



September 29th, 2021

Dear Prairie Community,

As part of Prairie's ongoing commitment to excellence, we are excited to share an important enhancement to our academic structure. Beginning next fall (2022 - 2023), 5th Grade will return to being a part of the Primary School here at TPS.

While the existing model has afforded generations of students an excellent environment in which to learn and mature, our experience demonstrates, and research supports, a Pre-K – 5th Grade Division being separate from Grades 6 – 8 is best to meet childrens' academic, social, and emotional needs. While Prairie moved the 5th Grade up to Middle School decades ago, returning it to the Primary School provides a more age-appropriate setting within which to support student growth in a way that best prepares them for their Middle and Upper School years.

### **Developmentally-Appropriate Timing**

The gift of time in Primary School allows for more robust skill development and maturation. There is a wide developmental chasm between a 10-year-old beginning 5th Grade and a 14-year-old 8th Grade student. Similarly, most 5th Grade students are not mature enough to fully benefit from the rigors of Middle School. By returning the 5th Grade to Primary School, we are giving our students an additional year to develop academically, and to hone their executive functioning abilities. The new program will have students rotating between two teachers and the specialists rather than the seven-teacher Middle School team. The combination of time and small teams will allow students to grow into their best selves without being rushed into adolescence.

### **Numerous Institutional Benefits**

This model also creates academic advantages that will reverberate throughout the school. Middle School class sizes will shrink, allowing for more individualized attention. Upper School faculty will no longer need to drop down to teach the occasional Middle School section and both divisions will be able to build more focused teams with only language, COMPASS, and arts teachers crossing divisional lines. Further, a more traditional 6th – 8th Grade structure with three sections in all three

grades will better align with school systems in Southeastern Wisconsin, making entry into Prairie's Middle School a natural transition for our incoming families.

Ultimately, a more focused Middle School program will prepare students to achieve at an even greater level in Upper School. Over the course of this year, we will share more details regarding the specifics of this plan. While this is a relatively simple change and we are confident in a smooth transition, we look forward to staying in regular communication with the families who will be most impacted in 2022 – 2023 and beyond.

Sincerely,



Susan Holum  
Head of Primary School



Kathy Boero  
Head of Middle School



Dr. Nat Coffman  
Head of School and President