

Together, inspiring each student to think, learn, achieve and care in a global community.

Shamrock Connection

DISTRICT QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

2025-2026 Newsletter Volume 15, Issue 1

Berrien Springs Public Schools

PBIS programs at Mars Elementary offer all students opportunities to grow academically and socially so they can shine as **ROCKSTARS** in the classroom

**By Kristen Dow
Mars Elementary
PBIS Coordinator**

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) continues to grow and change at Mars Elementary to help support our youngest Shamrocks in the areas of social emotional learning, building community, and reinforcing academic content.

Our SEL program, SEL-4Success provides monthly videos and activities that reinforce a character trait. For example, in October we focused on responsibility. Teachers build on these themes during their morning meetings and they help guide a selection for the Students of the Month. These students are awarded a certificate and shamrock gift at our monthly PBIS assemblies. New this year is the addition of a secret invitation to their families who show up as surprise guests cheering for their accomplishment! We also choose a special group of staff members and recognize their positive work for the month. Each assembly begins with a fun, *Minute to Win It* challenge for either staff or students.

Positive behavior incentives will be offered quarterly this year, as our students work to earn UROCKS to participate in these special events. So far this year we have been able to recognize students with participation in the Homecoming parade and some who earned the opportunity to join Sylvester for their Extreme Science assembly. More fun to come at the end of October for our top five earners in each class, while all



Mars Elementary PBIS Coordinator Kristin Dow congratulates a few of her Rockstars.

of our other **ROCKSTARS** will have an opportunity to make a selection from our UROCK store.

In order to build community we have a variety of opportunities: Breakfast buddies for students who need a little extra time to get adjusted as they begin their school day, daily morning check-ins with learners who need some additional encouragement to get their day started, Monday morning video announcements for students who are ready and want to utilize their leadership skills. This modeling helps encourage others to work towards becoming an “anchor” as well. New this year will be the addition of collaborating with other buildings to provide reading buddies and mentors.

PBIS also works to reinforce academic content through the addition of Morning Meetings where we can combine social emotional, community building and academic content in the first 15 minutes of our day.

The goal is to set a positive tone where all students feel safe, valued and connected through their shared experiences. To support this initiative we have invited Tiago Baltazar from the Berrien RESA to attend some of our staff meetings to share the work he has seen being done in other schools in our state. He shared the importance of greetings as students enter classrooms and we modeled that piece as staff entered the meeting! We also share a Word of the Day through our daily announcements. This effort allows teachers to expand on these words during morning meetings where students can practice reading and speaking with the new vocabulary. This repeated exposure helps students to better understand and retain new words, ultimately leading to stronger communication skills across all subjects.

As always, our PBIS room provides a safe place for students to come when restorative

practices are needed. We take time to read social stories and intervene with practices that allow them the time they need for reentry into the classroom. We are also adding new PBIS posters this year with pictures for our youngest learners. These posters are part of our school-wide system to define, teach, and reinforce positive behavior. They are posted to visually remind students of the expected conduct in different common areas, such as the hallways, cafeteria, and playground. These along with a refreshed Behavior Matrix will help support the classroom teacher and serve as tools to create consistency for expected behaviors.

We are excited about the ways we are able to offer positive behavior opportunities to every Mars learner and know with the clarity and consistency of our PBIS programs and addition of some new ones, we will see ALL shine as **ROCKSTARS**.

2 Standard Response Protocol for Student Safety

District implements Standard Response Protocol for staff and student safety

By Jeff Yauchstetter
Assistant
Superintendent

At Berrien Springs Public Schools, the safety and well-being of our students and staff remain our top priority. To strengthen our emergency preparedness and ensure that every member of our school community knows what to do in any situation, the district is implementing the Standard Response Protocol (SRP) across all on-site schools this year.

The SRP provides a common language and clear set of actions for how schools respond to a variety of situations

— from medical emergencies to severe weather or external threats. The protocol is built around five simple, easy-to-understand commands: Hold, Secure, Lockdown, Evacuate, and Shelter.

Each action is paired with a specific directive, such as “Lockdown – Locks, Lights, Out of Sight” or “Evacuate – To the Announced Location.” This shared vocabulary helps students, staff, and first responders communicate quickly and clearly during an emergency.

