Dear families,

We hope that the first week of school was smooth for you and your child. The start of every year always brings schools and school leadership new logistical issues that need time and fixing. This year has been no different than past ones and Meg, Pia and I have been busy addressing a number of operational concerns. What is new this year is that we are also implementing a number of new procedures that the faculty created and voted on last year at the end of our school tone and culture study. So in addition to working on the normal beginning of the year issues like busing, blue cards and school food, the past week launched some small changes that we believe will help us all feel more safe and cared for here at Arts & Letters.

The newly implemented procedure that was most prominent for me this week was our bathroom and hallway passes. Every classroom now has two laminated and roped passes for bathroom and hallway use. The passes are located near the doors and can be easily seen by our teachers. In case of an emergency teachers can more readily account for his or her students by surveying the room and then looking to see how many, if any, of the passes are there. To make the passes a bit more sanitary over the weekend Meg got some strong adhesive hooks at Home Depot for students to hang the passes onto before going into the bathroom. Sadly, by Wednesday afternoon, the hooks had fallen off the tile walls and our system is again in need of revision. Since this time the students have of course been improvising and hooking the passes to existing knobs and overhangs in front of the bathrooms. A group of 1st and 2nd grade girls have been doubling up the rope on the lanyard and pushing it into a high round hole next to the sink that is about a centimeter in diameter. After they wash their hands they just grab the pass, pull, and walk to class. They have been really pleased with their own ingenuity and have come up to me excited to show me this way of hanging the pass. While I wish the hooks had stayed up on the walls, I am pleased that we accidentally provided an opportunity for these young ones to think outside of the box and come up with an elegant and very pragmatic solution to the problem. Our world would be a much better place if we all could be such flexible thinkers and problem solvers.

Curriculum night is on Thursday starting at 6. We look forward to seeing you then. Enjoy your weekend.

-John
Celebrations

6th Grade: Aiko Enriquez- Compassion, Jahiem St. Bernard- Clarity

7th Grade: Azure Billings-S.H.O.W, Isha Hasan S.H.O.W.

8th Grade: Priscilla Caldera-Compassion, Adjale Brown-Compassion, Zion Leben-Compassion, Selimatu Diallo-Compassion, Imaiya Lemons- Courage, Kiauna Fulcher- S.H.O.W

Staff: Ms. Shuart-Courage

Thursday's Book Talk with Ms. Ballantine

One Crazy Summer by Rita Williams-Garcia

Eleven-year-old Delphine is like a mother to her two younger sisters, Vonetta and Fern. She's had to be, ever since their mother, Cecile, left them seven years ago for a radical new life in California. When they arrive from Brooklyn to spend the summer with her, Cecile is nothing like they imagined. While the girls hope to go to Disneyland and meet Tinker Bell, their mother sends them to a day camp run by the Black Panthers. Unexpectedly, Delphine, Vonetta, and Fern learn much about their family, their country, and themselves during one truly crazy summer.
Kindergarten (Adelphi) with Mr. Allgood and Ms. Lockhart

In the early days of Kindergarten, we are focused on getting to know each other, learning names, figuring out new routines, feeling good and safe in school, and enjoying learning. It's interesting to see what skills children bring to the class; every year it is different. I'm particularly struck this year by the block buildings children have made. This photograph is representative: two of the three buildings were just about as tall as could be possibly built (that is, with feet on the ground!). It was not the height that caught my attention, though. It was the sturdiness of the buildings, and that children built them in self-selected partnerships. At another moment, I hope I can write more about the combination of math, science, and social studies concepts that children interact with in making a make a strong, purposeful building. For now, let's just enjoy the artifact.

-Mr. Allgood
3rd grade Humanities with Ms. Clevering

Lafayette and Myrtle have already accomplished some impressive milestones in just their few weeks of class. Students are now transferring between Humanities and Math & Science. This is an impressive feat for third graders, and one that enables all academic subjects to receive a greater depth of focuses throughout the year.

Students are also beginning to take more ownership over their learning. Students are taking down their own homework assignments, and learning the skills necessary to be successful in each area of study.

