Middle School MPA Meeting Minutes

Meeting: Middle School MPA Meeting
Date: September 2026
Attendees: 38 online via Zoom, 9 in person

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1. Welcome & Introductions

Alyssa Davis welcomed families to the first Middle School MPA meeting of the school year.

- Alyssa Davis — Middle School MPA Chair; parent of a 9th grader and 7th grader.
- Elena Holford — Middle School MPA Vice Chair; parent of a 5th grader and 2nd grader.

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2. Administrative & School Updates — Brendan Minihan, Head of Middle School

Brendan provided several updates regarding the beginning of the school year.

Admissions

- Admissions activity is already underway for next year's incoming students.
- The school is beginning its first admissions tours of the year.
- Approximately 16 tours are scheduled over the next several weeks.

Beginning of School Year

- The school has had an active and positive start to the year.
- The major theme for the Middle School is community building, connected to the school's “Joy Lives Here” theme.
- Faculty and administrators are emphasizing the school's Character Compass values: Honesty, Responsibility, Respect, Kindness

Honor Code

- Students participated in an Honor Code assembly.
- Students signed the Honor Code and brought forms home for parents to sign.

Middle School Assemblies

- Early assemblies have primarily been teacher-led.
- The school will increasingly transition toward student-centered assemblies.
- Eighth graders will take leadership roles in presenting and running assemblies.
- Younger students, including 5th and 6th graders, will gradually have opportunities to present as the year progresses.
- Public speaking is identified as an important skill developed throughout Middle School.

Advisory Program

The school has enhanced its advisory program.

- Students begin each day in small advisory groups of approximately 8–10 students.
- The purpose is to provide:
    - A consistent adult support person
    - A sense of belonging and calm at the beginning of the day
    - Daily check-ins

    - Community building
    - Opportunities for reflection and discussion
- Advisory may include:
    - Daily organizational tasks
    - A “question of the day”
    - Community discussions
    - Character Compass lessons
    - Lessons connected to character development
    - Opportunities to reflect on personal growth
- The study hall/X block at the end of the day is also connected to students' advisors.
- Students can use this time for:
    - Homework
    - Extra help
    - Project work
    - Organization
    - Class meetings
    - Advisory curriculum

Brendan noted that he plans to provide parents with a future update on the enhanced advisory program.

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3. Learning Services Presentation

Presenters:

- Sara Rosiak, Director of Learning Services
- Lele Horich, Middle School Learning Specialist

Sarah explained that Learning Services is a PreK–12 program supporting students across Lower, Middle, and Upper School.

Middle School Learning Services Team

The Middle School has:

- 2 full-time Learning Specialists: Lele Horich and Patrick Martel
- 1 Reading Specialist: Maura Kennedy

Mission of Learning Services

The department's goal is to help students:

- Fully access the McDonogh curriculum
- Develop the skills necessary for academic success
- Thrive within the school community
- Become increasingly independent and self-advocating learners

Learning Services supports all students through teacher consultation and classroom support, while providing more intensive services to students who need them.

Learning Intentions Program

Learning Intentions is a dedicated class designed for students who need additional support with academic and executive-function skills.

Program Focus

Students work on:

- Executive functioning
- Organization
- Study skills
- Reading
- Writing
- Math
- Self-advocacy
- Core academic skills

Scheduling

- Learning Intentions is taken in place of a World Language.
- Lele teaches the 5th- and 6th-grades.
- Patrick teaches the 7th- and 8th-grades.
- Classes generally contain approximately 4–8 students, with younger groups typically smaller.

Placement

- Placement is made in collaboration with the family.
- The school makes recommendations and then discusses the recommendation with parents.
- For incoming students, information from the admissions process can help determine whether Learning Intentions may be appropriate.
- For current students, placement decisions are generally made before the school year because of scheduling considerations.

Curriculum Changes

The Learning Intentions curriculum is being strengthened and redesigned.

