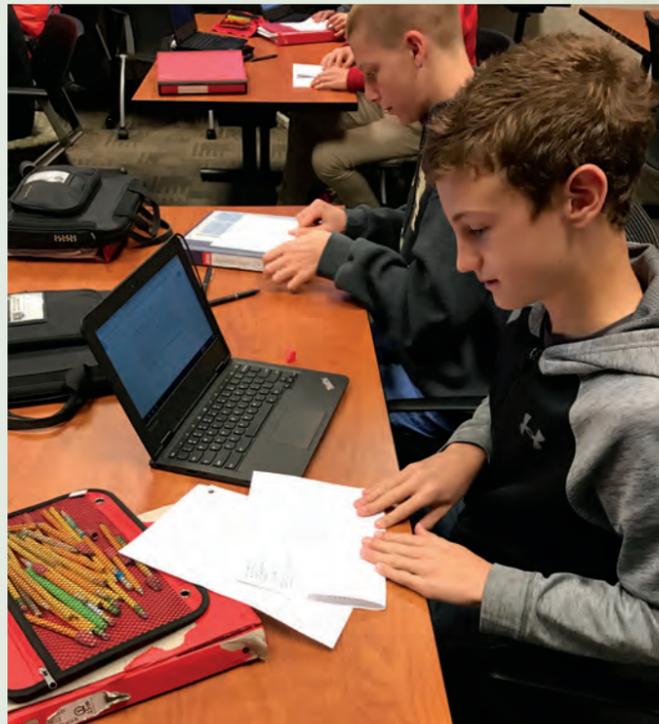


What Community Means

Middle School Programs Encourage Students to Explore and Engage



Seventh-grade World Geography students send letters to local and state officials as part of their unit on urbanization; above, a response from one Wake County leader

Ravenscroft Middle School students enjoy many opportunities for civic and community engagement. Sixth- and seventh-grade advisory groups volunteer with local organizations — sorting donations at the food bank and making blankets for Project Linus, for example — and see firsthand how committed citizens can make a difference.

AS THEIR LEADERSHIP competencies strengthen, they dig more deeply into issues or causes they are passionate about, exemplifying the model of engagement at the heart of Lead From Here.

WORLD GEOGRAPHY: Global Issues, Local Action

In the World Geography unit on urban geography, seventh-graders explore how humans' use of resources shapes (and reshapes) communities. From disappearing forests to traffic congestion, the

effects of urbanization are apparent on a global scale — but they are managed largely at the local level.

This reality, social studies teacher Greg Anysz said, allows students to apply their learning to “real-world experience they can actually see.”

“Our driving question is how we can raise awareness of the impact of urbanization around our area in a way that matters,” he said. “Students do research on urbanization around the world then choose a topic they’re interested in and can explore locally.”

Armed with facts, students write to local or state officials, typically in urban planning or natural resources departments, urging them to take action or congratulating them for a job well done.

“Many recipients email or write letters back, and some have come in to talk to the students about their work,” Anysz said. “The community is starting to take notice about the issues that are important to seventh-graders.”

MODEL U.N.: Multiple Perspectives, One Mission

Seventh- and eighth-graders interested in international relations explore diplomacy and develop critical-thinking, communication and teamwork skills in Model United Nations.

Central to the experience: both in class and at the regional simulation in the spring, students must represent the viewpoints and interests of a country other than the United States. The shift in thinking is challenging but essential, teacher Sameera Anwar noted.

“The goal is for students to take on new perspectives,” she said. “We spend time defining what community means, both locally and globally, because each goal we discuss has ripples and effects in other places ... We always go back to the U.N.’s mission, which is furthering human rights for all.”

Next year, Anwar will teach Diplomacy Through Dialogue, a year-long extension of Model U.N. that allows more focus on the “skills and tools” used in consensus building and decision making.

“Part of Model U.N. is seeing how interconnected we all are,” she said. “Learning how systems work and interact helps students start the process of getting involved, forming connections. It takes a while to



Model U.N. students prepare for a large-scale simulation of United Nations negotiations, representing the perspectives and priorities of another country

do, but the action piece follows the understanding piece.”

RAVENS IN ACTION: A Capstone Project

All eighth-graders integrate their service and leadership experiences in a capstone project called Ravens in Action, researching a global issue that has local ramifications — homelessness, habitat destruction, caring for the elderly — and identifying organizations that address that issue and ways to help.

“So much of what they do stems from their passions,” said language arts teacher Sarah Baker, who oversees the program with science teacher Tim Phillips. “They find ways to use that passion to help others.”

The project’s “action” takes place off-campus, so students engage with the broader community, and must provide direct service. Students often draw on their Lead From Here competencies to see it through.

“We’re asking them to be visionary: what can they do, add to, help with?” Phillips said. “The hardest part can be moving from research to practice. That’s when it gets strategic.”

At the end of the year-long project, students present outcomes and reflections to their families and classmates. For most of them, the project represents a significant commitment of time and energy. For many, the cause remains the focus of their community service as they move to Upper School. *R*



(left) Ravens in Action present their service projects and reflections to classmates and families; (right) GRAY BAKER '22's Ravens in Action care packs, which provide snacks and supplies for the homeless in Raleigh



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By Karen Lewis Taylor