



Blake Blue Note

January-February 2015

A service of the Blake Parent Teacher Student Association

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PTSA President’s Remarks

Stay tuned for a very busy second half of the school year. Our annual **Book Sale runs Jan. 21 – Feb. 16** at the Cloverly Shopping Center, 11517-11519 New Hampshire Avenue (facing New Hampshire Avenue, not in last year’s storefront). This is our biggest fundraiser of the year, with proceeds going toward many programs that serve our students. See the article on page XX for drop-off hours on Jan. 24 and 25, and how you can volunteer.

The **PTSA-sponsored peer-parent meetings** are being scheduled for February. Currently scheduled are the sophomore parent meeting on February 5 (before the Blake Talent Show) and the Junior parent meeting on February 25.

We submitted more than a dozen student entries of music, art, literature, dance, and photography as part of the **National PTA Reflections arts program**. We’re waiting to hear about our students’ projects that may be forwarded for Maryland State and National recognition. Many thanks to Sharon Mosley-Ramsey for spearheading this project.

After Prom takes place on May 9 at the Mid-County Community Recreation Center on Queensguard Road. This is the PTSA’s largest funded item each year and takes as much as \$18,000 and dozens of volunteers to arrange and hold. It’s vital that we host a program that keeps more than 500 students in a safe, supervised, fun,

secure, alcohol- and drug-free environment while they celebrate after the Prom. This extremely important event requires your financial support. Please consider making a donation of \$40 or whatever you can give to make this event possible. Donations can be left at or mailed to school, marked After Prom, or you can donate at <http://www.blakeptsa.org/after-prom-2015-donation/>. Parents of freshmen and sophomores: it's extremely important for you to help by "paying forward," to ensure the success of all proms, including those of your students. You can also donate to After Prom whenever you shop with Amazon. Simply use the Blake log-in to give us credit: http://www.amazon.com/?_encoding=UTF8&tag=blhiscpt-20.

Events surrounding **Graduation** will be announced this spring. We can always use help with these events. **One vital position now open is the coordinator of our buses to Graduation.** The format is simple: accept reservations and their payment, and schedule riders to fill as many buses as we can. It's best that a parent of a freshman, sophomore, or junior fill this position. Please send me a note at president@blakeptsa.org or call me at 240-354-6412 to volunteer.

We're still accepting **memberships to the PTSA**. Please join if you haven't. Fill out or turn in the membership form found on the Blake PTSA website, http://www.blakeptsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Blake_PTSA_Membership_Form.pdf, or join and donate via PayPal, <http://www.blakeptsa.org/join-online/>.

It's also not too early to **consider running for a PTSA office or volunteer coordinator for the 2015-2016 school year**. Please volunteer – it's the best way to stay connected to the school and other parents/guardians, and shows your student that you care about their school and education.

I hope you will join us at our **January 27 general meeting at 7:00 p.m. in the Media Center, immediately preceded by the NAACP Parent Council meeting at 6:00 p.m.** Mr. Kim Tolbert will talk about Registration at 6:00 p.m., with Jewru Bandeh, East County Regional Services Center, speaking at the 7:00 p.m. meeting. Bring your ideas and share your spirit.

Many thanks,

Paul Girolami
Blake High School PTSA President, 2014-2015

Principal's Perspective

Christopher Berry

Welcome back for the second half of the year, and a new semester. While January signals the beginning of the calendar year, the school year in a high school actually begins again around the first of February. For many students, turning that page means the opportunity to take a fresh look at class in which they are continuing, or start new study habits that are better than old ones. There is nothing better, in many cases, than a blank page in which to make a new start. As I plan to tell students on our televised news on the first day, every student currently has a 4.0 GPA. Every day represents the opportunity to keep that 4.0. Students should not view a new semester simply as a directive to focus on fulfilling minimum requirements with the least possible effort.

