

The High School View

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Science fair remodeled

BY ALEXIS CONDON

This year's annual MVRHS (Martha's Vineyard Regional High School) Science and Engineering Fair — revived by a new coordinator, science teacher Jason Neago — featured a “Shark Tank”-inspired engineering competition and resumed the Wind Turbine Design Competition. The fair was a two-day affair: On Friday, judges spent time with student projects, and Saturday was dedicated to public viewing and awards. Additionally, “Maker Class” projects were displayed in the hallways, highlighting the work of art, design, and technology students. Mr. Neago returned to the high school this year after spending two years teaching in Japan. He said, “[Science teacher Jackie Hermann] had been the science fair coordinator for over a decade, and was at the point where she was looking to hand it over. It

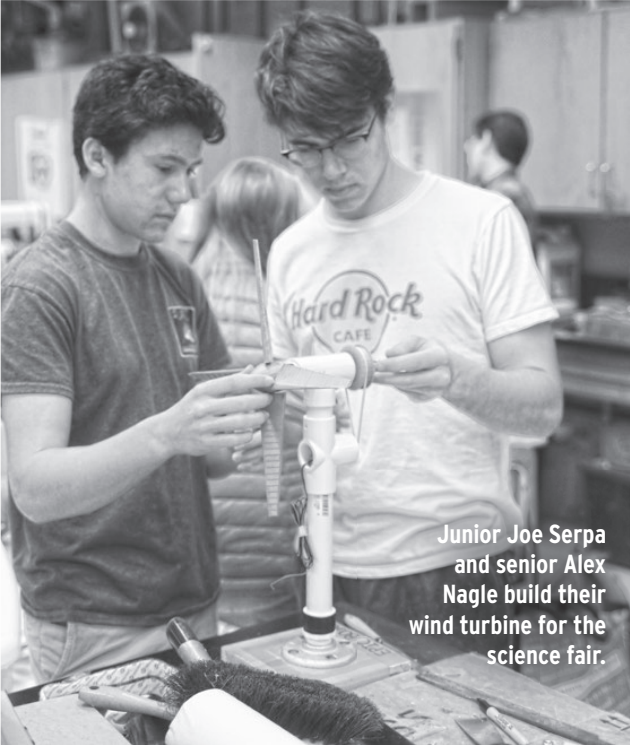
happened that I had just come back. I had done some work with engineering and science projects there, so I felt like it was a good fit for me to come into this role, continue her work, and maybe add a few of my own little twists.” The fair, which typically takes place in February, was moved to March this year. While this timing prevents winners from moving on to the regional science fair, it gives students maximal time to work on their projects. Freshman Henry D’Andrea was named the overall winner of this year’s fair, receiving first place for his investigative project, “Can Bacteria Grow in Space Without a Spacesuit?” Henry said, “A long, long time ago, when I was in something like middle school, I learned that bacteria could breathe without oxygen, and I was like, Wait, can they just go to space? All this time I’ve been waiting to do this project.” Awards were further di-

vided into investigative and engineering categories. Special awards and “door prizes” were also announced. The first-place engineering award went to sophomores Chloe Combra and Kate Howell for their project, “Degradable Water Cup.” Many students took it upon themselves to find mentors in the local community to inspire their project ideas. Sophomore Graham Stearns sought the help of Wampanoag environmental laboratory director Andrew Jacobs, and won second place for his investigative project testing mercury content in local fish. Graham said, “Because I’m an avid fisherman, I was curious about the amount of mercury I was taking in while I was eating what I catch. It was fantastic. I got some very knowledgeable judges. I’d say I felt confident.” Sophomores Charlotte Packer and Ciara Hoyt were inspired by a trip to the Island Grown Initiative Green-

house at Thimble Farm. Charlotte said, “Getting to see hydroponics on a larger scale really intrigued us, and made us want to build

of the event. Ciara said, “It was a little nerve-wracking in the beginning, but after the first judge it was pretty easy, and we got better at answer-

The “Shark Tank” competition had a small contestant pool, with only 12 entries. Chemistry teacher Dr. Natalie Munn, who coordinated the competition, said, “It’s meant to entice people who wouldn’t find traditional projects appealing. Maybe they’re interested in business, and will be doing pitches in the future. Similar to an elevator pitch, it’s a different kind of skill set, and just like the wind-turbine competition, it’s geared to give the upperclassmen alternatives.” While not officially part of the fair, sophomore Anabelle Thomas, president of the Film and Video Club, took the opportunity on Saturday to present to visitors a short film she made, with the help of her club, calling attention to potential issues with the high school’s building and infrastructure. She said, “We started in late November, and just finished. We interviewed a bunch of faculty, the principal, and superintendent, and we took footage of the school and its exterior and edited it in [Adobe] Premiere to compile a video.” **HEV**



Junior Joe Serpa and senior Alex Nagle build their wind turbine for the science fair.

