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School Counselors

Lower School Counselor
Shaun Ditty, M.A., LPC

Middle School Counselor
Shekyra DeCree, M.A., LPCC-S

Upper School Psychologist
Suzanne Ritter, Ph.D.

Counseling Intern
Amy Brooks

Health & Wellness Support

School Nurse
Beckie Hoagland, L.S.N.

School Nurse
Janet Fireman, L.S.N.

Health & Wellness Specialist
Ann McCabe, M.S./M.A.T

Academic Support Specialists

Early Childhood Director
Brelle Farrenkopf

LS Reading Specialist
Cyndi Yakscoe

Learning Styles Specialist
Alyssa Thiele (PreK-Grade 4)

Speech-Language Pathologist
Adrienne Moser (PreK-Grade 4)

Speech-Language Pathologist
Alexis Marin (Grades 4-8)

MS Reading Specialist
Tamarah Davis

MS Learning Styles Specialist
Carolyn O'Brien

US Reading Specialist
Jeff Arndt

US Reading Specialist
Katy Frickel

COVID Testing Site Returning to CA Campus

Beckie Hoagland & Janet Fireman
School Nurses



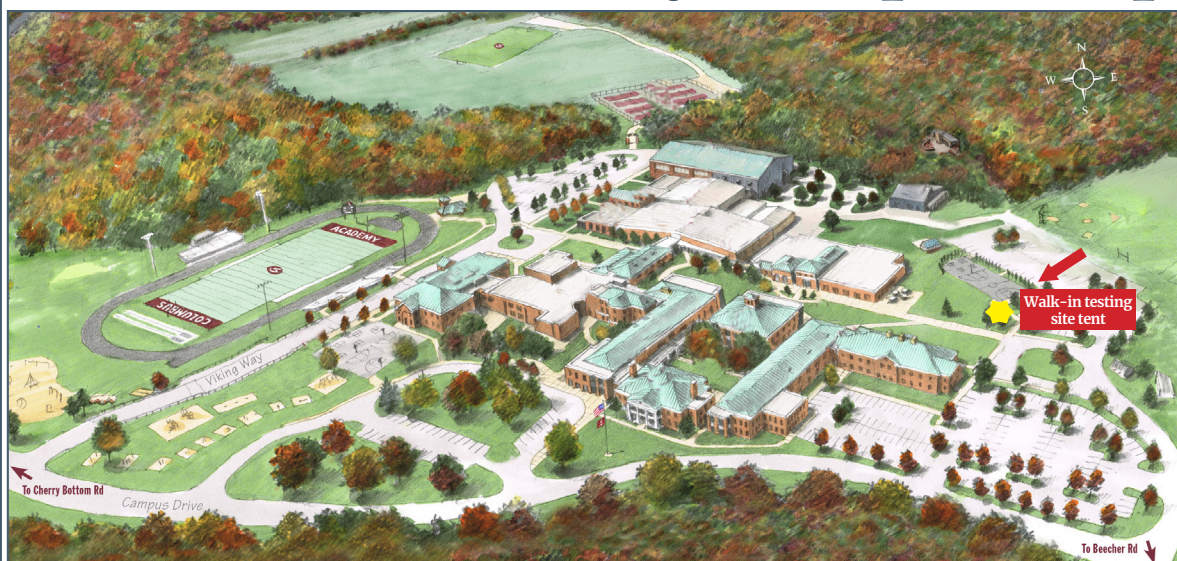
**COVID-19
Walk-In Testing
*Open to the public***

Saturday, January 30th | 9:00 a.m. – noon

Columbus Academy Campus – Sommer Family Recreation Area

PrimaryOne Health, Franklin County Public Health, Ohio National Guard
and Columbus Academy will conduct COVID-19 PCR nasal swab tests

Columbus Academy Campus Map



Location of the
testing site at
Sommer Family
Recreation Area



**To pre-register text COVID to 614-502-5329 and follow
the prompts sent to you by PrimaryOne Health.**

Bring your insurance card and photo I.D. to the test site | No out-of-pocket costs regardless of ability to pay

Lower School Counseling Update

Shaun Ditty
Lower School Counselor

As we all begin to settle into a new year, many find themselves (myself included) excited for what 2021 may bring. A new year can represent the opportunity for fresh starts, new routines and healthier beginnings. However, this year many individuals may have found themselves relieved about 2020 being over. I will admit that I found myself in that very spot, simply excited that the “terrible year” was over and looking forward to just moving on from it as if we can wipe it from our memory or delete it from our story. After careful reflection on this, I would like to implore you to look at 2020 in a different light.

