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Belchertown, Granby & Amherst

# SENTINEL



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## PARCC results revealing

### District does better than expected with scores

By Aimee M. Henderson  
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BELCHERTOWN – Despite early indication from the state that scores from PARCC across the Commonwealth were less likely to be in the “meeting expectations” range, the Belchertown School District did better than expected.

Results from PARCC, or Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, were released late last month. Ben Admussen, data administrator for the Information Technology Department, presented the local findings to the Belchertown School Committee during its Nov. 10 meeting.

“I’m very pleased to see these numbers,” said Admussen to the board. “Now that we have some data, it should be the start of the conversation, not the end.”

Students in third through eighth grades were administered PARCC in Belchertown as part of the state’s two-year “test drive” of the exam.

The results of PARCC released statewide, according

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Shawn Fortin, director of Teaching and Learning in Belchertown, places a washer on the boat his team built during a STEMposium.

Turley Publications photo by Aimee M. Henderson

## Educators build on STEM program

By Aimee M. Henderson  
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BELCHERTOWN – Teachers have learning down to a science after swapping roles with students during a recent STEMposium.

Educators from the region gathered at Belchertown High School on Wednesday for a STEMposium hosted by Accelerate Learning. The company presented a K-12 digital curriculum called STEMscopes, which marries hands-on learning with science education.

Robert Miot, New England account manager for Accelerate Learning, said there has been a lot of focus on the new science standards in Massachusetts. He said, during the Mass STEM Summit earlier this month, it was noted that other states are ahead of the Commonwealth in STEM learning. Miot also said that schools are not producing enough STEM students.

Terry Talley, director of professional development for STEMscopes, said there’s a

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### GRANBY SCHOOLS:

## Building budget set at \$34.2M

By Walter Hamilton  
Correspondent

GRANBY – A budget of \$34.2 million for the construction/renovation of the elementary schools will be sent to the Massachusetts School Building Authority, following a vote of the West Street School Building Committee last week.

The MSBA is expected to approve a reimbursement of one half of that amount, leaving the final cost to be borne by local taxpayers at \$16.8 million. The figure includes contingency funds that if not needed may reduce the final cost of the project somewhat.

The MSBA is expected to pay 63.12 percent of eligible costs, but with its exclusion of certain items such as legal fees, contract administration and site costs, as well as caps on construction, that reimbursement will be closer to 50 percent of the total project, according to Owners Project Manager Alan Minkus. The “Owners” in this case is the town.

The \$252,000 cost of installing air conditioning at the schools, which will combine the renovated East Meadow School with the new West Street School building in front of it, was placed in the final budget as an alternative that could be eliminated if costs exceeded the contingency cushion.

The select board was recently notified by the state Department of Environmental Protection that it has officially, under school population limits, allowed the project to proceed, using the existing septic system at East Meadow School. The decision eliminates the need to build a costly wastewater treatment facility.

The budget will be submitted to the MSBA on Nov. 30, ahead of the Dec. 1 deadline for the next round of projects to be considered by the state agency. The MSBA is expected

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A group of volunteers gathers in front of a house that is near complete.

## Residents travel to Haiti, flex volunteering muscle

By Tyler W. Leahy  
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BELCHERTOWN – For Belchertown residents Mark O’Connell and Jim Phaneuf, helping those in need transcends a donation, becoming a call to action. Their most recent service left them personally transformed,

building living structures for the impoverished on the mountainside above earthquake-stricken Grand Goave, Haiti.

O’Connell and Phaneuf traveled with Paul Scully of Sturbridge on a volunteer team-building trip, leading 15 Wolfe

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**STEM | from Page 1**

misconception that schools need a vocational program or computer program in order to have a good STEM based curriculum. "It's about integration," she said.

One of the biggest focuses in the STEMscopes curriculum is the shift to more hands-on learning in the classroom. During the STEMposium last week, educators got to experience that first-hand.

During the in-service, one of the experiments educators in attendance were tasked with was constructing a barge that would float in water and support the weight of metal washers. The objects the teams worked with to construct the barge included tinfoil, straws and tape.

Throughout the room the teams worked together to create their barges, some succeeded and some failed. However, the ones that sank still provided a chance to learn.

"It's all about teachers experiencing STEM in a hands-on way," said Miot of the STEMposium. "The thing teachers aren't comfortable enough with is teaching it's okay to fail. Science provides a wonderful opportunity to provide failure."

Miot pointed to one group in the room whose barge had just sank to the bottom of the bucket of water. Although the group laughed about it, they learned from their mistake what not to do and re-engineered their project.

"We need to evolve a new culture of teaching," said Miot. "Massachusetts was a leader in this, and I think they will emerge again as one."

Miot said the goal of STEMscopes is to free up the teacher's time, allowing him or her to work in the classroom in a more hands-on fashion.

Louise Levy, science teacher at



**Heather Wilde talks about "Putting It All Together" for STEM in action in the classroom.**

Belchertown High School, was one of the participants last week.

"This is the kind of science we want our students to do," said Levy. "This is where we have to go as a school system."

Levy said the "active and engaging" form of learning activates knowledge and helps build a better understanding of what is being studied.

Shawn Fortin, director of Teaching and Learning in Belchertown, also participated in the in-service. His team's barge won the floating competition, holding 55 washers.

Fortin agreed that this sort of learning is where the district needs to go.

"We are very interested in Science Technology Engineering & Math (STEM)

curricula because we are beginning the process of aligning our current science curriculum with the updated MA frameworks," said Fortin. "This is a multi-year process that will include a review of our current curriculum and an exploration of options for new ones."

Fortin said STEMscopes is just one of the sets of materials at which the district is looking. Fortin liked what he saw last week. He said, "it has two major plusses" in his opinion.

"One, it has an incredible online/digital component and, two, it provides access to a network of science educators across the country," said Fortin. "We are looking at more traditional materials (textbooks) as well, but even those all have an online component nowadays."

Fortin was happy to have been able to host the STEMposium.

"We were very fortunate to have Mr. Miot and his team in Belchertown... They put on a great day of professional develop-



**One of the boats built during the STEMposium on Wednesday.**

ment for our teachers and our colleagues from area districts," he said. "Part of the day included opportunities to network with local educators who are in a similar position with regard to transitioning to the update frameworks."

Accelerate Learning worked in conjunction with Rice University to create STEMscopes, which was the most widely used PreK-12 science curriculum in Texas. It's now available nationally, and serves more than 1.4 million students.

STEMscopes is a digital science solution for PreK through grade 12 students offering three core curriculum programs, STEMscopes K-12, STEMscopes NGSS, and STEMscopes Early Explorer.

According to Accelerate Learning's website, "Each curriculum is supported by STEMcoach, a professional development portfolio offering a free STEM community that allows teachers to share best practices and lessons while learning from experts in the field, embedded professional development within the program, and onsite launch, advanced and coaching and mentoring sessions."

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