



# MIDDLEFORK SCHOOL

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*Cultivating a learning community that engages the hearts and minds of students, one child at a time*

August 2, 2012

Dear Middlefork Parent,

As I draft this letter, Mrs. Murphy is organizing registration information for another new family that will join our Middlefork community this school year. We are experiencing a wonderfully busy summer of welcoming new students and families; at press time we have 15 new students in grades 1-3, and the number seems to change daily. When I include the kindergarten roster, the number of families entering Middlefork for the first time is 25! It's a delight to escort these children and their parents through the halls of Middlefork during the summer, to introduce them to Mr. Parks, Mrs. Murphy and the teachers who are invariably around, and to talk about all of the fun and enriching learning experiences that are in store for them. It is also gratifying to hear the positive feedback about Middlefork that our friends in the community are sharing with these newcomers. Thank you for being such supportive stewards of Middlefork School! Your support and enthusiasm for our mission – *to educate the hearts and minds of students, one child at a time* – mean the world to us.

Whether this is your first Middlefork Back-to-School letter or your tenth, I hope you will find the contents helpful in planning your back-to-school preparations. Included are details about our teachers, the school hours, keeping parental contact information current, school drop-off and pick-up procedures, the Middlefork Chess program, key dates on the fall calendar, and much more.

## **Middlefork Staff**

As of today there are no *new* faces among the Middlefork staff, only some familiar faces in new roles. Mrs. Lindsay Bozeday will be moving from first to second grade, joining Ms. Rouse and Mrs. Bell on the second grade team. Mrs. Maureen O'Looney, formerly a teacher assistant in our K-1 Boost program, will assume the role of K-1 Student Services teacher this year. Mrs. O'Looney holds a Master of Arts in Teaching from National Louis University and most recently earned her Learning Behavior Specialist (LBS1) certificate through Northeastern Illinois University. Finally, speech and language pathologist Mrs. Kate Robinson will be working at Middlefork part-time this year, primarily with our pre-school age children. Mrs. Robinson was previously employed by the North Suburban Special Education District and is very familiar with Middlefork due to our mutual association with NSSSED.

Many of the Middlefork teachers spent summer days working on curriculum initiatives for 2012-13, from the new Common Core Standards for both English Language Arts and Math, to planning Play Pod activities. You will hear more about the revisions to Middlefork's reading,

writing, and mathematics programs in light of the new Common Core Standards at the September 13<sup>th</sup> Open House. In addition, new units were developed for second grade Social Studies, third grade Math, and the Art and Music programs. Finally, many teachers attended technology workshops and increased their expertise with using iPads and other 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom tools.

### **School Hours**



The Middlefork school day begins at 8:30 a.m. for all students. From 8:15-8:25 a.m., the children may wait in the two entrance areas (main lobby for K-1 students and north foyer for 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup>). Those arriving at school after 8:30 a.m. will be considered tardy and must enter the building through the school office.

As in past years, the first day of school is abbreviated, and parents are welcome to accompany their children into the building in the morning. The hours will vary a bit for first graders during the first week of school, in order to assist them in acclimating to the longer day and to allow for parent/teacher in-take conferences. Kindergarten hours will continue to follow the gradual extension from three to four to five hour days, August through October. The details are listed below:

**Kindergarten: 8:30 - 10:30 a.m., Monday, August 27, 2012**

8:30 - 11:50 a.m., August 28 – September 14, 2012

8:30 - 12:50 p.m., September 18 – October 12, 2012

8:30 - 1:50 p.m., October 15 – June 7, 2013 \*\*

Please note: Kindergarten In-take Conferences, August 29 – September 7, 2012

**\*\* Kindergarten dismisses at 11:50 a.m. on Halloween, October 31, 2012**

**Grade 1: 8:30 - 10:40 a.m., Monday, August 27, 2012**

8:30 - 1:50 p.m., Tuesday, August 28 – Friday, August 31, 2012

*(Earlier dismissal due to parent/teacher in-take conferences)*

Regular school hours, 8:30 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. beginning Tuesday, Sept. 4, 2012

**Grades 2 -3: 8:30 - 10:40 a.m., Monday, August 27, 2012**

Regular school hours beginning Tuesday, Aug. 28, 2012:

2<sup>nd</sup> grade: 8:30 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

3<sup>rd</sup> grade: 8:30 a.m. – 3:10 p.m.

### **Enrollment and Class Lists**

During April, May, and June, the Middlefork teachers, Dr. Stange, and I went through an extensive process to create well-balanced classes that would support the needs and learning styles of all of our students. Determining the best placement for each child as well as the optimum composition for each class is a very challenging and complex process, and so changes are not made to these final lists. We appreciate your trust and understanding regarding this.

