Dear Rivendell Families,

This fall I sent a lengthy letter all to all Rivendell families explaining issues related to federally required standardized testing (the SBAC) in Vermont and across the country. The time for administering the tests is approaching. I would like to update you on what the testing will look like at the Academy and update you on what we have been continuing to do in order to roll back the testing requirements.

During the week of February 9 - 13, we created a special schedule so the 7th and 8th grade students spent approximately 5 ½ hours learning how to take the new online tests and taking practice tests in English and math. They spent additional time in class working on testing strategies. The 11th grade took a half-day on March 3rd to run through the online test materials.

The time spent on familiarizing students with the test format takes away time from instruction and learning. We are trying to avoid wasting time on test prep, while doing what we need to do to familiarize students with the new computer format and the format of the questions. Since the law mandates the tests, it would not be fair to students to not give them some preparation negotiating the new types of questions and computer format. Our staff also needs to increase its knowledge about strategies of administering the tests, and we will be trying to push our computer network to the limit to determine if we can maintain full wireless access in the building as we test.

There are two components to English and math tests. In one section the questions actually increase or decrease in difficulty depending on a student’s answer. The second part of the tests begins with a scripted ½ hour classroom activity that we do with students the day before they take the test. The second test (both subjects) does not level the questions. The testing will take place over 6 days.

In addition to the critical issues that were raised in my fall letter, Michael Galli’s presentation on tests, letters and a visit to the Vermont Secretary of Education and other work that we have continued to do, the most frustrating issue at the moment is the significant amount of instructional time that is being spent on testing and the amount of staff and administrative time that the SBAC is costing the school and district. Here is a rough estimate of the time spent so far:

- ¾ day meeting in October (Keri, Chris White, Eric Reichert)
- Full-day meeting in January (Keri, Gabi Martino)
- Student practice time described above
- 25 hours (Nancy Murphy and Gabi Martino organizing schedules and information regarding testing requirements)
- 7 hours (On-line certification of teachers, administrators and counselors who will potentially need to proctor the testing)
- 25 hours (Hank Plaisted loading secure browsers and updating the network to support the testing)
- 8 hours meetings (Keri, Jan Cole, Gail, Tammy)
- 4 hours data input (Bridget Peters)
Between October and today we have spent roughly 141 person-hours related to administering the test. This is a conservative estimate and, in addition, we still have work and meetings planned, student data to input, and scheduling to do before we actually give the test. None of this includes the instructional time that will be missed during the testing itself.

We should not be spending so much time and money on work that, I have no doubt, will NOT help us do a better job of educating our students. I have included a memo from the secretary of education indicating her opinion of the testing. I am less optimistic about what value the test results might have. Quite often the results of educational research or data gathering is simply common sense. Also, I have not heard one national or state strategy for educational improvement linked to test results. My worst fear is that opponents to public education will use the results to further erode support for public education. This comes at a time when the US has reached an 80% national graduation rate, an all-time high. Iowa is at 88% and Vermont and Wisconsin are at 87%. (http://www.governing.com/gov-data/high-school-graduation-rates-by-state.html)

I have continued to speak out against the testing. Michael and I contacted Senator Sanders’ office and discussed our concerns with one of his staffers, David Cohen. I learned that Senator Sanders is working hard on the Senate Education Committee, chaired by Tennessee Senator Lamar Alexander to repeal the No Child Left Behind Act. This would help relieve Vermont, one of the top states in terms of student achievement, of having all of its schools become “in need of improvement” based on the NCLB Act’s requirement that all states test proficient in math and English by 2014.

I encourage everyone to contact Senator Sanders’ office. Here is a copy of an email that I sent to David Cohen after our conversation.

Dear Mr. Cohen,

Thank you for taking the time to listen to our concerns about the SBAC test, AYP requirements, school improvement and all the rest. Yesterday, I mentioned that school administrators and teachers in Vermont were not engaging in a robust public debate about the education issues that we are facing today. Here is a link that will take you to a letter from another Vermont principal who has found his voice. The letter was sent to Vermont principals from the Vermont Rural Partnership. It is a thoughtful letter that reflects the challenges of teachers and principals across the state.