“The Standard Response Protocol allows everyone — from kindergartners to teachers and emergency personnel

— to respond in a coordinated way,” said Mars Principal Jake Skelly. “By practicing these responses and using consistent language, we create safer, more confident school environments.”

Throughout the year, students and staff will participate in age-appropriate safety drills to practice each SRP action. These exercises are designed to build familiarity and calm confidence, not fear. Parents and guardians will also receive information to help reinforce this understanding at home.

Berrien Springs Public Schools has partnered with CrisisGo and The “I Love U

Guys” Foundation to implement the SRP district-wide. This collaboration ensures our approach aligns with best practices used by schools nationwide and local law enforcement agencies.

Our goal is simple. We want every student and staff member to feel safe, know what to do, and trust that our schools are prepared. Safety is a shared responsibility — and through the SRP, we’re all speaking the same language.

For more information about the Standard Response Protocol, visit www.iloveguys.org or contact your child’s school office.

Sylvester Elementary

Science engages students and fuels their natural curiosity

Sylvester Elementary staff connect science to learning in engaging ways

By Micah Lambert
Sylvester Elementary
Principal

This school year, Sylvester Elementary students are experiencing science learning in different ways. This year, our students are diving deeper than ever into more hands-on learning.

We are working to put an emphasis on how to connect each subject so students can see how they connect to the world around them.

This is our first full year of Integrated Studies, where all students are exploring both Social Studies and Science in meaningful, connected ways. These lessons help students think like scientists and historians—asking questions, making connections, and discovering how people and the world work together.

A recent highlight was a visit from the Michigan Farm Science Lab, where students



Sylvester Elementary students are learning about sugar beets during a visit by the Michigan Farm Science Lab.

learned about one of Michigan’s sweetest crops—the

sugar beet! Students explored the parts of the plant, inves-

tigated how weather and soil
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Goal is to have every student OPPORTUNITY READY!

A Continuous Learning Ecosystem: Focusing on “Unreasonable Hospitality” raises student outcomes

**By Dr. Thomas Bruce
Superintendent**

This fall, as the crisp air settles in and our academic year gains momentum, we are challenging ourselves to rethink the very nature of success in our schools.

Many may have read the story of New York's Eleven Madison Park, a restaurant famous not for its perfect food, but for its pursuit of “Unreasonable Hospitality.” We, too, have built a solid foundation on our core strategies—Attendance, Achievement, and Engagement—and now it is time to start cooking with gas. We must move beyond simply delivering a good educational service to creating a motivating growth experience.

This shift defines the pursuit of hospitality over mere educational service. As the author behind this philosophy, Will Guidara, reminds us: “Service is black and white; hospitality is color.” We believe adding that “color” is the essential ingredient that ignites passion, deepens engagement, and ultimately drives student performance and sustains academic outcomes over time.

Fueling Performance Through Great Experiences: Last spring, we met with high school students who shared their school experiences. They told us they wanted to feel known, valued, and supported through relationships and real human connection. This is not a passive idea but it is an

intentional approach designed to strengthen learning, belonging, and achievement across our district.

At Berrien Springs, we see each learner as more than a grade or a test score. Every student who walks into our classrooms brings talents, interests, family stories, and hopes for their future. When we honor the whole person, engagement increases, confidence grows, and students take ownership of their learning. This pathway leads to “Opportunity Ready” students.

Personal Engagement + Active Instruction = High Performance: To deliver this level of unreasonable hospitality, we must focus on the clarity and purpose brought in the classroom. At BSPS, professional learning has become an important part of our organization. Our ongoing commitment to growth ensures that all staff members are equipped to be risk takers and provide an engaging learning environment for all students. **The Four Pillars of our Instructional Model** create the necessary focus, ensuring high expectations are met through high-quality student engagement:

Learning Is Personal: We connect the curriculum to what students care most about, maximizing relevance and student motivation.

Embracing Inquiry: We actively explore student interests and challenge them with complex problems, fostering

critical thinking and deeper learning.

Offering Relevant Choices: We empower students with agency and ownership over their path to mastery, which reinforces commitment and follow-through.

Providing Targeted Formative Feedback: We provide precise support via 2-way feedback, ensuring each student has the skills necessary to meet rigorous standards.

