



ST. JOSEPH  
CATHOLIC SCHOOL

# ORIENTATION TO MIDDLE SCHOOL

AN INTRODUCTORY OVERVIEW OF THE MIDDLE SCHOOL YEARS  
2017-2018

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## Welcome to Middle School

We are excited to welcome you to 2017-2018 in the middle school at St. Joseph Catholic School. We hope the summer provided you with many memorable opportunities to spend time with family and friends. It continues to be our honor and privilege to serve you in our learning community that's centered in faith and committed to spiritual, academic, and social growth.

As we enter this new year, perhaps your first in middle school, we are reminded that the beginning of school and the beginning of something new is truly a special time. We are eager to share these materials with you as we continue to partner together to nurture the ongoing development of our students as they inch toward their high school years. It probably doesn't seem like the first day of kindergarten was that long ago, does it?

## How Middle School Will Be Different From Grades K-5

To help you better understand what lies ahead, we thought we would highlight some of the changes students and parents experience as they begin the transition into middle school. Grades 6, 7, & 8 look very different to the student than their first six years of elementary school. The most significant difference is that students move between classes and teachers. Whereas in the past, students had a homeroom teacher who taught the bulk of classes, in middle school, each subject is taught by a different teacher. This will mean a heightened emphasis is placed on personal organization. Students need to learn their schedules and make sure they are where they need to be, when they need to be there. The first few weeks of school are dedicated to assisting the students in this process

Along with that, the students are more personally accountable for their homework and assignments. Students will need to write their assignments down in their planners in each class and then make sure when they get back to their homeroom and lockers at the end of the day to pack up all the books and materials needed for that evening's work. This process takes a little getting used to and can seem especially daunting to some, but, with help and guidance from their teachers and parents, students are able to learn the ropes pretty quickly.

Another skill the students need to develop is a new level of self-advocacy. When students are absent from school, it will be up to them to seek out the missed assignments from their classes. There are a number of ways this can be accomplished from checking *Edmodo* or *Power School* (more on that later), to asking peers or talking with their teachers. Each class is a little different, and each teacher's expectations on homework and assignments vary a bit, so it will be up to the student to develop a method for tracking their assignments and projects that works effectively.

Role modeling for the younger students at the school is something that is expected of all middle school students. Since the older students all wear “khaki and blue” they are very visible to the younger students and an emphasis is placed upon them to be good role models. In practice, this means demonstrating respect, following school-wide rules, responding aloud to the prayers at Mass, serving the community and, as we reflect on the school year’s theme, “Do Small Things with Great Love”.

### **Importance of Self-Advocacy**

As previously mentioned, our middle school students are encouraged to advocate for themselves. Having the ability to understand strengths and needs, identify personal goals, accept responsibility, and communicate needs to adults will assist students in being prepared for future grades, high school, and their lives beyond.

Parents can help their children develop self-advocacy skills by allowing them to experience the consequences of both success and failure. Students who take the initiative to monitor their own grades and approach teachers when they have questions are acquiring the tools necessary for future success.

Our goal is that all students will graduate from St. Joseph Catholic School with the knowledge required to problem-solve and the self-determination required to make responsible decisions.

### **Homework Expectations**

Homework at St. Joseph Catholic School is important for gaining practice with the skills learned at school and for building student responsibility. In the middle school years, it will be common for students to have approximately 20 minutes of homework for each class they’re taking. This means, for some students, that they may end up with between one and two hours of homework each evening. We know that some students complete homework faster, and some slower. If you begin to see that the homework is routinely taking more than two hours to complete, we ask the student to be in touch with the teacher whose class is requiring thirty minutes or more. The teacher will talk with the student and see if there are some suggestions that can be shared to help your child. If parents notice that the struggle continues, please check with the teachers. There are often some quick fixes to helping students work more quickly and organize themselves so the workload doesn’t get out of hand. Sometimes we’ll need to discuss a more detailed approach to helping with the workload. On any given evening, if a student has spent more than 2.5 hours on homework, we ask our students to send a message to the teachers to let them know that they have not been able to complete the work for that evening. We will work to support the student with suggestions when we’re together at school.

