

Regents grading accuracy questioned

by Suswana Chowdhury

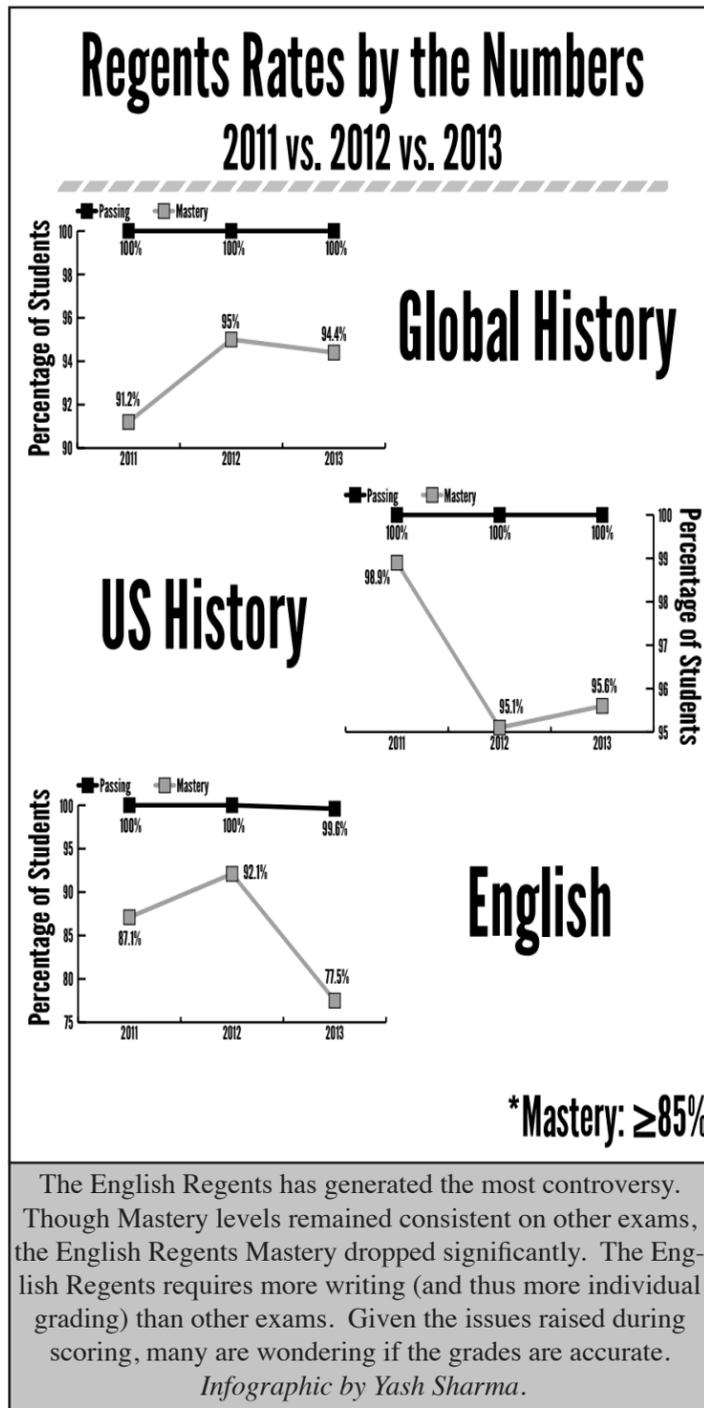
A new Regents grading policy implemented to streamline the grading process and increase accuracy has come under fire for doing the opposite. Numerous technical difficulties marred the city's new plan for computerized, centralized grading, resulting in an expedited grading process that rushed teachers to finish grading before graduation ceremonies in late June. Following a significant drop in the rate of students achieving mastery level on the English Regents at Townsend Harris, many members of the school community have questioned the accuracy of the grades. Save one, all appeals to the city and state to review grades deemed "questionable" have been denied.

The change in grading policy is in response to a state mandate meant to ensure that individual teachers do not grade the exams of students in their classes. Whereas most other schools in the state responded to the mandate by continuing to grade the exams 'in house' but requiring teachers to grade the exams of classes they did not teach, the New York City Department of Education went a step further and decided that teachers at city schools could not grade an exam taken by students enrolled in their schools, whether or not they taught them. In mid-June, teachers from high schools across the city had to report to grading centers to jointly grade the exams of the entire city's student body.

After conducting a series of small-scale pilot programs over the past two years, the Department of Education declared an electronic scanning system to be more efficient than the traditional pencil and paper grading system.

"We found that it saved time since teachers didn't have to unpack the exam and then repack it, and they didn't all have

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All bands meet

by Stephanie Geier and Sandhya Sewnauth

With a new bell schedule now in effect, teachers, students and administrators spent the early weeks of September adjusting to change. The community's response is decidedly mixed, with the issues of time management, homework, and public transportation drawing the strongest reactions.

The current schedule consists of forty minute bands meeting everyday and eliminates enrichment as a mandatory component of teacher schedules. It became official after a series of meetings, negotiations, and an official vote late last school year. The previous schedule included fifty minute bands meeting four times a week (though certain classes met for forty minutes five times a week) with mandatory after school enrichment for teachers.

Timing quickly became an issue as the school year began, with some teachers finding it difficult to adjust to shortened bands.

English teacher and Assistant Principal of Humanities Rafal Olechowski said he often ran out of time during classes and thus has had to adjust his "internal teaching clock."

"I've been putting the end time of the class on the board to be more mindful," he said. "My lesson plans have to be recalibrated and even rewritten. Things that initially inspired lessons now demand more time."

Music and Japanese teacher Mariko Sato also prefers longer bands in terms of her music classes. She finds it difficult to teach them with shorter bands because a considerable amount of class time is already used attending to equipment.

"It's also hard with my AP Music Theory class because they're very pressed for time," she adds.

Students and teachers have expressed that the new schedule is somewhat monotonous.

"There's a simplistic regularity about the new schedule, which can be boring," continued Mr. Olechowski. "I spend less energy teaching," *continued on page 2*

Lisa Mars departs, becomes principal at LaGuardia HS

by Vickie Savvides



Ms. Mars is now principal of LaGuardia HS.

Students and faculty were shocked to learn that Lisa Mars, former Assistant Principal of Language, Art, and Music has left Townsend Harris to become principal of Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music, Art and Performing Arts in Manhattan. Principal Anthony Barbetta has taken over Ms. Mars's responsibilities, with no definite plans to find a replacement formed as of yet.

Members of the administration found out about Ms. Mars's departure at the very end of August, just days before teachers reported back from summer vacation.

Spanish teacher Christian Castillo commented, "It was sudden and very shocking. No one knew about it. It must have been a last minute decision."