I am interested in hearing if your office is getting many calls from principals, superintendents, teachers, school boards, and parents about education issues. As I indicated in our conversation yesterday, I don't hear people speaking up in statewide meetings. I agree that Vermont is in a good position compared to states that signed the waiver agreement, but I am afraid that if policies don't change at the national level, it will only be a matter of time before Vermont and others are forced to fall in line. I have attached a letter that I mailed to parents about a range of issues and policies related to testing and test results.

Thanks again for your time and your work. Please tell Senator Sanders to keep us informed of his work with the Senate Education Committee and let us know what we can do to support his work with the committee. Time and resources in education are being wasted. We need a change in policy. We need to continue to be creative and innovative.

Best,

Keri Gelenian
Principal, Rivendell Academy
Head of Schools, Rivendell Interstate School District
(603) 353-4321
kgelenian@rivendellschool.org
I am doing this work and sharing it with you because it reflects the often stated but seldom practiced goal of many schools: preparing students to be active members in a democracy. If I am not using my voice in a democratic manner, if teachers are not, if the board is not, then we cannot claim that we are truly extending our students’ understanding of what it means to participate in the democratic process. Remember, 4 ½ years ago, a group of students organized to move the Raptor up the hill. They organized. They made a community survey. They gave two or three board presentations, got press coverage and had someone donate time and materials to move the Raptor. Our advisory program, our focus on student leadership and responsibility, and our work educating students reflects the very simple truth that life is what you make it. By extension our communities, state and country are what we make them through our active participation.

The following link takes you to the website of the Senate’s Health, Education and Labor Committee. This particular page contains information related to No Child Left Behind. The page also contains links to every senator on the committee.

http://www.help.senate.gov/search/?q=NCLB&x=0&y=0&access=p&as_dt=i&as_epq=&as_eq=&as_lq=&as_occt=any&as_oq=&as_q=&as_sitesearch=&client=help&ntsp=0&filter=0&getfields=title&lr=&num=15&nummg=3&oe=UTF8&output=xml&partialfields=&proxycustom=&proxyreload=0&proxystylesheet=default_frontend&requiredfields=&site=help&sitesearch=&sort=date%3AD%3AS%3Ad1&start=0&ud=1

Send an email. Make a phone call. Tell them that your school’s principal feels too much is being wasted on one test.

Best,
Keri Gelenian

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Rivendell’s Trip to France on the Horizon

At the beginning of the year, April 15th seemed to be impossibly far in the future; there seemed to be PLENTY of time to organize, fundraise, apply for passports, and make luggage selections. With less than 2 months to go, the trip is becoming a reality for 18 intrepid travelers. In February, students wrote letters to their potential host families in Saverne, France. They are now anxiously awaiting news of who they will be staying with. The idea of living with a French family for ten days is daunting for some! Our Rivendell students have lots of questions about what it might be like. The idea seems both exciting and terrifying to them. Truly, these travelers are stepping bravely out into the world.

This exchange with our sister school, Lycée Leclerc, in Eastern France has been going on since 2003. This will be the 7th group to go from Rivendell. In addition to the homestay, our students will spend 5 days in Paris visiting museums, parks, castles, and monuments. We wish them a “bon voyage”!
Theater Department News

The theater program is going strong with Seanna Rivera-Perry and Ms. Alden directing a one-act play called "Crazytown", to be performed on March 13th & 14th at 7:00 p.m. in the West Wing multi purpose room. Admission will be $3.00/$5.00. A sneak preview will be performed during the Student Expo on March 12th!

Join us for a fun evening performed by a cast of 11. Take a tour of the most messed up town in America, from police interrogation room where the nicest guy in town is issued a strange ultimatum, to the elementary school for a heated political debate on critical issues like tater tots. Welcome to Crazytown, where the motto is: Welcome to Crazytown.

