

# **Rancho San Joaquin Middle School**

## **Curriculum Prospectus**

### **Humanities (English/Language Arts and Social Studies)**

In Humanities classes, all students are learning to become independent, problem-solving and analytical thinking individuals. Humanities, a two-hour class, incorporates Social Science and English/Language Arts to support an integrated and culturally interrelated curriculum reflecting a balance of knowledge and skills, such as constructing support in writing, and quoting source materials. Extended class time allows teachers to integrate projects and make connections between English and Social Studies. Having fewer total students allows Humanities teachers to give more individualized feedback to both students and parents. Special Education students are mainstreamed into all Humanities classes with collaboration between specialists and general education teachers. Identified gifted and talented students are given the opportunity to enroll in GATE Humanities classes with differentiated instruction. A Sheltered Humanities class is provided to meet the needs of our Limited English Proficient students. Students in these classes are taught the exact same curriculum. The difference is in the manner of presentation to those who are not native speakers.

What is uniquely effective about our Humanities program is the fact that everything is integrated: history, literature, thinking, grammar, writing, and research. This makes learning more interesting for all students. Curriculum and instructional strategies are designed so that all student improve their writing skills, learn analytical thinking by constructing support for issues and ideas, and learn to identify elements of literature (plot, character, theme, etc.). The seventh grade Social Studies curriculum focuses on World Cultures and the eighth grade Social Studies curriculum focuses on American History. Novels, writing, field trips, National History Day, simulations, assemblies, speakers and other activities are integrated to coincide with each grade level focus. Through a variety of genre, authors, texts, and primary source documents, students are engaged in making connections between various elements of English and Social Studies. Students participate in a variety of learning activities (discussions, simulations, dramatizations, and debates).

All students write essays assessed with a rubric that includes the Analytical Thinking process of Constructing Support. Students use current periodicals, the online resources, and traditional library resources to aid them in researching past and present political, economic, and social dilemmas. Students spend time in our Library/Media Center learning to find accurate source material. They also learn to use their analytical thinking skills in measuring the accuracy of the vast amount of content available online.

## **Mathematics**

The focus of our mathematics program is on a problem-solving approach consistent with the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics Curriculum Standards, the California Mathematics Framework and our district's scope and sequence for mathematics instruction. All courses balance the teaching of basic skills, Pre-Algebra, Algebra, and geometry concepts, and the Analytical Thinking process of Problem Solving. We provide various levels of math instruction; primarily, two courses are offered at each grade level. Seventh graders enroll in either Introduction to Pre-Algebra or Pre-Algebra. Eighth graders enroll in either Introduction to Algebra or Algebra. Special Education and Limited English Proficient students are mainstreamed into all classes and collaboration exists between specialists and math teachers.

Curriculum and instructional strategies are designed so that all students learn math concepts and skills that will be important in their future, learn to communicate about mathematics by writing, explaining and demonstrating what they know, and learn to think analytically through the process of Problem Solving. Students participate in a variety of active learning experiences that relate mathematics to real life situations: simulations, use of manipulatives, constructions, integrated units and projects, thought provoking videos, and use of computer technology. All students complete problem-solving assignments that are graded with a common rubric. In addition, the textbooks chosen are language-based, where mathematics is introduced first within the context of language and then advanced into mathematical concepts and applications.

## **Science**

The scope of the science curriculum encompasses the panorama of subject matter in Earth, Physical and Life Science. All students complete a yearlong science class in the seventh grade, as well as a twelve-week Applied Technology class. During the eighth grade, students rotate among three trimester classes that include Health, Applied Physical Science, and Life Science. All classes are heterogeneously grouped, including Special Education students, who are supported by collaboration between specialists and teachers. All students are experimenting with and gaining conceptual understanding of scientific concepts and principles in a hands-on environment. Curriculum and instructional strategies are designed to ensure students will understand science in the real world, learn concepts and skills that will be useful in their future, and learn Analytical Thinking through the process of Experimental Inquiry.. During the seventh grade, students complete a Science Fair Project demonstrating their understanding of the scientific method, the Analytical Thinking reasoning process of Experimental Inquiry, and scientific concepts and principles. Students to complete lab reports in each class use writing and reading skills. Mathematics and data analyses are applied to solving problems and lab reports. The use of computer technology also enhances the science curriculum. A critical component of eighth grade science is the Health curriculum that provides every student with a comprehensive, challenging and success-oriented learning environment

rich in activities that foster the development of individual physical, mental, social, and emotional states of well being leading to healthy choices.

## **Foreign Languages**

Two high school level foreign language classes, Spanish 1 and French 1, are available to eighth grade students. In these classes, students learn to speak, listen, read and write in their chosen language. Cultural aspects of each language are also critical components. Teachers offer students experiences in food, art, geography, history, and literature during these yearlong classes. Higher order critical thinking and writing skills are developed through self-evaluation, synthesizing skits and oral presentations, analysis of writing, and comparing and contrasting cultures. Feedback from our high school indicates our students are successful in both second year Spanish and French.

