



# SCHOOLS TO WATCH – VIRGINIA

## ROBIOUS MIDDLE SCHOOL – VISITOR’S GUIDE



### Robious Middle School



#### Designated in 2017

Robious Middle School  
Chesterfield County Public Schools  
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### 2016-2017 School Statistics

(Sources: Student enrollment as of April 20, 2017)

Community: Chesterfield County  
Enrollment: 1298  
Grade Levels: 6-8  
School Schedule: Alternating Block

#### Student Demographics

- 69% White
- 11% African American
- 9% Hispanic
- 6% Asian
- 6% Multi-Racial
- <1% Native American
- 22% Economically Disadvantaged
- 13% Special Education
- 7% English Language Learners

Fully Accredited by VDOE:	2014, 2015, 2016
Math Pass Rate	91%, 92%, 93%
English Pass Rate	86%, 88%, 90%
Science Pass Rate	78%, 83%, 90%
Writing Pass Rate	84%, 87%, 90%
History Pass Rate	89%, 93%, 94%

## School Characteristics and Replicable Practices

### Academic Excellence

Robious Middle School (RMS) is recognized in Chesterfield County Public Schools (CCPS) as a leader in best practices and academic achievement. By meeting each student’s needs we are one of the highest performing schools in the county. For students who may struggle with Language Arts or Math, our Professional Learning Communities (PLC’s) meet before the year begins to craft diagnostic assessments for each class. Using this data, teachers provide differentiated instruction to their students. Ongoing formative assessments are administered to ensure students are progressing together and no one “gets left behind.” Teachers work with students during informal times (lunch, study hall) and more structured times (before/after school or through formal remediation programs which students are invited to attend.) Healthy snacks are provided to students who attend before/after school tutoring to help them focus. Teachers have common planning so they can work together to analyze data and craft relevant, rigorous lessons. Teachers are also provided time to observe each other so they can improve on their own teaching. Additionally, we understand that schools cannot do it alone. To this end, RMS has started a *Novels at Night* Program to involve our parent community in student growth regarding reading.

Specifically, *Novels at Night* is a program that strives to create confidence in and foster a love of reading for students who are struggling or reluctant readers. This program involves not only students, but their parents or guardians in the process. During the initial meeting a group of passionate teachers discuss the importance of

reading. Additionally, teachers share with families several methods for creating discussions about reading and a starting point for supporting comprehension growth. The most important, unique part of this program is that parents and guardians are reading together, creating their own book club. Every student that attended *Novels at Night* last year passed his/her Virginia Standard of Learning test. (SOL)

RMS is consistently called upon by CCPS and various statewide organizations to share our latest Project Based Learning ideas. Our students participate in meaningful and relevant projects at every level. Robious Middle School has a multitude of outstanding project options for Project Based Learning units. Staff provide students with exemplars of high quality work. The revision process is key and students are afforded multiple opportunities to revise in order to achieve a high quality product. Additionally, teachers ensure student projects are curriculum based and are often interdisciplinary in nature. Successful projects include critical thinking, real-world problem solving, collaboration, ongoing revision, and presentation to an authentic audience. Some of our exemplary projects include:

1. **“Healthy Lifestyles Initiative”**-This project introduces students to the four different food chains from which our food comes. Through the core subjects (Social Studies, Language Arts, Science, and Math) as well as Health and Physical Education, students learn the roles that farming, science, big business and advertising play in the food we eat and the choices we make. Students focus on Guiding Questions throughout the project such as: *How does food become energy? How healthy am I? What can I do to ensure I am healthy?* In health and physical education classes students learn about the importance of monitoring vital statistics, the Health Triangle, the Components of Fitness, Essential Nutrients, Food Groups, & Health and Wellness. In language arts classes students learn about non-fiction text structures, analysis, persuasive advertising, and writing techniques. In science the focus is on Cells, Cell Processes, and Genetics. Finally, in math students study statistics, proportions, and graphing. The project culminates in a student led community health fair where the Robious community, students, and faculty learn to about how to make more informed choices about the way we take care of our bodies.

