

## GRAY Matter

### A Middle School Program that Works: A look at 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grades at CRS

by CRS Parent Lisa Jason and Assistant Head of School Elizabeth Clayton

As a parent, how would you feel if you knew your child would enter high school well prepared, well grounded, and self-assured? That is the goal of the CRS 7/8 educational program; a goal at which we are succeeding.

CRS has been committed to having a middle school program for 38 years. Founded in 1971 with 7<sup>th</sup> grade and 1972 with 8<sup>th</sup> grade, the school has been growing and improving the program ever since. Upper Grades Coordinator Mary Walsh has helped develop it over the last 18 years. Her philosophy, as well as that of the entire 7/8 teaching team, explains why it has been successful. "We believe that if you treat students with respect and provide a genuinely engaging curriculum, they will invest in their learning and also in their community," says Mary. "The commitment of the teachers, the accepting environment they create in their classrooms, and the close relationships they build with the students through the advising program create a unique and supportive place to learn and grow. The combination of nurturing with the opportunity to 'be somebody' here gives the kids something they might not find in a traditional middle school."

"Academically, personal best is always the goal," she continues. "Classes are intimate enough that

teachers can tailor the expectations to each student. Everyone is challenged at his or her own level. There is an ability to be flexible in this environment, which greatly benefits the students and simply would not happen in a bigger school."

A testament to this success is past graduates. They unilaterally rave about the 7/8 experience. They feel they left CRS well prepared for their next step in life. 2008 graduate Tori Cabot says, "Charles River was, is, and will always remain my school. My seventh and eighth grade years were probably the most influential of my CRS education. I benefited from 7/8 in two major academic ways. In all my classes I learned information, and each of my teachers also gave me strategies on how to learn in the future...I know that CRS will forever endure in my heart as a place that gave me confidence, fostered a love of learning, and taught me how to think not what to think."

Almost more importantly, though, CRS provides a safe haven from some of the worldly pressures many young adolescents feel. Students



get to be kids for two more years, which gives them an interesting blend of childlike simplicity and unusual maturity. "Our graduates are often wise beyond their years," Mary says proudly. "They are able to speak to and interact with adults with ease because of their advisor relationship and the fact they have been treated with respect." Head of School Cathy Gately says, "The kids in our 7/8 program know who they are, what they believe in, and how to advocate for themselves. They are remarkably more confident than most young adults I see." She attributes much of this to the structure of and the support built into the 7/8 educational program.

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# An Academic Overview of Grades 7 & 8

by Upper Grades Coordinator Mary Walsh

Secondary school teachers characterize CRS graduates as eager, curious, and competent learners. Their enthusiasm for school is certainly due to the ongoing emphasis on genuinely interesting curricula presented in engaging formats throughout the school. The 7/8 program maintains the philosophical commitment to hands-on, experiential education present in the early grades as well as the careful cultivation of academic skills in these contexts. Teachers work to ensure that each student leaves with all of the tools/s/he needs in order to succeed in the future.

Reading is perhaps the most important of these tools, and it is em-

phasized across the curriculum. In social studies and English, students read with an eye toward analyzing history and literature. They learn to see beneath the surface by asking themselves, “Why did this happen? How did this happen? What if ...” There is an ongoing focus on understanding events and people from various points of view in the theme *Perspectives on Justice*. A variety of styles of literature is explored in English, and textbooks, primary sources, newspapers, and the internet are all used in social studies. In addition to their textbooks, world language students frequently read short stories, poetry and other samples of authentic media in the target language. Students have textbooks in math and science

as well, and close reading of these for specific information is yet another type of reading experience.

