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Dear Monterey Families,

Parents, students, new teachers and support staff, and even community members often ask me about “middle school”. *What is middle school and how is it different from elementary or high school, or the old “junior high” model? How is middle school organized? What are its main features?* To answer questions of this nature, I’ve prepared the following overview of the **key structures of the MIDDLE SCHOOL MODEL**:

Advisory: Every middle school student belongs to an Advisory Class with an advisory teacher. This structure is a key aspect of middle school that is most similar to elementary school, in that every student has one main class (with one main teacher) to which they belong. For the most part, students remain together with their advisory class throughout the day, and their advisory teacher instructs the bulk of their core (academic and physical/health education) courses, especially in grade 6 and 7 (while in grade 8, there are generally two advisory teachers sharing two classes to which they each teach half of the core courses). The advisory teacher is also most parents’ main point of school contact throughout the school year, and we strongly encourage ongoing communication between parents and their child’s advisory teacher around their learning as well as parental involvement in special classroom events and activities. Along with the *structure* of advisory, there’s also advisory *time* every day – time for the teacher and students to step back from the subject specific curriculum to focus on the community of the classroom and navigate together the unique challenges of adolescence. Within the larger community of the school, the smaller community of the Advisory Class aims to provide each student with a sense-of-belonging as well as an advisory teacher who provides each student with guidance, support, and connection that goes well beyond just their subject-specific learning.

Teaming: Middle school students not only belong within an individual advisory class (see above), but their advisory class is also part of a larger team. Through this team structure, students form a sense of belonging and connection to a wider community of students and teachers beyond their advisory class. At Monterey, our students and teachers have created the following four teams:

The Black Bears *The Blue Orcas* *The Red Wolves* *The White Ravens*

These teams, each comprised of 4 to 5 advisory classes, often organize their own special team-wide events and fieldtrips, as well as participating in school-wide spirit assemblies and friendly challenges against other teams during which team spirit points are awarded for celebratory prizes! Through this combination of advisory and team structures, students belong to an expanding community – that is, the community of their advisory class, within the community of their team, within the community of the school-at-large. Moreover, through this team-based structure of middle school, our advisory teachers also belong to a smaller professional learning community with whom they have common preparation time in order to: plan and problem-solve together; discuss student needs and support structures; develop cross-curricular inquiry projects; and organize team-wide fieldtrips and special events. This team format also provides an opportunity for our educators to support and learn from one another as instructional practices evolve and, along with our students, our educators continue to be life-long learners.

Exploratory, Enrichment, & Music Programs: While retaining a structure akin to elementary school of students belonging to one main class led by a generalist teacher, middle school also provides expert subject specific teachers and facilities more akin to high school electives – that is, through our Exploratory Program, we have specialist teachers and facilities for Art, Cooking & Sewing, Woodworking, Drama and more! Unlike high school during which students “elect” to take the courses of particular interest to them, our students “explore” all of these areas throughout their middle years, developing a well-rounded foundation and finding their passions into which

they can dive deeper during high school. At Monterey, our Exploratory Program is also enhanced with sessions on Literature and Storytelling with our librarian, Indigenous Cultural Studies and Drumming with our music teacher, and Social-Emotional Learning with our counselor. We also have a wonderful school-wide Enrichment Program during which we offer a myriad of special activities – from “Ecokeepers”, to “Brain Games”, to “Get Up & Dance”, to “Yoga & Mindfulness”, to “Chess Strategies”, to “Learn to Golf”, to “Artists on Bicycles”, to “Fitness Training”, to “Geocaching”, to “Survivor Challenge”, to much more – for which all students sign up to participate in a series of weekly sessions in their areas of greatest interest. Finally, our school district supports a substantive Music Program at every middle school, and our students can choose to join Core Band, Jazz Band, Strings and/or Choir classes which greatly enhance their educational opportunities and experiences through the middle years.

Flexible Scheduling: Another key feature of middle school is that, unlike the subject specialization of the junior high model, our core teachers instruct multiple subject areas to just one main class of students (or two in grade 8) rather than teaching one or two main subjects to 4 to 7 different classes of students. Not only does this give teachers the opportunity to better know and support the needs of a much smaller number of students (and engage in more regular communication with their parents), it also provides them with a more flexible schedule. During a given day or week, an advisory teacher has the flexibility to alter their block schedule to take students deeper into a particular topic or integrate multiple subjects within an overarching cross-curricular project. Moreover, at Monterey we are fortunate to be surrounded by a remarkable natural environment and, along with larger fieldtrips to cultural institutions and recreational facilities within the community and further afield, the flexible scheduling of the middle school model enables teachers to more frequently extend their classes beyond a regularly scheduled time-period so they can take their students beyond the school-grounds, walking nearby the forest trails and seashore to explore the local ecosystems in which we live.

Student Support Meetings: Finally, within the middle school model, we have a built-in student support structure through which each team of advisory teachers meets regularly throughout the school year with their colleagues on our School Based Team – Learning Support Teachers, Counselors, and Administrators – to plan and problem-solve together. These meetings provide an opportunity for our faculty to look more closely as a team at students with extraordinary learning and/or social-emotional needs so we can adapt our approaches and supports on an ongoing basis to better meet their changing needs. At Monterey, we also have scheduled times for our Learning Support Teachers to work directly with students in each class – where possible, bringing the supports to the students within their regular classes – which helps inform their collaborative work with core teachers (and where relevant, with educational assistants) aimed at helping each student, especially those with extraordinary needs, further develop their confidence & skills to become increasingly independent learners through their middle years.

School Culture: The above key structures of the middle school model – combined with many other features, such as an extensive Athletics Program, interest-based Clubs, Student Leadership opportunities, and a great deal of positive parent involvement in many of our school activities – provide our students with a nurturing environment in which to grow and thrive in their middle years. However, all the structures in the world are only as effective as the culture into which they are embedded. With that in mind, we foster a school culture that promotes a sense-of-community to which all students belong, valuing and celebrating diversity within that community. Moreover, we encourage our students to be enthusiastic learners who find and explore their interests, and who navigate the challenges of adolescence in a safe and responsive environment where they can learn from their mistakes while developing their resilience and independence. Our students aren’t just influenced by this school culture, but rather they play a role in its creation. We encourage Monterey students to contribute to our school culture, developing their skills and attitudes as caring, creative, and collaborative youth, making a positive difference in our school community and beyond!

I hope the above provides you with a better sense of the middle school model. Welcome to Monterey!

Ken Andrews
Principal