



September 2022

Dear Middle School Students, Parents and Guardians,

Welcome!

We want to take this opportunity to warmly welcome our new families and welcome back our returning families. Fostering our sense of community continues to be important as we learn, celebrate successes, face challenges, and innovate this year. We are eager to support our students and families as we integrate new strategies with our tried-and-true approaches. Please consider this letter a guide to some of our key systems and philosophies, old and new.

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Schedule

- For the daily schedule, see the Appendix of this letter. (If viewing electronically, [click here](#)).

Curriculum

- **Math Classes** are grouped according to skill level.
- **Block Classes** (Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies) follow a two-year cycle in which 7th and 8th graders are grouped together. The central themes of the two-year curriculum are identity, personal responsibility, and action. Guiding questions are: "Who am I?", "What are my responsibilities?", and "How can I make a difference?"

Language Arts, Science, Social Studies, and Art use an interdisciplinary approach to collectively explore the central questions. This year, the themes that tie these classes together are: Living in Vermont, This I Believe, and Migration.

- **Afternoon Classes** are grouped by grade. The four afternoon classes are: Spanish, Art, Study All, and Emotional/Social/Physical Wellness (ESP). Each class meets twice a week.
- **Literacy Reading Block** occurs once a week on Wednesdays. During this time, students are reading a book of their choice (not an assigned text). This block is designed to help students foster a love of reading and improve their literacy.
- **Phoenix Block** occurs once a week on Wednesdays. It is a structured academic work period in which students complete homework, work on ongoing projects, make up missed assignments, and receive extra support or enrichment from teachers as needed.

Proficiency and TSA's 7 Gateway Standards

At TSA, we use a proficiency-based system for learning, teaching and assessment.

Proficiency means:

- **Mastering skills and content:** The goal is to help our students have a very clear understanding of what skills and content we expect them to develop by graduation, and how to develop them.
- **An emphasis on feedback and progress:** The shift away from traditional A-F grades helps students reflect on their learning by asking: "How am I progressing? What have I accomplished? What can I do to improve?" rather than, "What grade

did I get?” The new proficiency-based system emphasizes getting and using feedback and tracking progress rather than final grades.

- **Multiple opportunities:** Students will have multiple opportunities within a subject to demonstrate mastery of a content standard, and will have opportunities across many classes and school experiences (such as Circus) to demonstrate mastery of transferable skills. Opportunities to revise work are frequently given.
- **Offering support and enriching challenges:** Tracking student progress against clear standards means we can more readily identify when a student needs support to meet the standard, and also when a student can use additional challenges and encouragement to exceed the standard.

Transferable Skills: TSA’s Gateway Standards

To provide a unified vision of the skills we value and teach, the middle and high school have developed descriptions of 7 transferable skills that students will begin working on as soon as they begin at TSA, and work towards mastery by the end of High School. They are called the **Gateway Standards**, and they are as follows:

- 1) ACQUIRE: Acquire Information Critically
- 2) REASON: Think Critically and Reason to Construct Arguments
- 3) DESIGN: Demonstrate Creativity in Problem Solving and Design
- 4) COMMUNICATE: Communicate Effectively
- 5) SELF-DIRECT: Take Responsibility for Learning and Growth
- 6) ENGAGE: Commit to Community and Responsible Citizenship
- 7) SUSTAIN: Explore Social, Emotional, and Physical Well-being

Each Gateway Standard is further broken down into **performance indicators**. A performance indicator is a specific skill that supports demonstrating mastery of the Gateway Standard (for example, one of the indicators for ACQUIRE is 1C Research). For more details about performance indicators and how we define proficiency in each, [click here](#).