Ms. Mars worked at THHS for over ten years. She founded the Festival of Nations, coordinated school performances, and (on occasion) taught French and Spanish. She forged many relationships with both students and teachers throughout the years.

Spanish teacher Beatriz Ezquerro recalls how welcome Ms. Mars made her feel when she first applied for a job at THHS.

"When I came to this country I was lucky to be interviewed by her," she said.

Ms. Ezquerro, who recently began advising Festival of Nations (FON), also emphasized Ms. Mars's determination to protect her staff during hard times.

"She has fought for her staff in times of budget cuts and defended the Classical Languages, which I think is very important to a humanities school like THHS," she said.

Senior Amanda Ramsaroop, last year's FON Coordinator, grew close to Ms. Mars during the time they worked together.

"Her office became a safe place for me; when friends looked for me the first place they went was the LOTE office," she recalled. "Through late nights spent working on—and stressing over—FON, as well as those wonderful lunch band dates, and the inspirational conversations, Ms. Mars has been wonderful."

Assistant Principal of Organization, Health, and Physical Education Ellen Fee said that Ms. Mars "had a calming presence during all the chaotic moments at THHS."

Ms. Mars was unavailable for comment.

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Custodial staff offers more than cleanliness to THHS

By Rachel Chabin and Asmaul Chowdhury

With Harrisites usually drowning in work, it's no surprise some forget their school is home to more than just students and faculty. The maintenance staff—a crew made up of an engineer, foreman, handyman, and a few janitors—is the behind-the-scenes team in charge of keeping the school up and running.

Hector Benitez, the school's foreman and one of the heads of the maintenance staff at Townsend Harris, has responsibilities unknown to most of the student body. Hector arrives at school around 4:30 each morning to oversee his co-workers, and get the school ready for the upcoming day. As part of his daily morning routine, he opens the gates and shuts down the alarms, turns on the lights, performs a series of tests to make sure fire alarms are working, examines equipment to see if everything is running smoothly, and paces the halls to make sure that nothing is amiss.

The maintenance component is only part of the job that Hector loves. In addition to fixing, checking, and tinkering with different objects around the building, he enjoys having the opportunity to interact with the Townsend Harris community. He says that he always tries to lighten the mood and make people smile at any given situation.

Staff members and students have a shared affection for Hector, though they occasionally participate in friendly teasing.

During an interview in the lobby, one of the security guards lightly mocked Hector from behind. Upon seeing her, Hector laughed and explained, "One part of my job is handling people like her."

Hector said, "This school has such a serious atmosphere and I like to liven things up. I also feel the need to help people when they need it. I remember when a student had convulsions and I stayed with her and I prayed for her."

Many students have fond recollections of Hector joking around in the hallways, and even bursting into song during lunch. "I remember he got up last year during my seventh band lunch to sing 'Feliz Navidad.' It was funny, and [everybody in] the cafeteria began to sing," recalled junior Raina Salvatore.

From speaking with him about his experiences at Townsend Harris, it's clear that he has a lot to smile about. "I have a wonderful boss, and the employees behave themselves," he said. "What is there to complain about?"

One of the best parts of the job for Hector is seeing former students return to the school to chat, reminisce, and catch up with what's going on in their lives. He said, "when students come back, you can tell that they've reached the light at the end of the tunnel, and it's great seeing them feel gratified and successful."

Another custodial staff member, Luis Perez, is the school's handyman. He is mainly responsible for routine repairs throughout the building. He's been at the school for nearly twenty years and is the second-in-command under Hector. He works from eight in the morning to five in the evening and is usually on the third floor.

This silver-haired, spectacled man has the same easiness and laid-back attitude as his co-workers. He recalls some of the senior pranks as the highlights of his career.

"Ten years ago, the seniors let chickens out as a senior prank and we had to chase them. We finally caught them and brought them to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals," Luis described.

"Another good one happened in 1998, when the principal said, 'When life gives you lemons, make lemonade.' So the seniors threw a box of lemons in the lobby, and we had to clean it up: we made lemonade that day. If we had kept the chickens, we would have eaten them too," he added.

Mario Vasquez makes up yet another member of the staff. If you have ever heard rock music praising the virtues of Jesus on the fifth floor, that would be nothing other than Mario's affinity for Christian rock. He

has been a custodian at Townsend Harris for the last twelve years, and works from two in the afternoon to eleven at night, cleaning and preparing the school for evening functions, events, and after school programs. It's a demanding job, but he enjoys it.

"I love how pleasant the teachers and students at this school are. There's only been one serious incident in the last 10 years, whereas cops are always present at other schools," Mario explained.

His most memorable moments on the job, however, involved Townsend Harris students at their most unruly and mischievous.

Like Luis, Mario described the senior pranks as a great source of anticipation and, for the custodians, subtle apprehension.

"One year, the seniors put fish in every imaginable place in the school. They put fish in the lockers, down the stairs, and behind the heating vents, which made the school stink for days," recounted Mario. "Another year, someone cemented the school gates shut."

These three men keep the school a safe and clean place for students to spend a majority of their day in. Senior Maham Ghani said, "We're lucky to have such a good staff to take care of everything and make this school such a nice place to walk into everyday."



The crew poses together on the first floor.

photo by David Heifitz

Community reacts as bell schedule changes take effect

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but it's more consistent. [The schedule] requires a different type of energy. I have to pace myself now."

Freshman Eileen Jimenez, who said her middle school had different classes on different days, also finds the new schedule to be tedious.

"The schedule is so repetitive. I have gym everyday on the first floor and then I have to go to the sixth floor. It's exhausting, and I'm always scared I'll be late. There's no variety."

However, others see advantages in shortened bands.

Although Social Studies teacher Charlene Levi prefers fifty minute bands, she admits that seeing her classes everyday facilitates scheduling homework and tests so that her classes move at the same pace.

Classical Languages teacher Andrew Hagerty enjoyed certain aspects of both schedules.

"I thought the old schedule was unnecessarily complicated but it made the school unique. I do see advantages of a less complicated schedule—it does away with certain problems like scheduling tests and homework."

Still others are unaffected by the new schedule. Junior Woo Jung Yi doesn't mind the new schedule because the homework level is the same and shortened bands make the days seem faster.

"I honestly don't see a change," she said.

A new policy designed to compensate for the pre-

vious system of missing each class once per week has also sparked mixed reviews from students, although teachers are largely indifferent to it. The policy requires teachers to give homework only four times a week with each assignment taking no more than thirty minutes to complete.

Mr. Hagerty commented, "The homework policy is fair. In the end it's for students and doesn't affect me as a teacher, but standing up and saying 'no homework today' makes me popular for a second, which is nice."

Junior Nijah Phills feels that the mandatory AP U.S. History outlines defy the new policy, with each taking well over thirty minutes.

"Teachers get around the policy by assigning more homework, but making it due in two days," she said.

