

## Editorial

# Let's all take a breather

In three days, many of us will be sitting down around the table for dinner with our families to celebrate Christmas. Others have been enjoying the festival of Hannukah.

Folks are scrambling to do errands and complete holiday shopping.

Remember it is supposed to be the season of peace and joy.

Despite the fact, that over the next few days the stores will be mobbed with people rushing around and the employees will be on their last legs having worked more hours with cranky people than is humane. So remember to take a breather. A five-minute break, or wait, here and there is not going to make or break your evening, even if you feel like it might.

One of the ways to save sanity is to support local businesses this holiday season. The shops that scattered through downtown Westminster, Ashburnham, Ashby and Townsend have many unique items, but that is not their only selling point. Your friends and neighbors own these businesses and work to make their living from providing you a convenient place to shop.

Take the time this holiday season to stop by these stores to buy your last-minute gift and say hello to these valuable members of our local community.

It has been a tough year for many of these people in these towns, with political issues dividing the residents. Arguments over management of the libraries, funding for public safety buildings and staffing, as well as other minor debates have at times rocked the communities.

Now is the time of year when everyone should put down his or her political bat and agree to move forward. The year is coming to a close and decisions have been made. We can't look back and say "what if?" because there is no way to reverse time and do it over.

Sit back, enjoy time spent with family and friends, and hold on to that holiday spirit.



## Former teacher speaks out against charter schools and MCAS

Let's hope that it doesn't take the Department of Education (DOE) as long to realize charter schools are about as useless as MCAS have been. As he nears retirement our esteemed Commission of Education David Driscoll has finally come out of the closet and informed the public a myriad of problems exist with MCAS, not that he and the DOE haven't heard this from the public in the past. Why wasn't this "revelation" made years ago? Did the DOE just make this "discovery"? Believe me, if so, their members weren't in the "top groups" when they went to school.

Every student would have a better education past ten years advanced student be much further they presently had never been

Every student would have received education over the and our most dents would ahead than are if MCAS "invented." I truly feel sorry for the students who have had to undergo undue pressure while taking these tests, especially those who struggle in the classroom. Mr. Driscoll, with all his ingenuity, now feels that only college-level students should take a more rigorous MCAS type test so they will be prepared to enter our state college system. These college-bound students don't need this type of test and school funds don't need to be reduced any further as a result of these tests anymore than any of us need an extra hole in our head.

Public school teachers are already doing a fine job preparing these students for the day they will take the already well established PSATs, SATs, SAT IIs and ACTs. New tests will only cost the state additional money. The DOE talks about closing the achievement gap, which hasn't happened and never will. It doesn't take much math ability to realize the only way to close the achievement gap is to slow down those furthest ahead, something the "experts" have unknowingly been doing for the past decade. It is amazing that in spite of the DOE the upper-level students have done as well as they have. The one thing that the DOE has accomplished with its MCAS program is to waste billions of dollars of the hard working public's tax dollar.

Now the DOE has decided to open a few more charter schools at the cost of millions of dollars while raping local districts of their funds. The problem in education today is not with local schools, it's with the DOE and politicians who know little to nothing about educating public school students. Many of these "experts" have never attended a public school but rather independent schools where there aren't even certification requirements for the teachers. Many of these "experts" wouldn't last from 8 in the morning until noon if they had to teach in a public school. Many of these "experts" have been kicked out and up from previous positions. Many of the positions they now hold have done nothing more than create useless work for public school administrators and teachers.

Has anyone missed the regional educational centers that used

### SPEAK OUT

Dick Mackey  
Westminster

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to exist? I don't think so. As my first principal told his staff at the first faculty meeting I ever attended 45 years ago: "I ask you all to attend some of the meetings at the State Department of Education. While there take very precise notes and listen carefully. When you return from the meetings analyze what you have been told and learned at the state department then in your classrooms do just the opposite of what you were told to do." It was true then and it's true today.

MCAS and charter schools have been nothing more than a waste of billions of dollars. If the DOE wants a new charter school let it build one near the DOE. Let the politicians and DOE members attend, learn something about education and then have them all take the 10th grade MCAS. My money says few would pass unless they lowered the standards. The only way public education is going to improve, and it is in much better shape today than the "experts" would make you believe, is when the state returns the control of public schools to local school committees, administrators and teachers. Suffice to say the DOE is lacking in many areas including real-life public school educators with common sense and experience, while being too ingrained with lackeys appointed by politicians. It really is too bad that voters in certain districts turn down school budgets and overrides. The only losers are kids and the value of homes in the district while the DOE continues to force school districts into higher budgets while not funding that which they force upon the public.

## Residents thank fire department

To the Editor:

A few months ago, the Ashby Fire Department requested a tax override to purchase a new fire truck, since the old one was in disrepair. Being a safety conscious person, I voted in favor of that tax override. Little did I know at the time, I was going to personally benefit from that vote.

We awoke shortly before 2 a.m. on December 11, 2006 to find our barn on fire.

As my husband raced to let our sheep and goats out, I called 911 to report the fire. We had barely gotten the animals out of the barn when the Ashby Fire Department showed up. I was truly surprised and impressed at how fast they were on the scene and how quickly they extinguished the fire. Because of their prompt response and expertise, I did not lose my whole barn or any of my daughter's animal that she shows with 4-H.

The fire team on the scene were very helpful and informative. The chief, Bill, even apologized for having to push one of my animals out of the way to stop the fire. I want to express my family's heartfelt thanks to the Ashby Volunteer Fire Department. Although many people in Ashby squabbled over the cost of the new truck, we are so grateful that the town was able to make the purchase. You never realize how important a decision about preventative measures and safety is until it affects you. Thank you, Ashby Fire Department for all you do and the risks you take to protect our town in times of crisis.

With our sincere appreciation,

Richard, Tammy & Elizabeth Moisan

Ashby

## COMMUNITY JOURNAL QUESTION OF THE WEEK

Did you give to a charity this holiday season?

Yes

No

Results of last week's poll.

When should a recall election be held?

- When voters are not pleased with the actions of the elected officials. 33 percent
- Only when an elected official has committed an illegal or unethical action. 67 percent
- Never. 0 percent

Cast your vote online at [www.thecommunityjournal.com](http://www.thecommunityjournal.com)

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P.O. Box 67, 53 Main St., 2nd Floor  
Ashburnham, MA 01430

Tel: (978) 827-3386

Fax: (978) 827-3200

E-mail: [editor@thecommunityjournal.com](mailto:editor@thecommunityjournal.com)

Sales Dept. E-mail: [sales@thecommunityjournal.com](mailto:sales@thecommunityjournal.com)



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