



Middle School Update

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As you likely know, despite the fact that it is 2021, COVID has not magically gone away, and we will continue to be diligent in our safety efforts. I continue to be proud of my students and appreciative of their parents as we work together to keep our community healthy. We need to continue into the new year with the same determination of the last year. COVID and student safety will always be first in our thinking, but despite the fact that this is our first and most important priority, so many other wonderful things have happened in our Middle School this year--things like:

- Fifth grade raising \$4,766.56 for the organization Water for South Sudan with money they earned themselves.
- Last year's Artscape moving to this past fall and showcasing the work of 120 Spartan artists.
- A food drive during which we collected 1,150 food items from grades 6-8 and held a gift/toy drive in fifth grade that benefited several families directly.
- A curriculum that is appropriately on schedule despite teachers managing the challenges of teaching in the physical and virtual world simultaneously.
- SFA (Skills for Adolescents) growing into SEL (Social Emotional Learning), expanding to include fifth grade, and incorporating new resources from The Social Institute to address current student issues.
- A fifth-grade Zoom meeting with National Geographic filmmaker Katie Bauer.
- Preliminary ERB scores that indicate no problems with a "COVID-slide" during our time distance learning last spring.
- A Zoom meeting for the entire eighth grade class with Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas.
- A new class in sixth grade entitled "Learning to Learn," which is designed to do what the title suggests with Learning Resource and academic teachers co-teaching the class.
- Our first-ever Narnia experience in fifth grade!
- 21 eighth grade students connected with their German pen pals at ESG, our partner school in Germany. Not to be left out, the fifth grade math club met their German counterparts over Zoom.
- Adjusted, but just as memorable and impactful as ever: Coming to America, Zeus' Birthday, *Outsiders* trial day (coming soon), and eighth grade exams.
- A Middle School play (February 5-7) organized in such a way as to include as many students in years past while limiting practices to very small groups.
- A PE program totally overhauled for this year that continues to teach physical education while giving Middle School students an essential physical outlet.
- A new building for our seventh and eighth grade students that is on track to be completed ahead of schedule which will be followed by a remodel of the Daughtry building for our fifth grade students -- all projected to be ready by August 2021.
- Conference Days adjusted to a physical/virtual option to better meet the needs of all parents.
- Incredible steps in learning of new connective technology like Zoom and Google Meet.
- Continued athletic accomplishments in after-school programs.

These special moments get our attention, but all of our success is built on the daily consistent excellence of our students and teachers in the classroom. A parent new to our school this year shared with me how pleasantly surprised he was with the way teachers "have been able to inspire a passion for learning in [my daughter] even in the midst of a pandemic." Despite all they have been asked to juggle this year, our Athens Academy teachers somehow still are finding ways to make their classrooms, both physical and virtual,

challenging, inspiring, supportive, and meaningful and are able to do so in large part because of the supportive behavior of their students.

The world is in a tough place right now, but it's my privilege to watch over this small corner of Spartan Lane where the exceptional effort of our students, teachers, and parents has given us a place for our children not to survive the year but to thrive in it. It's more work this year for all of us, no doubt, but it's most certainly work worth doing. Thank you for the opportunity to do it with you.