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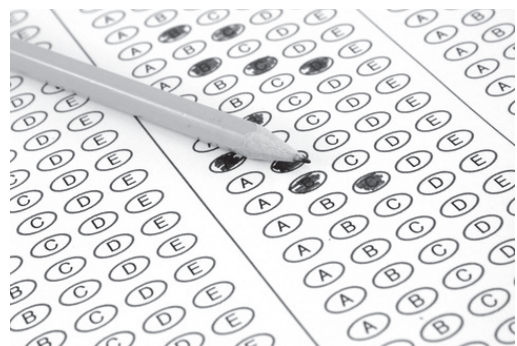
MARK YOUR CALENDARS: Schools are open February 17

Ridgefield schools will be open and operating on regular schedule on Friday, February 17, 2012 to make up January's snow day.

Ridgefield juniors excel at the PSAT

The results from the Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test (PSAT) are in: 14 juniors scored in the top 80th and 90th percentiles, and three sophomores scored in the 80th percentile when compared to all of the juniors who took the test nationwide.

In October, every junior at Ridgefield High School took the Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test (PSAT) to help them prepare for post-secondary education. The high school provided the funds to pay for each student's test as part of the district's dedication to offer students every opportunity to prepare for their own future. "Every student should leave Ridgefield High School college- and career-ready," said School Counselor Monica DeShazer. "Since roughly 75% of our students proceed to post-secondary education, providing a test for every junior will help all students know their post-high school options."



Teamwork improves student learning CONTINUED FROM INSIDE

Core Standards by the 2014-2015 school year, however schools in Ridgefield School District are adopting it earlier. "By converting early, our students will be better prepared for the tests they will eventually be required to take," said Janice Sauve, South Ridge Elementary School's Principal.

Teachers from each grade level form teams to define goals that include an overall objective (such as uppercase and lowercase letter recognition in Kindergarten or improved student learning in math in High School), activities and strategies that will be used to achieve that goal, and other information such as narratives which vary depending on the school.

Teamwork is a key element of every part of developing, implementing, and evaluating the SIP plans, and Ridgefield's the process can be very motivating. "Working together with the team has been a great experience," said Angela Freeman, Principal of Union Ridge Elementary School. "By sharing their work, the staff sees the innovative ways different teams are approaching problems and improving student learning."

Within the past few months, each building principal and assistant principal presented their school's plan to two board members and either the superintendent or assistant superintendent for review. "The plans provide a guide for improving student learning," said Superintendent Art Edgerly. "They involve a significant amount of work and are well worth it."

Following the approval and adoption of the SIPs, teachers use the plans to directly guide the focus of their lessons as well as to remain aware of the accountability of each task. "The SIP helps clarify and tighten up what we do in the classroom," said Lori Forrest, a first grade teacher at South Ridge. "Since the goals are based on the Common Core standards, every teacher throughout a school works toward each goal simultaneously as a team."

Would you like to review the School Improvement Plans for yourself? The district makes the SIPs available from its website (www.ridge.k12.wa.us) under the General District Information menu.

WINTER 2012 | 2724 S HILLHURST ROAD, RIDGEFIELD, WA 98642
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RIDGEGRAM



Robots take technology to the next level

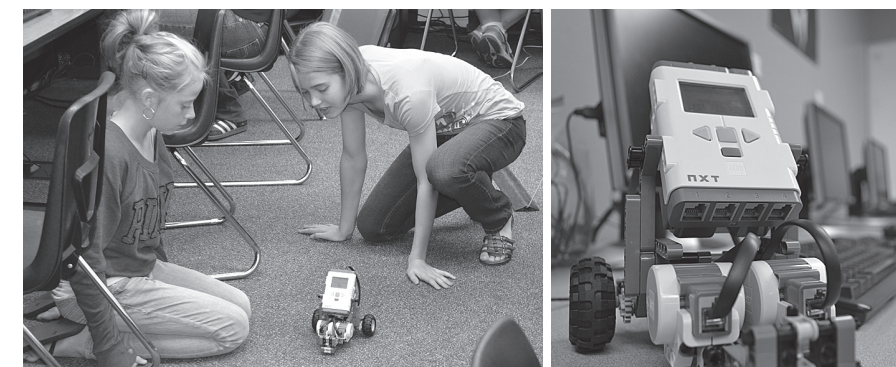
STARTING WITH THIS school year, a newly-designed course named Applied Technology introduces students at View Ridge Middle School to truly advanced technology including computer-aided drafting and robotics programming. Classes like this are part of a targeted approach for curriculum focused on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM).

