

Hood Canal Middle School Students Excel in State Tests, Gaining Skills for High School

Strong relationships and engaging programs drive student growth and confidence at Hood Canal School.

SKOKOMISH, WA, UNITED STATES, November 8, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Middle school students at [Hood Canal School](#) have achieved remarkable success, surpassing state averages in four out of five [Smarter Balanced Assessment](#) (SBA) categories and outperforming nearly all neighboring districts.

This milestone reflects the dedication of Hood Canal's middle school team to fostering relationships, boosting student confidence, and helping students reach their full potential.



Hood Canal Middle School students pause during a hike to take in the view of the Olympic Mountains, building teamwork and resilience outside the classroom.

In this year's assessments, seventh and eighth graders exceeded the state average in English/language arts for both grades, as well as in seventh-grade math and eighth-grade science. Additionally, half of this year's eighth graders are enrolled in Algebra I, a new high school credit-bearing course, marking a significant step forward.

"Our middle school team goes above and beyond to build meaningful relationships with each student," said Superintendent Dr. Lance Gibbon. "They see the kids as individuals with unique talents and help them recognize their own potential."

Hood Canal's middle school team of four teachers works with the same group of students over two years, building a strong foundation of trust and understanding each student's learning style. Beyond academics, teachers Heather Akiyama (science), Toby Syrett (social studies), Jessie Sage (English/language arts), and Dr. Suzanne Close (math) lead after-school clubs and enrichment programs that promote social and leadership skills. Programs like BOOTS and BYRDS outdoor education, Yearbook, Dungeons & Dragons, Robotics, and Service Clubs provide hands-on experiences that foster confidence and a sense of belonging.



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Dr. Suzanne Close

"Activities give students a chance to explore their interests in a supportive environment," said English/language arts teacher Jessie Sage. "They connect, discover their strengths, and find out what's possible."

Science teacher Heather Akiyama highlighted the team's collaborative spirit: "We meet students where they are, working together to lift them up. It's about challenging and supporting each other to meet their needs." Social studies teacher Toby Syrett added, "We build on students'

strengths, fill in gaps, and make sure they're ready for both school and life."

As students complete seventh and eighth grade, they are wrapping up their journey at Hood Canal, supported by countless staff members along the way. This accomplishment is celebrated by the entire school community as a testament to the dedication of teachers, support staff, and administrators who have guided these students from their earliest years.

With eighth graders preparing to transition to high school in the [Shelton School District](#), the middle school team emphasizes readiness as a core goal. "We're here to set our students up for success in high school and beyond," Dr. Gibbon said. "The skills they're gaining—both academically and personally—are tools they'll carry forward."

Teachers have instilled a strong sense of purpose in students around giving their best effort on state assessments. "We realized that motivation is key—if students don't see the value in doing well, they won't put in the effort," said Dr. Suzanne Close. "We help them see they're capable and that their hard work matters."

The school's success in reducing chronic absenteeism by half has further boosted achievement. "When students attend regularly, they have greater opportunities to engage, learn, and grow," noted Principal Steven Torres. Middle school students achieved the highest attendance rates in the school, reinforcing their academic progress.

This year's results reflect Hood Canal's commitment to a supportive and engaging learning environment. The staff and school community are proud of their students' accomplishments and look forward to supporting their continued success.

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