

Community-Based Learning

We use a wide variety of educational practices at The New School. One of our favorites is Community-based Learning which makes use of the community as a learning laboratory. It might include using local libraries, museums and historical societies as places of research, outdoor science labs in different ecosystems, town hall archives, or construction sites.

The New School seeks to include local people in every way possible. They are community teachers, serve on our planning team, are members of our student Roundtable and Graduation Committees, take community courses and join public discussion groups. We ask them for feedback, welcome their help, and value their participation.

The New School has partnered with many organizations throughout the region, including Wells Reserve, The Brick Store Museum, River Tree Arts, The Chamber of Commerce, The Nature Conservancy, Seashore Trolley Museum, Project AWARE, Kennebunk Library, United Way, The Morgan Horse Rescue Farm, the Food Pantry in Alfred, Toddle Inn, School Around Us, Kennebunk Elementary School, the ACLU, Peace Action Maine, InVert, the Youth Advocate office, local businesses, and our immediate neighbors. Our students do field studies, apprenticeships, and community service with these organizations.

Students may choose to learn with community members through Independent Studies and Apprenticeships. These learning experiences allow students to explore potential careers or dive deeper into personal passions with mentors who share their enthusiasm. Apprenticeships and Independent Studies are designed with the help of Advisors.

Active Citizenship and Community Service

The New School believes that citizenship is learned by practicing. Our school is run democratically and all students can serve on any committee or board and be as involved as they wish in decision making. Being active citizens includes the world beyond the school. It is our belief that community service should become a natural part of life, which is why service projects are embedded within our curriculum. We also set aside a minimum of four days a year to Give Back to our communities. Giving Back Days are whole-school community service opportunities. We work with local organizations to help local people throughout the year.

Environmental Stewardship

Understanding the interconnectedness between humans and the environment is an essential skill. We recycle everything, compost our food wastes, are learning to reuse and reduce, ride bikes instead of cars, use 100% recycled paper, and are aware of our buying habits. We demonstrate our knowledge at local events and offer workshops in sustainability.

Emergent Curriculum Design

Students and teachers collaborate to create a new course schedule every semester. Course offerings are based on student interest and student needs. Within specific classes, students continue to negotiate with teachers to find assessments that fit their learning styles and assignments that are appropriately challenging. Students and teachers are in touch with the world around us and there is an openness to following emergent interests within the context of a class.

Students develop **Personal Learning Plans** which outline their academic, health and personal goals. Every student meets weekly with a **Faculty Advisor** who helps them design their Plans, document and assess their work, troubleshoot challenges that arise, build their portfolios, understand their learning styles, manage their time, be a contributing member of the school community and explore careers and post-graduate studies.

Courses at TNS are often **interdisciplinary** and include real work in the community — for instance, students might learn chemistry and biology while restoring a local wetland. During election years students study the U.S. Constitution, Bill of Rights, and the history of elections while working on referenda or helping candidates of their choice.

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

As a holistic learning community, we know there are many different ways to learn. We provide a variety of opportunities beyond regular courses, and are always open to new ideas for learning.

Apprenticeships: After students have completed their Self-directed Learning Seminar, they are eligible for an Apprenticeship, with a mentor. Students are expected to make an apprenticeship plan and final report, to document their work, keep track of hours, and give their mentor the expected paper-work that helps the mentor evaluate the student's progress and write narratives. The advisor oversees the Apprenticeship. All day Wednesday is set aside for Apprenticeships, but other days can be arranged as well. Examples of past apprenticeships: elementary education, veterinary medicine, a lawyer's office, baking in a restaurant, Seashore Trolley Museum, fly tying, costume design, water testing for Wells Reserve, local libraries, historical societies.

Challenge Courses: Challenge Courses are demanding courses require students to have a solid background in the basic skills required by the class. Challenge Courses require a higher level of self-direction, outside research, reading, writing, and class participation than other courses offered at TNS. Challenge Courses often explore mature subject matter and may not be appropriate for younger students. Challenge Courses are indicated as such on transcripts. Examples of Challenge Courses taught in the past: The Origin of Languages (Linguistics), the U.S. Constitution, Anatomy and Physiology, Soviet History and Culture, Modernism, History of Medicine: Bio-medical Ethics. Some Challenge Course may have pre-requisites.

Early College: Students in Phases 2 and 3 are eligible for Early College Programs at local colleges including YCCC, SMCC, UNE and USM. As a rule, The New School does not cover the cost of tuition for these classes, but there are benefits for families to consider. Early College builds confidence for college and gives students the opportunity to do higher level studies in areas of particular interest. They receive

both college and high school credit for their work. Families interested in taking college classes should contact the Dual Enrollment Coordinator at the school they are interested in taking course at.

Field Studies: Field Studies take students out of the classroom and into the field, literally Field Studies provide authentic, hands-on learning opportunities and may be offered through a class or as an Independent Study. Examples: 1) a student interested in Marine Biology worked in the lab at Wells Reserve on a special grant about Estuaries; 2) a group of students assisted the Kennebunk Light and Power Company in their dilemma of what to do with their dams by doing research for their board.

Independent Studies: An Independent Study can happen any time. It can be connected to a class for extra credit or personal interest, or it may be a free-standing study. If an Independent Study is not connected to a class, a mentor is required. Examples of Independent Studies from the past: Readings in Soviet history and culture, the battle of Stalingrad, motocross racing, mythology of Egypt, Japanese Art, the stock market, building a computer, designing an herb garden. Students work with their advisors to plan how to document, share, and assess their learning.

Intensive Studies: Several times a year, students experience Intensive Studies that are a week to three weeks long. An Intensive Study may be a whole school study, such as Health Week, Art Week, or Brain Study. A week-long intensive may be anything from an archeological dig, to an exploration of urban gardening in NYC, a trip through Maine to study history or building a solar hot water system, building a greenhouse, or having a film festival. Once a year there is a three-week Intensive. This may be travel study, or an at home intensive such as hiking the Appalachian Trail, cooking and culture, documentary film making, a theater production, cryptozoology or an art trek.



Travel Study: *Travel Study is done in memory of Jacques Downs, a founder of the school who told us that American young people will never understand their privilege, or the way other people live unless they travel, and we should never let money stand in the way of that pursuit.* Travel Study is a kind of Intensive Study that involves traveling. Each year students travel to a Spanish speaking country, as that is the primary language we teach. There they do volunteer work to learn about the culture and take intense Spanish lessons. We have traveled to Mexico, Guatemala and Nicaragua. Students may participate in our exchange program with Gymnasium Phillipium in Marburg, Germany. Students have traveled to the Everglades, West Coast and Sonoran Desert to study ecology, as well as to Trinidad and Tobago. There have been trips to do Katrina Relief and a study of the Mexican Border issues. Students prepare for Travel Study well in advance and work to raise the necessary funds to support the trips.

Explorations: Short, project-based offerings provided by students, teachers, and guest teachers from the community. Explorations allow us to try out new things and to get our hands dirty.

