

Schools, Homework and the *Race to Nowhere*

-Alex Kerai, Freshman

I saw a film last year, a documentary, that was quite enthralling. I hadn't yet entered high school and therefore had not experienced the workload that was about to be shoved onto my back (figuratively and literally) so to me the movie was an eye-opener to what I *might* be experiencing next year. Three months later I began my Freshman year at Marblehead High and began to brace myself for the impact of work that I would have (inside and outside of class) but I was not prepared to be met with such a large amount.

The documentary that I saw was by a filmmaker who had a teenage child who also would complain about workload and that prompted this filmmaker to question our education standards. It was called *Race to Nowhere* and it has become quite a popular film due to the remarks it makes about cutting back on homework so that kids can have time to do things. As clinical psychologist Dr. Wendy Mogel is quoted saying in the film, "I'm afraid that our children are going to sue us for stealing their childhood." That speaks volumes because it says that kids don't have any free time these days to do things that they *normally* could and would do, but they now can't due to their extensive workload. Another person is quoted saying, "What's happening these days is that kids aren't getting a chance to find out what they love to do." That is due to constant pressure to get good grades and that starts with homework. As the film suggests, maybe by cutting back on homework, kids will be able to embrace life more freely.

For me, along with others that I have spoke with, I am consistently sleeping past my alarm. Maybe it's that I'm always tired or that I didn't get even close to enough sleep the night before because I was up late doing homework or maybe it's that my mind is racing towards the next day and the various homework assignments I will receive and the tests I have to prepare for. Either way, it's not a happy feeling. Each night I have math homework, some Biology notes, some Latin papers, and maybe a section or two on World Cultures with some reading thrown in from English and vocabulary from French. That's around five hours (sometimes more depending on the notes) of homework and then I still have to tack on after-school activities which can keep me at school past 4 o'clock. Each school day begins at 7:50 and from there it is constant classes and work until 2:30 when school ends. However, after school there are many clubs to join and go to, band practices, musical rehearsals, sports practices, and other extracurricular activities like Bridging Lives that may run late into the evening. I'm not the only one who feels like this, I see kids everyday doing homework during lunch, other classes, and whenever they have a free moment (for instance: a fire drill). This isn't healthy or good for us in the long run.

Now, this is all due to a constant pressure to succeed. It has only become more omnipresent in the past few years when national test scores dropped and we fell behind the world in the core subjects. We pride ourselves in being the best and now we have become pressured once again into making sure that we retain our place atop the world in education. We have some of the best universities in the United States (a few even in Boston) yet we can't seem to score well in elementary, middle and high school? Since then, laws have been passed to rectify the situation, yet none seem to do the trick. Maybe, the problem is that most children may not excel in society's preferred subjects, they may flourish in the arts instead and we squander those aspirations with subjects that we *need* to succeed. The people who may love what they do in the

arts (or another core subject) may not be able to push forward since they are frowned upon by some school officials looking to make the United States better in the global education market. Although, here at Marblehead High we do pride ourselves in the arts – which helps some kids achieve their dreams where other schools might squander them – but that still means that they have the same amount of homework as everyone else, but less time to complete it.

The week of November 17, 2011 was a turning point for schools in the North Shore. Swampscott made it rule that there would be no homework once a month on Wednesday. It was a small step towards achieving nirvana in the way of school homework. Vicki Abeles, the filmmaker who created *Race to Nowhere*, applauded the action. As her website for ending homework – www.endtherace.org – reads: “Research studying the correlation between homework and academic achievement consistently reveals a surprising fact: Most homework doesn’t increase learning, raise test scores, or prepare students for academic success. On the contrary, homework often emphasizes performance at the cost of sleep, friendship, family time, play, physical activity, and health. And it contributes to an epidemic of sedentary and anxious young Americans ill-prepared for the 21st century.” In retrospect, this is a huge step into making our neck of the woods a ‘city upon a hill’ for other schools in the United States. With this we can change things.

I consider a time when homework will be lenient and will drive in points without just making you busy. I await a time when I will be able to actually have ‘free time’ yet still be done with homework around 7:00-7:30 (having started around 5:00) and be able to continue with things that I love. Between two and two and a half hours of homework should be the average each night. I also wait for a time where other subjects other than the core ones will be appreciated equally with the core subjects. For instance, how many musicians, innovators, filmmakers, actors, composers, directors, artists, television hosts, writers, athletes, and inventors can you name compared with the number of scientists, mathematicians, history *buffs*, or writers that you can name? (Maybe the last two aren’t good examples.) It is the people who have the time, the energy, and the ideas to think differently that progress our civilization; it is with them that we move forward. I am not saying that homework is very bad, all that I am saying is that a cutback might be necessary to instill a creative voice in many people who might not have had one due to their work overload. Steve Jobs once wrote about these people who change the world for an ad campaign for his company, Apple, and it read: “While some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do.” I ask you to just remember that if it weren’t for the crazy ones, we wouldn’t be where we are: having electricity, music, iPods, computers, houses made from the materials that they are now without the people who thought: “Maybe this might work...”