



August 2025

Dear Middle School Families,

I relish the opportunity each summer to reconnect with my family. Many cousins (and aunts and uncles) descend upon a small coastal community in Rhode Island each summer as they have been doing for decades. A few family gatherings are held at houses, but more frequently we run into each other on the beach. I find these moments to be both fulfilling and heartening. I truly find comfort in reconnecting each summer, sharing funny stories from the past and learning what folks are up to in their current lives.

One gathering this year was fairly unique as it included some distant cousins, some of whom I truly did not know. When I arrived, I found myself heading for the familiar faces because I knew what to expect – they were in my “comfort zone.” As the afternoon progressed, I wondered if I should reach out to a few of the people I did not know. Was this a missed opportunity? I could easily rationalize that I may not run into them again, and I already had plenty of close relatives to mingle with and enjoy their company. It got me thinking about how we all act when we enter new social situations.

The new academic year is special to every student. The first days of school bring a wealth of opportunities, and our middle school students spend considerable time and effort navigating these first few days and weeks. Who will I meet? What should I wear? How should I act? Who do I sit with at lunch and in class? Where and with whom do I belong? We have new students joining DCD in grades six and seven this year. All sixth graders are essentially new to middle school life. Even our returning students in grade seven and eight are new to their grade, their classes, and some of their teachers. How will they all act as they enter this new “family gathering.” Will they confine themselves to familiar faces and surroundings, or will they venture out and explore new relationships and challenges. Our expert middle school teachers are excited to partner with your children, and support them as they learn to stretch themselves both socially and academically.

The start of this year is a great opportunity for us all as we join (or rejoin) the DCD community in September to step outside of our comfort zone and to make the effort to meet new people and try new challenges. When we sit down in class or at the lunch table in these early weeks, we should look for those we don't know well and spark up a conversation. Not only does it help you grow as an individual, it also creates a sense of belonging to others, and it helps DCD “embrace an inclusive interdependent community of students, teachers and parents that fosters trust and encourages children to take risks.” I, personally, feel as though I did just that this summer, approaching and initiating a conversation with some younger, distant cousins. I was surprised at what I learned and felt as though my family, or sense of family, grew a little that afternoon.

With these thoughts in mind, I wish to make you aware of a few items to help with the upcoming school year:

- **Mobile Phones and Smart Watches at DCD**

DCD strives to build students' knowledge of digital literacy and citizenship with technology as a whole, while recognizing the particular challenges of dealing with access to mobile devices and smart watches. DCD's longstanding practice, which is in line with the latest research on student well-being, has been to limit the presence of mobile devices on campus while reinforcing our mission of creating "independent, resilient, lifelong learners" by asking students to work through the main office whenever possible, to determine their needs and facilitate communication with home.

We ask all families to help us accomplish these goals by complying with the following policy:

DCD does not permit the use of mobile phones or smart watches at DCD or at any DCD-related activity.

- Lower School students are expected to leave all personal devices, including mobile phones and smart watches, at home.
- Middle School students are *strongly encouraged* to leave personal devices, including mobile phones and smart watches, at home.
- The DCD Health Office will work directly with any family whose student needs access to a device for medical monitoring (i.e. continuous glucose monitoring) and manage communication to DCD faculty and staff regarding those needs.

The main office is intended to be the center for all information and communication regarding students. During the school day, all communication between students and families should go through Amy Catlin, Main Office & Admissions Associate (781-329-0850).

If a Middle School family feels their child must have a cell phone or smart watch with them for use immediately following the school day, they agree to the following guidelines for storage and access to the device:

- From the time students leave their cars in the morning until they are back in their cars at the end of the day, cell phones must be powered off and stored in student backpacks or bags. Smart watches must also be placed in student backpacks or bags. The backpack should be placed in their cubby for the duration of the day.
- When the child is picked up from school, they may then access their device.
- If a student takes their phone out at any point of the day, the phone will be held by the school and returned at the end of the following school day. This includes travel to/from athletic competitions or other school activities. DCD will alert families of such incidents. A second infraction will require that the student leave the device at home.

- If a Lower School student brings a mobile device to school, the device will be held by the school and returned to the family. Multiple infractions may result in appropriate consequences.
- Students' schedules, class sections and teacher/advisor assignments will be available on DCD's website by logging into MyDCD the **week of August 25**.
- At the conclusion of each academic year, the math department and I have a lengthy discussion about the Middle School math program as a whole and how best to section the classes based on the needs of the students. As has been our custom, **Grade 6 math** classes are grouped heterogeneously at the beginning of the year. After about six weeks of instruction, the math department groups the students by ability to best prepare them for Grade 7 math. This year in **Grade 7**, we will have three math sections. One section will move at an accelerated pace, another will be a standard section and a third section will move at a slower pace that allows for more practice and instruction in addition to a smaller size class structure. We will reevaluate these sections periodically to ensure students get the support and challenge they need. **Grade 8** will begin the year with three math sections that meet the various needs of students.
- Under the leadership of our DEI Director, Ivy Alphonse-Crean, we have Affinity Spaces and Dialogue Groups available for middle-school students this year. Affinity Spaces allow students who share an identity to gather, talk in a safe space about issues related to that identity, and transfer that discussion into action that makes for a more equitable experience at school. Students suggest topics for groups, and then we form groups to meet student needs. Dialogue Group Spaces allow students who do not necessarily share an identity to gather, talk in a safe space about issues related to their experiences, and transfer that discussion into action that makes for a more equitable experience at school. We will share these opportunities with the students when they arrive in September.
- It is a great time for the students, if they have not already done so, to begin reading at least one book this summer that they have not previously read. You can find recommended books on the Summer Assignment page on [MyDCD](#). When we return in September, students will share what they read with their advisory groups.
- Supply lists and information about summer assignments are available on our website. Please log in to your parent page ([MyDCD](#)) on dedhamcountryday.org to find "Summer 2025 Assignments" which also contains supply lists.
- We are planning retreats for Grade 6 and 7 at Hale Reservation in Westwood on **Friday, September 5** during the school day. Grade 8 will have their retreat on **Thursday and Friday, September 4 and 6**. More details will be forthcoming.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions. I will be in school periodically over the next two weeks, and I regularly check my e-mail. I wish you all a wonderful conclusion to your summer. See you in September!

Best,

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