



Dear Middle School Families,

I hope that you all have had a wonderful summer break and that you all have had the opportunity to connect with family and friends. As I enter my third year as the Director of Middle School at Vail Mountain School, I continue to learn more about this wonderful community and to find myself grateful to be able to connect further with the amazing faculty and staff as well as our great families. The information in this letter will be helpful as we enter into a new school year and I look forward to connecting with all of you at some point during the year.

In my letter last year, I expressed that the focus for the year would be on the *Develop Character* portion of the mission as I felt that we did not do enough to explicitly build the character of our students through programming. I am proud to say that we certainly made progress in this area through our new Seminar, Advisory, and Club programming and the Middle School faculty is excited to further this work during the 2022-2023 school year. Our goal with the Seminar program is to teach concrete skills to students in the domains of executive functioning, healthy lifestyles, and navigating the world through real world and current event topics. The Advisory program is structured to support students in building community inside and outside of our walls. During Advisory sessions, students will fortify relationships with their peers as well as the faculty, develop their sense of self, learn about the identities of the community members around them, and, ultimately, celebrate the person they are while crafting the person they want to become. Finally, our Clubs program exists to assist in building cross-age relationships, in supporting the pursuit of passions outside of our traditional courses, and in developing relationships with people and organizations in the larger community of Eagle County. During Back To School night, I will be holding a Middle School parent meeting to expound upon these programs by sharing my middle school philosophy along with the Middle School Dean of Students, Lizzy Reed, as we strive to build strong partnerships with families for the upcoming school year.

Here are two important pieces of information for families to know. In Middle School students complete MAP testing twice a year, once in the fall and once in the spring. First, in Middle School, we do not share MAP testing data with families unless it is requested. The MAP testing data and information will be used to inform classroom instruction and is particularly used in 8th grade to determine advancement in math. Typically, teachers only look at grade level data from MAP scores to identify concepts and material that may need more attention. We do not focus on individual scores unless they are abnormally low or high. Second, every week we host subject matter study halls during Middle School recess and we encourage students to attend these study halls if they have questions, need one-on-one support, or just want to complete their work. We have also worked with families to require students to attend certain study halls to ensure that they are best supported in their learning of the different disciplines. The schedule is the same every week and is as follows:

Monday - Math Study Hall
Tuesday - English Study Hall
Wednesday - Science Study Hall
Thursday - History Study Hall
Friday - World Language & Elective Study Hall

There is inherently a lot of information that is shared at the start of a school year, so I would highly encourage you to visit our website and review all of the information available on our [Back To School Page](#). This is where you will find information about summer reading, supply lists, new schedule information, and more. Finally, you can access the [VMS Calendar](#) on the website as well to keep abreast of events.

Please read the following information and take note of important opening dates for your calendars! Opening school events and protocols are different this year and I am highlighting many of them in this letter.

MIDDLE SCHOOL BOOK 6-8 CLUBS

We are excited to continue our 6th to 8th grade summer read book discussions at the start of the school, a program launched by our Middle School English teachers three years ago. Each student should have a copy of their book - please be sure that they have read it. For new families, we have a plan for incoming students that may not have had a chance to read the books to still be a part of the program.

STUDENT SCHEDULES

We are entering the second year of our new schedule format that allows for more mission-specific programming for our Middle School students as well as block periods that will provide time for in depth learning. Student schedules will be available to all students and parents by August 19. The school will send an email with instructions on how to log in to the Veracross Parent or Student Portals to download individual schedules, which includes their Homepage assignment.

TECHNOLOGY

We are continuing our school-issued Chromebooks program this year for 6th and 7th grade students. All 6th and 7th grade students will be required to use their school-issued Chromebooks for classwork. The school-issued Chromebooks will use a content filtering program called Go Guardian that is like a firewall, greatly adding to the online security of our students. In addition, Go Guardian protected Chromebooks will still be protected if your 6th or 7th grader is using their Chromebook off campus. The 8th grade students will be required to bring their own device following the requirements listed below.

