



Pennsylvania Don Eichhorn Schools: Schools to Watch

Schuylkill Valley Middle School



Re-Designation: 2017

Schuylkill Valley Middle School • Schuylkill Valley School District
• Principal Joshua Kuehner • Vice Principal Jeremy Crills
• Berks County • Pennsylvania • 114 Ontelaunee Drive,
Leesport, PA 19533 • Phone (610) 926-7111
• Email: [HYPERLINK "mailto:jkuehner@schuylkillvalley.org"](mailto:jkuehner@schuylkillvalley.org)
jkuehner@schuylkillvalley.org [HYPERLINK "mailto:jcrills@schuylkillvalley.org"](mailto:jcrills@schuylkillvalley.org)
jcrills@schuylkillvalley.org
• Website:
[HYPERLINK
"http://www.edlinesites.net/pages/Schuylkill_Valley_MS"](http://www.edlinesites.net/pages/Schuylkill_Valley_MS)
http://www.edlinesites.net/pages/Schuylkill_Valley_MS

School Statistics

<http://paschoolperformance.org>

Community: Suburban

Enrollment: 605

Grade Levels: 5, 6, 7, 8

School Schedule: 9 period day with advisory/support and team planning

Student Demographics

American Indian/Alaskan Native	0
Asian	1.16
Black or African American	3.97
Hispanic	7.93
Multi-Racial	1.32
White	85.62

2013 School Performance Profile: 90.8

2014 School Performance Profile: 87.4

2015 School Performance Profile: NS

2016 School Performance Profile: 74.7

School Characteristics and Replicable Practices

Academic Excellence

- All students are constantly challenged to use critical thinking skills to solve problems.
- Grade level expectations are presented at the beginning of every school year in a variety of forms including informative grade level parents' nights, updated websites, and online homework calendars.
- The high academic expectations in the classrooms are obvious as tasks are clearly stated at the beginning of all units of study considering essential questions which are aligned to challenging academic standards.
- High quality examples of work are provided to the students as samples of the expectation of excellence.

- Revising and publishing written work and projects through peer editing and teacher conferencing is another example of how we incorporate meaningful feedback and showcase the students' mastery of learning in the classroom.
- The results of the high expectations are a heightened sense of achievement, self-worth, and the intrinsic pursuit of knowledge.
- The curriculum is adapted to meet the needs of our student community in a challenging, non-repetitive way. Through department and grade level meetings, all content area teachers are aware of the expectations in the subsequent years and teachers prepare the students for those challenges.
- Reading Apprenticeship skills and specialized graphic organizers are incorporated and utilized across the content areas to help our students master complex reading material.
- Direct instruction and cooperative learning are the backbone of our strong instructional program.
- The activities that are created by the faculty are challenging, engaging, and incorporate the curriculum seamlessly.
- The fifth grade students transform themselves into residents of Colonial Williamsburg during a holiday open house to highlight their knowledge of colonial life. This includes facts about the colonists' architecture, customs, food, trades, and entertainment. This after school community event is one of the highlights of the school year.
- The fifth graders also create their own chocolate covered pretzel company.
- Students learn about the stock market and participate in the process of creating, marketing, advertising, and distributing the product to the rest of the school.
- The sixth graders participate in an interdisciplinary unit for Cinco de Mayo where the students experience Mexican culture through activities centered around history, literature, food, and entertainment.
- The seventh grade students read *Chasing Lincoln's Killer* by James Swanson and are transported back to Gettysburg in 1863 where they witness Abraham Lincoln delivering the historic Gettysburg Address.
- Eighth grade students host a biography reception where students become the subject of their self-selected biography, while assuming their personality and appearance for the sake of the reception. They hand out business cards and have informal conversations with the guests, who include fellow students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members.
- For those students who might find some academic tasks overwhelming, teachers provide a variety of extra learning opportunities during the school day in the form of lunchtime help, extra remediation classes, and open periods where students work with teachers individually or in small groups to overcome learning obstacles. It is in these multiple settings where the students can realize their true potential as academic learners.
- Homework Center is an after school program which is offered quarterly to provide support for students who are inconsistent with regular homework completion. Certified teachers facilitate the program in its entirety. Students are selected to participate by parent requests and teacher recommendations. Students registered in the program are offered bus transportation home to accommodate the schedules of working families.
- There is also an additional after school academic support program for any academically ineligible children to not only improve academic performance, but foster organizational and time management skills. This is especially beneficial for the student athletes who need to raise their academic standing to participate in athletic competitions. The ineligible athletes divide their practice time between academics and their sports.
- Departments meet on a monthly basis to assess the curriculum and align it to meet Pennsylvania standards. Members collaborate on topics via shared Google documents to keep all parties informed of changes and revisions to the fluid curriculum as needed. These procedures ensure that the material is consistent, rigorous, and relevant to the students.
- Independent reading is also a priority that is highlighted every day throughout the school year. A preset period of time is set aside daily to participate in Silent Sustained Reading (SSR), when the students and the teachers enjoy reading books for pleasure.
- The efforts of SSR are showcased in a number of ways. In fifth grade, there are Accelerated Reader Top Ten lists displayed in the hallway throughout the school year highlighting the names of that grade's top