Mr. Olechowski predicts that some subjects will end up taking more time to finish homework for than others.

Students have also expressed concern that they won't be able to attend tutoring now that enrichment is no longer required for teachers.

Junior Lina Rob said, "What if teachers are busy when we have lunch? It doesn't work out."

Students have also complained that the earlier arrival and later dismissal disrupt their daily commute because public transportation is fuller and there is

more traffic at these times.

"It really interferes with the MTA schedule, and I end up getting home much later," said junior Meraldina Ziljkic.

Students on athletic teams find that the later dismissal interferes with team practices and competitions, with members often getting home much later than before. "I have to rush to Brooklyn everyday for practice, and we end up getting only an hour in the pool because it's so late," said junior and swim team member Ariana Stergiou.

Junior Paula Fraczek, a member of the soccer team, said that the team often doesn't have time to warm up before games after school and noticed that practices tend to last shorter.

Generally, however, seniors have been unaffected by the new schedule because of their extensive free bands. Senior Annie Medina feels like the schedule "affects underclassmen more."

Overall, Mr. Barbetta finds that the schedule has been successful so far: "I don't have any strong feelings about it. But from what I've observed and what I've asked students and teachers, it's been a smooth transition. I have not received any problems, but it's early."

Although Spanish teacher Beatriz Ezquerro finds shortened bands difficult for her AP classes, she thinks that "it's all a question of getting used to it."

Clubs, activities weather changes

by Stephanie Geier

photo by Suswana Chowdhury



Karen Su working on the JSA board for the club fair.

Due to the new schedule eliminating tenth band and mandatory after school enrichment for teachers, some after school activities have been altered, but many have found creative ways to continue on into the new school year.

Jazz band class has been moved from tenth to zero band, creating both positive and negative changes in how the class is run.

Jazz band instructor Peter Lustig said he'd been nervous about the time change but admits that the class has been running smoothly. However, he believes that there are cons to the change.

"My impulse was that it was going to be terrible, but it's fine," he said. "I miss how after tenth band students would stay, hang out and jam, but now they can't because they have to get to class. However, now they've been coming earlier to practice, as early as 7am."

He's disappointed that the jazz band can no longer make recordings for concerts in the auditorium, which is full of students during zero band.

Junior and jazz band member Sarriyah Hanif also has mixed feelings on the change. She likes how there is more opportunity to do other leisure activities after school and that more students are showing up to practice during zero band than they did during tenth band. However, she misses the

stress free atmosphere of tenth band jazz.

"It was honestly more exciting after school because people would stick around and just hang out, but now everyone is hustling to get back to class and it's kind of exhausting," she said. "Jazz was definitely a nice release after a long day of school, but many people never used to show up and it really affected our grades. It might just take time, but jazz isn't the same zero band."

During the first week of school, there had also been confusion over which clubs would be running this year.

Prior to the schedule change teachers had to either tutor or advise a club after school. Now after school activities are voluntary.

The change left certain clubs without advisors, so a memo was sent to teachers asking which clubs, if any, they would advise.

On September 17, Coordinator of Student Activities Aleeza Widman and Club Liaison, junior Karen Su, emailed an official list of clubs that would be running.

One big change was the merging of Amnesty International and Free the Children into one club, International Love, due to the advisor of Free the Children being unable to stay for enrichment. Both have the common goals of helping others on

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Ms. Wallace selected for major trip

By Poonam Dass and Simrankaur Wahan

Photo courtesy of Ms. Wallace



Ms. Wallace in Orvieto, Italy.

Whether it's through her "Culture Culture" projects or her annual coordination of student trips to Europe, English teacher Georgette Wallace is renowned among Harrisites for her love of culture and international experience. This past summer, Ms. Wallace once again immersed herself in global travel after being selected for a prestigious five-week program in Italy offered

by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).

The NEH is a national agency dedicated to supporting education and services in the Humanities through grants of money to relevant institutions and individuals. Ms. Wallace was one of sixteen Humanities teachers in America chosen to participate in the program, receiving a \$3,900 stipend for a trip to Italy aimed at exploring Dante's epic, *The Divine Comedy*.

"It was inspiring to associate with so many fine colleagues from all over the country," Ms. Wallace said.

The trip focused on a series of seminars on *The Divine Comedy*, which is a philosophical tale about a pilgrim who travels through the afterlife from hell to paradise.

The sixteen honorees worked with Professor Ron Herzman of SUNY Geneseo and Professor Bill Stephany, a retired scholar from the University of Vermont.

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New Standards

by Magdalena Grabos

Public schools across America are experiencing an era of change. Since 2010, 46 states have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), a set of educational guidelines designed to ensure that students at each grade level learn similar material and acquire the same classroom skills. Common Core changes have been affecting schools all around New York, beginning when the New York State Board of Regents opted to use the standards in January 2011. Though Townsend Harris has been incorporating the CCSS for the past two years, this year will see an increased focus on the implementation of the new standards.

Humanities Assistant Principal Rafal Olechowski said that THHS is ahead of most other schools, since it started early. Two years ago students completed a project under the Common Core, and last year's teachers aligned at least one unit to the standards. This year, the plan is to have all lessons in all subjects following the CCSS.

"It is difficult not to use Common Core, since most teacher lesson plans include the principles. Also, any content can be adjusted to fit the Common Core," commented Mr. Olechowski.

Some teachers will have to adjust their lesson plans, but others are not experiencing any changes so far.

English teacher Joseph Canzoneri said, "Most of what we do in AP English is higher level, so we meet the criteria. Now, there is a greater emphasis on non-fiction writing, but I've always done that with my students so at least for now changes have been minimal."

He believes that it will take a year or two before any major changes become noticeable.

Other teachers are seeing the changes and think that they are beneficial to students.

Biology teacher Sarah Oberlander is now planning to include weekly science articles into her curriculum.

"The goal is to have students become more science literate and be critical thinkers. This starts with students practicing reading, analyzing, and forming their own opinions," she said.

Ms. Oberlander hopes that this will force students to not just memorize facts, but analyze the readings and actually learn from them.

Principal Anthony Barbetta explained that Townsend Harris is not seeing many changes yet because the school meets most of the requirements.

"We are now just waiting to see what the exams will look like. That is where we might need to make some changes later, because teachers will need to adjust to the tests and standards. Our curriculum will remain the same, we might just slightly need to adjust," explained Mr. Barbetta.

States around the country will release new tests that meet the criteria of CCSS within the next few years. As of now, it appears that they will not replace the Regents in New York State, and students will take both tests. However, there is nothing that is decided yet, and the only thing that students and teachers can do is wait.

Most states approved the standards because they are supposed to eliminate the possibility of students on the West Coast learning something different from students in the Midwest or the East Coast. The Obama Administration also tied adoption of the standards to funding, which served as an incentive for most states to adopt the standards fully.

