



Photos by Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian
From left, Eli Harold, Isabella Scroup and Nessa Greeley discuss the problems on an upcoming exam.

Math: ‘This is so much better because it feels like you’re in control’

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For years, the high school’s math teachers created their own lesson plans and tests. There was no textbook.

Now, more students are passing math classes on their first try, Donovan said. In general, students seem to be learning and retaining more, teachers say.

One big change: Tests are a learning tool.

Eliminating anxiety

Students are able to look at tests before taking them and discuss what they see among themselves — effectively eliminating test anxiety and taking care of many cheating issues. They are forced to communicate and collaborate, and, in some cases, convince their peers that the way they solved a problem was correct.

Students review tests again after taking them, working through blank versions in groups before they even get to see their graded exams.

“The kid who got an ‘A’ doesn’t know he got an ‘A,’” Ero explained. “He has to convince everyone (in his group) that he’s right.”

Teachers write and grade tests together, and find themselves frequently debating and refining questions. In the classroom, they constantly circle students back to previously learned concepts.

Gone are the days of



The new math curriculum by College Preparatory Mathematics was implemented at Astoria High School and turns tests into a learning tool by allowing students to review their exams before they take them.

a teacher standing at the front of the class and lecturing while students memorize concepts piece by piece, study for a test on those concepts and then move on.

Donovan, a former math teacher, compares the current model to a science lab. There is a little bit of instruction and then students are off, working and talking about problems and concepts among themselves.

“I have seen more math happen than I think I had ever seen in my career in math classrooms,” she said.

“As a teacher, it’s hard to let go of the reins a little bit,” said math teacher Chad Madsen. “Now we’ve done it and I see the results and I see how kids are growing from it.”

A byproduct of forcing students to interact and problem-solve with their peers is that students build

“soft skills” not often associated with high school math classes, said Jessica Todd, the high school’s math department head.

The approach also seems to be helping students who would not normally consider themselves “good at math,” or who may have hidden behind more confident students.

Fits and starts

But change came in fits and starts and there were growing pains as the math department figured out how best to use the curriculum and apply new teaching and learning principles.

“I hated it at first,” said senior Sam Gray.

He was not alone. Most of the students in Ero’s calculus class this school year resisted the switch, but have since changed their minds.

“This is so much better

because it feels like you’re in control,” said senior Aaron Rickenbach.

“This lets you be a mathematician,” Gray clarified, “whereas with other math classes you’re a robot memorizing how to do things.”

For all the gains teachers have seen, there are still gaps that need to be closed.

Astoria Middle School has started to transition to the same curriculum, but students who arrive at high school without this approach to learning math in their background face a sort of culture shock.

The current roster of math teachers developed a teaching and testing model for the curriculum, but there will be a learning curve when someone leaves and a new teacher is hired. The teachers continue to assess how concepts taught in one class flow into the next.

Some of the younger classes are still struggling. Teachers are figuring out how best to work with these students to encourage group discussions and help them understand the material, Todd said.

“It will never be exactly where I want it to be because there’s no way of having the perfect day ever in education,” Donovan said. “It doesn’t work like that.”

But, as students and teachers both continue to refine their approach, “We get closer and closer all the time.”

Grad rates: School district hopes to address gaps

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range of students, as well as more opportunities for students to earn credit at Clatsop Community College.

The school district also launched an attendance campaign in 2018 to battle chronic absenteeism. That campaign has been successful, Hoppes said, with the chronic absentee rate dropping from 25% to below 15% districtwide.

A student is considered chronically absent if they miss more than 10% of the

school year.

Despite the positive numbers captured by the state, there are still gaps the school district hopes to address.

Many of the students who are struggling to meet graduation requirements are struggling because they are dealing with external issues like poverty or mental health, Jackson said.

While the school district has developed tools to help students navigate academic rigors, it still needs to address other well-being issues that impact attendance and, ultimately,

graduation, he said.

Money available through the Student Success Act will go directly to these efforts, Hoppes said.

“Kids who have emotional or mental health issues, any of our kids that are historically underserved ... kids that are in special education and kids of color, we just have a lot of work to do in those areas,” he said. “Not just at the high school but districtwide.”

Warrenton High School also saw gains in its graduation rate, coming in at 80.5%,

over the prior year’s 76.7%.

Seaside, which has experienced some ups and downs with its graduation rate, was at 76.8%, up from the prior year’s 73.3% and ahead of a dip that occurred in 2016-17 when graduation rates fell to 66.6%.

Jewell School, a small campus, achieved a 100% graduation rate for 2018-19, up from 86.6% in 2017-18.

Knappa High School logged a graduation rate of 88.8%, down from 94.2% in 2017-18 and 90.6% in 2017-16.

Forum: Grandmother’s love of Columbia River inspired author’s imagination for novel

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to unionize loggers. Her character is contrasted by another character in the story, Aksel, inspired by Marlantes’ grandfather, who wants nothing to do with unions.

“It’s almost allegorical in what we face in our country today. We have the individual and we have the collective,” Marlantes said.

He said people argue for one or the other, “but we need

them both.”

As Aino’s character arc goes on, she and Aksel finally come together in a dance that Marlantes says is symbolic of the synergy created in the joining of the individual and the collective.

