

## Youth Court

Another growing initiative at SMS is our Youth Court system. Through Youth Court, we hope to give kids second chances, introduce them to mentors, and improve their communication skills. Our Youth Court has its roots in Mr. Pataki's ELA classroom, where students first explored the concept by reading about Janusz Korczak and his work with children in a Warsaw orphanage before and during World War II. Based on the concept of restorative justice, this system of discipline teaches typical courtroom roles such as judge, bailiff, jury foreman, and advocate. When students admit wrongdoing (committing minor school infractions), they are brought before the court for questioning. They must reflect on their actions, and the consequence is restorative rather than punitive; the wrongdoer must repair the damage done to the school community.

With its roots in Korczak's progressive view of the responsibilities and potential of each child, our Youth Court is unique in the nation in that it also recognizes virtue and rewards the Six Pillars of Character; furthermore, it is reinforced through young adult literature, including the writing of Korczak as well as stories such as *A Retrieved Reformation* by O. Henry. Our hope is that all students have a chance to understand the consequences of their actions, learn from their mistakes, and make better decisions in the future. Knowing that classic detention or suspension does little to help students learn to self-regulate behavior, we are approaching behavioral issues with energy and creativity, believing, like Korczak, that by empowering students as stakeholders in their own governance and leadership, there will be significant change that positively affects the entire school community and sets a model for other schools to follow.