

How Much Prep Is Needed?

BY ANJEWEL NACEL
and ALEC LAM

Sophomores and juniors at Frank McCourt High School took the PSAT on Oct. 17. Scores have not come out, but many students say they felt the school did not prepare them well for the test.

The students suggested that the school should offer a PSAT prep course or program to prepare for the PSAT and the SAT. In the meantime, some have been trying to prepare their own way by studying or using different practice methods.

Many of the 20 students who were interviewed for this article suggested that the school provide further preparation for the test.

Two sophomores, Stella Berfas and Nadia Shadi, agreed that the PSAT was the most difficult test they've taken. They said they were not prepared at all, except for a little bit in the math, and the reading was especially tough because the vocabulary was very hard. The easiest was the writing.

Kate Nelson, a junior, said, "The school should absolutely have an SAT preparation course or after-school offering. It would be so beneficial to many people."

The PSAT is the preliminary standardized test that focuses on critical reading skills, math problem-solving skills, and writing skills. It is a practice SAT test to see where you are at with the test. It will be exactly like the real SAT and will be graded so students can see their grade. It is not used for college admissions, but students can qualify for National Merit Scholarships if the PSAT score is high enough.

Principal Danielle Salzberg and guidance counselors say that the school curriculum is designed to prepare students for the SATs, but the PSAT is to help students practice and for

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Many students want the school to provide further preparation.

students to reflect on their scores and see what they can improve on. There is not much preparation before the PSAT.

HOW DID YOU PRACTICE?

How did you practice for the PSAT? Alex Herlihy, a junior, said, "I have a tutor for the SAT that was very beneficial to me." Ethan Diaz, a junior, said, "I study here and there during my free time at home and during school."

"I still need to do more studying on my own time, I am studying by an SAT Prep book and hopefully getting a tutor soon," says Sibelle Mutalip-Mejia.

Kate Nelson said, "I study by working in the Princeton Review SAT preparation book."

Ray Demnitz, a junior, said, "I was well prepared for the PSAT because I practiced on many SAT prep booklets" on his own time. "Since I was well prepared the grammar section was one of the easiest parts of the PSAT."

WHAT WAS EASY OR HARD?

The majority of the sophomores and juniors we interviewed felt the easiest part of the exam was critical writing. The sophomores struggled more with math, while the 11 graders found the reading and writing portions to be more difficult. Students at both grade levels said the level of vocabulary was an issue.

Sibelle Mutalip-Mejia says, "I think the most challenging part was the math, and the writing was the easiest." Ray Demnitz said, "The easiest part for me was the vocabulary." Kate Nelson said, "I felt the easiest part was the writing section with the vocabulary, and the (Continued on Page 2)

The Advice From Guidance

BY ALEC LAM

When we interviewed both school counselors, we discovered that the school's policy is to use the PSAT as a starting point to help the students find out what they need to improve on when they take the SAT.

Ms. Eileen Houlihan said the "PSAT is not a test that one prepares for but rather an assessment that students can utilize to determine what areas they need to focus on when preparing for the SAT."

She said that in the 10th grade, taking the PSAT is a baseline or starting point where the students know what they have to improve on when they take the PSAT in 11th grade then the SAT late in 11th or grade or 12th grade. In the 11th grade students receive their results

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Counselors say the test is just a starting point to prepare for the SAT.

and compare it to their previous results from the 10th grade and they will know if they improved or not. But the PSAT that is taken in the 11th grade still helps students understand what to improve on when they take the SAT.

Ms. Julie Morris, another guidance counselor, said, "We focus on helping the 9th grade with things such as course work and helping the students adjust. In the 10th grade they take the PSAT to know where they need help."

Then we asked Ms. Houlihan, "What do you do as a college counselor to help the students after and before the PSAT?" She said, "My role is to disseminate information about the PSAT exam (content, structure, scoring) to advisors, who can then review this information in advisory classes with (Continued on Page 2)

Some of the people quoted in this article



Alex Herlihy



Kate Nelson



Nadia Shadi



Ray Demnitz



Stella Berfas

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hardest was definitely the math.”

Alex Herlihy said, “The hardest part for me was the critical reading and how you had to interpret what the questions were asking, and the easiest part was to fill in the blank, critical writing section.”

Sophomores Stella Berfas and Nadia Shadi said the most difficult part was the reading, especially because the vocabulary was very hard, and the easiest was the writing.

Naqash Ashref, Angelica Cooper, Aaron Santos, and Nicole Olivo agreed that the hardest was both parts of the math, and the easiest was the critical reading.

We asked Principal Danielle Salzberg what section she thought the students did the worst and the best on. Ms. Salzberg said that since students in the 10th grade didn't know the material on the PSAT, many students felt uncomfortable with doing it.

