

Dear Middle School Families,

I hope you are finding ways to relax, refresh, and enjoy your children in these last few weeks before school begins.

Here on campus, we've been dreaming and planning for the new school year within the context of our theme: "New spirit...one heart," taken from Ezekiel 36. It speaks so well to who we are: though separated from each other in the summer, we've once again seen the strength of this community's heart in the prayers and active support for Gwen Snead and her family.

Leaning on our theme, we are embracing new opportunities and renewing our commitment to a school culture where each student feels welcomed and is known, valued, challenged, and supported. Our plans also include ways to bolster our communication with you so that we might be more effective partners with you in one heart for your children.

You will find a wealth of information for the start of school on our new [Back to School](#) page on our website, but I also want to highlight some new opportunities and plans.

Faculty Training in Developmental Designs for Middle School

Next week, the middle school faculty, David Perkinson (Head of School), and I will spend four full days training in this nationally known program to help teachers create structures, practices, and responses that are both effective and developmentally responsive for 10 to 14-year-old students. We are grateful for a new approach to improving middle school culture. Not only is DDMS aligned well with our EDS values, but David can attest to its effectiveness from his previous experience with this model. I am eager to be able to share more with you about how DDMS is helping us meet our goals as we are trained and begin implementation in our advisory program.

Renewed Expectations and Support

We aim to regain some ground lost during Covid by raising expectations both academically and behaviorally, with additional support in place in both areas.

Study Skills are critical, and we will address these in 5th and 6th grade using the SOAR Study Skills curriculum, which "teaches the most critical learning, organizing, and communication skills needed to be successful in school, in virtual learning environments, and in the workplace."

Student Support is growing this year. Gilchrist Phillips will continue to provide academic support in an expanded role. We are also thrilled to welcome Alyssa Johnson as our school counselor. Alyssa will work in partnership with teachers and parents to provide social and emotional support for our students so that all are cared for and well served. David will share more details about these new and expanded roles as well as other staffing in an email early next week.

In addition, we have created time during the school day for a “Math/Writing Lab” for support and enrichment in addition to the extra help teachers routinely provide.

Curriculum Reviews are underway in our science, writing, and research curricula, along with the move you already know about to Singapore Math through 6th grade (and in subsequent years to 7th and 8th grade).

Experiences at Flowing Wells will continue as we strengthen our curricular integration. Under the leadership of Ms. Ty Jenkins, we are focused on fostering a foundation of exploration, discovery, and wonder in nature studies that include all disciplines. We look forward to leveraging our access to an 8.5-acre forest grove adjoining our larger 30-acre Flowing Wells Campus to provide meaningful learning experiences and a beautiful space for students to explore, wonder, study, and play.

Uniform and Dress Codes might seem unimportant in the big scheme, but we know that small things can be powerful symbols that help us to the desired outcome. School uniforms promote a sense of community and belonging (think of our athletes who wear their team jerseys on game days) and help students create a mindset for learning. We are ready to reset this year!

With this in mind, we have reviewed our uniform standards and made a few adjustments that we believe will make following the dress code easier. See the EDS Uniform and Dress Code Standards chart on the [Back to School](#) webpage, especially noting items in blue font indicating a change or special emphasis.

Respect for our school community will be emphasized. Along with an appeal to the better natures of our students, we will emphasize simplicity and consistency in expectations for following rules such as dress code, use of cell phones, movement in hallways, behavior during fire drills, and other such matters. Simple and expected consequences for this lower level of misbehavior will reinforce our broader efforts to build towards higher self-regulation and more responsible independence.

New and Renewed Opportunities

Along with the introduction of Developmental Designs for Middle School mentioned above, look for:

Our **Digital citizenship curriculum** continues with #WinAtSocial, an online learning platform from *The Social Institute* to help young people make high-character decisions and safe, healthy choices about technology and social media. We will introduce their robust parent resources this year as well.

Grade-level trips for 6th and 7th grade are back! 7th graders will go to the Green River Preserve in North Carolina the week of September 12, the same week 8th graders are on Outward Bound. The 6th grade will enjoy a trip to an environmental center later in the year.

Spirit Fridays allow us to enjoy wearing EDS spirit wear on top with pants, jeans, skorts, or shorts that follow our revised uniform code for both Spirit Fridays and class days at FWC. These will occur almost every Friday of the year.

Lockers will be assigned and grouped by advisories. (Students may bring a locker shelf or other organizing aids on August 10th if they wish and may personalize the inside of lockers. Magnets should be used to post schedules or other papers; no tape or glue may be used.) Keep in mind, we are not setting up lockers until the first day of school.

Communication

Our goal is for our communication with you to be effective and timely. To that end, we have several paths to help you know what is going on in middle school, in your child's classrooms, and with your child specifically, even as you encourage your child's sense of competence to handle school life and become responsibly independent.

Advisors (like homeroom teachers in lower school, but with a smaller group of students) will continue to be the first line of direct communication with families. Your child's advisor is his or her best advocate and a prime person for you for questions or concerns. Of course, I want to know how I can be helpful to you as well, and you will also receive contact information from all your child's teachers.

The Panther Post will continue to be a source of general announcements, calendar items, alumni news, and photographs of special events at school.

Guardian Summaries are new this year! Each week and for each of your child's classes, Google Classroom will automatically produce and email you summaries of units of study, assignments, and assessments. You will also be alerted if your child has any missing assignments. Along with our regular reporting of grades, these summaries should provide you with what you need to monitor your child. Should you need a more detailed account of grades and assignments, you can log into your child's Google Classroom account to see that information.

You will hear more about what you can expect from each teacher during our reimagined Back-to-School Day on August 9. For information on this day and other important back-to-school information, including August 8 and 9 evening athletic meetings, please visit our [Back to School webpage](#). It's going to be a great year.

I look forward to welcoming everyone back to school as we embrace a new spirit and one heart!

In partnership,

Anne