As of August 1<sup>st</sup>, we placed 15 new students into the eight 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> grade sections, and we continue to monitor the kindergarten enrollment numbers very closely. Presently we have two sections of kindergarten, but several families who still have not finalized their residency status could cause that number to grow into three sections before the first day of school. For this reason, the kindergarten classes will not be included on the Middlefork School roster until later in August. We will keep you apprised of the kindergarten situation via the District 29 website.

### **Staying in Touch**

<[www.sunsetridge29.net/middleforknews](http://www.sunsetridge29.net/middleforknews)>

Generally, I use the Middlefork News page of the District 29 website, as well as Dr. Vieth's weekly newsletter, to communicate school events and information to parents. I encourage you to do one of the following two things to keep abreast of the "goings on" at Middlefork: 1) simply click on the link at the end of Dr. Vieth's weekly email to connect to the Middlefork News; or 2) bookmark the Middlefork News page and check it every Friday. I am careful to highlight the new items added to the webpage each week.

### *Update Your Email Address*

The District has two additional means of expediting communication with parents: *Blackboard Connect* and *parent email groups*. The former is a district-wide phone and email notification system used mainly for emergency messages, such as school closings. The parent email groups are organized by grade level and school and thus allow us to reach specific parent groups with targeted information. Rest assured that I am judicious in my use of both of these communication vehicles.

It is critical that we have your most current information for both of these databases. If you are a returning family to Middlefork, your information is most likely already included in both of the above named databases. However, if you have changed any of your contact information (email, primary and secondary phone numbers), please contact Kevin Kolcz in the district office to update your information as soon as possible (kolczk@sunsetridge29.org or 847-881-9459).

If you are new to Middlefork this year, simply complete the emergency contact form in your child's registration packet and return it to the Middlefork office as soon as possible. The emergency form is our primary data source for the above named communication vehicles. Mrs. Murphy will take care of forwarding the new families' contact information for both the parent email group lists and the Blackboard Connect database to the district office. We will conduct a practice Blackboard Connect message on August 26<sup>th</sup> to ensure we have correct information for all families.

### **Lunch Program**

For many years, volunteer members of the District 29 PTO have administered the lunch program for both Middlefork and Sunset Ridge Schools. Interested parents may find information about the program and monthly menus on the PTO page of the District 29 website. Children may choose to purchase lunch at school on a daily basis. However, **lunch orders will not be accepted after**

**10:30 a.m.**, as Mrs. Weller is well into her preparations by that time and is unable to make additional changes.

### **Middlefork Driveway**

#### *Pick-up and Drop-off Procedures*

As you know, student safety is foremost in our minds, and traffic management in the Middlefork driveway goes hand in hand with that. For a very detailed explanation of the student drop-off and pick-up procedures, download the *Driveway Procedures* document posted on the website. If you are not going to be the primary transporter of your child, I ask that you share these directions with the person who will be doing the dropping off and/or picking up. A digest version of the instructions (included in this mailing) should serve as a reference tool for those who need a refresher course or who are picking up students during a different time slot this year. When drivers are aware of the processes and follow the recommended procedures as outlined in the *Driveway Procedures* document, it really does run smoothly. *Really*.

### **Important Fall Dates**

Please mark you calendar for the following September events and activities.

Monday, August 27	First Day of School, a.m. session
Tuesday, September 4	2nd Cup of Coffee, New Parents (9:15 a.m., 6:45 p.m.)
Wednesday, September 12	Vision, Hearing, Lice Checks at Middlefork
Thursday, September 13	Middlefork Open House (K-1st @ 7:00 p.m., 2 <sup>nd</sup> -3 <sup>rd</sup> @ 8:00 p.m.)
Tuesday, September 18	Kindergarten Hours Extend to 12:50 p.m.
Friday, September 21	School Picture Day

### **Second Cup of Coffee Meetings**

Periodic Second Cup of Coffee Meetings present additional opportunities for me to become better acquainted with Middlefork parents and to keep the lines of communication open. I value your ideas, questions, and concerns; in fact, if you have a suggestion for a Second Cup of Coffee topic, please contact me directly. The 2012-13 schedule with an invitation to the first meeting on Monday, September 4<sup>th</sup>, is posted on the website. Designed for parents who are new to Middlefork this year, the September 4<sup>th</sup> Second Cup will be held at 9:15 a.m. and again at 6:45 p.m.

