

Peoples Academy

Middle Level

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Dear PAML Parents and Families,

Happy October! We've seen a lot of growth in students in just the past few weeks. True to the age, we have seen many paradoxes emerge among our student population since August.

- They are more interested and engaged in learning, yet less organized and focused.
- They are settled into social routines, yet are experiencing more conflict and unrest among their friends.
- They are hungry for challenge, yet are tired and appreciative of an easier, softer way.
- They want to please the adults around them, but need to refuse, rebel and show their independence.
- They wish to be accepted by those around them, but need to defy the "norm".
- They are taking a strong stand about who they are, yet try on different identities weekly, daily, or hourly.

At PAML, we work carefully to make it a place where students have room to do all of the above from time to time, as we know that these are the characteristics of their developmental stage. The use of Restorative Practices and our approach to rigor and challenge is designed to support this age in particular, and I've outlined both of these aspects of our practice in this letter below for your information.

Restorative Practice: By now, your son/daughter may have been through a restorative process or you may have heard of students who have been through a restorative process. This process may have been facilitated by me, Jason Michaelides our Restorative Practice Facilitator, or by a teacher on staff. As the International Institute for Restorative Practices articulates, "The fundamental premise of restorative practices is that people are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes when those in authority do things *with* them, rather than *to* them or *for* them. The restorative practices concept has its roots in "restorative justice," a new way of looking at criminal justice that focuses on repairing the harm done to people and relationships rather than on punishing offenders. The most critical function of restorative practices is restoring and building relationships. Because informal and formal restorative processes foster the expression of affect or emotion, they also foster emotional bonds."

This approach is very appropriate for developing adolescents who exhibit the characteristics listed above, and we have had a great deal of success with it in lieu of a more punitive approach, which according to our data over the past few years as well as international data measures, is not successful in changing behavior most of the time. It is possible for students to serve a consequence along with the restorative process. As the next few months progress we hope to have a Restorative Justice panel set up at PAML that will assist in this process as we continue to build a student community that holds its members accountable for supportive behavior, rather than simply responding (or not) to adult expectations. More information can be found on the International Institute of Restorative Practices website, <http://www.iirp.edu>, should you have a deeper interest at this point. Stay tuned for more information about how our implementation is going.

Challenge: One of the questions that often comes up this time of year is, "How are you challenging my son or daughter?" Our approach to challenge is one articulated through Harvard's Graduate School of Education. It leads students to develop their skills in the following five areas:

- Weighing Evidence: *How do we know what's true and false? What is the evidence, and is it credible?*
- Awareness of Varying Viewpoints: *What viewpoint are we hearing? Who is the author, and what are his or her intentions? How might it look to someone with a different history?*
- Seeing Connections and Cause/Effect: *Is there a pattern? How are things connected? Where have we seen this before?*

- Speculating on Possibilities/Conjecture: *What if? Supposing that? Can we imagine alternatives?*
- Assessing Value – Both Socially and Personally: *What difference does it make? Who cares? So what?*

It is much more challenging for bright students to excel in these areas than for them to do more, faster. We find that many middle level students balk at thinking with such depth as it may not be what they are used to doing. As we prepare them for high school, we are committed to refining PAML students' skills in these five areas. As students show that they are ready, we vary the level of complexity of the materials students work with in their quest to be deeper thinkers (Different novels, types of math problems, sources of historical events, and depth in science inquiry). If you have questions about how these are applied for your son/daughter, please don't hesitate to contact your child's TA or content area teacher.

Upcoming Dates:

- NECAP administration will take place on **October 4,5,6** and **11,12,13** with make ups to take place on 10/18 and 19. Please try to ensure attendance, sleep, low stress, and breakfast for students during this time in particular as it is important that we get an accurate measure of what students are able to do.
- **October 12th** from 5:30-6:30 is a middle level parent forum. This is an informal opportunity to come and talk with me about any questions, concerns, suggestions, or celebrations you might have now that we have started the school year. Light snacks are provided.
- **October 17th** from 5:30-6:30 will be a Parent information night for all 6th grade students as they will be receiving Net book computers and printers/scanners to take home for use throughout the year. More information about this event will be forthcoming.
- **October 20th** will be an early release at noon to allow staff to receive additional training on ways to analyze new sources of math and literacy data.
- **October 21st** will be parent conferences. You should schedule these with your child's TA (or CORE Team teacher for 5th graders) by calling Jane Langdell. Your child's TA/CORE teacher will have information about your son/daughter's schedule, grades, work completion habits in all classes and his/her behavioral record. He/she can arrange for further communication with your child's teaching team should that be a helpful next step, and will be communicating any questions, concerns, or suggestions you might have to your child's teaching team after the conference.
- **October 26th** and **27th** in the MES library will be the Youth Basketball Registration for 2nd- 6th grade students.

Parent Portal: Today students in grades 5-8 should have the second progress report of the year in their backpacks. Progress reports should be signed and returned to your student's TA (or CORE teacher in the case of the 5th grade). Many of you were able to get your password to visit our electronic "grade book" through the parent portal. Here you will be able to see everything on the progress report in real time and keep track of any missing assignments or test/quiz grades as they happen (once teachers have had a chance to input the data). You will also be able to keep track of your son/daughter's behavioral data as well. All behavioral incidents that rise above an informal warning are logged electronically in Power School. As a parent, you have access to the time and type of infraction should any occur. For more information about the data you see, please contact your son/daughter's TA as they have access to more information about each occurrence and are in a good position to be able to assist you with next steps.

First Dance is Coming Up: The first dance for 6, 7, & 8th graders will take place on October 14th, from 7:00-10:00pm. Students will be allowed to go as long as they are in good standing behaviorally and have no more than two missing assignments across their academic classes. Carmen Small will be coordinating these important events, and information about how you can help will be forthcoming. 5th grade students will not be able to attend the dance. We'd like to assist in putting together something special for them. Any 5th grade parents interested in planning a fun night should contact me as soon as possible.

Please don't hesitate to call your student's TA or Core teacher should questions or concerns arise as he/she is your PAML guide!

Enjoy the weekend, and thank you for sending us great kids!

Wendy Baker, Principal