

AE/MS Scrutinizes Value Of NECAP Standardized Testing

By Vicky Mishcon
Andover School Board

This past October saw three weeks of standardized testing at the elementary and middle school levels. The testing has an effect on the entire school, and the inevitable question arises: Is this really necessary? Principal Jane Slayton and School Board Member Vicky Mishcon reviewed the costs and benefits.

The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) of 2001 mandates that all students become proficient in math and reading by 2018. Assessment is required to determine a student's level of proficiency, and, to that end, NCLBA requires that all students will be tested in reading and math in grades three through eight every year. Each state may use local tests to meet this requirement.

The New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) is a set of assessments used in New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont to meet the requirements of the NCLBA. The tests cover a broad range of learning expectations in reading and mathematics for grades three through eight, and in writing for grades five and eight.

Each school sets its own schedule. At Andover, the lower grades take one test per day in the morning for three weeks. In the upper grades, students take two tests per day in the morning for a week and a half. Each test is a minimum of 90 minutes.

All students take the same test, though some students are eligible for accommodations, such as use of technology, scribes (students dictate to a scribe), and readers (students may have help reading tests, except for the reading tests). A student who arrives late or who is absent must make up the test. Special Education teachers also administer tests, so all teachers are administering tests, and every nook and cranny in the school is being used.

There are many disruptions for students, staff, and administration during the testing period:

- Time is taken away from regular in-

struction.

- Special Education Services are disrupted, as all staff members are administering tests.
- Music and Art are cancelled due to the noise normally created in those activities.
- Physical Education is moved outside to reduce distractions coming from the gym.
- The lunch schedule is altered to accommodate the upper grades, who do two tests in the morning.
- All areas of the building are being used for testing and are off limits for normal activity.
- Students are not given homework during the testing to encourage them to go to bed early and to have a good healthy breakfast in the morning.
- October testing has a disadvantage in that the students have been in school for only a month and have just acclimated to the routine, which testing then disrupts.

Despite the disruptions, the testing serves the school well:

- The NECAPs fulfill the assessment requirements of NCLBA.
- The results offer deep and comprehensive information.
- The tests reflect what schools should be doing.
- The results are used to improve programming and to help teachers know what they should be teaching.

The information, however, comes late at the end of January, making it difficult to use for ongoing individual assessment within the school year. The school has many in-house tests built into the curriculum to meet those needs.

At this point, the October testing is necessary to meet federal standards and to help the school gauge the yearly progress of the student body. Despite the many disruptions, Andover Elementary/Middle School is using the results of the tests to look at the educational programs and determine any need for change or improvement.



The AE/MS Robotics Team gets ready for its final run at the regional competition at Bishop Brady in Concord. Vincent Bolte has his finger on the "go" button, while Eli Shedd prepares the next device for mounting on the robot. Watching from behind the blue line are Coach Sean Cox and team members Carl and Jake Hubbard. Missing: Nick Keniston, Josiah Wagner.

Photo: Charlie Darling



By Sean Cox
Robotics Team Coach

On Saturday, November 14, the AE/MS Robotics Team competed in the FIRST LEGO League competition at Bishop Brady High School. Our rookie team ended up 15th out of 18 teams, getting almost all of the points that we were aiming for.

Vincent Bolte, Jake and Carl Hubbard, Nick Keniston, Eli Shedd, and Josiah Wagner made incredible strides over the past few weeks to work out our challenges. During practice, we usually had 15 to 30 seconds left over during the two-and-a-half-minute timed section, but at the competition we always seemed to have at least an entire minute left over. For those of you who haven't tried this sort of competition, one minute is nearly an eternity.

Nick wasn't able to make it to the competition, but the rest of the team stepped up and managed to rack up a total of 300 points in the three rounds of the robotic challenge, playing head-to-head with another team each time. We also did well in the additional ses-

sions, which covered teamwork and technical skills. Watch for a video about the team on Andover Cable Channel 8 soon.

The team received terrific support from their parents and family. Rooting us on in Concord were Mr. and Mrs. Hubbard, Mr. and Mrs. Bolte, Adrian Bolte, Mr. Juergen (Vince's grandfather from Germany), Mr. and Mrs. Shedd, Tucker and Haley Peters, Mr. Wagner, Ms. Slayton, and Maddy Pfeifer. Thanks, everybody, for such great support on our first competition!

We are going to continue team meetings every Thursday from 3 to 6 PM in the AE/MS science classroom to finish up the additional challenges and get even more used to our robot. Everyone is invited to participate – no programming, or even LEGO, skills are required, just an interest in learning.

Our hope is that by next year we'll have a more seasoned team (again, this year we were all rookies) and will be able to learn from the teams that won and see what we can do to make our team better. And we're off to a great start.



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