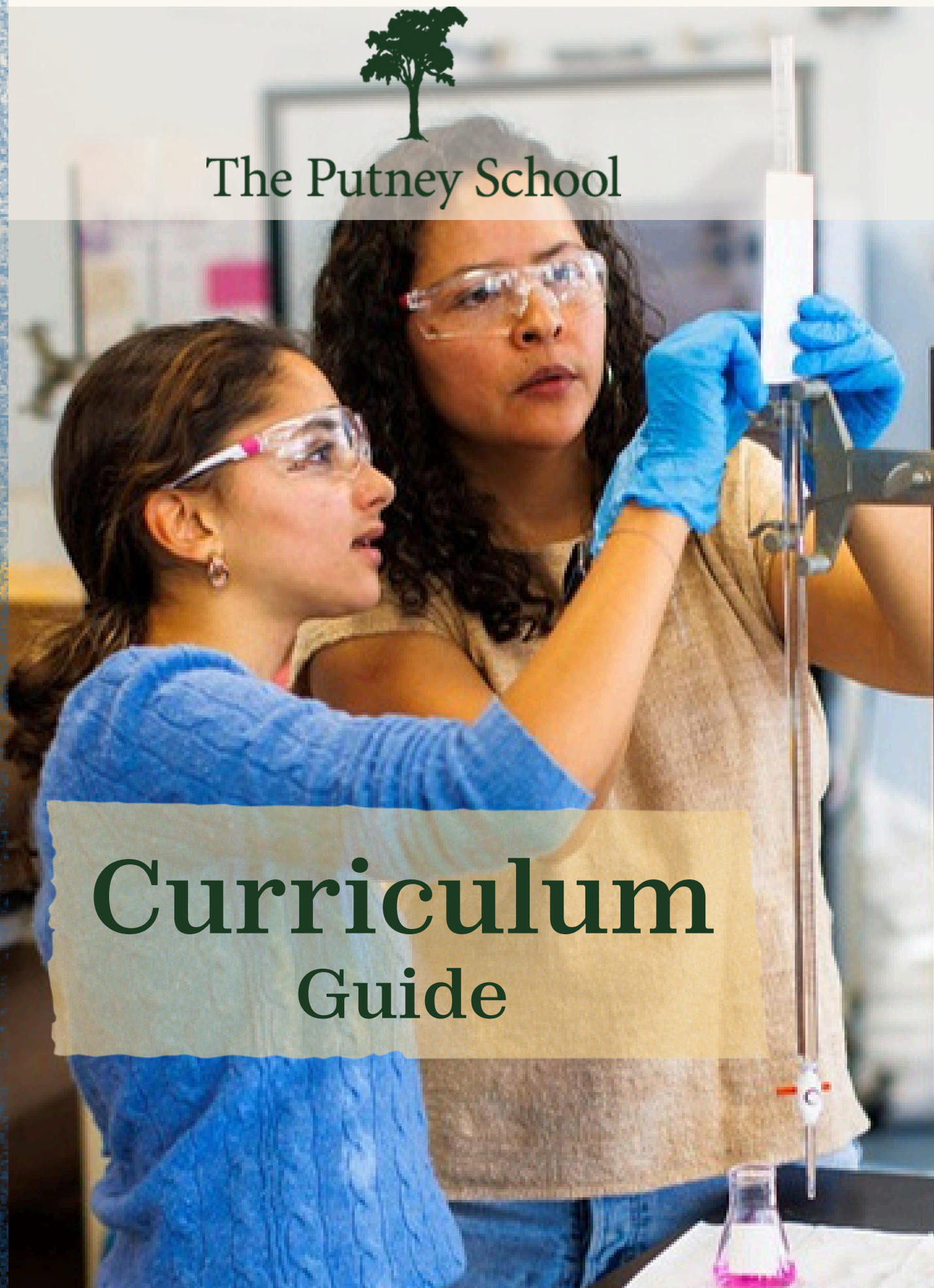




The Putney School

Curriculum Guide



Where curiosity meets challenge



so graduates are
adaptable, empowered, and *prepared*.

**Treasure the hard
stretching of oneself.**

— Carmelita Hinton
Founder of The Putney School



SUPPORTED, CHALLENGED, AND IN CHARGE

Putney students do more of what matters to them and less following teachers' scripts or prescribed steps. Students ask questions and **build frameworks for inquiry**.