student readers. In sixth grade, students and teachers create a list of their Fabulous 15 books and display the lists for others as an inspiration for future reading. All teachers in the building create door signs outside their classrooms stating the title of the book they are currently reading. Many times, the teachers have meaningful conversations with the students on interesting topics or books they have read that spark an interest in the students and motivate them to try something new. Our focus on independent reading in the school has assisted the Schuylkill Valley Reading Olympic team to place first in the county two times in the last five years.

Developmental Responsiveness

- The middle school has developed an advocacy program which focuses on the emotional well-being of the students. The insightful program is a collaborative effort of staff members and administrators who have designed lessons for the students to address topics such as bullying, fear, gratitude, fresh starts, heroes, empathy, and random acts of kindness. These lessons are designed to enlighten the students to the world beyond themselves and to start to take an active role in the appreciation of individual qualities and the betterment of the school community.
- Another new and exciting initiative in SVMS is the seventh grade Genius Hour, which is an opportunity to engage students in discovering and pursuing their passions. Each week, seventh grade students have 40 minutes to work on their passion projects. With the creation of original blogs and TED talks, students share their discoveries with the school community.
- Through monthly team meetings, students who are considered at risk are identified and discussed at length. If necessary, Student Assistance services are provided for families of students who may need additional supports in the areas of mental health and wellness with guidance from a representative of the CARON Foundation.
- The middle school hosts several events for fifth grade parents, which include a locker orientation three mornings in the summer for students to practice opening their locker for the first time, a Meet the Teacher night using a scavenger hunt to familiarize themselves with the building, and a Parent Tech Night. The Tech Night is an informative evening when parents can learn the procedures to follow to access their child's grades and introduce them to the Accelerated Reader program, Study Island, and various websites used throughout the student's school career.
- An interdisciplinary approach to education is also apparent in the curriculum. From the mathematician and Holocaust units in eighth grade, the *Chasing Lincoln's Killer* book unit in seventh grade, the *Number Devil* unit in sixth grade, the students can experience the same topics in several classes and learn the information from several viewpoints and subject areas.
- We foster healthy physical and social habits for the students in a variety of outlets including Ski and Snowboard Club, Skateboarding Club, Mountain Biking Club, Girls on the Run, 5th and 6th grade Gym and Swim events, and seasonal dances.
- Other activity choices for the middle school students are Student Council, Yearbook, Newspaper, Reading Olympics, Science Olympiad, Math Counts, Panther Pride, Art Club, Jazz Band, Select Chorus, Drama Club, and Debate Club.
- To continue the ideas of fostering healthy physical and social habits, SVMS implements an Outdoor Education program across the four grade levels. Each grade participates in active learning in regard to problem solving, teamwork, and cooperation.
- The fifth grade team travels to Ozzy's Fun Center to participate in team building activities led by Ozzy's staff.
- The sixth grade has designed multiple activities that can be done outdoors on the school's campus and focus on listening to directions, leaf identification, t-shirt design, map skills, map identification, problem solving, and teamwork.
- Seventh grade travels to Blue Marsh to learn how to canoe, practice survival skills, participate in nature walks and fish.

- Eighth grade spends two nights at Camp Conrad Weiser experiencing the outdoor lifestyle while orienteering, participating in stream studies, practicing building a fire, archery, and learning about Pennsylvania Dutch traditions.

