
MS Info Night and Spaghetti Dinner

March 27, 2025

Schedule

Dinner	6:30 - 7	Served by Middle Schoolers Please feel free to ask your servers questions about their Middle School experience.
Information	7 - 7:30	Smith Coleman, Head of School Katrien Vance, Head Teacher and MS Coordinator Middle Schoolers: Eliza, Ella, Emma, Mabel, Nuala, Wren
Optional:	7:30 - 8	Come see the classroom, talk more to the teachers, and get all of your questions answered

Qualities We Support and Actively Develop

- Kindness
- Respect
- Resilience
- Curiosity
- Independence
- Follow-through
- Initiative
- Discernment
- Problem-solving

The Learning Space

[Dr. Becky on The Learning Space](#)

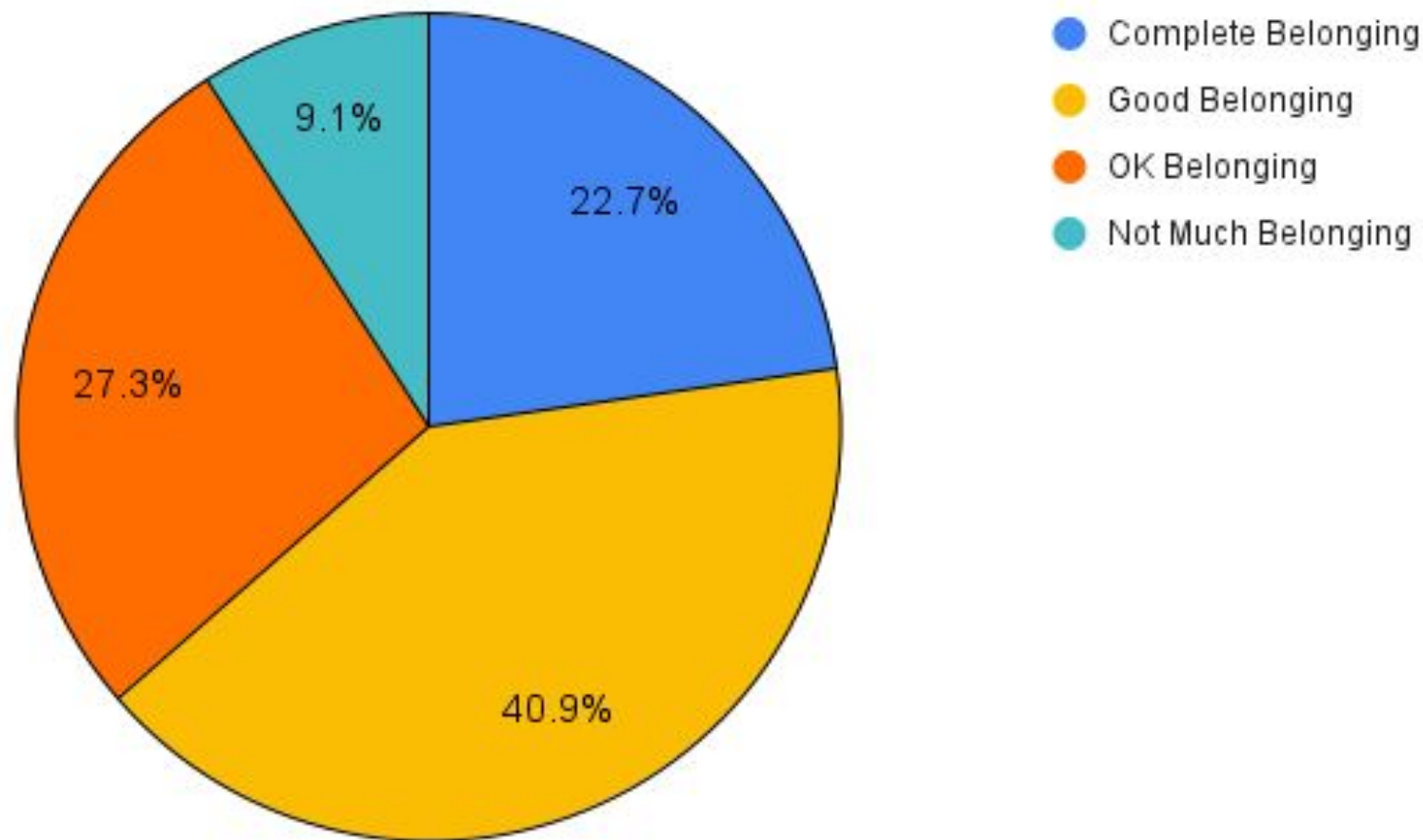
Learning How to Learn

- It's not the content, which is humbling . . .
- How to organize yourself
- How to manage time
- How to study
- How to read for content, comprehension, and retention
- How to write effectively