In other upcoming events, the one-act play "12 Ways to Screw Up a College Interview" will be performed during block 4 on March 13th by the Performance Skills class, when students will perform for their peers. Also, parts have been cast for our spring musical "Anything Goes"! So mark your calendar for May 14, 15, & 16 for lots of fun and great music.

Seniors will be presenting a description of their internships or Upper House Projects at the Student Expo on March 12th. This will give them a chance to explain about their experience and give others a chance to see what is possible!

From the Food Service Director

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All schools will be celebrating Free Fruit Week during the week of March 23-26. Fresh fruit will be available to staff and students throughout the week.
On Tuesday, February 17th Dartmouth College students presented their Money Smart Challenge to the 7th grade. The objective of this program is to provide students with an overview of potential career options, college aspirations and financial education; including budgeting, wants vs. needs and the consequences and benefits of making choices.

Our 8th grade is preparing for the Upper Valley Business and Education Partnership’s Job Shadow Day. This will take place on April 2nd. Job Shadow Day is a learning experience at a workplace in the Upper Valley Community. The purpose is for students to begin to identify career interests, learn about academic, technical and personal skills that are required for a particular job. We hope our 8th grade will gain an understanding of the connection between school, work and their goals for their future.

Rivendell Robotics Team State Champions!

**Rivendell Team Members:** Arianna Bauman, Nathaniel Dimick, Maxwell Green

**Rivendell Coaches:** Kerry Browne and David Green

**What:** VEX Robotics New Hampshire/Vermont State Championship

**When:** Saturday, February 28

**Where:** NHTI in Concord, NH

Rivendell competed against 40 teams from all over Vermont and New Hampshire at NHTI in Concord, NH. These 40 teams were invited to compete if they did well enough in other tournaments. They came from public and private schools of all sizes, from big schools like Kennet, Pinkerton, Pembroke and Trinity to smaller schools like Rivendell and Thetford. Rivendell's team, known in the robotics competition circuit as "Team 6191A - The Fellowship", went undefeated in the qualifying rounds. As a result, we were ranked number 1 going into the elimination rounds.

The elimination rounds involve alliances of three teams working together against other alliances of three teams. Our alliance consisted of our team (the alliance captain), one team from Kennet High School (5106E) and one team from Trinity High School (40K). In the elimination rounds alliances advance if they win 2 out of 3 against their opponents. In the elimination rounds we lost only one match.

In the finals, we defeated an alliance made up of Team 5106A from Kennet High School, Team 4886A from Thetford Academy and Team 134Z from Pembroke academy.

As a result of our win, we qualify to attend the VEX World Championship held in Louisville, KY. Unfortunately, we won’t be able to attend since Maxwell and Doc Browne will be on the Science Spring Break Trip to the southwest.

Over 10,000 high school and middle school teams from 32 different countries compete in over 750 tournaments all over the world.  

Middle School News

On Tuesday, February 17th Dartmouth College students presented their Money Smart Challenge to the 7th grade. The objective of this program is to provide students with an overview of potential career options, college aspirations and financial education; including budgeting, wants vs. needs and the consequences and benefits of making choices.

Our 8th grade is preparing for the Upper Valley Business and Education Partnership’s Job Shadow Day. This will take place on April 2nd. Job Shadow Day is a learning experience at a workplace in the Upper Valley Community. The purpose is for students to begin to identify career interests, learn about academic, technical and personal skills that are required for a particular job. We hope our 8th grade will gain an understanding of the connection between school, work and their goals for their future.
Congratulations to our eight Academy artists showing their work at the AVA Gallery Best of the Upper Valley High School Exhibition. Student artists are Emily Ghio (watercolor), Cameron Surprenant (photo), Veronica Weisberg (photo), Hayley Taylor (photo), Kaileigh White (painting), Hayley Taylor (photo), Megan Landgraf (photo), Tali Gelenian (photo), Moriah Ludwig (painting).