Freedom to propose and pursue genuine academic interests requires developing responsibility for learning. The balance of freedom and responsibility nurtures motivation and deepens engagement. It also teaches **discipline, self-direction, and reflection**.

Students learn to hold themselves accountable to their learning goals within each course; they learn to share their excitement with one another, too. Here, curiosity and creativity meet structure, **questions drive discovery**, and students are empowered to think boldly.

At Putney, we practice and build students' confidence in turning a question or a wondering about the world into a **rigorous line of inquiry and an academic pursuit**.

The result is a highly creative, autonomous thinker and contributor to society.



Kate Knopp
Assistant Head of School
Co-Academic Dean



Kevin Champney
Director of Technology & Library Services
Co-Academic Dean

Want to learn more about progressive education?

Kate and Kevin's Suggested Reading

- *Experience and Education* by John Dewey
- *Understanding by Design* by Grant Wiggins
- *Love Learning* by Little and Ellison

The Putney Core

Preparing Students to Imagine and Create What Comes Next



The Putney Core outlines for students, faculty, and families the core competencies every graduate develops over the course of their Putney journey. The Putney Core builds on traditional concepts of excellence so that students—with teachers at their side—continually deepen their curiosity and confront the nuance of questions they generate themselves. The core competencies are rooted in **creativity, agency, and community**, enduring strengths that shape **independent thinkers** and **engaged citizens**.

Core Competencies

ETHICAL, CULTURAL & SOCIAL JUSTICE

A Putney graduate understands the ethical implications of questions raised in each discipline and that all fields may be viewed through differing cultural lenses, appreciates the value of other perspectives, and understands the complexities of social justice.

LITERACY & COMMUNICATION

A Putney graduate reads, interprets, analyzes, and makes meaning from a multitude of sources including written, visual, and auditory, and effectively conveys meaning in a variety of modes including written, visual, and spoken.

COLLABORATION

A Putney graduate works with others in building an intellectual, creative, and active community, and engages in productive dialogue, shows respect to a group, and supports common goals.

INQUIRY & RESEARCH

A Putney graduate turns curiosity into clear, useful questions, pursues a line of inquiry, and practices academic research in the context of different fields.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE & SELF-REGULATION

A Putney graduate prioritizes, manages time, and understands personal learning styles, strengths and weaknesses, and perseveres in the face of adversity and uncertainty.

ARGUMENTATION

A Putney graduate constructs arguments, evaluates one's own arguments and those of others, asks salient questions, and evaluates competing claims in the contexts of different disciplines.

DESIGN & BUILD

A Putney graduate articulates practical problems, imagines possible solutions, develops plans, attains skills needed to execute plans, and creates objects that address the identified needs.

Assessment for Growth

Our assessment method redefines the relationship students have with their learning and the quality of conversation they in engage with faculty.

ACADEMIC GRADES

Students receive detailed comments on their work rather than letter grades. However, grades are important for college purposes and for keeping track of each student's progress; they provide a snapshot of the student's current academic standing. Letter grades (A+ to F) are regularly reported to the Academic Office for each class. Students and parents see grades only for the purpose of college counseling beginning in the winter of the junior year.

NARRATIVE REPORTS

Teachers write directly to the student six times a year. As well as discussing a student's understanding, performance, engagement, and curiosity, teachers also offer areas for reflection and specific recommendations for improvement. Students then process this feedback by meeting with their advisor and setting new goals for their future coursework.

ENGAGEMENT ASSESSMENTS

"How do I more effectively engage?" With the goal of building a student's capacity to be in charge of their own learning, each class provides an engagement assessment on a scale of 1-3. These scores reflect a student's attendance, time management, engagement in and out of class with assignments, and their engagement with the classroom learning community.

At The Putney School, reflection is **not a pause between moments of learning—it is the learning.** Rooted in John Dewey's progressive philosophy, our pedagogy views experience not simply as action, but as the raw material for deeper understanding.

We do not learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience.

— John Dewey

The Role of Reflection

In Putney classrooms, reflection is **woven into the fabric of academic life.** Students regularly complete self-assessments, using them to identify challenges, recognize growth, and set meaningful goals. Our approach to grading reinforces this mindset: students focus first on engaging deeply with narrative feedback—reading it with intention, curiosity, and a desire to grow.

Reflection is **the bridge between curiosity and accountability.** It teaches students not just what they've learned, but how they learn. It helps them define meaningful challenges, take ownership of their progress, and shape an education that is truly their own. At Putney, reflection isn't an afterthought—it's what makes learning last.

