

Blake Through Fresh Eyes

By Caryn Schall

One of the biggest transitions a child can make is changing schools. We asked a few of our new students to share what it is like to be a new kid at Blake. Their stories follow below. David reminds us that school is often just one of many stress factors in a middle school student's life. Zara learns the hard way how to speak up for herself. Jayson is concerned about protecting our planet, and Mashal's fresh, honest eyes at the Upper School are full of courage. Finally, young Ryan and his mom show us all that our experience here will always be as much about the journey as it is about the destination. To all new students and families, welcome!



David Myers '16, Caryn Schall and Jeffrey Davis

September 2009: "My name is David Myers, and sixth grade is a blast so far! I came from Gleason Lake Elementary [Wayzata]. Changing to middle school was a big change for me. New schedule, new friends and getting a locker. If you ever hear a guy talking to his locker, it's probably me. I'm still getting the hang of how a combination lock works. My homeroom teacher is Mrs. Macziewski, and she is the bomb! I have trouble sometimes getting organized, but I think that's going to stop soon. When I first walked into Blake, I thought I was going to look stupid because I got braces four days before school, but I realized lots of kids have braces, so there's nothing to worry about. I love going to different classrooms for each class. Everyone is real nice. The teachers sure are smart. I have other changes happening in my life right now, too. My mom is getting married on September 26. I get to wear a tux and walk her down the aisle. Then I have my birthday, and about three weeks after that we move to a new house. I still have to get my homework done when we have open houses at my current house. We just sold lots of our furniture, so right now we don't have a lot of places for me to sit. So school is sort of a relief for me. I'm glad to be at Blake because my uncle went here, and he is now a very successful man, so Blake might be the magic touch. Someday I hope to follow in his footsteps."

Zara Quraishi, an outgoing six year old, is a first grader on the Blake campus. She thought she had a good idea of what Blake was all about because her two older siblings were already students here. But Zara's biggest challenge to date has been navigating the lunchroom. Her first day she was so confused about where to go to get what that she ended up dining on nothing but a pickle and a piece of cheese. She has since learned



Maheen '14, Niki, Zara '21, Arman '12 and Arif Quraishi

it's okay to ask questions and, as a result, now knows where to find the full meal to add a few more nutrients to her plate. Zara spent her pre-school years at a Montessori school in Plymouth. Her favorite part of the day is recess, especially when the fourth graders push her high on the swings. She also loves library day. Her mom, Niki, marvels at the weight Zara manages to carry in her backpack after her enthusiastic trips to the library. Zara is looking forward to making lots of new friends.



LaShawnda, Nailah, Jayson '18 and Anthony Herrera

So far the transition to fourth grade has gone smoothly for Jayson Herrera. Jayson, who has impeccable manners, previously attended grade school in Eden Prairie. He's already making quite a few new friends. His favorite class is Spanish. Jayson also loves P.E., especially when they play Capture the Flag. The cafeteria food is great, according to Jayson, and he looks forward to lunch on Thursdays, which is dessert day! Jayson is interested in how his teacher has a cubby just for scrap paper so it can be re-purposed and reused. He talks about Blake's mission to take good care of our earth by encouraging recycling and non-wasteful habits. Jayson's parents, Anthony and LaShawda, like how Blake gives kids the freedom to question things, to expand their minds and to get outside the box. They have found the personalities of everyone at school to be very welcoming and open. They want to give Jayson all the opportunities possible for a bright future,

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and they think sending him to Blake is a major step in that direction. Together the family enjoys walking in Minnesota's beautiful parks. So, while Jayson is benefitting from the education that Blake provides, maybe we'll all benefit from Jayson's good old-fashioned manners. Thank you, Jayson!



Mashal '13, Roshaan, Emel and Masooda Sherzad

Blake can now proudly carry the moniker of “the school where Mashal Sherzad goes.” Mashal is a ninth grader who loves to bike, draw and dance. She came to Blake from Friends School of Minnesota. “It was a difficult decision to transfer,” Mashal says. “I was looking forward to high school at St. Paul Central, where a lot of my friends are, but I knew this would be a really good opportunity for me.” Mashal candidly explains that so far it has been a bit hard to find things in common with students in a smaller school setting. “My teachers are great, though,” she says. “I really like all of them and all my classes, especially World Literature.” Mashal is considering a career in journalism. She comes from a well-traveled and artistically creative family. Masooda (mom) is a phenomenal chef who enjoys music and dance, as well as fashion and fitness. Emel (dad) is an artist whose work is displayed at their restaurant, Khyber Pass Café, in St. Paul. Emel also loves music, plays the saxophone and hosts a weekly radio program, “International Jazz Conspiracy,” on KFAI Fresh Air Community Radio. Roshaan (brother) is a seventh grader at Friends School. He is obsessed with soccer, music, cooking and their little silky terrier, Leo.

Linda Thrasher journaled about her pre-kindergarten son Ryan's first days at school. Day 1: It's a beautiful late summer morning. Ryan wakes up and announces he's not interested in going to pre-school. He eats a partial breakfast and, after some convincing, begrudgingly walks to the car. We pull into the Highcroft parking lot. I point out how much the flowers and vegetables have grown since last May when he and his classmates donned gloves and shovels to plant the seeds. He doesn't seem interested. As we approach the front doors, I see a number of eager Pre-Kers, smiling and posing with their new backpacks for first day pictures. I realize I forgot Ryan's backpack. Oh well. Ryan refuses to have his picture taken. Ryan looks through the glass doors at the packed classroom — cameras are clicking, video recorders are filming and the conversation is loud. Ryan makes it through the door and bursts into tears. The staff assures me this is developmentally appropriate and that many students experience difficult

transitions. Eventually, Mrs. Gleeson takes Ryan into the hallway where they have a serious conversation about Iowa. Ryan's grandma lives there, and Mrs. Gleeson grew up there. It's time for the parents to leave. Ryan tears up. Mrs. Gleeson takes him into the classroom and lets him sit on her lap. Day 2: More tears. I drop off Ryan, kiss him good-bye and quickly turn him over to Mrs. Gleeson. Weekend: Rick finds a



New student Ryan Thrasher '23 talks to Pre-K teaching assistant Jane Gleeson about Iowa.

book about a rabbit that refuses to go to school but then loves it after the first day. We read it to Ryan. He finds it amusing, or perhaps strangely familiar. Day 3: Ryan's first full day at school. He cries when we leave, but we know he's in good hands. Day 4: My cell phone rings. Ryan fell off a piece of playground equipment, landed in the mulch and bumped his head. He's doing fine, but Mr. Gilsdorf wanted to make certain I was informed.



Jenna, Linda, Rick and Ryan '23 Thrasher

Rick receives a second call from Mrs. Loftus at 3:30 p.m. Our nanny is picking up Ryan in the carpool lane, and Ryan is refusing to get into her car. Rick talks to Ryan, but he is adamant that he is not getting in. Mrs. Loftus comes to the rescue and coaxes Ryan into the car. I begin to wonder how many staff members have already put us into their cell phone speed dials. Day 5: No phone calls, no tears! Ryan talks eagerly about school and especially about a discussion on germs. Day 6: Ryan has a fabulous day! A parent asks how I'm feeling about Ryan's transition and all of his future opportunities. I tell her it's a one-day-at-a-time process. I know the staff cares immensely about the students. We are already addicted to Mr. Gilsdorf's blog. Ryan talks a lot about school in the evenings. We are struck by how well the Blake teachers and staff communicate, and we recognize that our experience at Blake will be as much about the journey as it is the destination.