

Bridging to Blach

May/June 2007

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

We're sure it is hard to believe that the time has come for your 6th grader to say goodbye to their Elementary school and make their way to middle school. If you had asked them at the beginning of spring, they (and their teachers) would probably have told you that they were ready to move on. Now, when you can count the days, their feelings become mixed; they are eager for something new, yet sentimental about leaving the familiar behind. When the new school year begins, Blach's very experienced staff will help them feel right at home, and the high-energy "Blach spirit" will quickly draw them into the challenges and positive experiences that await them.

You will hear from us again in August when you receive your Back to School Packet. Until then, enjoy your final days of 6th grade and have a fabulous summer. We look forward to welcoming you to Blach at our Back to School Coffee on Thursday, August 23rd. See you then!

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From the Desk of Leslie Crane, Principal

One of the many changes that parents experience as their children transition from elementary to the intermediate school program involves the crucial area of communication between school and home. Dropping by the teacher's room at dismissal time for a quick chat about the social studies project doesn't work when there are seven teachers working with your child.

Overlaid in this reality is the desire of the young adolescent to handle things more independently, frequently expressed through a new reluctance to pass letters from school in a timely way ("How long has *that* been in your backpack?").

Here are some suggestions for maintaining good communication at Blach:

- Keep us posted about changes in your home or work phone numbers (and e-mail addresses) so we can easily reach you if necessary.

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Important Dates:

Mid August: Back to School Packets

First Day of School: Aug 22nd
Back to School Coffee: Aug 23rd

First Blach PTA Meeting:
3rd Thursday of the month,
September 20th.

- Report absences and appointment information by leaving messages on the attendance voice mailbox at 934-3838 which is accessible on a 24/7 basis.
- For information about daily assignments, check the student handbook (Planner) that your child will receive when school starts. Our teachers place great stress on the students' responsibility for writing assignments down. You can stay informed *and* reinforce good study habits by making a "binder check" part of your routine. You may also access our new portal in Powerschool, a web-based program enabling families to monitor academic progress.
- Do not hesitate to call or email if you need to talk to a teacher. We are all committed to returning your calls and emails promptly. Most of our teachers find e-mail a very effective mode for brief parent/teacher communications. The staff e-mail address format for Blach is: firstinitiallastname@blachschool.org. Addresses for all teachers and staff are also available on the Blach website at www.blachschool.org.
- We mail formal Progress Reports midway through each quarter to flag problems (and sometimes to note good performance or improvement). Teachers will expect to hear from you after you've reviewed the information with your child.
- Information filtered through the teenage brain is subject to data loss and creative embellishment. If you hear something that seems questionable, please check directly with the appropriate staff member.

2007-2008 Blach PTA Officers

It is our pleasure to introduce the 2007-2008 Blach PTA Board. Congratulations to these newly-elected Board members:

Co-Presidents:	Debbie Torok and Lara Daetz
1 st Vice President:	Missy Lutz Philp
2 nd Vice President:	Peggy Benenato
Secretary:	Karen Bellandi
Treasurer:	Barbara Wilbur
Auditor:	Shari Chao
Financial Secretary:	Cathy Rosen
Historian:	Sue Goldberg
Parliamentarian:	TBD

PTA Volunteer Opportunities:

There are many PTA opportunities available that can help you become an integral part of the Blach community. PTA is one of the best ways to get to know the Blach staff and to meet parents from other schools. Your child will be at Blach for only two years. You can't afford to wait. Jump right in and volunteer for a committee that interests you!

If you're interested in learning more, or if you'd like to be a committee chair (we are still looking to fill the position of Parliamentarian this year), please contact Co-Presidents Debbie Torok at 949-0808 or by e-mail at TOROK111@aol.com or Lara Daetz at 961-1558 or e-mail at ddaetz@hotmail.com. You can

also contact the 2nd Vice President in charge of volunteers, Peggy Benenato at 941-4711 or peggybenenato@yahoo.com.

A list of other committees with descriptions appeared in the March issue of Bridging to Blach. Please contact Peggy Benenato if you are interested in volunteering. A sign-up sheet will also be in the Back-to-school packet mailed to your home in August or you can sign up at the Back-to-School Coffee the second day of school.

