

Dear Oakwood Community,

Welcome to the Middle School! We love to take time to watch the seasons change and see the flowers bloom, but it is also a busy time in Middle School. Not only do we get to look back over the years and see how much our students have grown, both intellectually and socially, but we also start thinking about the future school year and the many transitions that it holds.

Transitions, particularly the transition to Middle School, are very important life events because they involve change. The transition to Middle School is quite important because of the large amount of social, emotional, neurological, and cognitive growth that occurs between 4th and 7th grade - do we dare say it? - Puberty. Young adolescents are not simply older elementary students nor are they younger high school students; they are in a dramatically different stage in their life that requires a unique approach to education. The Middle School provides a small learning community, where we allow our students to be heard, to think for themselves, and to learn the self-management skills that will be necessary to cope with Upper School. Our program allows our students to thrive academically, but we are also able to facilitate the social and emotional growth of our students. Pre-teens and teenagers may make you want to pull out your hair at home, but just know that is completely normal, and we are here to help with those changes!

After 3rd grade, we take special care to help our students (and their parents) transition to Middle School. In April, 3rd grade students get to spend the morning visiting our classes and learning more about how the Middle School works during our annual Transition Day. For some students, they get to hear that their older siblings weren't making some of this stuff up, while others get to be the first to experience this transition in their family and share all the juicy details at home. We also make sure to reach out to our students' parents to help alleviate potential anxieties at home. We host a Technology Transition Night for rising 4th grade parents so they can learn more about our iPad program in the Middle School. At the end of the summer, we have planned a family event to share more about the Middle School with rising 4th grade students and their parents. And, finally, we host Curriculum Night in the fall so our teachers can share specifically what the curriculum in their classes entails.

The initial transition to Middle School is one that should be done mindfully. Probably the biggest change is the start of specialized teachers in discrete content areas. This is where the Lower Middle School team of teachers comes into play. The 4th and 5th grade core teachers meet weekly to discuss our students, our classes, and events in the Middle School, so we can best support our students and their families. We understand that this is a big change, and we are here to hold your hand each step of the way!

After 5th grade, our Lower Middle School students cross the rotunda to the Upper Middle School. They have been prepared for this transition through a close working relationship between subject area teachers in the Lower and Upper Middle School and through the students' ability to take part in Middle School-wide activities for two years, including student government, weekly morning meetings, service activities, academic competitions, and more. As Division Coordinators, we make ourselves available to meet together with parents who might have questions about what this minor, yet still equally important and exciting, rite of passage includes.

As the oldest students in the Middle School, our 7th graders are well prepared for the transition to Upper School as they have been held to high expectations by their teachers throughout the year. In addition to demonstrating their maturity in everyday situations, students in 7th grade enjoy cross-divisional exchanges throughout the year within content disciplines, athletics, academics and social areas. A few of these opportunities include Girl Talk, SGA coordination of school wide events, and participation on numerous athletic and academic competition teams. In addition, students participate in a transition day lunch session in April where the current 8th graders share the things they wish they had known before going to Upper School. This open forum, set in the US student commons, helps 7th graders become comfortable with the transition and creates excitement for the future.

One of the wonderful things about Oakwood is the fact that as students move up to a new Division, stress and adjustment is minimized since they are already familiar with many of the faculty and functions of Oakwood. Teachers in all divisions work together to make these transitions as smooth as possible, not only at the end of each school year, but throughout the year. Working with students across and within divisions allows our students to become familiar with other fabulous teachers that Oakwood has to offer. Our 5th graders are matched with Kindergarten H.U.G.S. partners each year. Fourth and seventh grade students participate in B.U.D.S. and work collaboratively with both the fourth grade and seventh grade advisors. Lower School students visit science classes to interact with our Middle School students and learn about the projects they created. The History Department has hosted Cultural Connection talks in the Middle School that are open to all fourth through seventh grade students to learn together about cultures around the world. Math Club travels to competitions together with students from both the Middle School and Upper School Divisions. Our school Spelling Bee even allows our students to compete against each other in grades 4 through 8. Our annual Variety Show is open to students in all Divisions and all age levels are represented each year. Very rarely does a student transition from one division and not know at least one familiar face in the faculty in the next division! It is our plan that you, as parents, can say the same!

As you explore the transition into Middle School please feel free to reach out to one of us or your child's advisory teacher. We are committed to a successful partnership with you in the academic, social and physical development of your child.

Sincerely,

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