

School is off to a good start. The three Middle School teachers are excited about our class this year! We have several students that are new to SJMS as well as to our room. Be sure to welcome the families of Seth (4<sup>th</sup> year), Isabella (5<sup>th</sup> year), Charles, Xavier, and Maxi (6<sup>th</sup> years)! There are 56 students in Middle School, the year-by-year breakdown is 15 students in sixth grade, 24 in fifth, and 17 in fourth.

As always in Middle School, we emphasize responsibility in school work and in behavior. As a class, these first days seem to be going well. The best way to support the development of responsibility is to give responsibility and have conversations with your child about how things are going. The conversations should be two-way and both sides have a time to listen and reflect. You share your expectations and express your confidence in your child. Your child explains what is hard about academics or behavior issues.

It is always hard to grow up, so we need to let them know we are here to support them in this journey.

## **General Information**

Each month, usually on the first Friday of the month, we will send home a newsletter which will inform you of important announcements and classroom activities, and will also give you an idea about what's going on in your children's lessons. Because there is relatively little homework that goes home, the newsletter is the best guide to asking informed questions of your child.

For some children, the question, "How was school today?" elicits a non-committal, "Okay." Hopefully, you'll get a more elaborate response if you use the newsletter to say something like, "The newsletter says you're reading Detectives in Togas in class. What's the mystery that they're trying to solve? Who're the detectives? Are you enjoying it?" We find that specific questions get most children talking more about their day.

We'd like to use this first newsletter to remind returning families and inform new families about some of the standard Middle School customs.

## **Communication**

Communication is an essential element in the education of your children. The newsletter is one way we communicate information to all of you. As always, we invite you to communicate your questions, concerns, and feedback to us by way of note, e-mail, or phone. Our email addresses are listed at the bottom of the newsletter.

## **Start of the Day**

Classes start at 8:30. Your child should have time in the morning to put things away, greet friends, and prepare for the first class. Being ready on time allows the child to start the day calmly. We usually gather at 8:25, but children are not marked tardy unless they arrive after 8:30. We suggest dropping off your child as close to 8:15 as possible.

## **Water and Snacks**

We encourage the students to bring water bottles, especially in the heat. The ones with pop-up tops spill less often. As with everything, names on the bottles are helpful. Students are also allowed to bring fruits, vegetables, or cheese for snacks. **No nuts** can be brought due to food allergies of some of your children's classmates. Because we try to avoid spills, try to send snacks that have been pre-drained of liquid. The snacks need be ones that can be eaten quickly and without mess or additional preparation.

## **Clothing**

Clothing should be appropriate for the occasion. It is hot, but students should wear modest clothing. Attention to footwear is important. Be sure that shoes and sandals allow safe active play at recess and in the gym.

## **Homework**

Homework in Middle School may be different than what your child has been used to doing. Sometimes there will be definite assignments for homework. In addition, children may work on assignments for which they do not require materials from school, such as spelling or writing. Your child's planner may come home, but it is needed in the classroom daily.

Middle School teachers encourage one hour of some type of homework each evening. Attached to this newsletter you will find a page that suggests general homework activities.

When math homework is assigned, the expectation is that the children will work for about 30 minutes. The adult signs the paper and the child returns it no matter how much is completed. If the work is not completed, this gives Susan the following feedback: 1) she misjudged the amount or difficulty of the work, 2) the child finds this concept difficult or confusing, or 3) the home schedule did not allow time for the child to do the work. Whatever the cause, we go from that point. It is easier to help a child early with concepts that are difficult.

## **Birthdays**

In many classrooms, birthdays are celebrated by bringing in a treat to share with classmates. Because we have 56 students in our class, we realize it is asking a lot to expect a family to provide treats for the entire class. If you want to celebrate at school, we suggest the following as possible options: choose a smaller group to include, such as "the boys in my child's grade," or "just my child's grade."

We ask that invitations to birthday parties be distributed through the mail instead of passing them out in the classroom. This reflects sensitivity for the children not invited.

## **Cell Phones and iPods/MP3 players**

**Students at SJMS may not use personal cell phones while on school property.** If a teacher decides it is necessary, students may receive permission from a teacher to use a phone in the office. If a child carries a phone for safety reasons, it should be turned off during the school day. It may not be used until the child has left the premises or has permission from a teacher to make a specific call.

Middle School students are not permitted to use iPods or MP3 players during the school day. This includes lunch, recess, and aftercare.

### **Field Trips**

Since January 3, 2008, all volunteers and drivers who are responsible for children without a teacher being present must have taken the "Protecting God's Children" course and have a BCI check and be fingerprinted. For information on the course, you can go to the website at <http://www.virtus.org>.

