

South Orange Middle School

Transitioning into 6th grade

Frequently Asked Questions

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

Developed by the SOMS 6th Grade 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?

- Before the first day of school a packet of information will be mailed to your home. You will find a letter in the packet which will have the student’s homeroom number on the mailing label. It will indicate **the classroom number for their first period**. Since teacher assignment and team composition can change SOMS only releases the first period class assignment. On the first day of school 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 do not worry, on the first day of school all administrators are available with student assignment lists to help guide your child. You can also call the SOMS Main Office (973) 378-2772 and select the main office option. Either Ms. Smith or Ms. Richmond will be able to help you.

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

- Please contact Principal Lynn Irby; lirby@somsd@k12.nj.us, to make a request as soon as possible.

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 office secretary Ms. Ross is available at (973) 378-2772 extension 2007. 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. Who can I contact if I have concerns about my child’s Individual Education Plan (IEP)?

- If a rising 6th grader has an IEP, a member of the SOMS Child Study Team will be invited that student's annual IEP meeting in the spring of fifth grade. A letter introducing the Case Manager assigned to that student will be sent to parents/guardians at the start of the new school year. The Child study members for 2017-18 are: Janis Catalano, jcatalan@somsd.k12.nj.us; Dana Franza, drutkows@somsd.k12.nj.us and Greg Speth, Gspeth@somsd.k12.nj.us. If a student does not have an IEP but is making minimal academic and/or emotional progress in the regular education setting, their teachers address this in the team setting with their guidance counselor. If they or the parents find more is needed, the case may be brought to the Intervention and Referral Committee, led by Assistant Principal James Waldron - jwaldron@somsd.k12.nj.us. This team will convene and create a strategy to help the student be successful in the classroom and a plan and timeline for monitoring progress. If interventions are not appropriate or effective, a formal request for a special education evaluation may be made in writing and addressed to: Ella Rideau, Director of Special Services erideau@somsd.k12.nj.us. For more information, see: A Guide to the Special Education Process on the District's web site: <http://www.somsd.k12.nj.us/Domain/32>.

6. Who is the designated Section 504 Coordinator?

- Assistant Principal James Waldron - jwaldron@somsd.k12.nj.us, is responsible for coordinating 504 Accommodation Plans, addressing questions about compliance, or making revisions to those plans. If students are struggling in the general education setting, their teachers address this in the team setting with their guidance counselor. If they or the parents find more is needed, the case may be brought to the Intervention and Referral Committee.

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

- The Powerschool 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 lose your password, or if it does not arrive by mail, Roseann Voorhees is the only person in the district that can reset your Powerschool password. Her phone number is (973) 762-5600 extension 1142. She is incredibly responsive. If you have not heard back from her within a few days, please call her again. - If you notice that your child's information is not updated in a timely manner please contact Principal Irby. - If you are noticing many missed assignments please reach out to the guidance department to develop a plan to keep your child on track.

8. 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.

9. 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.

10. 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.

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

- The students have three 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, 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. For the 2016/17 school year the entire SOMS community will be on one schedule with the same start and stop times for each period. This will allow the administration to use a auditory cue (bell, tone, etc.) to keep everyone on schedule.

12. Who are the SOMS 17-18 class parent coordinators for the 6th grade class?

- The sixth grade parent coordinators for the 6th grade 2017-18 class are:

Verna Jackson VEJackson23@gmail.com

Juliet Michaud jbmichaud@msn.com

Kristen Mitchell kmitchell70@optonline.net

- All HSA Board positions and contacts are listed on the HSA website: somshsa.org.

13. 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.

14. Where can I purchase spirit wear?

- Spirit Wear will be 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 2017/18 includes:

Johanna Karpf: johannakdp@gmail.com.

15. How can I get involved with the HSA?

- We want your help! We have 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.

16. 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.

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

- You may visit your locker in the morning before school begins at 8:15 am, before the 6th grade lunch period, and after school.

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

- Backpacks are not permitted throughout the hallways at SOMS. *However, small purses are allowed.*

19. What time does school begin and end?

- School at SOMS begins at 8:15am with an end of the day dismissal at 3:05pm. Students will have until 3:15pm to see teachers for conference, and until 3:25pm on Tuesdays ONLY. Otherwise, students are expected to leave the building by 3:05pm unless they are attending a YouthNet Club or YouthNet Extended Day.

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

- Please contact the main office and report these items. 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 to sign them in or out.

21. When can my child join band, orchestra and/or chorus?

- 6th grade band, orchestra and chorus will meet during one of the Related Arts (RA) periods. A student that is interested in both chorus and an instrument will work out a schedule with the teachers. There are 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 (usually after 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.

22. What are the sixth grade period class times?

- The schedule was changed this year to streamline the scheduling, and create more times for teachers to plan together. It will be uploaded to the HSA website.

23. What is the "Rotation" period?

- 6th and 7th grade no longer have what we call "WIN". It is now called "Rotation". Each day they go to one of their 4 core classes. (Math, LA, SS, Science). Friday is flex day where they go to the class they need most, based on "What they need". Additional information will follow as it becomes available.

24. Does sixth grade eat lunch together?

-Yes.

25. 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 7:45 am. Children can pay cash or use their Meal Pay Plus account as well.

26. 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.

27. Who should I contact if my child is feeling Harassed, Intimidated, or Bullied (HIB)?

- You should immediately contact the building principal, Principal Irby. Her phone number is (973) 378-2772. She strongly encourages you to bring any situation to her attention sooner rather than later so that interventions can be explored. In addition, Ms. Steiner (SOMS Social Worker) is the HIB School Specialist. She can be reached at ext. 2012.

28. What afterschool activities are available?

-There are many afterschool activities and your child is encouraged to get involved. 1. YouthNet Afterschool Clubs – These clubs are run in 6-week sessions three times a year. These clubs have a registration fee. Students should 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. 2. 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.