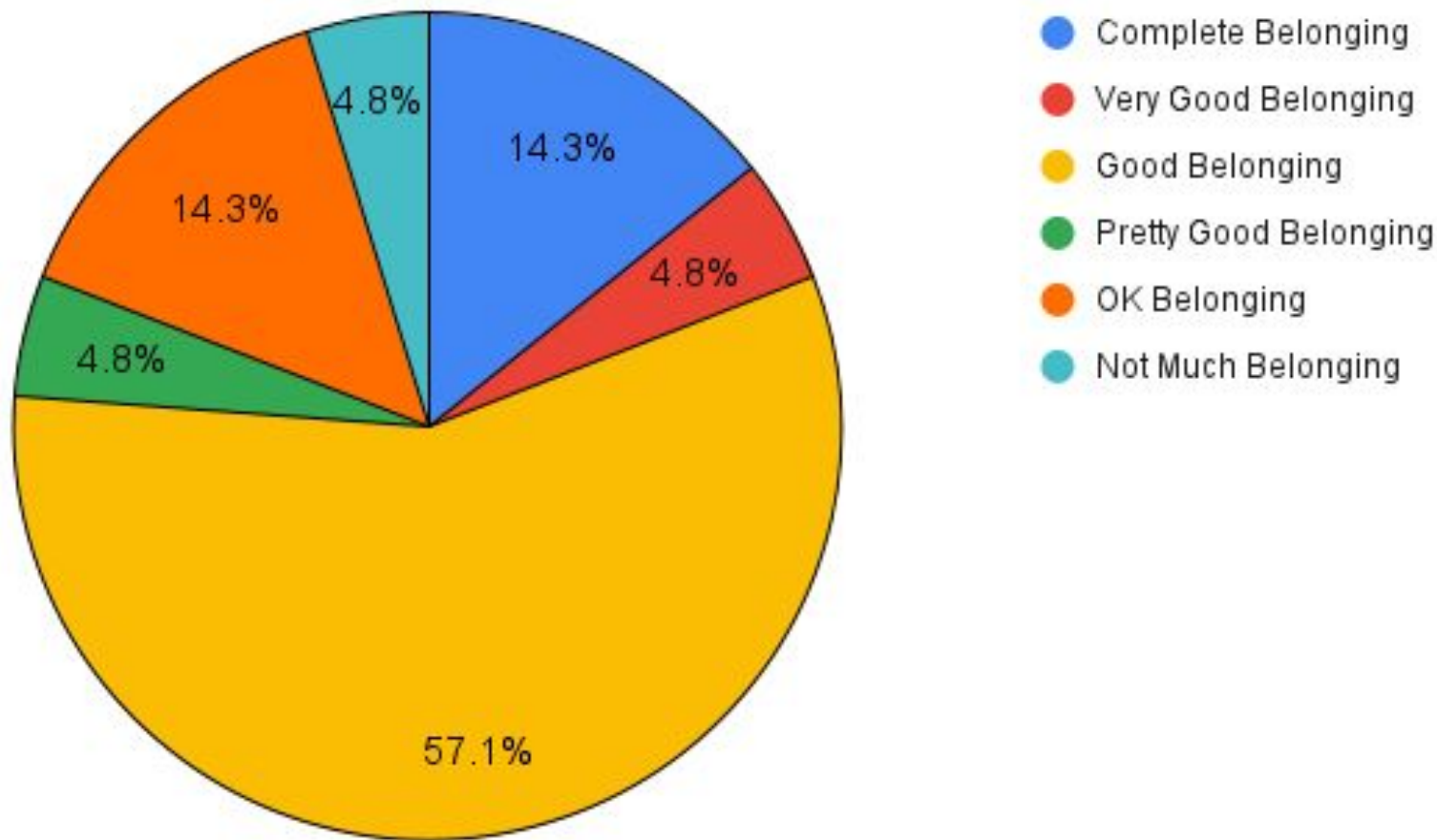
Hey, how's **middle school** going?

Ugh, not great.

