

The Learning Collaborative at Dent Middle School

Community, Collaboration, Core Mastery

Program Handbook

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Tamala Ashford
Principal
tashford@richland2.org

Dent Middle School
2721 Decker Blvd
Columbia, SC 29206

Marc Turner
Lead Teacher
mturner@richland2.org

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Program Description

The Learning Collaborative has been serving Richland School District Two since 1991 as a program of choice for middle school students. TLC is specially designed to meet the needs of high achieving, highly motivated students in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades by providing a specialized, rigorous, intellectually-stimulating learning environment. This learning environment encourages intellectual and creative abilities through collaboration as we prepare students for high school and beyond.

Community

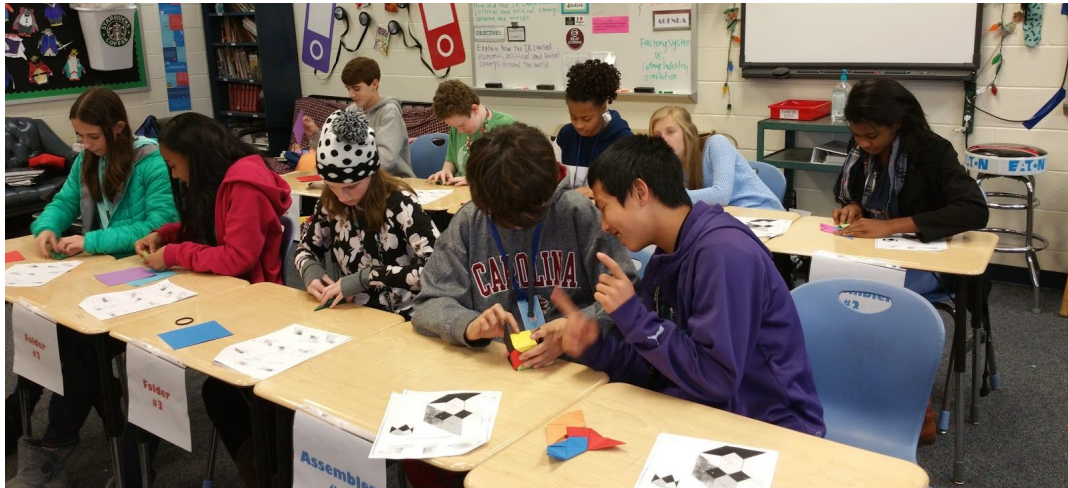
An important focus of the The Learning Collaborative is community. The activities and interactions from mentor groups, enrichment, and field studies help build the personal and group habits that make our academic and social relationships thrive and grow. Ultimately, these community experiences are the foundation that makes TLC an exceptional learning environment where we help our students grow into empathetic and engaging individuals.



Collaboration

TLC students participate in a core program of English, science, social studies, and math. Students pursue rigorous studies, engage in collaborative assignments, and work on interdisciplinary projects. This collaborative environment:

- demonstrates to students the interrelationships among subjects
- allows in-depth study and investigations of real-life problems
- allows for authentic performance-based assessments
- fosters better retention and transfer of knowledge
- provides for a variety of student groupings



Core Mastery

The Learning Collaborative encourages students to embrace the academic experience as a consistent and engaging journey that requires them to view learning as a process versus a performance. We seek to help students develop the habits of a mastery learner. Most importantly, we want students to be accountable for their learning. The rigorous environment of TLC requires perseverance and persistence in reaching personal academic goals. We want to help students develop skills to acquire and use information, to ask thoughtful and engaging questions, and to grow.

TLC Staff

The Learning Collaborative is comprised of fourteen educators who are committed to providing students with an innovative curriculum that challenges students while fostering their skill development and content mastery. Teachers are constantly developing new curriculum and evaluating existing lessons to nurture students' academic and creative abilities. Teachers are dedicated to their own professional development to create the best learning environment for students.

Lead Teacher

The Lead Teacher is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the program. This includes student recruitment and selection, curriculum development, and participation in district level magnet meetings. He is also a member of the Dent administrative team.

Grade Level Teams

Each grade level has four core teachers (science, social studies, English, and math) who are responsible for developing a unique curriculum that meets the needs of our highly motivated students. When appropriate, teachers integrate their subjects through interdisciplinary projects.

