

## International Harbor School Environment

### *Embracing Diversity*

North Star K-8 teachers, partnering with our incoming staff for next year, voluntarily spent last Saturday planning the transition to our beautiful building. They shared ideas, demonstrated methods and skills, and earnestly explored best ways to help families transition into a larger school community. Although time was spent fine-tuning our core curriculum practices, a significant amount of discussion focused on blending our doubled classes and configuring the two elementary wings. Each topic was handled thoughtfully and with caring wisdom. Here are the highlights of their professional discussion:

#### K-5 Classes

- Blending students every year empowers student leadership and prepares children for the transition to middle school.
- Annual blending will help avoid alienation, the formation of cliques among students, and will help virtuous citizens embrace our differences. An international mentality at a young age inspires excellence and global analytical thinking skills.
- Configure a K-4 wing. This provides more efficient transitions for students and traveling teachers.
- Proximity of same grade classrooms enhances team teaching, which exposes all students to the expertise of both teachers. Excellent teachers naturally glean best practices from each other.

#### 6-8 Classes

- Configure a 5-8 grade wing. This provides more efficient transitions for students and teachers. Highly effective middle schools are developmentally responsive to the unique needs of early adolescents.
- A 5-8 wing provides a specific location for middle school kids to call home, and an environment for self-contained 5th graders to prepare for middle school immersion.
- Middle school teachers will follow the middle school teaching philosophy of daily collaboration to plan interdisciplinary units and insure consistency.
- Mixing students every year empowers student leadership and prepares young adults for the transition to high school.
- Start time for grades 6-8 would be same as high school – 7:45 AM. This accommodates middle school sports after school and also will balance our bus loads between first and second bus runs.
- Traditional rite of passage from elementary to middle school to high school gives students a sense of ownership of their future.

On Saturday it became clear that the staff was unanimous in support of blending the students, as well as configuring our two new wings to house the K-4 grades and 5-8 grades. How and when will this happen?

- Our current teachers will use articulation cards to decide how the classes will be divided. These cards will identify your child's strengths and challenges as well as any support they may need academically. The two teachers for each grade will take the cards and decide which teacher would be the best fit for each student. They will also look to balance the class for gender and specific needs.
- After the classes have been divided, each family will receive an e-mail notifying them of their child's teacher sometime before May 19<sup>th</sup>.
- *A Welcome Picnic is planned for May 19<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 (site TBA) where the entire school community, including all new lottered families, will meet and greet the two paired teachers from each grade level. There will be food, our middle school choir and band will perform, and the middle school students will get a glimpse of "The Force" – our powerful middle school teachers. Please save the date.*

Blending the students, as well as building two environments - an elementary wing and a middle school wing - will facilitate an environment of respect, compassion, and diversity, while modeling the Harbor philosophy of civic leadership.