

August 21, 2020

Hello, Middle School Families -

We are so excited to have your child in Middle School this year! This letter is meant to help you get a picture of what online classes will look like, including goals, schedule, curriculum, and types of activities. If you have any questions after reading this, please feel free to contact any of us.

Our goals are to help your child grow in **independence**, **self-management**, and **self-advocacy**, learning how to succeed but also learning how to let their teachers know when they need support. We know they won't start off being completely independent. We'll ask them to **be brave with newness** while we work to give each student as much or as little support as they need to get comfortable and confident. We want them to love what we're doing and be successful!

We are uniquely positioned to offer your child an excellent online experience. Our small class size means

- We can run our online class meetings like informal chats with family, easily seeing everyone on the screen and hearing from everyone. Every student will be seen and known.
- When we receive work from students, we can quickly assess what students need in the next lesson. We can customize each day's lessons to your children's needs.
- We'll have time during the week to check in individually with every student and give them the support or stretch they need.
- We will continue to give you feedback and personal notes about your child every week in the traditional NBS Friday Folder, which will now be a Google Doc you and we share and can write back and forth on.

We cannot wait to work closely with you and your child.

Schedule: Here is a link to the MS online schedule: [MS Schedule](#)

Last spring, we had online classes for 3 half-days each week. That was all right for the emergency situation we were in, but now we'd like to bolster our plan a bit. We're holding 4 classes 4 days a week, with each day lasting until about 2 pm, except for Wednesdays, which is a much shorter day. We've increased the length of classes, to allow time for more of the informal conversations we value, as well as more time for students to be with each other.

We will also offer some outdoor fun for Middle Schoolers on Wednesday afternoons. We are working out the details--Katrien would like to offer pickleball in Crozet and just needs to get permission to use the Crozet Park courts. Smith will offer something else at school. This is completely optional and designed to give kids some time together, outside, in a safe, socially-distanced way.

Communication: We use a website as our central headquarters. That link is here:

<https://sites.google.com/nbsva.org/nbsmiddleschool/home>.

This is like the homework board in the classroom and will contain links to and directions for all assignments. It is also a place we can post the schedule and announcements. We think of it as a "one-stop shop!"

Google Classroom: We use Google Classroom as our Learning Management System. Each student will have a folder for each class, inside of which are the assignments for that class. Each assignment has its own due date and materials attached and can be completed and turned in online, in that folder. Sometimes, our assignments will involve art, video, or other kinds of presentations. These can be uploaded into Google Classroom and included in the student's portfolio of work. This keeps everything in one place for both the students and for us.

Curriculum: We offer engaging, student-centered inquiries into the real world, giving students the chance to broaden and deepen their skills in reading, writing, and thinking. We emphasize hands-on discovery and independent thinking, teaching students to support their ideas (whether on a math problem or a historical debate) with evidence and strong thinking. You can read more about our curriculum at the NBS website--going online has not changed our goals or methods.

Given that, here are some highlights from the first few weeks' offerings:

- We'll begin the year with some getting-to-know you activities, where we teachers will hear from your children about what works for them as they learn and what they need to be supported. We'll also talk about what makes us a community--even online--and craft a set of community agreements, including how to be a good digital citizen. We'll begin to offer students opportunities to lead activities in class, as much as they are comfortable doing.
- In **Humanities**, we'll begin with "Who Really Discovered America?" a combination panel discussion/debate and research project. Students will research an explorer's claim (either in teams or on their own, according to their own preference) and record a video defending that claim. Our virtual audience--parents, classmates, other students, and other members of the community--will have a chance to watch the videos and weigh in with their opinions. (You'll see this format again with our "Issues Forum" on the day before Election Day, when teams of students will research the Republican, Democrat, and one third party position on a specific issue and present that information to a community of voters via video.)
- In **Reading**, we'll begin with short stories by Ray Bradbury and Peter Clines. Besides being really good stories, these stories also link directly to the ideas we'll talk about in Humanities. We'll use activities on Jamboard and Padlet to allow students to post their thoughts about what they read and comment on each other's ideas before class discussion, making it easier for everyone to contribute.
- In **Writing Workshop**, we'll jump into prompts from Science, Humanities, Reading, and life in general for students to respond to. We imagine giving students prompts in class and then setting them free to write, checking back in for individual workshop sessions. We'll also work on grammar and use the online program Membean to practice vocabulary.
- We've been participating in a lot of professional development this summer regarding teaching **math** in more engaging, curiosity-sparking ways, whether online or in person. The school has acquired 3 document cameras to aid in our math teaching. We're excited to use tools from Desmos, Jamboard, and more with students to help them discover new concepts and understandings. Katrien has created her own Youtube channel so that she can post video tutorials, and Jennifer, too, prefers the "flipped classroom" approach, so that students can explore ideas on their own and then come together to check on and build understanding.
- In **Science**, we will begin by studying some of the major issues of our day such as coronavirus and climate change, and learn how to read scientific information from multiple sources and angles. Students will start with support in reading scientific passages for meaning, then move to research of their own, discussing and writing in teams and individually about their findings and ideas.
- At the beginning of the year in **Spanish**, we enjoy sharing exposures that we have had to the language or culture over the summer. We review the reasons for why we learn Spanish Language and Culture at NBS. Students will do a quick research assignment to see what they can find out about our Spanish speaking community. We will review the geography of the Spanish speaking world and end our introduction with our

new tradition of drawing and coloring flags into our own hand cut-outs. This will be followed by a presentation project on a few people of Hispanic Heritage, for Hispanic Heritage Month (Sept 15-Oct 15). Nina is excited that the small classes and class length will allow each student ample time to exercise their speaking skills. She, herself, will be speaking in Spanish at least 75% of the time and lessons will be centered around authentic and current texts and audio for reading and listening comprehension.

On **Tuesday, September 8**, you'll come to school for a "Drive-Through" version of our Packet Pick-up. From 2 - 3 pm, you can come to school and pick up any paperwork you need from Autum, school supplies from us, including texts, math supplies, and a computer (if you need one) and charger. If that time doesn't work for you, or if you have multiple NBS children, please feel free to come between 11 - 12 --or whenever works for you. On **Wednesday, September 9**, we will hold a "Meet the Teachers" online gathering at 4 pm and 6 pm (you are welcome to either one) where we can say a little more about ourselves and our online tools, and answer your questions. On **Thursday, September 10**, we'll begin our online classes using the schedule included in this email.

Of course, if you have any questions between now and then, you can contact any one of us: JenniferP@nbsva.org, NinaC@nbsva.org, or KatrienV@nbsva.org. If you have specific concerns or suggestions, please let us know; we only grow better when we have more feedback.

Finally, thank you for sticking with us on this adventure. Online learning isn't what any of us signed up for, but we know you'll find that, even through a screen, we have amazing things to explore together this year, and we are really excited to be doing it with this group of kids. Enjoy the rest of your August, have a wonderful Labor Day weekend, and we'll see you at school on September 8!

Sincerely,

Nina, Jennifer, Smith, and Katrien
The Middle School Team