

South Orange Middle School

Transitioning into 6th grade

Frequently Asked Questions

Who, What, When, Where, Why and How.....?

Developed by the SOMS 6th grade 2013-14 class coordinators

1. *What are “teams” and how are they organized?*

- The 6th grade at SOMS has three teams; A, B, and C, and students are assigned to one team. Each team has a math, language arts, social studies, science, and special education teacher. There is also one teacher that is assigned as the Team Leader that coordinates team information and assists in team meetings with parents. Students on a team (A, B, or C) generally share the same teachers and travel together as a group learning the same things but at different periods. Team assignment is random and there is no difference in curriculum or instruction across the teams. In 7th and 8th grade SOMS uses a two team system with an extra language arts and extra math teacher assigned to each team.

2. *When do I **find out** what **team** my child is on?*

- Prior to the first day of school, an alphabetical list of students will be posted on the front and rear doors of the school. Next to your child’s name, will be the **room number** of their first period class. On the first day of school, there will be a brief orientation for all sixth graders in the gymnasium. Once that is finished, teachers will escort the students to their first period class. Once there, your child will receive their full schedule and be introduced to their team. This is different than when your child was in elementary school and they go to school knowing their teacher’s name. Please make sure you go through each paper thoroughly and make sure your child takes that information with them to school. If for some reason you do not receive the information in the mail before the first day of school it is posted on the back doors the night before the first day of school.

3. *How may I be able to **request** that my twins, triplets, etc. are placed on the **same team**?*

- You must contact Principal Joseph Ugliodoro; juglialo@somsd@k12.nj.us, to make a request.

4. Who can I contact if my child has behavioral problems, academic issues or classroom/teacher concerns?

- You should consider the guidance department as your child's best advocate. The guidance counselors can help you and your child navigate many different issues, and they are also experts in problem solving and developing action plans for your child. The guidance department website is robust as well, and they have developed a flowchart of questions and answers to help all students navigate SOMS. That information is available on the last two pages of this document.

5. How am I able to *find out* my *child's progress* in his or her classes?

- The **Powerschool Parent Portal** is an excellent resource to view and keep track of your child's absences, tardiness, grades and missing assignments. A password will be mailed to you during the first week of school. Please keep your password handy. You will be able to use this password throughout your child's middle and high school years while in the district.
- If you notice that your child's information is not updated in a timely manner please contact Principal Uglialoro.
- If you are noticing many missed assignments please reach out to the guidance department to develop a plan to keep your child on track.

6. When would I be able to *schedule a conference* with my child's teacher since there are no parent/teacher conferences scheduled for middle school?

- You may schedule a conference through the team leader at any time. The best method is to send an email request to the teacher or team leader, or to leave a phone message with the front office. The guidance department has created a document that will help you identify when it is appropriate to call the guidance department, the team leader, the teacher, or the administration. This information is available at the end of this document.
- Signing up for PowerSchool and checking it regularly will keep you in touch with your child's academic performance.

7. What are *progress reports* and how are *report cards* made available?

- Progress reports are mailed home mid-way through the marking period to give you a summary of how your child is performing in their class. The information is a summary of that available on PowerSchool. If you have any concerns, please contact your child's team leader. The easiest is via email or call the main office and leave a message.

- Currently the district mails these progress reports and report cards home in the middle or end of the marking period. The district is considering emailing the reports home for a more timely and cost effective method.

8. *Where can I obtain a **class list**?*

- The SOMS HSA prepares a school directory in October. It is completely electronic and stored on the website (www.somshsa.org). A password is mailed out when the directory is ready to families who subscribe to the weekly HSA e-blast. The data is taken from the district and if parents wish to opt-out they can do so on the website.