Seniors' Sense of Belonging at NBS



Middle School Sense of Belonging at NBS



The View from Beyond...

From Kyla Dance, '98

As someone who spent eight years as a middle school counselor in the public school system, I can say without a shadow of a doubt that these are some of the **most socially challenging years in a student's life**. It's a time of transition and change, **figuring out who you are** and who you are not, learning lessons about friends who are there one day and gone the next.

The risk was low ...

The funny thing is, **I don't remember that being my experience in middle school.** I went through those awkward hard years of change in a safe space surrounded by a small community who had grown up alongside of me. There were certainly challenging moments, that's unavoidable, but **the risk was low. I was allowed to stumble and fall and experiment with who I really was without fear of my social standing crumbling as a result.** Because at North Branch School that **didn't exist**, at least not in the way that I know it does in public school.

Grow into my teen years at my own pace ...

In my middle school years, I was allowed to be a middle schooler and act my age and not grow up any faster than I needed to, because I didn't have the outside pressure from peers to be someone I wasn't ready to be. I personally needed this time to still be a kid and **grow into my teen years at my own pace.**

And get back to learning ...

And yes, Middle school is about academics as well of course, but the social game of these three years seems to take priority with the students who are in the thick of it. I imagine **learning Algebra in 7th grade is a lot easier when you don't have the weight of the world on your shoulders because "everyone in gym class hates you"**. A smaller and more nurturing environment that has **better options for conflict resolution and restorative justice** allows conflict to naturally occur where it will, sort through it appropriately, and get back to learning.

Safely growing into who I was going to be ...

Don't get me wrong, I have almost nothing but good things to say about my experience in my public high school as well, but I do believe **I was ready for that at 14 in a way I never would have been at 12 entering our local middle school. I needed a few more years to safely grow into who I was going to be.**

-Kyla Holliday Dance, '98

Managing Director for Well-being and Inclusion
Residential Well-being | Student Affairs | Virginia Tech



Middle School years were some of my favorite...

“Middle School is a challenging and exciting growth time, and it made it so much more meaningful to stay in a safe environment. 30+ years later with my own children in Middle School and High School, I continue to remain grateful that I am one of the few who is able to say that my Middle School years were some of my favorite—especially 7th and 8th Grades!”

-Amelia Uffleman Walton, '96



The Academic Program

Our goals for NBS 8th graders:

- A complete internal working timeline of world history, into which they can map whatever they learn next, including a year of American history in 7th or 8th grade
- Completion of 8th grade math, Algebra 1, or Geometry, according to the student's readiness
- An introduction to and experience with many fields of science; earth science, biology, physics, and chemistry
- Experience reading literature, plays, poetry, nonfiction, and primary sources
- Experience writing for many audiences, including creative writing, personal essays, research essays, and more - readiness for any high school assignment
- Completion of Spanish 1

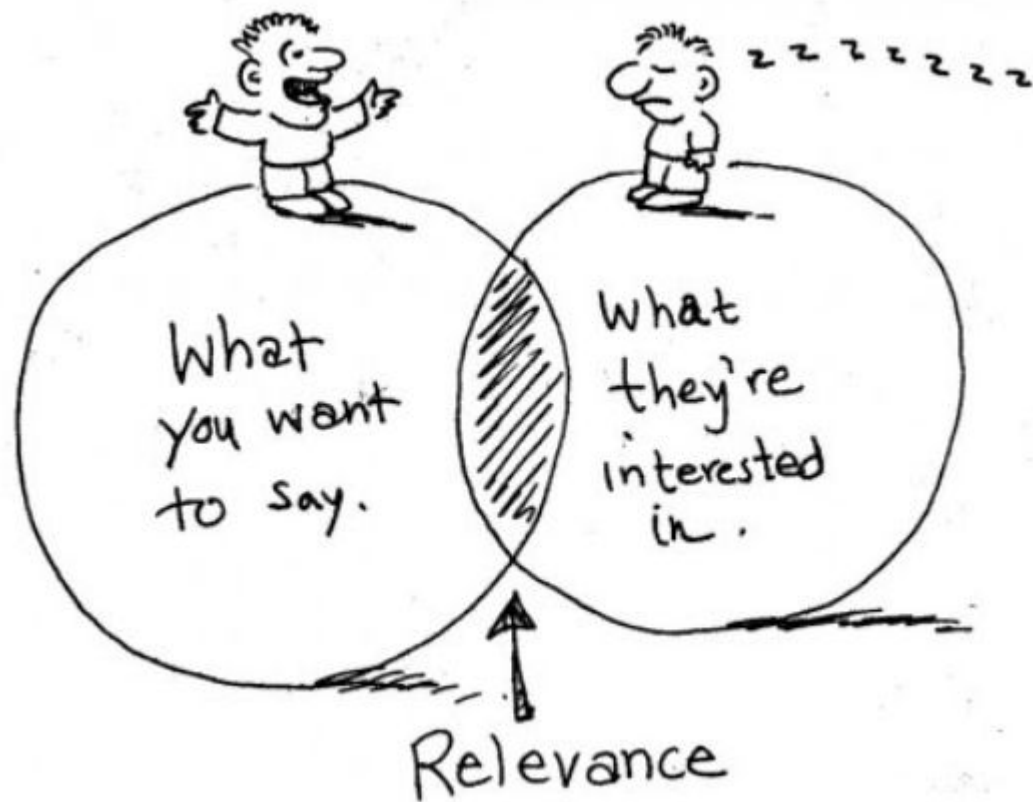
Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships

