

EDITORIALS



The ends justify the means

Rexly

W Penaflores II
Managing Editor

We have all stayed after school and talked to our friends in the hallway. While socializing about the day's latest drama, students often encounter security guards who command students to relocate into the Information Resource Center (IRC), to go to our after school activities or to leave the building. Considering that one of the roles of the school is to provide a safe, comfortable haven for students, this summary dismissal seems out of character.

I have seen students who have become angry with security guards and students who have decided to shout a few choice words before leaving. Like them, I once thought that security had no right to kick students out of school, but after investigating their rationale, I understand the validity of their actions.

Like many day-to-day confrontations between students and adults, there is more than meets the eye to the shepherding of students out the door at 3:30 p.m.

According to Principal Kaine Osburn, security staff want students out of the hallways because they are legally liable for students' safety. With teachers scurrying off to meetings, offices and homes, the number of adults in the building reduces dramatically. With very few security guards to watch over them, the notion of students walking around the hallways unsupervised after school is a recipe for disaster. Thus, is it important for students to clear the hallway and relocate to the Contest Gym, field house, club venues or the IRC.

Other seemingly unnecessary examples of wielding the rules are equally grounded in logic. Security guards are instructed to perform duties for all hours of the week. Even while school hours are not in place, front desk security is stationed to monitor whoever enters the building.

Throughout the school day, guards are stationed at every corner of the building to ensure students' safety. There are things that security personnel do that might frustrate some students, but nonetheless, the guards are only doing their job.

Throughout the school day, security staff tries to reduce congestion in the hallways by keeping the flow of traffic moving and asking students if they are carrying a pass while they are out in the hallway during class. In both situations, the security guards sometimes are less than delicate as they shout commands such as "keep moving" or "you cannot stop and talk to your friends." I have experienced this myself every day after first period where I wait for a friend on the corner of the Hall of Honor before we both head to gym class.

I used to think that the security guards did not like me in their presence, but when I observe the human tsunami that passes through that hallway, I can understand why the guards would like me to keep moving to my class. If there were a snag in the middle of hallway traffic, it could back up students trying to get to class on time.

Another place where security personnel are omnipresent is the cafeteria. In any lunch period, there is a plethora of kids standing inside the area where students get their food. Last year, the security staff began telling kids that they could not bring their backpacks inside the food area. The cause for the new rule was because there were a lot of food thefts. Now, we are told every day to take off our backpacks before entering the food area. I have seen times when students would have an argument with guards as to why they cannot have their bags with them in the food area, but when they are told of the reason why bags are not allowed in the food area, the students become sympathetic.

There is a lesson in that last statement, both for students and security personnel. Perhaps if students were to give the guards the benefit of the doubt and/or the security personnel were to explain their reasoning when issuing a request or demand, each side might find the other more accommodating.

While I am on the subject of the cafeteria, students often complain about not being able to access the cafeteria except during their scheduled lunch period and about being asked to leave the cafeteria in a timely manner after the bell even if they are not finished with their food.

However, close observation of cafeteria traffic patterns for several days revealed why security staff deny access and encourage students to rush to finish their food and leave. As soon as a period ends, there is a mob of people rushing to fourth-seventh period lunch. The number of people in some lunch period (fourth period in particular) is so huge that if people stay after their lunch period to finish their food or try to enter off schedule, the cafeteria would resemble the Kennedy/Edens junction at 8:15 a.m.

All of these scenarios show that while students may moan and complain about treatment at the hands of security security personnel (and to be honest, some could be more polite), the rules that they enforce make sense. These are rules that allow us to go through our school day without any problems or incidents.

Accelerated students deserve advantages



W Zoe Ljubic
Editor in Chief

With preparation for the college admissions process seeming to begin earlier each year, counselors have their hands full helping students to prepare transcripts, essays and recommendations. As a key component in the admission process, colleges nationwide consider class rank and weighted grade point average (GPA) when students apply.

According to www.collegeboard.com, class rank is a mathematical summary of a student's academic record throughout all four years of high school in comparison to classmates. It

A student's cumulative GPA and class rank are affected by the courses taken during his/her high school career, but many actually realize that it begins sooner—as early as middle school and junior high

incorporates the grade a student receives in a specific class in addition to the level of the course.

