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News - New Exam School Entrance Requirements Rolled Out

By Cendy Charles, '23

After two generations of students enrolling in exam schools using their comparative scores on the ISEE, this process was paused from 2020-2021. The move of peeling away for the MAP test has caused ripple effects throughout Boston Public Schools.

In Fall of 2021, a new policy was presented by the Working Group Recommendation to suspend the use of an admissions test for all Boston exam schools. It was passed with the adage that it would be a temporary solution to the academic inequalities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, instead choosing to enroll students based on their zip-codes.

In 2022, BLA students who took the ISEE before it was replaced have several reflections on their



experiences. Being that the first changes to the admissions process were in the name of equity, there were a range of experiences based on how they learned about exam schools, the ISEE and their means of exam preparation.

Martina Reardon, a senior at BLA, remembers how she learned about the ISEE and exam schools from her former school that if students took the ISEE and passed, they could get into “prestigious high schools.” Thus, the path to an

exam school was paved for her by her education.

“I remember my friends and I were talking about it a lot,” recalls Martina, thinking back to that time. “And we would define words for each other each day to get vocabulary built up. And I remember one of the last things we talked about was a word [that was] on the exam.”

In her recollection, Martina talked about how taking the ISEE was a natural step for her, as she was already taking advanced work at school. Soon after taking the SSAT, her teachers gave her the ISEE prep book with the expectation that she was going to complete it.

However, Roodnel Jeannot, a fellow senior, tells a differing tale about how he learned about the exams school and the ISEE. After learning about the ISEE from his mother, teachers soon announced an opportunity to take the test as well. He described being unprepared for the exam, despite the fact that he had the ISEE prep book and his school provided after school sessions focused on exam prep, he was unsure how to attend these after school activities.

“It was like this group thing that people had,” he stated. “And apparently a lot of people got into that, but...like I said, I wasn’t sure how people got into it or anything. So, it was just me, at home, doing stuff.”

Yohanis Tavarez, a junior at BLA, described a similar feeling of unpreparedness around taking the ISEE. “I didn’t even know that I was going to take the test. And so, my mom had told me like, a few weeks prior, so I didn’t have time to study.”

This inconsistency in exam preparation left students with different feelings of readiness and confidence in their test-taking abilities. Upperclassmen of exam schools took the ISEE before the first equitable change was made --- allowing students to take the exam at their own school during the school day --- and therefore took the ISEE on a weekend at a different school acting as the testing location.

“When I was taking it,” explained Roodnel, “it was pretty nerve wracking because, you know: they take you on a Saturday and you go to a school you’ve never been to before, taking a test with a bunch of people you’ve never seen before.”

When asked if testing during the school day was a move in the right direction for equity in the process, he answered, saying, “I’m not sure about that [equity]. But I do think it is a good move.” He considered the fact that students hoping to enroll in Boston exam schools could be seen as putting everyone on the same playing field, giving them the chance to take the high-stakes exam in a place they were comfortable with.

The opinions around the efficacy of entrance exams and their continued use in the admissions process isn’t just limited to students, teachers have their own opinions to share.

Ms. Boggs, a history teacher at BLA, stated that she saw discrepancies between the knowledge of incoming seventh graders that she taught. “...even with the ISEE, between what students knew and felt confident with, were vast and so the first two months, at least, we’re trying to get kids to write four paragraphs and trying to get kids who’d already written a research paper to scale it back a little bit...to make sure that everybody could be on the same page moving forward.” This situation, she stated, made differentiation of instruction challenging.

Roodnel felt that there had to be a standard of admission for future students. “I still think it’s probably important that you have some base level [for] people.” He found the admissions test a useful metric for measuring students’ current level of education.

Martina commented that, “I think it [the enrollment exam] was necessary at some point but I don’t think it’s any longer necessary.” She went on to say that she didn’t consider enrollment exams as “the best way” to showcase someone’s intelligence but only a benchmark for the student test-takers.

Yohanis Tavarez found that taking neither the ISEE nor the MAP test contributed anything to her education.