2) **Virginia Museum of Fine Arts “Slam Poetry” Night**- Since 2011, *The Poetry Slam* Unit begins in late fall/early winter, where students are introduced to their culminating project - to perform their own written piece live on a Thursday night during the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts’ extended hours. At the start of the unit, students conduct their “field work” by taking a class trip to the VMFA to select a piece they are “drawn to.” This piece serves as their initial source of inspiration for their poem’s rough draft, as well as the “stage” for their Slam Night performance. The weeks leading up to the Slam Night, students spend time developing a voracious appetite for the writing process: relentlessly revising, working in their mastery of poetic devices, slam battling with their peers, providing encouraging feedback, and establishing a strong sense for public speaking so that the voices they wish to introduce to the world are theirs and theirs alone! On the actual night of the event, students place themselves in front of their selected piece from the day of their field work, amidst regular museum patrons and begin to “slam” unsuspecting museum patrons, but never without the abundant support of families, RMS faculty, and former generations of slammers coming to support the newest generation of voices. RMS students put themselves out in the open for the world to see, to hear, and to ignite reflection on the lives they lead - not to mention remind audience members to never underestimate what a young voice has to say to the world.

3) **“Plan the Perfect 8th Grade Dance for the Perfect Price”**- Since 2013, the Algebra Professional Learning Community (PLC) at Robious Middle School has successfully completed this project centering around their Systems of Equations Unit. The objective is for students to create proposals for their own 8th grade dance and make formal presentations to the RMS PTA. The PTA selects one group’s proposal to use for the actual 8th Grade Dance each spring. Once students come up with a cost curve and revenue curve to represent their group, they then determine food options, entertainment, and decorations based on the budget. Groups present first in front of their classmates, and afterwards those who made the first cuts will present again in front of a panel which consists of an authentic

audience of teachers, administrators, and PTA members. The panel determines the winning presentation that the PTA will then use to determine the theme for that year's 8th grade dance.

4) "**Potato Bar**"- Our students with Intellectual disabilities host a Potato Bar bi-monthly for our entire faculty & staff during lunch. The students in our department participate in purchasing and preparing the food in their extra-large kitchen. As the faculty arrives our students greet them and ask them which toppings they would like on their potato. The potato bar works on socialization skills for our students and restaurant skills to help prepare them for the real world, especially after high school. This program promotes independence and job skills.

### **Developmental Responsiveness**

The 1300 students that attend Robious Middle School have various strengths, abilities, and needs. As a result, we provide many programs to support our student community.

RMS offers over 30 different sports, intramurals, or clubs to our students. Although many school sports require tryouts, we offer intramurals each season that are open to everyone. Additionally, we are responsive to student interests and needs. After many students requested to have a Dance Team at RMS, we created one last year. Also, students can join a myriad of clubs. Clubs are often student generated such as the "Rubik's Cube Club" and the "Fashion Passion Club." If a club doesn't exist and a student wants to create one, he/she can with the help of a faculty sponsor. RMS sponsors the "Groovy Green Club" which focuses on recycling. Last year the RMS Groovy Green Club participated in the TREX Challenge and came in the Top Ten nationwide by collecting 2, 074 pounds of plastic bags to be recycled.

Robious Middle School's Band participates annually in the *All County Band*, the *Fine Arts Festival*, and several competitions such as the *Busch Gardens Musical Festival* in the Spring. Robious band students also collaborate with the James River Marching Band for an annual *Buddy Night* in October, where middle school band students are paired up with a high school band student. The RMS Fine Arts Department displays artwork at the annual *Barnes and Noble Poetry Night*, local business and participates in the annual *County-Wide Arts Showcase*. Robious Middle School's Chorus participates annually in the *All County Chorus*, *All District Chorus*, *Pyramid Concert*, and *Busch Gardens Musicale Festival*.

Besides extracurricular activities, RMS also provides targeted support to small groups of students in need. Each year a small group of 8th grade boys is chosen to be part of "Men In Ties." The mission of "Men in Ties" is to foster positive relationships among a group of 8th grade boys at Robious Middle School. Middle school, and 8th grade specifically, is a time of great transition and we focus on assisting these young men as they seek to make positive decisions as they move into young adulthood. The "Men in Ties" group meets once a week and focuses on providing positive role models for many of our "at-risk" 8<sup>th</sup> grade boys. We focus on community service, future planning, conflict resolution, and how to handle potentially negative situations productively and responsibly. In addition to meeting regularly, we have numerous "off-campus" activities to encourage our mission, such as visiting college campuses such as Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU).