ACADEMICS

English



We can always offer students more and more. Our faculty can take a student as far as they can go, so by the time they graduate, they've done much of what people are studying in college, or maybe even beyond.



— Nathan Zweig, English Department Chair & English Teacher

CONNECTING LITERATURE TO OTHER DISCIPLINES

Students learn to express themselves with clarity and power, both orally and in writing. They learn to generate authentic, nuanced questions and original ideas, while reading literature with sensitivity and exploring varied cultural perspectives. From poetry, essays, and creative nonfiction to government documents, memoirs, and classic novels and plays, students analyze and interpret readings, synthesize and present ideas, debate and discuss concepts, and discover and explore their own unique interests.

GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

Humans in the Natural World: English (1 credit, 9th grade)

Writing Narrative Nonfiction & Writing About Literature (1 credit, 10th grade)

Integrated Curricula: American Studies/Writing & Research (1 credit, 11th grade)

Two English Electives (1 credit, 12th grade)



COURSE OFFERINGS

Contemporary American Poetry
Creative Writing
Dramatic Literature
Introduction to Media Studies
Philosophy for Social Change

Say What You Mean
Shakespeare
World Literature
Writing for Theater & Film
Writing Narrative Nonfiction



ACADEMICS

History



STUDENTS ACT AS HISTORIANS

History students create meaning from our past and present, and develop an ability to understand a historical framework for the world evolving around them. Classes emphasize discussion and oral skills, writing with an emphasis on analytical essays, and critical thinking. Students are asked to write history—to formulate, support, and document their own views of the past. The use of primary texts is critical in all courses and student research builds from primary document analysis.

GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

Humans in the Natural World: History (1 credit, 9th grade)

Trends and Forces (1 credit, 10th grade)

Integrated Curricula: American Studies/Writing & Research (1 credit, 11th grade)

History Elective (0.5 credits, 12th grade)



We're interested in students understanding how the narrative is constructed, and how they themselves can play a part in constructing the narrative. These kinds of core skills are essential.

— Pat O'Connor, History Department Chair & History Teacher



COURSE OFFERINGS

American Environmental History

Comparative Religions

History of Democracy



History of the Cold War

Introduction to Economics

Social Documentary Studies

Trends and Forces



ACADEMICS

Science



REAL-WORLD FIELD WORK

Science at Putney revives, instills, and encourages curiosity about the natural world by equipping students with the habits of mind needed to ask and answer questions using the scientific method. Courses introduce fundamental biological, chemical, and physical principles through active inquiry, experimentation, direct instruction, model building, field work, and exercises in problem-solving. Students develop an understanding of essential methods and content sufficient for lifelong learning, responsible citizenship, and for further study of science at the university level.

GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

Humans in the Natural World: Science (1 credit, 9th grade)
Biological Laboratory (1 credit)
Physical Science Laboratory (1 credit)
A fourth credit is *highly* encouraged.



We want our students to come through our science curriculum still excited to know that there's so much more to be in awe of and to be curious about the world and learning how it works.