Fostering students ownership over their own education is an essential skill that we will be working on directly all year long. For example, one of our first assignments was to brainstorm, and then critically reflect upon, each student’s “hopes and dreams” for this academic year. Students will soon self-select a focus of one or two academic skills that they want to work on consciously this year. Students have also begun to form their own rules for the classroom that will help them achieve their goals. For example, student will, among other things, “respect ourselves and others”, and “respect the classroom environment and supplies”.

In Writing Workshop, we have already read the first chapter of Ralph Fletcher’s A Writer’s Notebook. Fletcher states that we should all live like we are writers, and write down our ideas, experiences and reactions to the world. We will be putting Fletcher’s suggestion to practice in our class in the weeks to come.

Next week we will begin our unit on Building Community, starting with Because of Winn Dixie as a read-aloud. Stay tuned for more to come!

-Ms. Clevering
6th grade mathematics with Ms. Steiner

Sixth graders are beginning their mathematical journey this year by diving into the number line and all kinds of numbers. Prior to middle school, most students will tell you that a number is an amount greater than zero (and typically whole). Fractions and decimals aren't quite numbers, but something else. In September I often hear, "You can't divide 6 by 10" or "Three doesn't go into seven, you can't do that." Students tend to shy away from partial numbers, remainders, imperfect division. Yet these partial numbers that lie between the familiar whole numbers are infinite, and infinitely interesting. They also come in a variety of forms in our everyday lives -- fractions, decimals, and percentages -- that allow the same amount to be represented in different guises. This makes things even more interesting from a mathematical perspective, but a bit trickier for a young learner.

Today students are in the middle of a quest to order as precisely as possible several fractions between 0 and 1. Soon they will add a set of decimals. Their conversations are intense, and precise. Pairs of students are moving their fractions tiny portions of an inch one way or the other on the number line as they use a variety of comparative strategies to make their decisions. I am so excited to see the flexibility in their approaches, and their intense conversations, so early in the year!

-Ms. Steiner
8th grade mathematics with Ms. Shuart

Eighth graders are off to a strong start! We jumped right in to our first unit on Expressions and have thought a great deal about how to express very large and very small numbers in the most effective and efficient ways. The next few weeks will be exciting as we think about how fast a nail really grows and the speed of light.

Additionally, students have embraced our new way of thinking about math homework. We are talking a lot about the idea of completion versus stamina. In many math classes, students are often assigned a set number of problems for a week or for a night. This year, in our class, the 8th graders are assigned 30 minutes of homework each night. In that 30 minutes, they are to complete or try to complete as many problems as they can. To focus the work, by Wednesday and Friday students are to complete the "required problem" that we then share. Masai was the first 8th grader to share out a problem on our first share, ever! In his explanation, he conveyed his method for solving with precise mathematical language, made eye contact with his classmates, used the document camera to convey his ideas and presented with confidence. I look forward to all of our future shares for the 8th graders. Such a wonderful opportunity for a great learning moment.

-Ms. Shuart
A&L Happenings

Recess
Principal for a day

Ms. Liebmann joined Mr. O’Reilly on Tuesday to discuss the tasks for the day and the transfer of power. The day went very smoothly under her leadership.

Here is Ms. Liebmann noting with concern the large number of scooters that do not fold or have not been deconstructed in our scooter storage boxes.
Parent Shout Outs

Thanks to Erich Hahn and Alex Sichel (1963-2014) for their tireless support of Arts & Letters and our community.

We miss Alex very much.
Parent B

6th graders have begun their study of ratios and proportions this year with several investigations... all centered around FOOD.

We've compared recipes for chocolate milk to see which brand will give us the chocolatey-est taste, and we've righted several cooking mishaps where ingredients have gone out of proportion.

This week, I placed a bowl of M&Ms at each table, and asked students to build at least one (but hopefully more than one!) ratio that would satisfy each of the following criteria.

1. Make a 2:1 ratio of blue to red M&Ms, using at least 10 M&Ms in total.
2. Make a 3:2:1...