

## Local/Region

# Juniors to get more help for MCAS test

Will be available during school, and on weekends in preparation for December test

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GREENFIELD — High school juniors who failed a portion of last spring's Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System test will be getting more help during school and on weekends to help them prepare for retaking the test in December.

Two in-school programs, one for juniors, which starts immediately, and one for 10th-graders starting in January, are the primary focus of the remediation program.

"In-school programs were decided upon because we were finding it difficult to get kids to come. We're competing with sports, band, work and many other activities," said Carol Jacobs, director of teaching and learning.

She added that after-school enrollment is a problem throughout the state.

The programs are being funded by a \$22,900 grant, awarded from the state Department of Education. Jacobs said the money was released early to make sure programs could be in place to make improvements before the Dec. 11 re-testing session.

During the re-test, students only need to re-take the portion they failed. The re-test omits many of the harder questions.

Starting with members of this year's junior class, who were sophomores when they took the test, students must pass the English and math sections of the MCAS with a score of 220 or better to graduate. Juniors have four chances, including the Dec. 11 test, to re-take the sections they failed to

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meet the graduation requirement.

"We hope to help these kids develop the skills and the understanding of concepts they need to take the test as well as using staff from Sylvan Learning Centers to help teach better test-taking skills," Jacobs said.

A weekend component, for three hours every other Saturday, is also part of the program beginning in January, combining community service with real world applications of math, including algebra and geometry, as well as English.

"This answers the classic question that we often hear from kids, 'Why do we need to know this stuff. We're never going to need it.'"

Students will be working to build a structure during the program, although Jacobs said she was unsure for whom the structure would be built.

Also in January, a program called, "YES in the Classroom," will begin and teaches business skills through academics. The program will be led by a staff member of the Youth Entrepreneur Society and a GHS staff member.

"The group uses an integrated math and

English curriculum in a practical way and is, in fact, a work-based internship," said Jacobs.

"What we are trying to do is create options, all with the proper academic support."

These programs are different from those run before because they are part of the school day, replacing the student's gym period and a directed study hall period.

Greenfield High School Principal Nancy Athas said that the periods will run from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Sophomores who failed their eighth-grade tests and are at risk for failing the MCAS test this spring will also be identified and put into the program. Jacobs said ninth-grade students may also be included if space is available.

However, the sophomores and freshman will not start their programs until the beginning of January.

The grant allows for 110 spots to be filled for the three programs, but Jacobs said fewer spaces will be needed for juniors based on projections from early results from last year's testing.

Jacobs said she hopes the programs will not only teach necessary skills, but also increase confidence in the students as they begin to master what they need to know.

"The purpose of the programs is to fill in the gaps for students, to get as many of them passing the first re-take. If not, then to keep them going to pass the next one," Jacobs said.

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