Similar to "Men In Ties", BELLA (Becoming Exceptional Ladies of Leadership and Accountability) is a group comprised of approximately 15 eighth grade young ladies who are considered "at-risk". The goal of BELLA is to surround these young ladies with positive female role models and peers to encourage the development of self-confidence, self-determination, conflict resolution, and healthy personal relationships. Several female teachers at Robious have come in and given personal testimonies on challenges they have overcome in their pursuit of success. The girls had the opportunity to ask questions, and find common ground with their teachers, they otherwise may not have established. The BELLA girls have found ways to serve their school community as well. Last school year, the girls spent our club time volunteering and assisting in the ID department during Round Table. This helped bring our school mission of being inclusive to life, and it also gave some of our girls who struggle with reading a chance to build confidence. Along with Men in Ties, BELLA had the opportunity to visit VCU. Students can visualize the future possibilities that await them when they visit a college campus.

Likewise, the RMS Counseling Department offers large group and small group services for our students. Students who may be dealing with a divorce have the opportunity to attend a small support group led by a school counselor. We also host a group for those who struggle with regular attendance.

To foster the social, emotional, and physical development of every child, all students at RMS have the opportunity to go to an enrichment class titled "RoundTable" for 30 minutes. This small class serves many purposes. These include to: build relationships and develop empathy among students, build relationships between students and adults, foster social and emotional confidence in students, improve academic performance, and acquire life skills necessary for future success. Specific lessons revolve around community expectations (PBIS), team building, being college and career ready, cyber-safety, study skills, inclusion, diversity, and goal setting to name a few.

Students at RMS have a unique opportunity to engage the community as a classroom. The "Shark Tank" project is a multifaceted economics assignment modeled loosely off of the NBC television show Shark Tank. The students must create a new good or service of some type, write up a business plan complete with cost and profit projections, a resource breakdown, advertise their product, and ultimately pitch their product to their classmates. The final round of presentations are made to a panel of local business owners and members of the community, who also provide feedback. "Shark Tank" brings our economics curriculum to life in a way that is both meaningful and enjoyable for the 8th graders at Robious Middle School.

Likewise, fostering curiosity and leadership are important at RMS. In 2015-2016, our 8th Grade Science Fair was devoted to addressing the real world problem of our nation's water crisis. Over 85 RMS students performed small scale experiments to understand current weather management challenges, representing nation-wide problems. Their work caught the attention of Dr. Jonathan Lanciani- Founder, President and Chief Executive Officer of Sustainable Water. Students presented their findings to other students, family members, staff, school board members, and invited guests from CCPS.

Exposing students to potential career options is vital in middle school. Students start to understand the connection between school and their future. To meet this need, the RMS Counseling Department hosts an annual *Career Day* for all of our students showcasing a multitude of fields and occupations. Parents, spouses of staff members, and members from the community volunteer to help our students understand what they do. Last year over 50 professionals came to RMS including doctors, dentists, fireman, policeman, restaurant owners, karate instructors, realtors, car salesmen, authors, corporate executives, military, etc.

### **Social Equity**

Robious Middle School is a diverse school with high expectations for all of its students. Currently we have many student groups with various needs such as: students with IEP's (Individualized Education Plans), ELL (English Language Learners), SWD (Students With Disabilities including students with ID- Intellectual Disabilities and students in our Autism Catchment Program.) We also have CBG (Center Based Gifted) students, and SBG (School Based Gifted/Honors) students. The master schedule is created for the inclusion of all students as much as possible. Students with IEP's are placed in the least restrictive environment and provided support through a co-teacher if necessary. Teachers receive copies of student's IEP's before the school year begins so they can provide varied learning experiences to address the different needs of each student.

Our ID students participate in electives with their peer education counterparts. Students in the Autism Program attend many regular education classes, sometimes with the assistance of an aide. Our ELL students benefit from differentiated instruction where teachers make an effort to present curriculum in multiple ways, including using pictures or "act-it-outs" to support these students.

One annual project that our gifted learners (CBG) students participate in is *Relay for Life*. Participation started seven years ago when a father of one of our students was diagnosed with leukemia. Our students wanted to

help and involve the community in the process. Over the last seven years RMS has raised about \$190,000 for *Relay for Life*.

