

PARENT PRINCIPAL CORNER



Important News

- **November 9th ... No School Teacher Inservice**
- **November 13th ... Progress Reports will be mailed out to students with D's or F's**
- **November 16th ... Winter practices begin**
- **November 25th - 29th ... Thanksgiving Break**

Here Comes Winter

The time continues to fly by. It won't be long and the snow will be falling and the heavy coats will become a regular part of our daily routine.

In the last month or so, the community has seen a few changes at the high school. You can learn more about those changes in this newsletter and on the website. But to be honest, we aren't done yet. There will most likely be more changes in the months and years ahead. That is just the nature of education. Today's students are not the same students who walked the halls in the 1950's and 1960's. As a school, we need to adjust to the times and to our students.

By now we have also seen the end of some very hard work. The Cross-Country, Girls Tennis, Girls Golf, Football, Boys Soccer and Volleyball seasons have all come to an end. While the end results may not be what players and coaches

wanted, it was not due to the lack of hard work on their part. I want to thank the players, coaches and parents for the sacrifices they made during the season. It takes a lot of time and commitment on everyone's part to make a successful season.

Also, what a great honor Brad Nicks received in October. For those of you who may not know, the Milken Award is considered one of the top awards in education, but to show you how education works, most educators don't even know it exists. Believe me, it is a great honor. As Mr. Nicks said though, there are a lot of teachers at Shawnee Heights deserving of such an honor.

Over the last couple of months a number of parents have talked with me about how happy they have been with the high school and what is taking place here. I would like to encourage you to do the same with the staff as a whole.

No change could take place without the support of the staff. I think if you asked them they would say that things are moving in the right direction and moving pretty fast. For most of you I am sure change is hard, so imagine how the teachers are feeling right now. I truly appreciate how hard they are working!

November is a quiet month compared to many others. It is the transition from fall sports to winter sports. It has a nice long Thanksgiving break and a day off for staff development. It is also a month where parents can expect another progress report if your child has a D or F. We are getting down to crunch time. In a few short weeks we will be putting the grade in the grade book and issuing credit. Please remind your child to get it done!

Policy Changes

Last month's newsletter included three policy changes. Since board approval in October, I have received a number of questions from parents. I will attempt to answer a few of those here, but I also want to direct you to the high school website. There you will find a tab that says "Policy Changes". This tab will lead you to the actual policies, as well as answer questions, and give reasons why the changes occurred.

I want to start by stating that I do understand not all parents agree with the changes, but I also know that it is very hard to make everyone happy. My hope is that you will understand the reasons for the changes and give us time to work through them.

Attendance Policy

Starting in January, parents will be given 5 parent requests to use each semester. A "Parent Request" can be used any way a parent wishes, but it is our hope that parents will save these requests and use them only when really needed.

A Documentation Excuse is used when a student is taken to a doctor, dentist, lawyer, etc. The parent will need to get some form of signed documentation of this event, and return it to the high school office. (This can be faxed by the doctor's office as well). There are unlimited "Documentation Excuses".

Attendance Questions

- What if I have a student who has a chronic health problem, do I have to take them to the doctor every time they are ill? No, at the beginning of the year you would need to provide documentation from the doctor's office. When you call your student in you simply tell the attendance clerk that the student is staying home due to the health challenge.
- What if my child misses a couple of days due to illness, then we have an upcoming week-long vacation

scheduled, will my child not be excused from school? Yes, you can excuse your student, but we do ask that the parent notify administration of the situation.

- What if my child wakes up with a runny nose, do I really have to take them to the doctor? If you want to use a Documentation Excuse the answer is yes, but this is a situation when you could use one of your Parent Requests.

Late Start Questions

- What happens to my child if they ride the bus to school on late start days? We have several rooms open where students can go study or get tutor assistance. The library will also be open so students can go study or use the computers there. Students will be asked to stay in a couple of areas (for now, the cafeteria) so they can be supervised. We will attempt to have a television or two. For now, we are waiting to see how many students will actually ride the bus on the late start Mondays. In my past experience I noticed that over time less and less students rode the bus.
- So why is the first Monday of the month different from the rest of the month? In an attempt to reduce the amount of class time lost to clubs, we are using the first scheduled Monday of the month as a club day. This means the first Monday of every month is when students in school clubs will meet. Students not in clubs will be required to report to school and be in 1st hour by 7:45 a.m.
- How will you help keep students informed on when there is a late start and when it is club day? We will be making announcements the week before. We have also added information on the website along with a calendar that shows what we are doing for the rest of this semester.

