

Middle School Philosophy

Operated as a lab school by Western Carolina University (WCU) in partnership with Jackson County Public Schools (JCPS), The Catamount School (TCS) for grades 6, 7, and 8 is a learning community where all students are valued and care for themselves and others. We promote health and wellness and a commitment to learning through experience in a caring, collaborative, and socially just environment. We recognize that students have learning differences, and work to identify an individualized approach so that each student has the opportunity to succeed. TCS is designed to explore teaching approaches and applied learning opportunities to help every student discover their full academic potential in a specially designed environment geared toward meeting the unique needs of young adolescents. TCS is located on the campus of Smoky Mountain High School in Sylva, North Carolina.

<p>Purpose: Why we are here</p>	<p>The Catamount School is a learning community where all students are valued and care for themselves and others. We promote health and wellness and a commitment to learning through experience in a caring, collaborative, and socially just environment.</p>	<p>Guiding Principles</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Academic Excellence: All TCS educators take collective responsibility to increase the academic growth and achievement of each student. 2. Safety and Support: All TCS educators will maintain a safe and supportive learning environment for students and staff. 3. Leadership Development: All TCS educators are committed to developing a diverse group of highly qualified leaders who empower others. 4. Family and Community Engagement: All TCS educators will fully engage families, the community, and staff to work together for the success of each child.
<p>Direction: What we aim to do</p>	<p>We recognize that students have different learning differences, and we will work to identify an individualized approach so that each student has the opportunity to succeed.</p>		
<p>Beliefs: Our core values</p>	<p>We Believe in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting the Whole School, Whole Community, and Whole Child by promoting academic, physical, and social-emotional wellness • Personalizing instruction • Empowering world-class educators • Encouraging personal growth • Embracing diversity • Investing resources purposefully • Collaborating and communicating regularly 		

Key components essential in the planning and implementing of a high achieving middle school include the following:

- Students are assigned to academic teams.
- Interdisciplinary teams of teachers meet to review data and plan instruction together.
- Time is provided to nurture the adult-student relationships (advisory)
- An environment is created so that all students are successful and are recognized for their achievements.
- Students will have the opportunity to explore a variety of interests through elective/exploratory classes, clubs, organizations and other teacher-planned activities.



Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child

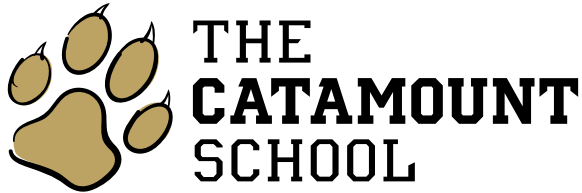
Through the collaborative efforts of fulltime TCS staff and WCU faculty, students experience a variety of activities and resources including physical education, music and arts activities, leadership experiences, and mentorship from experts in a variety of academic fields. We adapt our offerings over time to best meet the needs of our students and we pull from a range of academic programs including but not limited to parks and recreation, music, theater and studio arts, engineering, business, nursing, and leadership. We regularly dedicate time for students to engage with interests outside of the traditional academics which help students learn more about themselves and others. More information can be found on our [Enrichment page](#).

Community of Care

At the Catamount School, we maintain a team of university and school personnel with expertise in teaching, psychology, physical health and more to support the academic, physical and emotional needs of all students. Our school has developed a comprehensive team of experts to provide Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) to improve student success. In doing so we provide a community of care that ensures our class-wide and unique student needs are met.

Interdisciplinary Teaming

Interdisciplinary teaming in a middle school purposefully divides a larger student and faculty population in small units so that students receive more individual attention and recognition. Depending on the size of the school, there may be more than one team per grade level. The team typically includes four academic teachers who are called core teachers and other “elective” teachers who serve the students on the team. The core teachers (literacy, mathematics, social studies and science teachers) meet collaboratively to discuss students’ progress, plan teaching units, conduct parent conferences and consider other issues, which affect their students. The “elective” teachers meet with the core team to support the team’s curriculum and activities. Students receive recognition and support from members of the team. Team assemblies and team meetings provide recognition for excellence in academics, improvement in classroom behavior and perfect attendance. The team discipline policy is established by the faculty members on the team and is consistent within the team, thereby creating fewer guidelines that an adolescent must understand and follow during the course of a day. Homework expectations, organizational strategies and testing dates are developed by the team to create uniformity for the students. Parents can also benefit from middle school teaming. Parents can collaborate with the four academic teachers in one visit, maximizing time and effort. Parents benefit from hearing about their child’s academic progress in all of the core classes. A school counselor may be present at the time of parent conferences. Teaming allows teachers to know their students well. The team communicates special needs and learning difficulties to plan success strategies on an individual basis. Through the collaboration of these professionals, each child is more successful academically.



Homework Philosophy

The main purpose of homework at the middle school level is to increase student academic achievement. We believe homework assignments that are carefully structured by teachers and are meaningful to students have a significant influence on student achievement and academic success. Homework will be a natural extension of the classroom experience and a major opportunity for students to practice and further develop all levels of thinking skills. The completion of homework enhances student achievement, builds student study habits and helps develop a sense of student responsibility. The satisfactory completion of homework assignments or lack thereof, is a factor included in the calculation of student grades for each course. Teachers are expected to work cooperatively with their respective team members, department members and elective/exploratory teachers in assigning homework and in the development of evaluation criteria.

