

Minority Student Achievement Network advocates for academic achievement

By Yael Ben-Chaim

While only 64 percent of the student population at ARHS is Caucasian, it is normal for students of minority to feel, at times, out of place at school. Even though the student body celebrates diversity, students of minority often feel discouraged in honors and AP classes when they are one of the only students of color in the class.

The Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN) is a nationwide coalition of multiracial school districts that studies the gaps between the academic performances of students of color and their white classmates. School districts analyze policies and examine factors that affect the academic performance of minority students, specifically that of African-American and Latino/a students.

At ARHS, Dean of Students Mary Custard is the advisor of MSAN. When Ms. Custard started to work at ARHS, MSAN was already a program. "I've continued to help MSAN, I think it's a great thing," she said.

Ms. Custard believes the students at ARHS have what it takes to close the achievement gap. "MSAN encourages all students to work hard. You need education—that's the key," she said.

This past September, eight ARHS students and two staff members attended the MSAN student conference in Columbia, Missouri. Kyle Josias and Cid Ferriea, both '12, Regina East, Dyanna Oviedo, Jose Cabrera, and Miguel Reda, all '13, and Angela Ononibaku and Me-

gan Tassy, both '14, attended with ARHS Social Studies Teacher Shari Abbott and Ms. Custard.

All students who attended the conference and who are part of MSAN have excelled academically and have shown strong signs of leadership. MSAN students are expected to take a few challenging courses and continue to help eliminate the achievement gap.

This year's conference slogan was, "Defy the stats, by defining yourself." The slogan represents the idea that

cially remembered one of the speakers at the MSAN conference, Eric Thomas. "He told me even when you are at your lowest peak, you can always do better, build yourself up," she said.

To eliminate the achievement gap, MSAN encourages students to create an action plan to raise awareness. This year students at ARHS proposed a unique plan. "It should come into place by February of this year," said Ms. Abbott.

Students will have a shadow day for middle school students. By the end of the second trimester, students in MSAN will host a seventh

I can succeed in my future.

-Angela Ononibaku, '14

students must challenge the statistics about the academic work of minorities by proving themselves and developing into model students.

Ms. Abbott also has faith in MSAN. "At the conference, the students had the opportunity to be the majority race for a change. It was extremely powerful because there were high school and college students talking about the achievement gap," she said.

While at the conference, students were touched by motivational speakers, mostly middle-aged people of color, telling stories of their lives. Many had faced or witnessed homelessness, abuse, or drug use, yet were able to succeed in high school and receive masters and doctorate degrees. "[They] definitely gave me my own motivation to do even better in school," said Tassy. "The motivational speakers made me realize that I need to continue to work hard in school, so that I can succeed in my future," said Ononibaku. East espe-

grader from ARMS to show them the importance of taking honors classes. "We want future ARHS students to take honors Algebra in 8th grade, so they can take honors math classes in high school," said Ms. Custard.

The group has also proposed an action plan to educate and raise the awareness of teachers about the achievement gap, and what they can do to help. "They're doing a great job; they really know what they are doing, and know how to do it," said Ms. Custard.

This spring Ms. Abbott teaches the MSAN class that accompanies the club. The class is taught seminar style, because of the small number of students participating. The class will focus on the sociology of race and racism. "I've always supported MSAN, I was happy to teach the class," Ms. Abbott said. The class is currently only offered to students in 11 and 12 grade who have attended MSAN conferences.



Photo by Rosie Black

GSA members enjoy cider and a guest speaker.

New GSA documentary addresses diversity and acceptance in ARHS

By Talia Levy

ARHS's Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA) recently began working on a number of new projects, including a sexuality survey and a GSA documentary.

The "GSA film group," directed by GSA intern and Mount Holyoke student Ira Claybourne, aims to raise awareness of LGBT terminology, classroom homophobia, and different sexualities and gender identities through film.

ARHS students Michal Goderez and Karl Nislow, '12; Josia DeChiara, Nadja Shannon-Dabek, Aliyah Sarro-Schwartz, and Dominic Domer, all of '13, meet after school on Tuesdays

film medium. "There is something very powerful about students sharing their voices and stories on camera. The 'It Gets Better' project—the series of videos on YouTube in which adults and young adults talked about the possibility of a better world for LGBT people—inspired millions. This project is smaller scale, but will likely reach future members of the GSA and possibly ARHS faculty and staff for years to come," said Ms. Barber-Just.

To generate ideas, the group is working to approve a survey for a sample population of Amherst youth. The survey asks the youth's eth-

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nicity, religion, gender, and sexual identity, allowing for a wide variety of responses. It then continues to ask various open-response questions addressing coming out, LGBTQ acceptance, and negative "anti-gay" language. The group will take these responses and address them in the pending film.

in GSA Advisor Sara Barber-Just's room (175). The GSA meets Mondays after school in room 175; the Tuesday meeting is reserved for the survey and video project participants. "We're at an age when writing booklets and pamphlets isn't going to work anymore," said Claybourne, who is excited about using the

nicity, religion, gender, and sexual identity, allowing for a wide variety of responses. It then continues to ask various open-response questions addressing coming out, LGBTQ acceptance, and negative "anti-gay" language. The group will take these responses and address them in the pending film.