Writing goes hand-in-hand with reading, and, again, it is an important aspect of every class. Each student is on a personal path to expanding his/her grasp of grammar, vocabulary, and the structure of a good expository essay. Planning, writing, proofreading, editing, and revising are all a part of the process. However, the deeper goal is to express sharp critical thinking. Using evidence from a novel to illustrate and prove assertions about a character’s motivation, explaining the solution to a non-routine problem in math, arguing a position in a debate about a controversial current event, and defending a hypothesis in a lab report are all examples of assignments in which students are expected to clearly explain their reasoning in well-crafted essays. In world language, students keep journals in the target language and defend their choice of grammatical structures on tests and compositions in writing. Every spring, each student studies a topic related to justice, writes a thesis statement, and then defends the thesis in a research paper that includes a bibliography and footnotes.

Mathematically, students continue to broaden their conceptual horizons and evolve as problem solvers. In both math and science classes, students are introduced to increasingly abstract concepts and concentrate on





moving from qualitative to quantitative descriptions of phenomena. Taking class notes is required, and regular completion of nightly homework assignments is essential. Students learn to come to class ready with questions. Eighth graders take an accelerated course of Algebra I and most are ready to move on to Algebra II or Geometry when they leave, and, more importantly, they realize that diligent, daily effort is the most significant component of achievement.

Students are assessed in a variety of ways, including projects, papers, and traditional tests. Long term projects and research assignments require students to pay attention to time management and overall organizational

strategies. In fact, learning to handle the increased homework load is a skill in and of itself, one that is attended to by the entire 7/8 team and addressed regularly in advising. Test preparation techniques are discussed in classes so students can learn to do their best in these situations.

Specific skills are addressed throughout the 7/8 curriculum in order to prepare students for secondary school. However, the hallmark of a CRS education is the students' lifelong engagement in the challenge and joy of their own learning. More than anything else, this desire to make meaning out of what they study is what drives and distinguishes CRS graduates.

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## A Middle School Program that Works

“In a safe learning environment, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders will still take risks and try new things,” explains 7/8 social studies teacher Chris Raskin. “As a result, we are able to have a very demanding academic program at CRS. The students leave here with vital skills for high school and beyond, such as how to write a research paper and how to argue a case. Additionally, by being here through 8th grade, the kids get a lot of respect at school. This is good for them. It encourages them to act in accordance with that respect,” she adds. CRS Dean of Faculty Dibby Moder believes the PreK–8 school model is better for kids than other alternatives. “It gives the 7th and 8th graders an opportunity to be real leaders at school.” As a parent, Dibby has been thrilled to see her children Emily '05, Charlie '08, and Daniel '10 participate in the rich learning experiences offered at CRS. “There are so many intellectual activities for the kids to get excited about,” she says. “And the quality of the teaching is at such a high level.” She also appreciates that some of the social pressures of a traditional middle school are minimized at CRS. This can be attributed to both the size of the school and the ardent attention of the advisors. All of these factors lead CRS graduates to distinguish themselves academically at their secondary schools, and to be leaders as well.

# Extracurricular Activities in 7/8



There are so many opportunities to pursue outside interests in 7/8! In recent years, the extracurricular programs have blossomed, offering a wealth of choices for the upper grades.

*Mathcounts* started in 1998 as a way to provide additional challenges for exceptional math students. *Mathcounts* has become so popular that it is now both a club and an elective. Students in the club solve a set of ten *Mathcounts* “Warm Up” problems per week and then meet over lunch to discuss and compare solutions. A more difficult set of weekly “Work Out” problems is tackled by students in the elective, and additional curricula are also taught. Members of the elective participate in the Metro West chapter competition in February, and in three of the past six years CRS students have advanced to the state competition.

*The Newspaper Club* meets weekly and is responsible for producing the monthly 6/7/8 student newspaper, *The Charles River Rapid*. Students learn some basics of journalism writing as well as layout and design using the publishing software InDesign. Each issue has a different student editor, and student reporters are free to write about the topics that interest them and their readers. Recently students authored book and movie reviews, articles about the environment, and fashion. The *Rapid* also includes student created comics and editorial cartoons.