### **Health and Safety Topics**

#### *Allergies*

Because our students' health and safety are paramount, we have established several practices designed to minimize student exposure to nuts at Middlefork School. First, we do maintain *peanut/nut aware* classrooms at Middlefork. That means that no foods containing nuts or nut by-products of any kind may be consumed within the classrooms. That includes daily snacks and special occasion, birthday, or "special week" treats. Children are permitted to bring peanut butter sandwiches to school, but they may only be consumed in the school cafeteria. Our school lunch menu will not contain peanut butter for purchase.

The timely submission of student health records and information enables us to be aware of students' allergies. Whether the allergies are food related or not, great care is taken to ensure students' comfort and safety both in and away from school on field trips. A *peanut/nut aware* table will be available in the lunchroom for students with more serious nut allergies. Please contact Mrs. Mertes, Middlefork school nurse, at 847-881-9503 or [mertesa@sunsetridge29.org](mailto:mertesa@sunsetridge29.org), **prior** to the first day of school to discuss any issues related to your child's allergy or if you would like more information about the *peanut/nut aware* table.

### *Student Emergency Forms*

If you have not already returned your emergency contact form(s), please bring it with you on the first day of school. Many parents do not realize the importance of submitting a new emergency form **every** school year. Experience has shown this to be critical, as people change phone and email providers quite frequently in this day and age, and emergencies have their own timetables! *Note:* A time-saving tip for parents with more than one child in the district is to fill in all of the contact information on one form, make copies, and then personalize for each child in the family. It saves time and ensures consistency in contact information.

### *Head Lice Prevention*

Although not nearly as much fun as traditions like Picture Day and the Summer Fun bulletin board, lice checks have become an established back-to-school routine. Something once perceived as disruptive is now commonplace, and while that is certainly not the case when head lice prevail at home, it's at least reassuring to know it's not intimidating the children at school. Regrettably, our experiences over the past few years have shown us that the potential for the transfer of head lice among school age children is real and unavoidable. Since cases of head lice most often occur in schools during periods following vacations, we will check students on September 12<sup>th</sup>, in tandem with the annual vision/hearing screenings.

We have definitely learned over the past several years that the combination of regular monitoring, quick identification, and fast communication on both our parts – school and parents – does help to contain, or at least minimize, the spread of these irksome critters. Thank you for remaining committed to periodic screenings at home, especially before school starts in August, and for notifying the school immediately when you identify nits or lice. I'll cross my fingers that this is the longest correspondence about head lice that I will have to relay to you this year!

### **Summer Fun Bulletin Board**

We will continue our tradition of posting summertime pictures on the bulletin board in the main lobby, so if you have a 4"x6" photo of your child doing something fun this summer - a family trip, camp activity, visit with relatives, etc., we would like to display it. Please have your child bring it on the first day of school (with name and location written on the back).

### **Middlefork Fall 2012 Chess Program**

I am happy to report that the Friday morning chess program taught by Chess Education Partners will continue at Middlefork this year. We had a dedicated little group last year, but new students are welcome to join in the fun and games for the Fall 2012 program. The 13-week program begins on September 14 at 7:30 a.m. in the small gym. Registration forms and fees are due to

Chess Education Partners by September 10<sup>th</sup>. You will find the registration form and other information about the chess program on the Back-to-School webpage.

### **Lifelong Learning**

This summer my administrative colleagues and I participated in an extensive, state mandated training program on teacher evaluation. It was comprehensive, interesting, and provided the impetus for reflection on our own District 29 evaluation practices. Overall, the content was beneficial, but the instructional delivery, ironically, left a lot on the table. While this was frustrating as a student, it was also enlightening as a principal. In my view, the flaws in the state's training program stand in direct contrast to the instructional practices at Middlefork School. I truly believe that when your children walk through the doors of Middlefork School, they are in the hands of compassionate, committed teachers who treat them as individuals, and who tailor instruction to help each child develop into a thinker and a learner. That includes crafting challenging, differentiated curriculum delivered through multiple modes of instruction, providing constructive feedback in a timely manner, and doing so with lots and lots of care, communication, smiles, and support.

I often introduce myself at concerts and events by saying that it is my pleasure and privilege to be the principal of Middlefork School, and that feeling remains steadfast after more than a decade "at the helm". I am proud to work with your wonderful children and a group of dedicated professionals, and I can't wait for that 8:30 a.m. bell to ring again.

Enjoy the rest of the summer with your families, and please do not hesitate to call or stop by if you need anything. On behalf of everyone at Middlefork, we are looking forward to seeing you on August 27<sup>th</sup>!

For your children,

Mary Frances Greene, Ed.D.  
Associate Superintendent/Principal