August 2026

Dear Middle School Parents,

All of the MS teachers and I are looking forward to the coming year as we welcome new and returning students. We strive to give our students opportunities to learn, explore, gain confidence, and create. We are looking forward to a great year!

This year's theme is ***All in***! Middle School is traditionally a time when adolescents are becoming more independent, trying new things, and struggling to learn how to take greater responsibility for themselves on their path to becoming self-sufficient young adults in just a few short years.

The African proverb, "*Smooth seas do not make skillful sailors*" can be applied to this tumultuous time in every person's life. I have never met an adult who said that they remember middle school (or junior high) as the most comfortable time in their life, and yet we learned so many times that we can figure things out. Every challenge is an opportunity to build confidence and strengthen skills. Even when things don't go well at first, reflecting and trying again allows self-esteem to grow. When adults step in to fix every obstacle, we are inadvertently telling a child that they can't handle it. Instead, I ask that when a challenge or frustration arises this year, please give your child a chance to tell you what is happening, and then ask them "What could you do now?" They may need help coming up with ideas, they may need a reminder to follow-through, they may need you to secretly send the teacher an email asking them to find a discreet time for a chat…but, we are all part of the team to support your student on their journey.

Important Documents: *Where are all the documents to read and forms sign?*

- **Final Forms** (https://stgeorges-wa.finalforms.com/) is our main platform for housing and submitting forms (permission forms, waivers, athletics info, medical and emergency info, etc.).
    - If you are unable to access Final Forms, please contact tech.support@sgs.org.
    - Please complete these before Friday, **August 7th**, to help us start the year smoothly.
        - There are some forms that students must complete. Please don't worry about it if you child can't access them before school starts, we will have time for this once school starts.

- **Student schedules** are available on PowerSchool (https://ps.sgs.org)
    - We are still making changes with scheduling to balance classes and minimize conflicts, therefore schedules may look different by the time we get to the first day of Middle School on Tuesday, August 25th.
    - Please email me (Joelle.neiwert@sgs.org) if you have questions or need to discuss possible changes to your child's schedule.

- The 7/8th grade Theater Productions class is very popular and is currently full. Students who made a later request for this elective are on the waitlist.

- **Back to School Informational Documents** are available on the SGS website by clicking on the Parent Portal link (password is *inspiring*), then look under the Back to School Documents icon (https://sgs.org/home/parent-portal/back-to-school-documents/).
  - **Middle School Booklist 2026-27**
    - You can buy or rent books from numerous online sites including: Amazon.com, BarnesandNoble.com, and Powells.com. Alternatively, there are many used book supply sites to try, such as abebooks.com, textbooks.com, and valorebooks.com. Please use the ISBN numbers we have provided to search for the correct edition. Books may be new or used, so long as they are the right edition, unless the instructor has noted otherwise on the list.
  - **6th, 7th, and 8th grade supply lists**
  - **Summer Reading Assignment**
  - **MS Parent & Student Handbook**
  - **2026-27 Calendar** - make note of holidays and teacher in-service days.

MS Policies and Procedures to Note

- **Attendance:**
  - The school day in the MS runs 8:20am-3:10pm. To excuse a student from school, please notify Michelle Bledsoe via the Edsby attendance feature, email, phone call or note in advance of the absence or by 9:00am the day of. If a student arrives late to school, your child must sign in at the MS office so that attendance records can be updated. If a student needs to leave school early, the parent must sign the student out at the office. While absences from school are detrimental to students' learning, we recognize that some are unavoidable. When students are ill, for example, they should stay home to recover and prevent the spread of infection to their classmates and teachers. When students miss school, they may miss important class time activities and will need to make them up or their grades will be impacted. Parents or students can contact teachers directly to check on missed work due to absence.

- **Communication:** *How do I know what is going on?*
  - Every week during the school year, the **MS Parent Letter** is posted on Edsby and is linked on the SGS email update sent out at the beginning of each week. Please take a few minutes to read my letter for important information and upcoming dates.
  - Every MS parent and student should be included in the **"MS News" group** on Edsby. To help everyone be aware of what is coming up, I add MS events on the calendar and post documents and links as resources.
  - In Middle School, **Edsby course pages** are designed by teachers as a place for students (and parents) to access class information and links for resources. This is also where information about upcoming and graded assignments is found as well as current course grades for 7th and 8th grade students and parents. In addition to showing graded assignments, Edsby also houses

end-of-semester comments from teachers and assignment specific comments, where appropriate. I encourage 7th and 8th grade parents to log in to Edsby once a week with their child. As part of the 6th grade students' transition into Middle School, the 6th grade team begins the year by sending home grade updates every three weeks to show trends. This starts the year by placing emphasis on the importance of effort and growth, rather than the accumulation of points. Class teachers and advisors guide their students and communicate regularly with parents about student progress.

