

THOMAS BLAKE MIDDLE SCHOOL

24 Pound Street, Medfield, Massachusetts 02052

(508) 359-2396

FAX (508) 359-0134

Nathaniel Vaughn
Principal

Kelly Campbell
Assistant Principal

August 24, 2023

Dear Blake Families,

I hope that this 'opening letter' finds everyone healthy, safe, renewed, and rested as we welcome the 2023-2024 school year in partnership with excitement, optimism, and hope for our students and community. I am reaching out with important information, reminders, and some 'shares' and 'resources' to help frame our year. To help all families navigate and gather student-specific and family-specific information, the 'section headers' (*hyperlinks*) outlined on the next page hopefully provide a 'quick reference' format to meet the varied needs of our community.

All of this information will be posted on my blog and the 'Blake Updates' section of our website for future reference. As I have shared in the past and will continue to with students, staff, and families...

Please know that I am always happy and eager to process, listen, discuss, and share - my door is always open - and I encourage everyone to do the same with one another.

I look forward to the work that lies ahead for all of us and wish everyone a safe, enjoyable, and memorable final stretch of summer.
Take care.

Nat

The following will bring you to important information reminders, and some 'shares' and resources to help frame our year. These 'Section Headers' are hyperlinks and provide a structure for 'quick reference' and access for all Blake families.

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"Do I belong?" is one of the biggest concerns students have in almost every grade level. Let's give students proof every day that this is the right class and teacher for them.

- Rick Wormeli in Education
Week Teacher

August 24, 2023

Dear Blake Families,

Hopefully everyone is reading this letter in a relaxed and restful state of mind, having enjoyed a wonderful summer with family and friends. We are very fortunate as a family to have had a nice summer with trips to the beach, runs/yoga/bike rides, gardening, blueberry picking and swimming in the Berkshires, summer sports, and time to relax and 'just be' together as a family. The wide array of emotions and feelings that exist at this time of year are certainly real for all of us - trying to hold on and appreciate the last days of summer, while looking ahead with excitement and wonder about the beginning of new stages - Maggie will be starting her second year at Fordham University, Owen is entering 11th grade, and Grayden begins his last year of middle school as an 8th grader. And, of course, Katie and I will be continuing to 'make the path as we walk it' along this wonderful, humbling, exciting, and ever-evolving journey of parenting!

First and foremost, I want to reiterate and share these sentiments - *they are ones that have prefaced all updates and communication since March, 2020* - as I do not believe they can be said enough, and they hold true at all times (face-to-face, remote, hybrid, pandemic, non-pandemic, etc.)...

- ***You (you, your children, our students, your families, our staff, your/our loved ones, and our collective community) are all very present in our minds and your health, safety, and well-being are the top priority.***
- ***Our collective focus and message (to students, families, and staff) is on taking care of one another and ourselves - so, please do just that and let us know if there is anything we can do for support.***

As I sat down to write this letter (*a 'task' I have already over-thought to the 'nth degree'!*) it is hard for me to believe that this fall marks the beginning of my 26th year as an educator in the Medfield Public Schools! Each year I love and aim to keep in mind the words of one of my colleagues, Marianne Young, who at the time was the principal at Monument Mountain Regional High School in the Berkshires. At one of my first conferences as an administrator about 17 or 18 years ago, she shared that Labor Day is New Year's Day for all students and teachers as we have the unique and real opportunity to 'start anew' on an annual basis. I appreciate this sentiment and believe it is one we should all practice, embrace, and cherish. They leave me with a sense of hope and promise for what lies ahead for our students, our staff, and our community of learners. And, it is always important to note and respect that the excitement of a new year can and does bring forth some feelings of anxiety and worry - we will both individually and collectively keep this in mind to support and nurture all of our learners.

The words below come from a post written by Chris McNutt at the end of June - ***it is poignant, relevant, and gets at the heart of our theme, Belonging*** - putting systems in place that work for **all** of our learners...

...it's not that we don't know better — hundreds to thousands more of these studies exist dating back more than one hundred years ago — It's just the will to change. We need to recognize that youth and educators are in crises — and that schools need to change. It's no longer warning bells — we are in a state of emergency.

It's going to take mitigated risk-taking of thousands of educators and young people who have the willingness to take actionable hope. It's only then that we'll truly start to restore humanity to education.

Each school year brings change - the students are different, we are different, and each day brings something different. Although change is hard for me, it is also why I truly love my job and school. Through each step along this path, our mission, essential questions, theme of discovery, equity-driven practices, and our steadfast efforts to provide a safe, healthy, challenging, and nurturing environment will guide all of our work. As you read through the information outlined within this letter (*there is a lot of info within, I know!*), I encourage you to join me in keeping our 'guiding lights' at the forefront of our work and thinking, along with some words of the great progressive educator, John Dewey (*these guiding lights and Dewey's words are 'traditions' that help us stay relevant!*)...

Our Guiding Lights at Blake

Our Students

Blake's Core Values: Respect, Responsibility, Resourcefulness, Reflection

Our Essential Question: *How can we cultivate and curate the progression of student learning and growth?*

Our Mission: *Blake Middle School believes in a living mission statement, based on the concept that our community seeks and respects knowledge, integrity, character, wisdom, and the willingness to adapt to a continually evolving world.*

The most important attitude that can be formed is that of desire to go on learning. - John Dewey

You cannot teach today the same way you did yesterday to prepare students for tomorrow. - John Dewey

It is a true blessing to work in a community of inspiring students, teachers, and families. Blake Middle School aims to foster a wonderful, nurturing, and challenging environment and it is truly a privilege and honor to come to work every day, greeted by our mission. I look forward to working with you and your students throughout the year as we collectively strive to continue to cultivate a culture of learning and respect.

We have both successes and challenges that lie ahead and I am excited about what the future brings for all of us. Our 'guiding lights' will both ground and direct our work as we celebrate another 'new year' together as a Blake community and hopefully find opportunities for all of our learners to hope, envision, and dream!

