt Gaul, a junior at Eastern, said, "I don't see any real use for it. All the students know their grades anyway."

Liz Abbott, a Central junior said, "I think it's better because a letter grade is really vague."

The computer switch was made by a committee appointed to select a new software format from four or five competing versions, said Edith Mosback, a secretary at Eastern's main office. They chose the School Administration Student Information program, she said, which is already used in Hampden, Newington and Wallingford.

In handling grades, the SASI program allows office personnel to enroll students, change schedules, and keep track of student body attendance. It should save time, eliminate most paperwork, and make the office more efficient, said Daniel Viens, assistant principal at Eastern.

The new and improved report cards are printed on a gray watermark paper disabling students from forging a reproduction of their grades.

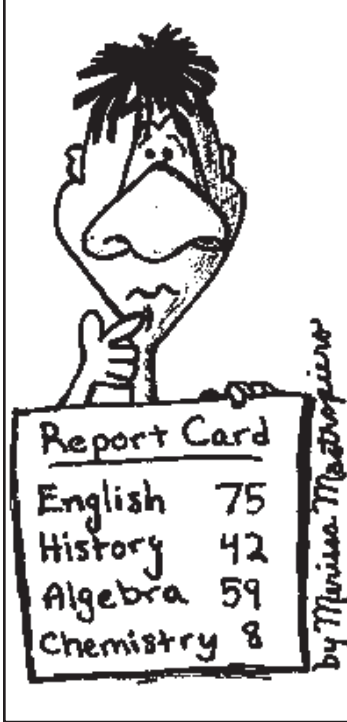
There is also a citizenship or behavior column on the new report cards.

Teachers only have a variety of 20 standardized comments on the cards, in which they are allowed to choose two. "I don't like having fewer comments," said Linda Hayes, a French teacher at both high schools.

To produce the report cards, teachers will first fill out a scantron sheet in which they will bubble in the mark grade, exam grade, citizenship, comments, and absences. These

sheets will then be scanned into the computers.

The report cards — which used to be printed in another town — will instead be printed on dot matrix printers at the



Merissa Mastropiero / The Tattoo

schools and then given to students.

At the moment, there is a glitch in the computer system.

The printer can't connect directly to the computers, but the problem is expected to be fixed quickly.

"Once all the kinks are worked out, it will be more effective," said Richard Barlock, an English teacher at Central.

Barlock said the delay this year helps a little because it gives teachers more time to evaluate students.

"Don't worry," said Viens. "Everything will be fine."

Construction sickens BCCHS

By AMANDA LEHMERT
The Tattoo

A few weeks ago, a mysterious dust cloud rolled down a second floor hallway packed with students and teachers at Bristol Central High School.

"We all saw it. It was ridiculous," said Martha Bansavage, an English teacher. "We were exposed to it and breathing it."

After listening to numerous faculty complaints about the thick cloud of concrete dust kicked up by construction work, the project's architect, Jim Lawler, said that "anyone in the corridor should have been hospitalized."

The cloud was only the most serious of a growing list of gripes about air quality from

teachers and students complaining about headaches, burning eyes and sore throats.

Responding to the concerns, Central Principal Christopher Clouet recently organized a meeting between faculty members, Lawler and several construction supervisors to discuss possible health issues.

Clouet allowed a reporter from *The Tattoo* to sit in.

Teachers questioned how poor the school's air quality is — and whether or not it poses a health risk. They also wondered about strange chemical odors seeping into classrooms.

"I'm concerned that we're in a situation where we might not get the clean air we need," Clouet said.

Since the session, steps have been taken to start testing the air regularly, seal off construction areas better, provide chemical information to teachers and establish a procedure for dealing quickly with complaints.

Both Central and its crosstown rival, Bristol Eastern High School, are in the midst of a lengthy \$40 million renovation project to modernize the buildings.

Central's teachers and administration were concerned that some of the construction areas were improperly sealed off from classrooms, causing the air problems that made some people ill.

Central's school nurse, Jane Glasgow, said a couple of teachers have tied their health problems to the building by documenting the times symptoms arose.

