

Dear Middle School Families,

We wanted to take the opportunity to share with you some goals of the Drama Program in the Middle School and to help clarify expectations for you and your children as they consider making this commitment to being in a school play. We hope that this will give you insight when talking with them about their first audition, as well as to provide more general information about opportunities for participation in the performing arts. Below are main issues that we feel are important for your family to know about the after school drama program so that you can provide support to your children at home.

Auditions: How can we support each student, whether or not they end up being in the play?

Your children are so brave to step out of their comfort zones to audition for a play. Here is what your children might experience during their audition. First, we communicate with them how much we admire their courage and engage them in a very thorough discussion at the beginning of audition day about the possibility that not everyone will be able to get a part in the show. We discuss openly specific reasons for that and also how it might feel to get a part or to not get a part. We emphasize that this isn't because there are bad actors but because someone else fit that particular part best or their schedule was more flexible (among some of the reasons).

We talk about how it might feel to get a part, but your friend doesn't and vice versa. We come up with ways to be supportive, encouraging and sensitive in this situation for all parties. Both directors share experiences when we did not get a part we wanted or weren't chosen to be in a show. We always, always urge them to come back and audition again if they aren't in the play this time, and focus on the determination and emotional strength that are innate in all of them. We hope you'll give them the same encouragement if they are disappointed this time around.

Inclusive Participation vs. Final Product

Our philosophy has never been to exclude participants for the sake of the final production. Rather, we balance a variety of goals. First, we want to include as many students as possible. When more students audition than we can accommodate, we have maximized participation by doing a number of things. In the past, we have rewritten scenes to add parts, changed the characteristics of some roles (such as turn a person into triplets or a creature into a two-headed being), and created new jobs for the stage and tech crews.

Unfortunately, we have been victims of our own successful growth as an extracurricular program (the last few years have seen record turn-out for auditions), and we have had to turn away students for the first time. It's possible that this year we we'll be in the same situation of not being able to accommodate everyone. As above, we hope your children will receive a consistent message that they need not be discouraged, and that we will welcome their participation in the future.

A Fine Balance Between Flexibility and Fairness

Prospect Sierra students are so multi-faceted and talented in many things—it's amazing how busy your children are with their extra-curricular activities. We understand that drama is only one of their many interests, and it might seem unreasonable to expect them to commit to a tight schedule of rehearsals and productions. If ever we seem to enact rigid expectations for attendance at rehearsals, please understand that we want to be fair to everyone in the production and not waste people's time. We will try to be as accommodating as possible if we can prepare in advance for those conflicts. We just ask that you please communicate with us early and often!

Other Opportunities to Perform

We are fully committed to giving students as many opportunities as possible to act, perform, and express themselves. Ultimately, we'd like to realize a goal of having every student in the middle school perform in front of his/her peers either in a play or in a drama assembly! So if your children are not on stage in this particular play, they will have another chance to show their dramatic side in a future assembly. Thank you so much for being our partners at home and encouraging your students' participation in the drama program at Prospect Sierra. If you have any questions or comments, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Keith Davis
Drama Teacher and Director