January 6, 2015

Dear Parents of Middle School Students,

Mini-Course Week, one of the year’s most popular Middle School events, is coming soon and it is time to begin the course selection process. Scheduled for February 6-12, Mini-Course Week is a program of interdisciplinary and experiential education that provides a wonderful learning opportunity for our students. There are twelve courses offered this year ranging from off-campus adventures in neighboring states to homegrown activities on campus. All courses are designed and taught by our incredible Middle School faculty and each offers an exciting opportunity to become immersed in a topic. This year we are adding a new course and bringing back an old favorite. These courses have created quite a buzz already.

Please review the attached course offerings with your child and complete the form according to the directions. Please note that sign-up forms are due back to the Middle School office no later than Thursday, January 15. Each mini-course has a limited number of participants based on the size of the program, and balance of gender and grade level is maintained for each course. Students are placed into the course randomly. I have heard many students and parents talk about different strategies to get a favorite course placement. Unfortunately, this is mis-information and the placement is truly random.

As you can imagine, often a middle school student will have his or her heart set on going on one particular trip or being with a special friend. There is inevitably initial disappointment for a small percentage of students. That feeling rarely lasts more than a day into the mini-course as students become actively involved in the adventure of new friends and activities. Getting to know different teachers, making new friends, and being exposed to new ideas are all part of what makes Mini-Course Week so popular.

Once your child is assigned his or her mini week course, he or she will be given a complete and final itinerary. If your child participates in an overnight trip or a day trip off campus, we are not allowing our students to bring cell phones, laptop computers, iPads, portable DVD players, or speakers with them on the trip. While students may bring iPods, e-readers and other compact music and game systems for the bus rides, many locations do not allow electronics to be brought in, and we cannot assure security of these items at any time. Cell phones are not allowed on the trip so that the students benefit from the bonding experiences and personal interactions they will have with their mini week group, which is one of our most important goals. If you will need to speak with your child at any time while they are off campus, you will be able to call the chaperones on the trip at any time. They will let you know their cell phone numbers. Students are welcome to bring a disposable or digital camera.

Mini-Course Week is one of the special opportunities that sets PDS apart from other middle schools around the country. We are blessed to have a dedicated faculty who is interested in working with our students in this interdisciplinary setting.
As always, if you have any questions or concerns, please don’t hesitate to call.

Sincerely,

Alesia Klein
Interim Head of Middle School
MIDDLE SCHOOL MINI-COURSE WEEK
February 9-12, 2015

INSPIRATION SANDWICH – Grades 5-8
Break out of the midwinter doldrums and join us for a medley of adventures and games. Our goal is to explore hidden talents, stretch ourselves physically and creatively, and explore the wonder of the winter landscape. Start each day with a yoga session and, new this year, an introduction to compassionate meditation. Learn how your breath affects your state of mind. Learn about and teach your peers the ancient art of Qi Gong – the root of all martial arts. Learn about the Mayan calendar, the Mayan system of writing and create your own birth monument. This will require some math instruction during a resource period the week before the first Friday afternoon of mini-course week. We will devote the time needed to complete this colored-pencil piece of artwork worthy of framing. Improve your hand-eye coordination with the international sport of Speed Stacking. Check out this speed stacking youtube video for inspiration (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HmDf9efqZTM). Build forts with your peers, reconnect with Winnie the Pooh, and learn how to play some traditional street games. Do some improvisational drama and release some energy playing elbow tag and learn the basics of Zumba. Learn how to juggle and compare Japanese and Chinese origami. Sample exotic fruits and teas. See portions of the DVD Rivers and Tides in which Andrew Goldsworthy creates his ephemeral works of art and then go outside and create your own. Dress warmly and visit the Grounds for Sculpture to seek shadow art. Then move on to the Rockville Climbing Center and dare to reach new heights.
Please note: On Thursday, 2/12, we will leave campus for the day and return in time for buses by 3:15 p.m. Liability release forms must be signed in order to participate at the indoor climbing center.