"Rigor is ensuring that each student you teach is provided the opportunity to grow in ways they cannot imagine." - Barbara Blackburn

"Building the right culture to grow the minds of students that are founded in trust of their teachers and staff to ensure an intellectually and emotionally safe environment. . .encourages students to take more chances and put forth more effort." - Principal's Playbook

"The strength of our student relationships makes the difference in translating our passion for teaching into their passion for learning." - Beth Morrow

*"No significant learning can occur without a significant relationship."
- James Comer*

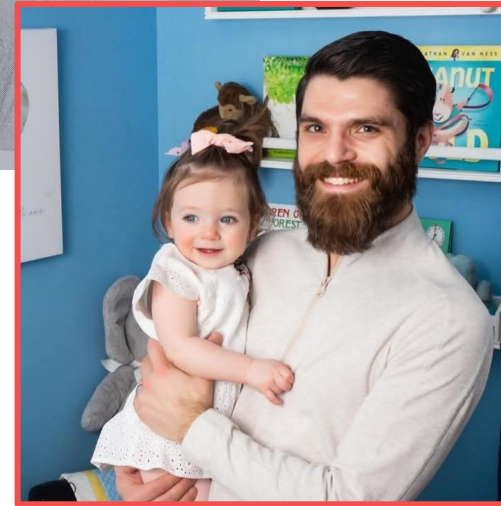
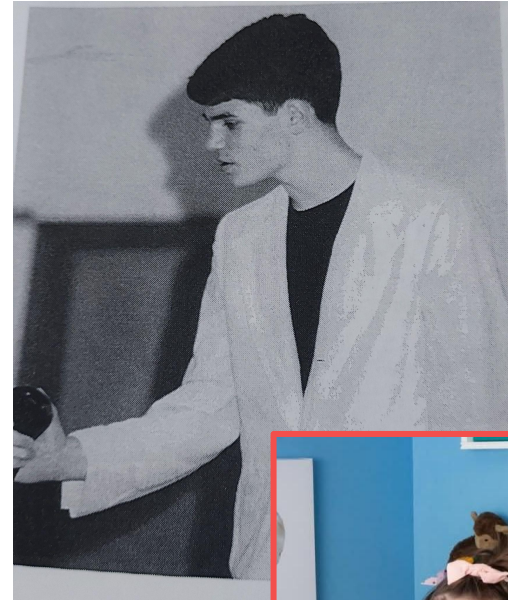


The joy of learning ...

Middle school for a lot of kids can be a very challenging & unpleasant few years of intense transition, and I don't look back at my time in 6th - 8th grade that way at all. For me it was a supportive and nurturing environment.

Academically NBS was excellent and became the foundation of future classroom successes in HS, which led to engineering undergrad and beyond. One notable example for me is that I was given the chance to accelerate my math class, and trusted with self-study, which was both effective and a lot of fun. Memories of Wednesday math class when Alan and I would go find a quiet nook by ourselves with our textbooks in an unused younger kids' classroom are among my favorite from middle school and one of countless times that NBS taught and reinforced for me the joy of learning.