*The CRS Speech Team* began as a fall elective and now meets after school every Friday in preparation for Massachusetts Forensics League tournaments. The “speechies” learn how to offer each other positive reinforcement

and thoughtful criticism on their interpretive poetry and oral readings, and they then compete in four to five tournaments per year. In addition to honing their skills at competitions, “speechies” have the opportunity to connect with other students with similar interest at these day-long events.

*The Model United Nations (MUN) Club* allows students to attempt to resolve real-world problems using the UN’s structure and rules of procedure. In preparation for a MUN Conference, student delegates work in teams to prepare draft resolutions that accurately reflect their assigned country’s position on a current issue. Club meetings also review negotiation techniques, conflict resolution strategies, and public speaking skills. The regional conference takes place at Northeastern University, and CRS students also travel to an international conference held in New York City at the United Nations Headquarters.

In recent years, *Chorus* has grown to include 50 students. Open to Grades Four through Eight, the chorus generally sings popular songs, and members have a good deal of input into song choices. This approach has enticed many seventh and eighth graders to remain involved right up until graduation.

Three electives provide more in-depth musical opportunities for our middle school students. The CRS Band was comprised of five students in a fall elective this year, playing songs from *Journey*, *The Kings of Leon*, and the



*The Community Service Committee* coordinates the 7/8 service initiatives with school-wide efforts. The Social Committee strives to make the school day more fun. For example, it holds bi-monthly parties for all the kids whose birthdays were in those months. The Social Committee also prepares presentations about various holidays and celebrations observed around the world and by families in the CRS community.

With so many options, virtually every student is engaged in at least one extracurricular activity, and most have more than one area of involvement. The broad range of choices is an important facet of the vibrant middle school program here at CRS.

Beatles. The winter singing elective emphasizes close harmony and a tight ensemble sound, and the spring a cappella elective further promotes ear training as well as reading music.

*Dance Team* is a new option this year. Organized by students, it meets during the flex period on Wednesdays. The season began with a dance professional teaching a clinic in choreography and getting the students started on their steps, after which student directors assumed leadership.

Grades Seven and Eight also have a *student government* and elected committees. The government is based on the Town Meeting model, led by a Moderator, Secretary, and grade level Representatives.



# Preparing for Life After CRS: The Secondary School Process

by Upper Grades Coordinator Mary Walsh

Every year the 7/8 team hosts an informational evening to tell CRS parents of younger children about the upper grades program. We talk about our philosophy, advising, extracurricular opportunities, and the academic program, and participants go on tours led by recent alumni and current students. Parents meet with the 7/8 teachers, followed by a question and answer session with teachers and alumni. Two queries that are directed at alumni every year are clearly foremost on parents' minds: First, how did you determine what school you would attend after CRS, and, second, do you feel you were well prepared when you got there?

The secondary school process begins in the spring of Seventh Grade. All parents of students who intend to apply to independent schools attend a meeting with Cathy Gately and Mary Walsh at which a clear, step-by-step procedure is shared, along with some overarching messages. Because every student is different, the goal is for each to earn a spot at a school that is a "good fit." This involves everything from academic expectations to personal interests, and even a school's community mores. Also, this is a collaborative effort, which means it is imperative for families and the school to work hand in hand in order to ensure a positive outcome.

After the kick off meeting, the 7/8 team brainstorms about each student. We consider what type of environment would best promote personal and academic growth, and we keep in mind the profiles that have typically been accepted by each of the schools. Meanwhile, parents are also thinking about their children: What instructional approaches have worked best? How big should the community be? What sports, arts, or other extracurricular opportunities are important to my child? Single sex? Boarding or day? So much to consider!

Each student's advisor and the parents meet to share thoughts and create an initial list of schools to investigate, usually before seventh grade ends in June. Over the summer, families can send away for materials, check out web sites, and even drive through campuses to start to get a feel for the schools. In September, interviews are scheduled and the search begins in earnest.