PTA Fundraisers

Each year, the PTA sets specific goals and then raises funds to reach the goals. For the past several years, the major fundraisers have been the Direct Appeal Campaign and Hot Lunch. The Direct Appeal takes the place of the numerous fundraising events that take place throughout the year in elementary school. Through this fundraiser, we provide each student with a student handbook (Planner), publish a school directory for each family, and conduct various student activities throughout the year.

Another way in which the PTA raises money is through family participation in eScrip. If you've not yet registered for this program, please consider doing so. If you've already registered, please update your registration to support Blach before school resumes in August. If you have children in other schools, eScrip allows your purchase to benefit more than one school. For more information about this program, visit www.escrip.com.

From the Desk of Dr. Judy Rothenberg, School Psychologist/Counselor

Dear Parents of teenagers or soon-to-be teenagers,

Welcome to Blach School. During the two years that your son or daughter attends Blach School, they will shift into adolescence in high gear, if they are not there already. Seventh and eighth grade are years of enormous change. Developmentally, the only other period of childhood during which so much changes so rapidly is infancy! The youngster that you thought you knew so well may become moody, argumentative, defiant or withdrawn. Suddenly, your son or daughter wants to spend time alone in their room and those who were open and communicative may become secretive. Parents are likely to be perceived as “embarrassing” and well-established and once-liked family routines may become “boring” or “stupid.” Your calm and pleasant family atmosphere may become strained.

All of these behaviors are normal for emerging adolescents. Not only are they changing, but parents must adapt their parenting to the needs of their straining-to-be-independent teens. For example, what used to lead to consequences may now need to be ignored. This is especially true as teens try out their new ways of thinking and philosophizing. Teens have learned how to think about their thoughts, to reflect on rules and moral behavior, and begin to question our reasoning. This aspect of parenting is especially challenging in the middle school years!

Confused about how to manage homework? Uncertain how to deal with changing behaviors? Noticing attitude shifts and unclear how to handle that? Give me a call. Counseling services at Blach are available to all Blach students and parents. Children may be referred for counseling assistance, for help staying on top of their assignments, or for many other reasons. Help is available to both the student and their parents. Parent input and communication is essential to the counseling process. Individual,

family, and group counseling services are available either directly through me or from our Children's Health Awareness Council intern. Referrals come to me and I will either help or refer the situation to our CHAC intern. Counseling sessions are scheduled to minimally interfere with your student's academic program at Blach.

Unsure if you really need to talk to me? Call anyway! The worst that might happen is that I might tell you that you are handling the situation as well as can be expected. With teenagers, that kind of feedback is so reassuring. I am looking forward to meeting you, formally or informally and getting to know your teens.

Sincerely,

Dr. Judy Rothenberg, M.Ed., PH.D.
School Psychologist/Counselor

Helping Our Students Succeed

Middle school is a good time for us to allow our children to be more responsible for themselves. Instead of bailing them out, we need to allow them to learn from their mistakes.

Organization is the key to success. Blach gives each student a key organization tool in the form of their student handbook (Planner), which contains an assignment calendar. You may need to encourage them to use it, but then it's your job as a parent to step back a bit and let them keep track of assignments on their own. According to one student, "The handbooks are great. Everything's in there, all in one place. Without it, I'd be lost."

What to Expect in August

With the school year coming to an end and summer looming, we're sure you've got more than enough to think about. But, if you're like us, you'll soon be scrambling to be sure your student is ready for seventh grade.

What do you need to do to get ready? Not much. Make sure your child's immunizations are up-to-date and you're set. All the other information you'll need will be mailed to you in the August back-to-school packet. It will include a welcome note from Blach's Principal, Leslie Crane, your child's class schedule, a map of the campus, school supplies needed and PTA information.

If your child is a little apprehensive about making their way around campus, please feel free to visit Blach to check out where the classrooms are located. You might want to practice biking, walking or carpooling, especially if your child will be transporting a musical instrument. When you are driving, please be extra cautious around all students. We look forward to having your family join us at Blach.

Words of wisdom from our Blach community to incoming families...

Student to Student

Take homeroom competition seriously.

Get a comfy backpack...you carry it all day!

Don't take too many after-school activities at once.

Study for tests!

You don't need to be nervous.

Teachers will help you.

Always try for extra credit.

Don't buy too big PE shorts.

Get hot lunch...It's great.

Changing in the locker rooms is really easy and no one makes fun of you.

Ask questions if you don't understand...people won't think you're stupid.

Don't lie on your music practice card.

