

MIDDLE SCHOOL MODEL

WHY A MIDDLE SCHOOL MODEL?

A Middle School Model will give our 6th through 8th graders the opportunity to learn in a challenging and rewarding environment. They will be able to take limited control of their coursework, while still taking required courses that meet or exceed local and state standards.

The Middle School concept has been put into place at other Diocesan elementary schools with much success. It is because of this success that we feel a move in this direction is one that will serve our students well, not only while they are attending St. Timothy, but also when they enter high school and beyond.

WHAT WILL BE THE SAME AS THE JUNIOR HIGH CONCEPT WE HAVE BEEN USING?

The basic structure will remain the same. There will be two 6th grade homerooms, two 7th grade homerooms, and two 8th grade homerooms. For the most part, each homeroom teacher will have a curriculum area of concentration. Students will have the appropriate number of minutes in each core subject (Science, Social Studies, Literature, Math, Spanish, Language Arts and Religion). They will have Science, Social Studies, Literature, and Math, 4 or 5 days a week depending on whether it falls in a 55 minute period or a 45 minute period. Students will have the other subjects 2 or 3 times a week, depending upon the Diocesan guidelines. They will also have two 45-minute PE periods a week. Students will begin and end each day with their homeroom teacher. Parents can rely on the homeroom teacher for general school information as they have in the past.

WHAT WILL BE DIFFERENT FROM THE JUNIOR HIGH CONCEPT WE HAVE BEEN USING?

The biggest differences are in the specials and in our ability to offer advanced classes in some curricula areas. In the Middle School what we currently call 'specials' will now be referred to as 'electives.' Students will be able to make some choices in the classes that they take.

Students in 6th grade will have their 'electives' at the end of the day. Instead of having art, computer, library etc., once a week all year, students will be able to choose an elective that will meet 4 times a week for 45 minutes, and it will last for either half a quarter or the entire quarter, depending upon the elective.

Students in 7th and 8th grade will have their 'electives' immediately after lunch. Like the 6th grade, they will have the opportunity to choose an elective that will meet 4 times a week for 45 minutes, and it will last for either half a quarter or the entire quarter, depending upon the elective. Since their electives take place at the same time, 7th and 8th graders may be mixed in electives.

Some electives will be mandatory but may be taken in any quarter. These would include art in some form, computer in some form, and health (half a quarter). Electives would include: astronomy, robotics, drama, and study skills. These are only a few examples. We are working on a more comprehensive list that will be available before the end of the school year. At that time we will clarify: which electives will be required and the length of each (half or full quarter); provide a brief summary of the material that will be covered; and request students to make some choices by a specific date. (Obviously, meeting the student requests and scheduling will be time consuming.)

As a school community, we have been very good at recognizing and meeting the needs of students who require assistance. For some time, we have been able to offer a smaller math class on grade level for students in 7th and 8th grades who would benefit from that smaller environment. The Middle School Model will continue to be a place where these needs will be met.

We have also been able to offer pre-algebra and algebra to students who show the potential for being able to handle a more challenging class in Math. The Middle School Model enables us to gradually expand our ability to offer more advanced classes.

As you may be aware, a large percentage of Fairfax County students take algebra in eighth grade. Some students take algebra in 7th grade and geometry in 8th. Any student wishing to attend Thomas Jefferson High School must have completed geometry. We have had students attend Thomas Jefferson and wish our students to continue to have that opportunity or the opportunity of taking an honors or advanced class in high school. As we move forward, we would hope to offer those advanced classes since this model gives us a larger bank of faculty and talent from which to pull. Either as a class or as an elective, we hope eventually to offer additional challenging classes in science, social studies and literature.

For next year our plan is as follows:

6A: Mrs. Kurtis: Social Studies (6th), Language Arts (6th-7th), Religion (7th)
Drama elective (7th-8th), including Shakespeare

6B: Mr. Raveia: Math (6th-8th)
Astronomy elective, Social Studies elective

7A: Mrs. Young: Science (6th-8th)

7B: Mrs. Gott: Spanish (6th-8th)

8A: Mrs. Raveia: Literature (6th-8th)

8B: Mrs. Cowan: Social Studies (7th-8th), Language Arts (8th)
Religion (8th)

Mrs. Ostrander will teach the smaller Math class (7th-8th).

Mrs. Toohey will teach Algebra, giving Mr. Raveia the opportunity to offer some electives.

Mrs. Kobyra will teach 6th grade Religion, giving Mrs. Kurtis the opportunity to offer some electives.

The presence of both Mrs. Toohey and Mrs. Kobyra on a regular basis in the Middle School offers an additional advantage to students, parents, and staff alike. They will be a part of the Middle School team and as such will have regular interaction with all the students. This helps to maintain the kind of behavior and respectful attitude that we all hope to see in our student role models. Expect to see teacher web pages and grading policies, etc., from both Mrs. Kobyra and Mrs. Toohey at the start of the school year. They look forward to returning, if only on a limited basis, to the classroom!

WHAT ARE ADVISORIES AND WHO IS INVOLVED?

Advisories are smaller groups of students (10-13) who will meet once a week (before Mass) with a member of the staff. The staff members who will be assigned advisories include the 6th-8th grade homeroom teachers, the specials teachers (art, computer, library, PE) and 2 resource teachers. In this case, the 6th-8th graders will be mixed with an equal representation from each grade level. Students assigned to an advisory will have that faculty advisor throughout their time in Middle School. Each advisory will be called a 'house'. Each house will have a patron saint, a motto, and a service focus. Following their weekly gathering, they will attend our school Mass (as usual) but will sit together so that they grow in the sense of being joined in faith and in prayerful responsibility to one another.

We have several goals for the 'houses':

- Students will have a faculty member who follows them through Middle School, both developing a rapport with them and helping them to be successful both academically and socially.

- Students will have an opportunity, in a smaller group setting, to begin to move from faith learned to faith lived.
- 8th grade students will have an opportunity to mentor the leadership roles that they should be living out to 'schoolmates' with whom they have learned about leadership.

House activities will be a combination of serious and fun-filled, academic and social, inter-house competitive and intra-house united.

SOME OF THE QUESTIONS THAT ARE 'OUT THERE'.

Will there be a formal recess?

No, there will be no formal recess. However, the students will have two 45-minute PE periods each week. There is also a possibility of a 'sports' elective. However, that has not been established at the present time.

Will 6th grade have to wear the Jr. High uniform?

Not initially. For the coming school year 6th grade students may wear the current K-6th grade uniform. In subsequent years, the 6th grade will wear the current Jr. high uniform. Some of the things that the 6th grade will do or not do will be different. For example, they will not have electives with the 7th and 8th grade. We are aware of the developmental differences between the 6th and 8th graders and are trying to be sensitive to that. However they will now be part of the 'Middle School' family and should wear the same attire.

Was this change prompted by a budget problem?

Absolutely not! In fact, enrollment for next year is strong, higher than this year. Our budget for the 2009-2010 school year was determined in its draft form back in February. We are financially strong for next year.

Our move to this model has been in the talking and thinking stages for some time. It is the right time to make the move and provide an atmosphere where education is more engaging for the students .