Having taken the ISEE years ago and then the MAP test during her junior year at BLA, Yohanis concluded that they were very similar tests with their focus on seeing the students' knowledge of Math and English, then comparing their scores to other students. "I'm gonna be honest and say I have not touched on or learned any topics that I remember doing on the ISEE." Yohanis elaborated that she thought that the topics on an entrance exam should be topics they were going to be learning in class.

Among the students, there seemed to be a consensus that the enrollment exams in general, weren't the most accessible in either their test-taking experience or the material they were tested on but that an admissions exam was still somewhat necessary.

On the reflection of the existence and impact of the entrance exam, all three students agreed that they considered an entrance exam partially unnecessary but were caught up by the moniker given to their respective school. "I mean," said Yohanis, "this is an exam school. So the point of the exam makes sense."

As an "exam school", Boston Latin Academy must require an exam for students to get in.

Whether entrance exams could ever be made more accessible, there were varied responses. Mr. Maguire, a Latin teacher going on this 29th year of teaching, felt that it wasn't entirely possible, the nature of the exam schools predicated on prior knowledge of how the admissions process works. As a child of Irish immigrant parents, he found that during his own exam school test prep, they had to outsource help from others. In the case of students who have parents or siblings who attended an exam school will always have an advantage in that sense.

As a teacher, Ms. Boggs gave her opinion that she didn't consider grades a very defining measure of all of her students' abilities. She stated that she didn't see much value in standardized test scores because there were too many variables to consider. "I think we as a group, in BLA, in society, in Boston, need to feel confident with how we learn versus what we can showcase."

Mr. Moran, who has been teaching pre-algebra going on 12 years, saw the change to MAP test with more optimism. He considered the data that could be collected from using a computer based evaluation as a positive that would become a valuable resource to the district and therefore teachers.

With the admissions test being reinstated, there is the urge to look back and reflect on why it was suspended in the first place.

On October 21, 2020, Ibram X. Kendi, author of *How To Be an Antiracist*, spoke before the Boston NAACP. He wrote a public statement in support of the Working Group Recommendation's initiative to suspend the admissions test for all three exam schools. He wrote in this speech, "This proposal can begin the process of Boston transforming our high-quality exam schools into high-quality opportunity schools. Let's call them that, let's make them opportunity schools."

As of now, beginning the process of turning exam schools into opportunity schools has momentarily been put on pause for the prestige of being considered exam schools.

News - Homework Hours Hot Topic for BLA Dragons

By Madison Anastas, '24 and Georgia Hedderman, '24

Over the past few weeks, we have been collecting data from the students and teachers at Boston Latin Academy about the question on homework load every night. It was understood that the best way to incorporate the Boston Latin Academy students' perspectives on the matter was to create a google form, focusing on the amount of time they spend on homework, and how that affects their sleep, GPA,

and the amount of free time they are able to have.

A Google form was shared with English students in different grades at BLA and got 278 responses, which represented about 1/7 of bla's students. There are different views on homework which share both pros and cons. While homework may mentally drain some people, others believe it helps them to master content outside of just the school building. There is a certain point where the pros could potentially cross a certain line, and that leads to stress, a lack of sleep, and overall mental health drainage.



Most students get about 30 minutes of homework per subject each night. 64% of students explained they spent about 30 minutes on math homework each night, and English had a response of 56.1% for 30 minutes as well. In all subjects, including science and history, it seems as if a majority of students spend no more than 30 minutes per night on homework. However, 30 minutes per subject each night, not including AP

courses students may choose to take, adds up to a total of at least 3 hours. It has shown through studies that homework improves student achievement in terms of improved grades, test results, and the likelihood to attend college. When looking at the bigger picture, according to our results, 43.2% of the 278 students have a GPA of 3.1-3.7, while 24.8% hold a 4.0 or above, and 20.5% hold a 2.4-3.0.

