

Profile

2018-2019



Community High School
of Arts and Academics

www.communityhigh.net

Note for College Admissions Professionals

Community High School is a rigorous, writing-intensive college preparatory environment. We believe it is the privilege and obligation of independent schools to offer independently designed courses, innovative in content and design. We evaluate narratively rather than using a letter or numeric grading scale. We hope the additional nuance inherent in our mode of evaluation is more helpful, though we do understand the relative difficulty this may present admissions officers whose institutions require comparative quantitative data. If such information is needed, please do not hesitate to contact our Registrar, Erin Coogan or our Academic Director, Josh Chapman.

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College Counseling Contact Information

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Précis

Community High School of Arts and Academics is a small, secular, private high school located in Roanoke, Virginia, with a commitment to seminar-based classes and to providing excellent scholars and artists as faculty. We are fully accredited through The Virginia Association of Independent Schools.

School Statistical Profile 2018-2019

- Faculty with post-graduate degrees: **74%**
- Demographic draw: **50-mile radius**
- Full time students: **65**
- Approximate full time student-teacher ratio: **4:1**
- Male/female student ratio: **25:40**
- Students on scholarship: **48%**
- Students representing traditionally underserved ethnicities: **11%**
- Students born outside of the U.S.: **3**
- Students who will be first generation college students: **6%**
- Mean ERW SAT (2017/2018) compared to Roanoke City: **639/561**
- Mean Math SAT (2017/2018) compared to Roanoke City: **554/541**

*Fully Accredited through The Virginia
Association of Independent Schools*



Description

Community High School (CHS) was founded in 2002. Our building, located in historic downtown Roanoke, boasts original wide plank flooring, exposed brick walls, and heart pine timbers, along with a flexible 150-seat theater, band rehearsal facilities, a public art gallery, painting and film-editing studios, and fully equipped science laboratories. Our location allows our students direct access to downtown, including regional institutions like the Roanoke Symphony Orchestra, Mill Mountain Theatre, the Science Museum of Western Virginia, the Virginia Museum of Transportation, the Harrison Museum of African American Culture, the O. Winston Link Museum and the Taubman Museum of Art, all within blocks of our campus.

Though CHS is not a free school, yet, that remains our long-term goal. Thanks to innovative and careful financial management, and to the committed generosity of our donor base, we were able to lower our tuition to \$5,000 six years ago, a fraction of the actual cost of educating each student. An additional third of our student body receives significant need-based aid.

As is standard in private educational institutions, the Board of Trustees is the governing body of Community High School. It is responsible for the financial well-being of the school, for setting policy and for hiring the Directors of the school in accordance with the By-Laws of Community High School. CHS is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) corporation. The Directors serve at the pleasure of the Board and are charged with the task of hiring and managing faculty and staff in accordance with the mission, policies and financial guidelines set forth by The Board of Trustees.

Assessment

Community High does not use a grading scale, either numeric or letter-based, to evaluate our students. All classes are offered Credit/No Credit. *More significantly*, each student's acquired knowledge and skills are described *narratively* and in detail for each class, each semester. Many Community High School students exceed the assignments and effort required for their classes. This is generally evidence of a student's deep investment in a particular class, or, when received in many classes over a semester, the mark of an exceptionally self-motivated individual. Credit with Honor does not represent an "A," and neither students nor their parents should view Honor as the expected standard of the college-bound, but as an exception.

Statement of Mission and Philosophy

Our mission, rewritten by faculty and ratified by our board on our tenth anniversary, is as follows:

Community High School is a small, secular, independent, college preparatory high school grounded in the liberal arts, founded with a commitment to seminar-based classes, and located in Roanoke's city center.

Our Mission is to develop creative and independent problem solvers with diverse backgrounds and abilities who will be scientifically and culturally literate, globally conscious, locally engaged citizens.

Our Pedagogy is founded upon academic inquiry, which emphasizes how knowledge is learned. Our students’ endeavors reflect the nature of intellectual and creative work in each respective field of study. Their efforts are assessed comprehensively and narratively with regard to students’ personal growth.

We Value trust, humor, empathy, curiosity, respect for the free exchange of ideas, and the acceptance of failure as an inevitable and necessary part of real learning.

We Approach the Arts as an essential form of intellectual inquiry and as a foundation of academic, emotional and social development, regardless of a student’s eventual academic field of study or career goals.

We Partner with area colleges, universities, cultural and civic organizations, and provide cultural programming for the community at large.

We Respect our students as scholars, citizens, and individuals, encouraged in their curiosity, active in their own education and responsible for their own achievement, as defined by their particular passions, goals, and circumstances.

Our Community, including students, faculty, families, alumni and board members, shares our commitment to compassion, citizenship, scholarship, and the intentional nurturing of place.