Since teachers all over the country will have the same guidelines to follow, hypothetically, no student should feel unprepared or at a disadvantage once they get to college or into their selected careers.

Something new that the standards will apply is a less-is-more approach, where students will cover fewer topics in the year, but will learn them more in depth.

This new method will apply to all subjects – not just English – because the idea is that students should be able to take information from one class and understand it enough to use it in another.

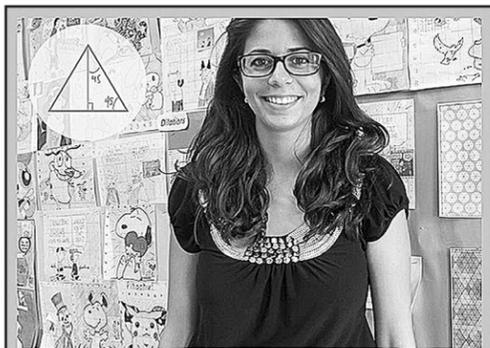
A new addition to math

by Rachel Chabin

Students are welcoming a new face to the sixth floor classrooms this year, as Ms. Maggie Christodolou joins the Townsend Harris staff. As the successor to Ms. Reilly, who left last year, she is teaching five classes of Geometry and Algebra II / Trigonometry.

Ms. Christodolou formerly taught Mathematics Research and ESL (English as a Second Language) math at Oceanside Middle School in Nassau County, Long Island. She has returned to her roots, as she graduated from the Macaulay Honors College right at Queens College. She is currently still in school, pursuing a Master's degree at New York Institute of Technology. Her favorite part of teaching math is showing students how to use the subject in their everyday lives.

More than anything, Ms. Christodolou said that she is interested in integrating with the school community at large. "I am most looking forward to getting to know my students and colleagues, while becoming a part of Townsend Harris," she said.



Name: Ms. Christodolou
Occupation: Math Teacher

→ graduated from the Macaulay Honors College at Queens College and is currently pursuing a Master's degree at New York Institute of Technology

"I am also excited to attend sporting events and musical concerts. It is so wonderful to see my students shine in other areas."

Artwork by Nadia Ali. Photo by Kseniya Davydova

She added that despite Townsend's reputable focus on academics, she wants to go to some of the school's extracurricular events in addition to her teaching responsibilities, so that she could get to know her new students in a different light.

She is looking forward to this upcoming school year, and concluded, "I am also excited to attend sporting events and musical concerts. It is so wonderful to see my students shine in other areas."

Bienvenida Ms. Gonzalez

by Kseniya Davydova

The Modern Languages department has just inducted its newest member: Señora Heidi Gonzalez.

The Peruvian native graduated from Queens College with a Masters in Spanish Language and has had the chance to be a student teacher in this school alongside Mr. Castillo, her mentor and guide.

Initially, Ms. Gonzalez worked with students at the neighboring John Bowne High School. There, she said that she dealt with noisy, unmotivated students who made teaching slightly more difficult. She described her transition to Townsend Harris: "[It is a] huge difference. There is better classroom management and the students are more prepared and respectful."

She feels privileged to have this opportunity, and hopes to gain experience at one of the best schools in the city. "The students here are more eager to learn," she remarked, explaining that she is very enthusiastic about her job.

Ms. Gonzalez is also grateful towards Mr. Castillo for making her feel more at home. He introduced her to the present seniors and made her feel more comfortable in our educational community.



Name: Ms. Gonzalez
Occupation: Spanish Teacher

→ She is a firm believer in teaching Spanish culture because it "brings people of different backgrounds together."

"The students here are more eager to learn."

Artwork by Nadia Ali. Photo by Kseniya Davydova

Her goals as a Spanish teacher remain intact. Her prime objective is for her students to be able to converse with one another outside of a school setting and to be able to maintain a conversation with native speakers.

Along with most other foreign language teachers, she is also a firm believer in teaching Spanish culture because it "brings people of different backgrounds together."

With her friendly personality and professional demeanor, Ms. Gonzalez is likely to lead her students straight to a perfect score on the Spanish Regents.

A legacy of teaching

by Maham Ghani

Ms. Christine Duffy is as new to Townsend Harris as the freshman she will be teaching in her English and Writing Process classes this year.

She joins us from her previous school, the Academy of American Studies, and already believes that this will be a different experience because of Townsend's "reputation for academic excellence."

Ms. Duffy comes from a family of teachers who have inspired her to pursue this career. "I'm passionate about literature and writing, and I hope to instill a love of English in my students. I believe that the skills students develop in an English class are essential to success."

She admits that there will probably be a lot of note-taking happening in her class, but hopes the information will come from student-generated discussions. She explains, "There is a lot of collaborative learning in my class because students learn from each other, and an English class requires the exchange of ideas."

She is also trying to keep the work interesting, although she believes that some old fashioned assignments are just as effective. "Assigning creative projects is important, but it's vital that students write essays in English because they need to learn how to clearly communicate their ideas."

Ms. Duffy is hoping that in the future she will also be able to teach a creative writing or short-story writing workshop. She described, "I come from a film background



Name: Ms. Duffy
Occupation: English Teacher

→ Ms. Duffy comes from a family of teachers who have inspired her to pursue this career.

"There is a lot of collaborative learning in my class because students learn from each other, and an English class requires the exchange of ideas."

Artwork by Nadia Ali. Photo by Kseniya Davydova

and at my previous school I was able to incorporate this into my classes. I would love to someday teach a class on novel into film adaptations or a film analysis class."

Additionally, she is interested in science fiction and horror, so she would love to teach a class "looking at dystopias or analyzing the relationship between monsters and society." Teaching a class on feminism also makes it on the top of her list.

For now though, she said that she is looking forward to challenging her students and becoming a part of the Townsend Harris community.

Student teacher goes pro

by Roxanne Lewis

Physics teacher Joel Heitman has recently joined the Townsend Harris High School community as the newest faculty member of the Science department.

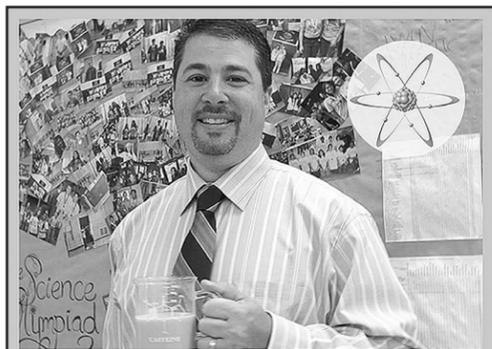
This year, Mr. Heitman is teaching Physics, Robotics, and is assisting Chemistry teacher Philip Porzio with Junior Science Research. He is not entirely new to Townsend Harris, as he has been both a student teacher and observer for the past four years.