So what does homework at Boston Latin Academy have to do with success? That's a question that sometimes differs for students, but it's shown that students who do their homework have more success in their classes. In an in person interview with Ms. Vu, a 10th-11th grade algebra 2 and pre-calculus teacher, she said: "Homework helps students practice for test questions. The more homework you do, the better and more prepared you are for a test. Those who do homework seem to be more prepared when the test comes." In an interview with Ms. Timilty, a 9th-10th grade English teacher at BLA, she generated a very similar answer to the same question. Her response showed the positive effect homework has through her words, "Homework can have a positive experience and should help bolster student's self-efficacy and learning experience by adding to their overall learning practices. It should help to further their

understanding whether recalling information, analyzing, or creating their own pieces of work. It should also enable them to review."

While homework is seen to provide extra-practice to better educate, when does there seem to be a crossing-the-line moment? When going back to the interview with Ms. Vu, in response to our question, "When do you think homework could have a negative effect on students?", she explained, "When it becomes too much and it prevents students from sleeping and only stresses them out." The simple answer to the question on the negative aspects of homework seems to always tie back to stress.

With certain amounts of homework comes the question of free time. 40% of students said that they have 1-2 hours of free time a day, followed by 35% for 2-3 hours. A majority of the students recorded that they got only 6 hours of sleep per night. However, according to National Sleep Foundation guidelines, they advise that healthy children and adults need between 7 and 9 hours of sleep per night. Sleep is crucial to a student's health, growth, and overall well being. Homework at Boston Latin Academy should be distributed in a way that is helpful to a students overall academic understanding, but is not holding the strain of stress.

News - Student-Led Clubs Flourish at BLA

By Jillian Tran, '24

Since the beginning of the school year, many clubs and student-run organizations have been created or resumed from the previous years in Boston Latin Academy and I have had the opportunity to interview some of them.

Clubs are important when applying to colleges but they can simply be a place to make new friends and experience fun things at BLA. They offer opportunities like visiting places outside of the country and volunteering in enjoyable events. You can get involved with these clubs by emailing the presidents or the respective teachers in charge and checking out their social media platforms!

The Hispanic Latin Student Union (HLSU) is a new club striving to integrate Hispanic culture into our school walls. "We want to show that we can all coexist and appreciate each other's culture without necessarily having to be a part of it and also creating a safe space to learn Hispanic culture even if they aren't Hispanic" (Danyael Morales, Co-President and Fidelina Martinez, President). They have already had a potluck this year and are looking forward to planning more events to bring more representation to their club and heritage.

They meet in Room 302 on Thursdays from 1:50-2:30 pm!

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Asian Student Association (ASA) is a returning club for Asian advocacy and for students to get along through Asian culture. Coming back with a bigger team this year, they hope to host more events since they couldn't have other festivities last year such as Asian Night. "Through these events, people should look forward to the experiences people can make because a lot of people know each other and some people don't but all around, it's a giant party" (Brian Doan, Co-President).

They meet in Room 341 on Mondays from 1:50-2:30 pm.

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The Junior Student Council has been fundraising during lunch in order to plan for prom and other future events such as college tours, spirit day, and holiday celebrations. "People should look forward to more information on how to apply for colleges; and through events, more connections in our grade as our time is ending." (Amya Walters, President). It would help the junior student council if the junior class can give ideas for the school year and support upcoming events.

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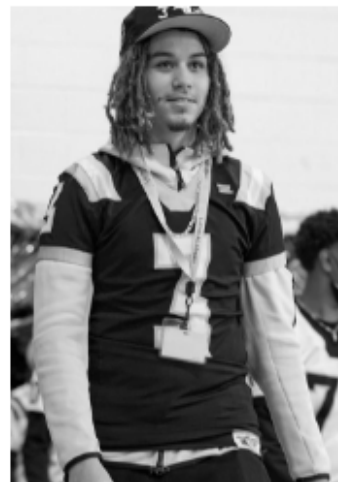
'Student Led Clubs' Continues on Page 8...



BLA Students feel the spirit in annual festivities.



Spirit Day 2022



'Student Led Clubs' Continued from page 5...

The Senior Student Council has hosted many events this year for the senior student body to be engaged such as senior show-off day on the last Friday of every month. "BLA is very academic focused but just enjoying ourselves is a very big thing" (Grace Malkemes, President). By doing google forms and polls, they value student voice to know how they can support their fellow classmates through college readiness or fun things like senior superlatives. "My ideal school year would look like community and getting to

continue that through events where everyone is able to feel content with the journey that we're on." (Grace Malkemes, President).