The show is on display at the AVA Gallery in Lebanon, NH through March 6th. Please stop in and check out the amazing work of our student artists and support all the student artists of the Upper Valley!

### March 2015

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<td>MS Basketball Awards Night, 6 p.m.</td>
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SENIORS

HAVE YOU FILED YOUR FAFSA??
Get 1st draft in ASAP and don’t
forget to finalize numbers
Time to get into scholarship mode!
EVERYONE should apply for the
Frank & Olive Gilman Scholarship,
found at www.nhcf.org/scholarships
This is open to both NH & VT resi-
dents. It can be worth up to $5K/
year. The deadline is April 15th.
Reminder to VT residents, deadline
for the purple VSAC scholarship
book (black tab section), March 6th!

OPPORTUNITIES

Interested in police work? The NH Cadet
Academy will be held June 20-26 at the
NHTI and Police Academy in Concord, NH.
Open to students ages 14 or older. Down-
load application at nhchiefsofpolice.com/
cadetacademy. Scholarships available to cover cost of $150 fee.

Institute for Security, Technology and
Society at Dartmouth College.
High school summer program
Students will explore cryptography, digital
forensics, privacy & security awareness. No
cost. July 6th-10th. Applications and a teacher
recommendation are due March 30th. More
info contact: info.ists@dartmouth.edu.

JUNIORS

Register for the
spring SAT or ACT
SAT: 5/2 or 6/6
(collegeboard.org)
ACT: 4/18, 6/13
(actstudent.org)
(Fee waivers available for students who qual-
ify for free/reduced lunch.)

Moira Valenti from
NHHEAF will be visit-
ing Junior advisories
on March 31st to give
an overview about
financial aid and the
cost of attending
college.

Girls State is for junior
girls interested in citi-
zenship, and local and
state government.
Spend five days on the
Vermont Technical Col-
lege campus from June
14th - June 18th. Dead-
line is March 27th. Go
to www.alagmgs.com.

Sophomores and Juniors

Free college planning workshops

College Pathways by VSAC
Saturday, March 21 - Saint Michael’s College
Saturday, April 11 - Castleton State College
Monday Evening, March 30 - Lyndon State College
(evening to include a college fair)

Destination College by NHHEAF
Saturday, March 14 - Plymouth State University

Workshops will include: applying to college, writing an essay that stands out, strate-
gies for the SAT/ACT tests, the college search and factors to consider and tools to use,
college costs and financial aid. To register visit: www.vsac.org/CollegePathways or
MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendents, Principals, VSBA
FROM: Rebecca Holcombe, Secretary of Education
SUBJECT: SBAC Test
DATE: February 17, 2015

It has been brought to my attention that some school leaders in Vermont are contemplating an "opt out" of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium ("SBAC") test at the local level. I know that for some of you, there is frustration around the timeline and the work involved with the initial administration of the SBAC. While this frustration is understandable, I want to be very clear that if we (AOE, school administrators and school board members) in Vermont do not maintain fidelity to federal requirements, we/you will forfeit federal funds.

As federal fund recipients, at both the state and local level, we must be clear that schools, districts or systems that do not administer the test will not be eligible for any federal funding, without exception. This includes federal programs such as IDEA, Title I, Title II, and federal support for Child Nutrition. Most of these resources provide additional support for children in poverty or children with disabilities. In addition, schools or districts which are not eligible for federal funding will lose access to federally supported work from AOE, including support related to implementation of EQS and local efforts which align to federal projects. Systems which lose access to federal funding will need to either cut services to students or raise the local tax rate - both of which have seriously negative implications for the students and communities we all serve.

