



Parent Curriculum Guide



Middle School...a time of transition and endless possibilities

6th Grade - Transitions & Growing Independence

In 6th grade it's time for the transition from the close, nurturing environment of the elementary school to one of building independence, developing the skills for self-directed study and learning, and becoming a contributing community member. The 6th grade program incorporates a multi-disciplinary approach to learning using a structure of small teams and flexible, block scheduling. A broad scope of interdisciplinary activities, team building and leadership events, help to develop the whole child during this important year of transition from childhood to adolescence.

7th Grade - Challenging & Complex

There is a lot going on in a 7th graders life!! The emotional and physical changes of adolescence, the growing importance of peers and the increased challenges in school combine to provide a complex and sometimes confusing time for students, teachers and parents alike. The 7th grade curriculum builds upon the skills established in grade six, continuing to foster growth and independence, while broadening the scope of academic experiences. The academic program is enhanced by a variety of projects, activities, and field trips to engage and further the development of the child using a multi-disciplinary approach to teaching

8th Grade - Foundations & Preparations

The curriculum and programs in the 8th grade solidify the foundations that have been laid to prepare the student for High School, continuing the process of becoming an independent learner and contributing community member. The 8th grade curriculum and instructional design continues to challenge students academically. Activities provide opportunities for developing leadership, career and character building. Several transition events help to prepare students for high school and career planning and provide insight into choices that will begin to shape their life goals and future.

Course Overview

Grade 6

Mini-Courses

6 1/2 weeks each of
French, German,
Spanish, Health, Art
& Learning Lab

Year-Long Courses

English/Writing
Literature/Reading
Social Studies
Math
Science

General Music or Chorus (every other day)
Physical Education (every other day)

Flex Block

(collaborative time)
including Band or
Orchestra twice a
week if eligible

Grade 7

Year-Long Courses

English
Math
Social Studies
Science

Year-Long Courses - every other day

Physical Education
Band or Orchestra
World Language
General Music OR Chorus

Semester Courses

Technology
Art
Family &
Consumer Sciences

Grade 8

Year-Long Courses

English
Math
Social Studies
Science
World Language

Semester Courses

Technology
Art
Health
Family & Consumer Sciences

Year-Long Courses - every other day

Physical Education
Band or Orchestra and Chorus
every other Friday if eligible



Curriculum Overview

The O'Rourke Middle School academic curriculum reflects



a progressive, spiraling approach to disseminating and applying knowledge across disciplines and grade levels, providing purposeful rigor and relevance to learning, and reinforcing strong core personal values. The curriculum design is one that strengthens a broad range of skills, particularly functional literacy in each of the specified content areas while facilitating independent exploration, preparing students to think critically

and act responsibly. Innovative classroom instruction, ongoing, varied assessment models, and reflective practices are utilized to deliver the curriculum so as to maximize the learning potential of all students on a personal level. A broad range of extra-curricular activities, and field experiences provide for extensive exploration immersions for each child that meet their developmental growth needs, as well as stimulate their interests and nurture their aptitudes. Continuous challenge is infused into the curriculum through differentiated learning structures, the use of technology, cooperative practices and diversified programming so that all students have the opportunity to meet and exceed their potential.

The many diverse, unpredictable phases of adolescent development present obstacles to parents and educators as they help the children make the rigorous transition from childhood to adulthood through the middle years. Our carefully designed curriculum, instruction, school organization, climate, and program fosters a structure that helps students meet the many unique and changing needs of their adolescent growth, while diversifying their learning experiences. This guide is designed to give parents an overview of some of the academic structures that support adolescent development, helping them to better understand the curriculum that provides the engine that moves the complex middle level vehicle and its precious passengers forward.