Working with kids every day is rarely boring. Kids are naturally fun. Their curiosity and energy rub off on me and keep me coming back for more. No matter how much education changes, kids will always need good teachers, and we will always need them right back. -- Pete Barnes

Imagination is the source of all human achievement. -- Ken Robinson

Something we all need in order to feel the fullness of life: It's not only a sense that we belong on our planet, but also that we belong in other people's lives—that we are loved, lovable, and capable of loving. – Fred Rogers

As I have shared in the past and will continue to do so with students, staff, and families...

Please know that I am always happy and eager to process, listen, discuss, and share - my door is always open - and I encourage everyone to do the same with one another.

I look forward to the work that lies ahead for all of us and wish everyone a safe, enjoyable, and memorable final stretch of summer.
Take care.

Nat

"Education is really the only equalizer we have."

—Robyn Jackson, ASCD Author
#willfulhope #willfulaction #longasIcanseethelight

Opening Day of School

The 2023-2024 school year for students will begin on Wednesday, August 30. As we have done in past years, we will stagger our starting times for the students. Arrival information for the opening day is as follows:

- **Students in grade six report to the gymnasium by 7:40 a.m. for opening orientation. *Advisory teachers will meet them there so it is helpful for students to know their advisory teacher's name or have it written down with them.***
- **Students in grade seven report to the gymnasium by 9:45 a.m.**
- **Students in grade eight report to the cafeteria by 9:45 a.m.**
- There will be a separate bus run beginning at 9:15 a.m. on the first day for students in grades seven and eight. Students should plan to be at their bus stops 2 hours later than the normal time.
- Students in grades seven and eight should not report to school before 9:25 a.m. on opening day

Staff Updates

You may have already met or been introduced to some of these individuals, but please join me in welcoming the following staff (some returning or in a new capacity) to Blake:

- Kathleen (Caprio) Burkell - Grade 6 English Teacher (returning after a one year leave)
- Meghan Carlson - Part-Time Nurse
- Kim Cataldo - Speech and Language Student Teacher (working with Sarah LoMonaco)
- Nancy Giammarco - Interim School Psychologist
- Marissa Keleher - Wellness Teacher
- Amy Kelly - Board Certified Behavior Analyst (joining Katie Aries as BCBA at Blake to work with our students)
- Kelly Lickteig - Special Education Reading Teacher
- Brian MacFarlane - 7th Grade Science Teacher
- Stephen Marks - Wellness Department Chair and Wellness Teacher at Blake
- Lisa Matthews - 7th Grade Special Educator (returning from her maternity leave)
- Steven Sergi - Orchestral Strings Teacher
- Cindy Yu - Mandarin Teacher (Long-term leave for Yaya (Xuguang) Zhang)
- Yaya (Xuguang) Zhang - Mandarin Teacher - Yaya will be taking a leave at the start of this school year
 - Library Teaching Assistant

- Teaching Assistants

Teaching Assistant Opportunities at Blake

We currently have [several teaching assistant position openings at Blake](#) for the 2023-2024 school year. These are important roles for our students and we value their presence on our staff. If you are interested in applying or know of any potential candidates, please reach out to me (nvaughn@email.medfield.net) and/or Kelly(kcampbell@email.medfield.net). Thanks in advance!

Student Schedules

Student schedules will continue to be revised and finalized up until the first day of school. Should your child have electronic access to their Blake schedule because of older siblings, please remind them that we are continuing to balance out classes until the day before school starts, and we check and double check that everyone has what they need. Therefore, everything can and likely will change up until the first day of school. Students will receive a paper schedule on the first day of school at Blake-- this will be their finalized schedule for 23-24. We do not want students to be disappointed because they think a mid-August version of their schedule is their actual schedule. Thank you for understanding and reinforcing this with your children if it comes up as a topic.

**** Important Information about the Saturn App**

You may already be aware of the app "Saturn," but for those who are not, it is an app that allows students to upload schedules to share/compare schedules with classmates. Though it is always the purview of families to decide on what apps/tools go on personal devices, we want to make you aware of the safety and privacy concerns associated with this app in advance of the schedules being published. Here are two articles written about the app:

[Is Saturn Safe? A Saturn App Review for Parents](#)

[Saturn App Review](#)

Student and Family Inventories - Thanks!

In an effort to help foster relationships with students and establish open lines of communication with families, we are asking all students and families to please fill out the respective Google Forms below about each student's interests and approaches to learning...

[Blake Student Learning Inventory 2023-2024](#)

(This link will be sent to students and they can only access this link via their Medfield e-mail accounts.)

[Blake Family Learning Inventory 2023-2024](#)

Our hope is that the answers will help our team support students and families throughout the year.

**** If you would like this survey translated into a different language, please let me know (nvaughn@email.medfield.net).**

New (or Returning) Students to Blake

Blake would like to welcome any families with middle school students moving to Medfield or attending Blake for the first time (or returning to Blake!)? Please contact Beth Ladouceur at (508) 242-8713 or via e-mail (bladouceur@email.medfield.net) regarding any questions about registration. Information regarding registration can be found at this link....

[New Student Information](#)

Mobile Learning Device Information - Chromebooks for 6th-8th Grade

Grade 6

The district has allocated resources to provide chromebooks for all incoming 6th grade students for the 2023-2024 school year. Devices and chargers will be distributed directly to students once school commences so families do not need to worry about any arrangements for distribution - please know that families do not need to purchase anything.

Grades 7 and 8

Our 7th and 8th grade students will be continuing their work with the district-issued chromebooks they used during the 2023-2024 school year.

If you need to replace a chromebook charger you may order it, at your expense, from: [Replacement Chromebook Charger](#).

We are excited about the prospects that lie ahead as we work to provide your students with the opportunity to learn with this technology and are hopeful that we can foster and promote a positive learning experience. We anticipate sending out more information throughout the year to families regarding user agreements, monitoring usage, and supports.