Handheld Questions

- Does my student now need a cell phone to attend Shawnee Heights High School? NO, no, no! Even though your child may try to play the school against you, there is no reason for them to have a cell phone in class. Yes, some teachers may do activities with them in class but they can be partnered up with a fellow student. None of the activities would have an impact on the grade because they don't have a cell phone. So again, they do NOT need a cell phone, or for that matter, any handheld device.
- For the record, we see more use of iPods during passing periods than we do cell phones by a large margin. We have only had a couple of violations of the policy within the classrooms. Students clearly understand this is a privilege that they want to keep.

Second Semester

- The high school leadership team will be proposing another change in the student planner. This deals with students failing two or more classes. In the past a student could fail as many classes as they wanted during the semester and still be allowed to attend all activities, or even participate in those activities. The number one job of a student is to get their education. The Academic Warning List (AWL) will be generated on Wednesdays. Any student failing two or more classes will be on this list. From there the student will be notified and placed on probation. While on probation students will not be permitted to attend school activities. A student can remove themselves from probationary status by simply getting their teacher or teachers to sign off that they are no longer failing. Of course, teachers will not sign off until the work is made up. For more, check out our website.
- FINAL CHANGE ... Please make sure to read the change in finals on page 4!

Student E-mail & More

When I arrived at Shawnee Heights I was surprised to learn our students did not have e-mail accounts. Don't get me wrong, I know some of the issues with students and their e-mails, over the years I have dealt with a few students who made wrong decisions. But I have also learned that by having a school e-mail system that can monitor and archive emails, students tend to be smarter in the use of their e-mails. Actually the very few kids who misused e-mail tended to go out and get their own e-mail through Yahoo, Google, Hotmail, etc. and neither the parent or school knew about them.

Even though e-mail is slowly being replaced by texting, it is still a fairly common tool for communication. Most colleges give students e-mail accounts when they enroll at the start of their freshman year. It allows them (and now us) a way to communicate with students without having to know all the different possible e-mail systems. We now have one e-mail address studentname@shawneeheights.net

The school not only created an e-mail address for the student, but also will give the student access to Shawneeheights.net Google Account. This means students and staff will have access to "Google Docs". Google Docs is a free, Web-based word processor, spreadsheet, presentation, and form application. It allows users to create and edit documents online while collaborating in real-time with other users. In English this means students and teachers can share documents, spreadsheets and presentations with each other. All you need is Internet access. No longer do you need Microsoft Office 2007, 2009 or whatever. You don't need to have PowerPoint installed on your computer. The program is no longer important. Since you don't have to have the same program, students can edit the same document at the same time. For example: two students are working on a presentation (want to use PowerPoint). With Google Docs student one can go home and work on the presentation from their home computer. Student two could do the same thing at home. As they save their changes the other can see them in real time.

To share a document or presentation within Google suites, one person invites the other through the shawneeheights.net e-mail. We are currently working on a solution for the few students who will not have an e-mail account.

Our plan was to launch this and get it rolling in November, unfortunately, the IT department wanted to get parent signatures on the user agreement first. This has slowed down the process. For one thing, we do not yet have all of the parent signatures. Then, we had to process the forms we did receive and note which students did have permission and which ones did not.

Like the handheld policy change, one of our goals is to place students in real world opportunities and help them understand the rights/wrongs along the way. Their future clearly will have new forms of communication that we old folks will never understand. If you have any questions feel free to give Mr. Beam a call.

FINAL SCHEDULE

This year there will be a few minor changes in finals. In an attempt to help reduce stress for our students taking finals, we are reducing the number of finals taken in one day. At most, a student should not have to take more than three finals, and usually will only take two a day.