Instead, students should always be asking themselves how they can maximize their results with one purpose in mind – creating as many opportunities as possible at the high school finish line. It’s a somewhat simple premise, but work with your student daily to ask the questions, “What else can I do?”, “Can that C be pushed to a B?”, “Am I REALLY ready to take that quiz or test?”

In the next few weeks, students in grades 9 through 11 will register for their courses for the next school year. Decisions may be difficult as so many of our students are eager to take advantage of the variety of interesting and challenging courses that we provide. The most important advice I can offer to students is to take the most rigorous and balanced schedule that the student, parent/guardian, and counselor believe the student can take. Students need to be challenged to reach beyond what even they see and their own potential. Often students opt for on-level classes because they see it as a safer opportunity to get a higher grade and grade point average. This needs to be questioned and discussed by both school-based adults and parents, and if the student has the potential to do more, even if it represents a stretch. We are short-changing the A/B student in an on-level class who is comfortable and choosing not to try the risk of an honors or Advanced Placement level class. Most teenagers are risk-takers; the challenge is to encourage them to be appropriate academic risk-takers, encourage them to find support when they need to, learn to work through struggle, and feel a real sense of accomplishment for having truly mastered something that is complex and difficult. This is a game plan for success. The grade of B in an honors or AP course is weighted the same as an A in an on-level course in the weighted GPA. Colleges and universities look at both weighted and un-weighted GPA’s and look more favorably upon students with a more rigorous course load.

One by-product of encouraging students to take more challenging courses can be student overload. It is critical to determine which honors/AP courses and how many are reasonable for students to take. The workload in an honors course is greater and harder than on-level courses. Likewise, the step up from an honors course to an AP course is another degree of difficult that some students find surprising. Honors and AP courses are a different level of difficulty. Many students are highly successful at taking mostly honors courses. Many really challenge themselves and succeed at taking one or two, and then progress to others. The term “honors program” is really a fallacy in high school, in that taking honors or AP courses is not a sequential, all-or-nothing process that student are selected for. All honors and AP level courses can be taken in an “a la carte” approach. Take advanced courses in the content areas for which you have a strength, strong interest or for which you have been recommended. The balance is an important part of the student success. There needs to be discussion with students, parents and counselors to plan for a rigorous but realistic course load. We have developed supports for students at all levels, but the month of February is the time to reprogram that academic GPS and determine your route for the coming year.

Let me offer a final few thoughts from the school perspective on the registration process. Student course selection is important as it determines staffing for the next school year. I probably don’t need to remind you that we live in extraordinary economic times, and that MCPS is having to make choices among bad options unlike many years in the past. While fiscal restraint is necessary, it will have an impact on the classrooms at Blake High School. Schools are given a set number of teaching positions based on student populations for the next school year. We hire teachers and assign classes based on the courses that student select. When students change there mind later, it can have a negative domino impact on class size. We build the master schedule with a distinct student-centered focus. Students need to make second and third choices because we can only offer classes when enough students are present to run the course. Sometimes we need to make hard choices when small numbers of students choose certain classes. We do not have the staffing to support every course every

student would like to take. Priority is given to team-taught and inclusion classes which are capped at smaller classes to ensure the best learning environment for students who need support. In addition, Advanced Placement and signature arts-related classes are a priority. We make a concerted effort to run all of these courses that we can to maintain a breadth and depth of creative and academically challenging classes in our schedule for all of our students.

Grade 12 senior students are rounding the home stretch headed to graduation. The spring brings with it a host of senior events celebrating not only the end of the year, but the end of a school career. One of the most important events to set the stage for this is the Senior Parent Meeting, which this year takes place on March 5th at 7:00 p.m. in the Auditorium. This meeting is about as close to mandatory as they come for at least one parent or each senior. The message and topics covered are very much geared for parents as we move into what should be a validating and joyous time of year. Many frequently asked questions are answered, myths dispelled and tips provided. There will be a letter to all parents of seniors in the near future, but please mark your calendars now.

