

Bernards Township STEM FAQ

I have both an 8th and 7th grader currently. Based on my understanding, my 7th grader will have an opportunity to join the STEM program right from the start. However, I am unclear about my 8th grader starting the STEM program. Can you elaborate on what the current 8th grader's options are and when they are available to them?

The earliest the program at Ridge can begin is the 2016-17 school year. This means current 7th graders would be the first cohort in the program. Current students at Ridge and WAMS 8th graders can take courses as they are introduced each year. Obviously, the more remaining years a student has at Ridge, the more STEM courses they will be able to take. For instance, a current 8th grader would be able to take an entire three course program of study in Computer Science or Engineering starting their sophomore year at Ridge.

For some kids, it may seem so early in their education to realize what they want to pursue (i.e., business, science, arts, etc.). If a child currently in 9th grade decides STEM is not for him or her but later decides it is, what are their options?

All courses, aside from Design and Creation, that are being introduced can be taken by any student at Ridge. Like any progression of courses, the sooner a student begins the progression, the more courses they will be able to take while at Ridge.

If the child in the STEM Program decides months or years later it is not for him or her, what are their options?

Students may leave the STEM cohort if they desire. Since the rest of the student's core courses remain matched with their grade level peers, they can easily move out of the program.

What are the class sizes for the high school stem courses?

The goal is to maintain a class size of 20-24 students, similar to science labs and technology courses.

In reality, what are the chances of a non-STEM student being able to take a STEM course? Will class sizes be able to accommodate students other than the STEM students?

The district has always maintained a policy of making every effort to accommodate student course requests.

Does the student go through the application process every year, or is it a one-time process?

It will be a one-time process.

What are the grade requirements to stay in this program?

At this time, we do not anticipate using grades as a program requirement. That being said, students in the program will be asked to meet certain standards of effort and collaboration.

I wasn't sure about what *sustainability* means in this context. I also didn't fully understand the phrase *cohort based*.

Sustainability refers to a focus on concepts like clean water, renewable energy and food supply issues through the lens of engineering practices that do not compromise the natural environment.

Cohort refers to a group of students that will stay together through the STEM program of study.

I also didn't fully understand how the academy model fits with the other requirements (Language Arts, World Languages, etc.). Do students in the academy mix with the other kids for these classes?

Yes, aside from the STEM specific courses – science and possibly mathematics – the academy students will take World Language, Language Arts, and Social Studies within the regular school schedule.

I didn't understand the tracks: do the kids pick one of the three at the start, and then follow it the whole time? In other words, a kid would apply to do the engineering track for four years?

Students would need to select Computer Science or Engineering at the start. Generally speaking, a student who is unsure is probably not a good candidate to participate in this model.

You mentioned the nontraditional learners and how this approach could be helpful to them. Do you see the academy model as *primarily* for these students? Or is it for kids with a particularly strong interest in science/technology? Or both?

We believe this model will be attractive to many types of learner, though we hope it provides opportunities for students who may not be well served by a more traditional comprehensive secondary school model.