An early Growth Education class focuses on what to expect at school visits, and secondary school advisors

conduct practice interviews with kids before they face the real thing. Advisors also check in regularly to hear impressions and experiences about each of the schools, always trying to help students keep their minds and options open. Often students become excited by possibilities at this phase, which can further motivate them to do their best in this important academic term. This effort extends to preparing for the Secondary School Admissions Test, or SSAT, one of the hurdles necessary for the application process.

By early December families have honed the list of schools to which their children will apply, which they run by the secondary school advisor for final feedback. When everyone is in agreement, the task of completing the applications gets underway. Students discuss essay options and strategies in English, and they also receive specific suggestions for completing the forms as efficiently as possible. However, there is no shortcut to doing a good job on these, and our students know they need to start early, work steadily, and revise until they are satisfied with the final drafts. Parents have their own sections to complete, math and English teachers write recommendations for everyone, other subject teachers supply additional recommendations, and Cathy Gately writes a personal letter for each student. Everything is sent in by the end of January, and the long wait for March 10th decisions begins.

As the date nears, Cathy Gately gets in touch with all of the admissions offices of schools to which our students are applying. She is able to advocate for them and also gets a sense of how the process is unfolding. Happily, our success rate is outstanding: the goal of securing a place for each student at a school that is a "good fit" is invariably met. Furthermore, almost everyone is still happy with the outcome throughout their high school years.

This leads to the second question: Once they get to their new schools, do CRS graduates feel they were well prepared? The short answer from 7/8 alumni is a resounding "yes!" They find they have the academic and organizational skills they need to make the leap up to the increased expectations of secondary school. Also, in order to keep current with all of our graduates' thoughts on their education at CRS, we send out a survey every winter asking for feedback. This further confirms our sense that we are sending them to the next step with the tools they need, and they also give us some

valuable critiques that help us in our ongoing effort to provide a quality education.

Interestingly, when asked about their CRS experience, alumni also frequently emphasize other, non-academic ways in which they felt prepared. Often they comment on the ease with which they communicate with adults and take on leadership roles; last year one graduate noted that whenever there was an issue with a teacher, her peers asked her to be the spokesperson when airing their concerns. She credited her comfort level with adults to the close relationships she had with teachers at CRS. One memorable response to a question about social readiness after attending such a small school came from a student who was shy by nature and went on to attend Milton Academy. He acknowledged that he was a bit slow to branch out socially when he first arrived, but he wasn't worried - CRS had taught him how to "grow friendships"; he had found his niche by November when he came back to be on the alumni panel.

As a teacher, there is nothing more gratifying than hearing about the accomplishments of your former students. Every time alums return to field questions for the 7/8 informational evening, I am struck by how poised and articulate they are, as well as how graciously they credit their success to their CRS experience, especially their years in 7/8. Their testimonies provide affirmation for the academic program, and, even more importantly, the personal attention and caring environment that prepared them in every way for the schools they chose to attend after Charles River School.

### Where Will you Find CRS Graduates?

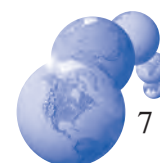
*In the past four years, 85% of CRS graduates have attended independent schools (67% day, 12% boarding, 6% parochial) and 15% have attended public high schools.*

Members of the graduating Classes of 2006 – 2009 (current high school students) attend the following independent schools:

Beaver Country Day School (10)	Boston University Academy (2)
Brooks School	Buckingham, Browne, & Nichols (5)
Cambridge School of Weston (4)	Catholic Memorial High School
Commonwealth School (4)	Concord Academy (4)
Dana Hall School (7)	The Holderness School
Middlesex School	Milton Academy (10)
Montrose School	Noble and Greenough School (3)
Notre Dame Academy	Phillips Academy – Andover (4)
Proctor Academy	The Rivers School (2)
St. Andrews School	St. Sebastian's School
Tabor Academy	Thayer Academy (3)
Walnut Hill School	Worcester Academy
Xaverian High School (2)	

The Classes of 2004 and 2005, now freshmen and sophomores in college, are attending the following colleges and universities:

American University	Amherst College
Bard College	Bates College
Boston University	Brown University
Carnegie Mellon University	Colby College
Colby Sawyer College	Colgate University
College of the Holy Cross	Columbia University
Dartmouth College	Davidson College
George Washington University	Gonzaga University
Lehigh University	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
McGill University	Muhlenberg College
Princeton University	Providence College
Quinnipiac University	Rochester Institute of Technology
Roger Williams University	Skidmore College
Spelman College	Swarthmore College
Trinity College	Tufts University
University of Arizona	University of Colorado, Boulder
University of New Hampshire	University of South Carolina
Vanderbilt University	Washington and Lee University
Wellesley College	Yale University



# Educating the Whole Child: A Middle School Mission

**B**eyond academics, there are many other important aspects of the 7/8 program. The following is an overview of these key elements of life in 7/8.

### *Advising:*

Advisors work with students to ensure a successful and happy school experience. Weekly one-on-one meetings are devoted to setting goals and monitoring progress, helping students manage personal and behavioral issues, overseeing the academic plan, and maintaining contact with families. This relationship is a key component of the 7/8 experience. (See advising article)

### *Growth Education (GE):*

All of 7/8 meets once a week together for GE. GE is comprised of two types of classes, "Community Business" and "Health and Wellness."

### *Community Business:*

» **Buddies:** Every 7/8 student has a PreK or K buddy. We usually meet on the first Friday of each month to read, do crafts, or just play together. We also get together on Halloween, for Simple Meal, on Valentine's Day, and for the Collections Assembly. This relationship is a very popular element of the 7/8 experience.

» **Student Government:** 7/8 has a government based on the Town Meeting model. Elections are held twice a year for the positions of Moderator, Secretary, Seventh and Eighth Grade Representatives, Seventh and Eighth Grade Community Service Coordinators, and Seventh and Eighth Grade Social Coordinators. Town Meetings are held every four to six weeks. Agenda items are collected by the Class Reps and



the Moderator runs the meeting using Robert's Rules of Order. It is a forum for discussing everything from fundraising to broader student concerns.

» **Miscellaneous Community Meetings:** In the beginning of the year we create our community agreement and explore the art of interviewing for secondary schools, and occasionally throughout the year we meet to discuss how we are doing as a community, either generally or around a specific topic.

### *Health and Wellness:*

Health and Wellness is an integral part of the 7/8 GE program. Over the two years 7/8 students can expect to discuss topics including: drugs, alcohol, and smoking; human sexuality, changing relationships and decision making; bullying and teasing; handling stress; and instant messaging and the internet. Students also have opportunities to suggest topics of interest. Beyond this, the Health and Wellness scope and sequence is intentionally flexible so that we are able to address issues or concerns as they arise.

### *Multi-Arts:*

Multi-Arts is a class that meets twice a week in mixed-grade groups. Instruction in a variety of performing arts is offered in sessions that range from six to twelve weeks. Visiting artists are brought in to teach some of the disciplines. This year the offerings are drama, hand bells, a cappella, the 7/8 musical, dance, and singing.

### *Community Service:*

Every 7/8 student is required to volunteer service to the CRS community as well as to their broader community. While the five hour expectation for service to CRS remains in place, we have revised the expectations for outside service in an attempt to make it more meaningful for students. The scope of service is still about ten hours, but we are replacing the “hours served” model with a project approach. Students will choose a project that allows them to interact with and serve people in need (i.e. the elderly or those coping with poverty or disabilities) and then spend time with that specific group over the course of the year. Parent volunteers outlined a number of viable projects, and groups of students can work together on the project of their choice. Also, students can make an alternate proposal as long as it meets the criteria. Though we will provide some school time, advisor supervision, and some volunteer parent support, students are responsible for planning and implementing their project, as well as preparing a presentation or another form of documentation of the work they did.

### *Flex:*

We have revamped the 7/8 schedule in an attempt to address a variety of limitations posed by the previous one.