We are asking all students and families to please fill out the respective Responsible Use Agreements (Google Forms) below...

[Responsible Use Agreement for Borrowed Chromebooks 2023-2024 - Student Form](#)

*** These guidelines will be reviewed with students during our opening days*

*** This link will be sent to students and they can only access this link via their Medfield e-mail accounts.*

[Responsible Use Agreement for Borrowed Chromebooks 2023-2024 - Caregiver Form](#)

As always, if you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to contact Tania Manuel (tmanuel@email.medfield.net).

Blake School Supply Lists

All students should refer to the [School Supply Lists](#) located on the School Counselor webpage. Students do not need to carry all supplies to school on the first day of school.

Lockers and Locks

All Blake students will be assigned a locker for their belongings and we ask all students to bring a lock for their lockers. They will give their combination to their advisory teacher for safekeeping in the event that they forget it. In order to give students time to practice using their lock and become comfortable with it, we recommend that families consider purchasing it early so that students may practice using it throughout the summer. A photo of locks that fit on Blake lockers can be found on the school supply list page ([School Supply Lists](#)). Please reach out to your child's school counselor or Nat Vaughn should your family need support purchasing these resources.

Blake Summer Reading Info!

All the information is on the [library website's summer reading tab](#) but if you have any questions, please reach out to Kiersten Cole (kcole@email.medfield.net).

Here is the Summer Reading handout for all incoming 6th graders...

[Dale to Blake Summer Reading Letter 2023](#)

Family Information Nights

Our Information Nights have been tentatively scheduled and will be taking place in September...

9/7 - Grade 8 Family Information Night (6:00 p.m.)

9/13 - Grade 7 Family Information Night (6:00 p.m.)

9/27 - Grade 6 Family Information Night (6:00 p.m.)

We will send out reminders and more details on all of these meetings as we get closer to the actual dates.

Family Teacher Conferences

We are excited to share that this year we will be holding teacher conferences in October and March. Our hope is that through these conferences, we will further strengthen school/home communication. We will send out more information regarding these conferences in the coming weeks.

Notification for Absences/Dismissals

If a student will be absent from school, please call Blake's absence line at (508) 242-8501. If a student needs to be dismissed from school before 2:07 p.m., an e-mail must be sent by the parent/guardian to

blakeearlydismissal@email.medfield.net. Please include the following information:

- Date
- Time of dismissal
- Student name
- Reason for dismissal
- Person picking up

If you have a last minute dismissal that your student is not aware of, please call the main office at (508) 359-2396 in addition to providing the written notice in order to assure that we get it in time.

Theme of Belonging for 2023-2024

Our theme for this school year at Blake is one of Belonging. We believe that this theme will extend the work we have done over the last eleven years with our themes of Community, Perseverance, Creativity, Acceptance, Collaboration, Empathy, Diversity, Happiness, Courage, Curiosity, Imagination, and Discovery. As ideas and thoughts come to mind, do not hesitate to email me (nvaughn@email.medfield.net) or Kelly (kcampbell@email.medfield.net) - all ideas and thoughts are welcome!

"ENSURING THAT EVERY CHILD
FEELS A SENSE OF SECURITY
AND BELONGING WITHIN THE
SCHOOL ENABLES EACH CHILD
TO ACCEPT AND PARTICIPATE
ACTIVELY IN TRANSFORMING
SITUATIONS THAT ARE PART OF
LEARNING EXPERIENCES."
-LORIS MALAGUZZI

“ True belonging and self-worth are not goods;
we don't negotiate their value with the world.
The truth about who we are lives in our hearts.
No one belongs here more than you.

~ Dr. Brené Brown

*Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True
Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone*

Feedback and Reporting Information

The purpose of reporting on academic progress is to provide feedback on a student's progress and to help direct future efforts. Effective feedback to students during the learning process is essential to a healthy and productive learning experience. Formal grade reports are issued at the end of each trimester.

Students will receive feedback in two major areas: (1) Content Priority Standards and (2) Learning Skills. The Content Priority Standards feedback provides information on the student's progress on meeting content area curriculum standards addressed by each department. Learning Skills feedback gives information on the student's progress on acquiring skills important for life-long learning that we strive to foster and help develop in our students.

Revised Learning Skills for 2023-2024

Below please find the finalized learning skills that will be in place to start the 2023-2024 school year. We will be continuing our work to calibrate and coordinate amongst and within all departments and grade levels.

- S1. Collaborates with others
- S2. Engages in learning
- S3. Meets expectations for work completion
- S4. Makes connections to extend learning

The structure of feedback for the end-of-term reports include these components...

- All Blake classes will utilize a 1-4 scale for the priority standards to report a finer-grained level of understanding.
- 7th and 8th grade students will receive a single end-of-term letter grade for Math, Science, Social Studies, English Language Arts, and World Languages based on their work throughout the term. This grade will align

to the following format: A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, Does Not Meet Standard.**

- Feedback on the Learning Skills is based on the frequency of observation by teachers

*** It is important to note that this letter grade does not represent a simple transposition of 4, 3, 2, 1 scale for A, B, C, and Does Not Meet Standard scale. Rather, it is a composite of your child's progress across a subject's priority standards.*

*** Here is a link to the 'summation models', outlining the composite mapping of how the summation of the priority standards establish the letter grades for grades 7 and 8...*

[Blake Feedback Summation Models - 2023-2024](#)

Our overarching goal remains to continue steadfast efforts to provide meaningful, actionable, learner-centered feedback for all of our learners.

