

## TEST STRESS

### Students opt-out of PARCC testing

Jessica Sommerville | Staff Writer

Count 326 students out.

As of March 2, these students chose not to take the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) test—an endeavor supported by Action for Mason Education co-head Kenna O'Sullivan.

"Ideally I would love to see all students opt-out," O'Sullivan said. "The freshmen have to all be aware that there are three paths. If they don't go the PARCC and (End of Course exam) pathway, they have to be able to earn the required score on the other test options, the ACT, SAT or the ACT WorkKeys."

The WorkKeys measures skills desired by employers as an alternative to the ACT and SAT route, but according to O'Sullivan, the PARCC test is not a viable pathway due to its subjective cut scores, or the lowest possible score required to pass.

"They're not going to determine cut scores until after the tests are graded, and they can set them however they want," O'Sullivan said. "Even if we have a group of kids who do well, they can set them so high that they don't do well...It's not a scientifically validated test."

While opting-out relieves strain for students, it adds strain for the district: students who refuse to test will receive a zero when calculating Mason's ranking, said associate superintendent Amy Spicher.

"The (Performance Index) is calculated using every student's performance level (advanced, accelerated, proficient, etc.) on every state test," Spicher said. "Last year we had .1% of our students who were untested, and this year we have approximately 4.5% of our students who are refusing to test who will receive a zero."

This will reduce the district's score, Spicher said, and put it in jeopardy of being unable to attain testing enrollment percentages required by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE).

"A district has to have a participation rate of 95% of students in each of the 10 student groups—all, race, gender, students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, and English Language Learners," Spicher said. "We may not reach that this year."

Should Mason fail to meet these requirements, the district could be subject to expenditure restrictions from the ODE. Opt-out decisions also affect teachers: according to Spicher, Mason will adopt the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System in 2015-2016. 50% of teacher evaluations will be based on student growth, and the progress of students who opt-out will not be included.

According to O'Sullivan, however, Action for Mason Education does not wish to harm the district but return control to it.

"We're not doing this against the teachers or the district," O'Sullivan said. "We're doing this for them, too. Because we have a great district, and we have great teachers, (and) we have great administrators. We want them making the decisions, not politicians."

## MILITARY ROAD SHOW

### American Soldier Adventure Semi opens traveling exhibit in Mason



Photo contributed by Drew Davidson

The American Soldier Adventure Semi traveled to Mason High School for its exhibit on March 3.

Gina Deaton | Online Editor

The American Soldier Adventure Semi (AS4) is an 18-wheel, 30-ton tractor trailer measured at 16 feet wide, 53 feet long, and 13.5 feet tall that sat in the back parking lot of Mason High School on Tuesday, March 3, open to students and the community. The self-contained, climate-controlled truck had a collective 30-minute exhibit on Army engineering and technology crammed into a space taking up just 20 parking spots. Sergeant First Class Matthew Velazco, who works with the Mason Corps of Cadets, organized the semi's visit to introduce and familiarize students with military technology and engineering.

"The whole idea of the adventure semi is to give—students mostly—an idea of what the Army's capabilities are nowadays and how they can better understand what kind of technology and engineering goes into making a lot of the equipment that we utilize nowadays," Velazco said.

Junior Drew Davidson, who has enlisted in the Army, visited the exhibit out of pure interest in the military technology and said he was stunned by how much interactive technology was squeezed into such a constrained, mobile area.

"It's kind of like a long hallway that you go down and on each side they have more things," Davidson said. "They had gear displays and let us try on the helmets...They made a model of a Humvee truck (that you could climb in) and put it inside. I still don't know how they did it. There were probably 30 people in there at once, and it was 80 degrees. It's ridiculous."

According to Davidson, the exhibit effec-

tively used its space to showcase each aspect of the Army, which is much more than many people realize.

"As soon as you walk in they take you around and show you the (exhibit) and different aspects of the Army that you can see it from and the different jobs," Davidson said. "A big misconception with the United States Army is that it's only boots on the ground, infantry—but that's not the case. Of course, there's a big gunfighter role if you're a rifleman but there's mechanics, there's aviation, there's medical, law—there are so many career options within the Army so they did a great job explaining that."

According to Velazco, these Army semi-adventures are an important recruiting tool because they help clarify the different perceptions of the military.

"A lot of people, they play Call of Duty and Modern Warfare, all of the video games that are out nowadays concerning warfare, and they actually have a lot of those capabilities in real life," Velazco said. "And they have some of those displays on that truck as well. They had thermal imaging, which means we can see through walls with our equipment to see body heat signatures and once again that comes back to engineering and mathematics which Mason places a great emphasis on and that's why I decided to bring that out here."

Davidson said that his favorite part of the exhibit was seeing firsthand all of the different kinds of gear used by the Army that he might be wearing himself in the near future.

"I'm really into gear, the tactical part of it—so probably all the gear displays (were my favorite)," Davidson said. "They had that set up, then all the big machine guns and that fun stuff. It's pure Army."