



April 2009

For sixth grade families of Covington, Loyola, Oak, and Springer Schools

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Parent Information Meeting

Monday, May 4 at 7:00pm
Blach Multi (old gym)

Math Testing

Covington (Admin. by Egan)
Oak, Loyola, and Springer (Spring)

6th Grade Tour (Students only)

Thursday, May 28, 9:00am

Your child will be at Blach before you know it! Are you ready? The 6th grade teachers in our area do a great job of preparing the children for 7th grade. Your child's year at Blach as a "sevvy" (what 8th graders affectionately call 7th graders) will no doubt prepare them 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 and the related organization/time management skills. With seven subjects, it's normal to have a couple of hours of homework each night. While teachers strive to coordinate major projects, there are times when several long-term projects are due in the same week. Students cannot afford to leave projects to the last minute, like they might have done in elementary school.

How can you help your 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 keeping track of assignments and planning 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 the information in this newsletter will assist you and your child in a smooth transition into middle school!

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Orientation Activities

Parent Information Meeting: Monday, May 4, at 7:00 pm in the Blach Multi (old gym), Blach staff and current students will share information and answer questions.

6th Grade Tour: Thursday, May 28, 6th grade teachers and their classes will visit Blach in the morning. Students who don't attend Loyola, Oak, or Springer, contact the Blach office at (650) 934-3800.

Math Testing: During spring, at school. *No special preparation is necessary.* Math placement notification is included in the information packets provided to students in August.

From the Desk of **Leslie Crane, Principal**



Dear Future Blach Parents,

Most of the curriculum at Blach is taught in heterogeneously-grouped classes. The mix of students in each period is random, resulting from the mechanics of scheduling rather than from any placement process. In Math, however, we separate students into three groups at each grade, continuing the Grade-Level, Accelerated and Advanced levels of the 6th grade elementary program. The math curriculum is highly sequential, and it is very difficult within one class section to accommodate learners at different stages.

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, including

- Math learner characteristics (our math teachers stress that work habits and strong interest in math are just as important as "ability" for success in accelerated classes)
- 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)

Our objective is to ensure that each child has an opportunity for both 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 can be perceived as failure or loss of status. Thus, we tend to err on the side of caution; when our data does not clearly support one level over another, we say, "let's start the student at grade-level, and review their progress in a month," rather than, "let's give them a chance at the harder class and see if they 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. When necessary, however, we do have specific standards and procedures in place that allow students to move among the levels when their performance warrants it.

A Word about High School

The high school math teachers constantly stress the importance of solid 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. A student who has struggled with 8th grade math may re-take Algebra, but this happens only rarely. If you have specific questions about math in high school, Dr. Judy Rothenberg would be

happy to discuss them with you.

Your child's math placement will be included in the information packet provided 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

Math Tracks Grades 6 Through 9

<i>Elementary Grade 6</i>	Blach		<i>High School Grade 9</i>
	Grade 7	Grade 8	
<i>Grade 6 Math</i>	Pre-Algebra Essentials	Algebra	<i>Algebra or Geometry</i>
		Algebra	<i>Geometry or Honors Geometry</i>
<i>Accelerated Math 6</i>	Accelerated Pre-Algebra	Accelerated Algebra	<i>Geometry or Honors Geometry</i>
<i>Pre-Algebra 6</i>	Advanced Pre-Algebra	Advanced Algebra	<i>Geometry or Honors Geometry</i>

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. Pre-Algebra Essentials students will enroll in Algebra 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 is an 8th grade course that meets the content requirements of the State Math Standards and focuses on the most critical algebraic concepts. At the

completion of this course, almost all students attending MVHS or LAHS will probably enroll in Geometry or Geometry Honors in 9th grade.

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.
- 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.
- Homework turned in late does not receive full credit. It is 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. The Parent Portal and Student Portal in Powerschool allows you to see our grade book so you can monitor grades throughout the school year. 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 at minimum four 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 (fristinitiallastname@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 interschool 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 and flag football team are organized separately and compete in a league that includes several local public and private schools. Tennis is sponsored by Mid-Peninsula Tennis. Flag football is coached by parents and sponsored by After School Athletics.

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:

Sport	Boys	Girls
Basketball	mid December – mid February	mid February – mid April
Cross Country	mid September – mid October	mid September – mid October
Flag Football	September – November	September – November
Soccer	mid February – mid April	mid December – mid February
Softball		September – mid October
Tennis	end of March – early May	end of March – early May
Track & Field	mid April - May	mid April – May
Volleyball	September - mid October	mid October – mid December
Wrestling	mid October – mid December	

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. An updated schedule for the school year will be posted on the Blach website sometime in August. All students must maintain the minimum 2.0 GPA required by state law to participate in after-school sports.

Typically, practices and games are held several days per week, Monday through Thursday. Games are usually scheduled for Tuesdays and Thursdays. Practices start after school and many continue until 4:30pm.

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. This hotline is 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 volunteer by contacting one of the Sports Boosters Chairpersons: Kathy Fischer-Colbrie, at 533-0695 (boys) or Elizabeth McDermott at 967-2863 or ecmcdermott@comcast.net (girls).

Hot Lunch

Five days a week, as part of the Blach hot lunch program, 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 five days. About 95% of the students participate.

Similar 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 to 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 you will receive 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

Look for our third and final issue, May/June, to arrive by the end of the school year.

If you have any questions or content suggestions for the next issue, please feel free to contact me.

Wendy Marshall

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