English Language Arts

The **O'Rourke Middle School English Language Arts (ELA)** program is a vital part of the district K-12 integrated comprehensive language arts curriculum. It is designed so that students will develop a solid foundation in the BH-BL Standards of Excellence in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The curriculum builds upon the previous year's language arts skills in a coordinated and developmental framework. Reading, writing, listening, and speaking are taught in contexts that are meaningful to the students and enable students to become effective communicators. The program at each grade level comprises of a broad literary experience, coupled with varied opportunities for written expression. From poetry to historical fiction and creative writing to documented research papers, ELA students at the middle school are afforded a thorough language arts program that unduly prepares them for the rigors of advanced work at the high school level.

Reading, writing, listening, and speaking instruction at each grade level mirror the New York State Learning Standards Skills for:

- ◆ Language for Information and Understanding
- ◆ Language for Literary Response and Expression
- ◆ Language for Critical Analysis and Evaluation
- ◆ Language for Social Interactions

Grade 6 Students have the benefit of two periods of English each day: Writing and Literature.

In the sixth grade writing program, the focus is on the writing process (pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, sharing), writing conventions, and proper essay format. A variety of writing activities are utilized, and when relevant, much of the writing is done in concert with Social Studies.

In the sixth grade reading program, students are afforded the opportunity to read a variety of genres which provide students an understanding of the scope of human experience. Some of the popular titles used are:

- * Leon's Story by Leon Walter Tillage
- * Yellow Star by Jennifer Roy
- * A Family Apart by Joan Lowry Nixon
- * Julie of the Wolves by Jean Craighead George

Grade 7 Continued development of reading and writing skills are integrated in the seventh grade ELA curriculum. Students are exposed to a variety of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts, through journal writing/ writer's notebook, analytical writing, narrative, and creative writing. Seventh grade students complete a formal research paper using MLA guidelines to defend their position on a controversial issue of their choice. With an emphasis on process, students learn to navigate the steps of the research paper using library databases and reputable websites



English Language Arts

Grade 7

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as they gather relevant information for their paper. Readers' Workshop continues to be a viable part of the ELA program in seventh grade. In addition to completing Readers' Workshop activities, students participate in small group "book talk" discussions with the library media staff.

In addition to the short stories and narratives, students are introduced to classic and contemporary literature. A sampling of the titles include:

- * "Mousetrap" by Agatha Christie
- * Woodson by Gary Paulsen
- * Day of Tears by Julius Lester
- * Call of the Wild by Jack London

Grade 8

The eighth grade ELA program is built upon the skills acquired from sixth and seventh grade. One unique feature of the eighth grade program is a rigorous year-long vocabulary program, consisting of 200 words frequently found on the SAT's. One day per week is devoted to vocabulary acquisition, practice, and mastery of the words, which are presented in lists of ten words. Special attention is given to deciphering context clues to extract the meaning of challenging vocabulary, and common assessments are administered to students after each list. Eighth graders read a core of books that give a common literary experience for the purpose of discussion and analysis. These titles, in addition to the quarterly Readers' Workshop choices, afford students with the ability to compare different genres in literature. Titles of the core list include:

- * The Giver by Lois Lowrey
- * The Outsiders by S.E. Hinton
- * Night by Elie Wiesel
- * Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry by Mildred D. Taylor

Students use a variety of electronic and informational resources, like the library, databases, websites, and hard copy resources to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge for the eighth grade research paper. The documented research paper in the eighth grade is a combined ELA-Social Studies endeavor. In English class, students self select an historical novel of their choice. The options are endless, and the one criteria for selection is that the student have a genuine interest in the time period. Following the reading of the text, the students begin an earnest effort to distinguish if history is accurately reflected in their historical novel. Students become discerning users of the Internet and hone their MLA research skills through additional instruction and practice in class and with our library media personnel. ELA and Social Studies teachers work in tandem to insure students have a thorough understanding and meet a proficient level of competency for each step of the research process.



Math

Students progress through a high performance integrated mathematics program where problem solving is the basis for all instruction. The curriculum is devoted to developing student knowledge and understanding of mathematics that is rich in connections among core mathematics concepts and life applications. The program incorporates the Process and Content Strands of the NYS Mathematics Learning Standards that were recently adopted in January 2005. The program's core enables students to make sense of and apply mathematics through activities that encourage higher-level thinking and problem solving.

