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## RIDGEFIELD POSTAL PATRON

# RHS introduces innovative math curriculum

ALTHOUGH TEACHING MATERIAL may remain much the same regardless of the subject, the methods used to teach it evolve with time. This year, Ridgefield High School introduced a new curriculum and new methodologies to teach math.

The introduction of a new curriculum involves a combination of looking at the standards required by the state while also reviewing materials to find those that make the most sense for the students.

"Our previous curriculum was strictly investigative," said Ridgefield High math teacher, Fred Chartrand. "Much of the responsibility for learning material was placed squarely on the student with the teacher serving as a guide rather than the leader."

The textbooks were integrated, meaning that subjects like Algebra and Geometry were blended together in single challenges. "We find that our students perform better by focusing on each individual concept instead of having everything together," said David Wear, also a teacher at Ridgefield High.

Core-Plus was the old curriculum while the new curriculum is called Discovering

Mathematics. "In Core-Plus, there was an abundance of reading and story problems with very little procedural fluency," said math teacher, Steve Rinard. "Discovering Mathematics still has applicable story problems, but now adds procedural fluency that our students need."

Ridgefield High School's math department spent hundreds of hours analyzing and scrutinizing textbooks until they settled on ones they felt were the best fit. For the 2009-2010 school year, the first three years of math curricula are being introduced: algebra, geometry and advanced algebra with the addition of higher-level courses planned for next year.

Normally, new curriculum for any subject is implemented over the course of several school years or semesters. Last year, new Washington State Mathematics standards were released, meaning that Ridgefield High had to make significant changes as soon as possible. "Our previous curriculum struggled to meet all of the new standards and hence we needed something new," said Rinard.

The new textbooks are much easier to read and understand. "Not only is this better

for our students, but it will also make more sense to parents and tutors," said Wear. "They're going to be able to pick this book up and easily help their students."

Even after curriculum is introduced, the teachers' work is not done. "We arrive at school early, leave late and even give up lunches," said Rinard. "Every Wednesday morning we collaborate to look for common errors and discuss teaching strategies."

Fortunately, all of the teachers' hard work is starting to pay off. "The primary goal of any curriculum is to open a subject to all types of learners," said Chartrand. "We are starting to see some immediate results as students are understanding some of the basics that were lost in the last curriculum."

Students are understanding the objectives and developing proficiency. In addition, the teachers find the new materials to be a much better fit. The introduction of a new curriculum is an ongoing project, and Ridgefield High's teachers are up to the task. "We're much happier with what we have now," said Wear. "Kids are understanding math more than they have in the past."

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# RIDGEGRAM



## Social media enhance district communication

CHANCES ARE YOU'VE read about Facebook and Twitter in the newspaper, or have seen a story on the evening news.

For the millions who use these services, social networking is the new normal. That's why the Ridgefield School District now has its own Facebook page and is tweeting on Twitter.

Facebook and Twitter allow school districts to provide users with immediate updates, ranging from sports scores to important school board actions, all at no cost to the user or the district.

If you haven't used Facebook, it's not hard to get started. First, you will need to sign up for a free account. Then, go to [www.facebook.com/ridgefieldschools](http://www.facebook.com/ridgefieldschools) and click the "Become a Fan" button. You'll begin receiving every update from our district directly to your Facebook home page.

Interested in Twitter? You don't even need to sign up. Just go to [twitter.com/ridge\\_schools](http://twitter.com/ridge_schools) to see the latest tweeted updates. If you decide to sign up, you can follow the district from your Twitter account or even receive updates on your mobile phone.

Our website will continue to publish the most important information about the district, but the social networking sites are a new way to keep in touch.

As new methods of distributing information are developed, Ridgefield School District will continue to stay on the forefront of the technology to ensure our parents, students and staff receive the information they need in the form they want to use.

# What do eight minutes mean for student learning?

DRAMATIC CHANGES ARE taking place at View Ridge Middle School. Last year, the School Improvement Planning (SIP) team decided to eliminate a period beginning with the 2009-2010 school year, changing from a seven-period day to six. This change increases each period by eight minutes, and though that change might seem small, it has huge effects on classroom instruction as well as student learning.

The SIP team develops new techniques to drive their instruction, with teams of teachers creating units of standards within their own subject areas. These units are chunks of lessons that will be taught to students throughout the year. By meeting as a group, teachers of the same subject ensure that they're teaching the same material.

"We're getting everyone on the same page when it comes to what needs to be taught," said Principal Chris Griffith. "Having the knowledge of what other teachers are doing in their classrooms enables each of our teachers to better themselves."