Tylor Hankins teaches the Applied Technology course to 7th graders, and this year's syllabus introduces programs not previously taught at the middle school level. "The course focuses on STEM elements to enhance digital literacy," said Hankins. "Students have the opportunity to develop critical thinking skills that will prepare them to take on real-world challenges."

Six separate units make up the course including: an introduction to mobile robotics; robotic task competitions; computers and networking; engineering and design; digital media, and a student-driven unit where the students determine their objectives and goals.

During the robotics sections, students learn how to program robots to perform tasks using Lego Mindstorm's NXT systems. The robots have sensors to help them determine distance, temperature, touch, the amount of light in a room, and more. "These units are the same as those used at the graduate school level," said Hankins. "These robots are capable of a myriad of high-functioning tasks, so students will have the chance to challenge themselves."

Once students learn the concepts of programming, they will receive complex objectives that they will need to program the robot to accomplish, such as navigating buildings or performing tasks at a simulated construction site.



Each new task requires the students to utilize computer logic to solve the problem, breaking the solution down into individual steps that can be programmed into the robot.

During the Computers and Networking unit, the district's information technology department provides the class with computers to disassemble and analyze. Students will learn what each part of a computer does, as well as how to reassemble the computers from scratch.

In Engineering and Design, the students will use programs from Google to learn about computer-aided drafting by designing actual buildings. Using Google Earth, students will study existing buildings to get inspiration to design their own literally from the ground up using Google's SketchUP program.

During the Digital Media unit, students work with audio and visual files on computers to develop their own projects. Once they have developed the basics of creating the files, they learn to create projects in real-time on the computer.

"STEM concepts are driving the creation of jobs for the future, and our students need to be prepared for that," said Hankins. "Classes like Applied Technology will give students hands-on experience to develop the skills they will need in their chosen professions."

“STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) concepts are driving the creation of jobs for the future, and our students need to be prepared for that.”

~Taylor Hankins,
7th grade teacher

Teamwork improves student learning

“By sharing their work, the staff sees the innovative ways different teams are ... improving student learning.”

~ Angela Freeman, Principal of Union Ridge Elementary School

PLANNING TO INCREASE student learning and improve school performance takes the hard work and continued effort of every staff member in the Ridgefield School District. In order to accomplish this task, the teachers and administrators at each school develop School Improvement Plans (SIPs) with research and goals to help guide the decisions they make in their daily lessons.

SIPs are developed as part of the district-wide weekly Wednesday morning collaboration time.

As teams, all of the teachers at each school analyze data gathered from the annual state tests - the Measurement of Student Progress (MSP) and High School Proficiency Exams (HSPE) -

as well as student report cards, and other assessments taken by students throughout the year.

“Every teacher is involved in the creation of the plan with their department team analyzing test data, assessments, and other information to identify strengths and weaknesses in their teaching styles,” said Griffith. “Then, they write narratives to reflect on their practice, the curriculum, and instruction score and sequence in order to create SMART goals.” SMART goals are Specific, Measureable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely. Throughout the year, these goals are monitored by the SIP teams at each school with department staff reporting progress at the end of each trimester.

“The SIPs provide a way to coordinate our efforts for continuous improvement,” said Tony VanderMaas, Principal of Ridgefield High School. “Each department develops their own improvement strategies, while the administration sets the goals for the building as a whole.”

Goals listed in the SIPs are aligned to Common Core Standards adopted by many states, including Washington. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) will require all grades to adopt the Common

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Students get their act together

Drama students at Ridgefield High School received special treatment this year in the form of personalized training from professional actors from the Portland Playhouse.

Two actors from the playhouse trained students to take on William Shakespeare's comedy, Twelfth Night, helping students with their acting and singing. In addition, students learned that not all directors have the same perspective and style. “Some directors like to expound on their method, while others are brief,” said Bob Meek, theater and choir teacher at Ridgefield High School. “Having different people giving instruction exposes students to a variety of styles, helping them hone their craft so they can be prepared to work with different people.”

Twelfth Night is a musical, however Ridgefield students put a different spin on this year's performance by composing



original songs interspersed with the traditional themes. “Shakespeare's plays can be challenging to prepare on their own right without original songs,” said Meek. “Having the professional actors on-site helping the students instilled a collaborative spirit in the entire group.”

Students compose the original songs alongside the play rehearsals. The process

can be arduous as the musicians struggle to blend harmony and melody. “Just the other day, we spent 45 minutes adding harmony to a single song,” said Meek. “Practicing while you're creating makes the process that much harder, too.”

