



# Valley New School

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CEEB code: 500066

## SCHOOL PROFILE

### Mission

To create a learning community that empowers individuals to become purposeful adults

### School Community

Founded in 2003, Valley New School is a state-certified, public charter school of the Appleton Area School District open to 68 students in grades 7-12. VNS was established to offer students the opportunity for personalized, student-driven, project-based learning. Our philosophy of education adheres to three basic tenets: that learning *how* to learn is more important than memorizing a predetermined set of facts, that process is just as important as product, and that belongingness and autonomy lead to engagement, which, in turn, leads to achievement.

Community is built throughout and beyond our physical space. Our facility is large, open, and office-like. Students and staff have their own workstations in the main work area, and several small rooms, including a music/recording studio, science lab, makerspace, library, and kitchen, are located on the perimeter. We are purposefully located in downtown Appleton adjacent to the public library and bus station and within walking distance of Lawrence University, the Fox Cities Performing Arts Center, three museums, numerous businesses, and many non-profit organizations. Our students are allowed and encouraged to take full advantage of learning opportunities outside the building during the school day.

As a nationally recognized Lab School, Valley New School staff and students have trained numerous educators and guided the start-up or redesign of over 150 schools in the Midwest. Additional accolades include Charter School of the Year (2009) and Charter Innovator of the Year (2010) awards from the Wisconsin Charter School Association, 2010 Fox Cities Youth Alliance Service Award from the Volunteer Center of East Central Wisconsin, and one of America's Top High Schools by *Newsweek* (2015).

### Regional Demographics

Appleton is the cultural and economic center of Wisconsin's Fox River Valley region, which is comprised of eleven municipalities with a combined population of approximately 198,000. The Fox Valley is one of the fastest growing regions in the Midwest and boasts a high quality of life. Offering small town virtues with the feel of a bustling metropolitan area, Appleton has been cited for its economic growth and excellence in education by *Forbes*, *Newsweek*, *Money*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post*.

The Appleton Area School District, the sixth largest district in Wisconsin, serves over 16,281 students in both traditional neighborhood schools (fifteen elementary, three middle, and three high schools) and public charter schools (fourteen, various levels).

## INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING

VNS graduates have been admitted to a variety of post-secondary institutions including:

Augsburg College  
Beloit College  
Fox Valley Technical College  
Illinois Institute of Technology  
Lawrence University  
Lewis & Clark College  
Macalester College  
Marquette University  
Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design  
Milwaukee School of Engineering  
Oberlin Conservatory of Music  
School of the Art Institute of Chicago  
Seattle Pacific University  
St. Norbert College  
University of Kentucky - Lexington  
University of Minnesota - Twin Cities  
University of Wisconsin - Green Bay  
University of Wisconsin - LaCrosse  
University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee  
University of Wisconsin - Oshkosh  
University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point

## Innovative Curriculum

Valley New School is a student-driven, project-based environment. Students, with the assistance of parents/guardians and advisors, are responsible for developing Personalized Learning Plans. The bulk of their learning plans is comprised of comprehensive, independent research projects on topics of their choice. These projects emphasize the processes of learning as well as fulfillment of academic standards. Students are encouraged to explore a variety of subject areas each year, individually or interdisciplinarily. Long-term goals as well as personal passions influence project content; students who plan to attend college, for instance, create rigorous curricula, including Advanced Placement, college coursework through Early College Credit/Start College Now, internships, and/or study abroad.

## Evaluation

Valley New School utilizes a credit system to evaluate student work for quality and quantity. Quality is determined first. During a 30-60 minute assessment meeting with two advisors, the student must defend their learning, speaking to and showing evidence of both content knowledge and project process. Marks of quality are noted on a nine-part performance rubric. If high quality (B- or above in the traditional sense) is achieved, credit is earned and determined by the quantity of work, the number of hours spent on the project. **One VNS credit equals 100 documented hours of quality work.**

Since Valley New School philosophy centers on continuous individual improvement, letter grades and class rank are not employed. When required, GPA equivalencies are calculated based on performance rubric marks. **One traditional high school credit/Carnegie unit is equivalent to 1.50 VNS credits.**

## The Project Process

Students follow a rigorous process to complete projects:

1. *Proposal:* After preliminary research to determine and narrow a project topic, students propose and defend project ideas to two advisors. The duration of the project and appropriate deadlines are also established based on three things: the estimated time necessary to research the chosen topic, the number of concurrent projects in progress, and annual credit requirements.
2. *Research:* Students do extensive research, utilizing a variety of primary and secondary resources as well as authentic learning experiences.
3. *Planning:* Students create plans to synthesize and demonstrate their learning during the Production phase.
4. *Production:* Students create works that demonstrate their research and learning, using self-reflection and feedback from advisors, peers, and parents to revise/develop until quality has been achieved. Each project must include at least one written (e.g., research paper, essay) and one non-written (e.g., painting, website, musical composition, video) product.
5. *Assessment:* Students present evidence of all steps of process, including final products, to two advisors. Parents are welcome to attend, and experts in the chosen project topic may be invited. Work is discussed and evaluated, using a rubric (see *Evaluation* above).

Please see the Project Process [video on our website](#) for more information.

## Graduation Requirements

In order to earn a diploma, Valley New School students must earn the required number of credits per year for their grade level as well as complete specific project requirements. Students who matriculate in seventh grade are required to earn a minimum of 54 cumulative credits.