Major areas of concern were the lack of time available to differentiate learning by providing either extra help or extra challenge to students when needed, as well as the amount of instructional time lost to early releases for athletic games. With the growing number of extracurricular opportunities, we also felt that some students were feeling stress due to multiple commitments, so we wanted to provide some time for clubs to meet. Beyond all this, we believe that kids should have down time in their lives, and we were constantly struggling to keep the homework load manageable. Our solution was to shave five minutes from each period and create a “flex” time at the end of the day to meet these needs.

### *Electives:*

6/7/8 electives are courses students have expressed an interest in taking (such as cooking, ceramics, iMovie, and mountain biking), that meet once a week on Friday afternoons in mixed-grade groupings. Students rank their top three choices for the season, and then assignments are made based on these preferences. We try to make sure that each student gets at least one, and preferably more, of his or her number one picks.



# Community Service in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grades

by CRS Parent Randi Ingerman

How do we teach our children the importance of helping others and the value of community service? CRS has a longstanding commitment to providing opportunities for its students to be involved in community service. For many years, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders have been required, on an annual basis, to perform at least ten hours of community service outside the school and at least five hours of service in support of the school. Over time, the requirement seemed to result in an undue focus by students on the hours they had spent on projects rather than the impact of the projects in which they participated. With this in mind, the 7/8 faculty, working in collaboration with the school's Community Service Committee, decided to revamp the 7/8 Community Service Program to make it more project-based and hopefully more meaningful to students.

In the new 7/8 Community Service Program, each student is asked to select a project that involves hands-on, active participation by students, including direct interaction with those they are helping. In addition, students are committing to the projects over a period of time, which will allow for more significant involvement. Students are responsible for coming up with their community service project; however, the Community Service Committee has also developed a list of potential projects that can be done individually or in groups.

The 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders, with faculty and parent guidance, are responsible for the overall planning and organization of their project. In particular, students contact the applicable organization, map out a timeline, and determine what supplies they need and



how to obtain them. Since the projects will be done over time, students will update their advisor about the status of their project during the school year. At the end, students will memorialize their project with a presentation/paper/poster reflecting on the significance of their project. Specifically, they will capture how they were able to help those in need, how they made a difference and what they got out of the project on a personal level. In this way, they can reflect on the importance of their community service activity and share their experience with others.

There are a variety of projects that students are participating in this year. A number of students are preparing and serving dinners at the Salvation Army, some plan to visit a Head Start facility to work with children, and a group will help out at a center for those with developmental challenges. Other students are helping the elderly in their community, either visiting nursing

homes, or helping out by raking leaves, doing home repairs or delivering Meals on Wheels. Some students will also be volunteering at Metrowest Interfaith Hospitality Network, a local group of churches and synagogues that provides transitional shelter, food and companionship to homeless families with children. These students plan to prepare and serve meals to the families, and to play games with or read to the children. The CRS community has responded very positively to the changes made in the 7/8 Community Service Program. Students are enthusiastic about their projects and have enjoyed beginning to work on them. Parents have expressed their support by volunteering to help out with specific projects. Through this community service program, our students will engage in worthwhile activities to help those less fortunate, become more aware and sensitive to those in need, and have the benefit of seeing the positive impact of sharing their time, talents, and enthusiasm to help others.

# Advising Program for Grades 7 & 8 Students

by Upper Grades Coordinator Mary Walsh

Psychologist James Garvin likens early adolescence to a journey where children leave the safe harbor of their parents' world and board a large boat with their peers. The boat sets off, but the destination is of no concern. The passengers are completely preoccupied by the fascinating interests, thoughts, and clothing of their fellow travelers. After a few years they begin to question where they are going and who is driving the boat; successful navigation of the early teen years is often a challenge for young adolescents and their parents as well. The 7/8 advising program at CRS gives students an opportunity to form and maintain a meaningful relationship with an adult during this exhilarating yet confusing phase of life.

