



Facing the Changes and Challenges of Making the Move to Middle School

News & Announcements

We're Growing!

Smart Tutor Referrals (STR) is very pleased to announce that Frederica Bowden BSc, PDP, MEd, EdS, PhD (ABD) is joining our team as Academic Director! She will be responsible for assuring STR's high quality academic standards.

Frederica has more than 25 years experience in the field of education. She has taught in several subject areas, in a variety of settings and with a range of students from elementary through to graduate school. She has been a Provincial Examiner and an Assistant Director in the Special Education Branch, BC Ministry of Education. She has also written and published extensively in education.

Frederica believes "everyone can be a successful learner." Her passion is "helping individuals learn how they learn most effectively and then developing strategies with them so they can achieve their individual potential."

Welcome Frederica!

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Hire an STR tutor if you'd like to:

- ▶ feel more relaxed in your studies;
- ▶ enjoy learning;
- ▶ build your skills;
- ▶ raise your grade point average;
- ▶ work one-on-one with an inspiring teacher;
- ▶ be recognized as a learner;
- ▶ explore new ideas.

by Ruth McGhee, in conversation with
Chris Harvey, Principal of Arbutus
Middle School

*"Change is not merely necessary to life,
it is life."*

Alvin Toffler author (1928-)

Teaching is my 'other' job, because without doubt the most important job I do is parenting. And this year, I am acutely aware from personal experience of the challenges that come with making educational choices for our son who will start school this fall. I am not sure if these decisions are easier - or harder - because I am a teacher: I have strong opinions about what kind of educational environment I want for him. What I do appreciate, though, is that I have a choice to make, and that even within the public system here, we are not simply limited to the assigned school in our neighbourhood. Of course, the educational choices we make for - and eventually with - our children are ongoing. The next big one looming on the horizon for us will be which middle school my son will attend. Many of our closest friends are in the midst of making the middle school decision for their children, and I have been privy to several dynamic discussions on the topic. The questions and concerns they raise I hear over and over again: "Is my son socially ready to move to a bigger school?" "My daughter is very sensitive, and I don't think she will be able to manage having several different teachers." "Will the workload be significantly more challenging?"

Any questions about middle school and I turn without hesitation to **Chris Harvey, Principal of Arbutus Middle School**

and energetic advocate for the middle concept. It is hard to walk away from a visit with Harvey and not be impressed by the welcoming atmosphere he has created at Arbutus. He has an obviously great rapport with the students and is an inspiration to faculty and staff alike. I recently spoke with Harvey on the topic of making the middle school decision, and asked him what he perceives are the most significant changes and challenges that students and families face in the transition; he also gave me the ever-important advice for parents - advice that goes beyond simply "Which middle school should I send my child to?" and reaches to the realm of just plain good parenting.

Changes

Kids themselves tell us, notes Harvey, that the most significant changes they face are: the *increased choice of courses* they can take, and the fact that they will have *several different teachers*. As for making educational choices, exploratories provide students with the opportunity to try their hand at music, drama, the arts, woodworking, Home Ec, and computing sciences, to name a few. Gradually allowing students a modicum of control over their own education is an essential element in helping them to mature and develop as independent learners. As for the increase in the number of teachers a student may have, Harvey says this change takes place gradually: all teachers plan and meet together to discuss common planning and kids' issues. Kids still need to feel that they are being cared for, and it is no coincidence that many middle school teachers are former elementary school

About Us

Our Mission Is:

- ▶ To provide top quality, flexible learning support and service to students and parents of students through:

Superior private tutoring matched specifically to each student's needs.

Stimulating workshops building skills in a practical and creative way.

- ▶ To enhance students' skills and increase learning confidence through individualized support, recognizing each student's unique abilities.
- ▶ To improve the quality of life, in individuals and communities through education.

Our tutors are certified teachers and professionals. Each is carefully screened and selected to match individual students' needs.

We help students to achieve.

For more information, and free study tips, visit us on-line at:

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teachers: "they have the Mamma Bear/Papa Bear attitude," Harvey remarks.

Challenges

One of the major challenges students will face is *building new friendships*. Children will likely have been with the same group of students in a smaller elementary school setting for, in most cases, five or six years. Now they are dealing with kids from other schools. And if, in the course of making the middle school transition, parents choose to send their child cross-boundary, or to a private school, then their child may be completely surrounded by new faces. "Kids and their parents want them to be surrounded by familiar faces, so you have to put some thought into that," remarks Harvey. Careful attention is paid to classroom composition in order to make this part of the transition as smooth as possible.

"Another major challenge students face is *organisation*," observes Harvey. With more choices for courses, and more than one teacher, comes the increasing demand for personal and time management. Most students these days are introduced to using an agenda in elementary school; these are essential to success in middle school. Teachers provide crucial support for students as they learn to manage their time and commitments, making sense of what lies ahead.

Advice to Parents

Harvey has some key advice for parents who are searching for the right middle school for their child. He starts off with suggesting some *key questions* that parents should ask of any prospective middle school principal:

- ▶ "What sets you apart as a great school?"
- ▶ "What are your school's goals for improvement and what are you doing to get there?"

- ▶ "How do teaching teams plan and work together?"
- ▶ "What is your attitude toward parents?"
- ▶ "Do you have a partnership with parents and how do you 'walk the walk'?"

Once you ask these questions, there is then the task of discerning which are the good or right answers for you. It will depend on what you are looking for, of course, but Harvey's general advice is "to look for a school that wants to get better, and is actively doing that, backed up by good data and research. You want to look for people who are in love with what they do, who like kids, and are broadening kids in various ways."

If you are reading this article, you are likely already interested and involved in your child's education. You will nod in agreement at Chris Harvey's *most important advice for parents*: "**Stay involved! Stay connected!** We talk about the home-school-student triangle, and parents must be part of that triangle and not just passively let their child's education happen. Parents should be constantly in touch with their kids, and when necessary, the school. While there is no direct correlation between parental involvement and academic achievement, there is ample indirect evidence that proves it positively affects a student's attitude toward school, and impacts decisions about further education. Do whatever you can," continues Harvey, "join PAC committees, drive to sports events, volunteer in any capacity - let your kids know you are part of the school; stay connected and don't let go." Harvey is clearly an advocate of parental involvement and its key role in students' success. His enthusiasm and vision for middle school education is contagious, and I am encouraged to know that there are people like Chris Harvey in our schools. "There are lots of us out there," he encourages me, and I am happy to know our middle school kids are in such good hands.