

Bridging to Blach

April 2007

For the Sixth Grade Families of Loyola, Oak, Springer & Covington Schools

Just think, your child will be at Blach before you know it! Feeling ready? The 6th grade teachers in our area do a great job of preparing the children for 7th grade. Your son or daughter's introductory year to Blach as a full-fledged "sevvy" (what 8th graders affectionately call 7th graders) will no doubt prepare him or her to be a wise-to-the-ways-of-intermediate-school 8th grader.

The areas that usually demand the greatest focus for incoming students are the increased homework load and the organization/time management skills that go with it. With seven subjects, it's normal to have a couple hours of homework each night. While teachers strive to coordinate major projects, there will be times when several long-term projects are due in the same week. Students cannot afford to leave projects to the last minute, like they may have been able to get away with in elementary school.

What can parents do to help students make these adjustments? One approach is to consider homework requirements when planning your fall calendar. Teachers will challenge the students from day one, so don't overbook your child during this period of adjustment. Another is to help your child become more self-sufficient in terms of keeping track of assignments and planning their time. It's never too soon to work on this! To help, the PTA provides each student with a planner the first week of school. The student planner has space to record each day's homework, as well as an informational section on school policies and procedures. We hope these suggestions, along with other information in this newsletter, will assist you and your child in a smooth transition into middle school!

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Important Dates for Parents

Information Meeting

Mon, April 30 at 7:00pm
Blach Multi (old gym)

Important Dates for Students

Math Testing

Oak late April
Loyola late April
Springer late April
Covington (admin. by Egan)

6th Grade Tour

Thursday, May 24 morning
This is not a parent event

Best Wishes,

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Orientation Activities

Parent Information Meeting

On Monday, April 30 at 7:00 pm in the Blach multi (old gym), Blach staff and a panel of current students will meet with parents of incoming students to share information and answer questions about our programs, curriculum and facility.

Math Testing

In late April, Dr. Judy Rothenberg, Blach School Counselor/Psychologist, will visit each feeder school* and administer a math placement test to all 6th graders. Results of this test, along with teacher input, grades, and STAR (or comparable) test results, help Blach place students in the most appropriate level of the math program. No special preparation for this test is required. Math placement notification will be included in the information packets mailed to all students in August. (**Please note Egan Intermediate School will administer the math placement test to Covington students*).

6th Grade Tour

On Thursday, May 24, 6th grade teachers and their classes will visit Blach in the morning. The objective is to help the incoming students feel familiar and comfortable with the Blach campus. Sixth grade teachers will coordinate the transportation.

From the Desk of Leslie Crane, Principal

Dear Future Blach Parents,

Most of the curriculum at Blach is taught in heterogeneously-grouped classes, and the mix of students in each period is quite random, resulting from the mechanics of scheduling rather than from any placement process.

In Math, however, we do separate students into three groups at each grade, continuing the Grade-Level, Accelerated and Advanced levels of the elementary program. The math curriculum is highly sequential, and it is very difficult within one class section to accommodate learners at different stages of readiness to move on to the next topic (unlike, for example, English, where all students can work productively at the same time on the essential skills of Expository Writing or Literary Analysis).

Placement Process

The Blach staff works closely with the sixth grade teachers and principals from our “feeder” elementary schools to determine a math placement for each child based on a broad range of measures.

These include:

- Math learner characteristics (our math teachers stress that work habits and strong interest in math are just as important for success in accelerated classes as “ability”)
- Scores on the California Math Standards Test (part of the STAR test)
- Scores on the Grade 7 Math Placement Test (administered in April)
- Report Card grades in Math (March of Grade 6)

As I explained during our parent tours, our objective in making math placements is to ensure that each child has an opportunity both for success and challenge in math. Adolescents are particularly sensitive

to the social implications of program changes and we try very hard to avoid making changes that will be perceived as failure or loss of status. Thus, we tend to err on the side of caution when placing incoming students; when our data does not clearly support one level over another, we will say, “let’s start the student at grade-level and then review their progress in a month,” rather than, “let’s give him a chance at the harder class and see if he can keep up.” Success is a better motivator than failure!

Changes in Placement

We monitor math placements closely and our experience over the years has given us confidence in the overall accuracy of the placement process. We do have specific standards and procedures in place, however, for making changes when necessary, and students do have the opportunity to move among the levels when their performance warrants a change.

