

Dear Friends and Families of MMS,

I have made a suggestion at the end of this email, so if you don't have time to read it, please scroll down to the final paragraph. Thanks.

Congratulations are in order to the students and teachers of our wonderful music program. The high school auditorium was a lovely spot for our Monday night choristers and singers, our Tuesday night strings, and our Wednesday night bands. As a veteran of dozens of such concerts, I didn't anticipate the high quality of the performances. Bravo to the musicians and their teachers. It is delightful to note that aesthetics are alive and well at MMS.

With the exception of a few make up tests, the Smarter Balanced assessments are in the rearview mirror, and we can collectively pivot to the six weeks of school that remain. I say that advisedly. Post-concerts, post-testing, and post-winter can inadvertently signal a post-learning mentality in the minds of some who are ready to shift into summer mode. I wrote to our faculty earlier this week and shared what I call the annual May-time "tighten up the ship" message: This is where the administration reminds the faculty to help the kids remain on task, to make follow up calls to parent-partners, to enforce our rules of deportment and so on. A few warm, sunny days are wonderful for our spirits, but it's too early for us to stop the important work of teaching and learning. We all want to be mindful of our need to help the kids remain on task.

Do you remember the tv commercial with the slogan "Choosy mothers choose Jiff"? That brand of peanut-butter, along with wonderbread, was the lunchbox comestible of choice for my elementary years. You can now get individual snack-sized tubs of the stuff. I'm prompting the memory of the old slogan because I want to contrast an advantage from my childhood with a reality of our kids. When I was a student at East Ridge Junior High in Ridgefield in the 1970s, advertising and purchasing decisions were clearly in the hands of the parents. The target of the advertising was the choosy mothers. You might remember other such advertisements. How about "If they could just remain little till their Carters wear out"? Sometime in the 80s or 90s, the ad agencies realized they could market directly to kids. Remember the breakfast cereals wars? Coo-Coo for Coconuts? Captain Crunch? Today, as we know, our kids' cell phones and media presence receive tailored marketing pitches. Okay, yes, this is another paragraph urging more control over student access to cell phones. My parent's kids (my two sisters, my brother, and me) did not carry the burden of making decisions about everything we consumed. Our kids today have to be sophisticated consumers, and honestly I wish that were not such a reality. This is one of many reasons I want our kids unplugged for much if not most of their day. After too many months behind a virtual screen, they need time at lunch, at recess, on the bus, and in sports or other venues as well as school to engage as kids with other kids.

I have two ideas that might help with that vital social work. The first is family dinner time as frequently as it can be managed. I recognize that coordinating schedules for a common meal time is far more challenging today, but I value it. Put a basket in the middle of the table and pile in all the communication devices. My wife and I have two girls -- poor kids to have a Dad who used them as his educational experimental subjects! When they were pre-teens and teens, we would capture them in a big hug and tell them, "You are the meat in our best-friend sandwich." One didn't mind; the other did! We had to adjust our wording when she announced a firm conviction to become a vegetarian. "You are the tofu in our best-friend sandwich." As parents we wanted our kids to know that our love for them wasn't contingent on

their attainment or achievements, which we verbalized often because of the competitive nature of school and sports today. In good weeks we could manage several family dinners. We had a related understanding about performance in school. If either of them had a low grade or a poor report ---let me just say we had a kid who often got the "talks too much" comment---, we had a deal. There was a magnet on the fridge that we called the "F" magnet. If they got the low-grade quiz or the teacher's note under the magnet before we heard from the school, then we couldn't react harshly. We would have a discussion as we ate. Take it for what it's worth. I am mindful of being the new guy and an unknown factor to you in this school, but having the privilege of walking the halls and interacting with your children is calling up memories of my own. The "F" magnet got the emotions out of the conversations.

If this sounds preachy, that's not my intent. Rather, I hope to establish that I'm also a parent who had to help my kids navigate middle school. I can testify to the value of the "F" magnet, not that we used it a whole lot, but that it helped us get our kids from "That teacher has it in for me!" to "I guess I should go and speak to him/her on Monday."

The suggestion I referenced in my opening sentence is this: If you can find a few minutes over the weekend, could you speak with your child or children about respecting their own and other people's personal space? That borderland of space around our bodies that we all maintain. Middle schoolers don't always know how to 'read' a situation when they get beyond that invisible border. Sometimes they crowd in on another kid and then are bewildered when that responds awkwardly. With conversations we can help them be mindful of how to keep a respectful distance.

Here is a link to "May Moments from the Middle School". [May Moments from the Middle](#)

Happy Mothers Day.

Respectfully,

Tom McMorran, Ed.D.

Interim Principal