



# SUFFIELD MIDDLE SCHOOL

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DAMON PEARCE, Principal

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Dear families,

Summer is going fast! In a scant three and a half weeks we will be embarking on the 2016-17 school year. This week we finished work on the master schedule and have opened the PowerSchool portal; families should now be able to view student schedules on-line. I should note that we will continue to make minor changes and all students will receive a finalized schedule in their first period class on August 31<sup>st</sup> (a note to our 6<sup>th</sup> grade families: we will have plenty of staff available to direct students to the correct classroom on the first day). If you have any concerns regarding the schedule, our school counselors, Tom Kadamus and Tracy Scatolini, will be available starting Monday, August 22<sup>nd</sup>. You may contact them with any questions that you might have.

Two years ago the middle school adopted a new master schedule that resulted in significant changes to the students' day. Last year, and once again for the upcoming school year, we have tweaked this new schedule structure in order to improve the overall student experience. The changes for this year are described below.

**School start and end times.** Earlier in the summer the district sent out communication describing new start and end times. It is our belief that this will have a positive impact on the students at SMS. In years past, students have been dropped off at the middle school as early as 7:15, only to be sent to the auditorium to wait for twenty minutes before the school day began. With the new start times, students will enter the building at 7:25 and proceed directly to their 1<sup>st</sup> period classes; no more waiting in the auditorium!

While this is a positive change, we anticipate that there will be one challenge with this new start time. Parents who drop off their children in the morning will have a much smaller window of time in which to do so. We will open the tennis court drop-off at 7:25 but the teachers who monitor that area must report to their classes by 7:35. Therefore, after 7:35 parents will be directed to drop off their children at the front of the school. As with any new routine, there is the possibility of some confusion until we iron out the logistics; we thank you in advance for your patience as we fine tune the morning drop-off procedure.

**Marking periods.** In previous years the middle school had four marking periods. This year we are adopting a trimester reporting model. This may sound a little far-fetched but the trimester model actually permitted us the flexibility to make other improvements to the unified arts block. *(The only exceptions are the classes that offer high school credit: Algebra, French 1 & 2, Spanish 1 & 2. These classes will follow the high school marking periods).*

**Daily schedule rotation.** For two years the middle school has operated on an A-B-C day rotation. This year we have removed rotation from the schedule. Classes held on a Monday will always be held on a Monday, Tuesday classes will always be on a Tuesday, and so on. This change will help students manage their unified arts, music and health/PE classes.

**Band and Chorus.** Last year band and chorus ensemble practices were sandwiched into our FLEX periods once a week. This year band and chorus are separately scheduled classes and we have been able to increase the meeting frequency so that they will meet a minimum of twice a week and, in some trimesters, practices may occur three times a week.

**Health and Physical Education.** This year students will have the same health/PE teacher all year. In addition, health/PE will be held on the same week days all year long. For example, if a student's schedule lists health/PE on Thursday and Friday, they will attend that class on Thursday and Friday for the entire year. Remembering gym clothes just got a whole lot easier!

**Unified Arts.** Last year students spent 24 instructional days in each of their rotations in art, media technology, and family consumer science. This year we were able to make a modest increase by adding two additional days for each rotation.

**FLEX period.** The middle school day includes a FLEX period which is held at the end of the day. During this time students participate in band and chorus, access the media center, obtain intervention assistance, engage in extra activities, visit their counselors, seek extra help from their teachers or simply get a head start on homework. It is truly a flexible block of time. Last year our FLEX period was held three times a week, on Tuesday, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. In order to satisfy the many demands placed upon this block of time, we are extending FLEX to all five days of the week. In order to preserve direct instructional time, however, we are reducing the FLEX period from 45 to 30 minutes. Our monthly advisory period will also be held during this FLEX time.

As you can see, there have been a number of changes this year. Implementing these changes was a complicated process that took longer than expected and resulted in many changes to individual student schedules. In fact, these many changes is why we attempted to close the PowerSchool portal (we understand folks had access) as we wanted to save students the frustration of watching their personal schedule change multiple times throughout the summer. At this time, the majority of the work has been completed and we do not anticipate major changes though individual students may experience minor changes. We are optimistic that these improvements to the master schedule will enhance the student experience during the 16-17 school year.

We are super excited for the first day of school (which is only a few weeks away!). Until then, enjoy the remainder of the summer.

Sincerely,

Damon Pearce  
Principal

Ashley Molden  
Assistant Principal