



# ROCKBRIDGE REPORTER

A Newsletter for Rockbridge Academy

March 2003

## ROCKBRIDGE ACADEMY RECEIVES GRADE OF "A" FROM COLLEGE ADMISSIONS OFFICERS

by Michael J. McKenna

**R**emember Ed Koch? He served as the Mayor of New York City from 1978 to 1989.

Mayor Koch, when he was out and about in NYC, was fond of asking the crowds that would throng around him, "How'm I doin'?" Almost invariably, the crowds would cheer and give him a vigorous "thumbs up."

In the spirit of inquiring how we're doing, I recently visited several college admissions officers to get their honest opinions of Rockbridge Academy's overall program, and how they thought our students would fare through their admissions process.

Last month I visited with the admissions directors of the Naval Academy, the University of Maryland, St. John's University, and Anne Arundel Community College. In addition, I spoke on the phone with the admissions director of Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, Michigan. My goal in speaking with these directors was simply this: to lay before them the high school program here at Rockbridge Academy, including student transcripts, curricula, PSAT and SAT test score averages, school profile...the whole enchilada. And then, after perusing all of that, to get their feedback as to whether our program is on track.

Following are the primary questions asked of the admissions directors, along

directors off guard. (In fact, St. John's preferred our system to the other.) The fact of the matter is that college admissions officers see so many varieties of high school transcripts, with so many methods of calculating GPA (and, unfortunately, so many high schools resorting to grade inflation to make themselves look better than they are), that most colleges give high school GPA less weight than you might think. Actually, the admissions directors I visited liked our transcripts because they were clear, concise, easy to read, and included much useful information that they like to see (e.g., class rank, letter grade, number grade, and GPA), while not including information they don't like to see.

*Rockbridge is a small, growing school. As a result, we can't offer all the "bells and whistles" that an older, more well-established school can. Again, are our students at a disadvantage?*

This question garnered an unqualified, "No. Your students are not at a disadvantage," from all but the Naval Academy, which gave only a slightly qualified, "They might be." The Naval Academy wants to see what percentage of the high school's graduates go on to college. This will only be a slight disadvantage for our first graduating class, which the admissions director confessed



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**“ IF STUDENTS GET GOOD GRADES, IT TYPICALLY MEANS THEY KNOW HOW TO WORK HARD. ”**

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with a summary of their responses. *As Rockbridge currently calculates GPA, an A+ equals a 4.0, an A equals a 3.7, and an A- equals a 3.3, but at some other schools, anything in the "A" range might be equivalent to a 4.0. Are our students at a disadvantage?*

Without exception, all of the admissions directors said the same thing. "No. Your students are not at a disadvantage." Rockbridge Academy's method of calculating GPA is not different from many schools, so it does not catch admissions

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was not insurmountable. We will easily be able to demonstrate that our students have been accepted to colleges, which will do in a pinch. After the first year, this will be a moot point. The other thing the Naval Academy wants to see is participation in athletics. Obviously, because of our small pool of students, the first couple of graduating classes may be disadvantaged here. However, the admissions director indicated that, especially in this geographical area, if students want to participate in athletic competition outside of school, there are so many opportunities available to them, that there's very little reason why students couldn't have participated in athletics, even if the school's program was not mature enough to offer them. Rockbridge began this year with boys' soccer and basketball, and we're currently fielding girls' Lacrosse, which are available to students up through the 9th grade.

The other schools immediately pointed to their active pursuit of home-schooled students as proof that this kind of "disadvantage" is no disadvantage at all (even the Naval Academy has a few formerly home schooled students). While Rockbridge Academy might not have a student newspaper or a Key Club or a chapter of the National Honor Society (yet), it is not a stumbling block to these colleges. The question is not "What programs did your high school lack?" but rather, "Did you make the best of what your high school had to offer?" Rockbridge Academy has a yearbook staff, athletic teams (albeit in the early

stages), a chess club, a Latin club, a drama program (we did *Music Man*, last year, and we'll likely do a musical every other year), after school volleyball, and more. Are your children taking advantage of what's here? If so, colleges will look favorably on that participation. In fact,



most colleges look less favorably on participation in many activities. Students are perceived as being "a mile wide, and 1 inch deep." College admissions directors prefer students to find their niche, and do well in that.

*Rockbridge Academy is pursuing accreditation and is currently in candidacy status? Will that affect your view of our graduates?*

Simple answer? No.

*Rockbridge offers a course of study in high school somewhat different from the run-of-the-mill program; our students study two years of Latin, two years of Rhetoric, four*

*years of Bible and theology, etc. How does that affect your view of our students?*

What all admissions directors said was that, as long as the program is college preparatory, and their grades are good and in line with their SAT/ACT scores, they'll be looked upon favorably. Obviously, Rockbridge's high school program is a college prep course of study, even where it deviates from "the norm." If students get good grades, it typically means they know how to work hard. If their grades are in line with their SAT scores, then that's a verification that the school is teaching them what they ought to be taught. If, for example, students from ABC High School get fabulous grades, but consistently lousy SAT/ACT scores, this might be an indication that the school is engaging in grade inflation. Upon examining our high school course of study, all admissions directors agreed that it looked sound.