Grade 6

Sixth grade students continue to develop knowledge of real numbers and apply this knowledge to word problems and more abstract applications. Algebra skills learned this year build a foundation for middle level mathematics.

Assessments/Final Exams:

- Unit Exams/Quizzes
- NYS Math (May)
- Final Exam (June)

Students will learn:

- Number Theory & Operations
- Measurement (capacity)
- Algebraic Expressions & Equations
- Probability & Statistics
- Geometric Concepts & Applications

Grade 7

Seventh grade students extend their concrete knowledge of real numbers into more abstract concepts including algebra and geometry. Algebra skills learned early in the year then reappear in every unit of study.

Assessments/Final Exams:

- Unit Exams/Quizzes
- NYS Math (May)
- Final Exam (June)

Students will learn:

- Number theory
- Integers
- Algebra
- Geometric Concepts & Applications
- Measurement (mass)
- Probability and Statistics

Grade 8

Eighth grade students take an introductory Algebra course that focuses on basic linear functions. Students learn about basic quadratic functions and irrational numbers. Students will communicate their mathematical ideas using the language of mathematics and algebraic symbols.

Assessments/Final Exams:

- Unit Exams/Quizzes
- NYS Math (May)
- Final Exam (June)

Students will learn:

- Number theory
- Measurement (mass)
- Probability and Statistics
- Ratio and Proportion
- Geometric Concepts & Applications
- Integers
- Algebra



Social Studies

Social Studies is the study of the relationships between people and the world in which they live. It brings together concepts and skills from the social sciences: Anthropology, Economics, Geography, History, Political Science, Psychology, and Sociology. It provides the framework through which students will acquire the basic understandings, knowledge, and skills they need to function and succeed as responsible citizens.

In a democracy it is essential that students appreciate the value of participation and have the knowledge and skills to enable them to participate. Therefore, students learn to use their knowledge and concepts and to apply their skills in a variety of activities both as individuals and in cooperation with fellow students.

Grade 6

The sixth grade program is designed to help students develop a fuller realization of both their relationship to the global community and the interdependence among various members of that global community. Students study the ancient civilizations of the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. They explore the Middle Ages in Europe, East Asia and Africa as a basis of comparison and contrast with the world they now know. They also explore the major issues facing the Eastern Hemisphere today. In addition, there is an emphasis on writing and on the integration of skills with the content of the course.

Grade 7

Seventh grade Social Studies, the first year of the two-year sequence on America, encompasses North America history from the first people who lived on our continent through the late 19th century. Topics discussed include: the Exploration and Colonization of the New World, the American Revolution, the U.S. Constitution, the early years of the Republic, Westward Expansion, the Civil War and Reconstruction, and Immigration into this country. The writing process and the application of content to today's world are important elements of the 7th Grade curriculum as well.

Grade 8

Eighth grade Social Studies is a chronological study of American History from the late 19th century to the present day. It is the second year of the two-year sequence on the American experience. Topics covered include: the Growth of Big Business and Labor Unions, the Progressive Era, World War I, the Roaring Twenties, the Great Depression, World War II and the Holocaust, the Cold War, the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War, and the events of the 1990's and early 2000's. There is a continued emphasis on writing and skills, both major components of the New York State Grade 7 & 8 Assessment in Social Studies. The State Assessment is administered at the end of the 8th Grade school year.



Science

The goal of science at the middle school is to enable students to understand science concepts through the use of scientific inquiry. Students will develop their skills of analysis, inquiry, and design through active laboratory work on a regular basis. While basic terminology is necessary in science, it is more important that students can explain, analyze, and interpret scientific processes and phenomena.

Grade 6

Sixth grade science emphasizes earth science and astronomy.