Communicating with Students & Parents: Assignments & Assessments

- Assignment Notebooks will be distributed to all students on the first day. They will record assignments for all their classes in their assignment notebooks. If you are wondering what homework your student may have that day or week, ask them to show you their assignment notebook.
- BlackBaud is our learning management system--this is where students and parents can find all assessed assignments, information about classes, staff contact information, and track student progress.
 - To see achievement on an assignment and progress on the standards, go to the “Learning Progression” tab.
- Google Classroom will be used for assignment submissions in some classes. Google Classroom will NOT have every assignment in every class listed.

Formative vs Summative Assessments

All assessments are intended as feedback to help a student understand, “how am I moving forward in my skills and understanding of content?”

Formative assessments are opportunities for learning new content and practicing new skills. As any accomplished athlete or musician knows, practice is not optional; it is essential for developing mastery. Examples of formative assessments are: classroom notes, reading response questions, pop quizzes, labs, and in-class activities.

Summative assessments are opportunities for students to demonstrate what they have learned. They are recorded in Blackbaud so that they factor into a student’s cumulative/final assessment on a standard. Examples include: essays, projects, tests, and other culminating experiences.

Assessments and Rubrics

We use rubrics to show students how to move toward mastery, and we use the same rubrics to assess students and give feedback. Rubrics make clear the stages of moving toward mastery. Being assessed at “Starting” for a standard is a natural part of the progression of learning! It does not mean the student is doing something “wrong.” The goal is for students to have a growth mindset, understanding that they can and will grow in their skills: we will coach them on how to progress through the stages of proficiency for each standard over the course of the year.

All summative work assesses at least one of the **Gateway Standards** and **performance indicators**, and sometimes also a **content standard** specific to the class. (Note: students will also receive specific steps explaining how to complete the assignment). For example, for a project in which students model a food web, they will receive a rubric or set of rubrics that looks like the following:

TSA 3E: DESIGN: Use and Develop Models			
Starting	Progressing	Meeting	Exceeding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes a model, following directions and with guidance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes a model and identify/label the key parts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes a model and explain the key parts Uses the model to describe a concept 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes a model and explain the key parts Uses the model to describe a concept in detail and to illustrate a phenomenon or process Acknowledges the limitations or inaccuracies of a model
Science Content Standard: Develop a model to describe the cycling of matter and flow of energy in an ecosystem.			
Starting	Progressing	Meeting	Exceeding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes key parts of a food web 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies and labels how parts of a food web interact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explains how energy flows and matter cycles using a food web 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Illustrates how energy flows and matter cycles in detail Acknowledges the limitations or inaccuracies of representing a food web this way

Habits of Work: TSA Gateway Standard 5 SELF-DIRECT

Habits of work have a major impact on the quality of students' academic work and skill development. Because of this, we will give your student frequent feedback on their habits of work using the TSA Gateway Standard 5 SELF-DIRECT: Take Responsibility for Learning and Growth. This helps us track a student's habits of work separately from their mastery of skills and content. The following rubric shows the two indicators from this standard that we will emphasize.

TSA 5C. Take initiative and responsibility for learning			
Starting	Progressing	Meeting	Exceeding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identifies what needs to be done to complete a task, with guidance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identifies what needs to be done to complete work independently ● Prioritizes tasks appropriately 	Progressing and... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Completes work ● Meets deadlines ● Self-manages time and the quality of work ● Asks for appropriate adjustments as needed 	Meeting and... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Seeks out and completes additional learning opportunities AND/OR <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Demonstrates quality, depth of work, and self-direction that exceed “meeting”
TSA 5X. Engage with Learning			
Starting	Progressing	Meeting	Exceeding
Occasionally, or with significant support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Attitude maximizes learning for myself and others ● Practices active listening (SLANT) ● Takes initiative, follows directions, advocates for own understanding, uses times productively ● Comes prepared ● Cleans own workspace ● Uses technology to enhance, not distract from, learning 	Sometimes, with some support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Attitude maximizes learning for myself and others ● Practices active listening (SLANT) ● Takes initiative, follows directions, advocates for own understanding, uses times productively ● Comes prepared ● Cleans own workspace ● Uses technology to enhance, not distract from, learning 	Regularly, with occasional reminders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Attitude maximizes learning for myself and others ● Practices active listening (SLANT) ● Takes initiative, follows directions, advocates for own understanding, uses times productively ● Comes prepared ● Cleans own workspace ● Uses technology to enhance, not distract from, learning 	Consistently, and/or independently: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Attitude maximizes learning for myself and others ● Practices active listening (SLANT) ● Takes initiative, follows directions, advocates for own understanding, uses times productively ● Comes prepared ● Cleans own workspace ● Uses technology to enhance, not distract from, learning