The updated approach will:

- Begin lessons with a generalized skill or strategy.
- Explicitly teach students the language associated with that skill.
- Teach specific strategies.
- Then apply those skills to students' individual needs and current academic work.
- Proactively prepare students for skills they will need in their regular classes.

Examples include preparing students for:

- Annotation before it is introduced in English/humanities
- Essay organization before a major writing assignment
- Executive-function demands associated with upcoming coursework

Sara emphasized that Learning Intentions is not simply a tutoring service. It is a structured class focused on transferable skills.

Reading Specialist Support

Maura, the Reading Specialist, focuses on the broader literacy area, including:

- Reading
- Reading comprehension
- Written expression

She works both directly with students and collaboratively with classroom teachers.

Classroom Support

Maura may:

- Co-teach with classroom teachers
- Work inside humanities/ELA classrooms
- Provide targeted support to small groups of students
- Help teachers implement effective instructional strategies

Data-Based Intervention

Reading support is based heavily on student data.

- Beginning-of-year assessments are used to identify students who may need additional support.
- Groups are fluid and targeted to specific skills.
- A student might participate in an intervention for approximately eight weeks and then exit once the skill has improved.
- Students may enter support because of new data, teacher recommendations, or a transition from another school.

This differs from Learning Intentions, which is a longer-term course.

Math Support

Learning Services also provides math support.

- Lele and Patrick can support students in math.
- Lele has spent significant time working within math classrooms.
- Fifth grade also receives part-time in-house math support from Ken Waller.
- Learning Services works directly with math teachers to support students.

Learning Center / Study Hall Support

Students who do not require Learning Intentions or targeted reading intervention can still receive Learning Services support during the end-of-day X block/study hall.

Support may include:

- Organization
- Executive functioning

- Assignment completion
- Academic strategies
- Individual questions
- Extra help

Sara emphasized that organization is a common challenge for Middle School students.

Questions:

Q: A parent asked whether Learning Services also support students who possess the necessary academic skills but struggle with anxiety, emotional regulation, or applying those skills.

Sara confirmed that this is part of the team's work.

Executive functioning includes the systems used to:

- Manage information
- Manage time
- Organize
- Plan
- Initiate tasks
- Regulate emotions
- Approach challenging situations

Learning Services works closely with the Middle School counselor, Brenna LaRose, when emotional or anxiety-related concerns overlap with academic challenges.

Q: A parent asked whether students who take Learning Intentions in Middle School are negatively affected when they begin World language in Upper School.

Sara explained:

- Students enter Upper School world language at Level 1.
- The Upper School requirement is to reach Level 3.
- Students beginning at Level 1 can complete Levels 1–3 during Upper School.
- Therefore, starting a language in Upper School does not prevent students from meeting the language requirement.

Contact

Presentation from Learning Services as well as their contacts can be found here.

For general questions about the Learning Services program, families can contact Sara Rosiak.

For questions specific to an individual child, families should contact the appropriate Learning Services specialist.

A shared email address is available so parents do not need to determine which specialist should receive their question.

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4. Equity & Inclusion / Student Reporting Framework

Presenter: Enaye Englenton, Director of Equity & Inclusion and Parent Engagement

Office of Equity & Inclusion

The office works to:

- Create conditions where every student can flourish.
- Build authentic connections and a sense of belonging.
- Ensure students have access to school programs and systems.
- Identify and remove barriers.
- Work collaboratively with Counseling, Learning Services, academic deans, and division leadership.
- Maintain transparent and meaningful communication with parents.

Student Climate Survey

Last year, the school conducted its first student climate perception survey since spring 2022.

- Approximately 1,100 students in grades 3–12 participated.
- Middle School students generally reported:
    - Feeling safe at school
    - Being happy at school
    - Having strong trust in teachers

Students also identified concerns regarding:

- Hesitation to speak up because they do not want to get friends in trouble.
- Concern about social repercussions.
- A perception that speaking up does not always result in visible change.