The title of this article may be a little deceptive, as the directors I met with didn't actually give me a grade before I left. What they all confirmed, however, was this: Rockbridge's program is a good one, students graduating from here will be able to compete with students from other high schools without difficulty, and we're doing a fine job in terms of our efforts to communicate to colleges what our program looks like, and how our students are being prepared for college and beyond.

How're we doin'? The college admissions directors I met with give us a vigorous "thumbs up." □

## SAT REPORT

Well, they did it! Our first group of juniors took the SAT tests this past January 25th. Of our six junior boys, four of them took the SAT's, and scores were received in the office this past week.

Scores on the SAT I are given in two categories, Verbal and Math, with scores ranging in each category between 200 and 800. A perfect combined score would be a 1600.

Our four boys' average combined SAT scores were 1348. An impressive first outing!

Congratulations, boys! We're all proud of your hard work and the evident fruits of your labors. Keep it up!



## COLLEGE NIGHT RESCHEDULED

Due to a power outage on February 21, just as College Night was about to get under way, we have had to reschedule the event. It is now scheduled for Friday, March 14, 2003 at Severna Park E.P. Church beginning at 7:30 p.m.

If you are not able to attend, please pick up a copy of Rockbridge Academy's *College Admissions: Nuts and Bolts* in the school office.



## GOT A QUESTION? DON'T KNOW WHOM TO ASK?

If you have a question dealing with your child's schoolwork or school day, the best place to begin is with your child's teacher. If your questions remain, you may take them to the headmaster; our teachers will not be offended if you do. Questions regarding curriculum may also be addressed to your teacher, and our director of instruction, Laura Tucker, would be happy to help you as well. If it's a question of school policy, the headmaster is the person to see. He has an open door policy. If these avenues have been tried, and satisfaction is still eluding you, you are encouraged to make your case known to the school board, in writing, through the headmaster.



## INCLEMENT WEATHER?

What should you do in case of snow or severe weather? Turn your radio dial to either **WRBS (FM 95.1)** or **WBAL (AM1090)**. Rockbridge Academy announces all early dismissals or school closings on both of these radio stations. We will also leave a message on our answering machine to indicate whether or not we will close. As always, we respect your decision to do whatever you feel is necessary for your family.



*Paul Vanik, Emily Hinz, Sonja Nelson, and Brianna Ong gallop to finish the four-horse chariot race.*

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once   
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# FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Rockbridge Reporter March 2003

**L**et's be honest. Occasionally, parents struggle with the question of whether to keep their children in Christian education through high school, with one of the most frequently given reasons for placing them elsewhere being that the parents want their children to experience the "real world" while their children are still under their roof. Two points immediately come to mind.

*What's your definition of "reality"?* If, by "reality" you mean *worldliness, sin, temptation, etc.*, you don't have to go far to find that. My office has plenty of it (when I'm in it, that is), and so does your child's classroom. Children in Christian schools are sinners, along with their parents and teachers. We deal with the mess of sin every day, even as you do. The difference is, as I'm sure it is in your homes, that a biblical world and life view is applied to sin when it rears its head. (Who among us would label life inside our homes "unreal"?) We encourage one another and the students to deal with sin according to the mind of Christ. We encourage parents, teachers, and students to apply biblical principles of conflict resolution and go to one another instead of others when they have difficulties. We encourage brokenness, humility, forbearance, and patience with one another. If by "reality" we mean a setting in which the children are *not* taught to apply the mind of Christ to their lives and studies, in which sin is left undealt with, or else is dealt with in a way that is contrary to biblical teaching, then I would suggest we re-evaluate what we mean by "reality."

*Don't discount the "warm bath" syndrome, or overestimate our ability to counteract it with 30 minutes of good dinner conversation*

*and church activities.* The way to boil a live frog is not to place it in a pot of steaming hot water, but to place it in a cool bath and then slowly turn up the heat. Likewise, very few children, when placed in secular schools, reject their faith the next day.

However, they come to view this new "reality" as normal. They become accustomed to it. It's so subtle, that it may become their new reality *over time*. Parents sometimes think that church activities and dinner conversation will be sufficient to "debrief" the children each day. Even if this were true, one wonders, why that education is deemed best which requires debriefing? Why would we want to place our children in an environment that requires "unlearning," or one that they'll be able to "survive"? Ecclesiastes 4:12 says that, "A chord of three strands is not easily broken." When home, church, and school *work in concert with one another*, our children's understanding and ability to withstand the pressures of life that come when they are out of the house is more secure, not less.

In a recent article in the New York Times, 25% of college freshman surveyed called themselves "born again Christians." *The question arises: Where are they? Where is their influence in commerce, government, higher education, and so on?* We're sending our children out to be "salt and light," but they have not the training and tools necessary to be effective soldiers for Christ. Perhaps the reason they disappear is because many of them were trained in "reality" instead of the *real* reality of how to bring every thought captive to Christ. □

**Far Right:** Ben and Daniel enjoy fellowship at the 1st grade History Feast.

**Right** Cheerful colonists at the 5th grade ball.

