

Seabury Middle School

Integrated Curriculum

A working example

Overview statement

At Seabury, we understand that an integrated curriculum best prepares children for life-long learning. Integrated education replaces the acquisition of discrete, compartmentalized subject matter with an approach to learning that cuts across disciplines, providing a process for developing skills and abilities required in the 21st century. It views learning and teaching in a holistic way and reflects the real world, which is interactive. It places heightened emphasis on projects and employs sources beyond textbooks.

The middle school program is designed to support students academically, personally and socially during their transition into adolescence. Research has shown that effective programs for young gifted adolescents engage them in firsthand experience with subject matter, where information is presented in meaningful, connected patterns. The ability to make connections, to solve problems by examining multiple perspectives, and to incorporate information from different fields is an essential ingredient to success. While it might be easier to tell students what they need to know, teachers choose to create an atmosphere where the students gain insight into the processes of learning for themselves, guided by adults who have expertise in the pedagogy of content knowledge, are well-informed about cognitive development, and are respectful of their students' unique characteristics.

In response to current research being done on adolescent development, Seabury has incorporated some unique aspects to the program.

Origins Curriculum

The centerpiece of the middle school program is an integrated, experiential, project based set of learning experiences. The spring board for this curriculum will be Tacoma – its history, its growth and development, the city government, the geography of the region, as well as recognizing an issue facing the greater Tacoma community and actively participating in devising a solution. The school places a high value on students providing service to their community and this feature will figure prominently in the middle school program.

The year will begin by identifying the reasons why people settled in the region we now call Tacoma. Students will explore the role that the Puyallup River played in that development, from its geographical features, to how it helped to shape the geography of the region, to

determining where the river originates, to how the river helped to generate rich soils for agriculture, to how the river facilitated the transportation of people and goods.

A traditional approach would be to ask the students to read about all these features and write a report.

The Seabury middle school curriculum will take a different approach. Here, students will:

- Identify the origin of the Puyallup River and make a visit to Mt. Rainier National Park and hike to the two points from which the river originates. Students will interface with Park Rangers to learn about the glaciers of Mt. Rainier.
- Trace the river from its source to its mouth by hiking along its river banks in its upper regions, to visiting multiple points, all along the 45 miles that constitute the river.
- Visit several working farms to learn about a farmer's perspective on how the river has created the rich fertile lands that are prime for agriculture. They will learn food production, issues facing small farms, the changes that have occurred to the Puyallup River basin, and land use issues.
- Interface with the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission to learn about the Native American history and perspective of the river's role in their culture, to understand fishing treaties, to understand the issues facing the health of the river system and what is being done to promote salmon habitat.
- Work with a hydrologist to understand how to measure the river's turbidity, rate of flow, means to predict flood levels, and water volume.
- Identify a fisherman to work with students to describe how they view a river, identify species of fish in the river, determine the food source of those species, and what constitute a prime fishing spot.
- Identify a Tacoma artist to work with students to do landscape painting.
- Work with the City of Tacoma to learn about the environmental initiatives and issues that are currently being funded that effect the Puyallup River.
- Visit many of the industries that exist on the Tide Flats to learn about how the Puyallup River has influenced their business, historically and today.
- Work with the Port of Tacoma to learn how trade and the flow of goods has helped to shape the economy of Tacoma, as well as the role that the Puyallup River played in the development of the Port.
- Develop a partnership with the Foss Waterway Project and the Working Waterfront Maritime Museum. Students will get the opportunity to "see" their community from the water.

Other learning opportunities that will tie into this first unit of study:

- Read primary source accounts about the settlement of the region.

- Work with residents at the Franke Tobey Jones Retirement Center to conduct oral histories of the history of Tacoma (this will be an ongoing relationship that is developed).
- Develop a partnership with the Washington State History Museum and their resources for Tacoma's history.

A day in the life of an integrated curriculum

The experiential, integrated curriculum requires that students will be out in the field, interfacing with “experts” to gain knowledge, understanding, perspective, and answers to the guiding questions.

The middle school curriculum and program has to strike a balance between Field Studies and the other curricular areas. While the description of the Puyallup River Field Studies focuses on Social Studies, Science, Language Arts, Communication, Critical Thinking, Analysis and Synthesis of Information, Problem Solving, and Math, time in the classroom will be equally important. Other subject areas will be addressed in the following manner.

Mathematics: As described in the Curriculum Scope and Sequence, math will be taught outside the Integrated Curriculum. The nature of a skill based subject area demands that it be taught sequentially and therefore, time will be devoted to math class every day. There will be a multitude of times that math is incorporated into the Integrated Curriculum as those opportunities match the student's skill level. Students are challenged according to their unique academic ability and are given the opportunity to advance at their own pace.

Foreign Language: Again, this is a skill based class and will be taught outside the integrated curriculum. French will be taught twice a week.

Physical Education: We have developed a partnership with the YMCA and students will be visiting that facility three times a week.

Music: Students will be working with Seabury's music instructor twice a week.

Art/Performing Arts: We will be contracting with a variety of artists and teachers to work with students on specific projects.

Technology: A technology instructor will work with students once a week in executing projects that specifically relate to the Integrated Curriculum. Certain skills will also be taught in conjunction with these projects.

Study Skills: On a regular basis, class time is devoted to helping students develop strong time management, organizational, and study skills.

A typical day would look like this:

7:45 – School begins. Morning Meeting

8:00 – Math

9:00 – English; finalize questions for the oral history project, work with a teacher designated partner to review questions according to the stated guidelines.

Work on Vocabulary, prep for test on Friday.

Reading assignment – Read the next two chapters of the book on the early settlement of the greater Tacoma region, be prepared for a discussion tomorrow on the questions listed on the middle school's web site.

10:30 – Field Study; To Franke Tobey Jones Retirement Center to conduct the first in a series of interviews.

12:00 – Lunch at Point Defiance Park

12:45 – Science; work on LEGO project --- remember the deadline is coming up!

1:30 – YMCA

2:30 - Closing meeting, review homework expectations, organizational work.

Partnerships

We have interfaced with the following organizations to develop these partnerships:

YMCA

Washington State History Museum

FIRST LEGO ® League

Pierce County Library System

Edgeworks

Franke Tobey Jones Retirement Center

Washington State History Museum

Puget Creek Restoration Society