Opportunity is Built Here: Our commitment to the student experience demands commitment from every member of our organization. It is the core function of our district identity:

BSPS: A Continuous Learning Ecosystem, Where Everyone Learns: This ecosystem we call school, must guarantee our focus on providing an engaging and robust experience for all students. We can do this because all three roles in the organization are acting in concert:

Learners Cultivate Mastery: Students actively commit to the rigorous work of their own growth in skills, knowledge and experience. Said differently, students cultivate their skills, knowledge and experience to be opportunity ready; to be ready for their future.

Teams Build and Refine: Educator teams ensure high-quality, engaging instruction is delivered consistently. All staff are learning alongside



Dr. Thomas Bruce

each other, constantly improving practice and product. When a team knows they have the power within them to make a positive impact, the sky is the limit.

Leaders Pursue Excellence: Administrators act as servants, providing the necessary system coherence and resources to guarantee an outstanding teaching and learning environment for student success.

When these elements work together, we confirm that our entire organization is operating as one entity to deliver high performance and ensure every graduate is Opportunity Ready!

**EXCELLENCE.
EXPECTED.**



Sylvester Elementary School staff connect science to learning in engaging ways

(Continued from Page 2)

impact sugar production, and even studied how sugars differ at the molecular level. It was a fun and fascinating way to learn about farming, science, and the environment.

Students also got to experi-

ence science in action during a special assembly featuring The Science Wizard, who many may recognize from *America's Got Talent!* The show filled our AAC with laughter, wonder,

and lots of “oohs” and “aahs” as students watched exciting demonstrations on static electricity, lightning, air pressure, kinetic energy, and phases of matter. It was a perfect mix of learning and fun that left students buzzing with excitement.

At Sylvester Elementary School, we know that science engages students and fuels their natural curiosity. That's why we are committed to making science a bigger part of learning both inside and outside the classroom.

Seventh graders become environmental research scientists through the engaging “Project WOAHs”

**By Joe Miller
Middle School
Principal**

When 7th grade students walk into the greenhouse behind the middle school, they are not just tending plants, they are conducting real scientific research that mirrors the work of professional environmental scientists.

Project WOAHs (Wildlife, Outdoors, Atmosphere, and Human Impact Services) began with an important decision: What did students want to study? Groups selected their focus based on genuine interest, choosing between agriculture (lima beans), landscaping (zinnias), or forestry (red maple trees). This choice gave students immediate ownership of their learning journey.

“Students are testing which soil will grow the healthiest plants,” explains seventh grade teacher Rob Reynolds as he described how each group designed experiments comparing traditional field soil, commercial products like Miracle-Gro, and field soil enhanced with organic fertilizers of their choosing.

For six weeks, students have taken on the role of research scientists. They’ve collected multiple types of data—measuring plant height and health, testing soil pH and moisture levels, and recording environmental conditions including temperature, humidity, and carbon dioxide levels both inside and outside the greenhouse. This comprehensive data collection teaches students that scientific understanding comes from examining multiple variables and looking for patterns.

The learning goes beyond simply recording numbers. Students are developing critical thinking skills as they prepare to analyze their findings. They’ll explore questions like: *Do carbon dioxide levels affect*



BSMS students are testing which soils will grow the healthiest plants.

greenhouse temperatures? Can plants help regulate their environment? Which growing method produces the healthiest specimens when measured by height, mass, and root development?

What makes “Project WOAHs” particularly meaningful is its connection to authentic challenges. The curriculum integration ensures that classroom content comes alive through hands-on experience. Students aren’t just learning about ecosystems and plant biology from a textbook—they’re living it.

The project’s impact will extend beyond the data sheets. This winter, students will grow a tree to replace one damaged in last spring’s storm, demonstrating that even young scientists can make tangible improvements to their local environment. It’s a powerful lesson: their work matters, their choices have consequences, and they have the ability to



create positive change.

Project WOAHs represents the heart of the student experience at BSMS—giving students agency, engaging them in meaningful work, and helping them achieve real understanding through experiences that connect classroom learning to the world beyond school walls. These 7th graders aren’t just learning about science; they’re doing science, and in the process, discovering their potential as environmental stewards and critical thinkers.

