



## SAINT ANN'S SCHOOL

### **Transitioning from the Lower School to the Middle School at Saint Ann's**

After completing third grade, it's on to the "Big Building" for fourth grade. While they are the youngest inhabitants of the Bosworth Building, our fourth graders are nonetheless full-fledged members of the middle school. Having spent their first through third grade years in the Farber Building with a gradually expanding palette of specialty classes added to their homeroom experience, students are well prepared to make the transition to a new structure, in which all instruction in academic subjects and the arts is provided by departmental faculty, rather than by a homeroom teacher.

Fourth grade curricula are developed and taught by faculty drawn from the very same departments that lead our most advanced high school students. While some students might be a bit tentative at first, they arrive fully charged and eager for this new adventure.

During each of their kindergarten and lower school years, students have had a head teacher and associate teacher for a classroom of twenty students. They have traveled in groups of ten to specialty subjects taught by departmental teachers. As fourth graders they will study English, history, language structures, math, science, music, theater, gym, visual art and computing. Each of these subjects will be taught by a member of that department who brings a depth of scholarship and experience in that discipline. Students move from one classroom to another for each subject throughout the day. Classes run in forty-five minute periods with a five minute interval between each period. A typical academic class size in the middle school is fifteen to sixteen students with one teacher, although fourth grade humanities classes are smaller, with thirteen or fourteen students. These thirteen or fourteen students form what we call a "humanities group" and will study English, history and language structures together. Classes in the arts are a bit smaller than the academic classes for all grades.

The full middle school at Saint Ann's spans fourth through eighth grades. Those five years are subdivided into lower middle school (fourth and fifth grades), and the upper middle school (sixth, seventh and eighth grades). At each of those stages the students have a division head who provides guidance, support, and the occasional course correction. The fourth graders begin their two-year tenure in the lower middle school under the guidance of Margie Hanssens, the head of that division. Margie works closely with a full-time assistant, Ramona Edmonds, and together this pair supports the fledgling middle schoolers through all manner of adjustments to their now fully departmentalized school lives. A daily morning assembly, which occurs after second period, provides a time to gather for announcements, check-ins, student readings and special guests.



Margie is also the point person for teacher and parent communication. As such she can gather the individual threads provided by the various subject teachers to weave a holistic view of each student, thus identifying larger patterns. Additionally, by centralizing parent communication through the division office, we foster the children's sense of growing independence and create space for strong relationships between the students and their teachers, an ingredient that we believe is key to their burgeoning intellectual agency and appetite.

As students move through the middle school years, the number of electives from which they can choose expands significantly, and one student's schedule can differ greatly from another's. Division heads work with the students as they make their choices, always encouraging them to delve deeply, sample bravely, and prioritize thoughtfully. Each student gradually becomes the lead architect of his/her own experience.