Class rank is important to many students, especially to my junior classmates. Students constantly change levels of courses and make sure their GPAs are as high as possible. A student's cumulative GPA and class rank are affected by the courses taken during his/her high school career, but many actually realize that the process begins sooner—as early as middle school and junior high.

At some point in this process, friends become rivals. As my classmates compete to achieve a high GPAs and class rank, some have expressed dissatisfaction with the advantages that some of our other classmates have received in the area of mathematics.

As a part of middle school educational programs, Niles West and its feeder schools offer students the opportunity to test into advanced math programs. These programs are designed to create accelerated math classes for students whose learning abilities are far above average. Here, the student works at his/her own pace with the teacher until (s)he masters the curriculum up to eighth

grade.

Once the student has mastered the entire curriculum up to eighth grade, (s)he is enrolled into a freshman honors math course at West. As a result, sixth, seventh and/or eighth graders are in the same class as freshmen.

If students begin their high school math in middle school, they will begin high school already in honors and could be in a

Do we punish those who excel in a subject just to level the playing field? How would that field be leveled?

level five math course as early as sophomore year. Overall, this positively affects an accelerated student's GPA and class rank. Thus, the students who began high school math in middle school have more of an advantage than those who did not. For example, if a freshman enrolls in the traditional math sequence at the outset of high school, (s)he will not complete the prerequisites to take calculus topics, a five weight class. The advantages accelerated students have coming into high school math while enrolled in middle school are immense. These advantages help the student gain a higher GPA and a potential rise in class rank.

For those students who did not take high school math as middle school students, there are clear disadvantages. Students who did not participate in the accelerated program cannot complete the entire honors math program. Thus, my friends' position.

While I sympathize, West cannot stop offering accelerated classes to middle school students just because accelerated students might get to take more GPA/class rank-boosting courses. Their skill and ability in math should be recognized, and they should be allowed to take said courses, even if they are freshmen or sophomores.

Such a high GPA and class rank reflects the accelerated students' hard work and dedication to the process and is duly deserved.

Besides, what are the alternatives? Do we punish those who excel in a subject just to level the playing field? How would that field be leveled? By not offering accelerated courses to middle school students? By not giving honors and AP credit or GPA points to accelerated freshmen and sophomores? Neither of those solutions seems fair.

Fortunately, math is the only discipline in which the problem exists, so such seeming inequities do not apply to a wide range of courses.

In the final analysis, we should applaud, not condemn, those students whose excellence allows them to accelerate and the schools that afford them that opportunity.

WestWord Staff

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WestWord

west opinions

Common final assessments applauded

Editorial

In an era of increased accountability for public education, one in which both 2008 Presidential candidates stressed revamping of public education, a new District 219 Board of Education policy that requires teachers of all sections of core classes to administer uniform final assessments is a step in the right direction for Niles Township students.

According to Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Anne Roloff, the assessments assure that classroom instruction mirrors curriculum. "The curriculum guide drives the [final] test," Roloff said and "will answer the question of whether our students have learned [material] based on the curriculum."

Under the provisions of this innovative plan, teachers will now evaluate students on specific concepts that are delineated in the guides, will adhere to *all* parts of the curriculum guide and will

Because teachers with common courses will work together to write tests, they will learn teaching and test-making strategies from one another

cover areas of the curriculum that might previously have been overlooked.

The new policy offers myriad benefits for students and teachers alike. Common assessments ensure that different teachers of the same course will offer identical finals with identical weight applied toward the semester grade. As a result, all students will be guaranteed equal opportunity regarding their grade for that course. This is more impartial than the current policy, under which different teachers of the same course may assign different percentages to final exams. This uniformity of grading assures that students in all sections of a course will be assessed fairly and objectively.

Uniform assessments for courses benefit teachers as well. Because teachers with common courses will work together to write tests, they will learn teaching and test-making strategies from one another. This is an advantage for teachers, as it will improve their ability to create tests that accurately evaluate if concepts have been

learned properly. As director of English Sanlida Cheng asserted: "When teachers get together and write these tests, we learn the process [of writing assessments]."