Topics:

- Weather
- Metric Measurement and Graphing
- Earth's Interior
- Movement of Earth's Crust
- Plate Tectonics
- Earthquakes and Volcanoes
- Rocks and Minerals
- Astronomy

Grade 7

Seventh grade science is a life science program

Topics:

- Microscope
- Cells
- Classification
- Five Kingdoms of life
- Genetics
- Evolution
- Human biology
- Ecology

Grade 8

Eighth grade science is a combination of chemistry and physics. Students will take the Intermediate Science Exam, a NYS test based on their grades 5-8 science programs at the end of 8th grade.

Topics:

- Force and motion
- Work and simple machines
- Heat and Energy
- Sound and light
- Electricity and magnetism

Science Acceleration:

Based on various test scores and teacher recommendations, a class of 25 students is accelerated one year in science beginning in 7th grade. These students will take physical science (usually an 8th grade science) in 7th and take the Living Environment (biology) in 8th grade. The Living Environment culminates with a regent exam.



Health

Health Education at O'Rourke Middle School is taught in grades 6 and 8. These courses are sequential and designed to help students gain the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will enhance positive behavioral choices that promote lifelong wellness. Teaching and learning is focused on student achievement of both national and New York State Health Education learning standards. The curriculum builds on students' existing strengths, skills and competencies and is continually updated based on current scientific research and the needs of the students. Assessment occurs through real-life application of health skills and knowledge.

Grade 6

6 1/2 Week Course

Health Enhancing Skills

- Self-Management
- Relationship Management
- Communication
- Decision Making

Functional Knowledge Topics

- Tobacco, Alcohol, & Marijuana
Drug Classifications
Physical, Social, & Mental Effects
Resistance Techniques
- Physical Activity & Nutrition
Major nutrients (emphasis on fat, sugar, and water)
Calorie balance
- Violence Prevention
Conflict resolution
- Family Life/Sexual Health
Changes related to puberty
- HIV/AIDS
Risky versus Non-risky Behaviors
Universal Precautions

Grade 8

20 Week Course

Health Enhancing Skills

- Self Management
- Relationship Management
- Stress Management
- Communication
- Decision Making
- Planning & Goal Setting
- Advocacy

Functional Knowledge Topics

- Violence Prevention
Depression & Suicide
Empathy
Bullying & Sexual Harassment
- Physical Activity & Nutrition
Preventing Lifestyle Diseases
- Tobacco, Alcohol, & Other Drugs
Internal & External Influences
Physical, Social, & Mental Effects
Resistance Techniques
- Family Life/Sexual Health
Review of Puberty Changes
Healthy Relationships
Gender Stereotypes
- Sexual Risk
Pregnancy
Sexually Transmitted Infections
Abstinence & Risk Reduction
- HIV/AIDS
Timeline of Infection
Impact on Body Systems



Art

The goal of the middle school art program is to develop a lifelong relationship with the visual arts based on first hand experience in art making.

Grade 6

6 1/2 Week Course

Grade 7

20 Week Course

Grade 8

20 Week Course

Students will exit the middle school knowing how to create, value, respond to, and understand the cultural implications of visual arts. Emphasis is on production with the students learning and refining necessary critical written and verbal responses about their art, the art making process, and art historical and societal references. This will be achieved through many different two and three dimensional projects including drawing, painting, sculpture, computer technology, printmaking, mixed media and collage.

Middle school students are involved in many building wide art projects that include wall decoration and murals, display case exhibits, and local exhibits in our community. Arts in Education funds are used to bring in visiting artists who have done a variety of mural, sculpture, illustration, and drawing projects with our students. Some middle school students also participate in local, regional, and national contests and exhibits. In addition, our middle school has a very active art club which meets after school once each week.

Physical Education

The aim of the Physical Education Program is to provide each student with the opportunity to experience a program that:

Grade 6

- relates to their varying social, mental, emotional and physical needs.

Grade 7

- allows students the opportunity to select various activities, but also receive core courses.

