

**Algebra (8th grade) 2016-17**  
**Mrs. Regal Coller**

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**Web site:** <http://pinckneymich.com/>

**Welcome to Pathfinder Algebra for 8th grade students!**

This class meets in a block format. There are no whole class out-of-classroom breaks during our blocks.

- **3rd and 7th period classes** generally have math on Monday (block), Wednesday (block) and Friday (33-minute class period).
- **6th period class** generally has math on Tuesday (block), Thursday (block), and Friday (33-minute class).

I share my students with Mrs. Kat Sharon for Science 8. Since Science 8 is heavily math-based, this allows for the opportunity to coordinate the introduction of concepts in math and science in order for students to have the maximum learning benefit at an appropriate level of rigor.

**Course Content: Pathfinder Algebra is an 8th grade level course.** Course content is aligned with the Michigan Standards for Mathematics for both content and practice. The resource series for the course is [Connected Mathematics Project 3](#) which includes both print and digital resources.

**IMPORTANT:** Each unit is contained in a separate softcover textbook. **These are NOT WORKBOOKS**, and students may not write in them (even with pencil) or damage them in any way. At the beginning of each unit, students will check out the textbook for that unit via the Pathfinder media center. **ALL students are expected to keep the unit text in their 3-ring math binders.** Folders or accordion organizers are NOT acceptable substitutes for binder for this purpose. **Math-only binders** should contain the text for the current unit, spiral notebook, and 5 tab dividers.

At the end of each unit, students will return their texts to the media center. **All media center penalties for late or damaged books apply.**

**The texts are available to all students in digital format. However, ALL students are expected to check out a print text.**

At the beginning of each unit of study, parents/guardians will receive a “Dear Family” letter to explain the content of the unit and questions parents/guardians may ask to prompt students thinking at home. These letters will be sent as attachments to emails through MISTAR. They will also be posted on my website. If you require print copies, please contact me. Links to additional resources for parents/guardians and students are available on my web site. **Parents/guardians are not expected to “help” students complete their homework by teaching the math content.**

- **Students are expected to show their thinking paths (work) and to justify their responses verbally and in writing.**

- **Partner and/or group work** is routine in order to help students communicate with others about their reasoning, questions, confusion and insights.
- **Calculators** are allowed for most all assignments. Students may use the calculator applications on their Chromebooks **except in test situations**. For that reason, it is important that each student has her/his own scientific calculator with a square root key. If you choose to purchase a graphing calculator for home use, a TI-83+ or TI-84 are preferred and will continue to meet your student's needs in high school.
- **Students are expected to arrive for school at the start of each day with their Chromebooks fully charged.**

**Algebra (8th) GRADING SYSTEM**  
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The grading system for Pathfinder Algebra 8th is a **mastery learning system**. Mastery learning allows students to practice new skills and application of concepts and to receive constructive feedback on their work. Students are encouraged to revise assignments until they have mastered the related content and process standards. Given the opportunity for more practice and revision, all students can grow in their mastery of math content.

- For each summative assessment a mastery score mark (4-0 scale) will be recorded. Use of this scale (which corresponds to letter grades) results in a more accurate summary of student achievement than a scale based on percentage of points earned.

Grade Equivalent	Mastery Score Mark (4-point scale)
A	4
B	3
C	2
D	1
E	0

**Formative assessments are assessments FOR learning (practice with feedback).**

- **Formative assessments will count as 20% of the quarter grade.**
- Classwork, brief progress checks, quizzes and homework are included.
- **Only key indicator assignments are collected.** Even though assignments are not collected, students are still expected to have the assignments completed before we discuss them in class.

- Students are expected to “re-do” assignments to correct all mistakes as directed on assignments returned to them as “fix and turn in again.”
- **Not all formative assessments will be scored and recorded in MISTAR Grade book.**
- “Late” work is accepted and evaluated without a penalty. **However, a zero will be entered for that assignment until the work is completed and corrected. At that point, an appropriate mastery score will be assigned.**
- Students will complete a self-assessment each week for each of the Focus Questions for that interval of time.

