



The High School View

The High School View is staffed and prepared entirely by students from the Martha's Vineyard Regional High School, and published on their behalf by The Martha's Vineyard Times.

Race Culture and Belonging Retreat builds community

BY PICKLE EVILLE AND ISABELLE ANTHONY

Last week, the Martha's Vineyard Regional High School (MVRHS) held its annual Race Culture and Belonging Retreat at the YMCA. The two-day retreat, which gathers students and staff for immersive workshops and discussion, is designed to foster understanding, empathy, and connections among members of the school community. The retreat has been a part of the high school for the past 20 years, encouraging reflection and meaningful dialogue between students while creating a safe space for student connection.

The retreat consists of a wide variety of activities, ranging from large fishbowl discussions to more intense conversations in smaller settings called home groups. Home groups are led by a student facilitator and teacher advisor. These conversations consist of sharing personal experiences with discrimination or stereotypes, as well as learning ways to navigate those situations.

Sam Hart is the coordinator of Pathways and Special Projects at the high school, and served as one of the retreat's faculty advisors. He appreciated the reflective aspect of the retreat, and how students are encouraged to think deeply



P.E. teacher Liane Dixon, left, and junior Nathan Larkin high-five each other during the retreat.

about their identities and the factors that shape them. "It's a time to come together and talk about issues that emerge from these questions about identity and important issues, things around race, ethnicity, cultural background, and how we as a diverse student body can support one another," he said.

Retreat co-coordinator Nell Coogan said she values the

unique educational experience the retreat provides. "Textbooks tell you certain things, articles tell you certain things, but actually talking to someone and hearing from them what their experience has been in certain situations is incredibly important," she said.

Physical education teacher Liane Dixon was a faculty advisor at the retreat, and led one of the home groups this

year. "[The home group] can range anywhere from 6 to 10 students, and part of the process is breaking up into these smaller groups to engage in various discussions and activities, and then we bring that activity back to the larger group to kind of synthesize all of our ideas," she said.

In the wider whole group discussion, people had the opportunity to speak about their

personal experiences. Junior Isla Solon attended the retreat for the first time this year after being nominated by a teacher, and was moved by the students' bravery to be vulnerable in front of everyone. "I was proud of the people who were speaking because [your personal identity and experience] can be a hard thing to talk about," she said.

Junior Samilly Guimaraes has attended the retreat since her freshman year, and was a facilitator this year. She highlighted the activity called "Build an Ally," where students create a poster of a person resembling characteristics one needs to be an ally. "You draw hair representing growth, or arms spreading out for being welcoming, legs for staying strong, shoes for empathy and being in other people's shoes, stuff like that," she said. The posters are now hanging in the school's front hall.

Mr. Hart believes the goal of the retreat is to continue to take steps toward a more inclusive community. "I think we need to take actions every single day, to just keep doing something that makes someone who may not feel like they belong here, or like they don't belong in the community,

to make them feel closer to the school and to their fellow classmates," he said.

Junior Soraya Randolph was a student facilitator this year, and valued the connections she made at the retreat. "I feel like a lot of people realized that they weren't alone," she said.

The Race Culture and Belonging Retreat will return next year, and students interested in participating are encouraged to sign up. Additionally, student facilitators hope to carry the retreat's impact into the wider community. "We really want to try to go into the middle schools, talk to seventh and eighth graders, and build a workshop with them," said Samilly.

With the growing interest in making the retreat a more regular part of school life, Ms. Coogan hopes that MVRHS is on track to continue its work toward becoming an ever-more supportive and inclusive community.

"I wish we could do it once a week, two days a week, until every student and every staff person in the building gets a chance to participate. Because, honestly, I haven't ever met someone who didn't leave the retreat feeling like it was worth their time," she said. *HEV*

Beyond the trends: Defining style at MVRHS

BY LULU WHITE, ROXY WHITE, AND ZERO MONTROYA

Walking down the hallways of the Martha's Vineyard Regional High School (MVRHS), you can spot a wide range of fashion styles. Lululemon leggings, Longchamp bags, thrifted sweaters, and pajama pants are just some of the trends that have become popular in recent years. With these styles, new ideas about fashion and self-image are emerging among students.

Personal style is unique to each person, but it's also influenced by others. Art teacher Tiffany Shoquist, who teaches a fashion and sewing course, noted that while fashion is personal, many students tend to follow similar trends. "In class we do a style sheet where students try to represent their own fashion," she said, "but it's interesting because a lot of them end up looking the same, or have similar elements."

Nell Coogan, who works closely with students as a ninth grade academic advisor,

said, "I love it when students break away from trends and do their own thing; I know that can be hard as a teenager."

While many students struggle to express their individual style while also trying to fit in, administrator Justine DeOliveira pointed out that the school's supportive and welcoming community makes it easier for students to dress how they want. "Fashion isn't a big deal here," she said. "People feel comfortable being themselves, and expressing who they are through their clothes."

Junior Zyler Flanders said comfort is what inspires his style. "Comfort, fair, fair, fair," he said with a laugh. Zyler shops at thrift stores and brands like Young LA, and also likes supporting local shops.

"If I see someone wearing something that looks comfortable, I'll get it," Zyler said. He doesn't judge people based on their clothes unless they're already unfriendly: "I don't

think the way someone dresses makes me view them differently unless they're a jerk."

While Zyler doesn't focus on mainstream trends, he admits that he sometimes picks up on what others wear. "I guess I follow trends in a way. If something looks comfy, I'll go for it," he said.

Though Zyler thinks some students feel pressured to dress a certain way to fit in, he believes it shouldn't be necessary. "I don't think people should feel like they have to dress a certain way to fit in, but it can make things easier," he explained.

For others, style is more than just fashion — it's connected to self-confidence. Sophomore Jasper Grow says his style changed after he became more comfortable with himself. "I was bullied a lot when I was younger, and I didn't dress well back then. But once I felt better about myself, I started expressing myself more through my clothes," he says.

Freshman Nora Duncheva agreed that fashion can affect self-esteem, and that the way people dress is tied to their self-worth. "When you dress in clothes that make you feel confident, it helps your mental health and overall happiness," she said.

Not all students feel confident in expressing their style, though. Sophomore Audrey Atkins said that some students feel pressured to fit in by following trends. "I think people are afraid to express themselves because they don't want to stand out," she said.

At MVRHS, there appears to be a balance between fitting in and standing out. Many students feel free to express themselves through their clothes, knowing they're supported by their peers. And in the end, personal style is about more than just what you wear. It's about expressing your identity, and feeling confident in who you are. *HEV*



Sophomore twins Dani, left, and Jasper Grow show off their outfits while talking in the hall.

BRADY VOUGHT