

GRAND RAPIDS PUBLIC MUSEUM HIGH SCHOOL

(GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN)

Public school, Grand Rapids School District

AT A GLANCE

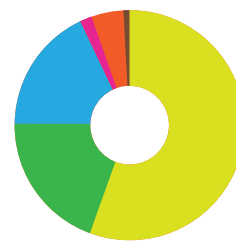
Grand Rapids Public Museum High School will welcome its first class of 9th graders in fall 2018 and add a new class every year.

The high school builds on the existing middle school, established in 2015 for students in grades 6-8. The high school will be located in a historic building in downtown Grand Rapids that formerly housed the Grand Rapids Public Museum and adjoins the city archive.

Founding Principal: Christopher Hanks

Projected Student Demographics (at Full Enrollment)

Student Enrollment: 360 Students (Grades 9-12);
180 students (Grades 6-8)



- **54%** White
- **19%** African-American
- **19%** Latino
- **2%** Asian
- **5%** Two or more races
- **1%** American Indian or Alaskan Native

43%

QUALIFY FOR FREE OR
REDUCED PRICE LUNCH

5%

ARE ENGLISH LANGUAGE
LEARNERS

A DEEPER DIVE

With the Grand Rapids Public Museum as home base, a “community as classroom” philosophy will permeate everything at a new Grand Rapids Public Museum High School opening in fall 2018. Building on the success of their existing middle school, the team designing this new high school aims to “tear down the walls” of the traditional high school, opening up a world of learning possibilities in the surrounding community and empowering students as problem solvers, active learners, creative thinkers and engaged citizens.

At the core of the team’s work is a simple idea: Disengaged learners are likely to become disengaged citizens, and the Grand Rapids community can change that trajectory by immersing students in engaging learning experiences. The school will serve as a base for community revitalization, civic engagement and community pride.

Instead of being housed within a traditional high school building, the school will be located in a former museum

facility that’s being custom-renovated to serve an exciting new purpose. Here, in a building adjoining the Grand Rapids City Archives, the museum’s collection of 250,000 cultural and historical artifacts will form the basis of a rigorous curriculum taught mostly through projects that enable students to engage deeply with their community. With this vast store of artifacts and documents readily available, students will have opportunities to touch, feel, see, study, research and analyze relevant materials to support learning across the curriculum. The GRPMHS curriculum will be interdisciplinary and theme-based, with particular emphasis on global awareness, sustainability, and technology and design, explored through the lens of the history, culture, economy and ecology of the Grand Rapids community and region.

Every item in the museum collection can tell a story about the community. GRPMHS will pioneer new ways to leverage community resources like these through a curriculum co-taught by field experts, scientists and

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(Continued)

researchers. The aim is to activate students to become ecological, economic and cultural problem-solvers on the road to college- and career-readiness. Students will also help to expand the museum's collections by acquiring, processing and curating additional materials in new artifact processing and design labs.

Museum staff will regularly teach classes, and students will partner with curators to help build exhibits that open up new learning for the community. "If we're just preserving [artifacts] for the future, that means we are missing an opportunity to have [the museum] used for its most noble purpose, which is education," Grand Rapids Public Museum President Dale Robertson said. A community commons area will be available to the whole Grand Rapids community—not just formally enrolled students. All this reflects the Museum's motto of "making knowledge open to all."

Principal Christopher Hanks describes the GRPMS approach to education as a "three-legged stool," built on a sturdy foundation of rigorous standards and supported equally by three core principles. First, the museum is not just a set of artifacts, but a mindset and distillation of the entire community and region. Second, place-based education is a commitment to the community and the real-world learning assets it holds. And, third, design thinking is used as a method and set of processes for engaging students in learning and problem-solving.

The museum will be a resource students use nearly every day, but that's not the only place they will learn. They will also spend time working with community partners and collaborators all over the city, from universities and nonprofit groups to local scientists, artists and businesspeople. Projects, including one designed to become the largest river-restoration project in the United States, will take students into every aspect of the their community and its surrounding environment. Lessons from community members will complement instruction by formal educators, with community

members proposing classes to teach as guest instructors. Examples from the existing middle school include everything from poetry writing and bicycle repair to a class focused on invasive species in the nearby Grand River.

The power in the Grand Rapids Public Museum School approach is that it is so tightly linked to the city's overall vision for its future. The school started as a partnership between Grand Rapids Public Schools and the Grand Rapids Public Museum to form a program for students in grades two to eight called Immerse, intended to "jump-start [student] development as problem solvers, communicators and innovators." Building on the success of Immerse, the school district and museum invited additional partners, including local universities and businesses; and a full middle school was born. The new high school, opening in 2018, will continue to refine and build upon the successful middle school program. The school is committed to attracting a student population that reflects the racial and socioeconomic diversity of the Grand Rapids school district. Students are admitted through a computerized lottery process. The school is working hard to spread the word about its programs and plans, for example, when students come to the week-long IMMERSE program or take a class field trip to the museum, they learn about the school and its offerings.

Overall, everyone involved with GRPMHS is on a mission to empower students as active learners, creative thinkers and engaged citizens, through powerful partnerships that eliminate the traditional barriers between school and community. Through rigorous learning experiences that connect students with community, research facilities and natural resources, and by tapping the expertise of museum educators, higher education partners, researchers, scientists and community members, they hope, not only to better the lives of their students, but to better the entire community they call home.