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Teachers align report cards with state standards

TEACHERS AT SOUTH Ridge Elementary are subtly tweaking their methods of grading to align report cards with state standards to continue using them as a method of guiding student learning.

"We keep our report cards aligned to the state standards every year, but it's an ongoing process that needs regular adjustment," said Principal Janice Sauve. "The staff is working hard – I'm very proud of them and where we're headed."

In addition to acting as an instrument to give parents and students insight into how well a student understands the material being taught, report cards help teachers know where a student might need more personalized attention with a particular subject.

"If we have a certain number of students who received 3s and 4s on their report cards, we should have at least that many students receiving those grades on the state assessments," said Sauve. "When we receive the results from the state, we'll be able to immediately see where we need to focus."

In order to align report cards with standards Washington State sets for assessments, the teachers from each grade level are creating rubrics to ensure that every teacher consistently grades each student. Rubrics are methods teachers use to determine how well a student understands a particular subject or topic. The better the rubric, the more accurate the grading process.

"Once we put the changes in place, it works like a roadmap," said Sauve. "We'll have the knowledge of where to go – it's not vague at all."



Art teacher Heather Fukuchi and student art projects from Union Ridge and South Ridge elementary schools.

Art is more than simply its creation

STUDENTS AT UNION Ridge and South Ridge elementary schools are learning that there's more to art than what it takes to make it. Heather Fukuchi teaches students lessons based on the state's Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs), that also include vocabulary and the big picture of art.

Students learn about the history of art by looking at how different cultures depict their lives in different ways. "Art can be as big a part of culture as food and language," said Fukuchi. "The students are exposed to all different time periods and artists."

For the hands-on portion of class, students are exposed to a wide variety of

projects including drawing, painting, clay, three-dimensional projects, watercolors and more. "They experiment with all types of media," said Fukuchi. "I find that students who are typically uninterested will find something that engages them."

Fukuchi knew she wanted to teach art classes since high school when she discovered a passion for both art and kids. "I craft my projects so students of any skill level can be successful," she said. "It's about the process, not the project."

The one-hour schedule lends itself well to the course. "I can teach the concepts and the students still have a lot of time to make their own art," said Fukuchi.

Start from the end and work back to the start

TEACHERS AT UNION Ridge Elementary honed their skills this year by learning to start their lesson plans with the goals in mind, and then work back to beginning to determine the best ways to teach to reach those goals. The process, called Understanding By Design, provides a structure for lesson planning.

"Using this approach, a teacher starts with what the students need to know," said Principal Angela Freeman. "By keeping the finish line in mind, teachers can ask themselves: 'Is this method teaching my students exactly what I want it to?' and then adjust their lesson plans accordingly."

Teachers have worked together to develop and compare lesson plans, and have also received training on Understanding by

Design throughout the year. "Taking the time to really look at how we create lessons helps refine and improve student learning," said Freeman. "I'm very proud of the dedication and hard work our teachers apply to their craft."



Foundation Corner

RIDGEFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS Foundation supports programs and activities that will enhance the academic, social and career development of all students in Ridgefield School District. des a structure for lesson planning.

The Foundation raises funds in the community to create grants for students, schools, clubs and teachers by working with PTAs, principals, teachers, staff and others to identify areas that need support.

Will you help?

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Students at View Ridge are Stepping Up to Writing

TEACHERS DANIELLE PUHL and Kathryn Goodman use the Step Up To Writing Program to help special education students at View Ridge Middle School develop and hone their writing skills.

The program utilizes innovative brainstorming techniques along with outline design to give students the skills to plan out their writing in advance.

"Students who often struggle forming basic sentences and paragraphs have started moving to multi-paragraph essays," said Puhl. "They work together in groups to help each other brainstorm and develop their ideas."

In addition to helping plan their writing, students receive assistance from the program's special color-coding. Paragraphs are marked with three colors – green, orange and red – indicating where the student should start, slow down and stop writing a paragraph.

Puhl and Goodman started using the program in early January, and the results have been surprising. "They are writing more than they ever expected to!" said Puhl. "The kids really enjoy the process because the color-coding guides them step-by-step along the way."

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~ Danielle Puhl, View Ridge teacher

Mentoring helps teachers, experienced and new, hone their skills

NEW TEACHERS IN Ridgefield schools have found that mentoring helps them better prepare for the daunting tasks set before them – 25 active, wide-eyed students, eager to learn, look to their teacher for their learning, safety and success in school.

At South Ridge, Nathan Ingroup, a first grade teacher in his second year, and Margo Manke, a seasoned veteran, regularly meet to discuss teaching techniques and help each other enhance their styles. For Ingroup, the program really helped him get used to the first-year hurdles.

In her role as Mentor, Manke helps Ingroup master instructional skills, classroom management, content knowledge, assessment knowledge, technology integration and leadership skills – no easy tasks for new educators in a new environment.