9. *How many **minutes** does my child have **to change from one period class to another period class**?*

- The students have about 3 minutes to change classes. For most teams, for most classes, the rooms are very close to each other. Three minutes seems like a small amount of time but it is sufficient for students to get from one place to another. In September and October the teachers are sensitive to 6th graders' confusion or fluster, and understand students may not be on time. However, by November the expectation is that students arrive to class on time. If your child is not feeling comfortable after the first week or so of finding their way, reach out to guidance so they can help your child become more comfortable.
- Part of the advantage of being on a team is that there will be many students moving with your child through the day from one class to the next. For example, in Language Arts there may be four or five students going with your child to science class so they can go together. They do find their way.

10. *Who are the **SOMS 14-15 class coordinators** for the 6th grade class?*

- The sixth grade coordinators for the 6th grade 2014-2105 class are Amy Campione; amycampione@yahoo.com, Janet Christmann; janetc973@gmail.com, Karen Hudson; karenwhudson@yahoo.com, Maria Witt; mariagwitt@yahoo.com and Shanta Gyan sbgyan@hotmail.com .
- All HSA Board positions and contacts are listed on the HSA website: somshsa.org.

11. *What do the sixth grade coordinators do?*

- The 6th Grade Coordinators organize the social events throughout the year. They will need help with chaperoning and supplies for these social events. They are also the primary resource for the teachers to help with school field trips and communications at the grade level.

12. *Where can I purchase **spirit wear**?*

- Spirit Wear will be sold during the 6th Grade BBQ before school starts and at the ice cream social in September. It will also be available during the book fairs and music concerts. If you cannot attend those events you can contact the fundraising team to arrange for orders. Fundraising team for 2014/15 includes:
- Sharon Geraghty sharon2326@gmail.com,
- Shana Teitelbaum hsteitelbaum@optonline.net and
- Marilyn Wright mm.wright@mindspring.com.

13. *How can I **get involved** with the HSA?*

- We want your help! We have moved to a weekly eBlast system that outlines volunteer opportunities during the upcoming weeks as well as school announcements. You can sign up to help us with the teacher appreciation luncheons, the back to school events, the courtyard beautification, the Lunch and Learn series, the book fairs, and so many other events during the year. You can sign up on our HSA website in September (somhsa.org) or check forms that will be sent home during the last week of August..

14. *What types of locks are to be used on the SOMS **school lockers**?*

- You may use any combination padlock with numbers and/or letters. You will need two locks. One for your main locker to store books and other important school items, as well as one for your gym locker to store your gym clothes. It is strongly encouraged that you purchase your locks during summer break so that your child can practice with them before the start of school. Lockers are also labeled with a silver plated plaque above the locker. Since many students purchase the same lock, remind your student to check the locker number before panicking about not being able to open the lock. If a child cannot open their lock and they have lost the combination, the custodial staff will help them cut the lock off. This is a last resort of course.

15. *How many times a day can I **visit my locker**?*

- You may visit your locker in the morning before school begins between 8:14-8:20am, before the 6th grade lunch period, and after school, 2:45pm.

16. *What can I **carry my books** in while traveling to my classes?*

- Backpacks are not permitted throughout the hallways at SOMS. However, you may use a cinch (drawstring) bag, or a small carry tote while traveling to your classes.

17. *What time does **school begin and end**?*

- School at SOMS begins at 8:14am with an end of the day dismissal at 2:45pm. However, it is strongly encouraged that the students stay during **conference period**, which is from 2:45-3:15pm. This is when all teachers are available for questions and help. This is a great time for your child to visit with their teacher to make sure they have all their homework to go home or to discuss other concerns.

18. *Who do I contact when my child is **late, absent, or need an early dismissal**?*

- Please contact the main office and report these items to Ms. Ritchwood. The phone number is (973) 378-2772. If your child is late or if you require an early dismissal, you must accompany your child to the main office and sign them in or out.

19. *What are the sixth grade **period class times**?*

- The schedule is being changed this year to streamline the scheduling, and create more times for teachers to plan together. Specific period times will be sent home the first day of school.