The stories we tell, the reactions we have and the words we choose are some of the biggest ways our children learn from us. Ask yourself this, in five years do you want your children to simply close their eyes and pretend that a difficult experience that just happened to them didn't happen? How we manage disappointment and move through difficult experiences matters, especially when we are doing it in front of our children. Does this mean we pretend everything is okay when it's not? Not at all; our goal should always be to be honest and real with our children. If something is difficult, it is okay to say this is challenging. When something hurts, it's okay to cry. Some of the greatest lessons we will teach children as adults are the ones we often aren't aware we are teaching.

I came across [this article](#) from the parenting section of *The New York Times* and wanted to pass it along. It features a letter written by a 12-year-old girl named Audrey to herself. Audrey's mother encouraged her to write down her feelings surrounding COVID-19 and 2020 in general. Rather than simply complain about a difficult year or gloss over everything as if nothing happened, Audrey chose to write a letter to herself where she not only acknowledged the challenges that 2020 brought but also the lessons she learned from it.

I am a firm believer that most situations have the ability to help us grow and learn from them, and 2020 was not any different. I encourage you to consider doing a similar exercise with your children this month. Ask them about their challenges, what they learned or how they think they have grown over the year. Consider writing it down and making a letter for your family to read together again someday.

[Shaun Ditty](#) | LS Counselor

Coming Soon: Ruling Our eXperiences

Shekyra DeCree
Middle School Counselor

There's a new program coming to the Middle School, and it ROX!

I will be inviting middle school girls to participate in the Ruling Our eXperiences (ROX) empowerment program for girls in the upcoming weeks.

ROX is an evidenced-based program that empowers girls to be confident, embrace leadership and engage in healthy relationships. The program will tackle relevant topics girls face in their daily lives such as body image, peer relationships, confidence, navigating social media and more.

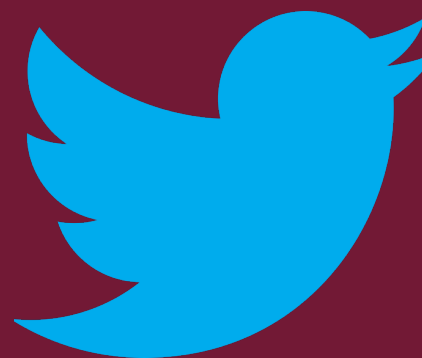


Learn more about ROX and everything it offers by visiting the [ROX website](#) and reading the latest research in the [Girls Index Impact Report](#) conducted by ROX founder Dr. Lisa Hinkleman and researcher Dr. Sibyl West. More information about this empowering program will be coming soon so stay tuned!

[Shekyra DeCree](#) | MS Counselor

Follow us on Twitter
@Vikes_Support
twitter.com/Vikes_Support

We provide links to helpful articles, publications and organizations related to school-age childrens' mental, emotional and physical health.



Middle School Counseling Update

Shekyra DeCree
Middle School Counselor

Many variables may impact your children's learning experiences in our Middle School. Developmentally, their pre-adolescent and adolescent brains are evolving in ways that influence their organization skills, ability to make decisions, increase efficiency and other changes. These formative years of brain development will also play a significant role in their learning experiences at school.

During this time, it is not uncommon for parents to question whether their children's learning style are being adequately accommodated in their classroom environments. Parents may also have concerns regarding notable challenges their children may experience in understanding what they are learning in their courses.

Our Child Study Team's mission is to help parents navigate ways of promoting the best learning experience possible while accommodating their children's unique learning styles and educational needs. In addition to myself, our Middle School's Child Study Team consists of [Carolyn O'Brien](#) (learning styles specialist) and [Tamarah Davis](#) (reading specialist).

Parents are encouraged to initiate the process by contacting me to discuss specific concerns about their children's learning experiences. A plan of action will be developed, which may include seeking psychoeducational testing, classroom observations conducted by the Child Study Team and reviewing psychoeducational test results.