As part of its dedication to education in the theatrical arts, the Portland Playhouse holds its Fall Festival of Shakespeare annually. Schools from around the region each perform 90-minute Shakespeare plays in a 3-day event taking place over the first weekend in November at the Winningstad Theatre in Portland's World Trade Center located downtown.

This year, the playhouse partnered with seven high schools - Ridgefield, Jefferson, Franklin, Hudson's Bay, Fort Vancouver, Rex Putnam, and De LaSalle. “This was the first year we participated in their program, but we'd love to be involved again,” said Meek.

Growing gifts with math and science

Students in Sharon Floyd's third grade class at Union Ridge Elementary learn math and science by growing holiday gifts for their families. Each student received a bulb of paperwhite, a perennial plant that blossoms into strongly fragrant bunches of white flowers typically around the winter holiday.

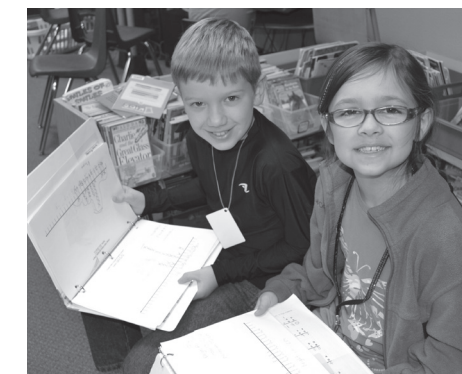
Instead of using soil, students planted the bulbs hydroponically, putting the bulbs into vases only filled with gravel, water, and nutrients. “We learned that you don't need soil to grow plants,” said Emma Smithline, one of Ms. Floyd's students.

“We record the dates and draw bar charts after we measure the number of centimeters our plants have grown,” said Gabe Carlton,

one of Ms. Floyd's students. “It's a lot of fun to learn about science by growing plants.”

Every other day, students measure the height of their plants, taking careful note in their journals. Then, as a class, the students collate their results, creating bar charts in order to determine the median, mode, and range of the plant heights for that week. In addition, they sketch their plants so they can visualize their plants' progress over time.

“Projects like these are a great way for students to experience science through hands-on effort,” said Floyd. “Watching the plants grow over time engages the students, and really demonstrates why knowing math is important in a variety of ways.”



Some of the more experienced student gardeners were careful to keep what happens to these paperwhites when they blossom a secret from their classmates. “I've planted these before, but I don't want to spoil what happens for the rest of the class,” said Carlton.

Teachers caught on tape... teaching



BEGINNING THIS SCHOOL year, teachers at South Ridge Elementary School may find themselves on not-so-candid camera. Teachers can elect to have a class session recorded on video to gain insight into how to enhance their teaching styles as a classroom observation instead of having the principal sit in and take notes.

Unlike surprise camera television shows that catch people unaware, teachers choose the day they want to be filmed. “The days are ordinary classroom days, however, by picking it in advance, the teachers aren't caught off-guard by a video camera in the classroom,” said Principal Janice Sauve.

During the observation, Sauve sits with each teacher, reviewing teaching methods, student interactions, and classroom behaviors. “There's a dialogue that takes place because of the video that's more instructive than a traditional paper-based observation,” said Ann Tracey, a 2nd grade teacher at South Ridge who was one of the first to try a video observation. “Rather than being told about what was observed, we discuss what's happening in my classroom while it happens.”

By watching the video, teachers and Sauve are able to evaluate other aspects of the classroom as well as the teaching. During the observation, Sauve and

each teacher develop a plan to reinforce strengths and target weaknesses together. “Video observations allow both the principal and the teacher to see what's going on in the actual classroom from an observer's perspective,” said Sauve. “By using recorded classes, both of us are partners in the observation piece.”

In addition to observing the teacher, the video enables the principal and teacher to see how the students are responding to the techniques and styles. “This process gives teachers the power to see every student in the class,” said Sauve. “It's almost like having eyes everywhere in the class at the same time.” If students are experiencing challenges to the presented material, the video observation gives Sauve the opportunity to follow up on that specific student, ensuring they receive the extra attention they need.

Even though this type of observation is optional, teachers are starting to see the benefits from using video instead of just notes on paper. “Previously, classroom observations felt like lists of things I did and didn't do,” said Tracey. “Now, I can see it right on-screen and reflect immediately on what's working and what minor changes I'd like to make.”

“Video observations allow both the principal and the teacher to see what's going on in the actual classroom from an observer's perspective.”

~ Janice Sauve, Principal of South Ridge Elementary School