



Parents Bulletin

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FROM THE ACADEMIC DEAN

New semester brings new challenges

We are all so proud of your children because, as their midterm grades and comments suggest, during the first semester, they worked diligently.

They improved their study skills, deepened their understanding of the course content in English, math, and Facing History and Ourselves, and became active participants in the process of their education.

As they complete their applications to secondary schools, I wanted to give you a preview of the second semester curriculum that we have planned.

From now until graduation, your children will experience a broadening and deepening of the scope of their academic vision through increased challenges in their core subjects and through additional curricular opportunities.

These challenges and opportunities will strengthen their overall knowledge base and "habits of mind" so that their transition to their high schools will be smooth.

As your children continue to prepare themselves to excel in their secondary schools, we have designed our rigorous second semester with some overarching goals.

The goals include expanded practice with the essential 21st century skills of

1. collaborative and creative problem solving
2. effective and precise communication
3. astute critical thinking
4. global awareness.

The students will also have increased

Eighth grade comes to an end; emphasis changes to high-school-level work

opportunities to hone their skills in time management, effective note taking and active class participation.

To these ends, we have developed ways in which the primary curriculum will be connected to the science and research courses that we typically add in our spring term, which runs from April through the second week in May.

For example, Sally Baker and I are going to merge her Community Service Learning class and my research work with our students through a jointly taught course, which will enlarge the scope of our individual classes' content.

This newly created course, Advocacy and Research, will focus on clearly stating and supporting a thesis and will emphasize both oral and written communication skills.

With you, we look forward to your children's growth and development during the second semester, and we are excited by the talented students and engaged community participants they are becoming.

Please feel free to contact me any time with questions that you may have.

Happy New Year!

—Joanne P. Hoffman,
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Calendar January

Candidates for admission to the Class of 2012 and donors can attend a Beacon Academy **open house** at Temple Israel from 8:30-10 Friday morning, Jan. 28.

February

Interim Term 3 grades close Friday, Feb. 4.

For **Presidents Day weekend** there is no school Saturday, Feb. 19-Tuesday, Feb. 22.

School reopens Wednesday, Feb. 23.

Beacon Academy Parents Association, B.A.P.A., will spend an evening at a location to be determined from 6-8 Thursday, Feb. 24.

Special reminder: **PFS cover sheet and copy of 2010 taxes are due** this month to SSS by NAIS, PO Box 449, Randolph, MA, 02368-0449. Any questions, call Laura Coleman at 617-320-8412 or Bernadette Manning 617-233-4363.

March

Beacon Academy hosts a **Secondary Schools Workshop** for parents on how to process and follow up on secondary schools' decisions from 6-8 p.m., Wednesday, March 9.

Secondary schools' **admissions decisions** arrive in the mail Thursday, March 10.

Term 3 grades close Friday, March 11

School is closed for **spring vacation** Saturday, March 12-Sunday, March 27.

April

Acceptance replies due to secondary schools Tuesday, April 19.

UPDATES on courses

COMMUNITY SERVICE LEARNING

After the students have completed their secondary school applications, Joanne Hoffman and I will begin co-teaching a unit on Research and Advocacy.

The goals of this unit are to develop solid skills in research (selecting and documenting a wide variety of relevant source materials) and public speaking (advocating for a cause in a clear, cogent and effective way).

Each student will identify a cause or issue of social change to embrace and support for his/her advocacy presentation.

The topics may range from local issues like safe playgrounds to national/international ones like global warming and the

ENGLISH

Students read John Steinbeck's classic novel *Of Mice and Men* in English class in December, and they explored the themes of friendship, loneliness, the American Dream and moral decision-making.

We continued work on literary devices, such as foreshadowing, imagery, setting and diction.

Students also continued to expand their

Dean Conway makes special return visit

To get ready to excel on the January SSAT, students had a special opportunity to improve their vocabulary skills.

Thanks to Dean Conway, founder of the Beacon Academy English program, they learned to make better educated guesses.