— Dawn Zweig, Science Department Chair & Science Teacher

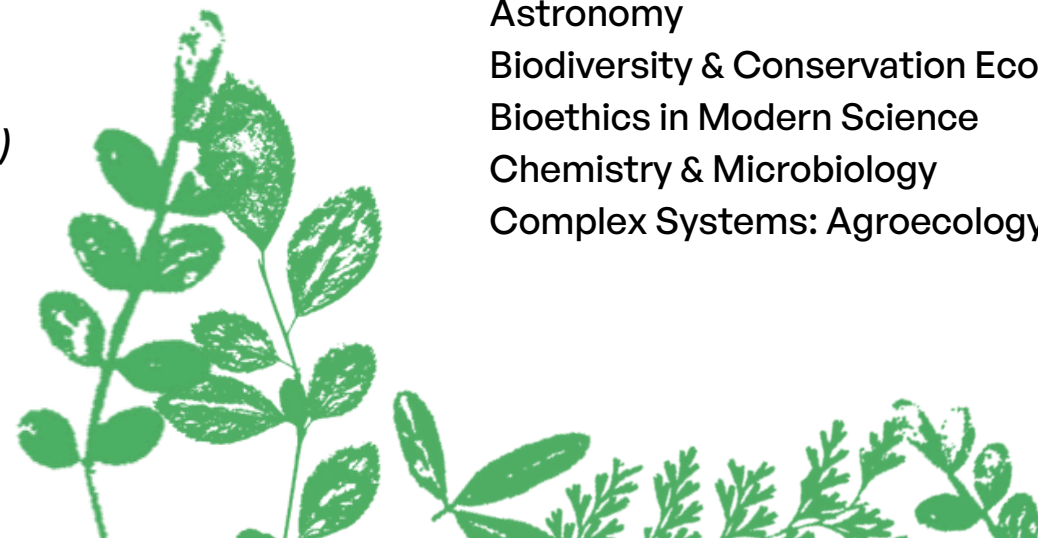


COURSE OFFERINGS

Anatomy & Physiology
Astronomy
Biodiversity & Conservation Ecology
Bioethics in Modern Science
Chemistry & Microbiology
Complex Systems: Agroecology



Engineering & Design
Environmental Philosophy
Field Ornithology
Physical Science & Engineering
Physics
Molecular Genetics
Organic Chemistry



ACADEMICS

Mathematics



TOOLS TO ANALYZE YOUR WORLD

Students learn the skills necessary for academic and personal success while building deep conceptual understanding through projects, rich problems, and explorations. In addition to the mathematical content, we place a heavy emphasis on these broad-based skills: thinking and acting flexibly and creatively, communicating with clarity and precision, collaborating effectively, learning independently, persevering, posing questions, and applying logical reasoning to problem solving.

GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

We require at least three credits of high school mathematics, including at minimum Algebra 2. A fourth credit is *highly* encouraged.



If you have that intrinsic motivation and curiosity, we will give you as much runway as you need. I have yet to encounter the student who's hit their ceiling while at The Putney School.

— Mike Keim, Faculty Development Coordinator & Math Teacher



COURSE OFFERINGS

Advanced Topics in Mathematics
Algebra 1 & 2
Calculus 1 & 2
Computer Science

Geometry
Investment & Finance
Precalculus
Statistics



ACADEMICS

World Languages



COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE

While the department's primary goal is for students to become active and proficient at communicating, learning a modern language and gaining insight into its culture(s) are also important for increased self-awareness and international understanding. Students are exposed to grammar and vocabulary through speaking, listening, reading, writing, and culture. Authentic materials, visiting speakers, and trips are central to this process, along with project-based learning.

GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

We require three credits of World Language, including at minimum an intermediate (3rd) level. A fourth credit is *highly* encouraged.



Our department allows us to teach a world language in a way that disrupts the notions of gender, identity, intersectionality, and interculturality—and to embed this into our lessons.



— Abelardo Almazán-Vázquez, World Languages Department Chair & Spanish Teacher



COURSE OFFERINGS

French 1-6

Spanish 1-8

Independent Studies in Foreign Language

Interested in another language? Ask your admission counselor about our independent study program!



ACADEMICS

Art



CREATIVE IMMERSION

Our art program is the heartbeat of The Putney School. Students are immersed in the creative world of theater, dance, music, and visual and literary arts as an opportunity to pursue in-depth studies and serious practices in an artistic field, or to simply further explore or discover an artistic outlet. We are deeply dedicated to holistic student growth, and one of our Fundamental Beliefs is that creative arts should have a place of prestige in our community.

GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

Academic Art Elective (1 credit)
Evening Arts (2 per trimester)



Involvement in the arts is an integral part of the Putney experience. Through a diverse range of disciplines and levels, students are empowered to pursue an artistic endeavor in a way that works for them.



— Robin Muller, Art Department Chair & Visual Arts Teacher



COURSE OFFERINGS

- | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| Ceramics | Guitar Intensive | Painting |
| Concepts in Sound | History and Language of Art | Photography |
| Design Build | Independent Topics in Music | Printmaking |
| Digital Filmmaking | Jazz Intensive | Recording & Production |
| Digital Imaging | Musical Theater | Sculpture |
| Drawing | Music Composition | Studio Art Intensive |
| Drawing & Painting | Music Foundations | Theater Elements |
| Experimental Performance | Music Theory | Vocal Intensive |
| Fiber Arts | | World Music |

ACADEMICS

Integrated Curricula



We're all about exploring perspectives. For example, in studying land use in Vermont using a common theme of observation, we will discover how to observe differently through the lens of a writer, the lens of a scientist, and the lens of an historian.