He said although the time period is often romanticized, he wanted to show the dance between individualism and collectivism, the feminine and the masculine, and between different cul-

tures, religions and political ideologies.

He said one of the major themes in the novel is expressed through a Native American woman named Vasutäti.

Vasutäti is symbolic of mysticism, but also of what has been lost — the loss of old growth forests, the loss of the Columbia River to dams and the loss of local native cultures.

Marlantes, who also wrote

“Matterhorn: A Novel of the Vietnam War” and “What It Is Like To Go To War,” said the life of his Finnish grandmother and her love for the Columbia River inspired his imagination for the novel.

“She had a relationship with the river,” he said. “She was an atheist. She was a communist. And I asked her if she ever had any thought that there might be a deity. And she said, ‘Well, if there is one it’s the river.’”

Downtown: Rules preserve view corridor

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The rules downtown largely limit development over piling fields and existing docks to the height of the riverbank to protect views, while allowing redevelopment of existing waterfront buildings.

The City Council concurred with the Planning Commission’s recommendation of a 28-foot, two-story limit on buildings over the water — or up to 35 feet, or three stories, for water-dependent uses.

The rules preserve an 80-foot view corridor along the Astoria Riverwalk, along with 70 feet along streets. Buildings within 100 feet of the Riverwalk corridor may rise to 35 feet, and to 45 feet, or four stories, farther inland.

The City Council and the Planning Commission,

recognizing downtown as an area meant for more permissive development, made several concessions to property owners worried about how to maintain their buildings.

They conditionally allowed hotels in existing buildings over water, along with medical and professional offices in new or old buildings over water. They also removed specific limitation zones on docks slated for development and allowed seafood processing north of the Astoria Riverfront Trolley tracks.

A separate motion by the City Council converted nearly 14 acres of tourist-oriented zones to more general commercial. The city argued the tourism zones, needed in more difficult economic times to spur development, are no longer necessary.



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian
The developer of a proposed Grocery Outlet allegedly pressured the owners of the Astoria Mini Mart to approve a shared driveway to Marine Drive it hopes will help resolve Astoria’s concerns about access.

Grocery Outlet: Family marketed property for years

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Councilors will likely decide next month whether to approve or deny the appeal, or remand the issue back to the Design Review Commission.

The developer originally proposed access to the store directly from the TP Freight Lines truck depot property off Marine Drive. The revised application rerouted the driveway to an existing Marine Drive entrance on the west side of the Mini Mart.

Main & Main secured the agreement after threatening litigation against Don Patterson, whose family owns the Mini Mart. Unbeknownst to the family when they purchased the property, a water-oil separator for their Shell gas station crosses into the truck depot property, Patterson said.

“Basically, they said, ‘Hey, we’re going to take you to court, or help us out,’” he said of the agreement.

Dan Dover, a co-owner of Main & Main, told the City Council that the rerouting of the entrance meets the spirit of the Gateway Overlay Zone to reduce vehicle access points along Marine Drive and ensures approval by the state. The application also addressed the Design Review Commission’s concerns by adding windows on the south side of the store and lowering the height of a roadside sign.

He called on the City Council to approve the project and tell his company how to make it acceptable.

“The site is an allowed use by the zone,” Dover said. “We are just doing our best to take direction from the city to conform to what you want. We need specific direction on how to accomplish that.”

The property is owned by the Heestand family, and family members traveled from Texas, Seattle and Gresham to appeal to the City Council for approval after years of marketing the property.

“The Heestand family wants a good and productive use of the property that is there,” William Heestand, the son of the late truck depot owner, said. “But we are left with a very difficult and unpalatable choice.”

Without approval of the Grocery Outlet, the family

will be forced to lease the existing building to whoever wants it, he said. TP Freight Lines is in the process of building a new location in Miles Crossing.

The Design Review Commission took issue with a lack of pedestrian orientation at the proposed store, which includes a pedestrian pathway through the parking lot. The revised application still includes the pedestrian pathway, albeit farther removed from the driveway’s entrance to Marine Drive.

Rosemary Johnson, a planning consultant for the city, reminded councilors that the pedestrian access and driveway, while critical issues, are matters for state and city engineers to review, and could ultimately change.

“While they were coming back with a lot of changes, the Marine Drive access and pedestrian orientation were things that we never did come to full agreement on,” she said of Main & Main.

Opponents of the Grocery Outlet argued that the design poses safety concerns to pedestrians and does not meet design standards emphasizing the area’s history or walkability focus.

Ty Wyman, an attorney for the co-op, said the Design Review Commission’s initial denial of the project got it right. The co-op will join the defense if Main & Main’s appeal is denied and the developer takes the issue to the state Land Use Board of Appeals, he said.

Opponents questioned why the Heestands haven’t already improved the property, a run-down truck depot surrounded by a potholed gravel parking lot, while marketing to potential buyers. Jorge Garcia, a resident, wondered why the Heestands hadn’t even invested in sidewalks despite more pedestrians in the area.

“I would ask, as a citizen, that you guys beautify a little bit the property to make it more palatable to other people that might be interested in purchasing it,” he said.

With the public hearing closed, Main & Main has a week to submit a final written rebuttal before the City Council reconvenes next month for deliberation.