



What is a Government Shutdown and What Does it Mean for You?

Caroline Johnson, Sophomore
Reporter



For the past few weeks, the media has been dominated by the U.S. Federal government shutdown, which is now the longest in the nation's history. Both Republicans and Democrats have been placing the blame on each other as to who caused the shutdown, and there is a lot of false information circulating about what the shutdown means for Americans. Here are some shut down basics and ways that the shutdown could affect you.

Every year on September 30, a fiscal year ends and a new budget must be passed by Congress. Usually, the President and Congress need a little more time so they pass what is called a continuous resolution (CR), which extends the previous year's funding plan to a specific date. If the CR runs out before a new budget is determined, and no new CR is passed, a government shutdown occurs. This year, the budget included 5.7 billion dollars dedicated to President Trump's highly controversial wall, which would be constructed along the U.S.-Mexico border. The wall was the major sticking point in debate over the new budget, and it is a significant reason that explains why the new budget has yet to be finalized.

So, how does this shutdown affect the average American? Some government programs that are deemed essential are still in operation and receiving funding, such as Social Security, Medicare, unemployment checks, most FDA food inspections, farming subsidies, veterans benefits, interest payments on the national debt, and active military duty. Public schools are also still receiving federal funding, but in general, most of the money spent on education comes from the state and local levels. This means that MHS and all other public schools are not too strongly impacted. Other programs like the National Park Service and the Smithsonian Museums are shut down because they are nonessential. Those working in nonessential agencies have been sent home, while those in essential agencies continue to work, unsure of when their next paycheck will come. One place where the effects of the shutdown are particularly evident are America's airports. Those who work for the TSA and as air traffic controllers are deemed essential but are working without pay. As a result, thousands of TSA workers have been calling in sick to find temporary employment elsewhere until they can be guaranteed a paycheck. This means if you are planning on flying before the shutdown ends, you can expect significantly longer lines than usual at security due to a shortage of staff.

As a result of the shutdown, there has been enormous kindness shown by Americans, and even those abroad, towards federal employees working without pay. Canadian air traffic controllers have been sending pizzas on planes heading to the U.S. for their American counterparts to eat for lunch. Restaurants like Pauli in the North End of Boston have been offering free meals to federal employees. Some daycares have been allowing their clients who are employed by the federal government to send their children for free for the duration of the shutdown and to pay back the balance when they start receiving paychecks again.

Hopefully, the shutdown is drawing to a close as both the President and Congress have stated willingness to negotiate the new budget. There is even a possibility that this will happen by the end of this week. Still, as of now, many Americans employed by the government are going without pay, and some even looking for employment elsewhere.

All You Need to Know About the MHS Math Team

Alexis Earp, Freshman
Reporter

The Marblehead High School Math Team is about half-way through its six-meet season. I had the opportunity to interview Ms. Waitkevich, one of the Math Team coaches, about what goes into running the Math Team. She also answered questions that will inform people about the competitions.

Q: How many people are on the Math Team this year?
A: This year, there are approximately 35-40 students who are on the Math Team.

Q: How long have you been a Math Team coach?
A: This is my second year being the Math Team Coach for Marblehead. I was also the Math Team coach at a school in Austria, where we competed with other international schools.

Q: Where do the Math Team competitions take place?
A: Each meet takes place at a different school that we compete against in our division, which consists of a total of 8 schools (Marblehead, St. John's, St. Mary's, Beverly, Swampscott, Salem, Lynn English, and Lynn Classical). The first meet of the year is at Marblehead, followed by St. John's Prep, Lynn English, Salem, and Swampscott. The sixth meet is determined by each school's team scores and the league overall (consisting of 42 schools). Last year we went to Concord-Carlisle for the last meet.

Q: What are some of the topics covered in the competitions?
A: We cover a wide variety of topics during the competitions. Everything from Algebra 1, Algebra 2, Geometry, Trigonometry, Number Theory, Probability, Pre-Calculus, etc.

Q: How does the Math Team practice for meets?
A: The Math Team practices each Tuesday afternoon. We usually have about four practices before the next competition. The day after each meet, the math coaches receive "look alike" problems for the next meet. These problems are similar to the first question in each round that will be asked during the next meet. Students work through these problems during the first practice. By the next practice students usually have an idea of the rounds they would like to compete in, so they are given more problems focusing on the topics in those rounds. The third practice, we focus on "team questions," and the fourth practice we focus again on the individual rounds.