Latin Teacher & World Languages

In 6th grade, TLC students have the opportunity to take exploratory classes in Latin or Spanish. In 7th and 8th grade, students are required to take a world language. Latin has been the traditional language for TLC students, and the Latin teacher is a member of our staff. However, students have the option to take Spanish. At the end of the 8th grade course, TLC students will have earned a high school world language credit when they pass the course.

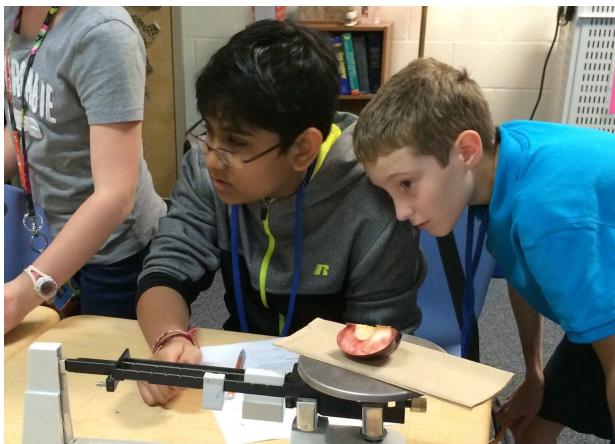


Curriculum

The Learning Collaborative started 27 years ago with an innovative curriculum that sought to engage high achieving and highly motivated students. Upon completion of our program, students are ready for the demands of high school magnets and honors programs, college, and beyond. Underlying that vision is an understanding that students come from a variety of academic backgrounds and must transition into our rigorous learning environment.

The hallmark of our program is student collaboration in the classroom. This goes on in each grade level in a variety of ways. Our teachers design lessons and units that encourage students to work together on solving problems and deepening their understanding of content and concepts. On a typical day, students may be building roller coasters, engaging in a Socratic seminar, solving math problems, or preparing for a simulation. The sound of our classrooms is often rich and boisterous with students exchanging ideas together about their work.

TLC also develops individual skills that lay a foundation for lifelong learning and instill the habits of a mastery learner. Each project is graded for cognitive skills. Based on grade level and subject level emphasis, work is evaluated with a common rubric used by each teacher in the program. These skills focus on writing, research, and problem solving. The skills rubric is calibrated to each grade level. This allows students to grow in their skill development over three years. These skills are aligned to honors level programs and prepare students for the challenges of the Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses they will take in high school.



“The focus on group work helped build skills for working as a team; the rigorous curriculum but relaxed classroom environment and hands-on activities truly made for a great three years. I really wish my high school experience could have been closer to the TLC experience - learning from teachers who put so much pride into their work each and every day and went the extra mile to make class interesting, creative and engaging.”

Kiran Ravindra

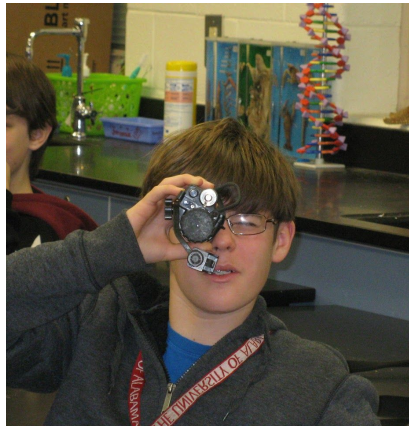
Cognitive Skill Emphasis

In order to promote growth, each core subject emphasizes the development of certain cognitive skills from 6th to 8th grade. Cognitive skills are brain-based abilities we use to attain, process, and apply new information in order to create meaning from knowledge and experience. Basically, they are the core skills our brains use to think, read, learn, remember, reason, and pay attention. Certain skills are emphasized in each content area and assessed in projects and assignments at least three times during the year. Here are the emphasis skills for each subject:

Science	Social Studies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Asking Questions ● Prediction/Hypotheses ● Identifying Patterns and Relationships ● Justification/Constructing an Explanation ● Modeling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Asking Questions ● Selecting Relevant Sources ● Contextualization ● Selection of Evidence ● Narrative
English	Math
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Writing & Composing ● Textual Analysis ● Speaking & Listening 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Precision ● Interpreting Data ● Modeling ● Justifying/Explanation

In addition, there are multidisciplinary skills that will be assessed across grade levels each year in assignments and projects. These include:

- Conventions
- Oral Presentation
- Preparation
- Precision
- Justification/Constructing an Explanation



One TWO One

Our program, like the rest of Richland 2, learns in a 1:1 environment, meaning each student is assigned an electronic device, such as a Chromebook or iPad, to facilitate learning. This offers students and parents the advantage of online access to curriculum, resources, testing, and grades. On their devices, TLC students use a variety of digital platforms in their classes.

