



August 8, 2011

Families of A1 Students,

Each year we as a faculty evaluate all the different facets of the school, classes offered, learning environments, curriculum, and all other parts of the school. At the end of this process we often decide to make some changes we believe will help the school more effectively meet its mission as a Montessori school that prepares students for their unique roles to be responsible and engaged citizens in the world. We are very excited to announce and explain these key changes to you at this time. If you have any questions about these changes please contact Ben Moudry the A1 Level Coordinator (bmoudry@greatriverschool.org).

Spanish

Last year GRS added Spanish for 8th graders. This year GRS will continue to follow its Strategic Plan and add Spanish for 7th graders, thus making Spanish available for all students at GRS! All 7th and 8th grade students will have Spanish for 30 minutes each day for four days a week. Also, Spanish classes will be at its own distinct time and will no longer take time away from recess, an important request from 8th grade students last year that GRS was able to honor. It is also important to note that students who have Spanish class in the morning semester 1 will have it in the afternoon semester 2. This flipping will happen so that students can have the opportunity to take different occupations (see the section about occupations below and weekly schedule included).

Occupations

The term “occupation” was created and used by Maria Montessori to name activities or work that are a balance of the intellectual and practical, have a specific goal, and have concrete and tangible tasks to complete. Occupations also require studying and investigation to be knowledgeable about the information related to the work as well as competent in the completing the work itself.

GRS has offered occupations as elective classes for years with the hope of one day integrating occupations into the core classes of Humanities and Field Studies. We are very excited to announce the goal of connecting occupations to core classes will be achieved this year. Some of the occupations offered this year will be organic gardening, mechanics (includes Bike Shop work), literary journal, waste management, and music performance. Occupations will have state standards and GRS academic requirements attached to them. Occupations will be offered for 80 minutes every morning and 40 minutes every afternoon. Each day students will either have occupations in the morning or afternoon depending on if they have Spanish class in the morning or afternoon.

Afternoon Electives

For a few years the consistent evaluation from the A1 teaching faculty was they could achieve the goals of the afternoon electives in a shorter amount of time (hours and weeks). Therefore, this year the afternoon electives of Philosophy, Seeing with the Mind, Bike Shop, and Math Focus will be integrated into the core time of Humanities and Field Studies or into occupations. Due to the integration of these classes there will be no separate and distinct time of afternoon electives for A1 students. This change in the schedule gives more time for Humanities and Field Studies and helps create time for occupations.

Silent Sustained Reading (SSR)

The scheduled time for Silent Sustained Reading will not be continuing due to achieve the goals of offering Spanish and occupations for all 7th and 8th grade students.

Weekly Schedule for Lessons and Independent Work

Another change this year will be that students will be having lessons for Humanities and Field Studies in two to three week sessions. We have made this change to enable the guides to be able to communicate weekly schedules to students with more details and also to have the schedule be more consistent and firm. This would mean that a student would have Humanities or Field Studies for their core class for 8-11 consecutive days (not counting Wednesdays - see the weekly schedule included) before switching to the other class. We believe this will help keep the schedule and work more steady and simple for students. There will be work on going for both classes as well as some projects, but will have more of planned out and focused time to meet and work with Humanities or Field Studies guides. It should also be mentioned that students will always have Math lessons each week regardless of if they are in Humanities or Field Studies.

Evaluation of Student Work and Skills

One final change is the removal of letter grades for Adolescent 1 students. Instead of letter grades students will be given feedback based on more narrative descriptions and focusing more on key standards and competencies. Some assignments and work will be directly tied to demonstrating learning of these standards or competencies and will then be placed into students' portfolios. This change has been discussed for a few years. One of the consistent concerns incoming parents and Adolescent 1 teachers have is the negative effects letter grades have on students. Instead we would like to focus on a student's work and talk about how they are progressing and achieving with specific skills, concepts, and habits in a more meaningful way than just letter grades. This move away from letter grades is a significant step and we are taking it slowly and deliberately. We look forward to your comments and suggestions as we work through this change together as a community.

Generic Weekly Schedule for Students with Spanish in the MORNING

Time	Monday and Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday and Friday
8:30 AM	Advisory	Extended Advisory	Advisory
8:50 AM	Elective 1		Elective 1
9:45 AM	Lessons & Ind. Work		Lessons & Ind. Work
10:45 AM	Spanish		Spanish
11:15 AM	Lunch & Recess	Community Meeting	Lunch & Recess
12:05 PM	Occupations	Lunch and Recess	Occupations
12:40 PM	Humanities or Field Studies	Creativity, Action, Service (CAS) (starts at 1 PM)	Humanities or Field Studies
2:50 PM	Cleaning Environments	Cleaning Environments	Cleaning Environments
3:00 PM	Handshake Goodbye	Handshake Goodbye	Handshake Goodbye

Generic Weekly Schedule for Students with Spanish in the AFTERNOON

Time	Monday and Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday and Friday
8:30 AM	Advisory	Extended Advisory	Advisory
8:50 AM	Elective 1		Elective 1
9:45 AM	Occupations		Occupations
10:45 AM			
11:15 AM	Lunch & Recess	Community Meeting	Lunch & Recess
12:05 PM	Spanish	Lunch and Recess	Spanish
12:40 PM	Humanities or Field Studies	Creativity, Action, Service (CAS) (starts at 1 PM)	Humanities or Field Studies
2:50 PM	Cleaning Environments	Cleaning Environments	Cleaning Environments
3:00 PM	Handshake Goodbye	Handshake Goodbye	Handshake Goodbye