But, she said, it's hard to say whether other health-related complaints by teachers and students are connected to the construction, especially with flu and allergy woes so common this time of year.

Lawler said that some construction areas weren't sealed off correctly. "Frankly, it was a problem," he said.

He said concrete dust is probably only harmful if the dust is inhaled over long periods of time.

"It is the concentrated levels that are a problem," said Lawler.

That's why construction workers who deal every day with the dust wear masks to keep from breathing it in, he said.

After faculty complaints about the dust, Lawler said construction crews sealed off the areas properly.

Teachers said the problem did seem to lessen afterwards.

"I think it's gotten better," said Ann Norton, an English teacher.

Lawler said part of the air quality problem is caused by the

school's poor ventilation system.

Beyond that, some exhaust fans do not function properly, making the lower level locker rooms and some classrooms on the second and third floor prone to less than perfect air, Lawler said.

He said the malfunctioning fans are a maintenance issue that does not fall under his jurisdiction.

"You do not have a real ventilation system in the majority of the building," said Lawler.

He suggested that teachers in highly effected areas should open their windows whenever it is convenient and keep their doors shut at all times.

Lawler said a representative from the company that does air

tests after asbestos removal will now also conduct random tests to make sure the air is safe.

Clouet seemed confident after the meeting that the building's air is not a health risk, and tests should prove that.

"I think we'll find out we're not in a dangerous building," he said.

At the Nov. 5 faculty session with construc-

tion experts, a lot of the discussion focused on chemical smells in the building and their possible origin.

Lawler said that, to his knowledge, there were no chemicals used on the project at this time.

A construction worker who also attended the meeting, whose name is unknown, said the company used a water-based spray paint to mark the walls while it worked, but the small amount involved shouldn't have affected anyone.

So it remains a mystery what teachers and students are smelling.

Lawler said that Central will soon have Material Safety Data Sheets — also known as MSDSs — that provide information about the levels of hazards certain chemicals pose.

Although the sheets are meant for people who work directly with the chemicals, they will be available if there is ever a concern that someone else has been improperly exposed.

"Those are very important," said Glasgow.

Clouet said he wanted the faculty to meet with the contractors to open lines of communication to learn the best way to have concerns addressed.

Sometimes when the faculty brings up problems, Clouet said, "We get answers something like, 'We don't know.'"

"I don't have anything to hide and I don't want anything hidden from me," he said.

Lawler agreed that there needs to be more communication.

"When there is a problem, we need to address it immediately," he said.

Lawler told faculty members they should contact Clouet anytime they have any kind of construction-related problem.

Then Clouet can contact those in charge of the job, he said, who should be able to correct it.

After the construction session, teachers were a little more optimistic.

"I did think the meeting was beneficial," said Norton. "Now there is an avenue of communication that's been opened."

Glasgow said that communication is important, especially when problems arise.

"There are always going to be glitches in the plan," she said. "At least they're listening to us."

'I'm concerned that we're in a situation where we might not get the clean air we need' — Central Principal Christopher Clouet

New country, new experience

By LIZ TINKER
The Tattoo

Imagine this: you have just moved to a new country. You don't know anybody. And you can barely speak the language.

Well, this is reality for Thais Carolina Ibarra Avila — Caro for short — a 16-year-old from Venezuela who's an exchange student at Bristol Eastern High School.

Ibarra said that teenagers spend their free time in the "same ways" in Venezuela as they do here.

Just like in the United States, teens in her country like to hang out with friends, listen to music, go to movies and shop.

However, unlike young people here, Venezuelans don't play a lot of sports. They concentrate more on studying, Ibarra said.

Although school is very different here, Ibarra said she "likes it very much."

Back in Venezuela, kids go to school from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. and then again from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Ibarra, a junior, said she gets more homework here than she did in her native Merida, Venezuela. She said it's also harder here.

Still, Ibarra likes school.

She said she also likes that there are fewer classes at Eastern than her own school. Ibarra came to Connecticut three months ago after signing up for the exchange program at her school. She'll be here for another seven months.

Ibarra said she likes living here with her "exchange" family.