Most independent schools and many public middle schools have an advisory program. In fact, the New England League of Middle Schools includes advising in its list of elements essential to educational success. Two aspects of the advising program at CRS make it particularly effective. First, students have the same advisor for two years, and, second, throughout these two years each student has weekly one-on-one advisor meetings, as opposed to the group model used at most other schools. Each advisory relationship follows its own unique path, and the thoughtful care given to individual students invariably results in a strong advisor/advisee bond.

Advisor selection begins in the spring of sixth grade. The Head of School invites parents to provide written input describing their child and the type of person they believe would be a good match as an advisor. The Sixth Grade teachers review parental requests, and in turn make advisory recommendations based on their knowledge of the



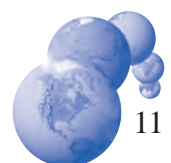
students and of the 7/8 team. Sixth grade teachers, the 7/8 team, and the Head of School then discuss each child until all parties agree on advisor assignments. Once a student enters 7/8, advisors coordinate all aspects of school life: academic, behavioral, family support and involvement, and social (when and if a student invites this input). However, before a direction and course can be set, the advisor needs to get to know and appreciate his/her advisees. All of our early endeavors are focused on this. We discuss hopes and fears, read past reports, and just spend time together in relaxed conversation. Advisors also get a bird's eye view of their advisees' approach to learning in the flex period at the end of each day, and the additional time spent together further cements the bond.

After the relational groundwork has been laid, the advisor wears many hats - coach, advocate, problem solver, case manager, fan, disciplinarian. Teachers and parents give feedback to advisors, and advisors work with the student to ensure a successful and happy school experience. Ongoing responsibil-

ities include setting goals and monitoring academic progress, helping students manage personal and behavioral issues, overseeing the community service requirement, and maintaining contact with families.

One of the final responsibilities of the advisor is to guide their eighth grade advisees through the secondary school process. Although this process can be somewhat complicated, it is also a unique opportunity for students to explore their strengths, weaknesses, interests, and talents. This leads to many meaningful conversations between advisor and advisee and can be a period of exciting and significant growth.

Advising is a cornerstone of the 7/8 program. Growing up is never an easy journey, but advisors can help smooth over the rough spots and keep their charges focused on the goal of becoming competent, caring people. This truly human resource provides important guidance and encouragement to students in their final years at Charles River School.



# Mary Walsh's Top Five Reasons to go to CRS for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grades

**1**. Everyone on the staff is firmly committed to truly respecting students' feelings and ideas, and also to engaging them in genuinely interesting curricula. As a result, a high standard for how everyone in the community should treat each other is set. We have minimal behavior problems, and students enjoy close relationships with teachers.

**2**. Our advisors have weekly one-on-one meetings with advisees, and we keep the same advisees for two years. A strong bond is formed, allowing advisors to attend to the social, emotional, and academic needs of each student.

**3**. We provide a very challenging curriculum that maintains the school-wide emphasis on experiential learning while also focusing on individual academic skill development. The team follows each child's progress closely, and every student has goals and strategies for achieving them that are monitored in class and supported in advising. Because there are no grades, each student learns to strive for his or her personal best.

**4**. We only have a few rules. First and foremost, we insist that everyone treat each other with respect. Other specific rules are centered around helping students stay organized and on top of their work. There are immediate consequences for not doing homework, and overall assignment completion is tracked weekly. When there is a specific behavioral issue, it is dealt with first in the context of the advisor relationship. We believe it is often more painful to let someone you care about down than it is to serve an impersonal consequence like a detention.

**5**. As the oldest students in an elementary school, there are many opportunities for leadership - buddies, running assemblies, giving tours, helping out at school events – and the younger children all look up to them. A wonderful paradox evolves: Because our students are invested with the respect and admiration of the community, they are poised and more mature than many of their peers; at the same time they are sheltered from the influences of older adolescents, so they seem more naïve or childlike than others their age. This preservation of childhood is perhaps the most valuable aspect of the “safe harbor” we provide.