The Middle School teachers of St. Joseph Catholic School will follow the same homework completion and submission expectations. They are as follows:

- All homework is due on the assigned day. For full credit, homework must be turned in when the teacher asks for it. If a student does not have it with him/her, it is late. If a

student turns it in later that same day, it is still considered late. Exceptions may be made for students receiving learning accommodations.

- Individual teachers will set guidelines for turning in late homework. Each teacher will discuss their guidelines when deemed appropriate for their class. In order to help our students turn in all assignments, study time has been built into all Middle School schedules. Work Study is a time for students to study and check in with teachers regarding late or absent work and current assignments.
- If a student is absent, additional time will be given to make up work assigned during the absence. Each teacher will communicate with the student dates for turning in absent work specific to that student.
- Any homework, test, or project that the student knew about before the absence is due at the teacher's discretion upon the student's return.
- The student should confirm the due date with the teacher assigning homework.
- Communication with teachers is important to successfully complete absent work.
- *Edmodo* is available to assist students with homework assignments and activities. Please check this site daily for homework.

If students are going on a planned vacation or traveling out of area and will be absent, it's not our practice at St. Joseph for teachers to gather or hand out work prior to the time away. Since the pace of study is in response to how quickly students grasp the concepts and skills, it's often a challenge for teachers to accurately prepare for the work the students might miss. Instead teachers will collect assignments during the student's absence. While away, students can also stay up to speed with the assignments that are being given by accessing their *Edmodo* accounts. If they take their books and materials with them while they travel, they should be able to do some work as they go by learning of details from *Edmodo*. While homework can be made up for these absences, there is no replacement for actual teaching of concepts in class. For this reason, excessive absences for reasons other than illness may end up being reflected in a student's learning and grades.

### **Grading & Academic Honors**

Our students in the middle school are graded on an A-F scale, with corresponding percentages listed below.

97 - 100 = A+  
94 - 96.9 = A  
90 - 93.9 = A-  
87 - 89.9 = B+  
84 - 86.9 = B  
80 - 83.9 = B-  
77 - 79.9 = C+  
74 - 76.9 = C  
70 - 73.9 = C-  
67 - 69.9 = D+  
64 - 66.9 = D  
60 - 63.9 = D-

Beginning in Grade 5, all classes assigned a grade will be included in the Grade Point Average (GPA). In computing GPA, some classes (PE/Health, Art, Technology, and Spanish) are combined into a single grade and added to the grades given for Reading, Religion, English, Science, Math, and Social Studies. All grades below 60% are failing grades.

#### *Academic Honor Roll*

Students in Grades 6-8 who achieve a GPA of 94% or higher will receive First Honors and students in Grades 6-8 who achieve a GPA of 90-93.99% will receive Second Honors for that trimester.

#### *Valedictorian and Salutatorian*

The student selected as the 8th grade valedictorian must meet the following criteria:

- She/he has the highest cumulative grade point average as calculated from the sixth grade through the second trimester of eighth grade.
- She/he has attended St. Joseph Catholic School for the three full years of grades 6-8.

The student selected as the 8th grade salutatorian must meet the following criteria:

- She/he will have the second highest grade point average as calculated from the sixth grade through the second trimester of eighth grade.
- She/he has attended St. Joseph Catholic School for the three full years of grades 6-8.

The valedictorian and salutatorian both speak at graduation. Students who have an overall GPA of 94% or higher in grades 6 through the second trimester of 8th grade will be awarded gold honor cords to wear at graduation.

#### **Attendance**

Due to the way middle school works, we need to emphasize the importance of regular attendance and timely arrival each day. Since classes last between 40 and 50 minutes, even missing a few minutes of class can have a significant impact on student learning for a given day. Not only does the student who is arriving late miss learning experiences that are not able to be recreated, but late arrivals also can create distractions or interruptions for other students. We ask for your support in making sure that your child arrives on time and is regularly present to ensure their success and the success of those around them.

#### **Student Planners**

The student planner is an important tool for middle school students. Beginning in the third grade, students learned to use a planner to keep track of important assignments and due dates. In middle school, this tool becomes increasingly important as the student is now solely responsible for deciding what books and materials they need to take home to complete their evening assignments. The planner is divided by weeks with large blocks for each subject to keep track of homework and due dates. Students are expected to write their homework in the correct section at the end of each class. Homework will be written on the board and time will

be given at the end of each class for students to copy the homework into their planners. Students carry their planners with them throughout the day and then are expected to refer to them in the afternoons before packing for dismissal.