We are also building in time for students to get make-up work completed while working with their teacher. On the last day (Dec. 22nd) we will complete testing around 1 p.m. If a student has work they owe, a test to make up, etc. they need to return to that teacher and get the work done. Once they are done with all make up work **they are excused for the day**. If a student has no work to do they will be excused at 1 p.m. Students riding the bus can stay with a teacher or hang out in the cafeteria.

Teachers will be notifying students weeks in advance if they have outstanding work that needs to be completed. Students can get that work done at any time before the 22nd as well.

Parents, it is important for students who owe work to understand the need to see their teachers on the 22nd. Failing to at least check in with a teacher on the 22nd will result in all incomplete work being converted to a 0 and could lead them to fail the class.

Fun & Punishment

Fun

One of my goals this year was to bring a little fun to Shawnee Heights High School. Not that folks weren't having fun here before, but I believe if you enjoy where you work (school) you want to be there. If you want to be there then you will do your best. Then when asked to go a little above, you tend to step up because you are happy. I believe this is true with staff and students.

There is a fine line sometimes between fun and taking advantage of a situation. Here are a few examples of what I mean.

- Have fun at sporting events, yet be good sports. Making fun of the opponent or official is not good sportsmanship. I believe you can have a blast at sporting events without making your opponent your target. I do understand that not all schools see it that way, but I believe our students can, and show a little class along the way.
- Privileges like being able to carry your handheld devices shows students we respect them and trust them, but students need to use the devices when the guidelines allow.
- Being allowed to dress up for Halloween, but dress in a manner appropriate for a school setting.

If your student is coming home talking about school in a positive way we must be doing something right. When I see them in the halls I see smiles, except maybe around 7:30 a.m. I have seen them at the games and they seem to be enjoying themselves there too.

We have a few more surprises in the months ahead so don't be shocked when they come home **with a buzz**, but please feel free to tell them what they hear from me all the time, enjoy yourself but make sure you take care of the number one job. That job for all students is to get an education. **Do what it takes to learn and get ready for life after high school.**

Most of our fun and privileges will revolve around taking care of that number one objective for students. As long as they take care of that job I think they will be excited about being a Thunderbird.

For the record, I have been very impressed with our students. They carry themselves very well. Even in large crowds they have been a joy to be around.

As the year continues I hope to have even more fun/surprises here at Shawnee Heights.

Punishment

As we move into the second semester and begin to implement some additional changes toward taking care of that number one job, some students may feel we are punishing them for not being a good student. I want to say it now and will repeat myself often; **WE ARE NOT** punishing our students for being poor students. What we will do is place some motivation to not fail. Not only will we have this motivation, we will also have support to help the student be successful.

Everything we do as a system will be geared so that once a student achieves passing status, they will be reinstated.

For example: We currently have an Academic Warning List (AWL) which identifies students with failing grades. I hope to have a system in place at the start of the second semester which will identify students failing two or more classes. These students will be placed on a form of probation. The length of the probation will be up to the student. The system will be set up in a way that a student, after being notified they are on probation, can go work with the teacher(s) whose class they are failing and see what is needed to be done to pass. Additionally, we will

have support in place to help the student get caught up. Once all of the work is done and the student is passing those classes, they will be reinstated as a student in good standing.

However, while on probation, students may not be allowed to attend any after school activity. If they are in a sport, they may be allowed to practice but not play in a game, but if they continue on probation for several weeks, then they may not be allowed to practice at all. Students on probation could be **required** to come in on late start Monday's at 7:45 a.m. and meet with a tutor.

Again, students may feel this is a punishment, but remember it only lasts as long as it takes the student to do the work required to get off of the list, and there will be help here to assist in accomplishing that goal. The biggest key is the student needs to want to get this done, and if they are willing they will be successful.

Perceptions

I have learned a hard lesson during my 25 plus years in education. I have learned that a student's perception of their teachers can be negative when their teachers stop accepting the student's failure.

When students are struggling to pass, teachers have to get on them, make them get that work turned in, assign them after school time to make up work, challenge them to do better, etc. Unfortunately, today's generation tend to see any form of criticism as "they hate me". In the months and years ahead, your child may come home and say "Mr. X doesn't like me." When this happens, please contact Mr. X. I can almost guarantee you that this comment has evolved around the issue that Mr. X has been challenging your child to do better in class.