

Spotlight



LAKE ORION'S MIDDLE SCHOOL CONCEPT



Middle school students are separated by grade during much of the day

Middle school can be very challenging for a student, both from an academic and social perspective. Lake Orion Community Schools work hard to help children succeed over those obstacles. That is why Lake Orion's unique middle school concept, making a big school seem small, is so beneficial to the district's adolescent students in sixth through eighth grades.

The cornerstone of our middle school concept is its unique team approach. A group of 4-5 educators in the core subject areas of math, science, social studies and English work closely together during the year to coordinate teaching activities and explore cross-curricular learning opportunities with approximately 100 students. The schools also offer a number of extracurricular classes in world language, music and the fine arts.

This team approach differs considerably from the traditional approach at middle schools that more closely mimic junior high buildings where a group of teachers may be responsible for 600 or more students with little personal attention. Lake Orion's team-based approach also helps staff more quickly identify students who may be struggling academically or socially.

When teachers work so close with a group of students every day, they naturally gain a better understanding of how each learns, as well as their emotional needs and concerns, Scripps Middle School Principal Dan Haas said.

In addition, all three middle schools offer students a curriculum support period for math and reading, staffed by teachers. It replaces an elective class on a student's schedule.



"This curriculum support period is another unique part of our schools that has proven to be very helpful to students who risk falling behind academically," Waldon Middle School Principal Randy Groya said.

Parents share their appreciation for how Lake Orion's schools operate. The Middle School Concept also benefits students who excel in the classroom. Teachers work together to adjust the curriculum as necessary to keep these students engaged and motivated throughout the year.

Given the age and maturity differences between sixth and eighth graders, all three middle school buildings are designed to separate the students within reason. When Oakview opened in 2002, it was designed to not only keep the grades apart, but also place the teams of teachers and students together. Scripps and Waldon underwent extensive renovations during this time, as well, to meet these needs.



Students listen to a classmate's presentation.



All three middle school offer world language classes

"If a student makes a poor decision or starts to stray, we're structured in such a way that they do not get lost," Principal Groya said. "Our teams notice what is going on and we have conversations with the students much earlier. We'd rather see a student make a mistake here than in high school."



Technology is integrated into many classes

Standardized test results support this approach. In 2014, all three Lake Orion middle schools scored higher than the national average on the EXPLORE/ACT assessment in every testing category (English, math, reading and science).

If a student does get in trouble, the relationships forged between a team's teachers and their students play an important role in helping kids learn from their mistakes and not repeat them.



Band is an elective class at the middle school level

To Principal Haas' knowledge, there are no other middle schools in the county that offer a middle school program quite like Lake Orion's and he appreciates the district's commitment.

"To execute our Middle School Concept effectively takes time and resources, primarily additional staffing," he said. "Our administration's willingness to continually support it does not go unnoticed. Fortunately, I think we're making a big, positive difference in these students' academic and so-cial experiences as they prepare to thrive in high school."



Lake Orion's middle school principals (left to right): Dan Haas, Sarah Manzo, and Randy Groya.