Your grades will probably improve in the second quarter.

Get a LAYC card...the dances are fun.

Don't feel bad if you don't make the team; you probably learned something while trying out.

Don't turn anything in late...do it on time.

Always put the correct heading on your paper.

Have fun...live a little.

It's a good idea to look at Blach and find where your classes are before the first day of school.

Write down **all** your homework and everything that your teachers say to write down.

Parent to Parent

This is a great opportunity for your child to meet new friends so encourage them to branch out to meet others.

Don't be concerned if your child isn't eager to have you participate in activities like they did in elementary school – it's part of the detachment process.

Volunteer for hot lunch. It's one of the few opportunities for you to be on campus to check out the students in a social setting.

Remind your kids to be kind to all other kids. We are all different, we all need help at times, and variety is the spice of life.

Take advantage of the resources Blach offers to help navigate the challenges of the middle school years...the Parent Connection, e-mailing teachers, utilizing the school counselor and listening to the Principal and the staff. They have a better handle on the issues facing 7th and 8th graders than most parents do.

The homework can be overwhelming at first. Allow your child to figure it out themselves, but keep in touch...they may not be ready to organize it entirely on their own.

The Health classes are very informative. They discuss a lot of things our parents and teachers never told us.

The teachers ALWAYS have the homework written on the board so your child can ALWAYS write it down when he/she enters the classroom.

Student to Student

Be friendly, especially on the first day.

Don't be afraid to asking eighth graders for help.

Don't procrastinate.

Know how to write an essay.

Be organized.

Have lots of spare pencils and pens.

Plan your time wisely.

Don't be too cliquey.

Choose electives that you will like, not just what your friends pick.

Dress up for spirit days.

Eighth graders call you "sevvys."

Do your work on time.

You can handle the homework load.

Use the Blach Handbook.

Don't sit on the desks, they fall over.

Don't be afraid to make new friends and talk to people you don't know.

Finish assignments as early as possible.

Don't be afraid of changing periods...4 minutes is plenty of passing time.

Parent to Parent

You won't have the same cozy, drop in relationship with the teachers, but most of them respond to e-mail quickly. Feel free to contact them.

Remember how difficult it is to be a teenager so go easy on the pressure. Kids are hard enough on themselves (and each other) already. Be there to love and support them through the hard stuff.

Remind your child that they should bring home their PE clothes to be washed over the weekend – they will not magically be cleaned in their locker.

Children at this age become very private so expect a change in this area of their personality.

Remember to ask your child for handouts from Wednesday's homeroom...the papers sometimes get crushed down to the bottom their backpacks!

Seventh grade is a transition so expect them to make mistakes and let them learn from them.

Don't ask what they talk about in Health class at the dinner table...especially if you have younger children.

Lots of teachers provide ways to earn extra credit. Many have study sessions and some even allow retaking of tests. Have your child ask them about it.

Volunteer to be the carpool driver whenever you can. It's the best opportunity to have casual and informative conversations with your kids and their friends.

Advice for Parents from Students

- Give your child more responsibility.
- Be lenient with the choices they make, they're trying stuff.
- They will want more freedom to do what they want to do; you have to let them go.
- Be supportive of their new friends.
- Know where your kids are and who they're hanging out with because it reflects on what they're up to.
- Be accessible but don't be omnipresent; sometimes they'll need you but don't hover.
- Things start so quickly at Blach - the speed at which education progresses is super fast.
- Don't ask your kids what they did right when they get home from school - it's really annoying.
- Don't stress out; give them more freedom. They know their limits better than you do.
- Expect changes; if you don't it will come as a shock.
- Don't get mad at your kid the first time they get in trouble; take it easy on them. They've gone through enough and they will learn from each other.
- Let your kids make mistakes and let them deal with them on their own; they will learn and become a better person.
- Volunteer for PTA activities. Your student will learn leadership and organizational skills watching you juggle your work load while contributing to the benefit of Blach students.

Getting To and From School

How will your 7th grader get to and from school, now that school may be further away and across major intersections? Students come by foot, bike and carpool. When walking or biking, students often meet friends so that they can walk or bike together. If you must drive, please arrange carpooling to help reduce traffic and increase safety.