### **Edmodo**

One of the tools introduced and used in middle school is a website called *Edmodo*. This site is not meant to replace the student planner. Rather it is used as an additional organizational tool to keep everyone – teachers, students, and parents – on the same page. While the planner information will always take priority, *Edmodo* is a universal spot for students to clarify instructions for assignments, projects, due dates, time limits, and announcements. Though we discourage daily homework and assignment checking from being a parent responsibility (our goal is for students to be accountable and to become self-advocates), we want you to know that it is a nice back-up tool for students and for parents if their children are struggling with keeping up with the assignments from the different classes.

### **Edmodo Parent Account**

While our main form of communication with parents will be via e-mail, some of our parents like make their own *Edmodo* account to see a more day-to-day snapshot of their child's life at school. If this is something you are interested in, the first thing you need to do is have your child log in to their account and look to the bottom left corner.

From here, you have two options. You can either directly invite yourself by entering your e-mail and wait for instructions or you can copy down their individual code. After obtaining their code, you will have to log out of the account and go to the *Edmodo* homepage and select, "I'm a parent." Here you will be prompted to enter the parent code as well as your personal information to create your account. Once you have pressed the "Sign Up" button, you should see your account which mirrors the teacher messages your child is receiving.

If you have any questions or would like help setting up your parent account, please do not hesitate to e-mail Ms. Cestnik, technology teacher, at [amandac@stjoevanschool.org](mailto:amandac@stjoevanschool.org).

### **PowerSchool**

*PowerSchool* is a tool for teachers to share information about graded assignments, projects, tests, and quizzes, students to stay up to date with their progress, and for parents to monitor how their students are doing and if they're completing their homework and classwork. At its simplest, *PowerSchool* gives a snapshot of the most current grade a student is earning in all of their subjects. Diving deeper, students and parents can use their account to: see the grade earned for each individual assignment, generate a list of any missing work, and see written teacher comments (ex: the work was completed on time, but a portion was incomplete or the assignment was turned in late, or the student did an exceptional job on the assignment). At the beginning of the school year, students will discuss at school how to use *PowerSchool* to make sure they know what they are looking for as they browse. Throughout the year, students are encouraged to check *PowerSchool* regularly in order to take ownership for their work.

While our students are encouraged to take the lead on many facets of their education, as parents, we appreciate your continued support and guidance at home. Like students, parents are able to log into their student's account at any time. The information on both accounts is very similar; parents, however, have the ability to set up and customize an email forwarding option with their account. Grades and missing work can be delivered to your inbox as frequently as you like if that is an easier way for you to check. No matter your preference for viewing grades, as you monitor, if worrisome trends start to appear, please feel free to reach out to your child's teacher so we can come up with a plan to address the concern. New families will receive *PowerSchool* login information for both student and parent accounts within the first three weeks of the school year.

Our teachers value this tool and will try our best to update *PowerSchool* in a timely manner to help keep everyone in the loop. Please keep in mind, though, that grades like homework assignments and daily participation can be entered faster than essays, tests, and projects, as these larger items take longer to evaluate. In this case, teachers will make use of the green check icon to communicate the assignment has been accounted for and we are in the process of grading it.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask. If it is a technical question, Laura Parlette, our IT director, oversees our school *PowerSchool* account and can help troubleshoot obstacles. She can be reached at [laurap@stjoevanschool.org](mailto:laurap@stjoevanschool.org). If you have general questions or would like to sit down with someone to learn how to use *PowerSchool*, let a teacher know and we will arrange a meeting with you as soon as possible.

### **Support for Students Struggling With Transition**

As previously shared, students in middle school will be faced with many different transitions throughout the day. Some students are very organized and have little trouble moving from room to room or building to building, while others struggle a bit more. Struggles with transitions are not uncommon and is part of the middle school learning process. However, the staff would like to make this as painless as possible. During the first week of school, we put a great deal of emphasis on organizing their belongings such as binders, pencil pouches, and lockers to make moving from room to room more efficient. In addition, every student is given a copy of their schedule for their binder so they can refer to it any time. We spend time reviewing the schedule and highlighting any areas we see as challenging. As we discuss the schedule, we help the students decide when they will be able to visit their lockers next and plan what materials they need for the morning, mid-day, and afternoon transition times.

