

The High School View

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Nervous smiles abound as masks come off

BY JOSIE WELCH AND JULIET MORSE

After nearly two years of mandatory mask-wearing at Martha's Vineyard Regional High School (MVRHS), students and faculty are not required to do so anymore as of Monday, March 7. Over February break, the six Board of Health committees met on Zoom and voted to suspend the indoor mask mandate. The week prior, Island schools voted to align their decision with the Board of Health's verdict.

The decision surprised senior Alison Custer. "I thought at least for the week or two after break, we were going to have to wear them, but it was a nice surprise," she said. "Things are going well

enough that we can do that." Senior Silas Abrams agrees that it's time to return to normalcy. "Everyone has the right to wear [a mask] if they feel like they need to, but I feel that it's good we are recognizing that if you don't want to wear one, you shouldn't have to," he said.

Junior Nolan Carreiro is unsure whether cases will rise now that students and staff are not required to wear masks. "Students don't wear their masks very well already, so removing the mask mandate might not have a large effect," he said. "Also, many students in the high school have already gotten COVID."

School nurse Mike Savoy is not too concerned about the prospect of not wearing masks. "Basically everyone



Student opinions on the removal of the mask mandate vary just as much as the way their masks were worn.

is wearing the mask around their chins anyway," he said. "Vaccination rates look good, and we have had a number of kids who have had COVID, and are functionally immune now. I'd say it's probably time to take the masks off."

Around the school, feel-

ings of both optimism and excitement as well as uncertainty and anxiety surround the lifting of the mask mandate. The pandemic has been the "new norm" for more than two years, and the habit and sense of safety that comes with wearing

masks may be hard to shed.

At MVRHS, the percentage of students who are double-vaccinated falls in the 60 to 70 percent range, according to data collected by Mr. Savoy's office, and 99 percent of the teachers are fully vaccinated. Among the 642 students, 260 are reported unvaccinated, and 74 of those have had COVID.

"There has always been pushback about having the vaccine," said Mr. Savoy, but he explained that because contracting COVID gives you antibodies, students who contracted COVID while unvaccinated have still contributed to the development of herd immunity.

For Alison, the decision to mask or not mask was a challenging one. "Coming in [on Monday], I was like, 'Should I wear one, should I not?' I wasn't sure what would be safest, because a lot of people went away [for

February break]. I was just going to come in and feel it out." Ultimately, Alison shed her mask.

Senior Keisilla Cecillio, who works as a certified nurse's assistant at the Martha's Vineyard Hospital, is choosing to continue wearing her mask to protect her elderly and immunocompromised patients. "I understand that people don't want to wear their masks anymore, and I'm not against it. I just don't think it's the right choice for me to not wear mine," she said.

School librarian Kevin McGrath explained that he was in the habit of wearing his mask all the time. "It feels weird not to," he said, but admitted that taking off masks would make face-to-face connection easier. "Being able to see everyone's faces and being able to hear people, being able to teach and listen ... it's exciting." **HSV**

Artists earn accolades in Scholastic competition

BY NICK CARPENTER, JULIA SAYRE, & CAMDEN TOWNES

Every year, Martha's Vineyard Regional High School (MVRHS) students are invited to submit their creative pieces to the Scholastic Writing and Art Awards, which accepts entries in more than 28 categories that range from drawing and illustration to digital art and photography. Student artists earned 23 awards at the regional competition this year, and three submissions are moving on to the national competition.

Scholastic judges evaluate student work based on originality, technical skill, and demonstration of a personal voice or vision. Regional winners earn a Gold Key, a Silver Key, or an Honorable Mention for their work, and submissions that earn the top accolade — a Gold Key — automatically move on to the

national competition. Photography teacher Chris Baer instructs students at all levels of photography, ranging from his Photo and Graphics I class to Advanced Photography.

