



## **MR. BALLARD'S 7TH GRADE MATH CLASS**

7th Grade Pre-AP Math, Cabot Junior High North  
**Michael Ballard**

Parents and Guardians,

I'm going to provide you with some quick information regarding what to expect and information regarding my expectations as an advanced math teacher. The choice to be in an advanced math class is a family decision that needs to be made based upon the understanding that there is more work involved than a regular class, the pace is faster than a regular class, but it comes with greater rewards and a more productive learning environment.

### **THE BIGGEST CONCERNS - GRADES, HOMEWORK, LIFE SKILLS, and a PRODUCTIVE STRUGGLE**

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**Regarding grades:** When deciding upon Pre-AP math, please know that we do have much higher expectations. We also have 50 minutes compared to the 100 minute block in middle school and cover a considerable amount of material.

That being said, grades in my class are representative of both work ethic and performance tasks, like tests. One can't exist without the other in an advanced setting. If the work ethic isn't there, the grades likely won't be there either.

**Regarding homework:** We do have less time in each class period and cover more material than the students are used to learning, so there is an expectation that homework will be completed in a timely fashion. I do strike a fair balance between the work required to fit in other advanced classes and extracurricular activities, but homework practice is there.

Homework is meant to be done just like practice in any other class, event, sport, or music - you need to practice in order to perform.

I also find homework a fantastic way for parents to see exactly what is happening in class and as a way for me to communicate the needs of your child to you.

**Regarding life skills:** The early transitional stage from middle school to junior high school can be a very difficult time as all of the students are learning how impactful their decisions are to their success in school. We spend a lot of time working on building practical skills such as making decisions, planning appropriately, and prioritizing life. The faster students can set up a successful routine with the support of their parents, the easier the transition to junior high.

Many Pre-AP students are used to doing very well in a middle school environment and the shock of all the changes can really have an impact on self-confidence. There will be more classes, more transitions, more planning, more organizing, more socializing, etc. This can cause grades to dip lower until a routine is developed.



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**Regarding a productive struggle:** At some point, many family discussions revolve around whether to stay in advanced math or to leave for regular math. *So, what is a productive struggle?* A productive struggle is when a student hits a difficult point, perseveres, and comes out the other side with more knowledge and as a more successful student. *So, what is an unproductive struggle?* An unproductive struggle is where the student works his fingers to the bone, up late at night, and might even see a tutor only to be knocked back down by consistently poor performance.

If you decide the struggle isn't proving productive and can't be overcome, then perhaps an advanced setting isn't what your child needs, and that's perfectly alright. Our students in the regular math classes are near the top of the 7A schools and we are very successful.

### SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER

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1. It is extremely beneficial to have a device like a computer or Chromebook at home for homework and research purposes in any advanced class, not just math.
2. Most of our work is done online and it really helps students maintain organization and helps with communication between parent and teacher.
3. Students learn almost two years of math in a single year, so the demands and rigor is quite high.
4. Of the students who leave advanced math, the **vast majority leave due to them not striking a balance between homework and life outside of school.** This majority typically neglects homework and, in turn, are not performing well.
5. Pre-AP math is an advanced class that builds upon foundational concepts - so if you are not in advanced math right away, it would be exceedingly difficult, maybe even prohibitively so, to join at a later date. **You will want to get it on the ground floor, which is 7th grade Pre-AP math.**

The choice to take advanced math is not one to be taken lightly. It is a challenge, yes, but the future rewards make it completely worthwhile.

I hope to see you at Cabot Junior High North next school year!