



The Community School

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Accredited by the New England Association of Schools & Colleges

Profile of The Community School

The Community School is an independent, non-sectarian day school with full-time programs for students in grades 6-12. We incorporate real-life problem solving, an integrated real-world curriculum, opportunities for collaboration, service, critical skill development, and independent exploration into college preparatory courses. Students spend time in classrooms, and use our farm, forest and fields, and travel nationally and abroad as extensions of our school-house. We do not offer special education services and are not a therapeutic setting, though highly motivated, curious students with mild learning disabilities can thrive with us.

We believe that learning should be a rigorous and joyful pursuit which promotes the interconnectedness of people and places, and which challenges mind and body. It's rare for a day to go by when we don't go outside for some portion of our school day.

Classes at TCS are small, with six to twelve students in each seminar or workshop. Multi-age classes allow students to learn from each other and to be grouped according to ability rather than strictly by age or grade. Daily classes include reading/writing, math, and foreign language workshops, for all students. Extended integrated classes meet four days each week and focus largely on sciences, math, and social justice. Friday afternoons are reserved for immersion in elective classes, offering hands-on explorations of everything from boat building or knitting to bee keeping or peer mediation, architectural drawing to astronomy.

We do not use rankings or grade point averages. Students receive for each class narrative evaluations which explain, in detail, strengths and areas in need of improvement. We have a pass/fail system described in depth in our Courses handout. Students must earn just over 32 credits to graduate. Requirements are designed to prepare students for college admission and successful interaction in and stewardship of our world, but also to emphasize our core values as taught through coursework, stewardship, travel, school meeting, and senior project.

Travel is essential to our program. Our teachers include field exploration as a regular part of their teaching. Several times each year, students are offered opportunities to travel farther afield, whether to major cities, wilderness areas, or foreign countries. These trips both connect to our mission and program, but also build, in and of themselves, important skills: self-reliance, perspective, empathy, and organization.

The Community School manages 340 acres under conservation easement. This land includes a certified tree farm and a farmlands. Students work closely with staff and community members to manage these assets, both for academic credit and community service hours.

Students come to us from more than a dozen towns in central New Hampshire and western Maine. Modest financial aid is offered. As of June 2018, TCS has graduated 137 students since its first class of two in 1992. About 90% of these students has won acceptance to college. For the past ten years, we have boasted a 100% college acceptance rate, working hard to match our students with colleges and universities which will enrich their lives and challenge them. We are fully accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) and approved by the New Hampshire Department of Education.

Courses at The Community School

In order for such a small program to do justice to the wealth of information, perspectives, and resources available for teachers and learners, and to have myriad opportunity to apply skills in context, our studies use an integrated model to explore real-world problems in context.

The Community School's full-time program courses fall into three categories: workshops, integrated block, and electives.

Workshops meet three to four days per week, all year. They include English, math, and foreign language. Students earn 1-1.25 credits per course per year. This consistent immersion both builds skills and dispositions essential for a strong academic foundation.

Students are grouped largely based on their experience with or exposure to material. Reading/Writing Workshop builds skill in and love for the written word through exploration of a variety of genre, and lots of time for individually-motivated reading and writing. Math classes progress logically from pre-algebra up through calculus, with our offerings each year based on student need. Foreign language follows a similar path.

Integrated Block runs all year, meeting 3.5 hours per day for 4 days each week; is multi-age; and digs deeply into sciences, math, and social justice. We use framing questions or foci to scaffold multi-year projects, most recently understanding and mitigating challenges around Climate Change. We work with experts and community members on our projects, and travel extensively to better understand the scope of the problems we encounter.

Electives meet on Friday afternoons for 3 hours, for one quarter, earning a total of .20 credits per stewardship session. During these classes, students immerse themselves in elective areas: the arts, wood working, farming, cooking, health and sexuality, invention, advanced math and sciences, physical fitness, and more. Expert craftspeople from our region often teach these classes.

Assessment and Evaluation

We believe that assessment and evaluation are tools to help learners to grow and to record that growth. To that end, we use a narrative evaluation system which highlights in detail each student's strengths and weaknesses with intellectual concepts, critical skills, and commitment to learning. Based on these narratives, a pass, pass with distinction, pass with personal honors, pass with concern or fail is recorded on the official transcripts. Pass with Distinction earns slightly more credit than a pass, acknowledging the extra time and focus required to meet course criteria with excellence. Conversely, Pass with Concern earns reduced credit as lack of work completion or engagement often signifies a dearth of time spent on subject work. See attached.

Our system has no correlation to a traditional alpha-numeric grading system, therefore our students do not accumulate a grade point average, nor are they ranked. We are happy to offer individual narrative recommendations for scholarship consideration, college course prerequisites, or in other areas which typically rely on standardized norms. It has been our experience, for over 15 years, that our students performance, as highlighted in our narratives, speaks for itself in the competition for scholarships.