"It is a privilege and honor to be invited to teach at Townsend Harris High School," he said. "The teaching philosophy at Townsend Harris is a good fit with my personal one."

Mr. Heitman has been fascinated with the sciences from an early age. As a child he gained an interest in applied science and math.

He found his passion for teaching while working in the airline industry, where he mentored new employees. He recalled, "Several of my trainees would come to my office and tell me how much they appreciated the time and effort I invested in them. As time went on, I realized that teaching others was something that came naturally to me and I wanted a future career centered on helping others gain knowledge and acquiring the tools for success."

His love for both teaching and science led him to his previous career at I.S. 61 Leonardo DaVinci school in Corona, Queens, where he taught general science and a Gifted & Talented class. There, he tried to expose his students to different



Name: Mr. Heitman
Occupation: Physics Teacher

→ Developed interest in applied science at a young age and later discovered he had a knack for teaching.

"I am expecting a great year full of the usual successes achieved by Townsend Harris and its talented students, and then some!"

Artwork by Nadia Ali. Photo by Kseniya Davydova

fields and aspects of science. "I took the seventh and eighth graders to the Hayden Show at Queens College. I also introduced audience response technology into the classroom. In collaboration with other middle school teachers, the school's very first Science Olympiad team participated in a competition and won "Best New School."

With all of Mr. Heitman's science and teaching experiences, he feels well prepared to officially join the Townsend Harris staff.

"I am expecting a great year full of the usual successes achieved by Townsend Harris and its talented students, and then some!"

E-grading raises more questions than it corrects

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to be at the same site to grade them,” said Shael Suransky, chief accountability officer of the New York City Department of Education.

To facilitate this system, schools shipped student exams to Connecticut, where McGraw Hill scanned the exams for grading. Teachers at grading sites then received the scanned version of the exam (without the student’s name or the school’s name) over the Internet using software developed by McGraw Hill.

When implemented, the system experienced a lag due to the high volume of exams processed. This resulted in teachers staring at blank screens for hours on end.

“There were times when nothing was coming up because we had to wait for scanning,” said Social Studies teacher Charlene Levi, who graded the Global History and Geography Regents at Martin Van Buren High School.

Ms. Levi said that, had she been grading the exams in-house, she would have graded 350 exams and would have been done grading in two days. With the computers, after two days of work only 42% was completely graded.

The new grading system had little effect on the majority of the tests taken at Townsend Harris, with one notable exception: the English Regents. This past June was the first time in several years that the passing rate for the English Regents was below 100 percent. More surprising was that the mastery level (students receiving a grade of 85 or higher) decreased 15 percent from 2012.

“The results on the AP exam shows that something went very wrong with the scoring of the regents.”

The disparity between some students’ grades on the Regents and their grades on the AP English Exam has members of the Townsend Harris community questioning the reliability of the results.

On the AP English Exam, which is widely accepted as the more challenging test, the class of 2014 had the highest passing percentage and received the most 4s and 5s in the history of the building.

“The results on the AP exam show that something went very wrong with the scoring of the Regents,” said English teacher Joseph Canzoneri in an email he sent to his AP English students after the release of the AP scores. In a later interview he said, “It doesn’t make sense how kids could increase greatly with the AP scores and tank the Regents. It’s a statistical impossibility.”

English teacher Katherine Yan, who graded the English Regents at Thomas Edison High School, explained that there “may have been several factors” that affected the drop in the mastery level rate.

Ms. Yan said, “If the training is different and [the graders] are from different schools, and they have different standards, it’s hard to get everyone on the same page. The rubric is there to keep us objective but it’s still hard to do that with so many teachers from different schools.” She said that the difference between one grade and another on the scoring rubric can affect the final Regents grade by “a lot” of

points.

Since the English Regents requires students to reference texts they’ve read, students often refer to texts taught in their schools. In the past, this made it easier for teachers at their school to grade the exams as they would be more likely to be familiar with the texts the students analyzed. At Ms. Yan’s grading site, supervisors reprimanded teachers for asking each other questions about tests, so if “someone behind you didn’t know anything about *Lord of the Flies*, they couldn’t ask any questions. Students are writing about all different texts and they can’t ask about it, so it might be hard to accurately grade somebody else’s student.”

Social Studies teacher Alex Wood served as a content supervisor at Brooklyn Technical High School. Mr. Wood said that, though he didn’t discourage people from talking to each other, the computers made “teachers feel like they’re grading machines and it hindered them from asking advice to give accurate scores.”

Senior Jonathan Chung did very well on both the AP English exam and the SAT subject test for English, yet he received below the mastery level on the English Regents. He said the Regents was “more like a test to see how well you can spell things out for people, and not so much of insight and comprehension.”

With parents, students, teachers, and administrators skeptical of the results, the option for appealing the test grades became more and more desirable.

The principal must send appeals to the superintendent. If there are a small number of appeals, the superintendent makes the call on whether they are valid, but if there is a larger number, the appeals might get sent to the state.

Principal Anthony Barbetta appealed all “questionable exams, meaning students who failed or who just missed mastery by a point or two.”

Only one appeal went through; all others were denied.

“They basically wanted us to find clear cut answers that were marked wrong but we couldn’t find it,” said Mr. Barbetta.

Since the essay grading depended upon live scorers, it was the focal point of the appeals, but the school did not receive the actual grades scorers gave to students’ essays; they only received the scans of the essays back. This made it difficult to prove that a student who received a grade below the Mastery level was graded improperly.

One of Ms. Levi’s students appealed after receiving a grade below mastery on the Global Regents. “Because it was a passing grade the department didn’t even want to deal with it,” Ms. Levi said.

During the process of shipping the exams to Connecticut, the DOE lost the exams of numerous students from other schools; these students had to return in August for retakes. For Townsend Harris, one exam was not scanned. “Originally it was put in as a failing grade, and it turned out to be in the high 90s,” said Mr. Barbetta.

However, not all feedback was negative.

Once the scans were available “it was much

faster to grade them on the computer,” said Ms. Yan. “Normally I wouldn’t be able to grade 20 exams an hour. This was much easier; you just click and go on to the next one.”

Ms. Levi added that while the graders “still had to read kids’ handwriting, it was cool to have it come up on the computer.”

“I think the system doesn’t trust us to be professional and I’m disappointed in that.”

Despite the positives, the participating teachers did not approve of the new policy.

“It feels like we can’t be trusted, like we’re going to compromise our integrity over Regents Exams,” said Ms. Yan.

Mr. Barbetta agreed: “I think the system doesn’t trust us to be professional and I’m disappointed in that.”

The Department of Education did an audit two years ago and found that there were some schools where teachers were inflating grades.

“The way we know that is when we re-graded them, some of the exams that were at the passing mark weren’t in fact passing,” said Mr. Suransky. “It doesn’t benefit the student to pass them if they’re not, so the question came up of how can we create an efficient system where teachers grade Regents that are not their own and we came up with a possible number of options, one of them being electronic scoring.”