The Summit Learning Platform is used to access course curriculum and testing. This platform provides parents and students access to the information they need to prepare for assignments, complete projects, access tests, and to see their progress in each course. Many of our students also use Digits and Math XL for their math courses.

Each grade level also uses a team website with a Google calendar where team, class, field study, and other important information can be located. Some teachers also use daily agendas, which can be accessed through the Web site for links to daily work and assignments. This is a great place to look when students are absent and need to see what they missed.



“My biggest take away from TLC in high school and college was having learned the importance of time management. As a student athlete, it was important for me to have a plan to keep up with my academics. These days, the part of TLC that helps me the most is the confidence I built in myself and my knowledge. When you embrace the curriculum and rigor of TLC, you’ll leave with such a solid foundation of knowledge, logic, and understanding, that you’ll feel capable of taking on anything. Learning to embrace the challenges that TLC presented gave me the confidence to embrace any challenge, academic or otherwise.”

Devon Walter

Assessment

Grade Calculation

The overall grade for a quarter is weighted in the following categories:

- 50% Cognitive Skills
- 40% Content Testing
- 10% Preparation

Cognitive Skill Assessment

Cognitive skills are assessed on projects and assignments using a specific rubric, given to students at the introduction of the activity. Each rubric level will be correlated with a percentage grade, dependent on the student's grade level. For example, in 6th grade, the following conversions apply:

$$4 = 100\% \quad 3 = 85\% \quad 2 = 70\% \quad 1 = 55\% \quad 0 = 0\%$$

Most major projects assess multiple cognitive skills; each skill is entered into the gradebook individually. For example, if an English essay is graded for "Explanatory Thesis," "Organization," and "Preparation," three separate cognitive skill grades will be entered. Students have the opportunity to submit project work ahead of schedule to receive timely, informative feedback from teachers on their progress before the final submission. At the end of the grading quarter, the lowest earned cognitive skill grade will be dropped. This provides each student with a safety net for continued growth on skills for which they need assistance and support.

Mastery Testing & Retakes

Mastery testing helps students and teachers identify specifically what has been learned proficiently and what needs further instruction. This method of learning establishes a level of content knowledge that all students must "master." In TLC, we believe that it is vital for students to have a strong understanding of content material; thus, students are expected to retest if mastery is not shown on a specific content assessment.

In addition to differentiated teaching methods and collaborative opportunities, students complete playlists for each content course throughout the year. A playlist is a series of content-based activities (readings, presentations, videos, virtual simulations, etc.) that allows students to work independently towards content acquisition. The goal of this method is to transition students to a personalized learning format where they take ownership and responsibility for their education. Completion of playlist activities has a direct correlation with success on content assessments. Teachers use playlist activities to provide meaningful, timely feedback to students about their learning process.

Students must complete diagnostic assignments, assigned by the teacher, before taking any content assessment. Assessments will take place in two formats: multiple choice and free-response. Mastery level for multiple choice assessments is a score of 80% or higher. For these assessments, students who do not meet mastery level will be assigned additional practice and/or be required to participate in

discussions with the teacher to aid them in preparing for a retest. Therefore, retakes can not be done on the same day as the original assessment and must be scheduled with the teacher. Students may attempt two retakes for any mastery test. After all three attempts have been completed for a multiple choice assessment, the highest earned score will show in the gradebook, and students will be asked to move on to focus on other material. All retakes must be completed before the quarter ends. Free-response assessments will only be issued once and offer no opportunity for retakes. Because these assessments allow students to articulate their knowledge in an open format, students are graded on a rubric that allows for more subjective assessment. These rubrics will be available to students before the assessments are taken so that they can prepare appropriately.

Preparation & Late Work

Because meeting deadlines is an important life skill for students, we expect that all major assignments and projects will be submitted in a timely manner. We also expect that students will take pride in their work and consistently submit their highest quality product. The cognitive skill of “Preparation” will be included for each major assignment/project, which assesses a student’s ability to follow directions, complete high quality work, and submit assignments within deadlines. This cognitive skill may also be assessed, at teacher discretion, for completion of academic activities outside of projects such as playlists, homework, and/or project checkpoints.