If you don't already know, Blake is now a daily presence on Twitter. I've been tweeting messages about school just about every day. Twitter is a great way to get up to the minute news and short, 140 character reminders. If you want to follow us on Twitter, I am @BlakePrincipal.

Let me close by thanking all of the parent volunteers who make our school a true community of students, staff and parents. Whether it is selling Blakewear, manning a concession stand, chaperoning a field trip, serving as a leader of a parent group, or writing a check for a fundraiser, Blake works because we all pull in the same direction. Your efforts do not go unnoticed by our students and staff. Thank you for the important and simple ways that you help our staff feel appreciated and, on a personal level, for taking the time to chat and reflect with me at so many student events. Please take the time to have a conversation with me about what's on your mind when our paths cross.

Peer-Parent Meetings – mark your calendars

- **Sophomore parent meeting: February 5, from 6:30-7:30 p.m. (before the Blake Talent Show)**
- **11th grade parent meeting: February 25**

PARCC College and Careers Readiness testing update

Mr. Tyrell is working with Mr. Berry and the Blake Instructional Leadership team to finalize the PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) Testing Schedule. The first round of PARCC testing, known as the Performance Based Assessment (PBA), will occur March 2 – March 26th. The second round of testing is known as the End of Year Assessment (EOY), and will occur April 20th – May 15th. Please contact Mr. Tyrell with questions related to the PARCC Assessments.

Blake HS NAACP Parents' Council Announcements

Happy New Year, Everyone!

Good news:

Through the December Close to Home gift card collection, the NAACP was able to bring cheer to 6 families with a total of 13 gift cards. Thanks for your donations!

Our next meeting will be Tuesday, January 27, 2015 at 6:00pm in the Media Center. We will hear about 2015-16 Course Registration from Mr. Kim Tolbert, Resource Counselor. And Dr. Omari Daniel will speak about the ACT-SO Competition at Blake – recall that last year we sent Poetry Gold Medal winner Nathan Peoples, to the National Competition! As with last month, PTSA will follow at 7pm.

For up-to-date information about the NAACP Parents' Council, Montgomery County, MD please check this website: <http://naacppc-md.org/>.

What is ACT-SO?

The Afro-Academic, Cultural, Technological & Scientific Olympics (ACT-SO), the “Olympics of the Mind” is a major national youth initiative of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

ACT-SO is rooted in the firm conviction that African-Americans can succeed and compete at the same or superior level as their counterparts in classrooms, boardrooms and laboratories across this nation and abroad. The objective of ACT-SO is to prepare, recognize and reward African-American youth who exemplify scholastic and artistic excellence. Gold winners may compete at the ACT-SO National Competition held at the NAACP's Convention held each July.

Last year, Nathan Peoples, an 11th grader and Blake student, was a gold winner for poetry.

The criteria and guidelines are mostly the same as last year. Here is the link for the criteria: <http://cms.montgomerycollege.edu/edu/departments2.aspx?id=8614>

For applications, please contact : actsomc@gmail.com or reach out to Blake teacher liaison Dr. Omari Daniel (Omari_C_Daniel@mcpsmd.org)

Sheila Holmes
sheilaholmes@alumni.princeton.edu

Crystal Lee
crysllee@comcast.net

NAACP Parents' Council representatives to Blake High School

Blake Open House, February 9

Monday, February 9, is the date for Blake's 2nd Semester Open House. On that day, parents are welcome and encouraged to drop by, sign-in the Main Office and observe your son/daughter's 2nd semester classes. Parents are welcome to shadow all or part of this day. There is no formal program, but it's a great opportunity to meet new teachers that your child did not have on Back to School Night.

Travel to Athens and the Aegean June 25 to July 4, 2015.

Go to www.explorica.com Student tours, sign up, matchamshepherd-6556

See Ms. Shepherd in B223 for more information. This trip is open to the Blake community, students, parents, and staff. Join us!