After the delay in getting all exams graded, which resulted in many students going to graduation without knowing if they did indeed pass the necessary exams, Mr. Suransky determined that “the technology of [McGraw Hill] was not good enough.”

On September 13, the Department of Education cancelled the remainder of the \$9.6 million, three-year contract with McGraw Hill, opting for the customary paper and pencil grading this upcoming year. Teachers, however, will continue to be sent to scoring sites to grade the work of students from schools other than their own.

“Teachers will be sent to different sites to grade the Regents...[and] they won’t be scoring their own kids but they won’t be doing them on the computer,” said Mr. Suransky. “I hope we can get the technology to work in the future, but we are not comfortable with this company and its technology,” he added.

According to Niket B. Mull, Executive Director of Assessment, the city has “a number of practices to ensure a fair grading process” when teachers grade the Regents next year with non-electronic methods.

“I don’t think the problem was the scanning,” said Ms. Yan in response to news of the city letting McGraw Hill go. “It’s hard to read those essays when you don’t have knowledge of the text and then be able to accurately grade them. Maybe if the money was put into school funding then students would be able to perform better and then there would be no issue of cheating on Regents exams because there would be no need.”

The city will receive a refund from McGraw Hill for the June portion of the contract.

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“From the Block”

Andrew Mitchel explores the different neighborhoods of THHS students. Each episode, a student takes Andrew to his or her neighborhood, shows him what makes the area unique, and finds the best slice of pizza available.



“DIY”

Stephanie Yeh offers you monthly tips on how to make and produce things inexpensively and creatively. Episode One teaches you how to create your own tote bag using simple supplies.



“Hangry and Hungry”

Stephanie Han and Jonathan Chung cook for you. Each month they find recipes from a different international cuisine and offer you tips for how best to cook it. Episode One focuses on food from Korea.

MEET THE 2013 S



SU PRESIDENT

What's the job?
She's in charge of working to improve after school functions, planning trips, and being responsible for the initiatives within the school.

What'd she do?
"For the first time, underclassmen received apparel...I also started the trend of going ice skating sophomore year and planned the junior banquet."

JUDY KWON



VICE PRESIDENT

What's the job?
His responsibilities include representing the student body, introducing more school spirit, and trying to keep the school a safe and happy place.

What'd he do?
He is president of the Society for the Preservation of the Earth club, and is a teacher's assistant on Sunday. He works alongside the SU president.

JOSHUA MERAI



ANGEL



CLUB LIAISON

What's the job?
She's responsible for managing club attendance, addressing the needs of each club, and helping them find advisors or classrooms.

What's her plan?
She's preparing a Student Union website with Yash Sharma, townsendsu.com, which will help people learn about clubs and see what's available to fit their interests.

KAREN SU



TREASURER

What's the job?
Generally, the major requirement of school treasurer is to manage the budget, specifically for club and team funding.

What's his plan?
He hopes to take part in improving communication within the student body by utilizing popular social websites such as Facebook, and assisting in developments regarding school conventions.

HARRY PETSIOS



JUNIOR QSAC

What's the job?
The junior and senior QSAC have to attend many meetings from high schools all over the borough and apply the advice received towards their own school.

What's her plan?
"I'm glad to be a part of the SU. I like the cleaning and organizing we did with the SU store. It's these baby steps that teach future members they need commitment."

HANNAH JANG

STUDENT UNION

SECRETARY

What's the job?
He takes notes during SU meetings. He also looks over the finances of the SU store and manages the school suggestion box.

What's her plan?
"I want to increase school spirit and get people excited about coming to school. My involvement in this school makes me want to give back to the community."



PUBLIC RELATIONS

What's the job?
He uses graphic design to create flyers and announcements to publicize events, and collaborates with Ms. Fee, Ms. Widman, and Karen Su regularly.

What'd he do?
Even before the school year began, he was working on P.R. projects, the most notable being an independent website for the Student Union.



JUNIOR SLT

What's the job?
Along with the senior SLT, she shares updates on the students' daily lives, interesting events, and debatable issues within the school community.

What's her plan?
"I'd like the SU Board to be more involved so students are able to approach any of the SU members and let us know what's on their mind."

SONG

YASH SHARMA

AMANDA LEE

SENIOR CLASS PRESIDENT

What's the job?
Typically, the Senior Class President is responsible for planning the yearly hall decorating, the senior mixer, the senior trip, and the senior prom.

What'd he do?
He's been a senator for the last two years and is also president of the Trivia Knowledge Club. He's wanted this position since he's been involved in the SU board as a freshman.



JUNIOR CLASS PRESIDENT

What's the job?
Nina assists the junior grade leaders, helps plan the Junior Prom, listens to her fellow classmates, and expresses their concerns at meetings.

What's her plan?
She is focusing a lot of her time on Junior Prom, wanting to have an attractive venue for an affordable price. She's also preoccupied by THHS's Hall Decorating event.



SOPHMEN CLASS PRESIDENT

What's the job?
Sherin follows the junior class president's example and tries to come up with new and innovative events for her fellow sophmen.

What's her plan?
Sherin Shibu plans on holding another scavenger hunt for the freshmen, getting grade apparel for both sophomores and freshman, and changing the freshman grade trip.



DILLON MAHABIR

NINA LEEDS

SHERIN SHIBU

gathered by Rachel Chabin, Asmaaul Chowdhury, Suswana Chowdhury, Yelena Dzhanova, Magdalena Cassidy and Senior QSAC Karan Chachlani were unavailable for pictures; see their profiles online.

Seniors test iPads in QC seminar

by Sarah Iqbal

It's apparent that technology has been increasingly making its way into education, with many teachers integrating it into their everyday lessons. Chris Lore and Brian Sweeney, instructors of the Humanities Seminar at Queens College, have similarly integrated the use of iPads into their courses in lieu of traditional textbooks.

Robin Hizme, the Director of the College Preparatory Program (CPP) at Queens College, worked with Principal Anthony Barbetta and Assistant Principal Rafal Olechowski to launch this program in the Fall of 2013, using grant money earmarked for the CPP.

Professor Hizme said "the idea was definitely a group effort and we were eager to implement it, even though funds had never been allocated towards technology in our program. Principal Barbetta was pivotal in the initiation and support of the idea."

Both Professor Lore and Mr. Sweeney have used technology frequently in a classroom setting. Professor Lore set up an online discussion board for his classes last year. Although it was successful, he noticed that students "had limited access to technology within the classroom itself, so comments on the discussion board did not surface during time in the classroom."

Mr. Sweeney discussed the role of the iPads in the class thus far.

