

The MHS Portal

- Alex Kerai

It's that time of the year. The quarter is ending and you are stressing out about your grades for the ten-thousandth time that day. You go online and log into the portal only to find that it has shut down! Upset and distraught, you plead with your teachers, hoping that they will give you, and only you, your grades weeks early. But that defeats the purpose of shutting down the portal.

I have spent the past few weeks interviewing teachers and students to get their opinion on the portal. I also interviewed Mr. Ken Lord, the technology supervisor of Marblehead Public Schools, to talk about the technological reasons for closing the portal, and Mrs. Debra Heaton on the administrative reasons for closing the portal. As it turns out, closing the portal every quarter is a necessary and helpful way for teachers to finish grading, and also we, as students at MHS, have it better than students in other districts because we are able to access our full grade book anytime we want.

Closing the portal began last year with Mr. Weinstein, our former principal, so teachers could do grades. With students checking assignments and grades a lot during each quarter (sometimes incessantly), teachers needed time to finish all of their grading without being pestered by students and parents. Ms. Harriet Page, a chemistry teacher, said: "When doing grading it is hard to put up all the grades for a 23 student class, so instead I might put up grades for 16 of the 23 students. Then the kids and parents email me, fretting about their grades. With the portal closing, I can put the grades in when I want, without the kids being worried or stressed because it is a work in progress." Would it be easier if there was no grade book online? According to Mrs. Heaton, we are one of the few schools in the area that does a full grade book. Most schools send out a progress report two times during a quarter and then the final report card at the end. However, the Marblehead School Committee voted for the full grade book; as a result, it has caused some problems among students, teachers, and parents. Some teachers don't want it because it creates obsessive children who check the portal constantly, which causes them to have to enter all their assignments at once. Parents like it because it can tell them what their children are missing. Mrs. Heaton is "Neither for it nor against it." She says that she "wants to do what is best for the most people. I do not shut the portal down because I want to, I do it because teachers say that it is easier for them to do grades."

When the portal goes up, it is published as is. There is no way to publish certain parts of the grade book at a time. However, on June 29 there will be a new portal. According to Mr. Lord, with the new portal there will be two different views: "There is an academics view, where you can view the teacher webpage and full grade book, and then there is just the transcript. We can choose which version we want people to see, and we will also be able to separate grade postings from assignments in the new system. The difference is that in the old portal system that we are using now, it is all or nothing." This causes difficulty for teachers like Ms. Page. Other teachers find difficulty in the student obsession with the portal. Mr. Connor Ryan, an English teacher, says that it makes no difference to him whether the portal is open or closed. He continued by saying,

“What does happen, however, is that when students lose access to the portal they become more anxious and ask me about grades which in turn affects my relationship with students and, in a general way, makes the portal more difficult to deal with.” Another teacher said that he had no complaints about the portal. Mr. Greg Dana, a math teacher, continued by saying that the only issue he had was a “slight inconvenience when kids make up work after the quarter ends and I have to change grades by hand with a written letter, not quickly online. Otherwise I enter my grades on time for my students to see and have no worries about it at the end of the quarter.” Teachers go either way on the portal, but they do agree that what they want is what is best for their students. As Mr. Ryan, Mr. Dana and Ms. Page all said, they don’t like when their students get worried about their grades, so they try to get their grades done on time and together, as to not have their students fret about grades.

The portal is closed now and the next time that you will see your grades is when you get your quarter-end report card. You will not know what you got on certain assignments, and you do not see if assignments were missing or not graded. This is a problem for some students and teachers. However, students can access past quarter grades in the portal.

It seems that the portal causes more stress than necessary among many students, parents and teachers. However, with the ability to access the full grade book any time we please (be it updated or not), students need to stop stressing about the assignments that may not have been posted, and instead let teachers do their job without worrying every second about their grades.

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