RIDGEFIELD SCHOOLS

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**RIDGEFIELD POSTAL PATRON**

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

Since students only need 23 credits, they can use the extra credit of two class sessions for early release, late-start or to make up a failed class.

"The confusion comes when a student fails one semester of a year-long class," said VanderMaas. "If the student needs to take a class in that subject each year to meet our graduation requirements, he or she will need to make up that semester's half-credit during the summer or in some other way."

### Culminating Project

The state mandates that each student complete a culminating project. In Ridgefield, the Culminating Project includes a ten-page research paper submitted during a student's Junior year as well as 30 hours of community service. During Senior year, each student must present the project for approval before a panel of judges.

### High School and Beyond Plan

Part of an effort to get students thinking about their future, the state mandates students develop a High School and Beyond Plan. Each student meets with a counselor to help develop a personal plan for goals after high school graduation.

### State Testing Requirements

The state's assessment tests are where the requirements can seem confusing. When Randy Dorn became the Superintendent of the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, he changed the name of the state assessment test from WASL (Washington Assessment of Student Learning) to HSPE (High School Proficiency Exam).

Eventually, the state will require each student to pass proficiency exams in four different subjects: reading, writing, science and math. "Introducing this requirement suddenly and immediately in a single year would have negative effects on students," said VanderMaas. "To be as fair, consistent and flexible as possible, the state has developed a plan to transition students to the new requirements."

Students graduating this year (2011) and next year (2012) must pass the reading and writing HSPEs, but not the science HSPE. Every student must also meet at least one of two math end-of-course (EOC) assessments (either Algebra or Geometry) or take a fourth year of math.

Students graduating in 2013 and 2014 will have to pass the science HSPE in addition to the other two HSPEs (reading and writing), but will still only have to pass either the Algebra EOC or the Geometry EOC.

Beginning in 2015, students will have to pass all three HSPEs (reading, writing and science) and both math end-of-course assessments, Algebra and Geometry.

Students who do not pass a HSPE or end-of-course assessment have other options to meet the state's criteria for graduation, too. "The legislature designs the system to ensure that every student can get the help they need to graduate," said VanderMaas. "I encourage students and parents to contact me with any questions or concerns they may have."

## Graduation guides

The high school provides an up-to-date Curriculum Guide under the For Students menu on its website: **www.ridge.k12.wa.us/rhs**. The guide contains the specific curriculum credit requirements students need to fulfill, descriptions of every course offered at the high school, plus more information useful to each student's high school career.

For more information on the state's guidelines for graduation, you can visit OSPI's Graduation Requirements webpage at: **www.k12.wa.us/GraduationRequirements**. To get in touch with Principal Tony VanderMaas, you can reach him at the high school at 360-619-1320 or via email: **tony.vandermaas@ridge.k12.wa.us**.

**SUMMER 2011** | 2724 S HILLHURST ROAD, RIDGEFIELD, WA 98642
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# RIDGEGRAM

RIDGEFIELD SCHOOLS

**WEDNESDAY COLLABORATION TIME**

## Teachers to meet to improve instruction

FOR TEACHERS TO consistently improve student learning, having opportunities to meet and discuss what's working in the classroom is essential for success. To improve student achievement, teachers need to have the time to share teaching strategies, discuss student achievement data and create grade-level assessments to measure the learning taking place. Starting in the 2011-12 school year, all schools in the Ridgefield School District will start an hour later every Wednesday to give teachers time to come together as grade-level and building-wide teams to accomplish these tasks.

Over the past year, staff members and district leaders met to talk about opportunities for teachers to regularly improve their skills and better meet the different needs of Ridgefield's students. The committee determined that having time each week would give teachers a way to increase student achievement by reviewing student data and examining what is working in the classroom.

These sessions before school hours will allow for regimented, data-driven and research-based discussions that will focus on the success of each and every student in the district. In order to make time for these meetings to take place, the number of early release days for the next year has been significantly decreased.

Research shows that huge rewards can come from teachers working together. Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker, authors of *Professional Learning Communities at Work*, state: "Teachers increase the effectiveness of their schools when they collectively identify and work toward the results they desire, develop collaborative strategies to achieve their goals, and create systems to assess student learning."

> "Teachers need to have the time to share teaching strategies, discuss student achievement data and create … assessments to measure the learning taking place.

## Graduation requirements aren't as complicated as they seem

THE REQUIREMENTS TO graduate from high school can seem almost insurmountable at times, especially when changes to the system complicate matters. However, becoming eligible to graduate isn't an overwhelming task at all.

"The recent change from the old state assessment test, the WASL, to the new test, the HSPE, have made graduation requirements seem more complicated than they really are," said Ridgefield High School Principal Tony VanderMaas. "In reality, there are four different components to graduation which are very straight-forward."

### Curriculum credit

Students must have a minimum of 23 credits in order to graduate. Each semester, a student can take up to six classes and earns 0.5 credits for each class they pass for a total of three credits. Over the course of four years, students can take up to 48 semester classes for a total of 24 credits.

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# Plotting a roadMAP to student progress

> MAP gives teachers an extra edge into figuring out how well a student understands the material.

RIDGEFIELD SCHOOL DISTRICT implemented the Measurement of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment this year to track students' current performance level in different subjects.

MAP is computer software that adapts to each student dynamically. In other words, if a student answers a question correctly, the next question will be more challenging. If a student misses a question, the next one will be simpler. By refining itself from one question to the next, MAP closes in on a student's learning level while engaging them with content that interests them.

At the end of the test, MAP provides a Rasch Unit score (RIT) which teachers can compare to pre-set Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) to help them narrow a focus for a student. RIT scores are very accurate equal interval estimates of where a student's performance resides in the curriculum at the time of testing. An equal interval result means that a student can answer about 50% of the questions correctly in their identified RIT, about 80% of the questions at one level below theirs and about 20% of the questions at one level above.