The school says it prepares kids in the curriculum provided in the students' classes, such as advisory. Ms. Salzberg said, “Advisory is designed to support students and prepare them after they have taken the PSAT. Both the advisor and the student study the student's results. This

to do practice on our own in the PSAT practice booklet she handed out.” Ben Moreno, in Ms. Donna Granger's advisory, said, “We were supposed to start Wednesday, but we didn't get to it.” Andres Sanchez, in Mr. Chandler Wells' advisory, said, “We worked on practice questions and we worked as a class to collaborate our work and speak about the problems we had.” Daniel McNatt in Mr. Patrick Perry's advisory, said, “I received the practice booklet, but they didn't really make it seem important.”

designed to help the students for math parts on the SAT.”

Ms. Salzberg added, “I don't think we should prepare the 10th grade for the PSAT because the PSAT will leave results that the students will know what to improve on. The curriculum is designed to help students in the 11th grade. But more students should use the resources that are available to them in the flex room such as the SAT prep books. Do I think students use it? No. Should students use it? Yes.”

BUDGET PROBLEM

The school says the PTA is trying to organize an SAT prep class after school, but there is no money in the budget to hire a teacher.

The juniors said they could feel a difference taking the test the second time around. Kate Nelson said, “I feel so much more confident this time around considering I took it last year and I knew what I was expecting.” Ethan Diaz agreed.

What's a target score for the SAT? Ms. Salzberg said, “It has to be a different score for every student. It has to be individual rather than for the whole school, because that would be unfair.”

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Ms. Salzberg says advisory is designed to support students after they have taken the test.



repeats in the 11th grade.”

We interviewed students in each 11th grade advisory and asked them what kind of preparation they had received for the PSAT in advisory.

Larry Bryant and Shane Lopez, in Ms. Daniele Gates' advisory said, “We went over test-taking strategies and how it will be scored, we also discussed what was the SAT for.”

Mackenzie Donohue, in Ms. Irene Krugman's advisory, said, “She gave us independent time

THE CURRICULUM

How does the school curriculum cover practice for the PSAT?

Ms. Salzberg said, “The school curriculum is designed to help students for the SAT. Writing, humanities, and history are focused on the English and critical reading parts of the SAT. These classes help students because they are assigned essays and DBQ's (Document-based questions). Algebra 1, algebra 2, geometry, and precalculus are

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students before the exam. After the exam, I meet with students in small groups to review their scores and explain how to use their score report as a tool for SAT preparation.”

Ms. Houlihan suggested these websites for SAT prep programs:

<http://ineedapencil.com/Index.aspx>

<http://www.number2.com/>

<http://www.majortests.com/sat/>

<http://www.freevocabulary.com/>

<http://www.satexamprep.com/>

Hallway Becomes Flexway: A Solution

BY SKYE GOMEZ

Last Monday, it was announced that the Flex Room, where students spent free periods, would be closed indefinitely. Although the teachers seemed initially happy about this idea, not a day passes where you don't see at least 10 students in the hallway, talking to each other or doing work and getting yelled at by one of the teachers using a nearby classroom.

The teachers are understandably tired of hearing students outside disrupting their classes, but the students are just as fed up with staying in the halls. With all this talk I hear from both sides of the argument about the Flex Room, it makes me wonder what are they going to do about it?

Obviously, putting kids in the hallway is not an efficient alternative to the Flex Room. You can argue that the Flex Room wasn't effective either. However, it had its pros. The Flex Room allowed students to have the time to work on assignments of their choice and use the computer and printer. Out in the hallway, students can't do that. The Flex Room was ultimately unsuccessful because the people in charge of monitoring it (a different sub each week) couldn't control the behavior

of the kids. The kids didn't listen because the adult in charge wasn't a regular faculty member who they knew would always be back. Also, these teachers barely did anything to control the behavior of students when they got out of hand. An incident that shocked me was when a student was locked into one of the cabinets and the sub didn't do anything to discipline the student who locked him in there. They really just let anything go.

So, I propose that they re-open the Flex Room and monitor the kids with a system of 3 strikes. Ideally, it would be good to assign regular staff members to watch the students because they are more respected and won't let the students get out of hand.

The teacher responsible for watching the Flex Room would write down a list of all the people in the room and each time a student misbehaved or was not doing what he or she was supposed to be doing, the teacher would mark down a strike. By the end of the week, students who accumulated more than 3 strikes would be forbidden from coming back into the Flex Room until the end of the marking period. These students would have to stay in the hallway. This would be an effective and more fair alternative to the solution in effect now. This way, students who do their work and use the Flex Room wisely won't have to pay for the behavior of those who don't.

Skye Gomez is a junior.