



SCHOOLS TO WATCH – VIRGINIA

GAINESVILLE MIDDLE SCHOOL – VISITOR’S GUIDE



Gainesville Middle School for the Arts and Sciences



Re-Designated in 2017

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2016-2017 School Statistics

Community: Gainesville, VA
Enrollment: 1388
Grade Levels: 6-8
School Schedule: 6 class day (6th and 7th grades)
7 class day (8th grade)

Student Demographics

- 56% White
- 15% Hispanic
- 14% Asian
- 11% African American
- 2% Multi-Racial
- 20% Special Education
- 15% Economically Disadvantaged
- 7% English Language Learners

Fully Accredited by VDOE:	2014, 2015, 2016
Math Pass Rate	90%: 2014, 2015, 2016
English Pass Rate	87%: 2014, 2015, 2016
Science Pass Rate	93%: 2014, 2015, 2016
2016 Writing Pass Rate	84%: 2014, 2015, 2016
History Pass Rate	<u>95%</u> : 2014, 2015, 2016

School Characteristics and Replicable Practices

Academic Excellence

Gainesville Middle School for the Arts and Sciences emphasizes all students learning at their highest potential as part of the vision and mission for the school. Our staff has embraced learning as measured by mastery of the standards. Students are expected to show evidence that they have mastered the Virginia Standards of Learning, and if not, there is a rigorous procedure in place for relearning and reassessment. This procedure includes teachers, parents, and the student and is monitored by grade-level administrators. This practice is now systemic and is part of the “fabric” of Gainesville. Parents often require that their students retake assessments simply as a matter of course, even if the original grade was not a failing one. Our focus is no longer just on how we teach the curriculum, but on when students actually master the material.

Teachers adhere to the curriculum as designed by the school division and the State of Virginia. Many of the Gainesville teachers participate in curriculum design at the division level. Interdisciplinary and collaborative teams meet to insure that the learning objectives are addressed in a coherent and progressive manner easily understood by the students. This has been accomplished by each collaborative team breaking their curriculum down into individual learning targets. Each lesson is focused on a specific learning target, written in student-friendly language, and prominently displayed in the classroom. The learning targets are then revisited multiple times throughout the class to ensure understanding.

It is understood that at Gainesville learning should be fun. Middle school students require stimulation and motivation to gain their attention and prepare them to learn. Teachers at Gainesville regularly utilize technology to design

exciting and hands-on activities that introduce new material and review prior learning. Teachers share these strategies with each other with the result that students are often heard exclaiming how fun classes were for them. Teachers implement a variety of learning strategies as appropriate, and are experts in understanding and measuring students' capacity for understanding and retaining essential learning

Gainesville participates with a number of other Prince William middle schools in Interactive Achievement testing. This consists of benchmark tests designed by our own teachers that provide information for teachers on student learning. Multiple methods of assessment are used at every grade level, along with rubrics for projects and papers. Students are familiar with the requirements for specific assessments and many choose to meet or exceed the requirements outlined in the rubric. Authentic learning experiences such as Mock Trials, Mock Congress, and Virtual field trips allow for students to be assessed in ways beyond standardized tests. Additionally, staff are expected to use formative assessments on a regular basis to measure students' mastery, and to use that data to inform their decisions about pacing.

The school structure of collaborative and interdisciplinary teams, along with a well-designed master schedule, insure that teachers have ample time to plan and share best practices. Collaborative Teams all have common planning times and meet at least weekly. Teachers are motivated to progressively improve instruction, and often meet during their lunch break to discuss strategies and to share ideas.

Developmental Responsiveness

Interdisciplinary and Collaborative Teams (CTs) are in place at Gainesville. Teachers work to build positive relationships with each of their students, understanding their needs and planning for appropriate methods to enhance learning. Core and encore teachers share information concerning students and monitor progress through all classes. Counselors at Gainesville 'loop' with their grade levels, accompanying the students through the middle school experience. At Gainesville all teachers understand that they are responsible for all students and work collaboratively to ensure that students' needs are supported. Outside of the classroom teachers can be found participating in Team Day activities, attending various sporting events, participating in community chorus and performances which helps students feel supported in their efforts beyond academics.

