

# PARENT FIELD GUIDE TO CASCO BAY HIGH SCHOOL



Welcome to Casco Bay High School, Portland's Expeditionary Learning high school. Below are brief descriptions of some key concepts and programs at CBHS, which are described in more detail in the CBHS Family Handbook and other materials distributed at the beginning of the school year.

## THE EL APPROACH

CBHS is an EL, or Expeditionary Learning, high school. EL schools emphasize learning that is active, challenging, and meaningful, and are based on key principles such as self-discovery, collaboration and competition, and service and compassion.

In addition, CBHS maintains core values in the 3 R's:

- Rigor – where students are challenged in their work and take responsibility for their learning.
- Relevance – where students are encouraged to consider how the curriculum in different courses is connected and how their learning relates to local, national, and global issues.
- Relationships – where the small size of CBHS and the Crew system help to form a cohesive, inclusive community and allow students to develop long-term connections with both teachers and fellow students.

The CBHS curriculum is organized around Learning Expeditions – long-term, in-depth studies, often centered on social and environmental issues. Expeditions involve fieldwork, research, critical thinking, and problem solving, on both individual and group levels. The study culminates in a performance or product presented to teachers, fellow students, and community experts. For more information on Expeditionary Learning, visit <http://elschools.org>.

## CREW SYSTEM

Each grade at CBHS is divided into Crews – groups of students that generally stay together through all four years, with the same faculty advisor for grades 9-10 and another for grades 11-12. Crew allows students to be part of a smaller peer community, and ensures that each student is known well by at least one faculty member. The Crew Leader meets with parents and students at conference time, and is the primary person to contact with questions about your child's progress in school.

Crew usually meets once a day and addresses the following questions over the four years:

- Who am I?
- How am I doing?
- What are my plans for the future?

## MAKING THE GRADE

CBHS uses a standards-based grading system to communicate student progress. Each class is built around course standards made up of concepts or skills a student must demonstrate that they have learned. Below is the standards-based grading scale used at CBHS:

- 1 = Does Not Meet the Standards
- 2 = Approaches the Standards
- 3 = Meets the Standards
- 4 = Exceeds the Standards

A student must meet or exceed standards to receive credit for a trimester. Progress reports are distributed halfway through each trimester. This gives students and parents the opportunity to identify areas that need extra attention in order to meet standards and receive credit for that trimester. Students and parents can also view assignments and grades online on Infinite Campus any time during the year.

## GETTING CREDIT

Forty-one credits are required for graduation. For most courses, two credits are awarded for a year-long class, or two-thirds credit (.66) per trimester. Students receive credit each trimester only for classes in which they earn a 3 (“meets standards”) or higher. Grades of 3.75 and 4 (“exceeds standards”) earn an honors designation on a report card and transcript.

The requirements for graduation are: four years of English; three years each of social studies, mathematics, and science; one year each of fine arts and physical education; and one semester of health. The remaining credits are earned through electives.

Because of the school’s small size, CBHS does not have the variety of electives available at Portland’s larger high schools. However, twice a year (in January and April), CBHS offers Intensives - week-long mini-expeditions that explore a variety of subject matters. Students can choose from approximately ten Intensives, although students are not guaranteed their top choices. Offerings may be in the areas of creative arts, performing arts, humanities, fitness, math, science, and the natural world. Intensives are graded and are typically worth one-third credit.

In addition to the total credits needed to graduate, there are credit requirements at the end of each grade that must be achieved in order to advance to the next grade level. This helps to ensure that a student stays on track to meet graduation requirements in four years.

## HOW TO GET IT DONE

CBHS recognizes that there is a strong correlation between academic achievement and quality “Habits of Work” (HOW), and students receive a separate HOW grade for each course, using the same 1-4 scale as for academic grades. HOW requirements encourage students to be accountable and pursue their personal best.

To earn a 3 in HOW, a student must do the following consistently (around 80% of the time):

- Complete homework.
- Meet deadlines.
- Participate effectively in class activities (includes regular, on-time attendance).

Students can earn a 4 in HOW by meeting these requirements all the time.

**It is within the power of every student to earn a HOW of 3. For many students, it is the key to success. With a HOW of 3 or higher, a student will have additional opportunities to revise work to meet standards.**

For instance, at the end of a trimester, if a student has a HOW of 3 or 4 in a class, but has not met standards, they will receive a grade of Incomplete (INC) and will be given two weeks and additional support to meet the remaining standards. However, if a student is not meeting standards, but has a HOW below 3, they will receive a 1 or 2 on their report card and may not have the opportunity to make up the standards until CBHS Summer School.

In addition, for students who need to attend Mud Season School or CBHS Summer School, there will be no fee for those with a HOW of 3 or 4. Students with a HOW of less than 3 will pay a fee.

## **MUD SEASON SCHOOL AND SUMMER SCHOOL**

Students who are close to meeting course standards in the first or second trimester, generally with a grade of 2+, have the opportunity to meet standards and receive credit during Mud Season School in March. There is a similar opportunity for students to make up 3<sup>rd</sup> trimester standards in CBHS Summer School in the week following school's end.