**Summative assessments are assessments OF learning where students are challenged to “show what they know.”**

- **Summative assessments are worth 80% of each quarter grade.**
- Major projects, tests, vocabulary tests, and presentations are included in this category.
- **Students are expected to re-take tests if their mastery score is 2 or below.** A student must meet criteria specified by the teachers which requires him/her to prove that he/she completed and corrected ALL formative assessment work assigned before the test (whether the formative assessment was recorded in MISTAR or not), corrected his/her mistakes from the original test and scheduled an appointment with the teacher before being allowed a re-take. The re-test will not be identical to the original test, but the content and level of difficulty will be the same. Only the better score will be included in grade calculations.
- **Students with test anxiety will be shown and encouraged to practice positive coping strategies to help them grow more comfortable with testing and to make sure their test results give an accurate picture of their levels of concept mastery.**
- If any portion of a student’s **summative assessment data** is missing at the end of a quarter, the student will receive an Incomplete for the quarter. The student will then be expected to complete the missing assessments within the first three weeks of the next quarter in order to earn a grade for the previous quarter to replace the “Incomplete.”
- **Per Pathfinder School policy, there is no extra credit available since a student’s grade earned must reflect the actual level of mastery of course content.**

**Parents/guardians and students have access to students’ grades through MISTAR Grade book.**

Agendas for each week are posted on Mrs. RC’s website. Agendas contain Focus Questions for each block, an outline of learning tasks for students to experience in class, homework assignments, information about upcoming performance assessments (summative), links for students to use to assist in their learning, and special events or reminders.

Students must read, keep and refer to their math agendas for detailed information.

**A student who misses class due to absence is expected to access the agenda (online or via hard copy available in my classroom “extras” bin) on the day she/he returns to school whether that day is a “math day” or not!** With a block scheduling format, it is particularly important that students stay current with learning and that includes prompt attention to “absent work.”

If you have any questions or concerns about grades, please let me know.

## Stressed Out? Homework Problem-solving Suggestions

Check out the CMP3 Family Brochure in the top portion of Mrs. RC's web site:  
<http://pinckneymich.com>

**Homework is sometimes a source of frustration for students and parents.**

- There is no expectation for students to spend “hours and hours” on their work! For 8th grade, expect a student to spend no more than 30 minutes two to three times per week. Trouble with completing homework is due to one of the following possible causes:
- The student has a **fuzzy understanding of the concept** and needs to spend the time working on easier problems first in order to build confidence and conceptual connections. There could also be some **gaps in pre-requisite knowledge** that the student may need to address in order to grasp the new concept. If this is a frequent occurrence (gaps in pre-requisites), please let me know.
- The student is **overestimating the scope and quality of the answers required**. There are some very “driven” students who may need to be told it is perfectly acceptable to put work aside as completed “well enough” even though it is not “perfect.”
- **The student was absent (or off task/not paying attention) during the exploration and summary portions of the section assigned.** The explorations are where students experiment with a concept, and the summary portion is where they solidify knowledge and make connections. If a student is absent for an exploration and summary, he/she really needs to try to re-create that experience before attempting the homework. This can be difficult to completely replicate what happened in class. Students should consult their agendas for what was missed, pick up any handouts from the extras bin and check in with his/her seat partner or group members for any data they may need to complete their assignments.
- **If the student was not paying attention (“tuned out,” distracted, trying to start on the in-class or homework assignments with the belief that he/she did not need to listen), it is not unusual for the student to say “no one told him/her how to do the problems.”** The summary is critical, and listening in class to partners/group members/teacher, paying attention and asking questions during the discussions are important behaviors to ensure less stress with homework assignments for students and parents/guardians!
- **The student skims the problem and “doesn’t get it.”** The tasks in this course are not “easy.” Each problem is different and contains important details. Students should expect to read a problem more than once understand what the problem asks them to do. Many students have not had enough experience with problem-based learning.. **Students need to READ carefully and thoroughly and to THINK.** This is more difficult if a student is very fatigued.
- The student has been trying to complete the work and is very frustrated. **Normal learning involves a degree of frustration, and many students call it a day before really diving into a task. However, excessive frustration is counter-productive.** If a student reaches the frustration max, **simply put the work away.** If time permits, try again later. If not, please just have him/her tell me that the frustration level was too high to continue. It would help if he/she were able to write down the questions he/she has and the point at which the confusion began in order that I may help to resolve the problem.
- **Maintain a sense of humor above all else,** and this will be a great year!

**If you have any questions, concerns, requests for conferences, or suggestions, please feel free to contact me.**

Feel free to leave a message on my voicemail, and I will return your call as soon as I am able to do so.

**Email is my strongly preferred method of communication with parents and guardians.** I do check email frequently during the school day and also during evenings/ weekends when I am able to do so. I can be reached via e-mail at [dregal@pinckneypirates.org](mailto:dregal@pinckneypirates.org). **Students are also welcome to email me with questions they have on their “off block” days or even on weekends. I will answer if I am available.**

I look forward to a rewarding and enriching year!

Thank you.

Deborah Regal Coller