How can parents help at home? Talk with your student about what type of organizational system will work best. Not every student can use a large zip binder. Some need an accordion file or a simple three ring binder without all the zippers and pockets. A sturdy pencil pouch is also extremely important. Students are expected to carry many supplies with them and a pencil pouch makes this much easier.

If parents see that their child is struggling with the transition to middle school and keeping up with the pace of class and work, we ask them to please contact their child's homeroom teacher to discuss. We'd like to be as supportive and collaborative as possible.

### **Behavior & Detention**

In the middle school, we ask our students to be leaders for our school community when it comes to showing appropriate behavior. A middle school student who does not meet behavior expectations, as outlined in the Parent & Student Handbook, may face a variety of consequences that are appropriate for the specific infraction. In some instances, they may be assigned to after school Thursday detention. Our behavior expectations outlined in the handbook are as follows:

1. Display an attitude of love and concern for others.
2. Show respect for those in authority.
3. Follow directions obediently and respectfully.
4. Use language becoming of a Christian who respects others.
5. Display playground courtesy at all times.
6. Tell the truth.
7. Maintain acceptable classroom behaviors.
8. Show reverence during prayer.
9. Adhere carefully to the dress code.
10. Refrain from chewing gum on school property.
11. Refrain from public displays of affection.
12. Refrain from any act which could result in damage, injury, or disruption of the educational process.
13. Refrain from cell phone use during the school day or dismissal; give the phone to the teacher at the start of the day if you will have it for after school.

Detention will be held on Thursdays after school and monitored by a teacher. Students will be in the assigned classroom by 3:30 pm and remain until 4:00 pm. Students who receive a detention through Tuesday will go to detention on the immediate Thursday. Students who receive a detention on Wednesday or after will attend the detention the following week. Parents will need to make adjustments to after school schedules to facilitate their child's detention.

Detention is not given for late work.

Detention is a reflection time to consider appropriate alternative behaviors.

If a student displays a behavior to warrant detention, the student will take home a Detention Slip to inform the parents. This slip requires a parent signature. If this slip is not returned the following day, the student will receive another detention. If a student does not complete an assigned detention, he/she will earn another.

A student who does not meet behavior expectations may meet with the principal, teacher, and parents to determine a Plan of Action. A student who receives three detentions in an academic year will meet for a Plan of Action.

### **Team Approach to Student Learning & Success**

Success for students relies on strong partnership between school and home. We look forward to partnering with parents throughout the year to best meet the needs of all students. If parents want to discuss their child's progress or connect with a teacher about a challenge their child is experiencing, please be in touch with us at school. You can leave a message during the school day at the front office at (360)696-2586, or reach teachers directly by emailing them at the addresses below.

#### *6th Grade Homeroom*

Sam Cartan – [samc@stjoevanschool.org](mailto:samc@stjoevanschool.org)

#### *7th Grade Homerooms*

Marianna Lee – [mariannal@stjoevanschool.org](mailto:mariannal@stjoevanschool.org)

Quentin Smith – [quentins@stjoevanschool.org](mailto:quentins@stjoevanschool.org)

#### *8th Grade Homerooms*

Jim Barbieri - [jamesb@stjoevanschool.org](mailto:jamesb@stjoevanschool.org)

Debbie Cestnik – [debbiec@stjoevanschool.org](mailto:debbiec@stjoevanschool.org)

#### *Other Middle School Faculty*

Jenn Larkin (Art) - [jenniferl@stjoevanschool.org](mailto:jenniferl@stjoevanschool.org)

Emily Herrmann (Spanish) - [emilyh@stjoevanschool.org](mailto:emilyh@stjoevanschool.org)

Patty Jayne (Health & PE) - [pattyj@stjoevanschool.org](mailto:pattyj@stjoevanschool.org)

Amanda Cestnik (Technology) - [amandac@stjoevanschool.org](mailto:amandac@stjoevanschool.org)

We look forward to having a great year as our students learn and grow with all of our support!

Sincerely,

The Middle School Team