- Grades are one of many ways to measure progress. In Middle School, we use them to prepare students for the more summative nature of high school. More important than any letter or number recorded in Edsby is the analysis you hear from your own child and from their advisor and teachers during conferences.

- **Student Organization**:
  - Planners - Structure and routine are important for students as they are learning to manage and organize their own materials and responsibilities.
    - We will provide all MS students with a paper planner. I cannot emphasize enough how important it is for students to take an active role in tracking their own workflow.
    - Parents can help by discouraging students from relying solely on Edsby to check what is due tomorrow, because this is not a great way to plan ahead.
    - Students need to practice this executive functioning skill by thinking about their commitments, when they plan to study, and when they plan to work on daily and longer-term assignments. There are many physical and digital tools to help with this.
  - All MS students are issued a computer and are given instructions on setting up and maintaining organized digital folders and files as well as keeping any hard copies organized in their binder/folder.
    - School-issued computers are able to connect to the school network, are set up in a similar way to allow teachers and the tech support team to assist them more easily, and have monitoring software that helps our faculty to more effectively keep students on task and block certain inappropriate sites. I know that some families prefer to purchase their own devices for their student, please note that student owned devices do not have these functions.
  - Please remind students to refill their school supplies periodically throughout the year. It is their responsibility to come to class prepared.

- **Secondary School Cell Phone Policy**:
  - The goal of our student cell phone policy goal is to reduce distraction and turn students' focus towards engagement in the classroom. Students are expected to store their phones in their backpack or locker. All areas of the school will be a device-free zone, even in common areas or in outdoor spaces on campus unless permitted by staff for educational purposes.

- Students are asked to alert a teacher or staff member if they need to call or to text a family member. If parents need to reach their child during the school day, please contact Michelle Bledsoe and she will deliver your message. If you leave Michelle a voicemail or send an email, she will send a quick reply to let you know that your message has been delivered to your child.
- Enforcing this policy at school is important, and we can use your help by 1) telling your child that you expect them to be off their phones during the school day, and 2) not communicating with your child on their device during the day (this is a really slippery slope for adolescents).

- **To come later in August**
  - We will offer an optional **lunch program** again this year. You will receive an email detailing the lunch choices and ordering procedures in a couple of weeks.

  - Bus routes and schedules - Please note that the school driveway is crowded in the morning. If you are chauffeuring your child to school, please plan to arrive before 8:15am, drive cautiously on campus, and yield to the buses when they arrive. You may also choose to use the shuttle stop at the Fairwood Shopping Center. Details will be included in the bus letter and route info on the Parent Portal (sgs.org, password - inspiring).

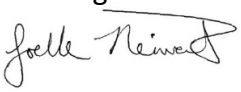
  - **Fall Sports** - For those who want to join the MS cross country or volleyball teams this fall, practices will begin during the first week of school. The coaches will be sending a detailed letter in August. Please also see Ryan's MS Athletic Letter on the Parent Portal (sgs.org, password - inspiring) for more details.

  - Michelle Bledsoe will send out an email with information for students who want to **set up their lockers** early. We will schedule times during the week of August 17th when Michelle will be available to help with lockers and locks. Note that magnets are okay, but stickers, markers, or anything else that cannot be pulled off easily are not allowed. Decorations should be in good taste. Please check your children's choice of decorations before you arrive.

Important Upcoming Dates

- **August 25** (Tuesday) – first day of school for the Middle School begins at 8:20am
  - Back to School Parent Coffee in Peter's Garden – everyone is invited to meet Parent Ambassadors, new families, and catch up after the summer break
  - Orientation day for the 6th grade students and parents – at least one parent is asked to attend the first half of the day to set the stage for a great MS experience (parents released around 11:45am)
- **August 28 -** Dragon Dance at 2:15pm, beginning on the Davenport Lawn - Parents are invited to attend this K-12 school kick-off tradition
- **September 7** – No School K-12, Labor Day
- **September 10** – MS/US Parent Back-to-School Night at 6:00pm
- **September 16-18** – 7th grade trip (parent letter to be sent)

Go Dragons!



Joelle Neiwert
Head of Middle School
Joelle.neiwert@sgs.org