Late Work

Small, formative homework assignments will not be accepted if they aren't completed by the due date, since this work is meant to prepare a student for the following class or activity. Major projects will still be accepted after the due date. Lateness on these major projects impacts the student's assessment on 5C: Take Initiative and Responsibility (described above), and not the assessment of their content knowledge or skill mastery. If a student misses a major deadline, they will work with the teacher to arrange an alternative plan for completion. Assignments that are turned in late will not be able to be revised.

Revisions

Revising one's work is an integral aspect of the learning process in middle school. On major writing assignments, students regularly will be asked to submit both their rough draft and final draft for assessment. However, instead of having the final draft replace the assessment earned on the rough draft, students will receive two separate assessments--one for the rough draft, one for the revised final. The rough draft assesses a student's ability to independently demonstrate various research and writing skills (i.e. Standards 1C: Research and 4A: Organized and Purposeful Communication). The final draft assesses a student's ability to revise their work (Standard 5C: Persist and Revise).

A few other announcements and reminders:

- ❖ Please bring the following for every day on campus:
 - Water bottle
 - Sunscreen
 - Snack and lunch
 - OR sign up each week for the free lunch (and breakfast/snack) program--see the weekly Newsletter for details, or contact Janice Stumpf
 - Clothing and shoes for outdoor activities
 - School supplies

- ❖ Microwaves and a refrigerator are available.
- ❖ Volunteering is critical to the success of our school; please let Janice Stumpf know if there is a way you would like to help out around the school. We are always looking for drivers for trips and sports, coaches, chaperones for dances, and so many other opportunities to spend time at TSA. It is a great way to get to know other families and we are so appreciative of the support.

Thank you so much for choosing TSA middle school. We are excited to start the year with your student, and are glad to have you as part of our learning community.

Sincerely,

The Middle School Staff

Andrew Lane -- Director of the Middle School
Hailey Neal – Language Arts and ESP Teacher
Clare Smith -- Science Teacher (on maternity leave till early December)
Ben Gross -- Pre-Algebra, and Science Teacher (through early December)
Fallon Abel -- Social Studies and Study-All Teacher
Tara Goreau– Art Teacher and Afterschool Co-Coordinator
Kyle Paquette -- Pre-Algebra Teacher and Student Support
Linda Jagoda -- Pre-Algebra Teacher
Tracy Gillespie -- Algebra I Teacher
Margaret Gish -- Math Foundations Teacher and Student Support
Ella Hayslett -- Spanish Teacher and Afterschool Co-Coordinator
Lydia Wood -- School Counselor (at the middle school in afternoons)
Janice Stumpf -- Office Manager

Appendix

Daily Schedule

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday	
8:15 - 9:10	Math
9:15 - 10:10	Block Class 1
10:15 - 10:30	Snack
10:35 - 11:30	Block Class 2
11:35 - 12:30	Block Class 3
12:30 - 1:15	Lunch
1:20 - 2:15	Afternoon Class 1 (Spanish, ESP, Study All or Art)
2:20 - 3:15	Afternoon Class 2 (Spanish, ESP, Study All or Art)

Wednesday	
8:15 - 9:10	Math
9:15 - 10:10	Community Meeting or Advisory
10:15 - 10:30	Snack
10:30 - 11:00	Literacy Reading Block
11:05 - 12:00	Phoenix Block
12:05 - 1:00	Club Lunch