"Within the first few years, a huge number of new teachers stop teaching," said Ingroup. "Talking to other teachers experiencing the same challenges helped me learn techniques to work through those problems."

Mentors meet with their new teachers twice a month to discuss any questions they might have and offer strategies. The mentor will also observe the new teacher's approaches in the classroom so they can discuss the lesson afterward. Plus, the new teacher will sit in on the mentor's class to see how they teach, too.

"Having someone observe your teaching without it being part of an evaluation can be

hugely beneficial," said Manke. "It gives us the opportunity to observe each others' lessons in a less pressured environment."

In their weekly meetings, Manke provides expertise in classroom routines and management; she discusses organization, grading, and using data to drive instruction. Most importantly, she provides an immediate connection as young professionals enter into a demanding teaching career.

New teachers find having someone to rely on can make all the difference. "I feel like I don't need to reinvent the wheel," said Ingroup. "The program really sets up the new teacher for success."

The mentor learns a lot from the experience, too. "It's exciting to see the growth of Nathan's students," said Manke. "Plus, the way he approaches his craft gives me ideas of how to improve mine."

"Mentoring really helps avoid overload at the beginning of a new teacher's career," said Barbara Lomas, ESD 112 Director of School Improvement and Staff Development. "It presents a really positive step to decrease burn-out and reduce the attrition rate." Research shows that 50% of new teachers leave the profession after seven years – most citing lack of support as a primary reason.



Nathan Ingroup and Margo Manke both enjoy the benefits of the mentor program.

ASB gives students the opportunity to lead

STUDENTS AT RIDGEFIELD High School get a chance to experience what leadership entails by participating in the planning and execution of Associated Student Body (ASB) events throughout the year.

Kim Allais teaches the ASB/Leadership Team class where elected student officers and ASB officers are responsible for the planning, organization, setup and administration of all school-related activities.

"It takes daily work, lots of planning, patience and tons of effort to complete activities and feel like they were successful," said Allais.

"My vision for this Leadership Team is to help the student leaders promote a sense of unity among the staff and student body at RHS."

The following are just a few of the events the ASB/Leadership Team handles:

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|-----------------------|----------------------|
| School dances | Pep assemblies |
| Tailgate parties | Fan of the Game |
| Blood drives | Buddy program |
| School board meetings | Battle of the Sexes |
| Mr. Ridgefield | The Spudder Olympics |
| RHS Has Got Talent | Class Elections |

"The number of events students plan is quite impressive," said Allais. "Not only do they have to carry the events out, but they are also responsible for any and all communication about these activities to the student body, staff and community."

All students interested in running for class positions are required to take the Leadership Class in addition to elections. There is an application process for other students who might want to be involved. This year, the Leadership Class has a total of 27 students.

"The Leadership Team holds great integrity and works hard to promote school pride while finding additional opportunities for student involvement in activities on campus," said Allais. "Working with these leaders shows me how much courage they have to take on this responsibility as well as the patience and perseverance required to execute their plans."

Once every two weeks, the Leadership class holds meetings to conduct business about school and financial obligations. Students follow parliamentary procedures like those seen in the House of Representatives or Senate. "Each class officer has a duty to fulfill and reports back to their entire class once a month at an all-class meeting," said Allais. "These representatives are an incredibly hard-working and determined group of students."

Transforming the Senior Project into a Culminating Project

A TEAM OF administrators and teachers are working to transform Ridgefield High School students' Senior Project into something more, a Culminating Project. The team includes: Jane Call, Monica DeShazer, Shannon Hemrich, Steve Hotka, Jill Uhacz and Nathan Plummer.

In the past, students began their Senior Project as Juniors by writing an English paper to set the premise for what they plan to do for their project. Students complete 30 community service hours in areas associated to the topic through their Senior year.

"Students choose any topic that interests them such as addiction or helping the homeless," said Assistant Principal Nathan Plummer. "We're looking at changing the project to encourage career exploration by having students' course selection be directed by the project."

The Culminating Project will begin in a student's Freshman year with more activities required in each subsequent year. "We want the project to be more and more relevant as a student progresses through their high school career," said Plummer. "By the time they graduate, a student will have a portfolio of their progress including work samples and accomplishments."

In addition to focusing on careers, the team reviews other ideas such as character strengthening and an advisory model where a single advisor would stay with a student throughout their entire high school career. "This would give an advisor the opportunity to watch their students grow and offer them insight along the way," said Plummer.

Community connections and partnerships will play a key role in the success of the Culminating Project just as it does with the current Senior Project. "We have members serve on the Boards to evaluate projects," says Plummer. "We would like to keep that connection as well as branch out in other ways."

Career fairs at the high school are another idea that intrigues the team. "Filling the gym with community business partners so students could talk to real people about their professions and careers would be amazing," said Plummer. "Students would be able to see different options without having to leave campus."

Interested members of the community are encouraged to contact the high school to participate.



"We want the project to be more and more relevant as a student progresses through their high school career."

~ Nathan Plummer, RHS assistant principal