Freshman Josh Salop, who is enrolled in Mr. Baer's Photo and Graphics I Class, earned an Honorable Mention for his photo "Road Trip." Josh's class assignment for the photo he entered was to create a fictional portraiture in which he staged a movie-like or dreamlike scene. In his black and white photo, the trunk of an Audi A4 is slightly open, revealing a body that has been stowed inside.

"I just thought it was a cool idea to have a kind of captive," Josh said. "I think [photography] is a cool way to express creativity in a realistic way, because it's a physical thing you can create and capture."

Sophomore Toby Russell-Schaeffer was given the op-

posite assignment: Create a documentary portraiture. These unstaged and undirected photographs depict people naturally, and attempt to show their true personalities.

His photograph, titled "Juvenile Perspective," was awarded a Gold Key. Toby started photography at a young age, and his interest has grown since then. "I had a camera when I was 11, and I went to Yellowstone and took some photos, and I enjoyed that," he said.

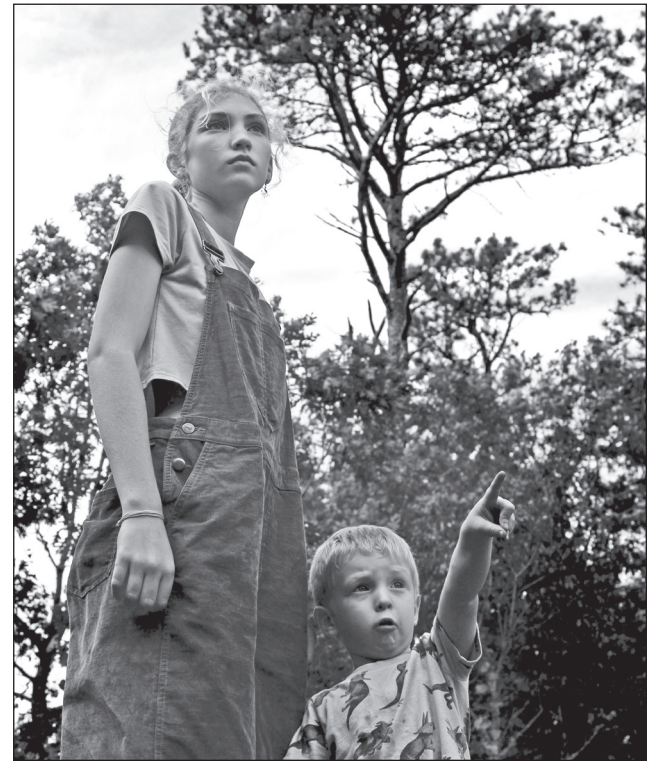
Junior and Advanced Photography student Isa Merriam was awarded two Silver Keys for her photographs "Pride" and "Quiero Entender."

"I got interested in photography in eighth grade," Isa said. "I started experimenting a little bit, and then when I saw that it was offered as a class in high school, I decided to dive a little bit deeper into that."

Isa's work mostly consists of portrait photography. "When you're photographing a person, you can't stage it perfectly, like you can with an object. Usually I end up with something not what I expected, but that I'm happy with," she said.

"Isa puts a lot of thought, time, and feeling into the work she does," Mr. Baer said. "[Her work] is self-reflective, where she is looking at her cultural identity, and it's very abstract and almost surreal in the way she approaches it."

Mr. Baer has seen the confidence boost that students often receive when their work receives recognition from expert judges. "These awards can change the arcs of people's lives. [Earning an award] can change the path or study of what students want to do," Mr. Baer said. "I was talking to a former student who is now a professional graphic artist, and she



TOBY RUSSELL-SCHAEFFER

"Juvenile Perspective" by Toby Russell-Schaeffer won a Gold Key for photography in the Scholastic Writing and Art Awards.

pursued that career because she won a Scholastic award, which allowed her to take herself seriously."

He added, "This year's

awards were all well-deserved, and these students consistently put out solid work, so they've earned these prizes." **HSV**

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