A late work penalty will be incurred through the Preparation cognitive skill on major projects. For each day an assignment is late, 7.5 points (out of 100) will be deducted from the Preparation grade for that assignment. If a major assignment/project is not submitted within five school days of the given deadline, a zero will be given for each associated cognitive skill, including the Preparation grade. Unsubmitted cognitive skill grades are final and will not be considered eligible when dropping the lowest grade each quarter.

Habits of TLC

At TLC, we want students to develop behavior that promotes lifelong learning and success. Each quarter, teachers provide feedback on how a student performs in regard to personal responsibility and citizenship. Performance indicators are ranked from 1 (needs frequent reminders and support) to 5 (consistently exceed expectations). Scores are not linked to course grades; evaluation is provided to encourage self-reflection, self-awareness, and growth in students.

Personal Responsibility	Citizenship
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Completes tasks and assignments on time 2. Revises work for quality; perseveres until successful 3. On task 4. Prepared to learn 5. Participates in learning 6. Accepts responsibility 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Listens to and respects others’ perspectives 2. Collaborates with others 3. Communicates clearly and appropriately, academically and socially 4. Follows classroom expectations

Schedule

All grade levels follow the Dent schedule. Each core subject has PLT at the beginning of the class period to instill content acquisition and study skills. This is when students are taught and practice the strategies to acquire information and prepare for their core courses. This time of the day is also used for testing of content during the year.

We want students to understand the connection to the content they are learning in PLT with the activities and projects in class. It is important that students learn how to make sense of new information in a course, independent of their teachers, in order to use class time effectively.

During the week, there is one day of extended PLT time. This affords more opportunities to work with teachers individually, in small groups, or with peers to clarify understanding of content prior to class activities and tests.

Teachers may also double-block classes for longer periods of work. For example, the English and social studies teachers may double-block to allow students two hours to collaborate and work on interdisciplinary group projects.



Mentoring

During the first quarter, TLC students are assigned to a mentor group. This group is usually made up of students from a Diamond Enrichment section, the school wide advisory program that meets every day. Mentors work with their mentees in a variety of groupings, including whole group, small group, and individual meetings. The topics in the enrichment curriculum assist students in several key areas, including academic and personal skills that will make them successful and productive members of the Dent and global communities. As time permits, the mentor group can explore topics they are interested in pursuing or that their mentor may want to introduce based on the needs of the group.

“Above all, TLC really taught me how to be a good student. It taught me at an early age how to approach topics that I really didn't understand. Math and science were never my forte, so being in advanced math and science classes taught me how to deal with the frustration that came with not understanding a topic and getting help from teachers. In addition, I learned how to manage my time and I learned study skills that I used throughout my academic career.”

Akua Dawes



Field Studies

TLC students participate in several field studies over their three years in the program. These learning opportunities help students grow academically and personally. By making the commitment to be a part of The Learning Collaborative, we expect that all students will be participating in each field study. There will be 1-2 overnight field studies at each grade level. Because TLC is a magnet program, drawing students from elementary and middle school across Richland 2, private schools, students moving into Columbia from other cities and states, and previously home schooled students, TLC students need an opportunity to get to know each other in an informal setting. Overnight field studies also help build strong student and teacher relationships each year.

Each field study offers activities that connect to our curriculum. They help develop cooperative group skills, camaraderie, and relationships essential for working in collaborative groups. Additionally, field studies help student make connections between the school and larger world.



Magnet Policies

Academic Policy

The purpose of the academic policy is to clearly outline our expectations for students' academic commitment and achievement in order to maintain the integrity of our mission. TLC students, by entering the program, have indicated that they choose to pursue excellence in academics. Thus, we expect grades to be at the B level or higher. An average of B or higher is exemplary performance.

However, any student with a grade of 69 or lower in TLC Science, TLC Social Studies, TLC English, Math, and/or World Language at the end of any quarter grading period will be placed on probation. As part of the probation, the student and parents will attend a conference with the TLC teachers and the TLC Lead Teacher to design an intervention plan. The student's intervention plan will remain in effect for the remainder of the year in that particular subject and will be reviewed or revised as the student's performance dictates. If the student earns a grade of 69 or below in the same academic subject during any other quarter, the student may be dismissed from the TLC program and placed in a more appropriate academic setting. In addition, if a student fails an academic subject for the school year, he/she will be dismissed from the program.