I understand that many of you object to the punitive use of these tests under NCLB. I share these objections. Like many of you, I do not support sanctions that discourage our best teachers from serving those students who need them most: students with disabilities and students living in poverty. Like many of you, I worry that too much emphasis on test-based accountability creates a new kind of equity gap, as schools -- and particularly high poverty schools-- feel compelled to narrow curriculum to what is tested, and away from other critical learning children need to thrive as adults in civic and economic life. Given that the “proficiency threshold” on the new tests is set so high that two-thirds of our high school students will likely not score as “proficient,” it is a virtual certainty that once again, all our public schools will be labeled “low performing,” despite the fact that a study by the US Department of Education ranked us seventh in the world in math and science. This is also despite the fact that our students know more, on average, than children in their parents’ generation, judging by scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. As one legislator recently told me after reviewing a sample SBAC test online, “I am really glad I am not in school today, because I don’t think I would do very well.”
In addition, Vermont does not support reporting in terms of performance thresholds because their use distorts the true story of schools’ efforts to improve learning. Performance thresholds are arbitrarily set and mask the growth students make from year to year. If every single student in a school does not score above a subjective proficiency threshold, regardless of how much growth he or she made over the past year, the school is labeled “low performing.” Although publicly funded students in our historical academies score the same, on average, as students in our public schools, the federal government does not require them to wear this “scarlet letter” of shame. I understand why you would want to be exempt from this shaming.

I also worry about the impact on our children of repeatedly focusing on the label “not proficient” rather than focusing on the growth they made during the year. The researcher Carol Dweck tells us that focusing on growth and marking progress and effort increases the willingness of students to take risks and persevere with hard tasks. In contrast, Dweck tells us that focusing on performance and failure can lead to discouragement, and unwillingness to try challenging tasks and disengagement. Let’s focus on helping our students stretch and grow, rather than focusing on telling them they don’t meet an arbitrary cut score.

However, I ask you to not let the inappropriate uses to which tests are put under NCLB undermine what value there is in tests, when used appropriately. Unlike previous tests, this is a computer adaptive test which adjusts the difficulty of questions in response to the answers students provide. This allows for more accurate information about what each child can and cannot yet do; this information will help teachers to better respond to their students’ needs. Without tests, we would not know for example, that one of our highest priorities as a state needs to be improving the learning of our boys who are growing up in poverty. We would not know that while the performance of our most affluent students outstrips the nation and is improving every year, we have founed in our efforts to improve the learning of students with disabilities. Let’s work together to use these tests to improve, not shame, our schools and systems. We know we have work to do to improve, and used wisely, tests can be one of a series of tools that help us target our efforts.

Along with the proper administration of the SBAC, we are also asking you to work with us proactively, to help the public understand what the SBAC test does and does not measure. Most importantly, we need to push back with Vermont’s voice, and explain the appropriate and inappropriate inferences to be drawn from student scores on standardized tests, as well as our firm conviction that the purpose of our schools is not to educate our students to do well on tests, but to educate them to thrive in life. If we do the latter, I am confident we will also see steady, incremental and real learning gains that will also be measured by the tests students take.

In a few weeks, we hope to send out the recently completed white paper, written by members of SBAC’s technical advisory committee, which speaks to appropriate and inappropriate uses of test scores. We hope this, along with a letter from my office, will help support your messaging around SBAC.

On a lighter note, we are inviting a few legislators and journalists to take the SBAC test with our high school students this spring, so they can speak for us and for our students about what this test demands. We expect our 10th graders will give our legislators and journalists a run for their money!

Thank you for your continued efforts on behalf of Vermont’s students. I value and appreciate all your efforts to support our educators and keep the focus of our schools on improving learning, especially given the challenging policy context in which we are all operating. I know none of you entered this job because it was easy; you do this work because you know there is nothing more important to the health of our community.

Please contact my office if there is anything we can do to assist you during this period of transition to the SBAC test.
CONVERSE FREE LIBRARY

presents

College Admissions and Financial Aid: How to Get in and How to Pay for It

with

Karl Furstenberg and Virginia Hazen

Thursday, March 19, 7 p.m.

Karl Furstenberg, of Lyme, is the former Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid at Dartmouth College. Virginia Hazen is the current Director of Financial Aid at Dartmouth College. Refreshments will be served. For further information, call 603-795-4622.

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