



School Year 2026-2027

8th Grade Newsletter

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October 15, 2026

ADVISORY

8th graders returned from a successful and challenging Fall Leadership Outing (FLO) in late September and have been settling into their regular schedules and routines. We were all really impressed with their tenacity and strength! Advisors are talking to students about academic perseverance, leadership and having check-ins. This month, students will be listening to presentations during Office Hours from some of the local high schools. 8th graders have also received information from Dean Rob about the high school application process.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS (ELA)

8th grade ELA is wrapping up the “Gadgets & Glitches” unit in their textbooks with discussions and reflections on the ways in which technology and automation affect our lives. Students will respond to the “Essential Question” for the unit: “Does technology improve or control our lives?” with Op-Eds or Letters to the Editor. Their responses will include a persuasive claim, rhetorical devices they’re learning in ELA, and an example of a technology that illustrates their position. Class discussions have generated high levels of participation as students have shared strong opinions and great insights about the role, possibilities, and limitations of technology.

MATH

The 8th graders are entering the heart of the linear relationships unit – as we are transitioning from mastering slope-intercept form to analyzing systems of linear equations and their solutions. With this transition comes their first major project of the year, “Shark Tank: Business Proposal.” For this project, students will design a business proposal that they will pitch to a panel of Billings Staff Members before “hitting the Marketplace” to sell their products to the rest of the school. This project will guide the learning that we do during class time, as the goal is for the students to demonstrate their mastery of learning targets through the project they make.

SCIENCE

Students have been working full steam ahead in our chemistry unit. Students conducted their first lab of the year and identified mystery substances using a series of tests. We have been learning about the structure of atoms and will continue to learn about the Periodic Table and the structure of compounds and molecules in the coming weeks. Students should expect an increase in the amount of homework they will receive in coming weeks. Please continue to check Google Classroom and your students planner for assignments and due dates.

SOCIAL STUDIES

8th grade students are continuing to explore ethics including Kantian, Utilitarian and Aristotle's "virtue" ethics. Students watched and analyzed a television program or movie through an "ethical" lens and will continue to have discussions in class where they will think and speak about ethical dilemmas. Students will explore relatively "simple" issues like lying and cheating, as well as more complex issues like the use of drones and artificial intelligence. Students will hear from Ben Glatstein (Sam) about artificial intelligence and will create a skit about an ethical issue to show their understanding of these various ethical philosophies. Coming soon will be our study of Hinduism with a tour of the Hindu Temple on October 26th.

SPANISH

8th grade Spanish has been utilizing movement based games to build vocabulary, describe likes and dislikes, name colors and objects with the correct beginning and ending in la, el, las and los. They chose Spanish names and have been practicing addressing each other with those names in Spanish class. Students have learned about Mesoamerican and Pre-Hispanic cultures through a historical documentary series. Students have begun a stories unit and are exploring folk stories, novels, and children's stories. This will culminate in an original story from the students in Spanish.

STEM LAB

In STEM Lab, students worked well to design backcountry water filters! Students presented their final projects last week to great success. Each group ended up with a creative solution to the problem at hand, and there were several different filter ideas presented. We are starting our next STEM Lab project this week all about Insulation and Hypothermia.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION /GO (GET OUTSIDE!)

After recently concluding our Ultimate Frisbee unit, dodgeball has taken center stage in PE classes. As we learn and play different versions of this classic game, students are encouraged to emphasize fair play and risk-taking over competitive results. Ask your child why catching balls is more advantageous than throwing them at opponents. We also have a parkour station set up on stage so students can practice vaulting and hurdling skills during breaks from dodgeball. Our next teamsport unit, handball, is coming soon. This unsung sport was very popular with students last year and we're excited to play again!

VISUAL ARTS

8th grade artists learned about the "picture plane" by drawing their hands on a clear piece of plexiglass balanced on top of them, turning a 3D image directly into a 2D image! Then they applied that understanding through contour drawings of their hands from sight, using just one continuous line to capture every detail. This process helps us let go of perfectionism and focus on slowing down, seeing details, and learning through steady practice. Ask your student to show you how it's done, and try it together!

DRAMA

Drama students have begun the work of understanding the three types of comedy and how they show up in the world around us on a day-to-day basis. This includes discussions and action regarding understanding our audience and our responsibilities as comedic artists. These discussions help guide script choices as we prepare for the December 9th performance.

VOCALS

Vocals students have been learning intermediate level singing terminology, as well as understanding their individual singing range. Students have also been learning the criteria of selecting songs for a Billings 7th & 8th grade vocals class through listening to the soundtrack from the musical *Hadestown*. These skills will soon translate into selecting songs for our December 9th performance.