A Word about High School

At our articulation meetings, the high school math teachers constantly stress the importance of solid preparation in fundamental skills over early acceleration. They report that Blach students do very well in all levels of the high school math program. Both high school math departments offer two levels of math to entering freshmen, Geometry and Geometry Honors. If a student has struggled with 8th grade math, they may re-take Algebra, but this happens only on rare occasions. Our students move from a three-level math program to a two-level math program in 9th grade. If you have specific questions about math in high school, Dr. Rothenberg would be happy to discuss them with you.

Your child’s math placement will be included in the information packet mailed to you in August (if a student is changing levels, the elementary school will contact you in the spring).

Sincerely,
 Leslie Crane, Principal
 lcrane@blachschool.org

Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9
Grade 6 Math	Pre-Algebra Essentials	Algebra Essentials	Algebra I or Geometry
		Algebra I	Geometry or Honors Geometry
Accelerated Math 6	Accelerated Pre-Algebra	Accelerated Algebra	Geometry or Honors Geometry
Pre-Algebra 6	Advanced Pre-Algebra	Advanced Algebra	Geometry or Honors Geometry

7th Grade Math Course Descriptions

Pre-Algebra Essentials – This is the grade-level course offering students a challenging and sound preparation for success in Algebra. Prentice-Hall’s *Pre-Algebra* is the basic textbook. Typically about 50-60% of our 7th grade students are enrolled in this level. Most Pre-Algebra Essentials students will enroll in Algebra Essentials in 8th grade; some students recommended by their teacher (via summer study and an exam) may be able to move into Accelerated Algebra in 8th grade.

Accelerated Pre-Algebra – These students also use the Prentice-Hall textbook (as well as supplementary materials), but move at a faster pace, completing their preparation for Accelerated Algebra. Typically about 25% of our 7th grade students are enrolled in this level.

Advanced Pre-Algebra – These classes consist almost entirely of students identified and placed in the most advanced math classes in elementary school. They complete the pre-Algebra material which they began in sixth grade, and cover a major portion of the Algebra course content as seventh graders. About 20-25% of our 7th graders enroll in this level.

NOTE: Algebra Essentials is an 8th grade course which meets the content requirements of the State Math Standards and focuses on the most critical algebraic concepts. At the completion of this course, most students attending MVHS or LAHS will probably enroll in Geometry in 9th grade, providing they meet the requirement of MVLA School District that students in any level of Algebra must have a cumulative yearly grade of 74% or higher in order to go on to Geometry.

There are no “remedial” or “below-grade-level” math courses at Blach; all students will easily be able to complete, for example, the UC math requirement during high school. Identified special education students placed in the Resource or Special Day programs may receive supplementary or alternative math instruction per their Individual Education Plans (IEPs).

Tips by Math Teachers Marcia Chron, Jeff Allyn, Marron Honigman, and Sharon Moerner

- Be interested, ask your student questions, ask to see their school work and understand what they are currently working on. Encourage your student to show their work rather than just writing an answer.
- If you are accustomed to helping your student with homework, this is the time to help them become more independent. Ask them questions and if they are having a difficult time understanding some material, encourage them to ask the teacher. All teachers offer extra time to students for help. They also offer time to review, practice and complete make-up work. Encourage your student to seek extra review before tests and quizzes.
- Remind your student that homework includes reading the text and reviewing concepts as well as completing written homework.
- In general, homework turned in late will not receive full credit. It is very important to do work on time.
- In most cases, tests and quizzes cannot be re-taken, so be prepared.
- Students receive a “progress report” periodically. Always feel free to call or e-mail the teacher if you have questions or concerns.

Report Cards/Tracking Process

With seven subjects and seven teachers, keeping track of your child's progress can be a little tricky at first. The most important thing to remember is that while Blach emphasizes that your child is responsible for his or her own performance, we are happy to discuss your child's progress with you.

There are several systems Blach uses to keep you informed on a regular basis:

Report Cards

The school year is divided into four quarters of about nine weeks each. Report cards are mailed home to parents at the end of each quarter and include grades, teachers' comments and attendance information.

Parent/Student Portal in Powerschool

The portal allows both parents and students to view a teacher's grade book. This web-based program enables families to monitor academic progress. At the beginning of the school year, every family will receive a letter containing their passwords and directions so they can use the portal.

Progress Reports

Teachers also send Progress Reports home to selected students mid-way through each quarter. Some teachers give them to all students, while others give them only to students who are having difficulties. These reports may alert you to incomplete or missing assignments, or may note positive aspects of the student's performance. Progress Reports are sent to all students whose work is below a grade of "C."

