

Spartanburg

DAY SCHOOL

A little bit about us...



We are 2 year old-12th grade independent school in Spartanburg, South Carolina~ roughly 450 students and we have been around for just over 62 years.

Our middle school is 5th-8th grades. We are a cell-phone-free division. We have a dress code. Our faculty teach in 5th/6th and 7th/8th teams, and we embody a complicated mix of traditional and progressive thought and teaching.

We have a very large MS dog named Fern who is part of our day every Wednesday and many other days as well.

This will be my 19th year as a part of our MS. I taught literature and writing for 11 years and this is my 8th year as our Division Head.

The ability to see a need, develop a plan, and fairly quickly put something like this in place is one of the many reasons I love working in an independent school.

Our Mission

To provide a superior educational experience,
in a community of trust,
that prepares students for a life well lived.

What About Wednesdays?

Farrar Richardson

Head of Middle School

Spartanburg Day School

PAIS Winter Meeting

January 2020



What we needed to tackle and attempt to address...

- ~ **Rising student anxiety** presenting itself in multiple ways
- ~ Questions related to **why we always separate students** by age
- ~ Frustration with the limitations of a very **traditional and shared schedule**
- ~ Too many **“special schedules”**
- ~ A **nagging parental conversation** that I couldn't shake
- ~ Diminishing **student school spirit, enthusiasm, and engagement**

What we wanted and needed more of ...

Time for creativity and some fun

Opportunities for students to interact with teachers & students of other grade levels

The possibility of student choice

Insight into what our students wanted to learn and practice

A break in the monotony of the weekly cycle

An opportunity to experiment with assigning less homework as a division

And to be perfectly honest, three years into my hesitant move from the classroom to administration, I was really missing my old job and needed some time for *this* again.



*So, the faculty did what
committed and patient
teachers do at the end of
a long year*

They agreed to an added EOY inservice day and worked through this with me. (They are an amazing bunch.)

This is what I asked for....

- ~ no homework one day a week ...
which also meant no assessments one
day a week
- ~ an abbreviated daily academic
schedule
- ~ a gift of their time and hidden talents
- ~ a name for this day
- ~ a positive commitment to two years
(we are now in year four)

Here's what we created>

the chosen day of Wednesday

30 minute classes starting at 8:00-no advisory

10 min. break on the hall in place of recess

no homework on Wednesdays

no assessments on Thursdays

SDS t-shirts for students

jeans for teachers

1.5 hour workshop blocks

“Wellness Wednesdays”



Ultimate Frisbee with Ms. Sorrenti

Knitting with Mrs. Cooksey

She can do anything... crochet, origami, coding, Sketchup...you name it. Who knew?



...and
sewing, too.



Coding with Mr. Burnham....

The other favorite workshop 7th & 8th grade science teacher, Mr. Burnham, offers is the wildly popular return of D&D. (I didn't get this game when I was in high school and I don't get it now, but they love it.)





Indoor soccer with a variety of SDS and local college coaches...

This eventually became student-led which morphed into an unexpected and popular trend.

Disc Golf with Mr. Barnes...



We have a new disc golf course that was given as a gift by the Senior Class a few years ago. Mr. Barnes, the music & band teacher, is always ready to play and keeps frisbees in the Band Room!

Yoga with Mrs. Harrelson...she never misses a Wednesday!



Poker with LS parent and card shark, Mr. Dawson....

...and the most adept poker player in
the group was a 5th grader.



Art Lab with Mrs. Moody.....

Because, sometimes, even though you are in the Band, you still want time to make art....



**Woodworking
with 3rd grade
teacher, Mr.
Roehl...(trying
to get faculty
from other
divisions on
board,too!)**



A sample of other workshops:

Lego Robotics

Drama/ Improv

Origami

Cards 101/Board Games

YIG/MATHCOUNTS

*Second Chance Cafe

Grade-level service projects

Student-Directed Plays

Lower School Helpers

Role Playing (D&D)

Japanese and American Chess

Volleyball with Wofford Players

Sewing and Cooking

Garden Work, Woodwork

Garage Band

PBL Field Trips



Google Form for sign-ups

QUESTIONS RESPONSES 115

WW January 31

Please select your first and second choice...

