

Summit Middle Charter School: What we do and how we do it

Mission Statement:

- To provide a rigorous, academic curriculum that promotes high levels of student effort and academic achievement.
- To foster high self-esteem through stimulating intellectual challenge and meaningful academic accomplishment.
- To inspire in students a lifelong love of learning, a desire for self-development, **and good citizenship**.
- To create a community of peers who value scholarship, academic achievement, and creativity.
- To serve as an excellent preparation for students intending to study in rigorous college-preparatory high school programs, including International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement.

The Summit Board of Directors published this document in May 2009. The purpose of this document is to provide members of the Summit community—and people who are thinking of joining the Summit community—with some guidance about what kind of school we are. This document sets out many of Summit's goals, and some of the policies we have adopted to carry out those goals. This incorporates the key principles articulated by Summit's Founders. This document is *not* an official legal policy. It does not create any legal rights, and it is meant to be read as a statement of principles, and not to be parsed as if were a binding statute.

Summit is a happy place. We have outstanding teachers and administrators who love what they do. Our enthusiastic students embrace learning in a supportive and stimulating environment.

The really big picture

Summit was created so that there would be a charter school for students and families who want a rigorous academic program. Everything flows from this. The Mission Statement is derived from this foundational goal.

What families and students should expect

If you want to work hard in a rigorous academic program, Summit may well be a great place for you. Summit prides itself on its diverse student body and ability to help *all* students realize significant academic gains. All teachers and staff at the school work very hard to support every student, but sustained student effort and parental support are crucial for success at Summit. If you choose Summit for some other reason—such as it being a relatively small middle school or close to your home—you may find that Summit is not a good match for you. So if you come to Summit, be ready and eager to work hard and to be fully engaged with your learning.

Summit is *not* a school only for the intellectual elite. We have no admissions test. It is a school for people of widely varying talents who want to work hard and be challenged academically.

Curriculum and classes

The curriculum is set by the Board of Directors and then implemented and elaborated by the faculty. Summit has five core subjects: English, Math, Science, Social Studies, and World Language. Every student takes a class in every core subject every day.

The curriculum is fast-paced, and covers a great deal of material in every subject. The curriculum is founded on a specific set of benchmarks, approved by the Board, to be met over the course of the year, tailored to each particular class (e.g., Algebra A, English III, American History).

Teachers do not assign homework for the sake of homework. They assign it to advance learning. Families should expect a significantly heavier homework load than in neighborhood schools.

Because the curriculum is so extensive, we aim for a school year of approximately 180 contact days. This means that when you sign up for Summit, you are signing up for a school year that will likely begin earlier and end later than the rest of the Boulder Valley School District. Students are required to be in attendance for the entire academic year. Parents are expected to support their child's attendance, and to ensure that their child arrives at school on time.

Summit is a data-driven school. This applies to everything we do, and it especially applies to student assessments. We use standardized tests from time to time, and we use tests, quizzes, and take-home projects throughout the year. And of course we use the state-mandated CSAP. If you object to your student being tested, Summit is not a good fit for your family.

Students at Summit are placed in their English, Math, and World Language classes based on objective assessments, not based on their age. One of the reasons that Summit was founded was to ensure that English and Math placements would not be based solely on what grade the student was in, and to make sure that every student would take a world language class every day.

If an assessment indicates that a student should be in a particular class (e.g., English I as opposed to English II; Pre-Algebra as opposed to Pre-Algebra Honors), we are extremely reluctant to change that student's placement based on a parental request. Experience has taught us that when a student is placed in a class for which he or she is not ready, the placement often creates problems for the particular student, slows down the other students in the class, and diverts an unfair amount of the teacher's time.

We aim to have class sizes in the core subjects in the low twenties, although this can vary from year to year, based on scheduling and budgetary factors.

It is a core value of Summit that every student participate in Physical Education at least every other day.

At Summit, we offer electives in music, arts, and wide variety of other subjects which change over time based on faculty and student interest. Because of the heavy scheduling load of the five mandatory core classes plus P.E., we do not mandate that students take an art or music class. Over the course of a three-year career at Summit, students have the opportunity to take many different electives.

We do not attempt to match the full range of arts, music, athletic, or other non-core classes which are available at many neighborhood schools, which typically have an enrollment much larger than Summit.