Beth Matcham-Shepherd

James Hubert Blake High School

Transition Support Teacher

EduCorps Teacher

301-879-1356/room B223

All Maryland Public School Students Can Download Office 365 Pro at No Cost

Press Release: Maryland, Microsoft Strengthen Learning Powered By Technology

http://marylandpublicschools.org/press/01_08_2015_a.html

MSDE, Microsoft, and the Maryland Education Enterprise Consortium (MEEC) have arranged for all students at public schools in the State to receive the Microsoft Office 365 ProPlus benefit at no additional cost. Every student and teacher at public schools across the State can download Microsoft Office on up to five PCs or Macs, and Office apps on any mobile device, enabling them to get their school work done virtually at any time and from anywhere.

The no cost Office 365 ProPlus offer is available to all students at public schools across Maryland. The following private and secure site has been developed by Planet Technologies, in collaboration with MSDE. Students and their families can download Office 365 ProPlus at the following Internet address:

<https://marylandaccess.education>.

Advanced Placement Registration is Open

Taking the Advanced Placement exams is an important part of all AP courses. All students are expected to take AP exams for the AP classes that they have taken. Scoring well on an AP exam can often earn students college credit thus allowing them to start at an advanced level of college instruction or sometimes saving tuition.

For the 2015 AP exams, students at James Hubert Blake High School will be registering online. This registration will take a few minutes and can be completed from any computer with internet access. This year each AP exam costs \$95.00. James Hubert Blake High School desires that every student be able to take their AP exams. Students requiring financial assistance should contact Ms. Anita O'Neill, Grade 10 Administrator, to learn more.

Online exam registration will begin on Mon, Jan 19, 2015 and end on Fri, Mar 13, 2015. In order to register, students should click on the link provided on the school website or visit www.TotalRegistration.net/AP/210959 to register/. To complete registration, students must answer all of the required questions. Registration is not complete until students have printed the PDF of the confirmation page that is provided at the end. We know that parents may desire to register their students for exams. We strongly recommend that parents and students are both present while registering to ensure that the correct exams are ordered.

James Hubert Blake High School is excited to offer families the convenience of paying exam fees online at the time of registration. Please be sure to have a credit card or debit card available before beginning registration. Paying online is a great way to make sure that payment has been made while avoiding mailing payment. However, if online payment is not an option, payment can be mailed.

Here are the important dates for the registration process:

- 📅 Mon, Jan 19, 2015 at 8:59 AM - Registration Begins
- 📅 Mon, Mar 9, 2015 at 9:30 AM - Registrations and payments after this date will incur a \$10 late fee per registration.
- 📅 Fri, Mar 13, 2015 at 8:59 AM - Registration Ends
- 📅 Mon, Mar 16, 2015 at 8:59 AM - Registrations that have not been paid for will be cancelled and exams will not be ordered.

Please contact Ms. Anita O'Neill, Grade 10 Administrator, if you would like to register for an exam not listed or have any questions.

Blake HS PTSA's 7th Annual Used Book and Media Sale

11517 – 15519 New Hampshire Avenue

Cloverly Maryland 20905

(just past the Cloverly Safeway and next to the Kabob restaurant)

January 31 - February 16, 2015

The Blake PTSA Used Book and Media Sale is starting to become a regular fixture in our area. People anticipate our opening every year and are telling friends about us. That's why the book sale is now the top fundraiser for the PTSA. Because the sale is getting bigger and better, we need the Blake community to step up and help make this project a continued success.

Location: This year's used book and media sale will be held in the Cloverly Shopping Center. Kramer Enterprises is letting us use a store there for a month, which gives us more storage, more time to sort, more chance to pick the good stuff for you to buy.

Drive-through book/media drops: We all have books, CDs, DVDs, etc., that we just don't know what to do with. Happily, you can donate them to the sale. To make donating even more convenient, we will have several drive-through book/media drops right at the store. All you have to do is pull up in front of the store, and someone will take your donations out of your car for you and, on request, give you a receipt.