"The iPads don't replace in-class discussions," he said. "The best thing they do is facilitate discussions during the reading process by allowing students to share comments while reading each e-text. Students can come to class ready to continue and improve a conversation that has already started."

The app that does this is called "Subtext." With it, students have constant access to digital libraries. Use of Google Drive for student e-notebooks has also increased student collaboration.

"We think that this collaboration will break down the barrier between time in and out of class, and result in a more well-rounded and comprehensive learning process," said Professor Lore.

A real concern that arose and remains troublesome involves Queens College's Wi-Fi, which hasn't been able to handle the amount of students logging in all at once.



Students in the seminar can use their iPads at THHS.

"It takes up so much of class time to set everyone up and half the time [the iPads] don't work with the Wi-Fi," said senior Katherine Kulesza. As a result of the problems, Katherine feels the iPads haven't been worth it. "It is nice reading on them but other than that there is nothing too special about them to continue the funding."

Others felt the Wi-Fi issue to be less impactful.

"Despite the technical difficulties we had in the beginning, I find it very beneficial," said senior Laura Caba. "Reading books on Subtext is incredibly helpful. Everyone comments and participates in discussions. And whenever I have a question [while reading] people answer so I'm rarely confused. I'm glad the iPads have been introduced."

"We want to emphasize that this really is meant to be a test," said Mr. Sweeney in response to questions about the Wi-Fi. "Even after the Wi-Fi is fixed, if students don't find this useful and we don't see results, we won't continue it. Our hope is that the iPad enhances the experience."

Professor Lore added, "The acquisition of knowledge and the honing of skills, in my opinion, is not a one-way street from teacher to students, but multifaceted and diverse, and the more ways we can provide to allow students to make their opinions heard the more successful the

Clubs cope

(continued from page 3)

an international level, so the merging is compatible. International Love will be advised by Robert Babstock.

"Although it will be a challenge, our clubs will coexist and merge in both events and fundraising," said International Love co-president, senior Leanna Narain. "We will also have more members that will contribute to our club and help us in our fight to essentially reform the society we live in. Both club leaders plan on using our time efficiently and using the advantage of more members to get things done."

Although the student body has been under the impression that clubs were dying out because teachers no longer wanted to stay to advise them, Ms. Widman notes that this is a misconception. She says that club activities are "in good shape" and feels that they were largely unaffected by the schedule change.

"To be honest, I don't think there are any clubs that won't run," she said. "Around forty clubs for a school with 1100 kids is pretty good. We have a good mix of things."

While certain clubs had trouble finding advisors she adds that teachers have been gracious about staying for enrichment.

"Teachers are advising clubs because they want to. Everybody's doing it on a voluntary basis," she said.

Karen feels that the situation was handled in the best possible way, expressing thanks to the teachers for their cooperation.

"I highly suggest that we move away from the negative light shed upon this situation," she said. "Instead we should focus on the positive aspects such as more quality in clubs, and a bright future for student involvement and school spirit here at Townsend Harris."

The Hawk's Nest opens for student sales

by Poonam Dass

With its enhanced school colors, vibrant murals, and upcoming promotions for student involvement, the Student Union store, which was refurbished over the summer and renamed the "Hawk's Nest," is up and running.

The 2013-2014 SU board members decided to revamp the store last June because they felt it lacked student appeal, choosing a name that gave it a greater sense of school spirit.

"We weren't really utilizing the SU store to the best of our abilities," said junior class president Nina Leeds. "We noticed that there was a lot more we could be doing with it."

The SU Board also wanted to increase student awareness of the actual items sold in the store.

"The products in the store always stayed the same: books and uniforms," said junior Harry Petros, SU Treasurer. "During the cleanup, SAT and United States History books resurfaced that hadn't been opened since 2005."

Various SU Board members began renovating during Regents week last June and finished during the first week of September. In addition, a mural contest was held over vacation with the winning designers, sophomore Cindy Xu, senior Selina Feng, and junior Jessica Mgbеojirikwe, receiving gift cards to Michael's Arts and Crafts store. During the revamping, SU members repainted much of the store crimson and gold, and Cindy painted her mural. They also added an LED light-board conveying messages to students in the cafeteria and a suggestion box to encourage input on the store. Furthermore, a new

SU logo was designed by Public Relations Officer, junior Yash Sharma, to "show the change of administration."

"We ended up using a lot of our creativity by recycling old wooden boards, brushes, or any material we could find. Price-wise, I felt that we tried as hard to renovate without major costs so we volunteered a lot of our time to make the changes," commented Club Liaison, junior Karen Su, on the renovation's allocated \$200 budget.

In addition, students will have the opportunity to apply for a managerial position that oversees earnings and activities of the Hawk's Nest during each lunch band.

"The addition of a student manager will make this less of a "school store" and more of a "student union store," said Harry.

Although it is already functioning, the Hawk's Nest is still developing. The SU Board plans to have the two remaining murals painted and will try to create a "Rewards Card" for students. Although the store's merchandise will stay the same for now, the SU Board wants to soon sell new items that appeal to students. However, SU President Judy Kwon noted that it's "not very easy to bring items that are approved by the Department of Education and items that the students can enjoy."

The SU Board sees success for the Hawk's Nest. "I definitely think students will come into the store much more," said Yash. "With all the new stuff we're adding, it's really a great and convenient place to get certain jobs done."

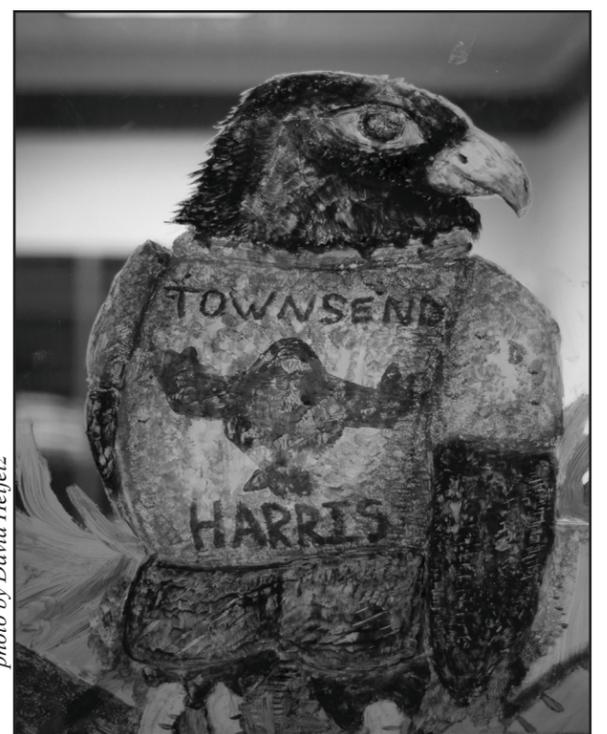


photo by David Hejletz

One of the new murals in the Hawk's Nest.

