

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is Project-Based Learning?**

Project-based learning really means learning by doing. Most of us know from experience that this is the best way to learn. When our grandfathers or fathers taught us to fish, or our mothers or grandmothers showed us our way around the kitchen, they didn't sit us down at a desk and offer a lecture followed by a test.

We went fishing, or we baked a cake.

It's the same way in almost any other endeavor. We all learn best through real experience. And while such methods are used in traditional schools in some cases, most larger, institutional school districts have turned away from such approaches in recent decades, leaving us with what has come to be known as the traditional classroom. Few would argue that the traditional classroom is a better or more effective way to teach students. But some believe it to be a more efficient way to teach large numbers of students.

In a project-based environment, students have much more autonomy over what they learn. They still must meet all state standards and testing requirements, but they can do so in a manner that focuses on areas of particular interest. Teachers in such an environment are primarily facilitators and mentors, assisting students as they pursue their various projects. It transforms the typical classroom environment from one of "teacher telling" to "students doing."

Project-based learning involves students in complex, real-world projects through which they develop and apply skills and knowledge. In such a learning environment, students are engaged because they have a real voice in their individualized learning plan and because they can focus on subjects that truly interest them. We've all seen the student who shows real passion for things outside of the classroom, but who is disengaged in the traditional classroom setting. In a project-based environment, students can pursue their passions in real depth, work at their own pace, and gain new skills and confidence in the process.

### **What is Vermilion Country School's Philosophy?**

- *Our vision statement:* To provide students with the skills and confidence needed to lead a positive and productive life for themselves, their families, their communities, and their world.

- *Our mission:* To create a small, safe, nurturing, and non-sectarian learning environment where students take an active role in their own education and in the betterment of their community. We wish to engage students in critical thinking and teamwork that empowers them toward life-long learning and global citizenship.

**What is your admissions policy?**

We are a public school in the State of Minnesota and every student is eligible to attend here provided sufficient spaces are available. We don't anticipate utilizing a lottery system, at least for the first few years.

**Do you charge tuition?**

No. We are a public school and there is no tuition.

**What extracurriculars do you offer?**

Charter schools are eligible to join the Minnesota State High School League and participate in all MSHSL-sanctioned activities. Which extracurricular activities are ultimately offered at the Vermilion Country School will be determined primarily by student numbers and interest. If a sufficient number of students wish to participate in a given activity, we will endeavor to provide that opportunity.

**What types of special offerings are available at Vermilion Country?**

In a project-based school, students are able to pursue an exceptional range of opportunities, limited only by their interests. At the Vermilion Country School, course offerings won't be limited by numbers of students. Whether students are interested in obscure historical subjects, want to study water quality in a lake near their home, or want to learn to speak Mandarin, that becomes a project that they can pursue using state-of-the-art teaching materials. In a project-based environment, the sky is the limit.

Vermilion Country School is currently in the process of establishing a partnership arrangement with the new Lake Vermilion State Park, that will allow students to engage in a wide range of potential projects within the park. These could include everything from wildlife studies to assisting on an archeological dig.

**How will you handle bullying?**

While bullying is possible in any environment, most project-based schools find that it is much less of a problem because the school environment is so

much different than in a traditional school. Students are encouraged to work cooperatively on projects, there is active peer-to-peer mentoring, and each student is engaged in work that interests them.

At the Vermilion Country School, we understand that bullying and harassment are serious impediments to student learning and well-being and we will instill a culture of respect that will start from the top-down. A complete bullying policy will be developed prior to opening and staff will be trained in its implementation.

### **How many students will be in a class?**

In a project-based school, students typically are grouped in what are called “advisories.” Each advisory is made up of approximately 15 students and will have a teacher/advisor who works with each student on their individual educational plan.

Advisories are typically multi-grade, which works well in a project-based environment because each student works at his/her own level and at their own pace.

### **How will the school track student progress?**

As with other public schools, students at the Vermilion Country School will be required to take all state-mandated tests and will have to demonstrate mastery in order to graduate. Students will also participate in other assessments, such as the NWEA-MAPS tests, as well as the Hope survey. The Hope survey has repeatedly demonstrated that students in a project-based school environment feel a sense of greater autonomy, personal value, and hope for the future.

In addition, students and their teacher/advisors will track their progress towards meeting all the state graduation requirements through an innovative program known as Project Foundry.