Curriculum

Community High was founded by university faculty trained in the liberal arts tradition; our curriculum reflects those origins and the mission they forged. At CHS, we hire teachers whom we presume to be wise, humble and curious, and trust them to develop and pilot their own courses as professors in liberal arts colleges do.¹ And just as most liberal arts colleges allow students to exceed minimal requirements in areas where they have special interest or talent, so do we strive to allow students to take more classes than would be typical in math, science, art, language or the humanities.

A Word on Divisions

We offer our students a college preparatory **Humanities** curriculum in a format different from that of other schools in our region. Our courses are generally offered by semester, and conducted in small, multi-age seminars. The dominant model is that of college. Instead of English 9, 10, 11, and 12, for example, this year a student may take a class on Twentieth Century Korean History and the Novel, another on the African American Experience, another on Piracy, and so on. As many preparatory schools and colleges do, we require all students to

¹ Though most of our upper level courses are quite difficult, we generally do not offer AP classes. There are philosophical reasons for this—it seems foolish to rob good teachers of the central pleasure and obligation of course design—and practical: an AP History course, for example, requires teachers to speed rapidly and shallowly through the same facts without regards to local history, the interests and personal backgrounds of the students, or the echoes and ramifications of current events. The same objections do not extend to Calculus, so we do offer that.

take two semesters focusing on American history², and we often offer courses in Geopolitics or academic writing focused on the developmental needs of underclassmen.³ Most classes, however, are likely to contain both literary and social science content, so that students are required to approach an individual course's content focus from a variety of curricular perspectives. Critical and creative writing, independent research, seminar discussion and close reading are all emphasized.

Students select courses investigating the literature, art, political and social history of several cultural regions (among them, specifically, the United States, Latin America, the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, Arabia, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Eastern Asia, Southern Asia) and eras (which divide by region). No class could reasonably contain all modes of inquiry—archaeology is more applicable in some courses, political science in others, for example—but over the course of their time at the school, students will be exposed to the research methodologies of a wide variety of social sciences. Similarly, students will be exposed to a wide variety of literary forms, not presented abstractly, but in their appropriate historical, formal, and cultural contexts, aspects of literature too often neglected in English classes.

Classes are small, capped at 16 and rarely exceeding 12 students; the lion's share of teachers' work is therefore concentrated in editing, coaching and continuing scholarship.

Though content perforce varies in Humanities classes, evaluation of performance and academic growth is typically clustered around progress in consistent areas. These include: *academic writing, problem solving and critical thought, test performance (including, but not limited to, memorization, extemporaneous argument and deductive reasoning), independent research, participation and seminar discussion, formal presentation, and academic reading.* Faculty discuss expectations in each of these areas with students and among themselves with the goal of graduating students who are prepared to excel in college-level scholarship and assessment.

Our **Math** courses are yearlong, and more closely align with those offered in peer institutions. As noted above, we do not generally offer AP courses at CHS, as we value the ability to develop responsive and independent curricula; our math department is an exception, as we do offer AB and BC Calculus courses for students who are prepared to pursue them. We also offer Statistics as an advanced course, with the recognition that for many professions and fields of study, grounding in statistical analysis is more valuable than Calculus. For students who take longer to master mathematical concepts, or whose pre-high school preparation prevented them from progressing to either Statistics or Calculus by the time of graduation, we provide necessary interim courses, such as F.S.T. (Functions, Statistics and Trigonometry). Occasionally, as appropriate, we also have offered terminal courses in practical applied mathematics in personal finance and related fields for students whose IEP's indicate that a more conventional preparatory path in higher mathematics is unwise.

The modes of assessment in mathematics center around testing, as one might expect, but our small class sizes allow teachers to observe students engaging in mathematical work every day.

² In addition to this, we ask all students to undertake one of a variety of courses offered focusing on targeted historical themes and literatures of post-WWII America.

³ In recent years, we also required freshmen to undertake specific coursework in these areas. We have since opened these requirements to allow students more agency in their early course selection.

Class participation is therefore not merely a measure of quiet, respectful citizenship, but of creative quantitative analysis. Our primary goal is not the mastery of process, but the nurturing of independent abstract reasoning.

Our **Science** curriculum contains relatively conventional high school survey courses in Chemistry, Physics, Environmental Science and Biology. (We do occasionally offer an AP Biology option as well.) Such courses are often multi-age, though Chemistry and Physics have a minimal math requirement, and can be taken in any sequence. All of our teachers have experience teaching on other campuses, including colleges, public and independent schools, and design their classes to meet or exceed normal college preparatory expectations in content knowledge. We do, however, in consonance with our mission, take special care to focus not only on knowledge mastery, but also on how science works, on how knowledge is learned. We require that all students pursue two of their three Science Courses with an additional Lab class and credit, so that they may actively engage in experimentation throughout their time at CHS. Assessment of students is therefore based on thorough and engaged participation in the laboratory process, as well as in testing, academic writing, research and formal presentation.