Conduct & Bias Incident Reporting System

The school has created two separate reporting systems.

Conduct Report

Used for concerns such as:

- Bullying
- Digital harm
- Threatening behavior
- Other conduct concerns beyond normal classroom issues

Bias Incident Report

Specifically addresses identity-based harm, including issues related to:

- Race
- Religion
- Nationality
- Ethnicity
- Sexual orientation
- Gender identity

- Other identity-related concerns

The two systems are intentionally separate because the school believes separate reporting channels encourage more reporting and provide better data.

Philosophy

The reporting system is intended primarily for community repair rather than punishment.

Student Education About Reporting

The Equity & Inclusion team has been meeting with students in grades 5–12 during the first weeks of school.

Students are being taught:

- How to identify concerns
- The difference between tattling and reporting
- How reporting can be an act of community care
- How to advocate for themselves and others
- Language for discussing harm and repair

Approximately five Middle School reports had already been submitted during the first three weeks of school.

The school has a protocol for following up on reports, and parents are included in appropriate conversations.

Where Reports Go

- Conduct reports: Initially go to the division head/deans.
- Bias reports: Go directly to the Director of Equity & Inclusion and then to appropriate division leadership and grade-level deans.
- If an incident involves both conduct and bias, parents/students should use the Bias Incident Report.

Digital Harm & Technology

Digital harm can include incidents occurring:

- On school devices
- On personal devices
- Through group texts
- Through Google Chat
- Through other digital platforms

If an incident occurring outside school affects the school community or student learning, the school may respond.

Student Phones & Digital Guardrails

The school described several existing technology guardrails:

Grades 5–6: Students place phones in lockers.

Grades 7–8: Students use designated phone “parking lots” during the school day.

Q: A parent raised concern about students receiving school laptops and gaining access to websites such as YouTube and other distracting content.

A parent specifically asked whether there is a school-compatible parental monitoring/blocking system similar to one used several years ago.

The school confirmed that the previous program is not currently in place.

The Equity & Inclusion director agreed to discuss the issue with Ms. Little, who oversees technology.

The school will explore:

- Whether additional parental controls are possible
- How parents can establish appropriate restrictions
- How restrictions can be implemented without interfering with academic requirements
- Potential parent education about technology controls

Enaye's contact information and presentation can be found here.

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4. Upcoming MPA Events & Volunteer Opportunities

Faculty Free Fridays

Upcoming Faculty Free Friday dates (October 2nd, December 9th, March 4th, May 6th) will be listed in Parent News.

Volunteers help cover Recess and Lunch

Teacher Appreciation Lunches

Two Middle School faculty/staff appreciation lunches are planned (December 9, May 6)

Volunteers needed: 1–2 parents to help organize.

Expected responsibilities include:

- Ordering food
- Setting up
- Helping serve

8th Grade Overnight Trip

The MPA sponsors breakfast for the 8th-grade overnight trip (October 7th)

Volunteer needed: Shopping for breakfast supplies.

Typical items include: Bagels, Fruit, Yogurt

The school provides a detailed shopping list.

Jeff Selingo — College Admissions Event

Jeff Selingo, a bestselling author, will speak on October 13, 6:30-8pm about:

- College admissions
- Finding the right college

The event is intended to be particularly relevant for older Middle School students, although younger students and families may also benefit.

The event is being coordinated with Garrison Forest School and St. Paul's School.

Honey of the Jam Fest - October 16, 3:30–5:30 PM
Volunteers will be needed to assist with:

- Setup
- During-event activities
- Cleanup

A signup opportunity will be provided.

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5. McDonogh Minute
A new McDonogh Minute communication is being sent every Sunday.
It provides a weekly overview of:

- Major events
- School activities
- Sporting events
- Special days
- Other important reminders

Parents can access it through:

- Parent News
- Their parent dashboard under subscription/notification settings

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6. Next Meeting
The next Middle School MPA meeting is November 12.