

Blended/Clustered Language Arts Classrooms at McClure Middle School



McClure Middle School is on a path of excellence for **all** of our students. Our staff collectively studies and applies researched strategies to meet the needs of our students and provide effective levels of support and challenge. We have spent more than four years embracing and utilizing the concept of **growth mindset** – the research-validated principle that we can teach students that their success in school is not stagnant or based on their past but, with grit and perseverance (and a supportive, intentional school environment), **all** of our students can and will grow.

Our Language Arts department has fully embraced the idea of growth mindset and supporting all students in rising to and successfully mastering high levels of challenge. The department has been defining and applying the rigorous Common Core State Standards for Literacy. This includes spending time developing a common definition of what rigor means in terms of standards and outcomes. Our Language Arts Department has determined that rigor involves attention to **depth of knowledge** and enhanced opportunities for **critical thinking**, **not** necessarily accelerated pacing and volume of work. This results in outstanding learning opportunities for **all** students.

Language Arts teachers are intentionally using data to inform their teaching practice to better serve individuals and groupings of students within each classroom. They have also developed common rubrics that include opportunities for all students to reach beyond the proficient level of achievement. Furthermore, our Language Arts Department has aligned its curriculum and skills across grade levels; this alignment already includes the same scope and sequence for our Spectrum and General Education classes. The department is comprised of a close-knit group of talented teachers who are dedicated to giving all students what they need to be successful in literacy and critical thinking.

To better serve and increase rigorous learning opportunities for **all** students, McClure Middle School's Language Arts Department applies a blended (or clustered) model for the composition of our Language Arts classes; all of our Language Arts courses will include students who have tested in to Spectrum, students who have not, and students who may have an Individualized Education Plan for various disabilities. There are no longer be separate Spectrum classes. To make this decision, we have looked at test data, grades, disciplinary, attendance, and school report data and have come to the conclusion that there is not a vast difference between the performance, behaviors, and attitudes of students in our General Education and Spectrum Language Arts classrooms. We can effectively serve our students in a blended model and we believe this model will lead to higher achievement and opportunities for rigor for **all** of our students.

The following are some informational bullet points that support this new model:

- **Outstanding teachers** – all Language Arts teachers provide “honors” level opportunities for rigor and depth of knowledge for all students.
- A focus on **differentiation**: our Language Arts teachers differentiate instruction in their classes; they share strategies and rubrics to serve the array of students in their classrooms every day. Seattle Public Schools Advanced Learning department stipulates that Spectrum students should be “offered appropriately deep, complex and/or accelerated curriculum.” This is not easy work but it is an obligation that our teachers continue to address in their classroom structures at McClure.

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- **Opportunity and Grading:** Teachers teach at an “honors” level with the assumption that all students can and will pursue this level of rigor. All students will have an “H” next to the course title on their semester grade reports. All students will be held to the same level of rigor to earn these grades.
- **Same format as the rest of the school:** All other departments at McClure are blended/ “clustered” model classes. All of our feeder schools have blended/cluster model classrooms. (Our math students are placed into the next math course in the sequence of math coursework. There are no Spectrum or Honors designated math courses at McClure.)
- **Studies** show that grouping high achieving students together is beneficial to their achievement. McClure has a significant number of high achieving students in our General Education classrooms so student groupings are robust and optimal with this model.
- **Studies** also show that students who are not performing at grade level benefit from having peers model grade level or advanced level work, behaviors and scholarly attitudes.
- **Studies** also show the most important skills for being a productive member of society are communication, problem solving, and critical thinking. Being part of a blended, diverse learning community enhances the opportunities for all three of these skills.
- **Seattle Public Schools Advanced Learning department recognizes clustered groupings in Middle School:** The “formula” stipulates that there must be at least six Spectrum-identified students in every clustered/blended classroom. This is easily accomplished in our Language Arts classrooms.
- **Supports:** McClure will continue to garner a robust cadre of tutors to help support McClure students in our Language Arts classrooms.
- **Diversity:** In a “blended” classroom, each student benefits from the diversity of others. Diversity is not a hindrance but a benefit to the acceptance and value of the other.

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