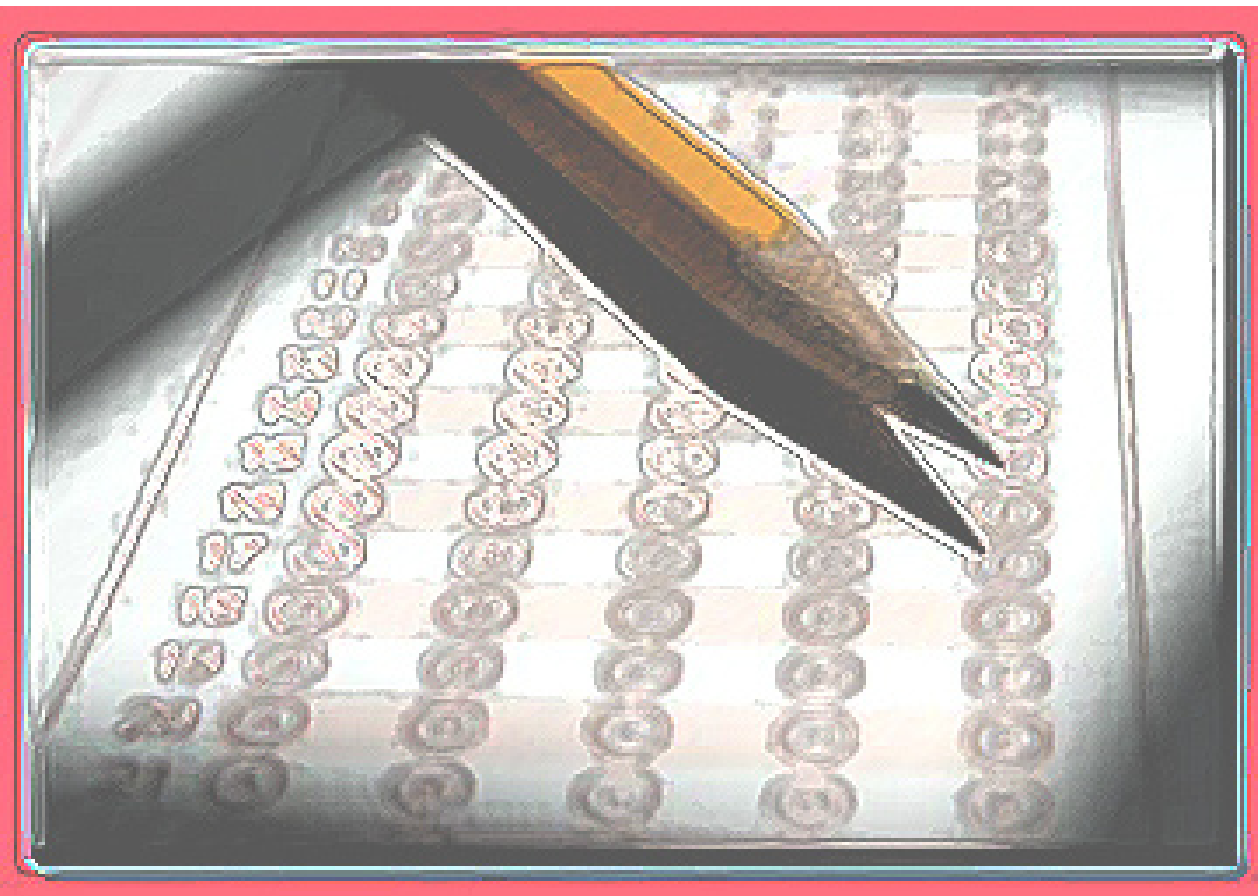
One of the most fundamental advantages of final assessments is that they foster improvement in teaching quality

One of the most fundamental advantages of final assessments is that they foster improvement in teaching quality. When exam results are examined, administrators will be able to assess the strengths and weaknesses of teachers' methodology and content knowledge. If a high percentage of students perform poorly on an assessment, administrators and teachers can work together to evaluate, remediate and improve teaching quality and strategies, ideally resulting in implementation of more skillfully designed lesson plans—closely tied to curriculum—leading to increased success for students. Thus, administrators can be assured that not only students, but teachers as well, are on track.

