



Renaissance at Rand Middle School



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Our mission at Renaissance at Rand Middle School is to inspire individuals to think critically, responsibly and empathetically. At the heart of Renaissance are students and faculty who investigate ideas through an interdisciplinary, thematic curriculum. We design our program to support all dimensions of student growth: socially, emotionally and physically as well as intellectually. We have an extended school day four days per week, allowing Fridays to be a day of curricular extension through field research trips, elective classes and community service activities. Renaissance develops well-rounded learners who are critical and creative thinkers. Through the hands-on community service curriculum, all students are taught that they have a place in, and responsibility toward, their community.

What characterizes Renaissance at Rand Middle School?

- A culture where students are motivated to work individually and cooperatively on challenging tasks, projects, and activities
- Students who are engaged, persistent, confident, and proud of their work
- Teachers who connect learning to students' lives
- Diversity of learning contexts and modalities
- Active learning guided by salient themes, problems, issues, or questions

Learning at Renaissance is rooted in challenging, investigative work aligned to Common Core and other state standards, resulting in the growth of autonomous learners who make connections with each other and the world around them in a lively, inspirational atmosphere.

EQUITABLE EDUCATION FOR ALL

We hold the following core values:

- Students should have access and exposure to all educational experiences and all academics
- We have a role in developing students' empathy through acceptance and understanding of all kinds of people
- We must foster multicultural awareness
- Students need and deserve support to grow as resilient learners and as responsible, compassionate human beings
- Emotional safety is essential for learning to take place
- Connections to Real Life experiences with hands-on, minds-on learning are essential
- Students should be taught to think critically and creatively
- Cooperative learning is important for social and academic growth
- We must help students develop life skills, coping skills, and independence as learners
- Community service and activism should be encouraged as life-long habits
- Students learn optimally in a small environment

- We must all remain open to self-examination
- All educators should be involved and invested in our students' education

Our core values frame our work with students. Our school was founded on the premise of access and equity for all. We believe deeply that all students can learn, that they learn best in open, inclusive classrooms, and that learning occurs in many settings and modalities. We do not have “pull-out” or “replacement” classes and we have blurred the line between general education and special education settings to benefit of our students. Our teachers are skilled at modifying curriculum to meet individual students' needs. Our paraprofessionals are skilled at supporting student learning of all types. All Renaissance adults are mindful of the diverse, divergent backgrounds and preparedness of our students. We are proud of the quality and the integrity of the education that all of our students receive. To personalize learning, we offer afternoon enrichment classes designed to meet individual student needs and preferences, as well as in-depth classes in all core subjects, related arts, and electives.

OUR FRAMEWORK

Students are organized into four homerooms per grade level, led by the English Language Arts, Math, Science and Social Studies teachers. Teachers are part of grade level instructional teams and cross-graded departments by discipline. The teams provide an optimal student-teacher ratio so that both group and individual pedagogical techniques can be used. The school operates on an extended day four times a week, affording 196 hours of additional instructional time during the school year.

In keeping with the idea of Renaissance as an age of enlightenment, **all sixth graders** take art, dance, music, technology, phys ed, health, and world language in addition to their core subjects. Seventh and eighth graders have more choices and more chances to specialize in areas of interest. In math, all Renaissance students have completed Algebra I by the end of eighth grade and may take Geometry, also. Both courses follow the high school curriculum.

The schedule is unique. Block scheduling encourages students to spend extended periods of time concentrating and working on specific activities. Specifically, students work in the four core (mathematics, language arts, science, and social studies) areas for 80 minutes twice a week. Mathematics and English Language Arts are further bolstered with additional forty-minute periods of instruction on the other three days. A daily Advisories curriculum supports student growth in social, emotional and executive functioning skills.

Our Renaissance at Rand community is composed of a rich diversity of family backgrounds, geographic origins, achievement histories, talents, needs and strengths. We value and celebrate differences which make us unique and commonalities which unite us.

The teachers at Renaissance at Rand Middle School have crafted a dynamic curriculum where student work is evaluated through various modes of assessment. The thematic approach of our curriculum centers on essential questions. The structure of the school is based on commitment to maximum use of instructional time.

Renaissance students enjoy a range of extracurricular activities throughout the year. These include Robotics Club, ECO Club, Dance Club, Model UN, Model Congress, plays and musical productions, school dances, spirit weeks, honor rolls, Student of the Marking Period (STOMP) and annual performance awards.

HIGHLIGHTS

At Renaissance we maximize our staff's creativity and ingenuity by offering classes such as Survivor, Ballet, Modern Dance, Digital Literacy, Glee Club, Rock Band, Opera, and Digital Filmmaking, to name a few. All students take a World Language for all three years. Instruction is offered in French, Spanish, Latin and Italian. Renaissance also enjoys a productive collaboration with the Montclair Art Museum and Montclair Public Library.