September 17, 2026

ADVISORY

8th Graders have spent time connecting with each other, planning for Convocation and prepping for their upcoming Fall Leadership Outing (FLO) to Mount Adams scheduled for September 22-25. Students will be focusing on leadership skills, technical skills (filtering water and bear hangs, etc.) as well as personal goals throughout the trip.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS (ELA)

8th Grade ELA students wrapped up their study of the summer novel, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, with essays. Students reflected on the summer assignment, participated in class discussions, and worked on group projects using elements and themes from the novel. We're ending the week with *Rez Ball*, a 2024 film that offers a modern perspective of adolescent life on a reservation. Students are making insightful connections about messages in the novel and movie, which they'll share in a written review next week.

MATH

We are off to a great start in 8th grade math! The students are working through a mini unit on describing and representing linear relationships. After we established expectations and classroom routines during the first week, the students dove into the mini unit's "discovery activity." For this task, they calculated the cost of a "Party Promotion Dick's Deluxe Burger" and

represented the cost of an “Any-Sized Dick’s Deluxe Burger.” Beyond this activity, students must master representing linear relationships using graphs, tables, written descriptions, and equations. When they return from the backpacking trip, we will dive into analyzing linear equations and inequalities.

SCIENCE

We have jumped full speed ahead into our first Chemistry unit of the year: Matter and Its Properties! Students conducted their first lab last week and used observations and tests to determine the identity of mystery substances. In preparation for this lab, students did a lab safety review and prepared to enter the lab setting this year. Additionally, students have been learning about the different states of matter and how matter behaves. The 8th graders have their first Chemistry quiz on Friday, September 18th during science class.

STEM LAB

In Stem Lab, students have been working in groups to design backcountry water filters. So far students have conducted research into different types of water filters, and designed their own water filter mock-ups. After the FLO trip, students will build their water filter systems and test them in class.

SOCIAL STUDIES

8th grade students have started to explore human motivation and ethics. During the first week, students presented symbols of humanity. Students showed their understanding of human beings by using a metaphor of a brain, Legos, a book, a specific song, or a tree. Students will create a personal “canon” or book of important writings, images or “scripture”, consider Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, and study a few specific schools of ethical thought. In the coming weeks, students will be tasked with exploring ethical dilemmas through the lens of specific philosophies!

SPANISH

Students have learned and memorized a poem with movement in Spanish. They have learned and memorized the vowels, alphabet, and numbers from 1-100. In addition, we have started working on a group rhyme; greetings and goodbyes; and expressing how we are feeling in Spanish. We have also started our Dance and Music of the Americas unit. Students are currently learning the basic steps to Salsa.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION / GO (GET OUTSIDE!)

Students begin PE/GO classes with a mindful breathing ritual with three yoga-pose options: mountain, easy, or (the ever-popular) corpse pose. This brief, quiet moment emphasizes how focus, self-control, and precise technique translate to success in all athletic endeavors. Ultimate Frisbee is our first teamsport unit. The variety of athletic skills, teamwork, and inclusivity it promotes makes it a very popular sport in our community. Our 8th graders are well-versed in the sport’s culture and I appreciate how many of them help their younger peers participate in Ultimate scrimmages during lunch breaks.

VISUAL ARTS

8th grade artists are exploring a "new way of seeing" that allows us to slow down, notice details, and see the world as it really is. We practiced switching into this way of seeing by turning images upside-down and revealing only one section at a time, so we wouldn't know that all of the lines and shapes we were drawing were part of a person until the end! After the FLO trip, we'll learn how to see edges and draw 3-dimensional objects on the 2-dimensional "picture plane".

DRAMA

In Sketch Comedy & Production, 7th grade students are working side-by-side with 8th grade students to become a sketch comedy ensemble whose first show will be December 9th. Our initial work focuses heavily on building artistic agreement and consensus while learning about dramaturgy, production elements, and whether they'd like to be a stage manager, actor or both! (All students will participate in some light design work.) Next, students will peruse script options from our school-appropriate selection from the catalogue of Seattle comedy-scene legends Bald-Faced Lie. We'll begin rehearsal and production work for those scripts once selected.

VOCALS

8th grade vocals students have been busy cocreating the fall vocals ensemble class that will consist of ensemble performers and also ensemble managers, stage managers, and low tech props coordinators. The first several weeks of class every student in the class including ensemble managers and stage managers will sing with the class to develop their ear training and singing abilities.

MUSIC

In Digital Arts, 8th graders started with 'the groove', learning how to create drum beats using Drumbit and understanding how the kick, hi-hat, and snare interact across different musical genres, while also practicing those rhythms by hand. Afterward, students transitioned to Soundtrap, where they have been transcribing songs from YouTube and building foundational production skills to apply to their own original compositions.