School Profile

The Sycamore School

The Sycamore School follows a mastery-based learning model where learning is personalized, engaging, and self-paced. Social-emotional and executive functioning skills are taught alongside academic skills. Students master a range of academic and life skills and are asked to apply those skills in their community. Our goal is to cultivate independent lifelong learners who contribute positively to their community.

By the numbers

- Founded, year: 2017
- Students in the high school: 28
- Number of students expected to graduate this year: 5
- Faculty members in the high school: 15
- % of students who qualify for financial assistance: 26

Curriculum

The Sycamore School embodies a mastery or competency-based approach to learning. We focus on building skills in six areas: Research, Communication, Executive Functioning Skills, Critical Thinking & Problem-Solving, Understanding Self & Others, and Self-Directed Learning. We use aspects of several research-based curricula including Mastery Based Learning, 21st Century Learning, Common Core, Virginia's Standards of Learning, Universal Design for Learning, Next Generation Science, Discovery Math, and Mindful Schools. Instead of having all stand-alone classes, our core classes are integrated using a transdisciplinary curriculum.

Unique program offerings

The Sycamore School embraces an urban campus model, where students learn to utilize community resources to augment and enhance their learning experience. Located in the heart of Ballston, we are accessible to metro/public transportation and walking distance to five parks. Students and staff are encouraged to utilize public transportation, walk or bike to school. Students participate in a semester-long class that weaves together language arts, history, and science concepts under a unifying theme, such as Civilizations, Forensics, Motion, or Good Eats. We offer two math tracks: a traditional math track which includes Algebra, Geometry, Algebra II/Trig, Pre Calculus, and Calculus OR a second track which includes Algebra, Data Science, and Probability and Statistics. Students can choose from a variety of electives including American Sign Language, Coding, Creative Writing, Film Criticism, French, Furniture Rehab, Instrumental Music, Journalism, Philosophy, Spanish, Theatre, 2D Art, and 3D Art. Students are also required to take a Movement & Mindfulness class that teaches a variety cooperative games, mindfulness activities, and yoga. Graduates are required to take College and Career Preparation classes including Career Explorations, Financial Literacy, and a Senior Seminar. Students follow the same schedule Monday through Thursday. Friday is our Community Based learning day where students participate in field trips and community service activities. High School students may also use this time to complete externships.

Contacts

Dr.

Karyn Ewart
karyn.ewart@thesycamoreschoolva.org
703-717-5360

Ms.
Andrea Shore
andrea.shore@thesycamoreschoolva.org
703-717-5360

Ms.
Julie Diefenderfer
julie.diefenderfer@thesycamoreschoolva.org
703-717-5360

About mastery credits

Instead of traditional grades and Carnegie units, all Mastery Transcript Consortium schools measure student achievement using mastery credits. Each mastery credit represents a specific set of skills that are cross-disciplinary. To earn a credit, students build a portfolio of evidence from a variety of learning contexts, which is reviewed by school staff. Students are then either awarded the mastery credit or given feedback on how to advance their portfolio in order to demonstrate mastery. Mastery credits are divided into two levels--foundational and advanced--as explained below.

Foundational credits are graduation requirements. To earn a diploma, students are required to master 80% of The Sycamore School's identified skills; each mastered skill earns them a credit. Advanced credits (ACs) are optional. A student can earn an advanced credit by applying a mastered skill in the community. Similar to foundational credits, students must present evidence demonstrating that they have successfully applied a foundational skill in the community.

Interpreting credit profiles

Since mastery of skills is the goal of our school, we do not require advanced credits. However, if a student demonstrates use of a skill outside of the school, we would consider that an advanced credit.

- Max achievable advanced credits (AC): 27
- Max achievable foundational credits (FC): 27
- Typical number of ACs earned by most students prior to graduation: 2
- Threshold number of ACs that is unusually high and relatively rare: 10

Evidence

Students submit a portfolio of evidence to earn each mastery credit. The Featured Evidence displayed on the mastery transcript are individual pieces of evidence from a variety of portfolios that the student has chosen to feature. These provide an authentic snapshot of the breadth and quality of work indicative of this student. Additionally, many credits on the mastery transcript have a single piece of evidence attached to them. This evidence was selected by the student from the portfolio of work used to earn that particular credit, and gives the reader a window into the type of work associated with the credit.

Full credit list

Research **Communication**

Students can find, collect, organize, evaluate, and synthesize information from multiple disciplines.

Foundational
Locating & Collecting Research
Research Organization & Citations
Evaluating Resources
Synthesizing Existing Research

Advanced
Locating & Collecting Research
Research Organization & Citations
Evaluating Resources
Synthesizing Existing Research

Students can use oral, written, and visual communication to convey thoughts and ideas.

Foundational
Public Speaking
Literacy
Composition
Vocabulary Acquisition and Usage
Visual Presentation

Advanced
Public Speaking
Literacy
Composition
Vocabulary Acquisition and Usage
Visual Presentation

Executive Functioning
Executive functioning skills enable us to plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and manage multiple tasks.

Foundational
Goal Setting
Material Management
Time Management
Productivity
Using Feedback Productively
Adaptability

Advanced
Goal Setting
Material Management
Time Management
Productivity
Using Feedback Productively
Adaptability

Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving
Students can ask critical questions, build on previous knowledge, evaluate and synthesize ideas to find solutions to real world problems.

Foundational
Quantitative Reasoning
Empirical Research & Reasoning
Problem Solving
Depth of Knowledge

Advanced
Quantitative Reasoning
Empirical Research & Reasoning
Problem Solving
Depth of Knowledge

Understanding Self and Others
Students gain a deeper understanding of themselves and others through developing their social-emotional skills and exploring identity, culture, and diversity.

Foundational
Self-Perception & Self-Awareness
Social Skills
Conflict Resolution
Respect for Others

Advanced
Self-Perception & Self-Awareness
Social Skills
Conflict Resolution
Respect for Others

Self-Directed Learning
Students approach their learning so that it engages their interests, fits their needs, and challenges them to grow.

Foundational
Collaboration
Reflection
Self-Efficacy
Mindfulness & Emotional Regulation

Advanced
Collaboration
Reflection
Self-Efficacy
Mindfulness & Emotional Regulation

Mastery credits and courses	There is not a one-to-one relationship between mastery credits and courses. Students gather the evidence needed to earn each mastery credit from a combination of course, extracurricular, and flexible pathway learning. While many mastery credits draw heavily on specific discipline-based learning, other credits can be earned with evidence from a wider variety of experiences.