— Kevin Champney, Co-Academic Dean & Director of Technology and Library Services



AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

Students' questions about the world are often interdisciplinary. All students at all grade levels develop critical thinking skills and use their creativity to explore the value each academic discipline offers as they learn about resources, economies, culture, and trade world-wide. Students learn that each academic lens offers new insights and more questions. Projects develop student skills in data analysis, research, and collaboration. Students learn how to present their ideas in multiple ways.



GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

Humans in the Natural World (3 credits, 9th grade)

American Studies/Writing & Research (2 credits, 11th grade)



ACADEMICS

Independent Learning



DESIGN YOUR OWN LEARNING

Independent work prepares Putney students for a world without operating instructions. Students propose independent study and choose a teacher to sponsor their work. In a structured process of proposals and regular meetings for reflection and feedback, students pursue their questions and design a line of inquiry. Teachers are guides who challenge and support students as they work iteratively and in partnership. Sharing their work and their learning with the community near the end of the term inspires other students to take the challenge.

GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

Project Weeks (4 projects per year)



Students have agency at Putney to seek a depth of work they wouldn't otherwise. If a student has a clear interest, they are encouraged to pursue it with an adult who is eager to explore the topic with them.

— Kate Knopp, Assistant Head of School & Co-Academic Dean



A LAYERED PROCESS

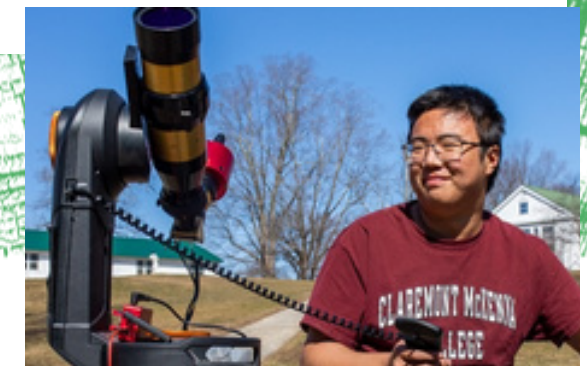
Project Weeks - Students carry out independent projects that are inspired by curiosity and tied to their academic work.

Independent Topics - Designed for highly motivated students who want to pursue a specific topic in math, science, music, or theater.

Independent Studies - Advanced students may design an independent course of study during the fall or winter trimesters.

Work Terms - Students may apply for an off-camps apprenticeship to gain hands-on experience from a professional.

Senior Exhibitions - Considered the capstone of our independent curriculum, students create a project that draws upon the breadth and depth of their educational experience at Putney.



SCHEDULING FOR DEEPER LEARNING

Fewer classes means deeper learning. Longer time blocks, no bells, and intentional spaces to connect offer students more time to be curious, collaborate, and explore ideas together.

Daily Conference Blocks allow for 1-on-1 meetings with teachers — ask questions, dive deeper, plan a project.

Time between classes is a minimum of 10 minutes — stretch, get outside, connect with a friend, reset the brain.

Students navigate large blocks and learn when they work best. This strengthens executive function and builds agency.