She is staying with Craig and Laura Minor and their daughter, Natalie. It's the second time the Minor family has hosted a student from overseas.

Though she likes her "new" family, Ibarra said she misses her real family back home.

So even though she may not speak English well and comes from another country, Ibarra really is a lot like you and me.

She's making friends fast, her host family says, and is a member of the Spanish club at school.

Venezuela is a relatively prosperous South American country where people speak Spanish.

Anyone interested in participating in a foreign exchange program or hosting a foreign student can get information from school administrators, the library or on scores of World Wide Web sites.



Liz Tinker / The Tattoo
Carolina Ibarra from Venezuela is a junior at Bristol Eastern High School this year

It's not dandruff, it's just a little dust

Wednesday, Oct. 28, 1998

There's one thing about this construction that I can't quite figure out. How, with a rule that prohibits the wearing of coats in school, are we supposed to avoid hypothermia in English class? Believe me, it's hard enough to concentrate on Mr. McMahon reading *The Merchant of Venice* with my fingers turning blue and my teeth chattering so loudly I can hardly hear it — as if I would have any clue as to what "sooth" meant anyway!

— Natalie Minor, freshman, Bristol Eastern

Wednesday, Nov. 4, 1998

Driving into the parking lot this morning, I find that the entrance to the side lot is now blocked off, that the front has a strip of dirt separating it. Wow, now I found that the construction has found every possible way of disrupting my life. Not only must I make a journey out of my trips to class, but I also must go off-roading to get to my parking space.

— Collin Seguin, senior, Bristol Central

Wednesday, Nov. 4, 1998

My day started off well. I was doing fine and hadn't made any major mistakes. I was thinking about how good I was doing when dust particles started to fall on my head.

At first it was fine, but over and over again, that was when it became a problem. After thousands of particles flew into my hair my day was ruined. On top of all of that, my hair was dusty.

— Shawnte Miller-Ligon, freshman, Bristol Eastern

Wednesday, Nov. 4, 1998

Well, I'm in English, and about ready to act out a "dumb show." Now, this would be hard enough, given my complete lack of acting talent, but now the banging in the background has made it impossible to hear my teacher's directions on play. At least when my performance comes up pitiful, I can just blame it on the construction.

— Collin Seguin, senior, Bristol Central

Life Under Construction

We don't know but we've been told, the Tattoo staff is mighty bold

In the past nine weeks, a motley crew of new recruits has dared to join the infamous *Tattoo*.

In this short time, they've examined the high school grading system, dished out new album gossip, revealed the life of a foreign exchange student, previewed an upcoming school musical and a new museum exhibit and shared many a construction gripe.

And they're just getting warmed up.

Here's the roster, new and old: From Bristol

Central come the venerable Amanda Lehmert and Collin Seguin, both seniors, as well as sophomore Joe Aparo, and freshmen Suzanne Gregorczyk and Irene Sitalides.

Bristol Eastern gives us senior Jon Theriault; juniors Joe Wilbur, Merissa Mastropiero, Van Monirak Chhun, Leslie Marshall, Jessica Norton and Hila Yosafi; sophomores Jen Rajotte and Chantelle Garzone; and freshmen Liz Tinker, Natalie Minor and Shaunte Miller-Ligon.

Junior Courtney Pendleton writes from St. Paul; junior Kathleen Haynes makes the drive from Torrington High; Dave Zienka represents Terryville High. Staffer Shaina Zura is a student at Simon's Rock in Massachusetts, and all the way from Century High in Rochester, Minn., comes sophomore Kate Majerus.

These impressionable young minds are regularly shaped by Press reporters Jackie Majerus and Steve Collins, who volunteer their time to the

group. Kiernan and Mary Ciara Majerus-Collins — not journalists and therefore innocent — often share their toys with their teenage friends.

After more than two months of weekly publication, we're taking a break but we'll be back next month. To get an e-mail note when the next page appears, write to us at SteveJackie@prodigy.net

Comments on this page are welcomed at 589-5316. Our Internet address is http://ourworld.com/puserve.com/homepages/Majerus_Collins