FARM WEEK – Grades 5-8
Immerse yourself in life on the farm at a 200-acre working farm in Duchess County, NY. This sleep-away adventure will offer you hands-on experience with animal care, cooking, and other farm tasks. Cows, chickens, goats, sheep, and pigs are all raised at Sprout Creek Farm, and since it will be birthing season when you are there, you may have a chance to witness the birth of a goat or a calf! You will learn about bread baking and cheese making, as Sprout Creek Farm makes their own award-winning cheeses right on the premises. You can find out more about the opportunities that await you at http://www.sproutcreekfarm.org.
This venue offers a strong educational program that connects students to the land, the seasons, and the plants and animals that coexist on the farm. You will explore sustainability issues and ideas, and look at the systems being utilized at Sprout Creek. If you are an animal lover, and if this winter has left you yearning to spend more time outdoors, this mini-course week offering is just what you're looking for!
Please note: We will be away for 3 nights, and rustic, heated sleeping accommodations will be provided. We leave campus Monday 2/9 at 8:30 a.m. and will return on Thurs. 2/12 by 4:30 p.m. (e.t.a.). Any questions email pflory@pds.org

CHOCOLATE IMMERSION - Grades 5-8
Do you adore chocolate? For many of us, chocolate is life. The Chocolate Immersion mini-course is your chance to learn the true story of chocolate, from majestic fruit to heavenly bar. We will explore its fascinating history, from the ancient Aztec and Mayan cultures, to European culture, to its international presence today. We will learn where and how it grows, and how cocoa beans are processed from pods to become the chocolate we know in its various delicious, delectable and delightful forms. We will become connoisseurs, flavorists and pastry chefs, as we seek to experience many types of chocolate and mouth watering concoctions. Other highlights of the week will include trips to Philadelphia and Hershey, Pennsylvania. Are you a daring and bold eater, able and willing to try new foods...particularly if they involve chocolate? Then come join us in our Chocolate Immersion mini-course, where - for a few days, anyway - chocolate is life.
Please note: Anyone with nut or dairy allergies should not apply. Our trips to Philadelphia on Wednesday 2/11 and Hershey on Thursday 2/12 will get us back on campus at about 3:45 p.m.
STOP-MOTION MOVIE MAKING - Grades 5-8
Are you a future Academy Award Winner? A budding Nick Park? The next Tim Burton? Get a start on a life of fame and fortune during the Stop-Motion Movie Making mini-course. During the week we will learn the basics of animated-movie making. Using laptops, digital cameras, and easy to learn software, we will create a number of short films and compare our results to commercial stop-motion films like the “Wallace and Gromit” series. The week will culminate in the joint production of a full-length music video, using all of the techniques learned in this course.
The week will be fun for novices as well as experienced moviemakers, for those new to movie technology as well as those experienced with digital video and photography. They say George Lucas got started in clay; join us to explore your future in films!
Please note: Mon.–Thurs. we will be on campus during normal school hours 8:00 a.m. to 3:15 p.m.

LORDS AND LADIES, KNIGHTS AND JESTERS - Grades 5-8
Prepare to embark on a time-traveling journey that will allow you to assume the role of a historical figure during the Middle Ages, a time of castles, jousts, feasts, and merrymaking. You will have the opportunity to participate in a variety of activities common during the Middle Ages, including juggling, stained glass making, falconry, and fencing, just to name a few. Of course, our week wouldn’t be complete without trips to Philadelphia to visit a modern-day castle and a cathedral inspired by the Middle Ages as well as a day spent at Medieval Times.
Please note: This mini-course involves a field trip to Glencairn Castle and Bryn Athyn Cathedral on Tuesday, February 10. Students will return to PDS around 3:00 p.m. It also includes a trip on Thursday, February 12, to a morning performance and lunch at Medieval Times. Students will return to PDS around 3:00 p.m.

GENERAL S, GOOBER PEAS, AND GHOSTS AT GETTYSBURG – Grades 5-8
Be a participant in the events of July 1, 2, and 3, 1863, in a small Pennsylvania town. Recapture the passion of those three hot July days that reversed the tide of the Civil War! Dig out your old family diaries, photos, battle maps, dominos, and canteens at home. Take on the persona of a real person who was involved in the battle and learn about this compelling time in our nation’s history through their experiences. Bring in your bugles and harmonicas to recreated the spirit of song on the battlefield and around a campfire in 1863. Relive the charge up the steep hill of Little Round Top; see the town of Gettysburg rocked by the clash of two armies; and take part in the ill-fated charge of General George Pickett’s Brigade across a mile of open fields. Listen to true ghost stories, some old and some new, of the town and battlefield. And, of course, feast on goober peas and hard tack. While in Gettysburg, we shall also visit the National Park Museum, the newly opened Seminary Ridge Museum, and the renovated Cyclorama. (What’s a Cyclorama? Join us and find out!) Our visit will be extra special this year because it’s the Sesquicentennial of the War. We could even get a glimpse of President Lincoln, himself!
Please note: Monday and Tuesday we will be on campus during normal school hours. On Wednesday, 2/11 our group will depart at 7:00 a.m. from the Great Road Parking Lot by the main entrance and return by 4:00 p.m. on Thurs. 2/12.