The Child Study Team can provide you with a comprehensive list of highly recommended psychoeducational testing providers in the Central Ohio area and will develop appropriate learning accommodations for your children based on testing and observations. Students are also encouraged to meet with me and the Child Study Team to advocate for their learning needs. The Child Study Team aims to partner with every family that has questions, concerns or needs related to seeking support services and learning accommodations in the Middle School.

Please help us eliminate the stigma of receiving support services. We all learn differently. There are both beauty and positivity in the diverse ways that we learn. Encourage your children not to be ashamed of their learning differences; celebrate them by engaging in self-discovery and becoming acquainted with their learning styles. Also, focus on your children's strengths and use language that avoids negative labeling. For example, instead of focusing on their learning disabilities, reframe conversations by celebrating how they learn differently. [Here's an article](#) that provides additional insight into this concept.

For more information regarding student support services and accommodations, contact me by phone (614-509-2677) or email (decrees@columbusacademy.org).

[Shekyra DeCree](#) | MS Counselor

The Adolescent Brain

Ann McCabe
Health & Wellness Specialist

In eighth grade health and wellness class, our curriculum theme is the adolescent brain. We start with lessons about basic neuroscience: the mid and lower brains develop early and are responsible for basic survival functions and immediate reactions that include fear, emotional reactivity and aggressive behavior. The upper brain is the area of the brain that controls reasoning and helps us think before we act. This area, the prefrontal cortex, develops later and continues to change and mature well into adulthood.

We use neuroscience as a basis for practicing and developing self-control skills like mindfulness and discuss how developing habits like time management and self control now will grow strong connections in their prefrontal cortex that will benefit them for life. I remind students that just because their prefrontal cortexes are still developing does not mean they are off the hook for poor decisions. When I teach about puberty to sixth-graders, I tell them puberty makes them smarter. "Puberty and adolescence are not just a time for changes related to the reproductive system," I explain, "it also is a huge time of change for the brain. This brain growth provides amazing potential for positive outcomes like learning, good habits and self control. These experiences and behaviors then influence the way your brain develops and functions: it's a self-reinforcing cycle. Harness the power of puberty!"

Students are interested to learn that the restructuring in the brain during teenage years causes teenagers to be more likely to care what peers think, take risks, seek out new experiences or feel like everyone is always looking at them. The last one is called "the spotlight effect," the phenomenon in which people tend to believe they are being noticed more than they really are. I ask students: "Do you ever feel like everyone is looking at you, like you are on a stage?" They perk up, look earnestly at me and nod. I think it is a relief to find out they are not alone, that everyone really is not looking at them all the time, and that these changes and feelings they are experiencing can be understood and explained through the lens of biology. Armed with this new knowledge, they are better able to understand and manage their thoughts, feelings and behavior.

One expert who helps translate some of these changes in the teenage brain into practical parenting strategies and advice for teens is [Dr. Lisa Damour](#). You might have heard of her books... she wrote [Untangled: Guiding Teenage Girls Through the Seven Transitions Into Adulthood](#) and [Under Pressure: Confronting the Epidemic of Stress and Anxiety in Girls](#). You might also have seen her monthly [Adolescence column](#) for *The New York Times*. One of my favorite columns she wrote was "[Dear Teenagers, Here's How to Protect Your Emotional Well-Being](#)," which provided guidance for teenagers on caring for their emotional and mental health during the turmoil of the pandemic. She also has a [podcast](#) called "[Ask Lisa: the Psychology of Parenting](#)" that covers topics like: How will the pandemic affect my child long term? Can online socializing go too far? How do I get my kid to open up? How do I hit the reset button for 2021?

PODCAST EPISODE #21

Ask Lisa



how do i hit the reset
button for 2021?

As always, feel free to email me at mccabea@columbusacademy.org with questions about the health curriculum or to let me know what parenting health and wellness topics/resources would be helpful in future newsletters.

[Ann McCabe](#) | Health & Wellness Specialist

The Stand Project

The information below was provided by
The Stand Project, a great local resource.

The Stand Project is a community coalition committed to impacting youth substance misuse and standing by families in finding help. Learn more by visiting TheStandProject.org.