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You can become part of the many communities within our school and develop new passions, skills, your transcript, and even earn community hours. If you're interested in more clubs, you can check out some of BLA's websites, latinacademy.org and in the extracurricular section of collegevigorbla.com.

News - Lifting the Curtain on the School Budget Process

By Lauren Muturi, '26

In Boston Public Schools, like other public school systems in the United States, the money that's used to fund schools comes from property tax. State money and property taxes together make up about 96% of schools funding. The other 5% comes from federal grants.

Because of the use of property tax in the funding of schools, lower-income neighborhoods get less money through property taxes than schools in high-income neighborhoods creating a gap between high income and low income schools.

However, the city of Boston is in the top ten when it comes to the highest property taxes in the state, meaning that the schools in the city will have some of the best funded schools in the state. The rest of the money that's used for the budget for schools in low-income areas are given to them by aid from the state, federal government, and private fundraising.

The size of the school district is also important when it comes to the funding of schools. Regardless of the size of the district, schools are still given the same amount of money. White school districts tend to be smaller than districts with

people of color, and yet they can still receive the same amount of money. This makes it so that bigger school districts with more people of color will have less funding than smaller, white school districts. As well as the fact that many black and brown students live and go to schools in lower-income neighborhoods, this way of funding disproportionately benefits white students.

Even the funding and aid states give to these schools won't measure the money that white school districts already have. According to The Education Trust, the difference between low-income and high-income areas is \$1,000 per student. Because the disparities between well funded schools and low funded schools are systemic issues and how it relates to race, there are many different factors that need to be addressed.

Opinion - Should passing MCAS be considered a graduation requirement at BLA?

By Anna Bailey, '24

When you begin to apply to colleges and universities you will find that many of them are test optional. All students at Boston Latin Academy have had to take MCAS and other standardized tests many times throughout their time at BLA. One of these tests is the PSAT, but the PSAT doesn't matter

to graduate. Why are we so test crazy if many of these tests we take yearly don't help us down the line? Is it helpful? Sure. We asked teachers and students their thoughts on the subject and the results were clear. MCAS should not be a requirement to graduate from our school.

There are many requirements to graduate such as community service hours, good grades, and passing MCAS. Students at Latin Academy take MCAS from seventh grade until tenth grade. Halfway through our highschool careers. If you fail the test in tenth grade you have to take it again in eleventh or twelfth grade. MCAS has been around for years and thousands of students take it yearly. Many teachers in this school alone took the MCAS and continue to teach things to help students with the test.

The class of 2013 scored #1 in the state for English and Math MCAS. Students in the graduating class gave their success to prep and teaching methods to teachers who still work at the school today. Since 2013 many things have changed, new learning strategies, new teachers, and new students taking the actual test.

In 2001, a law, The No Child left behind act, was passed. What happens under this law? Schools must test students on math and English from third grade until highschool. They must report the scores to show the state's

“proficient level” but every state can choose what this proficiency is. Schools with low proficiency levels in certain subgroups of students allow those students to transfer to better performing schools. Schools who don't turn in scores of these tests risk shutting down the school, becoming charter schools or other turnaround strategies. Why is this a good thing? It allows students to test out of certain schools if they do well enough and make sure those students receive the resources they need. But this also means if the proficiency level in a state is 100 and the best schools test over that and the bad schools under that the schools that test under or don't turn in any scores for those children to move to other schools eventually bringing down the entire proficiency levels.

I interviewed Mr. Freed, a seventh grade Latin teacher and former Dragon tales teacher. We asked simple questions, like Do you teach things for MCAS. This question is aimed for teachers who do not teach subjects like English or math to see if in their curriculum they have to teach things for tests like MCAS. He said, “As a Latin teacher, language helps with the reading part of MCAS.” I also asked if MCAS should be a requirement for graduating highschool, he said, “No I don't, I graduated from highschool just fine without MCAS but I also don't get to make

those decisions so I help prepare students for MCAS.”

