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To Parents and students in 6th grade;

One of the best things we do at the Middle School is smoothly transition students out of the elementary level. We go to great lengths to make sure that students have support with their organization, with their class structure and we also want to provide parents with a transparency that allows you to know our programming intimately.

One of the more difficult transitions that 6th graders experience is the *transition in science*, where students move to a year-long curriculum structure that continually builds upon previous concepts. At our elementary level we purposefully build our curriculum around 3 units per year that cover Earth, Life, and Physical Sciences, but in 6th grade we transition students to Earth Science in a year-long format that meets standards established by the New York State Education Department.

Some of the changes that we want to make sure parents and students are aware of:

- Unit tests in 6th grade focus strongly on concepts and how these concepts relate to each other
 - Typical flash card studying doesn't translate well to this dynamic because conceptual understanding involves synthesis of ideas more than memorization (See Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning). In other words, students will have to be able to describe how concepts are related to each other, rather than simply memorizing facts.
- The Content of Earth Science can be unpredictably abstract for some students
 - Earth Science is a curriculum that is strongly spatial and mathematical
 - Students who struggle in these areas typically need to seek help from their teacher outside of class to brush up on concepts
 - Students who have survived in the past by simply memorizing terms and / or phenomena will have immense struggles when they have to understand the linkages between concepts and / or when they have to create a mental picture of how a concept works. These students can become overwhelmed because they see Earth Science as thousands of distinct facts rather than a big picture whose pieces all fit together to confer deeper meaning.

What are the strategies that students should adapt and develop?

- Ask questions
 - Students often develop a false sense of security with a high grade on their first test only to find out that the content of subsequent tests has to fit together with previous information.
 - Students should go over a test when they receive it back to make sure they understand the information they got wrong no matter how good their grade was.

- When students encounter difficulty in class our goal is to create a classroom environment that is a safe one for students to express confusion and ask questions. Participation in class is regarded as extremely important.
- (Student) Meet with your teacher
 - ***Even if you (the parent) can help your child with the content have him / her first go to the teacher.*** Students who have discomfort with approaching a teacher after school build up their own stigmas about what a teacher will think of them and the sooner we dispel this notion the better. Our staff loves to work with students 1:1 when they struggle. This is one of the most rewarding aspects of teaching and we look forward to it as much as we do teaching an entire class!
 - **Help-seeking strategies** will become more and more important as students enter high school and effective strategies can impact any student's grade point average by as much as 10 points! In addition, students who go to college without effective help-seeking strategies are much more likely to flounder. Middle School is a perfect time to develop these skills.
 - What to do:
 - Approach a teacher ahead of time and make an appointment
 - Teachers have many after-school clubs, staff meetings, professional development, and planning responsibilities. Students don't see these and if they do not check with the teacher in advance, they risk a conflict and missing the teacher.

What will we do?

- Study Skills
 - All of our staff work cooperatively to implement study skills that assist students in creating strategies that map the big picture (how concepts go together).
 - Our staff create opportunities in class and model at-home tactics students can engage in.
- Constructivist Learning
 - Our lessons, lab activities, and unit resources are designed for students to construct their learning in an experiential method. Our practice is guided by research and we continually investigate new techniques that we are constantly exposing students to.
- Work with you
 - If you notice anxiety or frustration please share with our staff. We have had many students who commit an appropriate amount of time to studying but whose tactics for studying are not appropriate. When you can share this with us we can respond in a more timely fashion.

Lastly, if you have questions about any of the aspects of the 6th grade science transition the team that you are a part of is the teacher, the counselor, our Science Supervisor Jen Gonyea, and me, the Principal. You are as integral to our team as any member and we all are here to support your child.

Sincerely,

Mike Klugman

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Principal