**Frequently Asked Questions about Integrated Learning at RMS**

**What is Integrated Learning?**

Integrated learning programs operate on the premise that, in the real world, adults are required to perform tasks and demonstrate skills that are not defined in a single academic discipline. Instead, disciplines merge and overlap, and regardless of one’s profession, productive citizens benefit from being comfortable with the fluidity of knowledge and skills. In fact, the human brain itself does not operate in defined compartments of information. Instead, we naturally look for connections between ideas and often learn best when we identify such connections. In light of that reality, integrated learning breaks down those arbitrary boundaries between science, social studies, and language arts, and instead integrates the skills and knowledge traditionally defined within those disciplines into one theme-centered approach to exploring and learning about our world. Teachers of the integrated programs create lessons and activities that engage students in lessons, projects, and other learning tasks that focus on the connections between the skills and content taught in the regular curriculum.

**How do students engage in learning in the integrated programs?**

RMS’s integrated teachers strive to make learning and assessment as authentic as possible. That means student learning experiences will almost always include some or all of the following:

**Integration:** Students in an integrated program do not have defined times of the day when they are solely engaged in one academic discipline. There are no language arts, science, or social studies “class periods” in their school day. Instead, they engage in lessons and activities that integrate the skills and content of the traditional curriculum around a theme.

**Cooperation and Collaboration:** Life after education typically requires that adults work collaboratively and cooperatively in teams to produce results. Integrated learning programs assist students in developing those skills. Students sit in table groups, but more importantly, they spend a significant portion of their class time working on group tasks. These tasks range from short-term explorations, labs, discussions, or investigations, to long-term research projects that result in major presentations or products.

**Project-oriented curriculum:** Teachers in integrated programs often take on the role of facilitator of learning. While direct instruction is obviously sometimes necessary, teachers typically guide students through tasks and projects that require a degree of independent or group inquiry and research. Students have far fewer tests in the integrated programs. Instead, they regularly demonstrate what they’ve learned through writing tasks, presentations, or physical products.

Please note that student learning may have similar attributes in the regular RMS curriculum as well; they are just not core to the program and curriculum as they are in the integrated programs.
How are students assessed in the integrated programs?

Students are typically assessed through assignment-specific rubrics that gauge understanding and performance. Most of the integrated programs do not assign grades to student work, but instead rely on these rubrics and narrative comments. This method of assessment eliminates the singular numerical assessment of work in lieu of one that provides greater detail about areas of strength and areas needing improvement.

Most of the programs at RMS also utilize the student self assessment process for which students regularly review their own work and assess it prior to getting teacher feedback. Students also create goals, both yearly and assignment specific ones, to help focus their energies on areas of need.

Why is math not integrated into the RMS integrated programs?

Mathematical content is, by necessity, sometimes addressed in the integrated programs; however, it is not the primary means of instruction. Instead, students engage in the regular middle school math curriculum and have a regular math class every day. Due to the linear nature of math instruction as it’s practiced in the USA and most of the world, students must continue on that path throughout their middle school years. Students in the integrated programs participate in the same math curriculum as all other RMS students and have full access to all levels of math taught at RMS.

How can I learn more?

If you believe an integrated program may be appropriate for your child, we encourage you to go to the specific program websites to learn more. Those are accessible from the RMS Teacher Web pages. Please note that the programs for each grade level are as follows:

Grade 6 – Crossroads

Grade 7 – Watershed

Grade 8 – Gateways & Soundings