BERRIEN SPRINGS PUBLIC SCHOOLS TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT PRESENTS



Stuff-A-Bus

Friday, December 5

**Apple Valley
11:00 - 3:30**

**Hardings
4:00 - 7:00**

Please join us for Stuff-A-Bus by donating toys and non-perishable food items.

All donations will go to Christmas Care to support local families in need.

Together, with your help, we can make a difference in a child's life this holiday season.

For more information about Stuff-A-Bus, please contact the Berrien Springs Transportation Department at (269) 471-2594.





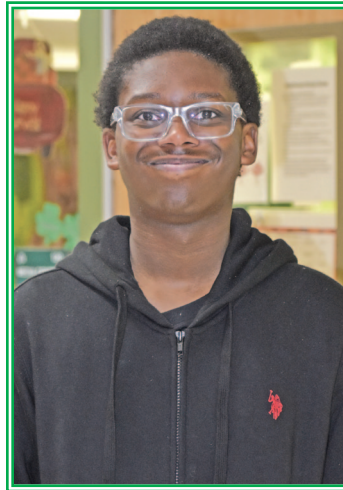
"In English class, we get 20 minutes to read. I love to read but struggle to find time to read. I just finished a book, which made me so excited to read the next one. I also am so proud that I have finished two books this year already."

--Piper P.
Class of 2029



"Marketing class has definitely had the biggest impact. I never knew how many different parts there were. In class, we've been able to make different projects and business ideas; this helps me to work on my presenting skills and use my imagination more often. Since starting this class, I'm open to future jobs in marketing, since I've wanted to explore marketing and its many opportunities."

--Rylee E.
Class of 2028



"Drama class had one of the biggest impacts—second to band. Drama has taught me to write better; taught me that I enjoy writing and storytelling. The biggest impact Drama has had on me was getting over my stage fright, which was a pivotal moment in my high school life."

--Jason F.
Class of 2026



"I'm so grateful for every opportunity. I was trying to learn how to do some chemistry when it comes to chemical reactions and chemical bonds. At first, I understood part of it, but then it started getting just a little confusing. I figured it out, though, and I came up with a plan to learn the material and ask for help because I didn't understand. I felt really proud of myself."

--Frankie M.
Class of 2028

Berrien Springs High School

Berrien Springs High School student experience blends learning, creativity and community!

By Charles Richards
Berrien Springs
High School
Principal

A positive and engaging student experience shapes the foundation for lifelong learning. This fall, our students have embraced opportunities to learn, lead, and grow through academics, the arts, athletics, and career exploration.

Our marching band students took the stage at the *Shamrock Band Invitational*. Ninth-grade students participated in *Career Pathway Day*. They explored potential career interests and made real-world connections between what they learned in school and their future career goals.

Student success extended beyond the classroom as well.

Athletes demonstrated commitment and sportsmanship both on and off the field, while choir students showcased creativity and collaboration through their performances. Our counseling department also supported students and families through hosting *FAFSA Nights*. They helped students and their families take important steps toward college readiness.

In classrooms, engagement and innovation are thriving. Mrs. Jennifer Cook's Advanced Art students participated in the *Crosley Record Player Costume Cruiser Contest*, transforming a standard white record player into a work of art that reflected the theme "Bands Together." Mr. William Eichberg's Modern Chemistry students engaged in hands-on



The Marching Band Color Guard Caption and Drum Majors celebrate earning a Division I rating in Music and a Division II rating in Marching at the MSBOA Band Festival held at Sylvester Stadium.

experiments using state-of-the-art laboratory equipment in a safe environment.

Our Career and Technical Education (CTE) team also provided real-world learning experiences, including a water rescue exercise at the Lake Chapin boat launch with Public Safety students. These

opportunities help students gain valuable career skills and explore pathways beyond the traditional university route.

At BSHS, learning extends far beyond the classroom walls. We are preparing each student to think, learn, achieve and care in a global community.

Transformational results by meeting needs wherever they arise

Student Services is woven into the daily rhythm of each building to help each student reach their full potential

By Luke Antvelink
Director
of Student Services

At Berrien Springs, the purpose of Student Services is simple yet powerful: to create the conditions for every student to access a world-class education—one that prepares them to thrive in a global community.

