

Friday August 21, 2020

Dear Juniors Families,

We have been looking forward to seeing you and personally welcoming you and your child to the Juniors class all summer! Whether remote, hybrid, or fully in person, we are planning a dynamic, engaging learning experience for every Juniors student. North Branch School is first and foremost a community of learners, and we will do everything in our power to instill that feeling in our online classroom. We will focus on building a warm, safe, close-knit class culture. Providing a venue for socialization and peer collaboration has never been more important than it is now. Those will be our overriding goals, even as we begin the year remotely.

Personal Connections

Initial “Getting to Know You” projects will draw on individual creativity and allow for self-expression while simultaneously introducing students to each other and to our learning platform and collaborative technological tools in this context. We want every student to feel valued, known, and competent from the very start.

We will be utilizing user-friendly, interactive applications, like Google Jamboard and break-out rooms, that allow for peer collaboration and small-group discussions. There will be opportunities for students to share their projects with the class, get feedback, and learn from each other in a safe, supported online environment.

Teachers will schedule regular one-on-one meetings to build connections with each student.

Once a week, Juniors will be invited to spend the afternoon together outdoors at school in activities supervised by Smith and occasionally other staff members. More information about this optional opportunity (and many other details) will be in the packet you pick up on 9/8.

Curriculum

Inquiry-based, hands-on learning projects continue to be the hallmark of NBS. The online format allows additional opportunities for student choice and individualized learning materials.

- Humanities: We will study all seven continents this school year! For each continent, students will complete a research project and hands-on activities. Remote learning offers a golden opportunity to access visual and auditory resources that will inspire students and immerse them in the music, art, animals, peoples, cultures, geography, languages and, of course, foods of each continent as we traverse the world together this year! There will be hard-copy reading materials provided as well, not just virtual resources.
- Reading/Writing: We will read a carefully curated collection of age-appropriate books, short stories, and nonfiction that connect the students to each continent. In small groups we'll talk about the language, vocabulary, and parts of each story and use those elements to write our own stories. Students will be regularly practicing the craft of writing both informal and “finished” stories, reports, poems, and daily entries in their journals.
- Science: Our study of biomes dovetails nicely with Humanities units, creating great opportunities for integrated project work. “Create an Imaginary Sea Creature” is a favorite multifaceted project that draws upon what students will have learned about animal adaptations for survival and the depth zones of the ocean. Students will also get to experiment with force and motion as well as monitor the weather and learn specifically about clouds.
- Math: Online time will involve interactive group learning experiences more than direct instruction - a big change from spring for returning Juniors. There will be task-oriented

and project-based assignments. Many assignments will be open-ended or allow for choice so that each student can work on the skills s/he needs to develop. Students will have individual learning goals that they are working toward.

Technology

For those of you who were online with us in the spring, our engaging project work will be similar, but access to posted assignments and associated resources will be streamlined and more user-friendly, as will the modes of sharing student work with teachers. Recorded verbal instructions will supplement written ones. We will strive to teach all Juniors how to access assignments and post work *independently*. Every student will receive an nbsva.org email address. This gives access to the Google Suite of programs through any computer or mobile device. We are excited to be utilizing Google Classroom to organize assignments and consolidate messaging, and we think you'll like it too!

We will also utilize Seesaw, which provides students with a simple, intuitive mechanism through which to turn in their work by drawing, making a video, taking a photo, or uploading work from Google Classroom, among other options. There are tools to make annotations and give verbal explanations. The Seesaw posts become a digital portfolio of each student's school work. Both Classroom and Seesaw create the possibility for students to see and comment on the work of their classmates when teachers feel like that is appropriate.

Care-giver Support

We will be asking you to provide time, quiet space, and internet access so that students can focus on their school work. Again, our goal is to teach your children how to use the required technology independently, and we believe this is realistic with the tools we have chosen and the training and in-context practice we are planning.

Teachers will also be curating and/or making concise video tutorials on how to use our tech tools that can be watched whenever necessary. Of course, we will be available for live tech support as well. We will instruct students to contact teachers via the direct messaging available through Google Classroom when they need help. Students will work on assignments during online class time. They can also join our study hall session at any time to work alongside their classmates and ask questions. *We expect that this will all lighten the load on caregivers and foster self-agency and independence for students.*

We are so looking forward to working with your child this year, partnering with each of you, and building a strong connection between family and school. If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to us. We are here to listen and help. Welcome to a fun, engaging and meaningful school year!

With love,

Jill, Karen, and Heather

jillf@nbsva.org

karenb@nbsva.org

heatherh@nbsva.org

Important Dates

Tuesday September 8th NBS Drive-Through (meet teachers and pick up materials at school) 11am-noon for families with more than 1 NBS student OR Noon-1pm for Juniors without siblings.

Wednesday September 9th, 5-6pm Virtual Back-to-School Orientation for Parents of Juniors