A history teacher, Mr Matthieu, said, “History and social science classes are literacy related. The history or social sciences class is going to be helpful for the English Language portion of the test.” He himself took the test many times at Boston Latin Academy in the early two thousands. When asked his thoughts on MCAS he said, “I believe that it has value in assessing where students are but I do not think it should be uniformly applied to all schools equally...” What Mr Matthieu is saying is that students should be tested to learn where they are academically but not every school in one state should have the same passing mark. It's important to students, the state, and teachers but it should not be important for students to graduate.

A student in eleventh grade when interviewed said, “The test is stressful when we are told many times that it is needed to graduate. It makes it even worse.” She has taken the test many times over the years as well as PSAT and other tests for school. When asked if MCAS should be a requirement, she said, “It should not be a graduation requirement because a lot of schools are in different places academically.”

Another student, a senior, said, “Highschoolers, like myself, already have credits to earn to graduate and if we earn all those

credits that should be enough. MCAS can be used to determine if you deserve academic scholarships for in-state schools but not to graduate.”

A seventh grader said, “I would say no because it can be very stressful for students, especially students who are going through personal events in their life during that time. There should be adjustments made on the requirements to graduate that are more considerate than to pass (MCAS) because not everyone has the same situation. Not the idea of making it easier but instead giving everyone a fair or equal chance.”

Many others said the same things. That it is too stressful and should not be needed to graduate due to other classes and tests seeming more useful for their futures.

Sports - Boys' Soccer Posts Historic Season

By Grace Harrington, '24

The Boston Latin Academy Boys Soccer Team had one of the most successful seasons a sports team has ever had at BLA. This strong, versatile team is led by coaches Mr. Hackett and Mr. Mudie all the way to be champions of the city final and onto states. They finished the season with a record of 14 wins, 5 losses, and one tie. Before this year, the boys city championship had not been won by BLA since 1994. This season was full of many difficult challenges to

overcome. When asked about these challenges, Mr. Hackett responded, “The most difficult part of the season was after the Somerville game where we lost 4 out of 5 games. I think what happened was that we came off this big win, and there was a little bit of let down.”

One of those losses was to East Boston. Coach Hackett goes into detail saying, “The game lost to Eastie was extremely important because we knew we were the better team, the boys haven't lost to them. Losing to them inspired us and refocused us.” After the Eastie game, the team started to realize that something needed to change. They became more focused in trainings and more inspired to get to the City Final to prove who they are as a team.

Having a record of 14 wins this season did not come easy. Senior goalkeeper Sebastian Patino had 10 shutouts this season and was the anchor for the team's line of defense. On Sebastian, Coach Hackett said, “He does all the little things well and all the necessary things when called upon.”



Another vital part of that defense is senior Fabrizio Zuluaga, who plays

center attacking midfield as well as center defensive midfielder.

Fabrizio is one of the most dangerous attacking midfielders in the city, forcing defenders to make a mistake.

Fabrizio's passes are precise and almost always lead to goals. While being a very strong attacking player, “He is also a shut down defender, his foot skills are next level, one of the only guys on our team who can take on 3 guys in the midfield,” as Coach Hackett explains.

Those passes from Fabrizio usually went to left winger Barra Ryan, who is the first city league player to make All Stars and All State having 14 goals and 16 assists throughout the season. Barra was always able to make the goals in important games that needed to be won, along with forward Fernando Vargas.

Fernando is a versatile player who is a forward but can also drop into the midfield. He scored 2 goals in the semi-finals against Burke and was the only goal scorer in the final against East Boston which made him the MVP of the game.

The team's dynamic this year was very mature. Coach Hackett says, “The experience of being together for 4 years and overcoming adversity. It made our team stronger. The maturity within the team, we had a mature team this year.” After the regular season, they went on to win the semi-finals

against Madison Park 1-0, then to win the City Championship 1-0 against East Boston. After these victories, the team advanced to the State Tournament where they beat Watertown 3-1 and then went on to play Pembroke which resulted in a loss for the team, ending their historical season. Most of the players on the team have been playing together since 7th or 8th grade, some even in childhood.