Site Council Openings for Incoming Grade 6-8 Parents/Guardians

We have openings for family representatives on the Blake Middle School Site Council. The Site Council meets monthly to review issues and discuss initiatives for the Blake Middle School community. The Council is also responsible for developing the annual School Improvement Plan and monitors progress with the plan throughout the year. Members include the administration, teacher representatives, and members of the community. The meetings are typically held once a month on Tuesday afternoons at 3:30 p.m. Serving on the Site Council is a wonderful way to get involved in your child's education and have an active and positive role in improving the Blake Middle School experience. Interested parents/guardians should send a letter of interest, indicating their desire and rationale for involvement, to me (nvaughn@email.medfield.net) by Friday, August 26. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

General Reminders

- All parents/guardians need to be sure to follow the parking regulations in the parking lots and around the 'flagpole circle'. When dropping off or picking up students, vehicles should not be parked ('stationary' or 'live') in the fire zone. We need to make sure that we are providing a safe environment at all times for our students and community. Thank you for your cooperation.
- Many students enjoy riding their bikes, skateboards, or scooters to school. Bike racks are provided beside the baseball field. We encourage all students to lock up their bikes during the school day. Please be sure to ride with caution when entering and leaving campus, use crosswalks and be mindful of car traffic, including in the staff parking lot. Riding bicycles and

skateboards and roller blading are not allowed at the bus loading area or the front driveway. Please walk your bike and carry your skateboard on school grounds. Students should always wear fastened helmets for safety.

- Forgotten items can be left with the office with the understanding that the students know to check in the office if they have forgotten an item. Please clearly label items with the student's name and grade.
- Students are not permitted to bring in baked goods (cookies, cakes, etc.) to celebrate birthdays or personal events. There are many students who have food allergies and other dietary restrictions, and it is important that we continue to provide all of our students with a safe and healthy environment. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Recognition of September 11

September 11, 2023 will mark the twenty-second anniversary of the tragic events that transpired on September 11, 2001. To help commemorate all those who were affected by the events that took place, we are encouraging everyone, in an appropriate and respectful manner, to wear the colors of red, white, and blue on Monday, September 11. One of the lessons we were all reminded of twenty-two years ago was the importance of community and looking out for one another. In that spirit, and to continue a tradition started several years ago, Blake will be helping its own Medfield community by holding a one day collection for the Medfield Food Cupboard. More details regarding specific needs will be shared as we get closer to the date. Donations will be collected in the guidance office on Monday, September 11.

Blake's Advisory Program

Throughout the year in advisory, students will participate in a wide variety of activities focusing on team-building, mindfulness, stress management, and organizational strategies. These activities are meant to help foster a sense of community within advisories and to provide students with strategies to help them feel confident and prepared to succeed in school. In addition to having fun and building relationships with their advisory peers, students will learn and practice different study and time management strategies, set academic and personal goals, and learn strategies to calm down when they feel overwhelmed or anxious. Our advisory program this year will be building off of the work we embarked upon over the past few years as a concerted means to align our efforts with the district's social-emotional learning goals.

Challenge Success

We are thrilled to be continuing our partnership and endeavor with [Challenge Success](#) this year, a coordinated program from Stanford University designed to help schools and families develop and articulate alternative models of success that are aligned with current research on healthy child development.

Building Updates

Our custodial, technology, and maintenance teams have done a phenomenal job preparing the building for another year of learning. In addition to the annual work (*cleaning of rooms, waxing of floors, painting and 'fix-it-up' jobs*) that occurs each summer, our guidance suite and several classrooms have new flooring, HVAC systems were updated, and cameras were installed in the interior hallways and corridors. A significant project has been an upgrade of our auditorium - fresh coats of paint are completed and we look forward to the installation of new seating and carpeting! Thank you to MCPE for their generous support of this project! Please join me in thanking Matt Frazier and our entire custodial team for their efforts to provide a safe and clean learning environment for students and staff.

Book Discussion Group for Parents for 2023-2024

Over the last few years the Blake Site Council has read several books and we will continue this practice during the 2023-2024 school year. Stay tuned for more information and we hope you can join in these discussions - all caregivers are invited and welcome!

Athletics Information for Fall 2023

Below please find information regarding Fall 2023 athletics (timeline, registration, important information etc). Registration for Blake Middle School fall athletics is open on FamilyID.com. There is a direct link off the Athletics page (under Activities) on Blake Middle School site. To complete registration, a check for \$225 needs to be submitted (Made out to "Town of Medfield") or payment can be made online (UniPay Gold). If this fee presents any hardship, please contact Eric Scott (escott@email.medfield.net).

Athletics Registration

[Registration Link](#)

Teams and Schedules

<https://www.arbiterlive.com/School/14340>

***Blake Middle School Sports offered for the fall season are:**

Cross Country (Grades 6-8)

Patty Graham (Head Coach) – pgraham@email.medfield.net

Football (7th and 8th grade)

George Chung - gchung@email.medfield.net

Volleyball (8th grade)

Alison Ryan - aryan@email.medfield.net

Field Hockey (7th and 8th grade Girls)

Garland Kincaid - gkincaid@email.medfield.net

Message from the Blake School Nurses

More information and details regarding health protocols, paper work, and procedures will be shared from our nurses, Tricia Williams and Meghan Carlson. Here are a few key reminders...

- It is important for your child to get an adequate amount of sleep every night, start each day with a healthy breakfast as well as drink plenty of water throughout the day.
- Please send your child to school daily with a refillable water bottle labeled with their name on it.
- All students are also welcome to bring a healthy snack to eat in the morning. Due to food allergies, we ask that parents/guardians please refrain from sending in any packages containing loose nuts including peanuts or any type of tree nuts for snack or lunch.
- During adolescence, eight to ten hours of sleep is recommended every night. A set time to turn off your child's phone, mobile devices, and other electronics for the night and charge in an area away from your child's room is also recommended to remove distractions and encourage good sleeping habits.
- If your student is entering 7th grade this fall and we have not yet received an updated physical for their school health file, then you will be receiving an email from us requesting a current physical. Please make sure to send us their physical by next Friday, 9/1/23.
- If your student will be participating in school athletics during the coming year, a current physical must be on file in our office. Physicals expire 13 months from the date of the physical.
- All medication (prescription and non-prescription medications) to be taken at school must be kept in the nurse's office and administered by the school nurse.

If you have any questions or concerns about your student, please contact Tricia (twilliams@email.medfield.net) or Meghan (mcarlson@email.medfield.net).