Stay informed by following The Stand Project on [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#) or [subscribing to our monthly newsletter](#).



Street Smart | SAVE THE DATE

March 2nd | 6:00–9:00 p.m. | Event Details TBD

Parents will be given a wealth of drug information and learn tips for recognizing use and abuse in adolescents. The program includes information about alcohol, marijuana, huffing, heroin, prescription medications, cocaine, mushrooms, methamphetamines and LSD just to name a few. Street Smart is a collaborative effort between D.A.R.E. and narcotics officers with the Franklin County Sheriff's Office.

Substance Use + Mental Health in Teens | Guide to Co-Occurring Disorders

We know the combination of substance use and mental health disorders can create a challenging situation. This guide from the Child Mind Institute, [Substance Use + Mental Health in Teens & Young Adults: Your Guide to Recognizing & Addressing Co-occurring Disorders](#), gives parents and caregivers useful information, insights and resources that can help make this journey easier and help you get quality care for your child.

PAX Tools for School@Home | Virtual Workshop

[PAX Tools](#) is a collection of evidence-based, trauma-informed strategies to improve cooperation and self regulation with youth. PAX Tools strategies draw on decades of science to support parents, youth workers and other caring adults to create a nurturing environment and help kids thrive! [Click HERE](#) to register for one of the upcoming workshop dates.

How to Talk About Suicide | Guide for Parents and Caregivers

Although it is a difficult conversation to have with your kids, research shows that bringing up the subject of suicide does not put the thought into your child's head. In fact, it helps to open the door with them and [create a safe space for them](#) to release their burdens, lessening their risk of making the attempt. Doctors say it is important to approach the subject differently depending on the child's age. Here are some tips from parenting experts as to how you can [approach the subject for different age groups](#).

Information sourced from The Stand Project.

Upper School Counseling Update

Suzanne Ritter, Ph.D.
Upper School Psychologist

Welcome back to a new year and to a new semester for your students! Although we were really hoping for some calmer and brighter times in 2021, it looks like this year is still going to be an interesting one, with some of the challenges from last year rearing their ugly head. With the pandemic still very much a part of our lives, and the unrest in the country continuing, parents and students may still be very much on the edge. It is more important than ever that we take care of ourselves, our children and each other.

As parents, our children look to us to set the tone and often steer the conversation around these challenges. I recommend listening to [this short podcast](#) by Dr. Rachel Busman, senior director of the Anxiety Disorders Center and director of the Selective Mutism Service at the Child Mind Institute, as she discusses strategies for helping parents when they are discussing their difficult emotions about what is happening in their lives and in the world around them. She recommends that parents set the tone by remaining calm and validating whatever it is they are feeling so that they will feel safe sharing their emotions.

She offers signs and symptoms that may indicate a child or adolescent needs professional guidance and intervention to further manage their emotions. In younger children, this could be physical complaints such as stomach aches or sleep issues. For older children, increased withdrawal, overwhelming sadness, anxiety and unusual loss of motivation may be signs. Finally, she has recommendations for parents about how to talk to your kids about these current events.

In the Upper School, we continue to find ways to include flourishing activities into our daily routine. More than half of our students have now taken the Values in Action (VIA) Character Strengths Survey to learn more about their character strengths. These were developed by psychology researchers Chris Peterson and Martin Seligman after working with a team of psychologists and philosophers to identify a list of virtues and character strengths that have been valued throughout history, cultures and religion. They developed a comprehensive list of universal virtues and character strengths and named this the VIA Character Classification of Character Strengths.

VIA is important to understand, as the survey asked for actions and strengths that we are currently using... so they are not what we are, but what we do! Some character strengths come naturally to us, and some can be developed through time and practice. All 24 strengths exist to some capacity in all of us, and we will continue to explore them with our students throughout the year using their signature strengths (top ones) to help support them when they face challenges and obstacles while also developing ones that do not come as easily to them. [Click here for more information about the VIA Character Strengths Survey](#). Try taking the free survey yourself and comparing it with your child's results. You can even help them "strength spot" as a way of helping them recognize what's "right" with them!

[Suzanne Ritter, Ph.D.](#) | US Psychologist