Additionally, RMS is a PBIS School (Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports). Our teachers and administration attend regular professional development opportunities regarding positive behavior strategies to use in the classroom. Our school motto is: "Raiders REIGN Supreme," which outlines the positive behavior and expectations for all students. Raiders should be: **R**espectful, **E**mpowered, **I**nclusive, **G**oal Oriented, and **N**oble. Teachers reference these character traits in class and in the hallways and administrators discuss these during student expectation assemblies. Unlike many awards ceremonies that recognize academic achievements, our quarterly awards assemblies recognize students who model these core values. Many students who receive a REIGN award are not Honor Roll students but instead students who exhibit character and perseverance each day.

Access to information is paramount for all of our students and parents at RMS. All RMS students are provided with a Google Chromebook at the beginning of the year. Students who cannot afford the Chromebook fee receive payment plans or a waiver of the fee entirely. Various forms of communication to parents include phone calls, emails, bi-monthly "Raider Reports", and social media (Instagram and Twitter.) Important communication to parents is often done in two languages to ensure there are no language barriers. Parents and students have on-line access to grades 24/7. Teacher email addresses are readily available should a parent wish to contact the school.

Administrators routinely analyze referral and suspension data to ensure fairness with regard to staff making referrals as well as consequences given. Over the past 5 years, suspension rates at RMS have dropped dramatically due to an increased effort by teachers and administrators to utilize more levels of intervention. All staff at RMS understand the best way to support our students is to develop meaningful, caring relationships with them. All staff members strive to call each student by name, even if the student is not in his/her class. Over the past few years RMS has been able to hire teachers and/or counselors who are fluent in Spanish and who have diverse backgrounds and ethnicities themselves.

### **Organizational Structures and Processes**

RMS is committed to continuous improvement and welcomes all stakeholders in the decision making process. Teachers, counselors, librarians, secretaries, nurses, and even our school resource officer understand that student relationships are key to student success. All groups strive to foster meaningful relationships with our student community.

For example, our librarians host authors and artists throughout the year encouraging students to come to the library. At Halloween, a professional storyteller turns the library into a scene from Broadway as he tells spooky Halloween stories during lunch to our students. Our counselors visit every classroom to talk about high school specialty centers and college preparation. All members of our library staff, counseling team, and our School Resource Officer visit the cafeteria daily to chat with students directly and cultivate relationships throughout the year.

RMS has many teams and committees that analyze data to provide feedback and suggestions for improvement throughout the year. Our Leadership team, PBIS team, Round Table committee, Gap Group committee, Our CSIT Committee, PTA, Committee, and Middle School Student Advisory team all contribute to the success of every student.

Teachers and staff are encouraged to seek out and attend high quality Professional Development to better themselves. Last year, RMS sent a teacher to Denver, CO to attend the STEM Forum regarding the integration of technology and engineering into science. This teacher returned to RMS with a wealth of information to share with her colleagues. We routinely send teachers to conferences across the state as well. Most recently teachers were sent to UVA to learn about Google Classroom and others received informative training regarding Autism.

Not only do our teachers participate in Professional Development, they lead Professional Development at the local and state level. Recently teachers, librarians, and counselors have presented on topics such as Google Classroom, WeVideo, Project Based Learning, & incorporating chromebooks effectively in the middle school classroom. Staff from RMS have made presentations for CCPS and for statewide groups such as VASCD (Virginia Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development) and the Potomac and Chesapeake Association for College Admissions Counseling. RMS also has staff who teach in the evening at the college level and participate on college panels from time to time sharing insights about teaching, technology, and leadership.

RMS has participated in the Teachers for Tomorrow program for the last eight years in CCPS. Last year, over 36% of our teachers volunteered to sponsor a high school student who was interested in becoming a teacher.

Currently, RMS is in the stages of developing and implementing a Multi-media Production/Makerspace. A primary purpose of this venue is to foster curiosity and creativity in a place where success is measured through the design process. Students will have a place to research and define problems, use their imagination to provide potential solutions, build actual prototypes or designs, test and evaluate, and then learn through trial and error how to revise and redesign. The interplay between hands on experience and access to new technologies in this space will enable students to actively learn and think. Our Makerspace will include electronics/circuitry, programming, papercraft, textile work, 3-D printing, and x/y plotting.