"When coupled with results from classroom assessments and test scores, the District will be able to ensure the most appropriate education for all of our students," said Nathan Plummer, Assistant Principal for Ridgefield High School. "Knowing how to challenge a student is just as important as knowing where a student needs help."

MAP assessments are administered throughout the school year as a regular part of a student's time in class. Teachers can use the results to determine where a student is excelling or struggling, and adjust a student's lessons accordingly. Over time, the compiled results will show growth over a student's career.

"The more information a teacher has about a student, the better that teacher can teach," said Plummer. "MAP gives teachers an extra edge into figuring out how well a student understands the material."

Currently, there are assessments for science, reading, math, language and the primary grades as well as end of course assessments for Algebra, Geometry, Algebra 2 and different levels of integrated mathematics.

# Keeping an eye out for the sweetness of science

» **Sixth graders at Union Ridge Elementary School teach first graders how to make ice cream for their culminating science project.**

ELEMENTARY STUDENTS IN Ridgefield School District are exposed to science in a variety of ways. Teachers use in-class experiments and activities to reveal the wonder of the world around their students.

Sixth graders at South Ridge Elementary School dissect cow eyes for their culminating project in their science unit on light. In order to build confidence for the actual event, students use a website that allows them to practice dissecting eyes online, build model eyes and learn about the physics of light in relation to vision. All of these activities prepare students for the day of in-class dissection.

"We find these activities help ease the stomachs of students who are uneasy about the idea of a dissection," said teacher Bailey DesRosler. "When the actual day arrives, students don gloves and excited smiles!"

Making sweet treats takes on a bigger role than adding flavor to the days of first graders at Union Ridge Elementary School. A culminating project in students' science unit on states of matter, students make ice cream. Sixth grade students help guide the first graders through the process.

"The older students help our younger ones recognize the differences between solids and liquids while making ice cream," said sixth grade teacher Terri Buruse. "Taking part in the ice-cream-making process helps pique curiosity and heighten students' awareness of the physical world while helping the older students develop leadership skills."


» **Sixth graders at South Ridge Elementary School dissect cow eyes for their culminating project in their science unit on light.**



# Students learn to make music… literally

THIRD GRADERS at South Ridge Elementary planned to learn about music in their science unit this year, but they certainly weren't expecting to make their own music on instruments they would create.

Throughout their science unit, third graders have been using Full Option Science System (FOSS) kits that are filled with activities to help students learn about sound. "Students get to investigate whether or not sound travels through solids, liquids and gases," said third grade teacher Linda Johnson. "Building an instrument was the logical next step."

The third grade teaching team decided that the culminating project for the science unit on sound would be for students to create and construct an instrument that changes pitch and volume. Students gave oral presentations explaining how they made their instrument and demonstrating how it functions.

"Practical hands-on experience holds just as much value as knowledge on the theory of science," said third grade teacher, Linda Johnson. "In prior years, we've found that this project works particularly well as an assessment of a student's knowledge of the science concepts."

This year, students brought a variety of homemade instruments including string instruments such as homemade guitars and harps, as well as drum sets and even a twisted horn. "The horn produced such a powerful sound that it nearly blew us out of the room!" said Johnson. "All of the instruments were beautifully decorated, too."

» **Third-graders at South Ridge gave oral presentations explaining how they made their instrument and demonstrating how it functions.**

**PRINCIPAL'S CHECKBOOK & SAUL HAAS FUNDS**

# Helping principals help students

RIDGEFIELD HIGH SCHOOL utilizes the Principal's Checkbook and Saul Haas Funds programs to provide supplies and services to students that need help in order to attend school prepared to learn.

"We are so grateful for the assistance we receive from our community," said Principal Tony VanderMaas. "Programs like these give us that little extra we can use to reach out and help those students that need it."

The Principal's Checkbook program gives Ridgefield's principals the discretion to use a set amount of funds to help students pay for school supplies and other needs not addressed by the District. Ridgefield High School receives approximately $250 each year for use in the program.

The Ridgefield Public Schools Foundation provides the funds used in the Principal's Checkbook program from community members and local businesses. More information is available from their website: www.ridgefieldpsf.org.

InvestED gives assistance to students through partnerships with those people closest to the student: teachers, counselors, coaches and school staff. An InvestED Fund Coordinator uses the funding to help keep a student in school by getting the student involved in school activities or by simply removing roadblocks to a student's success. Ridgefield High School receives approximately $300 a year for the InvestED program.

InvestED, formerly The Saul and Dayee G. Haas Foundation, is committed to improving the quality of life among needy secondary students in communities throughout the state of Washington by supporting schools to encourage students to stay in school, return to school, or get involved within their learning community.

> Programs like these give us that little extra we can use to reach out and help those students that need it."

# Woodshop projects give students real-world experience

STUDENTS WHO TAKE woodshop from Kent Bennett, Industrial Arts Teacher at View Ridge Middle School, are given the opportunity to create projects to fill real-world needs.

Bennett receives requests from his colleagues for different wood-based projects. Most recently, Mary Ford, a Language Arts teacher, asked if she could have a new podium for her classroom.

Justin Stay, Grant Mersinger and Cody Blue are eighth-graders in Bennett's class who volunteered for the assignment. Mersinger and Blue constructed the piece with assistance from Stay. "The boys jumped at the opportunity to measure, design and construct the podium," said Bennett. "The boys are very proud of their accomplishment."

The lesson didn't end in the workshop. In order to turn the podium construction into a cross-curriculum project, Ford assigned a paper for each student so they could write about their experience working on the project.

"This was truly an experience for the students that will have lasting benefits," said Bennett.