EMILY GAZZANIGA

something like it at home.” Their project, “In-Home Hydroponics System,” won the Biology award. For many students, judging was the most daunting aspect

ing questions after that.” Junior participant Caroline Hurley said, “It was definitely intense being under the spotlight, but by the third judge we were more prepared.”

New management system critiqued

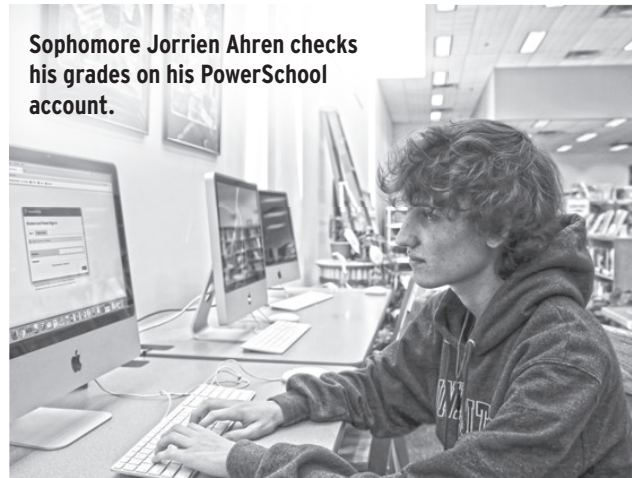
BY HENRY HITCHINGS AND ERIC REUBENS

This year marked the first time that Martha’s Vineyard Regional High School (MVRHS) has used the administrative and student management system PowerSchool. “One of the perks to switching to PowerSchool was that all of the elementary schools are now using the system, which makes record transitions between elementary schools and the high school easier,” said information technology director Clifford Dorr. Mr. Dorr, who began working at MVRHS in 2015, had worked with PowerSchool at the Oak Bluffs School, and

was instrumental in selecting the software as the new student management system. Prior to using PowerSchool, the school used PlusPortals, developed by Rediker Software. This software, however, was outdated compared to PowerSchool. “The old system concentrated management of data in a few people, so there were only a few people who knew how to pull it out or run the reports, and things like that,” said Principal Sara Dingley. “So I think there was a desire to make things like that a larger school task, where lots of people had the ability to manage and see the information.” “After I looked at several different vendors and prod-

ucts, and weighed the different advantages of the various [software], it ultimately ended

pick out more specific data points than the previous system, there have been issues with it as well. “Tons of issues came along with [the switch to PowerSchool],” said Ms. Dingley. “A lot of it involved



Sophomore Jorrien Ahren checks his grades on his PowerSchool account.

COLIN HENKE

up coming down to choosing PowerSchool,” said Mr. Dorr. While this system provides benefits, such as its ability to

[shifting toward] making grades visible to students, which didn’t really happen before. The portal was there,

but the grades were always hard to manage and see. [It was also challenging to take] all of our historical information from Rediker and put it into new transcripts and stuff. There are always glitches, so we’re still working through that,” said Ms. Dingley. PowerSchool has the potential to offer administration, faculty, and students alike the opportunity to see and work with a vast amount of data that will guide decision making in the years to come. Students, however, have yet to experience the extent of PowerSchool’s promises. Senior Owen Engler said, “I think it’s really hard to use. You can’t see your excused and unexcused absences besides looking at a complex spreadsheet, and it’s really important to be aware of your absences in order to pass your classes and graduate.”

For others, the transition from PlusPortals to PowerSchool has been a welcome change. Sophomore Vitor Lage said, “The PowerSchool app is much easier to use [than PlusPortals] for me on my phone, and I think the information is way more organized than on last year’s system. For me, it’s perfect the way it is.” According to freshman Atlas Zach, “[PowerSchool] is a good system for organizing all the grades and info for my classes. The only issue is that teachers as a whole need to be on top of inputting graded assignments within the system, and doing this consistently.” “When teachers post grades on time, and when it is working properly, I really think that it is a great resource for both students and teachers,” said senior Kaio Reis. **HEV**

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