Collaborative Fellows Partnership with Boston College

We are thrilled to share that we will be continuing our participation in the [Boston College Collaborative Fellows Program](#) via grant funding through Boston College to further our work with educational practices, specifically calibration, assessment, and feedback. This project (*Adapting Standards-Based Reporting to Incorporate Assessment for Learning Principles While Meeting the Disparate Needs of Stakeholders*) will build upon our partnership with Dr. Nathaniel Brown, Associate Research Professor of Measurement, Evaluation, Statistics, and Assessment at Boston College's Lynch School of Education. Dr. Brown is a

leading expert in assessment and evaluation and has worked closely with and provided professional development for our staff since 2018. The endeavor aligns with and continues our steadfast efforts to provide meaningful, actionable, learner-centered feedback for all of our learners via...

- *more descriptive and actionable feedback to students and families*
- *more meaningful and personalized assessment and grading practices*
- *greater calibration of expectations and assessment practices between/amongst teachers*

Substitute Applications

Blake is always looking for substitute teacher applicants. Applicants need not have teaching licensure but should be energetic, flexible and enjoy working with children. For more information or to apply, please visit medfield.net and find applications under the tab "employment opportunities", Professional Staff Openings. Please contact Kelly Campbell at kcampbell@email.medfield.net with any questions.

Communication and Updates

I will resume updating my blog on a consistent basis once again after the official start of the school year, and I encourage you to check this site weekly ([Blake Principal's Blog](#)) for updates and important information. In addition you can 'follow me' on 'X' ([@nat_vaughn](#)), as I am using this account as a communication and resource tool - tweeting up-to-date information, Blake happenings, links to sites, and articles on a daily or more consistent basis. We have also established a Blake School account ([@blakeoffice](#)) and hashtag ([#bmsed](#)) for education-related tweets of interest and Blake events, so be sure to check it out! Instagram is another form of social media that I am exploring and you are welcome to follow me ([nat.vaughn](#)).

Message from SEPAC

Medfield Special Education Parents Advisory Council (SEPAC). SEPAC is run by a group of parent & caregiver volunteers, who work for the understanding of, respect for and support of, all children with special needs in the community. As we head back, we encourage all parents to talk with their kids about differences. Here's a short article from Today's parents on why it's important to talk about differences before heading back to school: [Before the first day of school, please have this talk with your child | TODAY.com](#)

SEPAC has a lot of exciting things planned for this school year. Mark your calendars to join us at our upcoming meetings/ events:

- Tuesday, September 19th, at 7pm at the Blake Library: Digital communications workshop

- Saturday, September 23rd at Medfield Day featuring the dogs from Golden Opportunities for Independence
- Tuesday, October 17th at 7pm at the Blake Library: Meet the Medfield Educational Team Leaders (ETL) and the new Assistant Director of Student Services, Mark Harrison

Our meetings are open to all who wish to attend. A zoom link can be provided upon request. Please RSVP or get in touch with us at sepac@email.medfield.net and check out our [website](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) social media pages.

Message from Medfield Outreach

Please click on the link below to read the back to school letter from Medfield Outreach...

[Back to School Letter 2023 - Medfield Outreach](#)

Message from Blake PTO

The Blake PTO organizes parent volunteers, supports educational enrichment programs through teacher grants, and appreciates teachers throughout the year on behalf of all parents. We rely upon parent dues (recommended \$50 per child) rather than organizing fundraisers such as calendar or cookie sales throughout the year. Please make your tax deductible contribution for the school year via Venmo @MedfieldTownwide-PTO (note child name and grade) or send a check in to the school made payable to Blake Middle School PTO. Thank you for your support in continuing the initiatives that Blake faculty and staff rely upon.

Message from MCPE (Medfield Coalition for Public Education)



Message from Medfield Music Association

Welcome back to school from the Medfield Music Association! For over 50 years, the MMA has supported K-12 music education in the Medfield Public Schools. We are a parent volunteer organization that relies on support from our music families and donors in the community.

Interested in donating? Your donation can help support meaningful initiatives to excite and motivate our students to grow through music. Becoming a patron by October 31st allows us to grant music department initiatives in the current year. All donations are tax deductible.

Can you spare some time? The MMA relies on many helping hands, especially for our various events and activities which provide about half of our funding each year. We appreciate any amount of time you can give – big or small! To learn more about the MMA, please visit our website at:

[medfield music association](https://www.medfieldmusicassociation.com)

Or send us an email at:

mail@medfieldmusicassociation.com

Thank you in advance for your support!

Resources and 'Shares' of Interest for Blake Families

In a continued effort to share, learn, and grow together as an educational community, below please find some posts/resources that resonate and are of interest. For both similar and different reasons, each held meaning for me personally and professionally as they support, enhance, and affirm our values/approach/mission as a school and a community. I fully recognize that not all 'shares' will be read, but my hope is that some will strike a chord, spark an interest, or foster a discussion that is worth engagement. Some articles are ones I have read or come across in my feeds, and others have been shared with me by staff, colleagues, and parents. I welcome these and appreciate the ongoing dialogue to improve our work. As we begin our formal work together for this 2023-2024 academic year, I am highlighting several posts that I hope you will find of interest...

[Why we need to change schools \(right now\).](#)

by Chris McNutt in Medium

The current system isn't working and we can do better. We're past the point of waiting for change and hoping that a single policymaker or political party will "save" education. We must demand better right now.

Young people are struggling. The vast majority of students spend their days "tired" "stressed" or "bored." (1) Nearly all teenagers report that school is a somewhat or significant source of stress. (2) Teenagers face an unprecedented mental health crisis: feeling sad, helpless, depressed, and anxious. (3) This crisis has gotten worse over the last two decades, especially in middle school and high school — a problem before the pandemic which was exacerbated after 2020. (4) The APA has written that, "We are facing a national mental health crisis that could yield serious health and social consequences for years to come."

