

Welcome back to school!

August 2016

I am looking forward to sharing my love of mathematics with your students this year!

Over the next couple of weeks, I will be working very hard to get to know each of your students so that I can tailor the math curriculum to fit their specific strengths and needs. In all of my classes, we will review important prerequisite concepts and skills. Students will complete diagnostic pretests to provide essential input for my curriculum planning. We will work on fine-tuning study skills and finding an instructional pace that makes sense for your students.

Additional information that I hope will be helpful to you as we start the school year:

Please do help your student when needed. I would encourage you to guide your student's thinking **by asking questions** that focus on the important concepts or steps needed to find a solution. For example:

- What do you know that could help you figure this out?
- What don't you know?
- Where could you find the information you need?
- Tell me in your own words what these new words (or directions) mean.
- What are the central ideas in this lesson?
- What other resources could help you figure this out? (math help sites on the web, calling a friend for help)
- How can I help you?

To clarify your student's thinking about an incorrect solution (or a correct solution for which your student needs to show their solution process):

- How did you get that solution? (Or: Explain your thinking to me.)
- Does your answer make sense? How do you know?
- Why did you use that approach?
- Is there a different way to solve this problem that could help you check your answer?
- How do you know that's true?
- Can you explain how you found this solution?
- Which method of showing your thinking on paper will work best for this problem?

I do expect students to “show their thinking” on any problem that isn't immediately obvious. However, the way this looks may vary some by class and by student. When solving algebraic equations, for instance, I will insist that my students show me all steps for solving the equation, period. However, in all of my classes, we will be learning a variety of ways to show our work. Sometimes, students will need to show their method of solution with detailed steps. Other times, we will abbreviate this and how the major “steps along the way,” or write a short explanation in paragraph form. Some problems will best be solved with a chart, diagram, or systematic list. The important thing is that students find a way to communicate their thinking in a way that allows others (namely, me) to read, follow, and when necessary, help locate errors in the solution process. Without this information, it is very difficult to diagnose where a student's thinking might be going wrong and affirm it when it's right. In short, students MUST show me their work in a way that's appropriate for the problems they are solving. I will not give credit for ANY paper that consists of a page of answers only.

It is important that all students keep up with assignments. It is very difficult to catch up when students get behind, so please help by making sure your student is actively using his/her planner to record assignments and due dates. Please check your student's planner

nightly and help us establish good organizational habits early on in the year. I will post daily assignments on **Showbie** and my classroom assignment board for students to record in their planners. In case of any doubts about what has been assigned, you can check assignments for each class on **Showbie**.

When students are ill, they need to make every attempt to stay on top of their math assignments even while absent. When students come back to school two or more days behind, it is difficult to get caught up. It is hard to watch kids feeling overwhelmed by catch-up work after being ill; I am willing to work out modified assignments when necessary. Please have your student check **Showbie first**.

Please encourage your student to advocate for himself/herself when needed. Teaching students when and how to ask for what they need is an important life-long skill. However, please don't hesitate to e-mail me if you need to alert me to concerns or problems at home that your student may not be communicating to me. For example, if your student seems to be falling behind and you're not sure he/she is asking for help, I need to know. Also, if homework seems to be taking an inordinate amount of time (more than an hour on a consistent basis, realizing that I aim for no more than 20-30 minutes), we probably need to figure out why and modify appropriately. I need and value your input; leaving me a quick "heads up" message when necessary will help me assist your child more effectively in class.

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