To attend, students must be invited by their teacher and are limited to working on standards for two courses. There is no fee for Mud School or CBHS Summer School for students who receive a HOW grade of 3 or 4 for that trimester. For students with a HOW of less than 3, each course will cost \$25 (\$10/\$5 for reduced lunch/free lunch students).

In addition, Portland Public Schools offers a 30-hour, three-week Summer School program at Deering or Portland High School that enables students to earn full credit for a class. Offerings generally include English, social studies, math, and science. The fees for PPS Summer School (as of 2012) are \$100 for one course or \$150 for two courses for Portland residents. Reduced rates are upon approval by the program director.

In addition, CBHS often offers summer intensives for students who want enrichment or who seek additional credit. This summer there are offerings in wellness, math, and science.

## **QUESTS AND JOURNEYS**

During their years at CBHS, each student has several chances to participate in unique learning opportunities that often have a lasting impact. These include:

**Casco Bay Quest for Freshmen** – Each fall, the new freshmen spend four days and three nights on Cow Island learning about themselves and their new Crew members. Students kayak around the island and reflect about their experiences through journal writing.

**Casco Bay Quest for Seniors** – Seniors also complete a Casco Bay Quest in September, with greater challenges on the water and in leadership activities. Much of their writing focuses on what they plan to accomplish in their last year of high school and as they prepare for college and future careers.

**Junior Journey** – The Junior Journey is a week-long cross-cultural learning experience where students assist on service projects, such as a Habitat for Humanity home, or helping in an area hit by a natural disaster. In recent years, juniors have traveled to West Virginia and to Biloxi, Mississippi after Hurricane Katrina. In addition to the service projects, juniors interview area residents and compile oral histories to draw on and learn from the life experiences of others.

## **COSTS**

Some activities at Casco Bay do cost money and, when they do, CBHS works hard to make sure every student can participate, regardless of family resources. The school does lots of fundraising and grant writing to make these often transformative experiences possible for everyone. Any fee is often on a sliding scale. Below are some fees that can be anticipated, ranging from the cost for those who qualify for free lunch to the full price:

- \$10-\$50 Casco Bay Quest (for 9th and 12th graders)
- \$100-\$500 Junior Journey
- \$5-\$25 Each course at CBHS Summer School or Mud Season School (*Important Note: These remediation options are FREE if your child has a HOW of 3 or 4.*)

## **PARENT ADVISORY GROUP**

CBHS's Parent Advisory Group (PAG) is the parent association of CBHS and is open to all parents. PAG meets once a month with the principal to discuss topical issues and events related to the school and to teenagers and their families. PAG meetings are held on the second Tuesday or Thursday of the month from 5:30-7:00pm.

PAG is also responsible for CBHS fundraising through its tax-exempt status and conducts fundraisers throughout the year to support CBHS scholarships, needed upgrades for school equipment not funded by the school department, faculty projects, and EL programs such as Intensives and Casco Bay Quests. PAG's primary fundraisers are:

- **Craft Fair (fall)** – A large undertaking with area crafters, silent auction, gift baskets, a cafe offering lunch and entertainment, and a Cookie Walk.
- **Math Cup (spring)** – Student math teams compete against math teams from local businesses.
- **Annual Appeal** – A direct appeal to CBHS families (in the fall) and to the extended family and friends of the CBHS community (in the spring) for donations to help defray the costs of the many programs unique to CBHS.

All parents are encouraged to volunteer for some of the activities throughout the year. Your support will help make each event a success.

## **STAY INFORMED**

There are a variety of ways in which families can stay informed about events at CBHS:

- **Email** – By providing your email address to Deb Kierstead ([kiersd@portlandschools.org](mailto:kiersd@portlandschools.org)), you will receive the weekly Parent Newsflash from Derek Pierce, Principal at Casco Bay High School. The Newsflash contains information about upcoming events, student achievements, and important deadlines. The emails will also include attachments with relevant forms and special announcements. Families on the email list will also receive a monthly CBHS Newsletter.
- **CBHS Website** – The Casco Bay High School website, <http://cbhs.portlandschools.org>, provides information about the school, the faculty (including their email addresses), and upcoming events. Some teachers also maintain blogs which can be accessed through the website. Explore the links to learn more about CBHS.
- **Facebook** – Check the Casco Bay High School Facebook page for information on upcoming activities, and “Like” the page to receive updates in your News Feed.

## **KEYS TO SUCCESS**

Below are several ways in which you can help your child be successful at CBHS:

- Keep in touch with your child's Crew Leader for information about your child's progress and Crew activities.
- Check grades on Infinite Campus regularly.
- Some teachers maintain course blogs; check them for current assignments and deadlines.
- Encourage your child to practice good Habits of Work (HOW).
- Attend culminations where students present what they learned after completing a Learning Expedition.
- Check on your child's ALEKS pie – an online math tool used in some math classes.
- Encourage your child to keep a planner – paper or online – to track projects and assignments.

These topics are covered in more detail in the Family Handbook, which is distributed in September. If you have further questions, please follow up with your student's Crew Leader. We look forward to working with you and your student during your years here at Casco Bay High School!