Grade 8

- provides a variety of activities that will enable each student the enjoyment of a wholesome physical education experience.
- promotes wellness

Physical Education is a year long course for each grade level that meets every other day. Students are assigned gym lockers and are required to bring the appropriate gym clothing to class to be able to participate fully.



World Languages

Learning about other cultures helps students expand their personal horizons and become responsible citizens. The ability to talk to others and gain knowledge beyond the world of English can contribute to our community and country. Research has shown that studying a second language can improve skills and grades in Math and English and other subjects as well.

Students will do group activities, role-play, speak, listen, read, write and interact in the target language. They will also play games, perform skits, make “films,” do projects and use technology to increase their proficiency in a foreign language.

Grade 6

Sixth graders have the opportunity to explore all of our language offerings - French, German, and Spanish - for approximately 6 weeks. During this time they are exposed to basic conversation and culture in a fun and interactive environment. At the end of the year, students request their 1st and 2nd choices for which language they would like to study in 7th through 9th grade.

Grade 7

Seventh grade world language is a half-year program meeting every other day all year. Curriculum includes introductory coverage of most of the topics mandated by the New York State Syllabus, including: personal identification, house and home, numbers, colors, education, community, food, shopping, and culture. This is a 1/2 credit course.

Grade 8

The eighth grade program is a full year experience meeting every day. Curriculum again includes and expands upon topics mandated by the New York State Syllabus for Checkpoint A. Students are expected to work toward proficiency in their reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. Communication in the target language is stressed. This is a one credit course.

Accelerated Program

The World Language Accelerated Program is a high school Level I course for 8th graders who are willing and capable of meeting the challenges of a foreign language course at this level. Students are selected for this program at the end of the seventh grade language course based on established entry level criteria.



Technology

Technology Education is a project-based course of study designed to help adolescents use the knowledge, skills, and technology needed to solve practical problems. Students learn about the influence technology has on their total lifestyle and the social forces that make technology such an integral part of our lives. Through activity-based experiences, students develop creativity, critical thinking skills, and technological literacy while learning to use a variety of tools, equipment, and computer technology. Students will acquire the ability to solve technological problems through design, development, construction, production, operation, maintenance, and assessment of various technological systems. Throughout the course students are given the opportunity to practice communication skills, problem solving skills, goal setting skills, and resource management skills in order to build confidence, work more effectively in teams, and prepare for life in high school. In addition, Technology Education also provides multiple opportunities for students to read, write, and compute in the context of real-life situations. Technology Education is taught over two grade levels in order to allow student skills related

Grade 7

20 Week Course

Grade 8

20 Week Course

Skills

- Decision Making
- Goal Setting
- Problem Solving
- Communication
- Resource Management
- Critical Thinking
- Creative Thinking
- Teamwork

Concepts

- Material Processes
- Computer Applications
- Transportation Systems
- History of Technology
- Construction Techniques
- Systems Theory & Application
- Design, Production and Manufacturing
- Math and Science

Projects

- Design
- Architectural Drawing
- Construction
- Robotics
- Hydroponics
- CAD
- Digital Photography
- GPS



Family & Consumer Sciences

Family & Consumer Sciences (FACS) is a project-based course of study designed to help adolescents live in a society of constant change and to improve their quality of life. Students learn and apply essential skills in the context of real-life situations that are relevant to adolescents in order to gain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to meet their present and future responsibilities as family members, consumers, home managers, and wage earners. FACS is based on the understanding that the ability to reason, think critically and creatively, and to reflect on one's actions, will empower adolescents to act responsibly toward themselves, their families, their peers, their school, their community, and the larger society. Throughout the course students are given the opportunity to practice communication skills, leadership skills, management skills, and thinking skills in order to build confidence, work more effectively in teams, and prepare for life in high school. FACS also provides multiple opportunities for students to read, write, and compute in the context of real-life situations. FACS is taught over two grade levels in order to allow student maturation and experiences related to the course concepts to develop.

