

puget sound community school



turning passion into achievement

School Profile 2009-2010

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
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 young people discover and follow their passions while becoming thoughtful, sincere, and respectful global citizens. Students do not waste time doing busywork, rebelling against authority, or pleasing their teachers in hopes of winning good grades. Instead, they work in a collaborative school community that naturally creates meaningful educational experiences with an emphasis on creativity, personal responsibility, and joy. So honored, PSCS students discover and learn to use their innate gifts. They become self-directed and develop a deep sense of self. They build on their strengths and passions, and transform them into meaningful achievements. 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?

In order to translate the the wide variety of topics students study at PSCS into state credit, students work 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 allows 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 or biology. They can learn about ecosystems by analyzing documentary films on the subject. Students might explore principles of physics by working with their hands, through the construction and destruction of objects.



Annual Events

Students enjoy a variety of activities, including the week-long Backpacking Trip, Comedy Night featuring PSCS students on a live stage in a comedy club, the school play that typically involves over half of the student body, and the Music Café in which students and other members of the school community perform in front of an audience.

Some of Our 2008-2009 Course Offerings and Activities

Capoeira, Critical Listening, English Grammar, French, Graphic Design, Go to College, Hamlet, Introduction to Child Development, Leadership, Les Miserables, Lexicon and Vernacular, Meditation, Microeconomics, Middle School Math, Modern Political Philosophy, Music Ensemble, Next Level Math, Odd and Practical Science, Organic Farming, Parkour, Photography, Physics in Your Life, Positive Psychology, Rock Climbing, SAT Prep, Spanish, Stand-up Comedy, Tour of State Legislature, U.S. Involvement in Vietnam, 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

Mini-Term: Three weeks in December in which a special schedule of classes and activities that are best delivered in this timeframe is created

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

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, the culmination of a multi-stage process designed to guide the student into adulthood.

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

When hiring staff, the first thing we look for are people who demonstrate outstanding character and a commitment to lifelong learning. Because of the unique structure of the school that emphasizes passion and authentic teaching and learning, we have been able to select the best applicants from an extraordinarily rich talent pool. In fact, a recent teaching staff opening drew more than 150 applications from all over the world.

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.



One Student's Story

We do not advertise PSCS as a “college preparatory school” because we know that college is not always the best option for all students. Instead, we are proud that our graduates have a level of self-respect, self-discipline and self-direction that will bring them success in whatever paths they choose. Here is one student's story that illustrates the unique benefits of a PSCS education, told in the form of an email message that was sent from his mother to family and friends.



He actually wants to go to school now and is becoming engaged and excited about his education like never before, showing a deep personal investment not only in his future but also in his “now.”

Hi All,

I wanted to forward the latest school newsletter to you from Puget Sound Community School, where my son is attending now. You had expressed interested in knowing how he's doing there and I'm very happy to report that he's doing great. He's loving PSCS and looks forward to attending everyday and is learning more than I ever hoped. This last week he took part in the “Justice Intensive” and was thoroughly engaged and full of chatter and curiosity all week about all he was learning.

Best of all is watching his attitude toward school changing. He actually wants to go to school now and is becoming engaged and excited about his education like never before, showing a deep personal investment not only in his future but also in his “now.” Let me explain on that last note. One of the hardest things for us parents to grasp about PSCS is how the students are given so much freedom in choosing how they spend their days. If they want to sit on the computer and play games all day they're welcome to. The theory is that children will naturally choose to learn and grow if given the space and trust to do so.

When he began at PSCS he chose to attend some of the classes (hard not to since the teaching staff at the school offer such interesting classes) but spent every other minute of the day playing World of Warcraft on his computer. Andy (the school

director) kept assuring us that he would eventually work it through his system, citing story after story about all the other students he's watched through the years. He's seen it happen so often that he's even able to break it down into predictable phases (phases that students go through as they disengage from unproductive boredom-induced behaviors to making choices that support their own interests and desire to grow and learn). My husband and I struggled to keep biting our tongues about his W.O.W.-playing, but kept faith in the ideas that PSCS is founded on.

Recently, and quite suddenly and unexpectedly (at least for my husband and I, though I'm certain Andy saw it coming all along) he chose to stop playing W.O.W.—even going so far as to have a friend change his password on the game and not tell him what it was. When I asked him what had prompted him to do that (because it certainly had nothing to do with any of us complaining anymore about his W.O.W. addiction) he said he was just bored with it and wanted to do something different. Now he's searching for new ways to spend his time, researching deeper into the kinds of interests that will usher him into adulthood. All I can say is wow. It works!

I can't wait to see how the rest of his time as PSCS unfolds.