-Michael Tosto, '98



A problem solver ... confidence and perseverance

My middle school experience at North Branch School instilled a love for learning that continues to drive me today. The hands-on units of study showed me that learning could be both interesting and fun, sparking curiosity and a desire to explore new ideas and discover new things. I genuinely looked forward to going to school each day knowing that my thoughts and contributions held meaning and were honored. Through both individualized and collaborative experiences, I became a problem solver, gaining the tools to tackle challenges with confidence and perseverance.

Unique, in-depth learning experiences ...

Teachers are caring, approachable, invested in all students, and foster creativity. The close-knit community not only helped me build friendships that I still maintain today, but also taught me how to be self-assured and capable in any environment. The unique, in-depth learning experiences and the memories I made there are still so fresh in my mind, as if they happened yesterday. I remember learning how to play recorder, mastering the art of basket weaving, making Stone Soup, eating lunch in the Big Room, climbing trees at recess, being given the opportunity to write creatively, and making a to-scale model of the Chesapeake Bay.

Taking risks with a safety net...

North Branch provided opportunities to take risks, but with a safety net of teachers and friends to catch me and help me back up if I ever stumbled or fell. Even after moving to another state in high school, and now as an adult I have still maintained my middle school friendships and I attribute that directly to the structure and environment that North Branch so expertly creates. North Branch is home.

-Becca Zunker Malinowski, '00



Another View from the Other Side ...

"As a middle schooler, we spent plenty of time in nature where we could follow our curiosity. I remember long walks out into an open field where we would soak in the quietness, listen for bird calls, and journal our findings. Some days, we waded in the creeks, learning how to classify the creatures residing there and discussing the water's health. We sang together, and reenacted historical periods, bringing the past to life with costumes and food. **I enjoyed how a gentleness toward nature and toward one another was woven into the school's culture, and how learning wasn't confined to sitting behind a desk.** These are values I try to pass on to my son now, as we explore how our questions are more important than our answers. "

- Jessica Calderon, ‘

One parent's opinion ...

Darcy was homeschooled through 6th grade and started attending NBS for 7th and 8th grade. One of the things that I really appreciate about NBS is how they bridge the gap between the childhood years and early teen years. The middle schoolers still socialize and interact with the younger kids yet academically they are challenged. I'm impressed with how invested the middle school teachers are in bringing the best out of their students. The teachers push the students to think critically and ask questions. They are being prepared for high school level work but not in a "one size fits all" kind of way. Students are encouraged to write in their unique voices and be authentic. The result is that the kids are confident in their personal and academic abilities. The way that North Branch guides the kids to grow and learn is truly holistic.

And one more ...

Unlike many North Branch students, our daughter didn't begin her journey at North Branch until 5th grade when she transferred from public schools in Albemarle county, after a year of homeschooling due to COVID.

We were hoping to find a place for our daughter who was a differently abled learner who loved to be outside, was super curious, and had trouble sitting still and not talking.

We were hoping for kind.

What we got was so much more.

North Branch was just what she needed for her middle school years. The cross-discipline approach to curriculum, a team teaching approach by extremely gifted and knowledgeable instructors, time with younger students, instruction tailored to level and ability, connection to nature, daily horse play, and so many amazing extra curricular activities, like plays, Model UN, Shakespeare, science fairs, and amazing field trips. These facets of NBS in the middle school years are just not found in the public school system. We know this to be true because our son is a middle schooler at public school now also. Other private school options may offer the same academic rigor, but our daughter is known and understood, as a human being, by her teachers and the NBS staff, in a way that is just other-level.

She will leave North Branch with a certainty in her own abilities and self-worth, a set of friends that will stay with her for the next four years and beyond, and a depth and level of educational self-reliance that North Branch has instilled in her.

I know many of you are facing tough decisions about placement, timing, finances, sports, and car pools. I can only say that we understand; we're there too. We fully believe that Middle School at North Branch is the kind of quality education that will not only make our daughter successful in high school, but thrive.

I ran into Nuala's third grade public school teacher this week. We loved this teacher. She shared that she has heard only good things about NBS Middle School, and that she loved to read to evaluations sent home to parents. She marvelled about how well the NBS teachers writing the evaluations seemed to know the students. It's these relationships that sustained our daughter through the turmoil and highs and lows of middle school years. The grounding that NBS provided our daughter let her grow, warts and all, into a high schooler that she herself, and we her parents, are proud of. We'd like to thank North Branch and all the teachers for helping our daughter to find and to keep herself through these tough middle school years. We can't say enough good things about Katrien, Heather, and Tim.