

puget sound community school



Turning Passion into Achievement

School Profile 2008-2009

Quick Facts

Puget Sound Community School
660 S Dearborn St
Seattle, WA 98134
206.324.4350
www.pscs.org

College Code: 481177

Director: Andrew Smallman
Administrative Director: Melinda Shaw

Student to Teacher Ratio
7:1.

Enrollment
30-35, ages 11-18.

Accreditation
Washington state approved private school.

Admissions
Admissions decisions are made based on personal interactions with families and not on prior academic performance.

Financial Aid
PSCS believes lack of funds should not prevent any student from applying and provides tuition assistance as funds allow.

Governance
PSCS is governed by a self-perpetuating Board of Trustees composed of volunteers from the greater community. Students have the opportunity to serve as trustees.

Philosophy

What kind of a school is PSCS?

The central educational purpose of PSCS is to help students learn to use their minds well while becoming thoughtful, sincere, and respectful global citizens. Our students are immersed in a collaborative educational community that respects and honors their individuality, challenges them to step outside their comfort zones, and encourages them to pursue those things that bring them joy. So honored, they discover and learn to use their natural gifts. They develop a deep sense of self by creating meaningful expressions of their passions in the world. This humanistic approach allows students to experience personal success and fulfillment now, and in the future as capable engaged adults.

At PSCS, learning takes many forms. Students work each year with an advisor to identify their short and long-term goals, and to plan for what they want to accomplish and how. Classes and activities are offered in response to direct student requests, or because a staff member or community volunteer has identified a significant topic they want to share. Students also participate in regular community service projects and field trips, and most complete multiple independent study projects during their time at PSCS. All of the traditional academic subjects are covered through this approach, which also helps students learn to understand and work with their own internal rhythm, pace, and speed.

Where are the grades/GPA/class rank?

At PSCS we believe that grades aren't a valid, reliable, or objective way to reflect the quality of work that happens at school. In our respectful and supportive community, constructive feedback takes place naturally and informally all the time, and in a way that logically helps students develop mastery over what they are studying.

How is credit granted for such diverse activities?

PSCS students typically study a wide variety of topics at any given time. The structure of school classes and activities is also varied, designed to meet individual needs and learning styles. In order to translate the work students do into state credit, students work closely with their advisors to prepare Credit Challenge Plans (CCPs). A CCP is a school document that allows students to group together the activities they've successfully completed that fall under specific academic headings and is a reflection of the competences they've acquired. Staff members review the CCPs and award the appropriate credit, which is then recorded on the student's official school transcript.

Program Overview

Learning Process

Each term, the PSCS schedule is created through a process of collaboration and cooperation among the students and staff. The impetus for school activities comes from student requests, offers from the staff in response to these requests, and the interests of volunteers to facilitate a course. The schedule is developed communally so all involved have input, and students are able to structure their schedules around their interests, goals and priorities.

Each student is assigned an advisor who acts as her/his personal coach and guide. As well as helping students track their community hours (community participation is one of the few specific requirements at PSCS), advisors help students align their interests and affinities to their goals, and then match these to the school's open structure.

Interdisciplinary Structure

Our interdisciplinary and multi-approach structure honors individual learning styles and abilities as well as allowing students to combine their interests in meaningful ways. This means that, for example, instead of working through a school or district-wide science curriculum centered on textbooks, our students can study human anatomy through art, biology and world ecosystems through documentary films, physics through construction and destruction of objects, and evolution through history.



Some of Our 2007-2008 Course Offerings and Activities

Civil Liberties, The Great Depression, Evolutionary Biology, Organic Farming, Digital Video, Projects with our Artist-In-Residence, Mother Night, Music Theory, Game Design, Jazz Dance, Leadership, Living Science, German, Spanish, French, Latin, Music Ensemble, Criminal Justice, Fantasizing the Future, Parkour, Rock Climbing, Breaking Stuff/Building Stuff, High-Contrast Art, Comics, Greek Philosophy, Travel Planning, Writing About Music, Anatomy for Artists, Yoga, Great Peacemakers, Planet Earth, Gender Groups, Addiction & Healing, Drawing, Stand-Up Comedy, Digital Problem Solving, Jazz History, Community Service at a local food bank and at an arboretum, Lobbying at the state capitol, Typography, Graphic Design, Boat Making, Classic Bands, Physics, Rock Climbing, GeoCaching, Weird US History, Zen and the Art of Bicycle Maintenance, Go Out and Play, and more.



Approaches

Block Class: A facilitated activity that meets multiple times per week to provide more focus for engaging a topic.

Class: A facilitated activity that typically meets once per week to investigate a particular topic.

Field Trip: A facilitated off-campus activity.

Independent Study: An unfacilitated, off-campus activity that has been pre-approved and furthers a student's specific learning goals.

Individual Work: An unfacilitated, on-campus activity that arises from a student's curiosity.

Intensive: A facilitated, in-depth investigation into a theme or topic that takes place all day long over a period of several days.

Project-based Learning: An on-campus project structured around student goal-setting and meetings with an advisor.

Reflection Week: A week-long all-school intensive centered around a specific topic, with relevant classes and activities led by staff and volunteers.

