

STEAM Q/A From Orientation

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STEAM Academy Today's Meet Orientation Questions and Answers

Q: What are the major differences between traditional teaching approaches and SA?

A: STEAM Academy's instructional approach is very different in that we begin our planning with a real-life problem in mind for students to solve. Traditional schools generally start first with academic standards mapped across a school year, then teach toward those standards and try to connect them to real life as they go. That is very, very difficult because real-life problems are rarely if the sort that we use ONLY geometry, or ONLY Algebra II to solve them. Our approach begins with the problem, connects academic learning from across all content areas, and then academic standards are assigned "by opportunity." It's a very different approach, but it allows for our students to achieve high levels of learning within a context that makes sense to them.

In addition, our program places great effort into intentional planning for including the Arts in our curriculum projects, technology, and those workplace skills such as collaboration, creative & critical thinking, etc.

Another big difference is you will not see textbooks used in our school other than in very limited cases used as supplemental resources. Our students use free, online media for our learning.

All of the ideas above allow us to ensure kids are able to move at their own pace in most areas.

Q: What are the plans to incorporate technology into the classrooms this year other than Canvas and work online?

A: This year won't have to be spent learning about the do's and don'ts of Canvas, so we will have much more opportunity to begin using instruction as the learning tool it should be, rather than as the "event" it typically is in schools. For us that means we will be introducing new opportunities--in the form of apps, websites, etc--as we work through our problem-based curriculum. We know students simply MUST learn to use tools such as Dropbox, Evernote, Presi, and many, many more. We will see students this year filming and editing their own movies, designing with online tools and building objects, using technology to practice working collaboratively with partners in another location, etc.

Our STLP group this year is also going to take on a large responsibility in the planning and acquiring of additional technology the teachers and other students can use. We want students to be more involved in the process as well, and so they will have a voice as to what types of technologies they would like to see in the classroom.

Q: How will Math instruction be different this year?

A: In many ways Math can be the most difficult subject for students to learn, and for teachers to connect to real life problems. For freshmen we are continuing the practice of backing them all up to Advanced Algebra I in order to confirm their true mastery of those essential concepts. Sophomores are spread out at this point, and so will be more likely to be in different "courses."

In addition, we are doubling our efforts to connect Math directly to every project our students complete, and so that means there will be common Math experiences for all, e.g., Calculus concepts may be essential to designing a machine, and students will learn those concepts within that design process.

Q: Are computers/laptops required for students? Mac or Pc?

A: We do not require devices but they are strongly encouraged. Students simply need access to the type of technology they will use in college and/or career. We do have some devices students can check out for the day, but at this point it is not enough for a 1:1 ratio.

We are not a device specific school, so students may use whatever system or brand brand they choose. Our district tech staff will find ways for it to work for them.

The only thing we recommend when purchasing a device for your child is to look for a device with an actual keyboard. If you buy a tablet, buy a keyboard that can attach to it. The device also needs to be able to run basic Microsoft office features such as Word, Excel, and PowerPoint, or their equivalent in other systems.

Q: What are the latest plans for foreign language instruction?

A: Currently the language we offer is Chinese. Freshmen will not take a language their first year because we want them to focus on core instruction at first. They will begin Chinese I as sophomores.

This year's sophomores will finish Chinese II.

Q: Will more effort be put into hearing the student voice this year? Will you try to achieve ideas put out by students?

A: We think we did a good job of including student voice in our first year, but we can always be better and we are always looking for ways to include more student and parent voice.

One of the ways we've increased those opportunities is by directing involving students in the work of leading their school. This summer students served on our interview committees for hiring new teachers, planned and implemented a freshman boot camp, and will have participation in our advisory council. Student representatives will participate in our efforts to identify opportunities for problem-based learning, and will serve as project leaders in that work. Now that the school year has begun we are starting mentoring/advisory groups, a critical structure for our intentional work toward hearing student voice.

Q: The freshmen will be put in the basement right?

A: Sounds like a punishment the way you ask it, but yes, the freshmen classes will be on the bottom level of the building and the sophomore classes will be on the main level.

Q: Arts was the only elective covered last year. If any sections need more attention it is technology and engineering.

A: In addition to the Arts, students last year took Foundations of Technology.

Our freshmen will take that course this year, first semester, and will take Arts and Humanities second Semester. Our sophomores will take Creative Arts first semester, and will take a tech/engineering class second semester with Mr. DeBorde.

As our school grows and staffing dollars are increased, we will have opportunity for the Advisory Council to decide upon further electives.

Q: Is STEAM Academy associated with UK Criminal justice and as well as pediatric classes?

A: Our "official" partnership with UK is with the College of Education, but one of the roles they fulfill is to help us build further partnerships with other Colleges. Ms. Strange, our community liaison, is responsible for building those relationships, and if there is something specific within criminal justice or pediatrics that you would like to see, please contact her and we can get the ball rolling (As of right now, I do not believe that UK has a criminal justice program, but we can check on that for you).

Q: How is band going to work this year? Is Dr. Fisher going to run it again?

A: Dr. Fisher will be teaching the Creative Arts class and Arts and Humanities this year since the district has agreed to provide a part-time band teacher for us. Dr. Fisher will still be here to be a resource and may still help with band if his schedule allows. He will also still do Steel Pan drums but he won't be the official Band Teacher.

Q: Does the Online lunch account still work for STEAM?

A: Yes it does and our students didn't have any trouble with it. Please fill out the Free/reduced application online at FCPS.net as soon as you can to make sure that information is transferred.

Q: Learning about different fields of engineering?

A: At the end of last year we made contacts with UK Engineering and they are working with us. We are planning with Engineering Day at UK in the spring and Mrs. Strange is leading that along with Mr. DeBorde. We know engineering is a big draw for many students and so we are trying to make more connections with them. We are also working with local businesses like LexMark and Toyota to provide valuable career shadowing experiences and even possible internships down the road.

We are going to be meeting monthly with representatives of the North Limestone Community Development Corporation (NoLi CDC) to seek ways to involve our students in some of the grant-funded work they are planning for, and that will greatly increase the opportunity for STEAM kids to collaborate with real life Artists and Engineers working in our community.

Q: Who will be the teacher for STLP?

A: Mrs. Shockey and Mr. DeBorde will more than likely team up and take on this group. We want it to be more student-led as well this year.

Q: Can you remind students what the default Infinite Campus password should be?

A: Username: Student ID # and password: First initial/last initial/birthday in 6 digits (ex: ah101299)

Q: Please tell us about the Morehead Partnership.

A: Our STEAM teachers have the opportunity to teach dual credit courses through Morehead State University as long as our they have 18 graduate hours in their content area. Teachers would teach those courses at STEAM, but they would use Morehead's curriculum and final exam, and therefore the course would also count for credit at Morehead State University. As a partner with Morehead's State, STEAM would pay a nominal processing fee (max is \$1000K for unlimited number of participating students taking unlimited number of approved courses), and Morehead would waive tuition for their dual credit courses. The only cost for students would be the costs for books required for the course.

We currently don't have an official agreement in place between STEAM Academy, but our district is engaged that progress and it should be finalized in time for the Spring semester. We will join with other schools participating in our innovation zone. We will combine numbers if necessary, and so STEAM students may have expanded course options through Morehead State than most schools.

Most Morehead courses will transfer to any public in state college or university but it is ultimately up to the receiving university to make that decision.

Q: Will there be a limit to the number of devices registered on the network?

A: The limit is 2 devices at any given time per student.