



Blind Brook High School

From the Principal's Desk...



Blind Brook High School – An American High School Today.

One of the messages that I am fond of giving to parents and students is that the role of the high school is to take children and help turn them into adults academically and socially. It is a responsibility of the school to play a critical role in preparing students for the real world. Part of that responsibility includes providing guidelines for expectations of ethical behavior. Despite the lapses that we see in the media, societal institutions do establish codes of conduct and generally adhere to them. We see this in the professions such as medicine, law, accounting and engineering. Each has established do's and don'ts in one form or another. Each has set a standard for integrity. Each realizes that the enforcement of these standards is critical to the well-being of all members of that professional community. There are also times that the government finds it necessary to support and or strengthen those standards.

The Blind Brook school community is fortunate in that its Board of Education has fostered policies that support this philosophy seeking to teach students a practical skill, integrity. I looked it up in my old *Webster's* and it said, "firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values. INCORRUPTIBILITY. See honesty."

The Board policy attempts to define a framework of expectations for students. Each year the high school sends out a copy of the policy to the family of each Blind Brook High School student in the *Family Guidebook*. Teachers, as matter of course, emphasize the importance of this policy. It has been the subject of many articles by students in *Focus*, our student newspaper, most recently in the February/March 2008 issue.

Despite these multiple messages there are still some students who do not adhere to the policy. That is unfortunate, but not surprising. In an article for ABC.com news by Susan James, *Cheating Scandals Rock Three Top Tier High Schools: National Survey Finds Two-Thirds of Students Admit Cheating* (February 29, 2008) we are reminded that this is not solely a "Blind Brook problem." It is a national one. The article quotes several parents. "These kids are desensitized in a culture that values the bottom line. You see these scandals play out in the broader culture – Enron, Tyco and journalists and politicians that continue to misrepresent themselves. It's ubiquitous." "We are also taught not to take responsibility and we look for someone else to sue. We have a vast psychological mechanism that helps us exonerate ourselves."

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In my conferences with students and parents three reasons seem to explain the penchant for students who cheat.

1. There is so much pressure to succeed. "High stakes testing", is really a reference to every test, quiz or project that students face. "It all counts."
2. "Everyone does it." Homework, in particular, is routinely shared since the days of elementary school.
3. "I didn't know that this was a violation of the district's policy."

There is some basis of reality in each of these instances. That being said a high school is one of those places where lessons are taught and hopefully learned. The lessons coming out of the academic integrity policy are valuable ones. Each individual is accountable for his own actions. Each individual has a responsibility to be knowledgeable of established expectations.

In formulating its character education program one direction that Blind Brook might consider investigating is development and implementation of an honor code similar to what many colleges have adopted, most notably, the University of Virginia and Princeton. Such a strategy is a positive and pro active one that seeks to strengthen character rather than bemoan its flaws

In your role as parents be an active participant in the learning process. Discuss this matter with your children before the fact. In that discussion emphasize your expectations for them and how important self-respect is. Let them know that no one test in high school is the determinant of admission to the college of their choice let alone their success in life. Remind them that when they are in doubt about whether academic integrity rules are being violated, they should confer with their teachers prior to submission of the work. Together, we can succeed in turning children into adults.

As always your thoughts are appreciated.

William J. Stark
Interim Principal



Foreign Language at Blind Brook

The 2007-2008 school year continues to be very exciting for foreign language classes! Our newly created language laboratory is extremely successful with students and teachers using Audacity for voice recordings and instruction. Teachers use interactive websites and software on a daily basis and pod casts and video stream live in their classrooms. Improvement in writing skills continues to be a department goal as we examine our assessments and establish benchmark exemplars for a variety of writing genres. We continue to analyze the data that our standardized examinations provide thereby improving curriculum articulation and student performance.

Our high school classes have visited the elementary school and our traditional Saturnalia festival celebrated Latin and Italian culture with both students and parents. Our language clubs are quite active in the high school with a newly created World Language club that explores diverse cultures and cultural traditions and exposes the student community to languages other than the romance languages offered at Blind Brook. Both our World Language Club and our Italian Club donated money to charities this year.

During the week of March 3-7 2008, National Foreign Language Week was celebrated throughout the country. At Blind Brook, the foreign language department planned numerous events in all languages in all three schools. Each of the French, Spanish, Italian and Latin classes participated in activities ranging from cultural displays, poster and foreign language trivia contests, competitions and film festivals to food-tasting, cafés and club events. Announcements were delivered in a foreign language each day over the PA system accompanied by international music. Our high school Focus paper also featured a foreign language section this month.

March was also the month of national language contests. These are extremely difficult achievement exams that challenge students in the areas of listening and reading comprehension as well as vocabulary and grammar. Students participate in these competitions at their appropriate level of language instruction. If students place among the top ten scorers in the nation, prizes will be awarded to them from the American Association of Teachers of French and Spanish, as well as the American Classical League.

In the Fall of 2007, our FLES (foreign language in the elementary school) program of Spanish instruction was extended to the fifth graders. This language study began in Kindergarten and grades 1- 4 a few years ago. Exit outcomes for fifth grade instruction have been written which will dictate revision to the middle school Spanish curriculum reflecting this exciting change. All fifth grade students will still have the opportunity to choose French, Italian or Spanish in the sixth grade. Their Spanish language background will inevitably accelerate language instruction for those students as well. Our current middle school program includes levels one and two while ninth graders complete their level three Regents sequence at the end of the year. Tenth graders continue on to level four, while eleventh graders may take Advanced Placement language with an AP assessment in May. Due to our large enrollment in Spanish, our tenth graders have the option of a more rigorous Spanish Honors course in fourth year which feeds into the AP Language course in eleventh grade. Advanced Placement literature will soon become a course offering for our twelfth grade students. We are also excited about the prospect of offering an intensive second language course to our students during this twelfth grade year similar to the intensive study offered at universities. It is hoped that Mandarin Chinese will also become one of our choices for these students. Of course, Latin continues to be offered as a second foreign language to all of our high school students.





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The Blind Brook school district remains a forerunner with regard to several language department endeavors. We are among the first school districts in Westchester to implement a successful Spanish program in the elementary school. We are among the first school districts in Westchester to explore and research Mandarin Chinese as a course offering. And we are one of the first school districts in Westchester to begin language instruction in the sixth grade on a daily basis, thereby expanding options for our students. The foreign language department is very proud of its numerous and diverse course offerings, especially for a small school district such as ours. I hope you and your sons and daughters will take full advantage of this wealth of opportunities!

Parent/Principal Conversation
April 3, 2008
7:30pm in the IMC

April dates to remember....

- 4/07 BOE Community Budget Discussion 8pm**
- 4/14 BOE Budget Adoption 8pm**
- 4/15 Mark Sterner "A Personal Story of Reckless Drinking"**
HS Auditorium 7:30pm
- 4/17 PTA Meeting 8pm**
- 4/21-25 Spring Recess / Schools Closed**
- 4/28 Classes resume**

 **SAVE THE DATE:**
SOPHOMORE CIRCUS!
MAY 2, 2008 

Happy Easter
Happy Passover