Alongside these mental health statistics, we find a crisis of engagement. Children ask fewer questions as they proceed through school. Children aged 14mo to 5 years old have been found to ask an average of 107 questions an hour, but by the time those children reach elementary school they may only ask 2 to 5 questions over 2-hours. (9)

In what is described as the "school engagement cliff", a steep drop in engagement occurs from 5th to 6th grade (8 points); 6th to 7th grade (12 points); and 7th to 8th grade (9 points). In total, engagement drops from 74% prior to the typical middle school years (5th grade) to 40% after these years (9th grade). A 34% decrease. (10)

What Can We Do?

- *Incorporating interdisciplinary project-based learning*
- *When we incorporate alternative assessment metrics — such as portfolios, narrative-based grading, learning labor contracts, and other forms of moving away from grades (e.g. "ungrading") — we engage youth*
- *When young people and educators learn together, moving away from sit-and-get content and toward a framework of social emotional justice, they emerge with greater self-actualization, more purposeful lives, and greater engagement in their communities.*
- *Experiential learning, such as high quality project-based learning, is associated with higher academic outcomes and interest across all subject areas*
- *Implementing community-driven, project-based learning shifts the roles of educators and young people*
- *designing learning environments and experiences that bring people together, which celebrate peer relationships and academic success, directly correlates to less engagement drop-off and better well-being*

it's not that we don't know better — hundreds to thousands more of these studies exist dating back more than one hundred years ago — It's just the will to change. We need to recognize that youth and educators are in crises — and that

schools need to change. It's no longer warning bells — we are in a state of emergency.

It's going to take mitigated risk-taking of thousands of educators and young people who have the willingness to take actionable hope. It's only then that we'll truly start to restore humanity to education.

What We Lose When We Push Our Kids to 'Achieve'

by Adam Gopnik in *The New York Times*

Achievement is the completion of the task imposed from outside — the reward often being a path to the next achievement. Accomplishment is the end point of an engulfing activity we've chosen, whose reward is the sudden rush of fulfillment, the sense of happiness that rises uniquely from absorption in a thing outside ourselves.

Our social world often conspires to denigrate accomplishment in favor of the rote work of achievement. All our observation tells us that young people, particularly, are perpetually being pushed toward the next test or the "best" grammar school, high school or college they can get into. We invent achievement tests designed to be completely immune to coaching, and therefore we have ever more expensive coaches to break the code of the noncoachable achievement test. (Those who can't afford such luxuries are simply left out.) We drive these young people toward achievement, tasks that lead only to other tasks, into something resembling not so much a rat race as a rat maze, with another hit of sugar water awaiting around the bend but the path to the center — or the point of it all — never made plain.

Self-directed accomplishment, no matter how absurd it may look to outsiders or how partial it may be, can become a foundation of our sense of self and of our sense of possibility. Losing ourselves in an all-absorbing action, we become ourselves.

The pursuit of accomplishment, what I call the real work, never ends and always surprises...That's our real human achievement.

". . . And I Turned Out Just Fine!"

by Alfie Kohn

The point of insisting "I turned out fine," of course, is to deflect the original critique. There's no need to grapple with the possibility that Old School methods are damaging if you can just assert (based on an n of 1) that there's no reason to rethink the use of worksheets or behavior charts or spankings: They were used on me and, well, look at how successful I am!

In short, whether you choose a moderate or radical rejoinder, a self-satisfied declaration that anything we experienced as kids must have succeeded is a lot less persuasive than it may seem at first hearing. We can't so easily escape our obligation to carefully examine the impact of pervasive parenting and education practices.

Battling Toxic Achievement Culture with Jennifer Wallace
from The Puberty Podcast

(45 minutes)

Young people are struggling under the weight of today's toxic achievement culture. Journalist Jennifer Wallace's new book, *Never Enough*, provides rigorous research to help make sense of how we got here, shedding light on the critical underpinnings of how to combat this issue in our own families.

Suspicion, Cheating and Bans: A.I. Hits America's Schools
from The Daily podcast

(29 minutes)

Since its introduction less than a year ago, ChatGPT, the artificial intelligence platform that can write essays, solve math problems and write computer code, has sparked an anguished debate in the world of education. Is it a useful research tool or an irresistible license to cheat?

Stella Tan, a producer on The Daily, speaks to teachers and students as they finish their first semester with ChatGPT about how it is changing the classroom.

OPINION: Let's stop focusing on rankings and rethink what makes a good school

by Ashley Carey in *The Hechinger Report*

Our current education accountability system purports to measure school quality, yet it fails to reflect many of the characteristics of quality schools that most of us identify.

If our true aim is to inform Americans about the quality of their schools, then it's time to shift our focus to a more nuanced approach, one that uses [multiple indicators](#) — not just test scores — to portray a far more comprehensive picture of school quality.

So, what things should we measure? We can start with the characteristics of quality schools that our communities want, characteristics like ensuring students' physical and emotional safety, effective teaching practices, a positive school culture, demographic diversity and more.

We can create a more equitable and meaningful form of educational accountability in our nation, and we can start by asking: What does a good school look like?

Khan Academy founder Sal Khan on AI and the future of education
from WorkLife with Adam Grant podcast

(38 min)

As the founder and CEO of Khan Academy, Sal is a pioneer in the education technology space. With millions of users and billions of views, he's been recognized as one of Time's "100 Most Influential People," and now he's at the forefront of using AI to enrich learning. Sal and Adam have an exciting discussion about the role of AI in the

classroom, discuss the opportunities and challenges of designing tools that foster true critical thinking, and share their visions for the future of education.

5 Habits of a School 'Rethinker'

by Rick Hess in *Education Week*

Rethinkers know that schools can do much better but are skeptical of overly hyped, one-size-fits-all solutions. A Rethinker is open to reimagining how schools use time, talent, money, or engage with families, and knows that all of this is wholly compatible with a deep commitment to public education. Ultimately, there are five habits that a Rethinker takes to heart.

Ask why ... a lot!