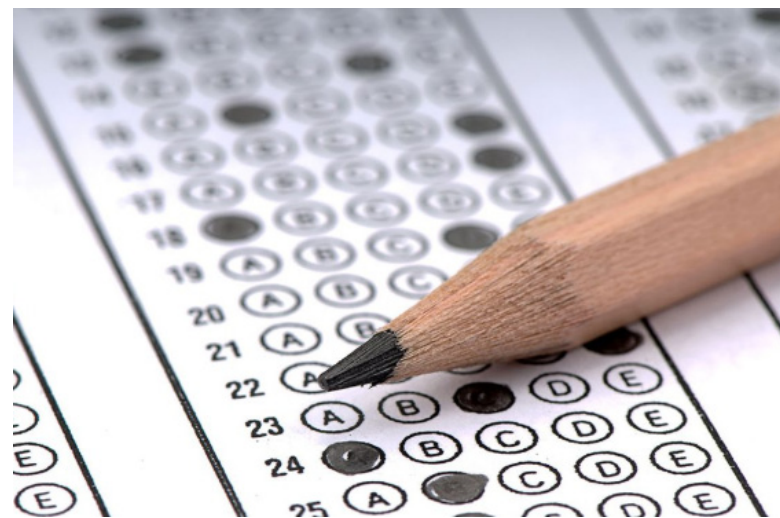
Q: What are regulars and alternates, and how is what they do at meets different?
A: During each meet we bring regulars (10 students that make up the team each meet) and alternates. Regulars are competing for the team score. If a student that is a "regular" is unable to attend a meet, an alternate can fill in the spot. Regulars and alternates change each meet, so everyone that attends practice is eligible to attend the meet. We take 10 regulars and about 3-5 alternates each meet. When we host the meet, everyone can attend!

Q: What is the hardest part of running the Math Team?
A: The most difficult thing about running the meet is prepping for when the meet is held at our school. Each host school runs off all copies for each round for everyone competing, arranges classrooms where the competition will take place, and orders pizza and snacks for all attending. Everyone on Marblehead's Math Team is very cooperative in making sure everything runs very smoothly.

Midterms and Finals: A Necessity?

Riley Bowen, Freshman
Reporter

During the first couple weeks of January, stress levels sky-rocket for teens in high schools across the nation. Midterms have arrived. For years prior, schools and students have questioned how effective these tests really are. During midterms and finals, stress levels are high, morale is low, and memory retention is pushed.



The real question surrounding cumulative assessments is whether or not they can accurately measure the amount of knowledge a student has retained from the course. After months of learning new material and likely spending little time reviewing old units, is it beneficial to require students to regurgitate old information?

Midterms and finals were originally intended for use by college students and were later adopted by high schools with the hope of better preparing students for college. One opinion is that more testing takes away time better spent on learning. Many teachers think that standardized tests, like MCAS, and summative testing, like finals, take up too much of the school year. Studies have shown that repeated cumulative testing throughout the year leads to much better memory retention than one or two cumulative tests. This concept of increased information digestion "by testing [students] several times on the same material via a series of cumulative exams throughout the term" was researched by Donald R. Bacon Ph.D. Some people think that multiple brief cumulative tests would be better than one or two long ones.

Before we jump to more testing, the well-being of the student body should first be considered. Just because students don't like to take tests doesn't mean midterms and finals should be abolished, but students mental health is something to factor into a decision. Google Trends shows a direct correlation with final exams and searches about school stress. The Anxiety and Depression Society of America and the American Psychological Association have stated that in recent years, there has been a sharp increase in depression and anxiety in high school students. A great increase in testing has also been reported in the past decade. Coincidence? I think not.

In my opinion, midterms and finals don't accurately assess a student's knowledge of the course's content. I would greatly prefer to have reviews throughout the year on cumulative information to help me absorb the content rather than finals or midterms. Having these summative tests causes students much stress and causes teachers to cram in work before the quarter ends. But alas, this article can't stop me from having to take the midterms soon. I wish all test-takers the best of luck.

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