New or gently used books (hardcover and paperback)—fiction, nonfiction, mystery, science fiction, romance, young adult, children's, cookbooks, history/politics, test prep, music scores, manga, etc.

Other media—CDs, DVDs, books on tape/CD, comics, manga

(We are no longer accepting computer books or videotapes)

Book drop-off days are:

Saturday, January 24, 10 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Sunday, January 25, 1 – 4 p.m.

Tuesday, Jan. 27, 5 – 8:00 p.m.

Thursday, Jan. 29, 3 – 6:00 p.m.

Volunteer and SSL opportunities: Parents/guardians, teachers, friends—we need A LOT of help with sorting before the sale, manning the store during the sale, and cleaning up after the sale (January 23- February 21). These activities give us a chance to get to know each other better while helping out the school. It will be a lot of fun. If you're interested and available, please let Barbara know.

This undertaking also offers many SSL opportunities for students, particularly with moving books and tables to and from the store and on drop-off, set-up, and clean-up days. We will hopefully have a student coordinator soon, but for now, contact Barbara.

Stay tuned for Eubiemail announcements about sale-related activities.

For more information or to volunteer, please contact Barbara Girolami at (301) 388-2227 or (301) 922-1859, or at blakebooksale2015@yahoo.com.

Special Tips for College-bound Seniors about Financial Aid

How do I know if I should fill out the FAFSA?

Most college financial aid, of any type, requires the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and many colleges and states require your FAFSA information to award their own grants and scholarships.

Tip: Use the [FAFSA4caster](#) to estimate your eligibility for federal student aid. Simply go to www.fafsa.gov and complete.

When should I fill out the official FAFSA?

FAFSA is available starting January 1st of your senior year, and you should start the application as early as possible that month. Why so early, you ask? The FAFSA takes time, and many colleges and states have their own deadlines, some as early as February 15! UMCP, for example, advises students to complete the FAFSA by Feb. 15. For most college students who plan to attend a college in Maryland, the deadline for state aid is March 1.

What things do I need to get ready to file?

Make sure you have: Social Security numbers for you and your parents, or if not a U.S. citizen, alien registration number or permanent residence card, your driver's license number, your parents' and your most recent tax returns.

Tip: If you file the FAFSA in January, you can estimate the most recent year's taxes using last year's tax returns. Corrections to the estimates can be made later once your tax returns for 2014 are completed/filed.

Ready to start?

Go to www.fafsa.gov and start with the "FAFSA on the Web Worksheet, 2015-16" which outlines everything you need to file. Completing that worksheet will save you time once you start the actual FAFSA online. On that site, you will also need to establish a Federal Student Aid ID called a PIN. Both the student and one parent need a PIN to electronically sign the FAFSA.

Once you enter all student & parent information, double-check your work and print out a copy to keep for your records. After your FAFSA is filed, you can log on and check the status at any time.

Note: Some private colleges also require the CSS PROFILE (in addition to the FAFSA), found at www.collegeboard.org. Check to see if any of your colleges require this additional financial aid form.

Two-thirds of all undergraduate college students receive some type of financial aid, and typically those that file early get the best financial aid offers, so don't delay.

If you need one-on-one help completing the FAFSA, please plan to attend COLLEGE GOAL SUNDAY on February 8, 2015 from 2-4 pm (snow date: Feb 15) at Montgomery College, Student Services Center, 7625 Fenton Street, First Floor, Takoma Park Campus. Financial aid counselors will be available to assist families individually in English & Spanish. Bring proof of 2014 income & benefits, such as completed tax returns and W-2 for both student and parents. Eligible non-citizens must provide alien registration number to complete the FAFSA.

For more information about College Goal Sunday events and to register online: www.collegegoalsundaymd.org.

To learn more about what's new with the 2015-16 FAFSA, check out: <http://www.fastweb.com/financial-aid/articles/4423-what-s-new-on-the-2015-16-fafsa>.