THE AMISH EXPERIENCE – Grades 5-8
Join us as we explore the culture, history, and lifestyle of the Amish. In comparison to our fast-paced society, the simpler, family-centered Amish way of life holds a special fascination. These people trace their heritage back hundreds of years, and yet, despite all the time that has passed and the many changes that have taken place in society, they still live and work much as their forefathers did. They have been employing horse-drawn power since the days when horsepower had a whole different meaning! Think you know everything about the Amish because of some recent “reality shows” on TV? Come join us to learn what is really real and true about the Amish people and their way of life.
We will spend Monday and Tuesday at PDS, learning about Amish history, schooling, community, and family life. Our experiences will include cooking Amish treats and learning about quilting and scherenschnitte (paper-cutting), two important arts of the culture. Then, we will travel to Lancaster County on Wednesday to learn about and explore the Pennsylvania Dutch country for two days. Our friends, an Amish family, will take us to a livestock auction, a one-room schoolhouse, and a working Amish dairy farm. We will have dinner in a family’s home and visit local sites to experience the past and the present of Amish life. This area of Pennsylvania is truly a culture within a culture. The Amish, the “gentle people,” have maintained their simple lifestyles for generations and have much to teach us about living in a world that is quite different from ours.
Please note: Monday and Tuesday we will be at Pretty Brook Farm on the PDS Campus during normal school hours. We will depart on Wed., 2/11 at 8:00 a.m. and return by 3:00 p.m. on Thurs., 2/12.
NEW YORK, NEW YORK – Grades 5-8

Explore the city that never sleeps! Even though we live very near to The Big Onion--think of all the layers--we don't often have the opportunity to take advantage of this wonderful city. This is your chance to see the sights and learn about some patterns of immigration into New York. We will go into the city for three day trips on the 10th, 11th and 12th exploring the Lower East Side, Midtown, the East Side and West Harlem.

- We will learn about the city during the early 1900's when many immigrants came to New York; perhaps your grandparents came to the United States during this wave of immigration?
- We will visit the Lower East Side Tenement Museum and lunch in Chinatown.
- We will visit the Guggenheim Museum to see works created by New York influenced artists from the early twentieth century to the present day.
- We will see the Broadway musical Matilda.
- We will visit the Cathedral of St. John the Divine.
- We will visit the Dance Theater of Harlem and have an opportunity to take a dance class, watch a rehearsal and to talk to young dancers, members of the DTH ensemble.

Come join us on our Mini-Course Week adventure in the BIG ONION!

Please note: Monday we will be on campus during normal school hours. Day trips Tues. 2/10, Weds. 2/11 and Thurs. 2/12 will depart from the PDS tower parking lot by Baker field at 7:45 a.m. and return to PDS main building by 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday and Thursday, and 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday.

SOLAR SERVICE – Grades 7 and 8 Only

Have you ever stopped to think about what your life would be like if you did not have a dependable source of electricity? Perhaps you experienced a day or two without power after a major storm. It certainly was inconvenient to be without lights, refrigeration, TV and Internet, wasn’t it?

Now try and imagine living in a place where there is no reliable source of electricity--where there are no outlets in your school or home, a place where candles and gas lamps provide the only source of light after dark. What if you could only cook over a fire, and, by the way, forget about a warm shower! No, we are not referring to the 18th Century, but to much of the developing world today!

Now imagine that you have the power to bring electricity to a school and a village in the Philippines...

Participants in the Solar Service mini-course will learn about solar energy and how to build a “Solar Suitcase” equipped to harness solar energy to power several light bulbs and charge small electronics. Through many hands-on activities, we will learn the basics of solar energy, learn about the energy needs of the Philippines, and build two solar suitcases to be sent to the Philippines in collaboration with “We Share Solar.” We will learn about the Philippines and its culture. Along with our solar service, we will engage in local community service through organizations such as HomeFront and the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen.