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First Choice

- Math Counts Squad: Math Counts members must sign up for this option
- Origami with Drew Summers and Mrs. Harrelson
- Extended Day with Mrs. Pruitt
- Fitness with Coach Pickens
- Coding(or Sketch Up) with Mrs. Cooksey
- Emma Lonon 20Time Project: Play Auditions
- Art Lab with Mrs. Moody
- Role Playing Games with (Mr. Burnham needs a sub for this week)
- Indoor Soccer with Jed and Logan
- Independent Study if needed: (must plan this and check in with a teacher)
- Frisbee Golf with Mr. Barnes
- Cards with Mrs. R.
- Other...

Second Choice

- Math Counts Squad: Math Counts members must sign up for this option
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What students like:

The **mid-week** break

No HW and relaxed dress

Being with other students from other grade levels (and other teachers, too)

CHOICE and the opportunity to try new things **without a long-term commitment**



What faculty like:

The opportunity to see **leadership** emerge

Chance to **engage with students outside of their specific grade levels and subject areas**

Flexibility this time offers for grade-level opportunities

Student/parent buy in is always nice

Wearing **jeans** (always the little things!)

What parents like:

The **predictability** and **consistency**

A **NO HW** night

A night to **create a family event**, even if it is just dinner together

Opportunity for their children to **catch up or get ahead** or simply get some rest on Wednesdays

Their children look forward to Wednesdays

Challenges

Restricted assessment days...

Variety of faculty participation...tricky at times

Some parents use this time for off-campus appointments for their children

Upper School schedule/8th graders taking US classes

Fine tuning the Google Form Sign Up process; One person must own this~

Students who resist varying their workshop choice and students who need more than one workshop time to learn and complete something....



And, our current challenge...

A group of 8th grade boys who ONLY want to choose P.E. themed games~

They choose “board games” when they cannot get into something else.

Then they turn board games into a huge cornhole game.

They are very pleased with themselves as of late.

This was not the idea and a bit difficult to support.



How we are addressing challenges

Return to a focus on backwards design and alternative assessments

Faculty sign up for workshops at the beginning of each semester (I always lead a workshop.)

The neverending wish and hope for creative and collaborative scheduling between MS and US~ we are working on it!

2-3-week clusters for workshops

Inviting 8th grade boys to organize and run their own workshop....we'll see.



An unexpected opportunity emerged with the abbreviated academic day,

...I shadow a student each Wednesday. I draw a name, rotating through grade levels, and meet them at their locker at 8:00 a.m. This is the best day of my week... hands down. This spring, I am sharing this gift and faculty are taking a turn shadowing!

Why? My connections with students were slipping and I needed to observe more social interaction.

I wanted to see the day from student and faculty points of view.

Faculty visitation and coaching was not happening as it should. (That was on me not them....)

I had copies of scope and sequence, long term planning, unit lesson plans, etc., but I wanted to see it “in the now.”

“Office trapping” (Also on me...)

Authentic conversations about teaching and learning weren't happening like I knew they could..

Questions?

Some that we asked....

- ~ How much does this cost?
- ~ What spaces do you use?
- ~ How do you keep students from always signing up with their friends?
- ~ What happens when workshops fill up?
- ~ What do teachers do who are not leading a workshop?
- ~ Do parents and community members ever volunteer?
- ~ What about the parents, teachers, and students who think it is a waste of time and not academic enough?

Final thoughts for the day....

“Progressive educators take their cue from the children and are particularly attentive to the differences among them. The curriculum isn’t just based upon interest, but on *‘these children’s interests...they design it with them, and they welcome unexpected detours.’*”

— Alfie Kohn

“I remain consistently in awe of our students and what they can do. Teaching them to take time for creativity, fun, a new skill, and caring for others is well worth the time away from what one might consider more traditional schooling, and dare I say *essential* to being well.”

— Farrar Richardson

**Contact me if you
are interested in
talking more...**

**or come and
spend a Wednesday
with us!**

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