

Watershed School Design Principles

The Watershed School is committed to a program and school culture that inspires and educates students to become highly capable, healthy, wise, and engaged citizens prepared to take on the world's great challenges. These Design Principles focus our vision, remind us of what is important, and inform our decisions.

Adventure and Wonder

Education at its best is an adventure full of wonder and discovery for students, for educators, and for schools.

We build a culture of curiosity and inquiry to nurture and develop the wonder, wisdom, and insight we all have within. We embrace adventure with the understanding that transformative learning and growth involves risk. Our work together remains fresh and dynamic because we are all committed to the continuous evolution of learning opportunities—for it is in the unknown that the greatest learning lies.

Real-World Learning

Deep, enduring learning happens first-hand – directly from the people, ecosystems, cultures, and challenges of the “real world.”

We explore important questions with a transdisciplinary approach that draws on real-world experiences and experts. The world is our classroom, as we travel locally, regionally, and internationally to explore and learn. Students build the capacity to solve problems by integrating their knowledge, seeking multiple perspectives, and understanding the complexity of our world. The curriculum is flexible in order to respond to real needs and learning opportunities as they arise.

Depth Over Breadth

Exploration of real-world topics and questions leads to deep understandings.

Students develop rich understandings of the complexity and connections in our world through deep study of real-world topics. Through these explorations, students discover and develop their own interests and passions. We know that success in the future does not depend on remembering a

broad collection of content; success depends on having the skills of effective learners: critical thinking, creative problem-solving, communication, collaboration, craft, and the broad perspective of a global citizen.

Student Agency

We honor students as architects of their own learning.

To develop lifelong learners, we help students learn to ask important questions and pursue them well. Learning is personalized because students have diverse interests and needs. Every aspect of the school encourages students to become increasingly responsible for directing their learning and supporting others. Students and educators collaborate to set goals, help plan expeditions, participate in committees, and participate in school-wide decision-making.

Educators as Learners and Mentors

To best help students learn and grow, educators' most important roles are as expert learners and trusted mentors.

Watershed educators model the skills and habits of deep learning for students. They actively engage in professional learning by remaining current with educational research, attending and presenting at professional conferences, and visiting other schools. Educators become effective mentors by knowing students well and having excellent rapport with them. To truly realize these roles, the student:teacher ratio is low, teachers work with students for extended lengths of time, and individual and group advisory meetings occur every week.

Our Community Ethos

A strong community is the foundation of great student learning and growth.

At Watershed, we respect the inherent dignity and worth of all people, and strive to build a world that is more just, more collaborative, and more sustainable. Therefore we all work together to create a school community that values diversity, equity, and inclusion and that fosters a climate of warmth, acceptance, unconditional respect, and fun. We connect our students with the communities beyond our school, cultivating awareness of social justice and sustainability so students are empowered to take thoughtful action to address issues that matter. In our community, students learn that all people can, and should, make a difference.

Work That Matters

Students learn best when engaged in work that matters – to themselves and to the world.

Our students engage in work that matters for two reasons: because schools should be of service to their human and ecological communities, and because motivation is higher and learning is deeper when the work has meaning. Students pursue answers to questions essential to their own lives.

Students also work on projects that make a difference beyond the walls of the school, improving the communities in which we live. These projects serve as authentic assessments of student learning.

Ultimately, Watershed inspires and empowers students and educators to bring out the best in each other, to contribute to our communities, and to be active leaders helping to take on the world's greatest challenges.