Although SU members admitted that coordinating and brainstorming for the renovation were difficult, they enjoyed the experience.

"Not only was it a thrilling experience in the sense that we were making near-permanent changes to the school," said Harry, "but it also offered some assurance that the Executive Board performs "hands-on" jobs, and doesn't simply deliberate school policy."

Harrisites too young to cast ballots volunteer instead

by Harry Quinn

In Townsend Harris, Government and Participatory Democracy classes require all seniors to contribute ten hours of service to a candidate or local politician in New York City. The goal is for students to better understand the legislative and democratic processes behind local leadership and current events. Additionally, underclassmen participate in summer campaigns to bolster their academic resumé and gain work experience and leadership skills. With local elections dominating the 2013 election, numerous students spent their summers on the campaign trail.

Many campaigns were ecstatic about having Harrisites volunteer.

Rebecca Pineiro, Field Organizer from the Peter Vallone Jr. Campaign for Queensborough President, said, “Before working on the campaign, I didn’t know much about Townsend Harris or the people who went there. However, the quality of interns from Townsend was always amazing, and convinced me that on my next campaign, recruiting at Townsend Harris will be a priority.”

Sometimes this volunteer work has led to graduates of THHS returning as official members of campaign staffs. Alumna Sydney Spinner served as Volunteer Coordinator for the Austin Shafran Campaign for City Council District 19.

“I got to watch one student I had

as a tenth-grader in my Constitutional Law class develop organizational skills and become the friendly, sweet leader I knew she could be,” teacher of Social Studies Linda Steinmann remembers. “She then came back and recruited Townsend students for the Shafran Campaign. She developed skills she never knew she had because of the experience. The most important skill students learn in the ideal internship is organization, which allows them to be better leaders and better deal with high school.”

Spinner raved about the involvement of Townsend Harris students: “[It] was an absolute pleasure working with my fellow Harrisites. This summer I wound up having around 150 people from Townsend Harris as interns and volunteers. These interns were the infrastructure of our organization [and] they were a great team to work with. I will really miss working alongside them.”

With an inside perspective on the intense fights for positions for New York City Mayor, Queensborough President, and City Council District 19, Townsend Harris students shared their experiences in multiple interviews. All of the interviews are collected at thhsclassic.com. Below is an excerpt from an interview with senior Lilly Rada who worked on Bill de Blasio’s successful campaign to become the Democratic nominee for Mayor.

Question: Why/How did you get involved with the campaign? Why de Blasio over other candidates?

Answer: Initially, I was working for Assemblyman Phillip Goldfeder of District 23. There a team leader from the de Blasio campaign recruited me. This was during petition season.

For me, petitioning was the test run. Ethically before joining, I researched Bill and was drawn in by his willingness to tax the wealthy and invest in early childhood education. I like his idea of using this money to establish a universal Pre-K system which would further snowball into fewer struggling schools. But overall, I met Bill several times and have come to know him as a earnest family man. His campaign was stellar. He didn’t discriminate because of our age but rather listened and respected our ideas.

Q: How did you contribute to the campaign? Tell me a little more about some of the work you did.

A: I was a Queens Intern early on in the campaign and eventually became a Queens leader training other volunteers. I attended press conferences. I went to a rally in Rockaway that was against the closure of St. Johns. I went to do visibility at the Colombian Day parade at the Jamaican Jerk Festival, and I also accompanied Bill on streets and subways of Queens to greet people and hand out literature.

Q: Tell me about how that translated on primary day. How did you feel during the day? How did you feel when you found out you won?

A: There was a huge countdown probably three weeks before primary day.

On primary day, straight after school I went home and took my parents to vote. [Later] I went to headquarters in downtown Brooklyn and phone banked, making sure all the contacts we made went out and cast their ballot.

There was a huge party for the campaign that very night. We never fully acknowledged the fact that Bill had won until Thompson conceded, but the feeling of a job well done, that is—campaigning with a victory—is still quite surreal.

Q: How has working with de Blasio changed your outlook on local politics, your community and New York City?

A: At first, I really wasn’t interested in politics at all. The interest was sparked by my first internship with Mr. Goldfeder doing constituent affairs. I think the most important thing I learned from the de Blasio campaign is that we the people actually do have a say and can contribute change. Concerning NYC, de Blasio opened my eyes to the crisis of inequality, what he termed “a tale of two cities,” that is going on in the city and the urgency with which we must act to change it.

Mayoral candidates’ views on NYC education

by Yelena Dzhanova

Bill de Blasio and Joe Lhota, the candidates in the 2013 Mayoral Race, have differing views when it comes to education.

Aspiring to put more funding into the New York City public school system in general, de Blasio plans to raise taxes from 3.86% to 4.3%, which will only impact those who receive an annual income of \$500,000 or more. Lhota also wants to fund public schools, but through other means aside from taxation.

With these new funds, de Blasio plans to make pre-K programs universally available to city children. Lhota claims that he can offer the same type of program without raising taxes, since “we’re the highest taxed city in the United States.”

On the issue of charter schools, de Blasio believes charter schools that share space with regular public schools should have to pay rent. Lhota is a larger proponent of charter schools, hoping to increase the



Candidate Joe Lhota.

amount in the city during his tenure.

On the issue of standardized testing, both appeared negative on the subject.

De Blasio commented that, “[They’re] poisoning our system.” Lhota said, “We really need to work with our faculty and our teachers to have them not train for tests. Train for the core competency of math and arts, as well as English and language.”

Regarding class size and teacher jobs, de Blasio said that he wants to hire more experienced teachers. Lhota wants to institute a merit pay system that would reward teachers with bonuses for proven success in the classroom. Claiming that high salary should be earned, he believes that it is the teacher’s responsibility to verify a child’s education. De Blasio has not yet expressed his formal opinions on this topic.

On at least one issue both appear to fully agree: students should be permitted to bring cell phones to school.

the CLASSIC Trivia Contest: Win an iPad!

Every month, the print edition of *The Classic* will provide you with four clues. Can you guess the identity of the staff member who matches these clues? If you can, buy a ‘guess ticket’ during your lunch band from the *Classic* staff. We’ll add your guess to our treasure chest, and at the end of each month, we’ll pick a ‘guess ticket’ at random. If we pick your guess, and it is a correct answer for **any month’s** clues, you’ll win a prize. Buy as many guesses as you want. We will leave your guesses in the chest for the whole year. In December the prize will be an iPad mini. Note: the iPad may be a refurbished product. Here are the clues for September’s mystery teacher! If you decide to research the mystery, do so in an appropriate manner and at an appropriate time.

WHO AM I?

I have spent more than two weeks of my life in complete silence.	I’ve eaten dog meat many times and have found it not unappealing.	I used to own and ride a motorcycle.	I am the current president of a 14,000 watt radio station.
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