Be precise.

Take a deep breath.

Know that new problems may call for new solutions.

Reject change for change's sake.

The Homework Apocalypse

by Ethan Mollick

... think of how the calculator completely changed what was valuable to teach, and the nature of math teaching overall - huge modifications that were mostly for the good. But calculators started off as expensive and limited tools, giving schools time to integrate them into lessons as they were slowly adopted over a decade (as [I wrote about previously](#)). But now, what happened to math is going to happen to nearly every subject in every level of education, a transformation without the delay: it is going to start as soon as school is back in session.

Students will cheat with AI. But they also will begin to integrate AI into everything they do, raising new questions for educators. Students will want to understand why they are doing assignments that seem obsolete thanks to AI. They will want to use AI as a learning companion, a co-author, or a teammate. They will want to accomplish more than they did before, and also want answers about what AI means for their future learning paths. Schools will need to decide how to respond to this flood of questions.

Instructors are going to need to decide how to adjust their expectation for essays, not just to preserve the value of essay assignments, but also to embrace a new technology that helps students write better, get more detailed feedback, and overcome barriers.

[I have written extensively about the massive opportunity AI provides for education](#), but it also brings immediate disruption. The Homework Apocalypse threatens a lot of good, useful types of assignments, many of which have been used in schools for centuries. We will need to adjust quickly to preserve we are in danger of losing, and to accommodate the changes AI will bring.

AI provides the chance to generate new approaches to pedagogy that push students in ambitious ways.

There is light at the end of the AI tunnel for educators, but it will require experiments and adjustment. In the meantime, we need to be realistic about how many things are about to change in the near future, and start to plan now for what we will do in response to the Homework Apocalypse. Fall is coming.

How addictive, endless scrolling is bad for your mental health

by Luis Velarde in *The Washington Post*

Lembke explains that social media has taken the work out of how we connect with other human beings, placing that effort online and adding three major ingredients: novelty, accessibility and quantity, making scrolling a very potent drug.

In May, Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy issued a public warning: Social media poses a risk to the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents. Now Murthy's report on social media is trying to move the needle again, and he has statistics to back up his concern: More than 95 percent of people ages 13 to 17 in the country say they use a social media platform, and more than a third say they are "almost constantly" using one.

"We are living in the middle of a youth mental health crisis in America. And my growing concern is that social media has become an important contributor to that," Murthy told The Washington Post.

How Grades Fail (And What You Can Do About It)

by Cindy Long in *NEA Today*

Let's talk about grading. (Yes, it's OK to groan.) It's a practice fraught with anxiety and frustration, but grading can be a useful tool for communicating with students and their families. The problem is that grades have become less about communication these days. Instead, they are considered tokens to be exchanged for future success. Many students and parents agree that good grades lead to good transcripts, good colleges, a good job, and a good life.

Students' decisions about how they approach schoolwork are strongly influenced by grading. The authors, both professors of education and policy, suggest that the current system incentivizes grades rather than a love of learning for discovery and personal growth.

Could it be that all we need to know about grading we learned in kindergarten? Well, it's not that simple, but inspiring students to pursue learning rather than grades is the start.

Focusing on the exchange-value of education, like good grades that can be used for advantage, undermines the use-value of education. We should place value on knowing things and being able to do things by emphasizing how schooling and education is an incredible gift in and of itself.

If you tell parents you want to change the grading system to allow students to better show what they've learned, parents will worry that universities won't accept the new measurements. But many higher education institutions no longer require ACT or SAT tests for admissions applications. Universities are the gatekeepers. If they let K-12 educators be more innovative, that could move the needle in the right direction.

Does Anyone Win When Colleges Compete?

by Andrew Bauld in *Harvard Ed. Magazine*

For historian and Ed School Professor [Julie Reuben](#), these decades of excessive competition are a warning. In the pursuit of institutional advantage, she believes colleges have lost sight of their original purpose of creating, preserving, and disseminating knowledge for the good of society.

"If these trends continue, it will be disastrous for all efforts to use higher education as an instrument of social mobility and a means to greater social equality," Reuben wrote last summer for The Chronicle of Higher Education in her opinion piece called, "[Hypercompetition is Harming Higher Ed](#)."

While rankings might be too big to ever completely exorcise, many in the field agree they need to change. Trisha Ross Anderson, Ed.M. '10, college admissions program director for the Ed School's [Making Caring Common](#) project, says she would like to see a turn "to some alternative ranking systems that looks at things that generally matter to kids and advance equity by sharing important information." Recently, for example, the Department of Education updated their College Scorecard to help prospective students and families compare a broader and more diverse set of college data, including average debt loads for students, diversity numbers, and post-college earnings.

"I would also hope that in this fantasy world of mine," she says, "we could shift away from this focus on competing for dominance and survival, and really try to think together about purpose, mission, needs, and the best way to fulfill those things."

Some Annual 'Shares'...

Five Guidelines to Make School Innovation Successful

by Katrina Schwartz (KSchwartz) in *MindShift*

Schwartz's post highlights [Science Leadership Academy \(SLA\)](#), a school led by Chris Lehmann (@chrislehmann) and the lessons they have learned to foster innovation in an educational community: *Simplicity Matters*; *Common Language*

Matters; Operations Matter; Culture, Talent and Instruction Must Align; Startup Is Hard, But So Is Sustainability.

Visiting SLA and talking to teachers there, it is clear that even though they open their doors to visitors from all over the country and share their approach at this annual conference, they don't feel finished or all-knowing. Teachers here are constantly pushing to improve, try new things, and balance the demands of school with a fulfilling personal life.

The Rise of the Learning Economy

by Bruce Dixon (@bruceadixon) in *Modern Learners*

Dixon's post speaks to the importance of emphasizing the importance of learning in an ever-changing world. It is an excellent read and aligns with our mission and efforts for our students.