Social Equity

- Schuylkill Valley Middle School provides every student with high quality teachers, resources, learning opportunities, and supports creating a socially equitable, democratic, and fair environment offering positive options for all students.
- Our English learners, students with disabilities, and gifted and honors students are included in heterogeneously grouped sections whenever possible. These students experience their education through differentiated instruction based upon their individual skills and needs. The teachers constantly monitor and adapt the curriculum and instruction through their common team and content area planning time.
- Content area teachers meet once a month with administrators to discuss and adjust the curriculum and instructional methods based upon classroom observations and student needs. Students are supported and challenged on a regular basis.
- Flexible student placement is key in providing students with tutoring, mentoring, enrichment, differentiation, special adaptations, and supplemental support as the need arises.
- Remediation classes for reading and math are provided twice per six-day cycle; students are assigned, added to, and removed from these classes as determined by data and teacher observation identifying individual needs.
- Individual teachers offer tutoring on academic deficiencies as well as basic procedures and organization issues before and after school and during lunch periods.
- Reading classes with a reading specialist are available to struggling readers. Enrichment is also provided through several platforms: lunch reading clubs where students read and discuss books as well as life lessons reflected in the literature, gifted classes, and extra credit offerings as extensions of the classroom material.
- Students are given differentiated tests and learning activities that represent varying ability levels and learning styles. Lessons are designed so that each student has an equal opportunity to master the standards. With this in mind, direct instruction, cooperative learning, project-based learning, simulations, kinesthetic activities, and integrated technology are incorporated regularly in all classrooms.
- Nearpod, Google Classroom, and Socrative are invaluable tools to assess and engage the students. These programs are used in conjunction with other content specific resources to enrich the educational instruction for students. An example of some of these additional programs and equipment are the Career Cruising program, Study Island, Glogster, MindMup, Doc Hub, Powtoon EDU, Quizlet, SMARTboards, graphic calculators, and response clickers.
- Sixth grade celebrates Day of the Dead as a cross-curricular event involving each grade level teacher focusing on an aspect of the Mexican culture and celebrating its uniqueness.
- Seventh grade geography class presents regular opportunities for multicultural explorations.
- Eighth grade examines ancient civilizations and the history of Judaism and European cultures through the Holocaust unit.
- Both seventh and eighth grade world language students focus on German and Spanish languages and cultures.
- Each year, all middle school art students are immersed in one culture of study; some of these have included French and African cultures. Next year's focus is the Asian culture including China, Japan, Korea, Thailand, India, and the Philippines.
- While the study of art is at the center of the unit, the semester ends with a culminating Arts Day where students experience food, activities, and music of that culture. Recognizing the increasingly diverse

backgrounds of the student population, it is essential to encourage and celebrate multiple backgrounds, ethnicities, and customs.

- To encourage the active participation of families, parent advisory meetings are held on a quarterly basis between administrators and parents to discuss the programs at the middle school. These meetings focus on the topics raised by surveys provided from administration to parents in monthly newsletters.
- The PRIDE program focuses on positive student behaviors and actions. Recently, sixth grade piloted the PRIDE program. PRIDE stands for perseverance and positive attitude, responsibility, integrity, determination, and excellence. PRIDE cards were given by staff members to students displaying these characteristics throughout the school day. The students placed their cards in PRIDE boxes located throughout the school. Winners were randomly drawn on a biweekly basis and students received prizes such as gift cards and t-shirts.
- Students serving as behavior role models are chosen for a monthly lunch with the principals where they have pizza, soda, and play UNO with the administrators while discussing their thoughts and suggestions about how to make the middle school a better place. This activity also serves as an opportunity for these students to have a voice in the day to day operations of the building.

Organizational Structures

- Schuylkill Valley has a shared vision of a high performing school. This vision drives the decisions that are made throughout the school year in regard to academic programs, staffing, and the overall execution of the middle level education.
- Team Leader meetings are held on a monthly basis with administrators where academic and non-academic issues are discussed and solved if possible. Some of these topics have included technology, advocacy, and discipline.
- Schuylkill Valley Middle School is a community of practice in which learning, experimentation, and the opportunity for reflection are commonplace. As part of the continuing professional development opportunities for teachers, the Master Teacher program has been utilized to inform teachers about the current trends and best practices in education.
- Efforts have been made to secure partnerships with community organizations and businesses to keep the learning community involved in the educational process. Currently, there is an initiative to promote a new STEAM program (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) in our school district.
- A partnership has been formed with Lehigh Hanson Cement Company to secure Lego Mindstorm Kits to be utilized in an innovative program to begin during the 2016-2017 school year.
- The middle school has a partnership with Penn State Berks Campus. Twelve middle school teachers attended the Penn State STEAM Technology seminar to help the university design teacher training programs that incorporate the goals of the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). The partnership with these two organizations will allow a personalization of the new STEAM program at Schuylkill Valley Middle School and help ensure its success.
- Educational decisions are made based on collection and analysis of a variety of data: 4Sight tests, CDTs, PVAAS, PSSA, and classroom performance. This school-generated evaluation data serves as the basis for parent meetings, enrichment, learning support/ inclusion transitions, transitions into/ out of remediation classes, recommendation for homework center, one-on-one tutoring, and flexible movement between tiered math classes.
- Schuylkill Valley Middle School and district staff partner with colleges and universities, families, and community members in setting and supporting the school's goal of high performance. Within our building, newly hired teachers are guided and supported through a mentoring program with an experienced educator. For an entire year, mentor and mentee meet to discuss district, building, grade level, and subject area expectations.