In a special return visit the week after the holiday vacation, he gave a highly focused class about the origins of the English language and especially its Greek and Latin roots.

Prefixes he highlighted included

- ped—child
- poly and multi—many
- scrib—write, and
- uni—one.

He also talked about months of the year, e.g., September = septem (seven).

Conway communicated his tremendous love of inquiry into the derivations of English words.

promotion of renewable energy sources.

After the students do thorough research on their topics, they will write a draft of the material they will present orally.

By the end of the unit, we will publish a schedule of the student presentations, which parents are welcome to attend.

Meanwhile, our reading partnership with the Temple Israel preschoolers continues twice a week during lunchtime.

Reminder:

It is very important to pack a lunch every Tuesday and Thursday.

—Sally Baker
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vocabularies, reviewing old vocabulary and revising essays.

The semester culminated in a comprehensive midterm exam.

Students were tested on vocabulary, reading and annotation skills, and *Of Mice and Men*.

They also showed their ability to write a thoughtful and coherent essay about how writers explored a particular theme in at least three of the works they have read so far this year.

On the exam all of the students showed solid progress and mastery of material.

Now, in the third quarter, students are reading Nobel Prize-winning author Toni Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye*.

Set in the town of Lorain, Ohio during the 1940s, the novel explores the themes of the American standard of beauty, internalized racism and the loss of childhood innocence.

Students will also have units on poetry and short stories.

Along with their work on vocabulary and grammar, students will continue to hone their writing skills through weekly or bi-weekly writing assignments including essays, stories and poems.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

—Anne-Marie Yu-Phelps
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FACING HISTORY AND OURSELVES

Our hosts at Temple Israel presented us with a special opportunity this month.

Through our unique partnership with Rabbi Jeremy Morrison, several of our Beacon Academy students worked for the first time with some of the eighth- and ninth-graders who attend Temple Israel's Monday Night School.

Our students interviewed the night schoolers about what is challenging for them at school and at religious school.

The whole group discussed stereotypes, God, friends and bullying.

They also did a project, which was to prepare a video presentation in anticipation of the annual shabbat service honoring the life and work of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Beacon Academy is proud of this association with the Monday Night School because it represents a continuation of an MLK shabbat tradition of cooperation established three years ago.

In our Facing History class, students continue to confront the terrible human atrocities of the Holocaust and other historical case studies.

They also continue to explore the meaning of concepts such as guilt, responsibility and judgment—and what those concepts mean in our world today.

Students also continue to discover that one way of taking responsibility for the past is to preserve its memory.

The class has recently written a paper based on our discussions of obedience and punishment. The assignment was to compare a World War II Polish police battalion/killing squad with peaceful demonstrations during the 1960s.

Readings in the next few weeks include Elie Wiesel's *Night and Dawn* and Ogden Nash's poem "The Hangman." The class will also watch and discuss the film, *Schindler's List*. Also on the schedule is a visit from Edgar Krassa, a Holocaust survivor.

—Mervan F. Osborne
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MATH

By the end of January, both the “Regular” and the “Honors” sections will have officially completed our “Pre-Algebra” course.

This means that since September, both sections will have completed the equivalent of one full year of public school math!

And for both sections, the challenge of Beacon’s math program will keep increasing by the month.

For students in the “Regular” section, the next few months will include one last look at Pre-Algebra.

There will be an emphasis on problem solving, an introduction to the challenging “Algebra I” textbook and a thorough exploration of linear relationships, which could be the most important topic of the year.

As I’ve said before, many of the students from last year’s “Regular” section have accelerated into “Honors” classes as freshmen – and the work that students do now will be critical in preparing them for that leap.

Meanwhile, in the third quarter, students in the “Honors” section will be expected to exercise even more intellectual independence as they explore new material, draw their own conclusions and connections from each new topic, and discuss their ideas with classmates.

Upcoming topics include

- linear relationships
- two-variable inequalities, and
- systems of linear equations and inequalities.