### **Camp**

Camp is back! After a one-year hiatus, we again have scheduled camp for our fifth and sixth year students. Accompanying this newsletter is a packet with information and forms to be completed and returned. **Please get them in as soon as possible as the fifth and sixth years go to camp from Oct. 5-7!**

### **Academic Information**

In addition to general information, we'd like to share some specific details about what the children will work on this coming month. Karla teaches biological sciences, grammar, and related language arts. Susan teaches math and geography, which includes physical and earth science. Bill teaches reading, writing, spelling, and history.

### **Mathematics**

Last year the term "HEMA" was coined. It translates to HIGHLY EDUCATIONAL MATH ACTIVITY and is also known as a game. Several HEMA's have been introduced. Susan has also presented several activities from the shelves and done assessments and given assignments. The fifth and sixth years have begun word problems. Each month 25 should be completed which means one set every 2 months. The fourth years will be doing word problems but they haven't been introduced yet.

We have a set of Hot Dots for math and for science, which the entire class is allowed to do. There is no due date, but the expectation is that some work in both sets will be done. These kits cover topics likely to appear on tests and have a test format.

Quite a few students have passed one or more sets of math facts. If you are interested in doing facts for our class, contact Susan. You can time the students or coach them. Thank you.

This year there will not be Math Club. Students who are interested in extra time for math need to make a plan with me. Parents may also discuss this with me.

### **Geography**

In Montessori, Physical and Earth Science come under the heading of geography. The sixth years began a study of chemistry. They have an outline of the content to share with parents. Their first assignment is due on September 1. In December there will be a BigTest. It is important for the students to be studying a little each week at home.

The fifth years are studying weather. They begin by defining 59 words! Since they are working in groups, each child has only 15 to do. During this study, they will also give oral

presentations, written reports, and make weather instruments and do experiments. This group is interested in the pin maps, and students generally work with a partner to do them.

The fourth years will be doing a study of the solar system and beyond. Often they become interested in constellations when this topic is presented. They work with various materials, write reports and give oral reports.

Everyone in Middle School plays Geography Baseball. We are starting with North America. Your child could teach you if you have a map, globe, or an atlas. You have 15 seconds after your country is given to locate it on the map.

### **Reading**

Fourth and fifth year students are being asked to read and share poetry at the start of the year. Bill is also reading aloud some poetry to them. Hearing literature read aloud is important to the development of each child's own sense of the rhythm of language.

Sixth year students are reading and discussing Greek Myths, while Bill is also reading aloud to them from the mythology spoof series "Myth-o-mania". The series claims to tell the "true" version of the myths, from Hades point of view. It allows some discussion of different topics in writing and reading as students compare the same stories from two characters' viewpoints.

### **Writing**

Several writing lessons are presented each week, and children are required to attend at least one of them, but may choose the ones that meet their individual needs best. For example, this week they could choose from a poetry lesson on rhythm and meter, a different poetry lesson on how the rhyming dictionary works, or a lesson about writing paragraphs with good topic sentences and supporting sentences. Several children chose to attend more than one of those lessons, and all included mixed-aged groups.

### **History**

Fourth year students are studying time. They will review telling time with analog and digital clocks. They will review using the calendar. They will review the months of the year and the days of the week, so that they will know them in order.

Fifth year students are reviewing the Timeline of Life, and will then extend the study to look at the "moral" of the story of the timeline.

Sixth year students are studying Ancient Greece. They will examine the culture of Ancient Greece and it's impact on the surrounding world, as well as it's lasting impact into the modern world.

### **Spelling**

Students took a placement test to help me determine initial spelling groups. We will be starting with 5 spelling groups that are sorted by skill rather than by age. Spelling lists will go home on Tuesdays, to be tested on Mondays. The first list will go home Sept. 6.

## **Grammar**

This year, SRA work will be part of the Grammar curriculum because there is a lot of grammar work contained in the SRAs. Each group of children has the responsibility of completing 2 SRAs a week. I will give them time on Monday to work silently during class. If there is no class on Monday – the workload will be only 1 that week, for example, next week. I have remade most of the language materials so I foresee them doing mostly work from the shelves and less from the textbooks this year. Remember that Grammar is cyclical. Each year we cover the same basic material, though it gets harder and more is added each year. I love teaching Grammar and look forward to this year.

## **Biology**

We begin the year with the study of Classification as usual. We are studying the Six Kingdoms. The sixth grade has been introduced to the idea of Domains – a new concept that has been around since the 90's. I was also able to purchase new charts for all of the Kingdoms and we look forward to delving into them. This work should cover the month of September.

Fourth graders should bring in a plant. Please help them choose hardy plants since we want them to be successful. They will care for them for the entire year or as long as they survive!

As always, we appreciate the trust you place in us in the caring for your child. While we often know them in a different way than you do, you know them best. Our partnership of student, parent, teacher needs clear communication, so once again, contact us with your questions and concerns.

Sincerely,

The Middle School Teachers

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