Disciplinary Policy

The TLC Honor Code states: **TLC students are truthful in the representation of their work and of themselves and are expected to respect the school, its property, and fellow students.**

Honesty

All students are expected to be truthful to themselves and others. It is considered academic dishonesty whenever a student willfully presents another's work, research, or conclusions as his/her own. Examples of academic dishonesty include, but are not limited to, plagiarism, copying the work of others, and cheating on tests, quizzes, or homework assignments. Students are expected to be honest at all times.

Respect

Respect for peers and adults is paramount in the TLC Honor Code. No student has the right to disrupt the learning of others. All students are expected to respect the campus, school property, and property belonging to fellow classmates. Defacing, destroying, or taking property without the consent of the owner is not acceptable.

Responsibility

TLC students have a responsibility to:

- conduct themselves in such a manner as to promote a positive educational environment
- not interfere with the orderly conduct of classes and activities
- not disrupt anyone's education

- put forth their best effort to meet classroom expectations
- be punctual and regular in attendance
- be responsible for all work missed when absent from class
- show respect and courtesy to all staff, students, and visitors
- respect the property and person of others
- conform to all school rules
- inform school personnel about misconduct or about persons who show disrespect
- behave in such a way as to bring credit to their home, school, and community

Accountability

For all TLC students, the purpose of the honor code is primarily educational. Accountability for one's actions is integral to the TLC educational process; therefore, consequences can be associated with breaches of the honor code. When a student behaves in a manner that is inconsistent with the TLC program standards, it is the responsibility of the teachers to educate the student about inappropriate actions. If a student is believed to have broken the Honor Code, the student will be made aware of the transgressions, educated in ways to avoid future misdeeds, and could face disciplinary action. In addition, parents and the Lead Teacher will be notified. Repeat offenders could face more severe disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal from the TLC program.

Family support is critical to the educational and learning process. If student behavior does not improve or a single student action is serious enough, then a student has violated the Honor Code and will receive the following consequences:

- **First Offense:** Parents will be notified of the infraction by the classroom teacher. The Lead Teacher will also be informed and will meet with the student.
- **Second Offense:** Parents will be notified of the infraction by the classroom teacher. The Lead teacher will set up a parent conference. The student will be placed on probation.
- **Third Offense:** The student will be dismissed from the TLC Magnet Program.

In addition, when a student receives a first suspension (either in or out of school) from an administrator due to a violation of school policy, rules, or the District's behavior code, the student is placed on probation. A probation letter will be sent home by the Lead Teacher.

When a student receives a second suspension (either in or out of school) from an administrator due to a violation of school policy, rules, or the District's behavior code, the student will be dismissed from the TLC program. A student may also be dismissed from the program following a recommendation for expulsion after the student is provided with notice of the reported rules violation and an opportunity to respond.

A student's standing in TLC or dismissal from it will be the decision of the school principal and magnet lead teacher. Although the general guidelines regarding the implementation of the Honor Code are provided above, in determining the appropriate punishment for a disciplinary infraction, the school principal and lead teacher reserve the right to consider any extenuating or mitigating circumstances.

Glossary of Terms

personalized learning time (PLT) - A time in which students have the option of taking tests, working on course content independently or in groups, or working on course assignments of their choice. Students can also ask teachers questions about assignments. Teachers may use PLT for small group or one-on-one instruction.

double blocking - When two or more teachers connect sections during a day to allow for longer periods of time to work on projects or labs.

grade weighting - The grade for the course is based on a set percentage for testing and cognitive skill assignments at each grade level. All middle school courses weight grades each quarter at 50% Cognitive Skills, 40% Content Testing, and 10% Preparation. High school math courses will include final exams that will account for 20% of the grade.

test retakes - TLC emphasizes strong test performance. Students must complete a diagnostic test or activity prior to taking a test. Students are expected to complete tests as scheduled. The expectation is students will pass tests with a grade of 80% or higher. Students who do not pass mastery tests with an above average grade can retake a test. Teachers will develop intervention programs for students who are struggling with testing.

playlists - Digital modules that include articles, videos, and activities to assist students with mastery of the state content standards for a course. Playlists allow students to work at their own pace. Teachers can tailor instruction to the abilities of individual students.

mentoring - Individual, small group, and whole class activities that focus on student academic progress and topics relevant to the developmental age of each grade level. Teachers will mentor whole class, small group, and individuals.

Summit Learning Platform - Comprehensive digital platform that houses assignments, testing, and mastery test grades for each student.

free response question test (FRQ) - Test format that requires students to explain, justify, or analyze content or concepts. FRQs are graded with a rubric and are not eligible for retakes.