

Dear Eighth Grade Families,

This winter we are excited to introduce a special academic experience for eighth grade. During this two-week capstone event, students will do school differently, applying their skills and knowledge in new ways. This continues the journey that began with the sixth grade Rendezvous and the seventh grade trip to Camp Widjiwagan. Each of these events emerges from the school's mission of cultivating students who can think critically and imaginatively and who have "supple minds that can synthesize, invent and build." In the heart of winter we craft an experience that engages students in unexpected ways, pushing beyond the familiar routines of the classroom. In eighth grade we call this experience "Winterupt."

During the first Winterupt week, beginning on January 27, students spend most of their time in a world language immersion experience. The goal is for eighth graders to gain competence negotiating real life situations in their language of study, developing increased confidence in their speaking ability, and making significant progress towards oral proficiency. Each day students spend four hours exclusively "living" in their language. Activities require inquiring, negotiating and collaborating in the language, and doing activities such as cooking, singing, sports, arts and crafts, and theater. Lessons and activities are entirely in the target language, and students are expected to maintain the immersion themselves and with each other. Students have formal and informal settings to practice interpersonal, interpretive and presentational skills. The week culminates with students mixed together in a multilingual event, sharing skills and negotiating with each other in familiar practiced situations.

During the afternoons of the first Winterupt week and for the whole second week, eighth graders shift gears, working in small groups to tackle a robust design thinking challenge. Design thinking is an approach to innovation championed by the Stanford University Institute of Design. The design thinking framework asks students to develop deep understanding of a problem, defining it in their own terms before developing, testing, and revising prototypes for a solution. In 2014, our challenge is for students to reimagine a major campus space: the recreational area outside of the middle school. To understand the problem, students interview students from multiple grade levels and examine video footage of how the space has been used during recess. They generate ideas and develop models of potential new layouts, engaging in an iterative process of analysis, critique, and revision. Ultimately, each group presents a proposal with a physical model to a panel of experts on Friday, February 7.

We anticipate that Winterupt will be an invigorating, challenging opportunity for your children. It is one more layer in our ongoing effort to help students tackle complex problems and will provide them with a purposeful opportunity to hone their critical thinking, collaborative, and communication skills while creatively tackling a "real world" challenge.

We announced Winterupt to students at an eighth grade class meeting this morning, Thursday, January 9. Feel free to discuss it with them and let them know that their advisors and I are happy to answer any questions. Similarly, if you have questions or observations or if you are aware of individuals we might tap as resources, please contact me.

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