PROCESS SKILLS

Communication

Critical & Creative Thinking

Leadership

Management

Grade 7

20 Week Course

Grade 8

20 Week Course

Content Topics

- Nutrition & Wellness
Fundamentals of Good Nutrition
Healthy Snacks
Food Preparation Skills
- Interpersonal Relationships
Adolescence
Effective Communication with Friends & Family
Conflict Resolution
- Child Development
Growth & Development
Caring for Young Children
- Housing & Design
Principles & Elements of Design
Energy Conservation & Safety in the Home

Content Topics

- Financial Resource Management
Budgeting and Managing Money
- Consumer Resource Management
Being a Smart Shopper
- Career Exploration
Job-related Skills, Applications, Resumes, Interviews, Computerized interest inventory, Career-Zone: (website for career exploration)
- Nutrition & Wellness
Healthy Food Choices
Sports Nutrition
- Clothing Management
Use & Care of Sewing Machine to Construct a Project



Music

The Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake Central School District has a rich history of excellence in the performing arts. All children have the opportunity to experience music through classroom instruction and concert performances. With students enjoying a high level of success in competition, college entrance and individual musical achievement.

Grade 6 - Required - 1/2 unit of music (chorus or general music)
- Instrumental lessons and band or orchestra offered

Grade 7 - Required - 1/2 unit of music (chorus or general music)
- Instrumental lessons and band or orchestra offered

Grade 8 - Chorus offered
- Instrumental lessons and band or orchestra offered

In **General Music** the components of music outlined in the New York State Learning Standards are the focus with many of these concepts learned through instruction delivered in our *Yamaha Music in Education lab*. Students work at small electronic keyboards learning through hands on participation. In addition, students engage in classroom learning where music history, musical cultures of the world, and current trends in music are discussed and performed.

Chorus students prepare chorus literature in preparation for performance at two to three concerts each year. Traditional singing concepts are taught and reinforced, including proper breathing, diction, posture, and pronunciation of foreign language vocabulary. There are separate choruses for each grade.

Instrumental Instruction occurs with personal and group lessons offered on a rotating basis. Schedules are designed so that students will not miss the same class repeatedly. In most cases the same class will be missed two times or less each marking period. Middle school staffing and schedule allow for instrumental groups to be a bit more varied. More contact time allows students to be grouped in situations that are more suited to the individual learning pace. Instruction also expands as more technical, solo, and ensemble music is introduced as student's progress.

Band and Orchestra students prepare a wide variety of grade appropriate literature for performance at two to three concerts each year. Each ensemble meets twice each week as a regularly scheduled class. The emphasis of the ensemble program is skill development in the areas of music reading, ensemble



Music

playing, musical independence, and individual musical literacy. Ensembles gradually progress to NYSSMA level 3 by the end of 8th grade preparing them for participation in our advanced high school performing ensembles.

Extra Curricular Music Groups that students may elect to participate in include: select choir, jazz ensemble, chamber strings, and the Drama Club spring musical. Tryouts for these groups are publicized via daily announcements and postings. There is an after school period for academic make up and activity participation during which these programs are held. Students also may expand their musical involvement by participating in the NYSSMA solo festival, Saratoga Warren County All County music festival, and Suburban Council music festivals.

Library

The curriculum delivered in the Speck Media Center is integrated and coordinated with all subject areas. In the context of their classroom work, students learn:

- ◆ To use the library effectively
- ◆ To find information in all types of sources
- ◆ To understand and appreciate literature

Grade 6

Grade 7

Grade 8

The library staff collaborates with teachers in designing research projects through which students learn how to find information in a variety of sources, including books, databases, and the Internet and how to synthesize the information, organize it and present in in the form of a paper or media project. Sixth Grade research usually centers around ancient cultures or the Middle Ages. Seventh Graders complete a research project on a social issue and eighth graders read a book of historical fiction and research the accuracy of the historical content of the novel.

The library sponsors a variety of reading incentives, including blogs and contests. At least once during the year, each middle school student comes to the media center for a small-group discussion as part of Readers' Workshop.





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