This is a time when learners rule. When it's not so much about what you know now, but rather what capacity you have to learn. When it's not about what someone can teach you, but far more importantly what you can teach yourself. It's not just about the knowledge you have, but rather what you don't know, and most importantly what you will need to know to grow and prosper, both personally and economically.

Many of yesterday's processes and business decisions no longer drive growth or profitability today, and with today's rate of change, business, indeed economies need employees who are learners, above everything else if they are to stay relevant, viable and strong.

In a world which is challenging our very understanding of change, learning is our only saviour. When change was in any way predictable or gradual as we might imagine it has been at times in the past, we could take time to adjust, adapt and accept it...or not. But when the rate of change accelerates to the level we see today, learning is the only way we can navigate our world and make sense of it, the way we understand or negotiate the things in our lives that in the past we have taken for granted.

It's also about equity. It levels the learning playing field for many who previously could not access resources that were shielded or locked away in formal learning institutions. Today, the real economic strength is coming from emerging ideas, new ways of thinking, disruption and an avalanche of unprecedented learning opportunities. For everyone.

*In a recent podcast interview, [Reid Hoffman](#) suggested media executive Barry Diller, who was responsible for *The Simpsons*, *Top Gun*, *Roots* and a lot more is what Hoffman calls an "infinite learner," because he says he's only interested in things he's never done before. And if they've never been done by anyone, better yet. He succeeds by embracing that he is, in fact, a master of nothing, and above all else, he is a learner.*

It seems only yesterday that we were adapting to the concept of a knowledge economy, and while that may have described our economic transition from the Industrial Age, I don't think we can doubt that economies that continually learn, and that are built on learning will undoubtedly be the ones that thrive in the future.

A Sandy Hook Parent's Letter to Teachers

by Nelba Marquez-Greene in *Education Week*

This letter was written in September, 2013 by a parent whose daughter was killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012. Her words are poignant, raw, and uplifting. They speak to the heart of our profession and are worth reading on a frequent basis.

When you Google "hero," there should be a picture of a principal, a school lunch worker, a custodian, a reading specialist, a teacher, or a bus monitor. Real heroes don't wear capes. They work in America's schools.

Parents are sending their precious children to you this fall. Some will come fully prepared, and others not. They will come fed and with empty bellies. They will come from intact homes and fractured ones. Love them all.

The Grief of Accepting New Ideas

by Rick Wormeli (@rickwormeli2)

As a proponent of change himself, I appreciate Wormeli's open and honest acknowledgement of the challenges and emotions that change brings forth. Within the post he shares some concrete suggestions and offers a nice perspective - one that I know I must keep in mind at all times when working with students, parents, and staff.

The way we teach is often a statement of who we are. If someone questions our practices, it's like they're questioning our value as teachers. Our classroom instruction, including assessment and grading, technology integration, student-teacher interactions, and more, are expressions of how we see ourselves; they are our identity. Can we navigate these frequently troubled waters without invoking self-preserving egos and drowning in resentment?...Teacher leaders can cite logical, well-reasoned statistics and arguments for new building initiatives, but nothing really changes in classroom practices unless leaders also appeal to teachers' ethics and the lens through which they perceive leaders' arguments.

We are all fellow travelers, and we are all inconsistent with ourselves and one another. No one likes to have protective layers pulled bare, revealing old scars or sensitive places still raw. To survive the day, we tell ourselves that our truths are THE truths, and they form our version of reality. When we're confronted with their illusory nature, we're no longer on solid ground. We grieve for former students we may have wronged, the real or not perceived loss in status among

respected colleagues, the time and energy that will be spent in changing who we are, and for the loss of self that was once so sure.

Let's help each other: Let's interact in ways that invite thoughtfulness, not invocation of self-protecting egos. Let's give colleagues time and encouragement to pushback and resist new ideas, and rather than be so self-assured ourselves, let's look for new insights we need to hear in our colleagues' arguments. And finally, let's extend the compassion to others we seek for ourselves, and honor the grief process that happens when asked to give up something we've held so tightly all these years—a truth, reality, perception, or practice—as they struggle to accept something new. Instead of leaving them to struggle alone, we can walk that path together.

Weekend Reads: Those Terrible Teenage Years

by Kathleen O'Brien in *The New York Times*

One of our steadfast goals at Blake is to provide resources and help navigate these middle school years together with families. We certainly do not have all of the answers, but our commitment and care is in place. I shared this post last year after having just seen [Eighth Grade](#), a film about a girl finishing her eighth grade year in middle school. Inspired by this film, NYT staff editor O'Brien highlights several posts that relate to the teen years and adolescence.

...I wanted to share some favorite recent pieces on the fraught teen years. Several I found revolved around the anxiety many teens feel. What can adults do to understand what they are going through? What should we remember as we try to guide them through rough times? These might be a starting point for answers. Other writers were grappling with issues like racial bias and the cultural forces that contribute to school shootings. All I could think was that our young people deserve a better world than the one we're leaving them — and I hope we can create it.

In Praise of Buildings and Grounds Staffs Everywhere

by Peter Gow (@pgow) in *Education Week*

Each year I share this post as I believe Gow's words provide a lovely reminder for all of us of the true communal effort it takes to establish, foster, and maintain a healthy school. We are truly blessed at Blake to have such a supportive behind-the-scenes crew, and they are worthy of our recognition:

Ask these men and women why they work so hard and take such care in their efforts, and nine times out of ten they'll tell you it's for the school, for the kids, for the program...They may sometimes be invisible to us in our classrooms and offices, but they are watching--watching us, watching the kids, looking for ways to make our lives go a little more smoothly...when school starts in a few weeks take a moment to contemplate and appreciate the men and women--and sometimes the summer kids--who have made it a point of pride that the school look "just so" when the kids stream back and what we consider the "real" work of the school begins. It's their real work year-round, in rain and shine, and they do

it for us.

As I share each year it is my sincere and sustained hope that we can take this message to heart throughout the year, finding ways to remember to recognize one another, students and adults alike, and keep this theme of gratitude and appreciation at the forefront of our thinking.

