



April 10, 2020

Dear Middle School Families,

Having completed our second week of online learning, hopefully you are seeing a routine develop for your children. The middle school schedule affords our kids the time to work independently and to engage in “live” classroom sessions with teachers and classmates throughout the week. By design, there are days when the time they spend doing either will vary, therefore giving them flexibility to manage their workloads.

Our students have proven they are able to organize their time responsibly, and I commend them on how they have gone about their work in the last two weeks. I would ask that you remind your children to keep their video cameras on throughout their class sessions and not to use their phones during class. Teachers will give them permission to leave class for a moment if they need to. And if you are nervous about how much time your children are spending in front of screens, [this article](#) includes some thoughts that you may find informative.

Thank you for your feedback through our parent surveys. This letter touches on some of the thoughts you shared. Please continue to reach out to me with your perspective so that we can continue to make the appropriate adjustments.

Fourth-Quarter Grading

Students in our Middle School will receive letter grades in all of their classes for the fourth quarter. With three out of four quarters completed prior to online learning, we feel we can in good conscience provide students with a grade that accurately indicates their ability. Skill acquisition is the foundation for middle school education, and the content of the curriculum is an avenue to teach those skills. Being flexible with the amount of content covered in classes, with few exceptions, is characteristic of the middle school program. Therefore, grading will reflect our students’ preparedness for next year, whether they are advancing to Upper School or moving into seventh or eighth grades. As usual, types of assessments in the fourth quarter will be determined by the teacher, with adjustments made to account for the shift to online learning. Teachers, as they have done before, will use online tools to give quizzes and tests in a secure way. Accordingly, final examinations will not be administered this spring. We feel exams and, more importantly, the preparation for exams will be affected to a significant degree without teachers and students being able to meet at school.

Special Holidays

Beginning this week and throughout April, many families in our community will celebrate significant holidays. Passover (April 8-16), Good Friday (April 10), Easter (April 12) and Ramadan (April 23-May24) mark some of the holiest times of the year in Judaism, Christianity, Catholicism and Islam. Puthandu (April 14) marks the New Year for Tamil-speaking people from South Asia and is celebrated by many around the world, including families in our school community. For those who are celebrating, it will likely be very different during this time when people cannot gather with loved ones or at places of worship. The school recognizes this may be difficult for families and want to wish you the best as you celebrate however you are able this year. Your families are in our thoughts.

Transition Meetings

The grade-level transition meetings will still take place for parents. Grade team leaders are thinking about the format of those meetings and the methods we will use to share and collect information. This includes the upper school transition meetings for eighth grade students and parents. Once the date for the upper school transition meeting is set, eighth grade parents will be notified.

Other Events

- We are combining the Arbor and Arts Day celebrations with plans to reschedule to late April.
- Plans for a virtual Jack White Memorial Track Meet (scheduled for May 7) are being discussed.
- Advisor conferences will still take place on May 8 in a virtual format. More information will come directly from advisors later this month.

Themed Dress Week/Spirit Week

Students are encouraged to participate next week in a themed dress week. The days and corresponding themes are below:

Monday 4/13: **Crazy Hat or Wacky Hair Day**

Tuesday 4/14: **Favorite Book or Movie Character Day**

Wednesday 4/15: **Favorite Hobby or Sports Team Jersey Day**

Thursday 4/16: **PJ Day** (celebrating National Pajamas Day)

Friday 4/17: **Mixed-Up/Mismatched Outfit Day**

As Melissa wrote in [her letter](#) yesterday, we await direction from the Governor with respect to the future schedule. Once we are clear on a timeline, I will be in touch about plans and arrangements for activities to bring this school year to a close. In the meantime, our energy is focused on developing the best school experience possible under the circumstances. On behalf of our faculty, thank you and please enjoy your weekend!

Shaka Arnold
Head Of Middle School