Frequently Asked Questions:

Q: What is Crossroads?
A: Crossroads is a year long alternative to the traditional sixth grade curriculum. The program combines the study of language arts, social studies, and science to explore issues related to cultures of family, community, nation, and world. Students in Crossroads do not have defined times for science, social studies, or language arts each day. Instead, they work on assignments and projects that integrate the topics and skills learned in those classes around the theme of culture.

Q: What and how do Crossroads students learn?
A: Students study the cultures of their families, school, community, nation, and world. They investigate how those groups have an impact on them and how they have an impact on those groups. Also, the methods of learning are different. Students work both individually and cooperatively to study the topics of culture. There are fewer tests and quizzes, and a greater emphasis is placed on individual and cooperative projects that allow students to demonstrate what they learn. Students also demonstrate what they learn through frequent written log responses, which ask them to recall or apply information they learned.

Q: How much time do students spend in Crossroads each day?
A: Crossroads students and their teachers, Mr. Canny and Mr. Rendulich, spend four of the nine class periods (about three hours) in Crossroads every day. The other five periods consist of math, two specials classes (rotated through art, music, phys. ed., tech. ed., FACS, and world language), lunch, and advisory/homeroom.

Q: Do students receive grades for Crossroads?
A: No. Instead of grades, students receive assessments, approximately every four weeks. These are completed by the students and their teachers together and go home to parents for comments and signatures. Also, twice per year, parents receive longer, more formal reports on their child’s progress completed by the teachers. Additionally, there are two annual open houses for students to show their parents what they have learned. They receive regular grades for math and all specials subjects.

Q: Is math taught differently to Crossroads students?
A: No. Crossroads students are taught the same math curriculum as the rest of the sixth grade and have access to the same math levels as any other sixth grade student. Math is not integrated into the Crossroads program; however, many Crossroads students may have one of their Crossroads teachers for math.

Q: How are language arts levels (accelerated, co-taught, etc.) addressed within Crossroads?
A: The strategy of differentiated instruction is utilized for students of varying reading abilities. Crossroads students read novels and engage in significant nonfiction reading during the school year. For many reading experiences, students are matched with books or materials that suit their reading level. Students use the same vocabulary and grammar programs as the regular sixth grade students. Assignments for those programs may also be differentiated by ability.
How much class time is devoted to group work and cooperative learning experiences, and how are students assessed on group projects?

Approximately 15-20% of in-class time is spent in the cooperative process, although there is much more group work toward the end of the year than at the beginning of the year. Students are assessed not only on their group’s final product, but also on their individual contributions to the group and their public speaking performance. Detailed rubrics are used to assess each individual and the group on a whole.

How do teachers manage group projects?

When students are working in groups, the teachers roam the room to guide and assist the groups. Typically, there are eight groups of students working in the room, so the teachers can only be with two of those groups at any one time. Students are expected to stay with their group and be on task even when a teacher is not with them. This can be a challenge for some students in a busy classroom of 40 students. Students are evaluated at the end of each major group task on their contributions and behavior during the group project.

Should students who do not enjoy group work still consider Crossroads?

Be fully aware that students always sit in groups in Crossroads and spend some time most days working as a group. Some students like to “sit back” and let others do the work. Others like to have control of projects and don’t allow others to have any real responsibility. Students who are not willing to work to overcome such shortcomings often struggle in Crossroads.

How does the homework load in Crossroads compare with the regular sixth grade classes?

Generally speaking, the overall homework load in Crossroads is comparable to that in the regular programs. That said, Crossroads students are much more likely to have long-term assignments and projects that are spread out over days or weeks. Interim due dates and progress checks are always provided for these assignments. There are very few single-night homework assignments in Crossroads beyond grammar and vocabulary assignments.

How does the amount of writing in Crossroads compare with the regular curriculum?

It is hard to clearly quantify the answer to that question. That said, students in Crossroads write often. Since there are few tests and quizzes in Crossroads, one primary way that student learning is assessed is through written responses to frequent “log questions.”

How much public speaking do students do?

Students demonstrate what they’ve learned to the class through planned presentations quite often. They are also periodically required to do planned individual presentations.

How do students who participate in Crossroads transition back to the regular programming in seventh grade?

Historically, Crossroads students transition well into the traditional seventh grade program. They perform similarly on in-school assessments and standardized tests. Students who participate fully in Crossroads should have improved their skills as cooperative learners and public speakers as compared with their peers.

What does the Crossroads classroom look like?

The Crossroads classroom is double the size of the regular classrooms at the middle school. It fits all forty Crossroads students as well as lots of books and 40 laptop computers.

Do students in Crossroads have lockers?

Yes, and they use them as frequently as any other sixth grader.
Q: Do Crossroads students change classes?
A: Yes. Most Crossroads students change class only one time fewer per day than non-Crossroads students. Some Crossroads students will have one of their Crossroads teachers for math, so they may move to the same teacher.

Q: Will Crossroads students have opportunities to see friends who are not in Crossroads?
A: Yes. Students will see these friends before classes, at lunch, recess, and, if they’re scheduled with them, during specials classes. Each specials class typically has only a few Crossroads students in it; the rest of the class is comprised of students from regular teams. Be aware that students may not see friends very often if they are on a regular team either. There are three other teams, and even students on the same team often have no classes together.

Q: How many field trips do Crossroads students experience each year?
A: We typically have around eight field trips. All are important learning experiences that specifically connect to what we learn in Crossroads. There is preparatory work in advance of them as well as writing tasks that follow them. Field trips are fun but be aware that we are not on trips for 174 days.

Q: If a student is in Crossroads, can he or she also be in Watershed, Soundings, or Gateways?
A: When the lottery is conducted for the 7th grade Watershed program, priority will be given to students who did NOT participate in Crossroads. Crossroads students may enter the lottery, but their names will be placed at the bottom of the wait list. Likewise, the lotteries for the 8th grade Soundings and Gateways programs will give priority to those students who were in neither Crossroads nor Watershed. This policy maximizes opportunities for students to participate in an integrated program at RMS. We encourage students and parents to become informed about all of RMS’s integrated programs before making a decision about Crossroads. Still, students must understand that not participating in Crossroads in no way guarantees them selection into any future integrated program.

Q: If a student is selected into Crossroads via the lottery, can he or she opt out of the program?
A: In May, students selected into the program receive a letter informing them of their selection. They have approximately one week to make a final decision after receiving that letter. After that time, they must remain in the program.

Q: Can students get out of Crossroads if they decide they do not like it?
A: No, students make a year-long commitment to Crossroads. We ask that students and their parents learn all they can about the program before committing to it.

Q: How can one determine if Crossroads is a good fit for his/her learning style and interests?
A: Many students can find success in Crossroads, but students who have the following characteristics work best in the program:
- You want to have more responsibility and independence when learning and presenting what you learn.
- You like to “dig deeper” and explore answers to questions independently or as part of a group.
- In addition to doing individual projects, you enjoy working in cooperative groups and consistently do your fair share of work.
- You are not motivated to learn solely by grades, appreciate more extensive feedback about your work, and you’re willing to use that feedback to improve future work.
- You want to be part of a community of learners who spend the year together, exploring who they are and how they fit into their world.
- You want opportunities to get out of the classroom and explore the world around you.
- You are interested in ideas of culture and community and how you fit into these groups.
If this list doesn’t help you enough, consider speaking with your fifth grade teacher. He or she may be able to help you determine if this is something you should do or not.