Summit governance

Summit is an independent non-profit educational corporation, governed by a Board of Directors which is elected by Summit families and staff. Since our opening, we have operated under a charter from the Boulder Valley School District.

The Board is a working board which strives to be well-informed about all aspects of Summit. The time spent by the Board in governing the school is significantly greater than that spent by charter school or

independent school boards. We believe our particular approach is one reason for our success, and is part of Summit's culture of a highly-involved parent community.

The Summit Board of Directors makes hiring and ongoing employment decisions for all Summit teachers, and most of the administrative team, including the Principal, Vice-Principal, Dean of Student Life, and Counselor. The Board of Directors sets the annual salary for employees.

Except in regard to matters for which Summit's charter contract gives authority to the Boulder Valley School District, all policies and governance of Summit are the responsibility of the Summit Board. The Board determines the school budget, including line items within the budget.

As a public school, Summit is not affiliated with any religious sect or denomination. Likewise, Summit is non-partisan. We endeavor to guide our students in their growth as good citizens of the United States of America; we do not inculcate a particular ideology.

The Summit Board sets the curriculum for the core classes by approving particular benchmarks and objectives. Teachers determine how to meet the benchmarks and objectives. Textbook adoption and purchases are approved by the Board.

Summit faculty and staff

Summit employees are not tenured. In the spring, employees whom the Board has chosen to rehire are offered one-year contracts for the next school year. Hiring of teachers and administrators is conducted by the Board; this is an unusual policy, even for charter schools, but the policy has proven itself to be very successful in selecting excellent teachers and administrators.

There is no salary scale or set of step increases at Summit. The Board makes salary offers to teachers and administrators based individual assessments, and strives to reward excellent performance.

As a practical matter, Summit's commitment to relatively small class sizes makes it very challenging for Summit to match the BVSD pay scale, although we have endeavored to reduce the gap, thanks to our annual Tools for Learning fundraising campaign.

We do not require that teachers hold a public school teaching certificate. We do require that teachers be experts in their subjects. In evaluating teacher applicants, we pay great attention to an applicant's university academic record, including research and writing skills.

Based on past experience, we have found that the only teachers who succeed at Summit are those with high intelligence and commitment to Summit's academically rigorous approach. We hire accordingly, aiming to maintain a faculty of dedicated professionals whose subject expertise is complemented by compassion and creativity.

The Summit community

In the classroom, teachers maintain a positive atmosphere, in which all people must treat each other with mutual respect. We likewise strive to maintain this atmosphere in all interpersonal relationships within the Summit community. We insist that parents do the same, both in their personal interactions with people at Summit, and with the standards they require for their children.

Summit values free thought. We help students grow in their abilities to provide reasoned arguments for their point of view, while being respectful of people who hold different views.

Summit attempts to create a strong community in which parents are involved. Our Community Connections program provides variety of ways for parents to get to know each other. We offer many volunteer opportunities. Parents are now and always have been crucial to Summit's success. We encourage every family to volunteer at least ten hours every year.

Because Summit aims for significantly lower class sizes than in neighborhood schools, our per-pupil revenue is spread more thinly, which means that Summit has historically found it impossible to match salaries that teachers earn at non-charter public schools in the region. This is unfortunate, since Summit's teachers are among the very best to be found anywhere.

We have been able to close the salary gap somewhat thanks to generous donations to Summit's annual Tools for Learning fundraising campaign. TfL also makes it possible for Summit to acquire new technology and teacher-requested classroom tools

Another financial challenge that Summit faces is the need to raise substantial amounts of money for capital construction. For example, thanks to the 2006 bond election, the Boulder Valley School District paid the construction costs so that Summit now has, for the first time in its history, an adequate library, science classrooms, and art room. But in order to receive the bond funding, Summit was the only public school in the BVSD which was required to make an enormous capital investment on its own—namely the new gymnasium, which will cost close to two million dollars.

Accordingly, every family is strongly encouraged to participate, within its means, in the school's fundraising endeavors. Our ability to reach higher depends on the committed parents who make Summit one of the best middle schools in the nation and the very best middle school in the State of Colorado. We want to make Summit the best school it can be today, and an even better school for students in the coming years.