8th Grade Device Requirements

Chromebook

- Any Chromebook new enough to run the latest version of Chrome OS, which is currently version 103. To check what version of ChromeOS your device is running, go to Help, About Google Chrome.
- Chrome OS updates should be set to update automatically.

Apple Laptop

- Must be updated to MacOS 10.15 Catalina or higher. The latest version is strongly recommended, which is currently MacOS 12 Monterey. Go to the apple icon at the top left corner of your screen then select “About This Mac.”
- All operating system updates and security patches should be run regularly.
- Access privileges must be set up so that students are able to download and install software and apps to their machine. Some administrative rights may be required.

Windows Laptop

- Laptops must run Windows 10 or 11. The latest version is strongly recommended, which is currently Windows 11. Windows identifies the operating system at startup.
- All operating system updates and security patches should be run regularly.
- Access privileges must be set up so that students are able to download and install software and apps to their machine. Some administrative rights may be required

Use of VPN software is not permitted on the school's network.

- If VPN software is detected, your student's device may be blocked from joining the school's network and not permitted to rejoin until VPN software has been removed or disabled.

MIDDLE SCHOOL CARPOOL

For new and incoming 6th grade families, morning drop-off or ‘carpool’ runs from 7:40 - 8:10 am. Please be on the lookout for the carpool protocols that will be shared with you before the start of school. Try to arrive by 8:05 am so that your child has time to get to their classroom before Homebase begins at 8:10 am.

Afternoon carpool starts at 3:15 pm. We ask that all Middle School families use lane three (the far right line) and have your child keep a lookout for your car. We will have a faculty member at the crosswalk to keep your children safe, but we do not walk students to their cars like in Lower School.

VMS FAMILY HANDBOOK

The VMS Family Handbook will be sent to all families in a communication on August 12. The Handbook serves as a guide to understanding our community at VMS. It sets clear expectations and is a good reminder about best and most inclusive practices for everything from communication to discipline. Parents and students will be asked to sign and agree to the policies set in our handbook.

2021-2022 BACK TO SCHOOL TIMELINE

Friday, 8/19: New Middle Student Orientation and New Family Welcome Program & BBQ

Time: 10:00 am-1:00 pm

We are excited to welcome students new to the Middle School from 10:00 am to 11:00 am for an orientation to the building as well as to the Middle School community. Then, families who are new to our VMS community in grades K-12 are invited to a gathering that will provide a welcome to the school, information for the year, as well as a barbecue lunch from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm.

Monday, 8/22: The First Day of School

Time: 8:10 am - 3:15 pm

All Middle School students start on Monday, August 22 with a school day from 8:15 am to 3:15 pm. For clarity, this is different from the Lower School, which has only a half-day, and the Upper School, which is embarking on their Orientation Overnight Trips. During this first day, we will go over expectations, meet teachers, and have some community-building fun. More details about Orientation Trips will be forthcoming from our Outdoor Education Coordinator, Liana Sideli.

Tuesday, 8/23 & Wednesday, 8/24: Middle School Orientation Trips

Who attends: Students in grades 6-8

Middle School students will participate in orientation trips by grade and with their Homebase over these two days. The 6th grade will have day trips Tuesday and Wednesday while the 7th and 8th grades will have overnight camping trips on those two days. Details will be sent to each grade separately and reviewed when the students are at school on Monday, August 22.

Thursday 9/8: Back to School Night

Who attends: All parents

Time: 5:30 pm to 7:30 pm

We are excited to welcome parents back to the building for Back to School Night the evening of September 8. The night will include a Middle School parent meeting, a welcome from new Head of School, Steve Bileca, and information shared from all of the Middle School teachers. Please be on the lookout for communication in the near future.

I know that this is a lot of information. Please reach out to me with any questions that you may have. I hope that you all enjoy the rest of summer before we welcome your children back to VMS!

Sincerely,

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Director of Middle School

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