Recently, our mission came to life when a family faced complex barriers that threatened their child's ability to attend school. Within days, our team brought together three buildings, two programs, language translators, and transportation services to design a plan that delivered on our promise of access and support. That's what Student Services does every day—we unite people, programs, and possibilities around our number-one priority: our students.

But Student Services isn't just a department—it's the connective tissue of our district, and it touches every part of who we are and what we do. From the positive culture built



Luke Antvelink, Director of Student Services, reads *Nobody Hugs A Cactus* to the children.

through PBIS, to the compassion and skill of TCIS-trained staff who support students in moments of crisis, Student Services is woven into the daily rhythm of each building. Its reach extends beyond our walls through community partnerships that provide mentorship, resources, and opportunities for students

and families. Together, these efforts reflect one unified goal: to ensure every student feels seen, supported, and empowered to succeed.

This work thrives on partnerships. Through two-way communication with families, collaboration with tutoring programs, after-school clubs, before-school programs, and

local resource banks, we build networks of care that extend beyond the classroom walls.

We don't chase trends or fads. We focus on the small, consistent actions that make the biggest difference—following through on every promise, providing what one might call *unreasonable customer service*, and meeting needs wherever they arise.

Because at Berrien Springs, the student experience is more than academics—it's a promise. From transportation solutions to disability supports, from after-school partnerships to family connections, we put people first.

Invest in possibilities...

When we invest in people, we invest in possibility—and that's what makes Student Services not just important, but transformational.

As my mentor once told me, "*Luke, this is a people business...do the right thing, always.*" That simple truth continues to define who we are and why we do what we do at Berrien Springs.

Success Virtual Learning Centers of Michigan

Flexible, student-centered approach

Wraparound support helps each student reach their potential and become an asset in their community

By Miranda Coburn
Executive Director

At Success Virtual Learning Centers of Michigan, the student experience begins with meeting each learner exactly where they are academically and socially. One of our students came to us with very high levels of social anxiety, rooted in negative middle school experiences and childhood PTSD. To support her, we began by allowing her to work

in our sensory/calm room space. This created a safe entry point where she could attend in person without the pressure of immediate peer interaction.

Within a few short weeks, she grew confident enough to join the general student area and now takes initiative to welcome new students during orientations. Her mother has expressed how deeply this transformation has impacted

their family life, sharing that her daughter now asks to come to school each morning, a dramatic shift from last year when she often begged to stay home.

This success has been made possible through a coordinated, hybrid support system: her mentor and IEP teacher ensure academic content is attainable, center staff scaffold her social integration with peers, and our school

social worker provides ongoing mental health support. Together, these layers of wraparound support exemplify how our program's flexible, student-centered approach allows students to build confidence, re-engage in learning, and thrive both academically and personally.



Hearing center is cornerstone for deaf & hard of hearing students, their families & community

By Mary Masciovecchio,
Director of Special
Education & Ashley
Porter, Coordinator
of Special Education
for ECSE & D/HH Programs

A key component of our district's commitment to providing a rich and inclusive student experience is the Berrien County Hearing Center (Hearing Center), a cornerstone service for our Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing (D/HH) students, their families, and our broader community. Since the wake of the rubella epidemic in the late 1960s, this program has provided an auditory/oral educational approach that has served thousands of children and families across our region.

A Historical Legacy, a Present Promise: For over 50 years, the Hearing Center has provided services for students in Berrien and Cass Counties

from birth to graduation. Our self-contained D/HH classrooms span preschool through middle school, while the vast majority of our D/HH students receive support within their home districts—ensuring both specialized instruction and inclusion. We also contract with St. Joseph County to provide audiology services through the Center.

Comprehensive Services Along the Continuum: We serve approximately 261 children with hearing loss each year.

Annually, we complete around 830 diagnostic evaluations, assisting families and school districts with early identification and ongoing intervention.