Conferences

Teacher conferences are held in November after the first quarter report cards have been mailed home. You'll have an opportunity to meet with as many of your child's teachers as you wish to discuss your child's progress.

In short, you'll be getting formal reports on your student's progress nine times a year. If you have questions or concerns in between these regularly scheduled intervals, you're invited to contact teachers or any member of the staff via e-mail (firstname.lastname@blachschool.org) or schedule an appointment for a face-to-face meeting.

After-School Sports Program

Blach offers a wide variety of after-school sports for boys and girls. Our goal is to offer an inter-school athletic program that provides instruction and builds self-esteem, self-discipline and sportsmanship. We encourage parent volunteers to help coach and officiate.

Most of our programs are run in collaboration with the Los Altos Recreation Department. Our teams compete in the Valley Athletic League, which includes schools in Los Altos, Mountain View, Cupertino, San Jose and Sunnyvale.

Our tennis team is organized separately and competes in a league that includes several local public and private schools.

Tryouts

Tryouts are held after school, a week or two weeks before competition begins. Students are placed on teams based on standards established for each sport. Those standards include height, weight, grade and skill level. In basketball and volleyball we form two “C” teams, one for girls and one for boys. The C team members are 5’3” and under.

In some sports, we must limit the number of participants due to the availability of coaches, facilities or competition in neighboring schools. In cross country, wrestling and track and field, no cuts are made and all students are encouraged to participate.

After-School Sports and Approximate Seasons:

Boys

Volleyball	September - mid October
Cross Country	mid September – mid October
Wrestling	mid October – mid December
Soccer	mid December – mid February
Basketball	mid February – mid April
Tennis	end of March – early May
Track & Field	mid April - May

Girls

Softball	September – mid October
Cross Country	mid September – mid October
Volleyball	mid October – mid December
Basketball	mid December – mid February
Soccer	mid February – mid April
Tennis	end of March – early May
Track & Field	mid April – May

To help you and your child estimate the time commitment required to participate in after-school sports, the above is a *rough* idea of a typical sports schedule. Please understand that this schedule varies considerably from sport to sport, and is subject to change. All students must maintain the minimum 2.0 GPA required by state law to participate in after-school sports.

Typically, practices and games will be held several days per week, Monday through Thursday. Games are usually scheduled for Tuesdays and Thursdays. Practices start after school and many continue until 4:45pm.

For games, we’ll need to travel to another school or wait for another school’s team to arrive at Blach. For that reason, games or matches typically begin at 3:50pm and may run until 6-6:30pm. Each sport will include up to 9 games or matches, and may include post-season play.

There are fees associated with each sport, stipulated by the Los Altos Recreation Department and Mid-Peninsula Tennis.

During the school year, you will be able to check the Blach website under Sports for more information, including schedules and directions to each school in the league. The Blach After-School Sports Information Hotline can be reached at 934-3828. When calling it, you will hear a recorded message containing information for the current week.

Volunteering for Sports Boosters

Blach PTA is always looking for sports-minded parents to help support our after-school sports program. If you're interested, please remember to sign up to volunteer when your back-to-school packet arrives in August. You may also contact Mary Magee, Sports Boosters Chairperson, at 965-0055.

Hot Lunch

Blach School students continue to take advantage of the hot lunch program. Five days a week, PTA volunteers serve our students meals delivered to Blach from local restaurants. The program is optional and students can choose from any or all of the 5 days. About 95% of the students participate.

Compared to the hot lunch programs at many of the elementary schools, Blach offers a variety of choices each session. We review the menu before each session and make changes to take advantage of new restaurants or replace items that students no longer like.

You are encouraged to use the on-line ordering system that is provided on the Blach School website (www.blachschool.org, under Hot Lunch). The details for the fall semester are included in the back-to-school packet that will be mailed to you in August. Blach offers two sessions of hot lunch, one each semester. **NOTE: It is very important to get your order placed with your payment turned in BEFORE THE DEADLINE.** If you miss the deadline for the first session, your student will have to wait until January to take part in hot lunch. One of the reasons for the strict rule is the contracts that must be signed with vendors - once they are in place, they cannot be changed.

Next Month's Issue

- Getting to/from School
- Letter from the Principal
- From the Desk of Dr. Judy Rothenberg, School Psychologist/Counselor
- PTA Update (officers, opportunities)
- What to Expect in August

If you have any questions or content suggestions for future issues, please feel free to contact me.

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