Field trips during our week will include the Solar Collector Field at Princeton University and the HomeFront Preservation Center. Our travels will allow us to have some delicious lunches and snacks out on the road before we head back to PDS for more hands-on solar learning and building our solar suitcases.

Your efforts in Solar Service will literally light the path toward a life-changing opportunity for those in need!

Please note: Solar Service will end each day at 3:15 p.m.

SPORT! Grades 5-8

Do you love sports? Join the Wide World of Sports and experience the thrill of victory! We will travel to Philadelphia to see the 76ers play the Golden State Warriors at the Wells Fargo Center. While on campus here, you will participate in a variety of team competitions, such as broom ball, a biathlon, and speed skating (optional). We will also travel to learn how to play paddle tennis and curling. No previous experience is needed for any of the activities. You will also become an advertising director and create your own multi-million dollar Super Bowl-like commercial for a new product and then pitch it to a team of judges. Lastly, we will learn about collegiate athletics at Princeton University. We will tour Jadwin Gym and learn some football plays from some of the Princeton football players and coaches. Come play sports with us!

Please note: Each day we will begin and end at the Rink. On Monday, February 9, we will begin at the Rink and will not arrive home from Philadelphia until approximately 11:00 p.m. Your parent must be available to pick you up at this time.
THE CAPE COD CHALLENGE - Grades 6-8

Cape Cod, virtually an island, extends 75 miles into the Atlantic and is dotted with freshwater ponds and lakes and 300 miles of beaches. Every season complements the beauty of Cape Cod. This mini-course will explore the history, the habitat, the culture, and the special character of the Cape.

Here comes the challenge. We will spend the entire week at Camp Burgess in Sandwich, Massachusetts. Almost all of our meals will be prepared by us; we will leave the place better than we found it; we will add to the community. This week is an “Outward Bound” type of adventure—be prepared to “rough it,” to leave some creature comforts at home and to have a great time! For some hints as to what is planned: Cape Cod is known for its beaches, out-islands, whales, seals, salt ponds, fish, windmills, lighthouses, unique environment, cold winds, and spectacular ocean views. We will visit Sandwich Glass Museum, Provincetown, Wellfleet, Chatham and other places important to Cape Cod. We have some new adventures planned for this year!

If you want to be a part of a “big family” hands-on week, cozy quarters, new experiences, and seashore excursions ending up with hot chocolate, join us!

There will be a mandatory parents meeting before the trip.

Please note: Group will depart PDS main building on SUNDAY, 2/8 at 9:00 a.m. and return Thursday, 2/12 at 4:00 p.m.

MARCO POLO - Grades 5-8

Have you ever wanted to have a grand adventure, exploring the world and experiencing cultures? Marco Polo lived that dream in the thirteenth century, and the journal he kept during his travels provides us with a detailed understanding of his times. Two modern men retraced Polo's journey along the Silk Route, facing similar challenges and overcoming them. One of those men, Denis Belliveau, will join us for mini-course week. Some classes will be held in our own student-built Mongolian style yurt, filled with artifacts from the Silk Route. Students will also build and test trebuchets (catapults), discover cartography (map-making) and porcelain designs, analyze the dilemmas of a traveler, and participate in a trading simulation that will result in an opportunity to cook foods from the Silk Route. On Wednesday, our group will travel into New York City to experience sights and sounds similar to this famous journey by visiting restaurants, markets, and temples. Join the caravan for an adventure of a lifetime!

Please note: We will leave campus on Tuesday afternoon for a visit to the Princeton Art Museum and will return by 2:30 p.m. Our Wednesday trip to NYC will return to campus around 5:00 p.m.
Mini-Course Week 2015 Registration

Please fill out this sheet completely, and return it to the Middle School Office by Thursday, January 15.

IMPORTANT NOTES: Not all Mini-Course schedules are the same. Please see course descriptions for activity schedules, overnight commitments, and daily course completion times. Parents and students should discuss Mini-Course descriptions before completing this form.

Full Name ___________________________________________________ Grade _______

Directions:
• List all of the Mini-Courses you have not attended, in order of preference.
• Do not list courses in which you have already participated.
• Fifth & Sixth graders: only list courses for which you are eligible.

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Parents of siblings in the Middle School, please check one of the following:
_____ We would like the children assigned to the same Mini-Course. (Rankings are same.)
_____ We would like the children assigned to different Mini-Courses.
_____ We have no preference; either way is fine.

Parent Signature ____________________________________________