In keeping with the philosophy of a "school beyond the walls," our thematic units include field study and investigation. Sites range from ecological to historical to the United Nations to the Smithsonian Institution. Students also work in gardens on our campus.

Physical education is vital to our students' short- and long-term well-being. We use the gym, dance studio, soccer field, and recreation areas on our property as well as the Soccer Domain, Township tennis courts, and exercise room in Woodman Field House to develop a well-rounded program for physical development. We get outside every day we possibly can, and we eat outdoors most of the year in our own picnic area.

Technology is an essential tool for learning. It is readily available for student use. Each classroom is equipped with a projector and document camera. Desktop and laptop computers and, iPads are integral tools for student learning. We are excited about our newest addition – Maker Spaces (3-D printers) – and will be offering courses as soon as our staff has completed training.

FRIDAYS AT RENAISSANCE

Departing from the typical Monday through Thursday schedule, Renaissance has created an award-winning Friday enrichment curriculum. What makes the Friday schedule special is an approach that allows students to expand the work they do in the classroom through field research trips, the exploration of enrichment topics, and Community Service. Field research may be as near as our own outdoor learning spaces to as far as Gettysburg, Pa. and Washington, D.C. Examples of Friday classes include Drama, Where In the World?, and Multi-Media Research at the Montclair Public Library. Social Action is taught in seventh and eighth grades. Learning focuses on Human, Animal and other Environmental Rights, and includes activities such as clothing, food, and toy drives, and the creation of original protest songs, to name a few.

All students participate in Community Service on Fridays during the school year. Community Service opportunities include work in the gardens at Renaissance, harvesting food which we deliver to Toni's Kitchen, volunteering at local nursery schools, working in classrooms at

Montclair elementary schools, participating in a Birding conservation program, assisting the Township Attorney in his office, building benches for the Colonial Garden, maintaining the Ga-Ga Pit and volleyball court, and volunteering at the Red Cross and IHN.

Renaissance students suggest clubs that match their interests and a staff member or parents and guardians always step up to nurture their ideas. Examples of current student clubs include Dungeons and Dragons, Magic the Gathering, ECO Club, Robotics Club, and Words and Curds (shared poetry and cheese tastings).

Families are engaged in the life of the school in many ways. Adult family members often accompany us on field research trips. They provide sponsorship and guidance for clubs and extracurricular activities. Our PTA and School Action Team are active in shaping student activities and guiding changes in our programming. Families gather throughout the year for food and socializing. Our once-a-month *Renaissance Unplugged!* evenings of potluck and non-electronic games help us connect families to kids and families to other families.

ENRICHMENT AND EXTENSION OPPORTUNITIES

During the school day, students have an opportunity to deepen their understanding and enjoyment in a number of areas. A *sampling* of courses includes:

- Photography
- Filmmaking
- Guitar
- Discovery Zone
- GENIUS
- History Beyond the Curriculum
- Anthropology
- Mock Trial
- Students (art) for a Sustainable World
- Read 180
- Study Skills
- Math Whizards
- Improvisational Dance
- Human Biology

AWARDS/RECOGNITIONS

- The New Jersey School Boards Association, Board of Directors School Leaders Award recognition for the Friday Program
- Service Learning Leaders Award for innovative service to the community
- New Jersey Service Learning Leader School Award
- State-championships in Robotics
- Science Olympiad recognitions
- Mid-Model United Nations Conference, this year at the United Nations building
- Model Congress awards
- Essex County Teacher Recognition participation
- Developmental Disabilities Council Fellowship for Inclusive Education: Renaissance recognized for exemplary Inclusive Education practices during Inclusive Education Week
- STAMP test awards
- American Mathematics Association Math Contest awards

SPECIAL FEATURES

- The Renaissance Reporter student-led newspaper
- Drama and musical productions written and performed by Renaissance Students
- Students of the Marking Period (STOMP) each quarter
- Renaissance Performance Ensembles: Chorus, Glee Club, Rock Band, Chorus, Choreography, Dance Ensemble
- Young Curators Partnership with Montclair Art Museum, including an annual exhibit at the Museum
- School-Wide Science Fair
- Robotics
- Science Olympiad
- Sixth Grade Expo – a showcase of learning for families held twice annually
- Model Congress
- Model UN
- Mock Trial
- Rogate Middle School Gifted and Talented Programs

FOR MORE INFORMATION

[Renaissance at Rand school website](#)

[Renaissance PTA website](#)