Starting at the beginning of the year, teachers met to create the first unit of study as well as develop standards and assessments based on the lessons they were planning to teach. During each meeting, teachers discuss the changes in their practice, beginning with the analysis of what they were intending to do and then the actual change in practice.

Griffith had the teachers sit in silence for an entire minute. "We have eight more of these in every class," he said. "We need to be conscious that these minutes enable us to improve student learning."

After general discussion as a group, teachers break into learning teams and curriculum groups to discuss the instructional core.

The Social Studies team talked about their six-week units as well as what they've been doing to prepare for the upcoming school



Chris Griffith, Principal of View Ridge Middle School, demonstrates the value of an extra minute of class time for teachers.

year. "What are the connections between the different grade levels and preparing our kids for future learning?" asked Social Studies teacher Brian Gunn to motivate discussion.

The Language Arts team worked to determine at what level their students are writing. "We need our kids to understand plot and apply it," said teacher Leah Tag. "They know what plot is, but they're not identifying it in their own stories." The team continued to discuss how long it takes students to write stories, the value of peer revision, and other topics relating to early writers.

Each team discusses the timeframe of their lessons, breaking the semesters into sections so they can truly understand how much time they have to teach the various sections. In addition, the team members make sure to unify their class curriculum in order to be sure they're all teaching similar material as well as planning how subject matter will be taught. "We all know where we're going and can prepare for the section that comes next," said teacher Claudia Jones. "This team approach will help teachers and students to learn more and do so more effectively."



# 40 YEARS of outdoor learning

*For Ridgefield's fifth graders, Cispus Learning Center teaches life lessons in the great outdoors.*

THIS OCTOBER, RIDGEFIELD School District sent 180 fifth graders from South Ridge and Union Ridge elementary schools to Cispus Learning Center, an outdoor school nestled in the woods outside of Randle, Washington. This is the 40th year that the district has sent its fifth grade classes to experience the center's many offerings.

Cispus offers a host of outdoor learning activities — from environmental analysis with water and soil sampling to identification of different trees and plants during hikes through the surrounding woods. Cispus also includes a team-building component with a challenging ropes course.

Marty Fortin, director of Outdoor Learning Centers, and Sue English, general manager, have worked with the Cispus Learning Center for years. A former teacher, Fortin used to bring his students to Cispus because it offered opportunities to enhance his lessons.

"As a teacher, I knew what I wanted to teach," Fortin said. "Cispus gave me the ability to use hands-on activities to help my students learn." Fortin says that although approximately 39 school districts from around the state participate in Cispus every year, school budgets are limiting and eliminating their ability to do so. "Cispus holds particular value to our students because of the educational opportunities at Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge," said Superintendent Art Edgerly. "Students take what they learn at Cispus and apply it locally, helping them develop a more comprehensive understanding of environmental science."

Sue English has been with Cispus since 1989 after a friend of hers told her about a secretarial position that opened up. She sees a difference in students when they come to Cispus. "We often find that kids who can be a challenge to teach in the classroom are engaged when they're here," she said.

Cispus also offers aspiring teachers the opportunity to see what it's like to guide students through its Leadership Courses. "After leading kids on the ropes course, you'll know for sure whether or not you want to be a teacher," Fortin said. Ridgefield High School students Jules Laspa, Chris Mohler and Maggie Yaddof experienced leadership firsthand as counselors at Cispus this year.

Yaddof was surprised the kids were so easy to manage. "We have a great group of kids, and everything's under control," she said. "I expected there to be more challenges."

"Boys are usually rowdy, but really they just want to have fun," Laspa said. "They work really well together and will make friendships they'll hold on to through high school."

Ridgefield parents Michele Owen and Susan Yaddof (mother of counselor Maggie) started their experiences with Cispus in the early years of the program: 1974 and 1975. "I love how Cispus has been protected," Owen said. "It's just the way I remember it."

Owen was a counselor at Cispus in high school and has been coming back to help for the past 10 years, with eight of those as a staff assistant. "Being a counselor was one of the most rewarding things I've ever done," she said. "You're like a rock star to the kids."



Yaddof was a counselor in her senior year in 1981. "You're a role model to the kids, and they look up to you," she said. "Some of the kids in my cabin back then still remember my counselor songs even now as adults."

The Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP) started its outdoor education programs in 1981 at Cispus Learning Center. Currently, Cispus serves more than 16,000 students and adults each year, with more than one million guests learning to better understand themselves and the natural environment in the woods surrounding the Learning Center.

Cispus is home to AWSP's student leadership programs, including summer leadership camps, which serve thousands of students and advisors each year. In addition to the camps, a wide variety of groups utilize the Learning Center year-round, including teachers, sport teams, youth groups and college interns.