### Credit Requirements

Grade 7	7 credits	Grade 10	10 credits
Grade 8	8 credits	Grade 11	10 credits
Grade 9	9 credits	Grade 12	10 credits

### Project Requirements

**English Language Arts:** Each year, students must earn 1.00 credit (100 hours) minimum focused on literature, literary analysis, reading comprehension, and/or writing.

**Math:** Students must earn 1.50 credit (150 hours) per year and are required to complete at least three high-school level courses.

**Family Project:** Students are highly encouraged to dedicate one project per year to subjects and activities that involve one or more members of their family.

**Service Learning:** Students must design and implement a service learning project annually, researching an issue/cause in the community and volunteering on a regular basis. The student body sets annual individual and schoolwide goals for service with a goal of 1.00 credit (100 hours) per student.

**Senior Project:** Every twelfth-grade student must design, implement, and defend an extensive capstone project that:

- Earns a minimum of 3.00 credits (300 hours of high-level work).
- Demonstrates detailed documentation and mastery of the VNS project process (see *The Project Process*).
- Has a strong focus on research. A wide variety of sources must be used; primary resources and firsthand experiences are mandatory.
- Has multiple products, including an in-depth research paper.
- Includes a professional oral presentation of the project topic and process to VNS students, staff, parents, and the public.

**Post-High School Planning Project:** During the junior year, every student investigates potential careers and college options. Multiple job shadows and college visits are mandatory. Products include a prioritized list of post-secondary institutions to which to apply during the fall of senior year.

### Additional Requirements

**Acceptance to a Post-secondary Institution:** In order to graduate, VNS students must submit evidence of acceptance to at least one of the following: college/university, technical/community college, the military, or an approved internship/apprenticeship.

**Public Project Presentations:** Three project showcase events are held annually, and participation is mandatory. The fall event is a fair-style showcase, the winter event is an evening of formal speeches, and the spring event takes a variety of formats (e.g., presentations for community organizations, a breakfast for local businesses etc.).

**Civics Exam:** As of 2017, high school students in the state of Wisconsin must pass a civics examination based on the United States citizen naturalization test.

## CLASS OF 2023 PROFILE

**Class Size** 12

### Post-secondary Attendance

4-year college	6
2-year college	0
Technical college	1
Military	0
Workforce	5

### Commitment to Service Learning

Total class hours for 2022-2023	903
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Average hours per senior 2022-2023	82.09
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### Senior Capstone Project Titles

*Conservation in Wisconsin*

*Veterinary Science*

*Living with the End in Mind:  
Thanatology & Gerontology*

*Producing an Album*

*The Psychology of Learning*

*Visualizing Architecture*

*The Secret Life of Bees*

*Wildlife Conservation in  
Media*

*Developing a Coffee Shop  
Business*

*Costume Creation & Video  
Editing*

*Small Business & Metal  
Fabrication*

## College Readiness

College-bound graduates consistently attend their first-choice school. Students who choose to enter the workforce upon graduation consistently garner stable positions in their chosen fields (e.g., corporate information technology, smartphone application design, home security installation). Project-based learning inherently teaches time and task management, organization, accountability, autonomy, resourcefulness, and communication skills. VNS alumni share that they are often more prepared to take on college-level work and independent living than their traditionally educated peers.

## Advanced Coursework

Students are encouraged to seek internships, study abroad, and take advantage of Early College Credit/Start College Now courses at Lawrence University, UW-Fox Valley, and Fox Valley Technical College. VNS students may choose to complete AP courses as independent studies or by cross-enrolling in traditional teacher-led classes. Recent examples of completed Advanced Placement courses include English Literature, World History, Calculus BC, French, Spanish, Biology, Art History, and Psychology.

## Composite ACT Average (2022-2023)

Valley New School students, like all students in the state of Wisconsin, are required to take the ACT college entrance exam in the eleventh grade.

Valley New School	19.6 (state administration)
Appleton Area School District	19.3
Wisconsin	19.3

## Admission to VNS

Valley New School is open to all students in the district and those open-enrolled from other districts who wish to learn in a non-traditional educational setting. Applicants submit a simple enrollment form. Applications are complete once parents and students attend an informational meeting. Names are drawn in a lottery for any seats available for the following school year, and a waiting list of 10-20 students is typical. Since VNS is a public school, students attend free of charge and do not have to reapply for admission in subsequent years.

## Our Faculty

### Andrea Fourness

#### Advisor

B.A., Science Education, University of Wisconsin La Crosse  
Licenses: Secondary Science

### Jennifer Kosloski

#### Advisor/Co-Founder

M.Ed., Interdisciplinary Arts in Learning, Lesley University  
B.A., Studio Art, Lawrence University  
Licenses: PreK-12 Art, Charter--Math

### Nicole Luedtke

#### Advisor/Co-Founder

B.S., Education, Northern Illinois University  
Licenses: Elementary Generalist, Secondary English, Secondary Social Studies, Charter

### Burke Wallace

#### Advisor

PhD., Leadership, University of the Cumberlands  
M.Ed., Curriculum & Instruction, Chapman University  
MBA, Taft University  
B.A., Political Science, California Lutheran University  
Licenses: Secondary English, Secondary Science, Secondary Social Studies, Principal, District Administrator