Berlin Middle High School
MOUNTAINEER COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER
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October 4, 2026

Dear Mountaineer Community,

We have a busy week ahead at Berlin Middle High School, and I wanted to share several important updates with our families. Some are fun, some are serious, and all of them are important parts of building the kind of school community we want for our students.

St. Peter's Crime Victim Services and Erin's Law

On **Tuesday, October 6th and Wednesday, October 7th**, we will welcome educators from **St. Peter's Crime Victim Services** to BMHS to work with our middle and high school students.

I know the subject matter can sometimes make adults uncomfortable, but it is important work.

Erin's Law requires New York public schools to provide age-appropriate child sexual abuse and exploitation prevention education to students in kindergarten through eighth grade. The purpose is not to frighten children. It is to help students recognize unsafe situations, understand personal boundaries, identify trusted adults, know that abuse is never their fault, and understand how and where to ask for help. (New York State Education Department)

St. Peter's Crime Victim Services has extensive experience providing prevention education in Capital Region schools. Their educators work with students on topics such as personal safety, healthy relationships, digital safety, recognizing abuse, responding to concerning situations, and connecting young people with trusted adults and resources. (St. Peter's Health Partners)

The legal Erin's Law requirement specifically applies through eighth grade, but I also believe there is value in continuing age-appropriate safety and prevention education with our high school students. As students get older, relationships and situations become more complicated. We want our students to have good information, know where to turn, and understand that asking for help is always okay.

If you have questions about these presentations, please reach out to me.

Spirit Week and Homecoming

We are also celebrating our first Spirit Week of the school year.

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Spirit Week may seem like it is just about funny outfits, school colors, and seeing which adult is willing to embarrass themselves the most for a theme day, and admittedly, some of that is true.

But it is also about belonging.

Students need opportunities to enjoy school, build traditions, laugh together, and feel like they are part of something bigger than a class schedule. School spirit helps build community across grade levels and gives students another reason to feel connected to BMHS.

And for the record, this is one of the few weeks of the year when dressing strangely may actually mean you understood the assignment.

Spirit Week will lead us into Homecoming 2026 on Saturday, October 10th from 6:30–9:00 p.m. The dance is for high school students only. Admission is $7 for a single ticket or $10 for a duo. Questions about Homecoming can be directed to Mrs. Hayes at ahayes2@berlincentral.org.

Our First Lockdown Drill

On **Thursday, October 8th**, we will conduct our first lockdown drill of the school year.

Deputy Alex DaLessio will lead the drill with members of the Rensselaer County Sheriff's Office and New York State Police, and we may also be joined by representatives from the Columbia County Sheriff's Office.

There is nothing enjoyable about having to practice a lockdown, but being prepared matters.

New York State requires schools to conduct four lockdown drills each school year, with two occurring between September 1 and December 31. A lockdown is used when there is an immediate threat of violence in or around a school. During a lockdown, hallways are cleared, doors are secured, students and staff remain out of view and quiet, and rooms remain secured until released. (New York State Education Department)

Our goal with the drill is not to scare students. State regulations specifically require drills to be trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate, and clearly identified as drills, without actors, props, simulated gunfire, or other tactics intended to mimic an actual attack. (New York State Education Department)

Having law enforcement participate gives us an opportunity to practice our procedures and identify anything we can improve before we ever need those procedures in a real emergency.

Please remind your children to take the drill seriously while also reassuring them that it is practice.

Attendance Matters

I am going to continue talking about attendance throughout the year because it remains one of our most important building goals.

New York State considers a student chronically absent when the student misses 10% or more of the school days in which they are enrolled. In a typical 180-day school year, that is approximately 18 days. Importantly, both excused and unexcused absences count toward the chronic absenteeism calculation.

Last year, approximately 28% of our students were chronically absent. Our goal this year is to bring that down to 20% or below.

This isn't simply about meeting a State requirement. Students who are not here miss direct instruction, conversations with teachers, intervention, feedback, labs, group work, activities, and relationships that cannot always be recreated by completing an assignment later.

This year, we have made changes to both our Grading Policy and Code of Conduct to strengthen accountability around attendance, tardiness, class cutting, and missed work. These expectations were not in place in the same way last year. We made the changes intentionally because attendance has become too significant an issue for us to address informally.

The goal is not to punish students for being sick or for circumstances outside of their control. The goal is to be much clearer about responsibility and accountability when students are choosing not to attend school, are repeatedly late, are cutting classes, or are not making up required work.

Students need to understand that being present and participating in their education matters. Families also need clear and consistent expectations from us. This year, we are going to follow those expectations and interventions more closely so that attendance concerns are addressed earlier and do not become accepted patterns..

Repeated tardiness, cutting class, or willful attendance problems will result in increasingly serious interventions. Depending on the circumstances, those responses can include student and parent conferences, attendance improvement plans, counseling or MTSS support, detention, loss of noninstructional privileges, Pre-PINS/diversion consultation, and ultimately the PINS process when the legal criteria are met.

What we are addressing more firmly is avoidable absenteeism, chronic tardiness, skipping class, and patterns that interfere with a student's education.

If attendance is becoming a concern for your child, please contact us early. We would much rather solve the problem together than wait until the student has missed so much school that catching up becomes overwhelming.

A Reminder About DASA

I also want to remind families about DASA, the Dignity for All Students Act.

DASA exists to protect students from bullying, harassment, cyberbullying, discrimination, intimidation, and retaliation and to help maintain a safe and supportive school environment. Concerns can be reported verbally or in writing to a teacher, counselor, administrator, DASA Coordinator, or another school employee.

Not every disagreement between students is a DASA violation. Kids will disagree, make mistakes, and sometimes say things they should not say. However, when something is reported to us, we have a responsibility to look into it and determine what occurred.

Our DASA contacts are:

Meghan Reynolds
Assistant Principal / BMHS DASA Coordinator
(518) 658-1500 x1161
mreynolds@berlincentral.org

David Bernsley
District DASA Coordinator
(518) 658-1500 x1005
dbernsley@berlincentral.org

Most importantly, please encourage your child to **tell an adult** when something is happening. We cannot address something we do not know about.

Building Leadership Team – We Need Family and Community Voices

Finally, I am excited to begin our Building Leadership Team, or BLT, this month.

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I am changing the way we use committees at BMHS this year. With the exception of our Attendance Committee, all of our other building committees and collaborative work will operate through the BLT.

I want the BLT to continue to be the place where we bring different voices together to talk honestly about BMHS, what is working, what needs attention, what ideas we should explore, and what decisions will help move our school forward.

That means we need more than administrators and teachers at the table. We need parents, families, and community members as well.

You do not have to attend every meeting in person. We will provide a Google Meet option, so if getting to the school at 2:20 p.m. is difficult because of work or family commitments, you can still participate.

Our first meeting will be **Thursday, October 15 at 2:20 p.m.**

If you are a parent, guardian, or community member and would like to be part of the BLT, please email me. I would genuinely like to have family and community representation involved in the conversations and decisions that affect our students and our school.

Looking Ahead

A strong school is not built by one person or one group. It takes students, families, teachers, support staff, administrators, law enforcement, community agencies, and community members working together.

This week reflects that pretty well, we are talking about student safety, prevention, attendance, school spirit, belonging, and community involvement. They may seem like very different topics, but they all come back to the same thing:

We want our students to be safe, be here, feel connected, and know that the adults around them care about their success.

Thank you, as always, for your continued support of Berlin Middle High School.

Have a great week.

David Bernsley
Principal

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