

Curricular Philosophy at Laurel

Curriculum at Laurel School promotes learning that is enduring and transferable. Teachers and families work collaboratively to help each student find her own path to knowledge, and for her part the student enters the classroom with an open mind, ready to be a partner in her own learning. We all play a role in finding the best way to reach each student, giving multiple opportunities for our girls to connect with the material and recognize its usefulness. With this as our guide and the phrase “enduring and transferable” as an overarching tenet, other pedagogical pieces follow naturally: skills or content taught without the context of application will not promote endurance, and impermeable disciplinary borders will not encourage transfer. Process and content must have an appropriate curricular balance to make each learning experience as rich as possible.

Laurel’s curricular goal, where content balances process and learning is enduring and transferable, requires many approaches to learning. To meet the needs of Laurel students, three kinds of learning in particular distinguish our curriculum: experiential learning, interdisciplinary learning, and service learning.

- ◆ **Experiential learning** is study that requires girls to be active rather than passive participants in their education—students learn by doing, helping to construct the architecture of their own understanding. Our Butler Campus affords us the space and the access to the outdoors that enhances a curriculum rich in experiential learning. Problem-based learning, kinesthetic learning, and student-driven presentations and assessments are all examples of experiential learning, which may take up as much time as the 2-week archaeological dig experienced by our 7th grade at Butler or as little time as a current-events assignment in a primary classroom at Lyman.
- ◆ **Interdisciplinary learning** takes many forms, and at Laurel it happens everywhere. Our girls are doing interdisciplinary learning when Upper School students read a novel in English class discussing the life of a character growing up in Germany during World War II while learning about World War II in history, and also spend time in a math class analyzing data on the WWII-era military population in European countries compared to that of the US. They are doing interdisciplinary learning when the second-graders combine biology, social studies, research, and technology to study honeybee populations and lobby for their protection. These and many other connections to other disciplines help the students understand that the subjects they study do not arise in a vacuum, nor are they naturally discrete entities, but rather fluid divisions made more fixed to simplify some elements of formal education.
- ◆ **Service learning** allows opportunities for our students to use both interdisciplinary and experiential methods to further their understanding of the role they play in the world. Community service done as an extracurricular does much to round out the life of a student; how much more power does service have when explored as a way to learn? At Laurel, we know that the more the girls understand about the service they perform, the more invested they are in it; the more they find opportunities to make a difference in the issues that are raised in the classroom, the more passionately they work to deepen their knowledge to better become agents of positive change.

Curricular Philosophy at Laurel (continued)

We understand that curriculum permeates everything we do, all the decisions we make in our interactions with our girls. Our students see their lives and their interests reflected in the stories they read, the problems they solve, and the projects they complete. At Laurel, our girls know their own strengths, and they also know how to appreciate the strengths of others. They learn through academics, athletics, and arts; they learn during advisory, during study halls, at their lockers, and in the lunchroom. They learn as they take in the artwork their classmates have produced that dot the walls throughout the school, and as spectators supporting their classmates at sporting events and drama productions. They crave strong communities, opportunities to work collaboratively as well as independently. Girls are compassionate learners who care about their fellow students as deeply as they care about the dilemmas of fictional characters, the struggles of historical figures, and the real-life problems that our global community is currently trying to solve with technology, math, science, politics, and communication. Laurel students blossom in an environment that nurtures girls. Building community, becoming a fierce promoter of social justice, learning both figuratively and literally to speak the languages of others, reading about women in textbooks and fiction, immersing herself in discussions where everyone has a voice, taking responsibility for learning through reflection on process, solving complex math and science problems with an eye to the holistic rather than the compartmentalized, each girl is inspired in her own way to fulfill her promise and to better the world.