In addition to the numerous laboratory activities Cispus offers, there are other lessons that students learn that might surprise people. Students learn responsibility by keeping their cabins clean, helping with chores at the cafeteria and learning to remember to take care of themselves like bringing a jacket when it's cold.

"Many of the kids don't know what it's like to sit down and eat together," Owen said, speaking about the family-style meals Cispus features. "They don't think they can survive the week without TV or electronics, but, in the end, they love it."



Union Ridge teachers meet to discuss student learning.

UNION RIDGE TEACHERS are working on new methods of intervention and challenges for students. Members of the School Improvement Planning (SIP) team meet regularly to discuss their plans to increase levels of achievement for all students.

Teachers on the SIP team serve a two-year rotation, with teachers representing each of the different areas of learning in the school. During each meeting, teachers discuss their plans with Principal Connie Ford. At the beginning of the 2009-2010 school year, members reviewed the previous year's goals to determine what worked and what needed more attention.

Meetings have revolving roles where different members take the responsibility of facilitator. Each grade's team leader reports on the progress of their teams toward their individual goals, as well as how to involve parents in their students' learning. "Parents have very high expectations for learning," said Ford. "We need to exceed those expectations and discuss methods for extensions and interventions."

The team meets on a weekly basis where teachers discuss assessment results by looking at student work. Individual students are assessed in an effort to create consistent instruction with raised expectations in the classroom. "We are always working to improve our student learning," said Ford. "We want all of our students to work and succeed at the highest possible level." Pre-assessment tests are used to help teachers determine which students need interventions and which need extensions.

Extensions are more challenging lessons that teacher have prepared for students who excel at the standard lessons. Students who excel join reading groups for more challenging lessons that include character analyses and book reviews. Teachers also have "Challenge Folders" which contain more

*Two methods Union Ridge Elementary is developing to increase student learning*

## Intervention & Extension

difficult lessons for students who finish before their classmates. For example, sixth graders receive "word cards" which motivate them to use new vocabulary words on a daily basis.

Interventions provide help for students who are struggling. Those needing help with reading or math attend double sessions with teachers in order to better prepare them for the material. The teachers refer to this method as "double-dosing."

Volunteers are vital to help teachers focus on both the higher and lower-level students. "Union Ridge parents are supportive," said Margo Manke, literacy coach for Ridgefield School District. "They volunteer to assemble packets and help teachers with activities to help provide every student with the extra attention they might need."

Teachers are continuing to focus on collaborating with the Special Education department, a goal from last year. "Special Ed students are all our students, too," said Manke. "Our WASL scores reflected our focus on improving Special Ed."

During the SIP meeting, members share innovative strategies as well as useful reading material that might help each other. These practices help each of them to improve their teaching styles and methods by leveraging what works and eliminating what doesn't.

In order to maintain accountability, teachers track their progress with checklists and demonstrate their achievements during in-service and early-release days. At the end of each SIP meeting, the facilitator holds a Process Review where members have the opportunity to detail what happened during the meeting as well as discuss next steps.

"We've found that our teaching teams really appreciate the opportunity to share their successes and trials," said Ford. "Everyone works toward a common goal to help all students and teachers improve learning at Union Ridge."

### At South Ridge, better reading comprehension takes the lead role

SPECIAL EDUCATION LEADS the way at South Ridge Elementary. Each grade works as a team to focus on assessment and improvement in student learning. In order to stay on target, an assessment calendar is created for the school year, and provides meeting benchmarks.

Last year, the School Improvement Planning (SIP) team worked to improve math scores, and the WASL results showed that their efforts were fruitful. Prioritizing reading scores, this year's SIP team members are working to come up with new methods to help students learn.

Throughout the year, teachers meet with Title-I specialists who offer advice, support and direction. "The emphasis this year is on student and teacher ownership," said Principal Vern Yoshioka. "Improving student learning requires all of us to work toward a common goal as a team."

All students needing help in reading will receive homework packets and in-class interventions to help them develop their skills.

"SIP continues to provide a valuable collaboration to keep track of the ideas, thoughts and the direction of the school," said Douglas TenEyck, a Special Education Teacher at South Ridge who has been participating on the SIP team since he started teaching at the school in 2003. "We're able to keep aware of training, surveys and discussion, as well as how those elements fit into the greater plan for South Ridge."

Early in the school year, SIP reviews surveys that help identify areas of improvement among the staff. Following meetings address the targeted needs with team members developing concepts for staff training as well as devoting time for group collaboration and other interventions.

"Everything the SIP team strives to do is meaningful and there's no fluff," said Yoshioka. "We don't just cooperate, we collaborate."