TIME	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
6:00							
7:00	Breakfast 7:30 - 8:00	Breakfast 7:30 - 8:00		Breakfast 7:30 - 8:00	Breakfast 7:30 - 8:00		
8:00	Academic Block 1 8:30 - 9:30	Academic Block 2 8:30 - 9:30	Breakfast 7:30 - 8:45	Academic Block 3 8:30 - 9:30	Academic Block 4 8:30 - 9:30		
9:00	Milk Lunch 9:10 - 9:25 Assembly 9:25 - 9:55	Milk Lunch 9:10 - 9:25 Dept. Mtg. 9:25 - 9:55	Academic Block 1 8:55 - 10:30	Milk Lunch 9:10 - 9:25 Sing 9:25 - 9:55	Milk Lunch 9:10 - 9:25 Assembly 9:25 - 9:55	Breakfast 8:30 - 9:20	
10:00	Conference Block 9:55 - 10:40	Conference Block 9:55 - 10:25	Conference Block 10:30 - 11:30	Conference Block 9:55 - 10:25	Conference Block 9:55 - 10:40	Saturday Academic Block 9:30 - 12:00	Brunch 9:00 - 12:00
11:00	Academic Block 2 10:40 - 11:40	Seminar 10:25 - 11:25	Academic Block 4 11:30 - 12:25	Seminar 10:25 - 11:25	Academic Block 1 10:40 - 11:40		
12:00	Passing Time 11:40 - 11:50	Passing Time 11:25 - 11:35	Academic Block 3 11:35 - 12:50	Passing Time 11:25 - 11:35	Passing Time 11:40 - 11:50		
1:00	Lunch 12:50 - 1:25	Lunch 12:50 - 1:25	Lunch 12:50 - 1:25	Lunch 12:50 - 1:25	Lunch 12:50 - 1:25	Lunch 12:00 - 1:00	
2:00	Academic Block 4 1:50 - 2:50	Academic Block 4 1:50 - 2:50		Academic Block 1 1:50 - 2:50	Academic Block 3 1:50 - 2:50		
3:00	Afternoon Block 1 3:00 - 4:35	Afternoon Block 1 3:00 - 4:35	Afternoon Block 1 2:00 - 3:30	Afternoon Block 1 3:00 - 4:35	Afternoon Block 1 3:00 - 4:35		
4:00	Afternoon Block 2 4:40 - 6:30	Afternoon Block 2 4:40 - 6:30	Afternoon Block 2 3:30 - 5:00	Afternoon Block 2 4:40 - 6:30	Afternoon Block 2 4:40 - 6:30		
5:00							
6:00	Dinner & Dorm Check-in 6:35 - 7:00	Dinner & Dorm Check-in 6:35 - 7:00	Dinner & Dorm Check-in 6:35 - 7:00	Dinner & Dorm Check-in 6:35 - 7:00	Dinner & Dorm Check-in 6:35 - 7:00	Dinner & Dorm Check-in 6:30 - 6:30	Dinner & Dorm Check-in 6:30 - 6:30
7:00	Evening Arts 7:00 - 8:30	Evening Arts 7:00 - 8:30	Evening Arts 7:00 - 8:30	Evening Arts 7:00 - 8:30	Study Hall 7:00 - 8:30		
8:00	Dorm Jobs 8:30 - 9:00	Dorm Jobs 8:30 - 9:00	Dorm Jobs 8:30 - 9:00	Dorm Jobs 8:30 - 9:00	Dorm Jobs 8:30 - 9:00		
9:00			In Dorms & Dorm Meeting 9:30				In Dorms & Dorm Meeting 9:30
10:00	In Dorms 10:00	In Dorms 10:00		In Dorms 10:00	In Dorms 10:00		
11:00						In Dorms 11:00	

Student leaders run our assemblies to build community and learning together.

Sleep in! Sleep is critical for learning.

Saturday Long Blocks allow time for field trips, research without interruption, or longer labs.

Free time on the weekends to study and recharge.

Graduation Guidelines

ENGLISH ————— 4.0 CREDITS

Humans in the Natural World	9th grade	1.0
Writing Narrative Nonfiction	10 th grade	0.5
Writing About Literature	10 th grade	0.5
American Studies/Writing & Research	11 th grade	1.0
Two English Electives	12 th grade	1.0

HISTORY ————— 3.5 CREDITS

Humans in the Natural World	9th grade	1.0
Trends & Forces	10 th grade	1.0
American Studies/Writing & Research	11 th grade	1.0
History Elective	12 th grade	0.5

SCIENCE ————— 3.0 CREDITS

Humans in the Natural World	9th grade	1.0
Two credits of laboratory science: At least one credit of biological and one credit of physical science.	10 th - 12 th grade	2.0

MATHEMATICS ————— 3.0 CREDITS

Three credits of high school mathematics, including at minimum Algebra 2. A fourth credit is highly encouraged.		3.0
--	--	-----

WORLD LANGUAGES ————— 3.0 CREDITS

Three credits of high school World Language, including at minimum an intermediate (3rd) level. A fourth credit is highly encouraged.

3.0

ART ————— 1.0 CREDITS

Two Academic Art Electives

1.0

PROJECT WEEK(S)

4 Projects per academic year.

EVENING ARTS

2 evenings of art per trimester.

WORK PROGRAM

6 work distribution requirements:
lunch waiter, dinner waiter, barn,
dish crew, general substitute, and
a land-use job. A job is required
each trimester.

AFTERNOONS

5 Afternoon Activity credits per
year: Two afternoons per week
minimum each trimester must be
a physical activity.

To graduate from Putney a student must complete twenty academic credits. Each trimester course equals a 0.5 credit. The featured classes equaling 17.5 credits are expectations towards graduation. Over four years, 24 credits are possible.

**...We must begin by creating
a highly engaged citizenry
that can ask questions,
think critically, is
respectful of diversity, and
can work collaboratively
for the benefit of all.**

— *Carmelita Hinton*
Founder of The Putney School



The Putney School