Service Learning: Typically an off-campus activity that is at least partially chosen to help or benefit other people.

Annual Events: Orientation Week Retreat, Backpacking Trip, Comedy Night, Music Café, Intensive Weeks, Reflection Week, School Play, City-Wide Scavenger Hunt, Student Showcase, Potlucks, Graduation

puget sound community school

PSCS graduates demonstrate high levels of self-expression, intrinsic motivation, and commitment to the community. A student's final year is the crowning development and expression of these characteristics and is more structured than any other year at the school.

Graduation Requirements

To graduate from PSCS, a student must:

Meet the school's presence requirement

PSCS is at its best when members of the community are present. Graduating students model presence for younger students.

Participate in Senior Seminar

Graduating students meet with the staff regularly during their final year and take advantage of these opportunities to learn from each other.

Conceive of and complete a graduation project

Graduating students design and complete a large-scale project that challenges their capabilities and advances their passions.

Present his/her credo to the community

To share their wisdom with and inspire other members of the community, graduating students are assisted in making a detailed declaration of who they are.

Students who wish to graduate from PSCS with a Washington state high school diploma must also satisfy the state graduation requirements by earning sufficient high school credits in a variety of subject areas as summarized below:

English - 3 credits
Math - 2 credits
Science - 2 credits (1 lab)
Social Studies - 2.5 credits:
 US History and Government - 1
 WA State History & Government - 0.5
 Contemporary World History, Geography, Problems - 1
Occupational Education - 1 credit
Health and Fitness - 2 credits
Arts (Visual or Performing) - 1 credit
Electives - 5.5 credit

Total credits required: 19

"We see that the PSCS learning environment is as deep, thorough, and interesting as our son's insatiable curiosity—indeed, as all young people's curiosity."

—PSCS Parent

Teaching Staff

We surround our students with passionate and interesting people of high character, beginning with those employed by the school. When hiring staff, the first thing we look for are people who demonstrate outstanding character and are lifelong learners, always striving to improve themselves. Recent teaching staff openings reflect our international reputation, drawing as many as 150 applicants from all over the world for one position.

Volunteers

Every year PSCS involves a number of volunteers from the community who bring their unique expertise and energy into the school. Students receive the benefit of the personal experiences of the volunteers, exposure to a diversity of teaching methods and styles, as well as an additional lens through which to learn about and explore the world. Volunteers participate in a mandatory orientation, complete a background check, and are supervised by members of the staff.



Alumni

The alumni of PSCS comprise a worldwide network of individuals who bring their compassion and will to effect positive change back to their peers, neighborhoods, and communities. From serving in the war in Iraq to running a successful record label, to honing their skills at culinary art school to travel, from returning to PSCS to facilitate activities to pursuing a career in dance the work of our graduates surrounds you. With an education from PSCS, our alumni have gone on to pursue their passions in a wide range of fields. Their stories take many forms. Here are just a few.



"PSCS changed my life forever. It helped me grow and become a person that I never thought I could become before. It let me choose who I wanted to be and not have someone else choose for me. PSCS helped me in a way no other school could ever do."

—PSCS Alumnus



John-Michael Spangler Sept 94 - June 00 "The greatest testament to a school's credibility and success can be found in its alums. Ask any student what they got out of school and they would tell you they got an education. Ask a PSCS student what they got out of school and they would tell you respect, a sense of self, empowerment, a sense of curiosity, the love of learning, the list will go on and on. PSCS gave me the ability to meet people's eyes when I talk, to become excited about the task at hand, and to fully engage with the world around me. This has allowed me to be successful in school, work, and life in general. PSCS fostered my natural love of learning so greatly I am currently working towards my Masters in Education."

Aidan Young Sept 95 - June 98 "PSCS gave me the freedom to make my own choices and provided me role models that held me accountable to those choices. At 15 I started pursuing a career teaching nature and music. At 21 I became the Director of Creative Arts for the Riekes Center, a non-profit mentoring organization in Menlo Park, CA. Directors usually have a degree and 5 years of experience in the field. PSCS taught me how to get that experience and responsibility before I was old enough to vote!"

Mia Karpov Sept 95 - June 99 "PSCS offered me endless opportunities within the school and greater community. It is an invaluable skill to meaningfully connect with people no matter where you go. I am currently preparing a trip to Kenya with Village Volunteers, where I will live and work in rural village clinics, orphan feeding programs and schools. Visit <http://miakarp.livejournal.com> for more info."

Jostin Darlington Sept 02 – June 06 "I currently reside in Nashville, TN as president of a major funded, independent record label. I love almost every aspect about my career. I am constantly asked about my age. Nobody understands how I could be so dedicated, so driven, and so independent at such a young age. Keep in mind, most of my co-workers are over 30. 'It's hard to explain, I went to a really awesome school,' I tell them. The only real explanation for my success at such a young age is Puget Sound Community School. The most valuable thing PSCS gave me was the time to really understand who I am and what I wanted to do with my life. PSCS let me run my record label almost full time for two and half years, earning high school credit for what I considered my job. Once I decided what I wanted to do, it was nothing but support and learning. PSCS is the reason I am who I am."