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## JBS / Class of 2026 Update

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January 2023

Dear 9th-Grade Families,

It's hard to believe we're already moving into the second half of the school year. I know our 9th-graders have worked hard to make a smooth transition to their first year of high school, and it's my hope that they're proud of their successes. It's rewarding to see how far they have come in one semester—refining their study skills, time management skills, and fostering meaningful relationships with peers and teachers.

One of the areas that I'd like the 9th-graders to focus on and think about are their interests in and out of the classroom, perhaps by answering some of the following questions: Are there particular subjects that they absolutely love and look forward to every day? What do they like to do in their free time when they aren't studying? What activities are so interesting to them that they lose track of time?

**We want to encourage our students to find their deep interests and to purposefully seek out things that bring them joy and meaning.**

Although it is very early, some families in 9th grade are thinking ahead and trying to prepare for the college admissions process. In my previous work in college admissions, and now with the college counseling team, I often get questions about which activities mean the most and are most impressive to colleges when students apply. Is it community service? Model UN? Sports? Leadership? Chess? My simple answer is: "All of them." But my qualifying statement is "*If* the student is truly interested in that activity." There are no magic admissions activities. The magic happens when a student is truly interested in something and pursues it happily and wholeheartedly. When these conditions are met, students can't help but begin to develop their natural strengths and often get deeply involved in their interests—which then might well progress to leadership, expertise, or further depth of knowledge or talent. Pursuing activities and experiences that they enjoy fosters meaning and purpose. And here is what's perhaps especially key: seeking out such activities and experiences will help prepare them not only for college but also for life.

Do students need to have a long list of activities and interests for college admissions? No. Some students may have a deep interest in only one or two things and that's okay. But before they commit solely to those things, they should first explore broadly. Students grow and change and so can their activities, as well as their talents and strengths. Colleges and universities are interested in whatever authentically interests each individual student. Do colleges look for different talents and interests? Yes, they do. Colleges and universities seek to build well-rounded communities, not necessarily a community of well-rounded students. Each year as colleges are shaping their first-year classes, they may be looking for different types of talent and/or interests. It is unpredictable what those are in any given year because these priorities are always changing and vary from school to school. So again, students should pursue their genuine interests and the fit for schools will follow.

I recently read an article from Berkeley that I thought nicely captured how to help students find their sense of purpose and [I'm attaching it here for your reference](#). It first describes what purpose looks like as defined by Stanford's "d.school" (a school of design thinking): 1) A student's skills and strengths; 2) What the world needs; and 3) What the student loves to do. The intersection of these three things fosters purpose. The article goes on to list some key areas to help students seek their purpose: 1) Prioritize internal motivation over external achievement; 2) Foster collaboration; 3) See teachers as mentors and coaches; 4) Take students out into the world; 5) Learn from failure; 6) Value students' inner lives; 7) Start with the "why."

Burroughs has an amazing number of clubs, activities, and events, which is a great way for students to explore their interests. Please encourage your students to take a look at the clubs and organizations at Burroughs and to attend a meeting or two. [You can find our club list here](#) and [our umbrella club list here](#). Clubs are not only great ways to explore interests but also ways to meet new people—expanding friend groups and getting to know students from different grade levels. Sometimes when I ask students what they like to do in their free time, I get a pat answer, like "Play video games." When I ask them why and what they like about it, the answers give more information: "I like playing with my friends," "I like the strategy," "I like the graphics," "I like that it's always a different game." These answers can sometimes lead to more meaningful suggestions that might push them to explore something in their wheelhouse.

Another great time to explore is during the summer. We all need time to rest and refresh, but it may be a good time for a 9th-grader / rising 10th-grader to try a part-time job, shadow one of your friends or colleagues if they are interested in a specific profession, try a new hobby or sport, take a summer college course, or participate in a program to explore an interest. (Note: This should also be interest-driven and not what one may think looks good on a college application. Taking a summer course at a college does not provide a leg up later for admission to that school. Many of these summer programs largely function as revenue-generating programs for the school and are often quite expensive.) There are also lots of [summer programs and opportunities listed on our JBS website](#). Here are some particular ones that we've announced to students at school: [Burr Oak counselors](#); [Aim High Teaching Assistants](#), and [Praxis Week](#) (a week-long program at Burroughs to explore STEM fields). Check them out! Some of these opportunities have applications and deadlines, many of which are in the winter, so I encourage you to look into them sooner rather than later.

Tomorrow, on January 18, the 9th graders will be meeting with our college counseling team during the Common Day period to get a general overview of the college admissions process, timeline, and to discuss all the many ways that students can explore their personal interests.

At the end of February, our 9th-graders will be participating in a grade-level program in collaboration with the 9th-grade Health Seminar. We'll be taking an interdisciplinary look at food citizenry—beginning with our own self-awareness and how we view food and health, and moving on to local and global implications of food, health and wellness of others. One tool that we will use in this work is a character-strengths assessment that may help students think about ways that they can further explore and develop their individual strengths and qualities.

I'm excited about this semester, but January and February can be long, cold months. So please help your students break up the winter blahs by getting involved in something new!

I hope to see you all soon.

With best wishes for 2023,

[Julie Shimabukuro](#)

Principal, Grades 9 & 10