Course Offerings

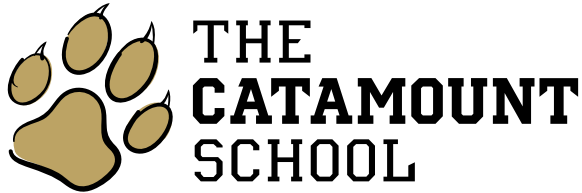
The Catamount School is organized to educate all students in grades 6-8. We offer a variety of learning levels to accommodate the students they serve. Students and teachers form a core team that works as a collaborative unit. Core teams are allowed the flexibility to move students within the team to accommodate academic needs. These core courses are based upon the North Carolina Standard Course of Study.

Teams accommodate a variety of educational levels based on test performance and develop instructional strategies to best meet individual student's needs. Core subjects are literacy, social studies, science, mathematics and reading. Within each middle school, beyond the core courses, there are three additional periods of time. This time frame includes a time for lunch, health and physical education. Our teachers and other professionals create a variety of enrichment courses and clubs in areas including fine arts, performing arts, career and technical education, technology, and world language.

Time may be used flexibly to provide for intervention needs; grade-level instruction, and accelerated opportunities. As a result, the integration of instruction takes place to provide more relevance to the student. Innovative, developmentally appropriate instructional strategies are incorporated to meet students' learning styles and needs.

Grading Scale

Effective with its inception, TCS has incorporated a standards-based grading model: Standards-based grading is a system that focuses on the effectiveness of instruction and the mastery of skills or standards for a specific subject. We believe the focus should center on the content taught rather than a letter grade. Students achieve a 1-4 on standards covered in the classroom and have opportunities to revisit standards that they have yet to master. Students, parents/guardians, and teachers better understand areas of focus for learning than in a traditional A-F grading system.



TCS Athletics (Grades 6-8)

The vision of CMS Athletics is to ensure all student-athletes become responsible citizens and demonstrate a spirit of generosity, sportsmanship, and teamwork as effective participants in society. **Sports Offerings** depend on student interest and, due to the size of TCS, our ability to fill a team. Typical offerings may include boys and girls basketball, boys and girls track, and cheerleading. Other sports may be offered such as soccer, volleyball, and/or cross-country.

Responsibilities of Parents and Student-Athletes

- Must adhere to all Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and CMS athletic eligibility regulations.
- Must complete and sign all required athletic eligibility participation forms.
- Must provide proof of medical or accident insurance.
- Must pay the participation fee or meet waiver criteria prior to the first contests in each sport season.
- Student-athlete must pass a health screening once every 365 days by a duly licensed physician, nurse practitioner or physician assistant.
- Student-athletes and parents must sign the Student-Parent Honor Code
- Must attend a required preseason meeting at the school prior to the sport season (fall, winter and /or spring).
- Student-athletes and parents must sign the concussion form.
- Must not accept prizes, merchandise, money, or any item that can be exchanged for money as a result of athletic participation.
- May not as an individual or as a team, practice during the school day or on a Saturday or Sunday.
- May only attend summer camps to which the athlete or his/her parents pay the fees.

Athletic Eligibility Requirements

Only students in grades 6-12 may participate in interscholastic athletic competition (State Board of Education Regulation). No student may be eligible to participate at the middle school level for a period lasting longer than four (4) consecutive semesters beginning with the student's entry into the seventh grade. The principal shall have evidence of the date of each player's entry into the seventh grade and monitor the four (4) consecutive semesters.

In order to qualify for public school participation, a student must meet the following requirements, but is not limited to the following requirements:

6th Grade

- A student who is promoted from the fifth grade to the sixth grade automatically meets the requirements for the first semester.
- Must have earned a 2.0 GPA from previous semester (beginning second semester).



- Must have passed a minimum load* of work during the previous semester (beginning second semester).
- Must be currently enrolled in at least one-half of the minimum academic course load.
- Must be in attendance at school the day of competition for at least one half of the instructional day in order to participate.
- May participate only at the school where he/she is enrolled.
- Shall not participate if he/she becomes 15 years of age on or before August 31 of said school year.

7th Grade

- A student who is promoted from the sixth grade to the seventh grade automatically meets the requirements for the first semester.
- Must have earned a 2.0 GPA from previous semester (beginning second semester).
- Must have passed a minimum load* of work during the previous semester (beginning second semester).
- Must be currently enrolled in at least one-half of the minimum academic course load.
- Must be in attendance at school the day of competition for at least one half of the instructional day in order to participate.
- May participate only at the school where he/she is enrolled.
- Shall not participate if he/she becomes 15 years of age on or before August 31 of said school year.

8th Grade

- Must meet local promotion standards (Waived for 2022-2023 1st Semester Only)
- Must have earned a 2.0 GPA from previous semester.
- Must have passed a minimum load* of work during the previous semester.
- Must be currently enrolled in at least one-half of the minimum academic course load.
- Must be in attendance at school the day of competition for at least one half of the instructional day in order to participate.
- May participate only at the school where he/she is enrolled.
- Shall not participate if he/she becomes 15 years of age on or before August 31 of said school year.

*Middle school: For athletic eligibility purposes, a minimum load is defined as passing a minimum of three out of four courses on a 4 x 4 format (or six out of eight courses in the A/B format) of block scheduling during the traditional school day.

Exceptional Children (Grades 6-8)

The 2.0 eligibility rule will be waived if (1) I.E.P. goals are being met; (2) satisfactory progress is being made in mainstreamed classes; and (3) has the principal's recommendation.