Unique features, as well as effective instructional approaches, include drama, videotaping to assess oral communication, and celebration of various holidays. During the year, teachers plan and conduct articulation activities with their high school counterparts to review and assess scope and sequence, instructional strategies, activities and assessments.

## **The Arts**

Students enjoy a wide variety of course offerings in the Visual and Performing Arts. Every seventh grade student completes an introductory Art course that integrates concepts learned in other classes. For example, students learn sumi-e brush painting that corresponds to a Japan unit in Humanities and calligraphy during the unit on Middle Ages. To support a unit on Africa, students use paper mache to create colorful cultural masks. Students learn to use the analytical thinking and reasoning process of Error Analysis to self assess their projects using teacher-designed rubrics. During the eighth grade, students can pursue advanced art course work.

Performing Arts students enjoy instrumental, vocal, and drama courses. Beginning and Advanced Band, Beginning and Advanced Orchestra courses provide opportunities for students at all levels of music proficiency. Students learn to critique musical performances by using the analytical thinking process of Error Analysis using teacher-designed rubrics.

Vocal students enroll in Choir and perform for student and parent audiences during the year. Drama, eighth grade elective course, offers students an opportunity to explore various aspects of the theater as well as to produce and perform plays in front of their peers. Students learn to use the analytical thinking process of Error Analysis and teacher designed rubrics to assess their performances and to critique professional productions they are encouraged to attend.

## **Student Advisement Program**

The Middle School years are often seen as a “transition” time between the relatively small, secure environment of elementary school and the large, fast-paced environment of high school. Because adolescents continue to need personal encouragement and support, students are assigned to an advisor for two years. We created our Advisement program based on our annual School Climate Survey that revealed that students didn’t think their teachers really knew them, nor did they think they received enough personal attention. We began to focus our energy and resources on an Advisement Program that helps students get more individualized attention and to develop a two-year relationship with a staff member who does really know them well.

The Advisement Program has specific curricular components: Ethical Values, and Charting the Future. Ethical Values are integrated into school spirit activities and organized around monthly themes. Students are engaged in a number of activities, discussions, and written assignments focused around these values. Lastly, students explore the beginnings of career interests through activities, discussions, and materials designed to help adolescents learn about how their strengths, skills, and interests might be enhanced in future careers.

Many teambuilding activities and physical challenges prepare students to work cooperatively. In the 8th grade, students learn about Civic Duty by working together to create and carry out a class Civic Responsibility Project. Students donate time to and/or raise money for a cause or agency of their choice to help them learn what they can do together to make a difference in their community. Past examples include buying land in the Children’s Rainforest in Costa Rica, donating toys to Orangewood Children’s Home, and raising money for Someone Cares Soup Kitchen. The documentation of their experience is then exhibited for the entire community during Open House.

## **Physical Education Program**

Designed to develop a lifelong appreciation of physical activities, teachers have created unique units of instruction that provide students an opportunity to select areas that are of high interest and provide the encouragement necessary to achieve at the highest levels. While implementing the State Framework and the Exit Standards for National Association for Sports and Physical Education, students experience a coed, well planned and balanced curriculum and are offered a choice of three electives each month. For example, students can choose between an understanding of Pure Movement taught in football (pass patterns), tumbling (development of routines) or American Gladiators (powerball). A variety of activities ensure that each student will be able to find an area of interest and motivation contributing to a lifetime of physical activity.

Students assess their own level of physical fitness by rotating through conditioning/fitness activities covering upper body strength, abdominal strength, cardiovascular endurance, power, agility, speed and flexibility. An extensive up-to-date weight room has been built with enough open space to hold several classes for lectures,

videos and presentations. Many lessons relate to health issues, nutrition, safety, and prevention of injuries. Rancho's Zero-period P.E. allows a limited number of students to participate in an Instrumental Music Program or Student Government. Students enjoy a lunch time intramural program with activities such as arena soccer, 3 on 3 basketball, and table tennis, and an after school activities program through a collaborative effort with the City of Irvine that includes horseback riding, surfing and rock climbing.

Unique for physical education, the department sets high expectations for student application of the Analytical Thinking processes of Problem Solving, by using baseline fitness scores to find strengths and weaknesses and then plan individual methods to improve, and Constructing Support, in which students defend their fitness plan and the activities that helped them achieve their goals. Another unique feature of the program provides students with training in peer coaching to assist the learning of others. Peer coaches are trained to video tape others learning the golf swing or circus skills and then help the student to identify ways those skills can be improved.

Perhaps the most unique aspect of the P.E. program is the highly creative activities in which students engage. While more traditional programs emphasize only team sports, our students add experiences in rigorous physical fitness activities embedded in highly interesting and motivating units like the American Gladiators, Life's A Beach, Survival Skills, and Circus Skills. In past years, the School Climate Survey has revealed that over 80% of our students have agreed that the P.E. program improves their general physical fitness. Dramatically, nearly 90% indicate that the environment in P.E. makes it safe to try new and different activities. Among parents, there is also strong support for the accomplishments of our P.E. program. In past Community Surveys, nearly 90% of parents agree that the program is helping their child to improve their general physical fitness and to be more successful in team and individual sports.