The team was able to take what they learned from their mistakes and apply it to future games, always making necessary improvements.

The team is a very close team, almost like a family. Coach Hackett who has been coaching the team says, “We are extremely proud of the boys, they deserve the accolade of doing something historic. They built a culture of family and we are proud of them for it.

Entertainment - True Crime: Fad or Affliction?

By Amishai Goodman-Goldstein, '23
Bundy. The Zodiac. The Golden State Killer.

Chances are that in the past few years you’ve heard one of those names not in the traditional context of legal reporting, but rather in popular entertainment. As cold-case solving technologies advance alongside the growth of

social media, the nation’s obsession with the true crime genre seems to be skyrocketing with no end. This fascination could not have been more apparent when countless BLA students returned from summer break raving about Netflix’s series on Jeffrey Dahmer, a late Wisconsin serial killer. So pervasive was the docuseries that teachers like Erich Mueller of the English department felt inclined to redirect students towards less morbid subjects in some assignments.

Anthony Mathieu of the social studies department, the longtime instructor of the junior/senior sociology elective, posits that true crime, as compelling as it may be, is just a fad. I sat down with him in his 2nd floor classroom on a November Tuesday morning to discuss the matter. “I think in a couple years the ‘true crime wave’ will probably go away into something else,” Mr. Mathieu says. While not personally very engaged in true crime media, he believes that, with regards to those like Dahmer, “there’s always a natural inclination to figure out why they are engaging in the behavior that they do.” He adds that “we are in this unique place in media history where there’s so many platforms and so many opportunities to put those stories out there.”

But, what, exactly is the appeal of true crime over equally puzzling non-violent cases like the Isabella Stewart Gardner heist? Mr. Mathieu hypothesizes that “the

same way that... I am interested in scary movies and want to feel a little sense of insecurity and vulnerability, I think [it] is part of the reason why people will definitely gravitate towards violent crimes.” Mathieu’s theory is supported by true crime and user experience researcher Coltan Scrivner, who in a 2022 study for Psychology Today deemed that “by imagining dangerous situations, humans can generate scenarios where the perceived learning benefit is high, but the cost of learning is low.” Perhaps, then, to the average American, true crime really is just an easy, cheap thrill.

The key consideration if we accept that true crime is and will remain simply an easy thrill is balance, Mr. Mathieu says. Despite lamenting that “anything can be sexualized, anything can be painted in an incredibly positive light, no matter how bad the person is,” Mr. Mathieu expresses that “it’s the responsibility of media outlets and production companies to try to (say) we’re not trying to get people to be fans of them, we’re just trying to provide some insight into what happened and why these things happen.”

And despite his mild distaste for the entire genre, Mr. Mathieu acknowledges just how broad its appeal is—admitting that even he sometimes is curious “to see which serial killer from the 80s and 70s they bring back next.”

'Dragon Tales' Is Thrilled to Re-Launch

By Erich Mueller, Faculty Advisor

It's good to be back. After a one-year hiatus, Boston Latin Academy's student newspaper is thrilled to be, once again, hot-off-the presses. If you like what you saw in these pages, here are some ways to help:

-Become a subscriber. Issues can be purchased for \$3 each and donations are appreciated!

-Get involved! As a student, please come to our meetings on Tuesdays from 1:50-2:30 p.m. in my classroom (room 321). Contact Editor in Chief Amishai Goodman-Goldstein (agoodmangolds@bostonk12.org) to be added to the mailing list and learn more. As a parent, please contact me about how you could donate your time or expertise. I can be reached at emueller@bostonpublicschools.org.

Many thanks to the unbelievable work from our student staff this year. Your dedication has paid off in an amazing first issue! The support of our unbelievably positive administration and teaching faculty has led to greater student turn-out and has made us feel like a valuable part of the community. Finally, thank you to all of the families of our editors, writers, and photographers. Without you, none of this is possible.

Wishing you a wonderful start in 2023!

Erich Mueller, Faculty Advisor

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