



## WESTWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

### E. W. Thurston Middle School

*Aim High • Work Hard • Do the Right Thing • Help Someone Else*

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*Interim Principal*

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October 6, 2017

Dear Thurston Parents and Guardians:

In a few weeks, Thurston Middle School will host parent-teacher conferences. Our official conferences, held each fall, provide parents with the opportunity to meet briefly with three core academic teachers and three arts/specialist teachers.

This year, conferences will be held on the following days/times:

**Wednesday, October 25      1:30 – 3:30 PM**

**Wednesday, November 8      1:30 – 3:30 PM & 6:30 – 8:30 PM**

**Wednesday, November 15      1:30 – 3:30 PM**

While conferences are a great opportunity to check in about your child's progress, they are just five minutes long—not long enough to tackle complicated problems or questions. Teachers, guidance counselors, team leaders and administrators are accessible via phone or email at other times if you would like to have an in-depth conversation. Face-to-face meetings can also be set up outside of regular conference times.

Conferences are scheduled using an internet-based program, *PickATime*, that allows parents to select dates and times for appointments. It also helps reduce double-bookings and other scheduling errors. Online scheduling will begin on **Monday, October 16 at 7:00 PM**. Conference sign-ups will continue until all time slots have been filled. The scheduling program will be closed, however, for 48 hours before each conference day. (This gives teachers time to prepare for the meetings.)

Please note that once conference sign-ups begin, *appointment slots fill up very quickly*—often within 24 hours. Evening slots and conferences with math and language arts teachers tend to fill up first. I encourage you to set up your *PickATime* account ahead of time and have your preferred dates and list of teachers handy when the system goes live. That way, when it is time to sign up, you are more likely to get an appointment with a teacher you would like to see. The program is fairly user-friendly, but it helps to be prepared.

Most of the Thurston arts/specialist teachers also hold conferences on Wednesday, November 8th in both the afternoon and the evening. Parents may schedule arts/specialist conferences *in addition to* the core class conferences. These conferences are scheduled as a separate “event.”

Please note that you are responsible for bringing your schedule to conferences. While we can print one out for you in the office, doing so may cause a delay, which will cut into your conference time.

The attached FAQ answers many common questions about the signup system and about conferences in general. If you can't find an answer to your question, please call the Thurston main office or contact me directly. I will be sending a reminder about sign-ups via email next week.

In closing, please remember that official conferences are just one way—and an imperfect way at that—that parents and teachers can connect about students' performance and well-being. We welcome your questions and ideas at any time during the year, and we always want to know if you have concerns. Middle school can be a tough time for kids. Working together, we can provide the support they need to navigate their early adolescent years and grow into kind, motivated and thoughtful young adults.

Sincerely,

Zeffro Gianetti  
Interim Principal

## THURSTON MIDDLE SCHOOL PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

### Directions for Using PickATime

#### *Prior to Sign-Ups*

- Go to the Thurston PickATime site: <https://pickatime.com/ThurstonMS>
- Create an account by clicking the “Login/Create Account” button and enter your information. **Please note: the program has been reset this year. Even if you used it to sign up for conferences here or at WHS in prior years, you will need to set up a new account.**

#### *Signing up for 2017 Conferences* (beginning Monday, October 16 at 7:00 PM)

- Choose a specific event (“Arts/Specialist Conferences” or “Core Class Conferences”)
- Check Aspen to confirm correct first and last name spelling of student and how their birthday is recorded (e.g., 4/8/99 vs. 04/08/99). You will need the exact entry as your passcode.
- Enter your child’s first and last name with no space between (e.g., JaneDoe) and birthday (e.g., 04/08/99).
- Select a preferred date for your conferences.
- If you have multiple children at Thurston, you can add each one and view multiple schedules.
- Using the color-coded guide, select times for your conferences. (You will be limited to three conferences per child, and you will not be able to book back-to-back sessions.)
- Click on “Your schedule” to see a listing of all appointments, to cancel an appointment or to change a time.
- Click on “Printable schedule” to print or email your schedule.

### Thurston Conference Sign-Up and Attendance FAQs

#### **My former spouse and I would like to attend conferences separately. What should we do?**

**We strongly encourage all parents/guardians to attend conferences together.** This helps ensure that teachers and parents receive exactly the same information. Please contact the Thurston office by 9:00 AM on Monday, October 16 if you are unable to attend conferences together. In that case, we will need to modify the online system to enable both parents to sign up separately.

#### **I do not have access to the Internet. How do I sign up for conferences?**

Please contact the Thurston office, and we will send home a form to fill out with your preferred dates and teachers. **Forms should be returned by Monday, October 16.** A member of our administrative team will then sign you up for conferences once the sign-up period begins.

**When I attempt to enter my child's information, I get an error message ("failed to find student with the values supplied"). I have tried several times but cannot get it to work. What is the problem? What can I do about it?**

It is likely that your child's information (the spelling of his/her name or birth date) is incorrect in our Aspen student database. You can check by logging on to Aspen using the username and password sent by the Superintendent's office at the start of the school year. Click on the "Family" tab at the top of the page and review your child's basic information. If there is a problem, please contact the Thurston office at x2336.

**I tried to schedule two appointments in a row but was unable to do so.**

The scheduling program will not allow you to schedule back-to-back conferences, in order to ensure that you have time to travel from one room to the next.

**What about meeting with staff members who are not teachers?**

Administrators, the school nurse, the school psychologist, counselors and other members of the student services team are available throughout the year to meet on an as-needed basis. If you would like to meet or talk with any of us, please call or email us directly.

**I was unable to book a conference with a teacher I would like to see. What should I do?**

If you need to touch base with particular teacher about any aspect of your child's performance, please contact that teacher via email or leave a message in the office. He or she will contact you to set up a time to talk on the phone or meet in person.

**Should I make an appointment with my child's team instead of setting up separate conferences?**

There are some circumstances where a team meeting is more efficient or appropriate than one-to-one conferences. (If a student is struggling or under-challenged in most or all classes, for example.) Contact your child's team leader or guidance counselor if you think a team meeting makes more sense.

**Do I need to bring a copy of my conference schedule with me on conference day?**

Yes. While we do have the capacity to print out a new copy for you in the office, the extra time it takes may cause you to be late or miss your appointment altogether.

**What happens if I am running late for a conference?**

Please get there as soon as you can. Conferences for some teachers are fully booked, and they are not able to extend time slots.

**Where should I park? How do I get into the building and find the classrooms where my appointments are located?**

Parking at the middle school is limited, particularly right after dismissal. Additional parking is available across the street at St. Margaret Mary's Church or up at Westwood High School. Please do not park at the Senior Center or in fire lanes (marked with yellow lines).

You may enter the building through the front door near the office or the back door between the Palladino Gym and Cafeteria. Maps will be available in both locations.