Data from assessment results can also help administrators and teachers to identify and revise curriculum guides that are outdated or inefficient. Test results can help determine positive and negative aspects of each curriculum. Such scrutiny will enable administration and faculty to remove, change or add concepts to the curricula.

Such assessments present challenges. Handling the logistics of soliciting input from all teachers of core subjects at both North and West will be a daunting task. Forming consensus no doubt will be a lengthy and difficult undertaking. Furthermore, teachers accustomed to flexibility and autonomy might chafe under the restrictions imposed by such common assessments. Such reservations aside, the *West Word* staff believes that whatever might be sacrificed in terms of autonomy and flexibility will be more-than-offset by accountability, consistency and—most important—increased competency.

West Word applauds the district board's decision to mandate common final assessments.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor:

In the previous issue, *West Word* ran an ad concerning a tanning salon called XO Glow.

XO Glow has a number of services such as threading, waxing, facials, airbrushing, henna tattoos and tanning. As school nurse, I am concerned about the ad.

My father died of malignant melanoma (also known as skin cancer) at the age of 61. My concern with tanning salons is that young people, especially young girls, like to go to these kinds of places during the winter to maintain their "healthy glow" and also

before prom to look nice.

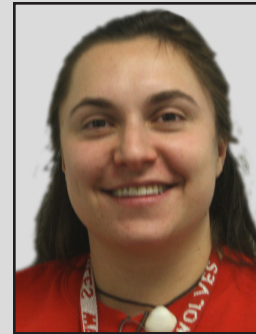
The problem is that they believe that it is not dangerous to tan at a salon as compared to sunbathing at the beach.

I believe that tanning salons are very dangerous. Besides serious sunburns, cataracts are also a possibility in the future if proper eye protection is not used. While sunbathing at the beach is a better option, this, too, is dangerous if proper sun screen is not used (SPF 30 or greater). There are lotions and spray tans available to give you an appearance of a healthy tan without the dangers of a tanning salon.

—Peggy Bassrawi, School Nurse

Should all core classes administer a common final assessment?

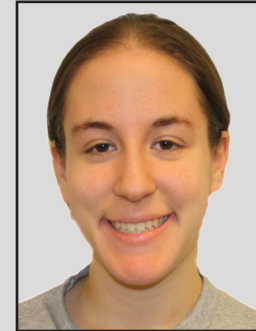
Faculty



Jessica Fliman

"Yes, because at the end of the day, everyone should be able to answer the same questions about a course."

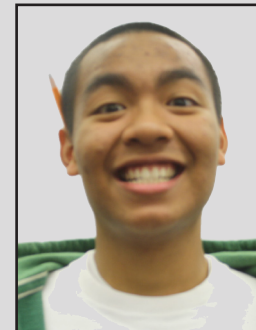
Senior



Jennie Koval

"I don't agree with assessments because if teachers can weigh tests differently, they can reduce students' stress levels."

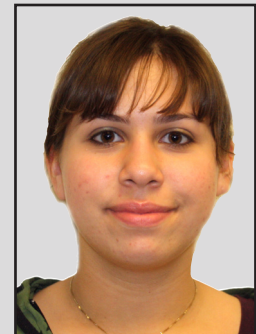
Junior



Jason Moosikkamol

"Yes, because core assessments are essential to the development of young students."

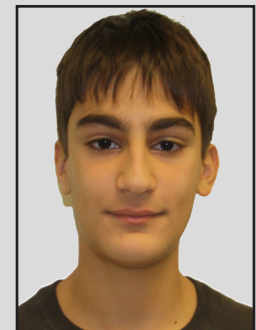
Sophomore



Marta Villalobos

"I think it would be a good idea because students will know exactly what to expect on their final test."

Freshman



Michael Nissan

"Yes, because teachers will be sure about what they need to teach by the end of the year."