Teachers are particularly alert to the needs of their students. They are familiar with the numerous resources available, and are well trained in insuring needs are being met. The school counselors, the nurse, and all of the staff are trained in recognizing a variety of health issues, both physical and emotional. Students with needs are addressed promptly and parents are provided with excellent resources and information. Throughout the year, families are encouraged to attend a variety of functions at the school. Among these popular events is the annual Signet picnic which draws hundreds of families. Parents and families are also invited to concerts, sporting events, drama performances, Principal's Pride ceremonies, and Honor Roll assemblies. Our physical education department initiated an entirely new method of delivering instruction through academic team competitions. The connections made to core subjects through SOL questions delivered in PE, and the competitive atmosphere have made PE a much enjoyed time of the day.

There is also an emphasis on the performing arts at Gainesville. In these classes, students study public speaking skills that enable them to communicate appropriately with peers and adults. Study and organizational skills are taught at every level and there are specific classes for 8th grade, e.g. Executive Strategies. Teachers have individual classroom management styles but one facet that is embedded in every classroom is respect. As a school we emphasize respect and courtesy every day – "Respect and Courtesy today, for that is the Gainesville way". Students understand that in order to succeed in this world, we all must be respectful to each other.

Across the board students are encouraged to debate and discuss current events. We recognize the need to make instruction relevant and do so by bringing the real world into the classroom on a daily basis. Conflict resolution is taught in the classrooms by our school counselors, and teachers are well-versed on how to assist students in handling these situations. Counselors work with students starting in the sixth grade to develop Academic Career Plans. These plans are maintained through a student's high school career, and are focused on a student's desired high school degree, and their post-secondary education plans. The plan begins in 6th grade when students complete a career interest survey that assists them in selecting a career pathway, and students are informed about the possible educational requirements of the career they're interested in. Students can update their plan, and parents have access to it throughout the student's middle school and high school careers.

Gainesville has a unique line up of classes that are focused on all of the above. During their time at Gainesville, our middle schoolers will all have the opportunity to explore a variety of fine and performance arts classes – including Chorus, Band, Orchestra, Drama, and Art, along with Communication, Journalism, Creative Writing, Family and Consumer Science, and Technology Education. These classes and their core classes give them ample opportunity to begin

to think about and set paths for career goals, and realize strengths that perhaps had been untapped in the past. Robotics and Drama are two clubs that attract many students. Each year, the Counseling Department assists many 8th grade students in applying to attend Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology in Fairfax County.

Social Equity

Starting in February of each school year, all students meet with their grade level counselor to discuss their scheduling request. Students are given the opportunity to take a variety of classes including Extended Language Arts, Extended Math, Enriched Science, Pre-AP Algebra I, Spanish I and/or French I in the eighth grade. Extended/enriched classes contain a cross section of the student population. Students with disabilities are included in the general education classroom, when appropriate. All administrators and faculty have high expectations for academic success for all students. Gainesville's Student Support Team insures that interventions put in place to assist a student are monitored and improved as the need arises in their classes.

Gainesville Middle School for the Arts and Sciences has embraced standards-based grading and the daily use of student-friendly learning targets. These learning targets help students take ownership in their learning, as they are better able to keep track of the standards they have mastered and with which ones they need assistance. All teachers differentiate instruction and assessment, and offer students a variety of methods to demonstrate mastery, including retakes. Prior to retaking assessments, teachers offer remediation to students to ensure their success on the various standards. Instead of using standardized testing as an exclusive source of data, students are given a variety of opportunities to demonstrate mastery, including performing speeches, skits, orally giving responses, providing reasoning for multiple answers, and creating projects to demonstrate their mastery of standards.

Within the first month of school, all students visit the library and computer lab. During these two orientation sessions, students learn about the resources available in the Media Center as well as gain access to personal online tools through their individual Office 365 accounts. All students are included in classroom activities and have access to the learning targets and curriculum for all classes. Technology is available to teachers and students through three standing computer labs, numerous computer carts, and computers in the classrooms. All classrooms have Smartboards which further enhance and enrich instruction and permit a variety of research methods.