Our services begin at birth and continue through graduation—all at no cost to families. At our core are two full-

time educational audiologists who provide:

- ✿ Newborn hearing screenings and follow-up services
- ✿ Diagnostic hearing evaluations
- ✿ Hearing aid fittings
- ✿ Cochlear implant equipment support
- ✿ FM system fitting aid evaluation

Innovation in Action: Thanks to over \$60,000 in recent grant funding, the Hearing Center continues to advance clinical and educational practice. A notable achievement funded by a grant from the Carls Foundation enabled us to purchase neurodiagnostic equipment—specifically, an Auditory Brainstem Response (ABR) and Cortical Auditory Evoked Potential (CAEP) system. These tools provide objective, clinical data to personalize intervention and enhance decision-making. The information from ABR and CAEP assessments supports not only audiological treatment, but also strengthens collaboration with physicians, early interventionists, and

clinicians within the child's multidisciplinary team.

Aligning with LEAD-K: This year, we are proud to have received a grant through Michigan's Language Equality and Acquisition for Deaf Kids Act (LEAD-K) initiative. LEAD-K is a statewide law that mandates access to age-appropriate language acquisition and literacy services for children who are deaf or hard of hearing, from birth through age five. Our participation in this initiative reflects our commitment to ensuring that every child arrives at kindergarten with a strong language foundation and equal opportunity for success.

Here for You: Families, please remember: we're always just a phone call away. If you have questions about screenings, amplification, educational support, or resources for your D/HH child, don't hesitate to reach out. Our Hearing Center phone number is 269-471-8858. All our services remain free for children from birth through graduation.

Athletics

Rocks celebrate successful fall sports season

By Joe Stephens
Athletics Director

This has been an event-filled and successful fall season of Berrien Springs High School Shamrock athletics. Every single one of our programs experienced improvement and success on the scoreboard this fall. Our community should be incredibly proud of the effort and energy that our athletes have played with; more importantly, their sportsmanship has been exemplary. These programs and the individual players have had an array of accomplishments this fall.

Our Shamrock varsity Soccer, Tennis, Girls Cross Country, and Football teams won conference championships this fall.

Soccer, under Coach Octavio Latino, won the Conference Championship for the second consecutive year, and then eventually lost in the district finals 3-2 to state finalist Hartford. They finished with a 12-5-3 record. They sent out a great group of seniors with a lot of success. That program was 1-12-1 two years ago.

The tennis program, under Coach Brian Shembarger, (Continued on Page 8)

CELEBRATE THE
 HOLIDAY SEASON WITH US!

The Shamrock Holiday Market

DECEMBER 7TH, 2025
 10:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M.
 BERRIEN SPRINGS HIGH SCHOOL AAC GYM



Holiday Cookie Bake Sale
 hosted by the Berrien Springs Choir

Shop from over 50 crafters and small
 businesses to find the perfect
 Christmas gift.

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Rocks celebrate successful fall sports season

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finished third at the MHSAA State Finals meet, and won its 8th straight Regional Championship. Two Shamrocks won individual state championships. Senior Phil Seo Junior Edwin Seo won 2 and 3 singles respectively. Number one singles player Euji Son finished in the Final Four at the State meet.

The football program, under Coach Ben Iliff, finished in a three-way tie for the conference title. They qualified for the playoffs, and won their home district semi-final against the Chieftains, but were defeated by Kalamazoo United in the final game.

The girls in the volleyball program, coached by Jake Skelly, continue to stay on the winning track. They were champions of the home Shamrock Invitational with a finals victory over rival Lakeshore. The volleyball program went winless (0-24-1) two years ago, were 15-16-2 last year and

finished 21-22-4 this year with a challenging schedule. The ladies fell to Buchanan in a thrilling five-set district match to close their season.

The girls' cross country team, coached by Jon Rodriguez, went from finishing near the bottom of the county in 2023 to the middle of the county standings in 2024. This season they have improved on that by winning their first conference championship since 2010!

The girls' golf team, coached by Ted Zahrt, put an entire team in the regional meet for the first time this year. They traveled to Forest Acres, home of Michigan State University golf, for their final meet of the year. They set several school record scores.

There are going to be a large number of student-athletes receiving All-Conference and All-Region mentions after those votes occur in the coming month.

GO SHAMROCKS!



Berrien Springs Public Schools
Senior 60+
Holiday Luncheon

Thursday, December 4
11:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Arts and Athletic Center
201 Sylvester Ave. Berrien Springs

RSVP by Monday, November 26, 2025
269-471-2891

Turkey or Vegetarian Meals Available