Each topic will include a heavy emphasis on problem solving.

As always, Beacon just keeps getting harder.

But after this class’s strong performance on December’s mid-term exams, I know they’re ready to face new challenges in the new year.

—Matt Dunkel
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How parents can help at this point in the process

Secondary school applications

Beacon Academy students have, collectively, completed more than 135 official secondary school visits and will complete the interview process this month.

Lora Farkas will continue to supervise the remaining interview schedule and keep our families informed.

Standardized testing is largely completed for Beacon Academy students; just a few students may be advised to sit for one more flex SSAT in February or March. (Students can take only one flex SSAT test a year. They must take all other SSATs on national test dates.)

Final application details will continue at school through the end of January.

However, our students have accomplished a great deal, and many have completed all of their applications.

A few reminders:

- Financial aid forms should all be finalized with School and Student Services for Financial Aid. The web address is www.nais.org. Please email Mervan Osborne or Lora Farkas with questions.

- Parents need to submit 2010 tax information to SSS as soon as it becomes available. Early filers should forward their 1040 forms to SSS and those who receive their W2 should do the same. (www.sss.nais.org).

- Students applying to Catholic schools must make sure that the FACTS online forms (www.factstuitionaid.com) have been completed.

- Transcripts from seventh and eighth grade, including the final eighth-grade transcripts from students’ previous schools, must be at Beacon Academy as soon as possible.

Laura Coleman and Lora Farkas are leading the effort to gather these documents and may contact you with questions.

- Parent statements are required by many schools.

Please check in with your coach if you have any questions about completing your parent statement. These forms are due at the same time as the student application.

- The next Parent Meeting will be Wednesday evening, March 9, just before secondary school decisions arrive in the mail.

At the meeting parents will hear about ways to proceed with decisions.

Topics will include

- what it means to be on a waiting list
- movement on waiting lists
- helping your child make decisions
- encouraging your child to be kind to fellow students
- how Beacon Academy continues to do its work behind the scenes to ensure the best opportunities for all.

And now, we wait.

— Lora Farkas
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—Mervan F. Osborne
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College Support Update

The College Support Team has met monthly throughout the fall to discuss issues and become more familiar with current college planning systems and requirements.

Over the holiday break, the team offered two sessions for seniors interested in help with their college applications.

Class of 2007

Twelve of the 19 seniors in the Beacon Academy Class of 2007 received some level of one-on-one assistance with their college planning and application process from a Beacon college mentor.

Colleges to which members of the Class of 2007 have applied include

Allegheny
Amherst
Babson
Bentley
Boston College
Boston University
Brown
Bryn Mawr
Clark
College of Wooster
Columbia
Connecticut College
Cornell
Curry
Dickinson

Emmanuel
Emory
Franklin and Marshall
Goucher
Hamilton
Harvard
Holy Cross
Howard
Lake Forest
Lesley
Morehouse
Mount Holyoke
Northeastern
NYU
Oberlin
Occidental
Princeton
Providence
Regis
Rochester Institute of Technology
Rollins
Sarah Lawrence
Smith
Suffolk
SUNY Binghamton
Syracuse
Trinity
Tufts
U. Chicago
U. Mass. Amherst
U. Michigan
U. Penn.

U. Rochester
Vassar
Wellesley
Wesleyan
Wheaton
Yale

Class of 2008

Beacon college support mentors will contact parents of the Class of 2008 by the end of March.

Meanwhile junior parents should

- attend the college counseling workshops at your child's secondary school. The schools usually give these workshops in the late winter/early spring.

- ensure that your child is registered for and plans to take the SAT (and/or ACT if your child's counselor recommends it)

- begin browsing through college guidebooks and websites with your child

- have your child register at www.ncaa.org if he or she plans to play a varsity sport in college

- consider planning visits to a few college campuses during spring break. These campuses can be local.

- encourage your child to focus on maintaining a solid academic record.

—Barbara Guilfoil
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