Our vision and mission emphasize the fact that all students belong to each of us. Each year teachers are provided with information about each child so that historical data is at their fingertips. They use the information to inform their instruction. No child begins as a blank slate at Gainesville. With teaming at all levels, the student population is broken into small groups which enables teachers to know all their students, and for students to bond together as a team to know each other well. Students are made aware of with whom they can share problems, and counselors, administrators and all adults in the building make it their mission to listen and care for each child. Our Student Support Team meets monthly to discuss solutions for struggling students, and how we can best support them.

All of these traits are rewarded through the Principal's Pride Awards, given every six weeks to students nominated by their teams for reflecting what we believe is the model Gainesville citizen. Students who are respectful and courteous, who are quick to help others, and who share their knowledge in their classroom are recognized with their parents present. This is a highly attended event. Additionally, once every 9 weeks, we have a Positive Referral Day, where teachers recognize students for their positive behaviors. Students can also receive a SCORE Card at any time from any staff member when they are observed demonstrating Success through Courtesy, Organization, Respect, and Excellence. These SCORE Cards are turned into the office, and each week students can earn prizes if their card is drawn. On the academic side, each quarter, interdisciplinary teams attend an Honor Roll Assembly, where students who made the A/B Honor Roll and the Principal's Honor roll are recognized. Parents are invited to this event, and hundreds of parents attend each time.

Organizational Support

Since Gainesville opened ten years ago, the administration, staff, and all stakeholders have shared and maintained the vision that it would be the best middle school in Prince William County. In many cases this has been achieved as evidenced by outscoring all other middle schools in the school division on the 2016 Civics and Economics, Math, and Science SOL tests. Each year we strive for excellence through engaging, rigorous, and meaningful instruction. Overall school decisions are driven by conversations and decisions in our Middle School Council including team leaders, department chairs as well as the School Advisory Council consisting of parents, staff members, and student

representatives. The vision and plan for the future are posted throughout the building and one line that is often quoted is, “We are responsible for ALL students”.

Prince William County schools operate under site-based management so principals have full responsibility for changes and plans. Through shared and collaborative leadership, plans for improvement are designed and implemented by staff and monitored by administration. The School Advisory Council represents and assesses the needs of the community and staff. The Advisory Council helps develop the School Plan and insures that it reflects the vision and mission of Gainesville. The Advisory Council acts as an advisor to the school administration on the budget, implementation, evaluation, and modifications of the School Plan. The School Advisory Council will identify concerns, obtain community and staff feedback, and support the goals of the educational system. The Advisory Council is comprised of 6 parents and 6 teacher representatives, and meetings are open to any parent of Gainesville Middle School who would like to attend.

Academic reflection takes place for teachers within their Collaborative Teams as they analyze data and best practices, and work to improve their instruction. For students, reflection revolves around the learning targets used in class. Many teachers ask students to keep a list of learning targets within a unit. For each learning target, students reflect on their own knowledge – either “I’ve got it”, “I need to work on it”, or “I don’t get it.” These student self-reflections then assist the teacher in providing re-learning opportunities before students participate in a summative assessment.

The school division provides professional development throughout the year to address weaknesses in a variety of subjects that they determine to be necessary based on testing data. Site-based professional development is supplemental at the school level to address the specific vision of the school. Rick Wormeli has visited Gainesville Middle School on several occasions to emphasize standards-based instruction and grading at the middle level. Leadership teams from Gainesville recently attended the ASCD conference and the Assessment Training Insititute and shared what they learned with the whole staff. To aid Gainesville in its journey in standards-based grading, Myron Dueck, author of Grading Smarter Not Harder, visited Gainesville in February 2017 to provide on-site training for all teachers. Gainesville also provides regular, in-house professional development to assist teachers in building their skills in working with EL students. This professional development, through collaboration with the district ESOL Office and the Center for Applied Linguistics, centers on Sheltered Instruction, language goals, and strengthening academic vocabulary. Staff that teach Sheltered Instruction classes meet monthly to discuss best practices and how to improve student progress.

Community partnerships are key to our success at Gainesville. Our PTO sponsors either a 5K or a Color Run race each year, dozens of spirit nights with local businesses, and numerous fundraisers that support that initiative. Proceeds from PTO events are used to acquire additional technology resources. Community businesses are also supportive of our positive recognition programs for staff and students; gift cards and coupons to local restaurants and stores are provided regularly as incentives