Dropping Off/Picking Up: We are very concerned for the safety of our students as they arrive at and leave from school, and ask your cooperation with the following guidelines:

- Do not use the concrete driveway in front of the entrance – it is for bus and emergency vehicles only.
- Do not park or stop along the red curb in the parking lot; pull into a parking space to wait for your passengers.
- Observe the “No Left Turn” sign as you leave the parking lot.
- In consideration of our neighbors, please do not use Muir Ct. to drop off or pick-up students.
- Be vigilant for students on bikes, who do not always look carefully before crossing either the parking lot or the streets adjacent to the school.

Bicycles: For some families, sending their 7th grader off on a bicycle alone is a very scary thing. Other students have been doing this for years. Whichever category your students falls into, we’ve found that as students approach the intersections near the school, they tend to ride in groups, whether they’ve planned ahead or not. “Test-driving” the route with friends over the summer will help both you and your student become comfortable with the route and the time required to pedal.

We require cyclists to “walk” their bikes until they reach the street. In compliance with state law, we enforce the helmet law (including fastening chin straps). Students may park bicycles in the bike cages at the front and rear of the school and by the gym. Please use a secure lock. The bike cages are locked at the start of the first period and opened at the end of the day.

Skateboards/Skates/Non-Motorized Scooters: Skateboards, in-line skates and non-motorized scooters are not encouraged as a form of transportation because of the high risk of injury. We continue to ban skateboards on campus because of safety concerns. Those who ride them to school are also required to wear safety helmets. Students who do choose to ride them to school may leave them, at their own risk, in the bike cages during school hours.

Motorized Scooters: Motorized scooters may not be legally operated by anyone under the age of 16, and therefore may not be used for transportation to or from school, or on the school campus at any time.

Books: Are you worried about your child lugging all those books and instruments (band and orchestra meet every day!) back and forth to school? With support from the Los Altos Educational Foundation (LAEF), many classes own an extra set of textbooks for the classroom so that your children’s textbooks can stay at home.

Lockers: A very limited number of lockers are available for students with medical conditions or other special needs for whom daily use of a backpack is inappropriate. All students will be assigned a P.E. locker.

Transporting Instruments: Parents of students electing to take Band or Instrumental Music may have one overriding concern for next year: How to get that instrument to school on a bike. For creative solutions to instrument transport problems, please consult neighbors and friends who are involved in our music programs. Mrs. McNulty, our Instrumental Music teacher, can get almost any instrument safely on a bicycle bookrack with strong bungee cords. The really large instruments, including bari saxes, tubas, cellos, French horns and string basses are provided by Blach for student use at school. Blach musicians can bike to school.

All these logistics may be a little mind-boggling for the first couple of weeks, but don’t worry, it will all sort itself out and become routine very quickly. If you or your student need help, just ask. Someone in the office or another parent will be able to help point you in the right direction fairly quickly.

Two Years to Independence

Dr. Judy Rothenberg

School Psychologist/Counselor

Right now you are in the midst of helping your son or daughter make a smooth transition to middle school. And, *you* have a transition to make, too. You are entering the land of less parental involvement in homework and less parental involvement directly in classrooms. As you go through this process, I think it will help you to understand our perspective about the middle school years. We have two years to help your children move from elementary school support to high school independence. During their two years at Blach, they need to become independent in their management of schoolwork and any other problems that arise in school. They need to learn to take responsibility for their own learning and that includes being responsible for making sure directions from teachers are understood by either asking for teacher help or calling a peer, taking care of finding out about missed assignments when sick, arranging to take missed tests without being prompted, etc., etc. The Blach staff often refer to this as “stepping up to the plate.” Middle school is the time when children can falter in their attempts to “step up to the plate” and suffer the consequence of those mis-steps without any damage to their academic record, as might occur in high school.

Middle school is the time for you to transfer any responsibility that you now have for managing your children’s work to them. They may not get it right at first, but together, we have two years to affect his change. Two years can be very long or very short depending on where you and your child start this process. We move the seventh graders and eighth graders along until they are functioning like ninth graders and we work with you if there seem to be any bumps in the road. I know it seems hard to think about high school now, but from our perspective, the two years seem very short.

A Final Word...

“Bridging to Blach” has been a collaborative effort by Blach staff, PTA co-Chairs Pam Thornton and Trish Moxon, and myself. I have enjoyed facilitating the production of each newsletter and truly hope you have found it helpful in preparing for your child’s transition to middle school. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. Have a great summer and we’ll see you in the fall!

Carla Rapp

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