20. *When can my child join **band, orchestra and/or Chorus**?*

- 6th grade band, orchestra and chorus all meet during the related arts periods. A student is able to take both chorus and band or orchestra. There are small group lessons for students as well on a rotating schedule so that they do not miss the same class period each time. Those schedules are handed out to the students.
- Do not bring your instrument to school the first day. Students will be told when their first practice session will begin. Last year it didn't start until the first full week of school. The music department includes: **William Cook**, wcook@somsd.k12.nj.us, Orchestra Director; **Don Tighe**, dtighe@somsd.k12.nj.us, Band Director, and **Jacob Ezzo**, jezzo@somsd@k12.nj.us, Chorus Director.

21. *What time does the sixth grade **eat lunch**?*

- 6th grade lunch is 11:36-12:06.

22. *How is the **cafeteria food** and process different than elementary school?*

- There are many more food options (made to order sandwiches, hot food options daily, including a pasta bar, and pizza). There are also more "snack" items available: pretzels, fruit, chips, fruit snacks. Please speak to your child about your expectations for the items they chose.

- If you are using the Meal Pay Plus you can also track your child's purchase history. Your child can also pay cash if you prefer that option.
- Breakfast is also available to all students in the morning before school starting as early as 7:30 am. Children can pay cash or use their Meal Pay Plus account as well.

23. *Where can I get a **supply list**?*

- There will be a partial list available on the HSA website in August, but it is recommended that each student wait for his or her teacher to supply them with a more comprehensive list for the year. Teachers have very specific requests and it is cost effective to wait and see what they ask for instead of pre-buying supplies.

24. *What is the **International Baccalaureate Program**?*

- The "IB" middle years program (MYP) is an inquiry-based learning program. The program does not dictate curriculum but instead focuses on creating learning environments which encourage creativity, reflection, and critical thinking. It also encourages schools to engage students to make connections across subjects and to the outside world. For example, this year SOMS 6th graders sponsored a food drive and held a bake sale to support Student's Change Hunger. The director of the Community Food Bank visited the school and addressed the real issues of hunger in our own community. Also, the Spanish Department led an interactive and interdisciplinary project for "Day of the Dead." This program is planned to be rolled out to all the classes in 2014 and incorporate World Language, Visual and Performing Arts, and Health and Physical Education.
- The current seventh grade class was the district's inaugural class for this program. They will continue with it through 7th and 8th grade.
- More information is available in the HSA website. You can also contact SOMS Middle Year Programs Coach Eve Kingsbury (ekingsbu@somds.k12.nj.us).

25. *How can my child get involved with **afterschool activities**?*

First, please encourage your child to use the conference period from 2:45 to 3:15pm. This is a critical time for students to make connections with their teachers, and it is also a good time to receive help with homework or class assignments. Please try to schedule appointments around that conference period. It really is valuable.

There are three types of afterschool activities and your child is encouraged to get involved.

1. Year Round Student Clubs -- Model UN, Math Counts, and National History Day. These clubs are run by a SOMS teacher and meet every week throughout most of the year.

These clubs also have a competition component that involves traveling to other schools or venues. *There is a fee for these clubs.* Specific information about these clubs is usually distributed to students near the end of September and they must go to the teacher running the club for more details. The first two sessions are also free to attend so that your child can see if it is a club that they would like to join (Your child will need a signed permission slip.)

2. YouthNet Afterschool Clubs – These clubs are run in 6-week sessions three times a year. These clubs are free to all students (please consider donating to YouthNet so that they can continue to be free). Students must go to the teacher running the club and sign up and obtain a permission slip. The idea is to encourage students to try something new and to explore their interests. This is another great opportunity to make connections with the SOMS teachers.
3. School Groups – Throughout the year there are other opportunities to join in activities at SOMS: Chorus, Yearbook, All School Musical, MLK Club, etc. These are other opportunities to interact with new friends and make connections with SOMS teachers.