In addition to the courses described above, we are also able to offer special topic classes on subjects as diverse as Paleoanthropology and Astrobiology. Such courses are offered in three or four-year rotation, and allow students to explore subjects they wouldn't otherwise be exposed to until college or university.

At Community High, courses in the **Arts** are considered “core” classes, and are required and weighted in the same way as those in languages, humanities, math and sciences. Evaluation is based not on “talent,” a slippery concept in any case, but in progress in creative thinking, in risk-taking, in sustained work ethic, in the full execution of ideas, in discipline and precision in that execution, in collaboration and openness to critique, and in the acquisition of skills relevant to the course.

Given that processual focus, CHS also requires that students pursue additional relevant coursework focusing on the history and **Theory** of arts disciplines. Since Band class is performance-based, for example, music students must also undertake survey courses in theory. Film Production class teaches camera use, lighting, screenwriting, and so on, while Film Genre and History courses contextualize that applied knowledge. Evaluation here depends on the course, but is mostly done according to the criteria established for the Humanities.

At CHS, we teach four **languages** other than English, including Latin, German, French and Spanish. With the exception of Latin, all courses are taught with a greater emphasis on oral and aural fluency than is sometimes typical of high school language instruction. This is the benefit of exceptionally small enrollment, since classes in this division typically range from four to eight. Students are expected to attain vocabulary and grammar skills with the goal of entering college language instruction at a high enough level that fluency at college graduation in an additional language is possible regardless of a student's major. Students who wish to pursue additional languages, from Korean to Norwegian, are allowed to do so through individual instruction, online instruction or college enrollment.

Physical Education exposes students to a variety of fitness programs and sports, with a goal of creating life-long fitness. We have partnered with Roanoke's nearby YMCA so students

may augment outdoor sports activities—soccer, hiking, etc.—with programs of personal fitness, yoga and gym literacy. Students who already participate in travel sports or ballet as part of their busy schedules have typically been exempted, though some continue to participate.

Each year, qualified students supplement CHS classes with college courses at Hollins University, Roanoke College and Virginia Western Community College. In the fall of 2017, these range from courses in Criminal Justice to Post-Colonial African History and Sociology. This option is typically limited to upperclassmen who have exceeded expectations earlier in their high school careers, and are undertaken for full college credit as well as toward high school graduation requirements.

Students with specialized or esoteric interests are also encouraged to pursue internship opportunities at some of the many downtown institutions, ranging from the library’s Virginia Room archive of historic documents to the Roanoke Children’s Theatre. Such Internships may be pursued for credit, and are evaluated by a sponsoring faculty member to whom the student reports and documents her work.

Graduation Requirements

Math: 6 required, 8 recommended

Foreign Language: 6 in 1 language or 8 in 2 languages, 8 total recommended

Fine Arts: 6 required

Humanities: 14 required, 16 recommended

Elective: 8 required

Physical Education: 2 required

Science: 8 required (6 lab), 10 recommended

Note: Most credits reflect one semester’s work.

Department	Required	Recommended
Science	8 total (6 lab)	10
Math	6	8
Foreign Language	6 in 1 or 8 in 2	8
Fine Art	8	
Humanities	14	16
Elective	6	
Physical Education	2	4
Total	50(48)	56

College Counseling

At CHS, we work with each student and family to ensure that the college chosen is appropriate and suited to a student's individual talents and goals. In doing so, we take our ethical obligations seriously, discussing the application process at length with students, but allowing the work and writing, in conception and execution, to be their own. Below is a list showing the range of colleges that have accepted our students in the past four years.

American University	Mary Washington University Honors College
Bard College	The New School
Beloit College	Oberlin University
Bennington College	ODU School of Engineering
Carleton College	Pitzer College
College of Wooster	Radford University
College of the Atlantic	Randolph College
College of William and Mary	Roanoke College
Davidson College	Sarah Lawrence College
Dickinson College	Skidmore College
Earlham College	Stevens Institute of Technology
Emerson College	St. Mary's College of Maryland
Fordham University	St. Olaf College
Franklin University (Switzerland)	Swarthmore College
Furman University	University of Michigan
George Mason University	University of Glasgow (Scotland)
Goucher College	University of Richmond
Guilford College	University of St. Andrews (Scotland)
Haverford College	University of Virginia
Hampshire College	Vassar College
Hendrix College	VCU Honors College
Hollins University	VCU School of the Arts
Ithaca College	Virginia Tech
James Madison University	Virginia Tech School of Music
Kalamazoo College	Wake Forest University
Macalester College	Warren Wilson College



Service and Cultural Outreach at CHS

Although it is a private school, Community High takes its responsibilities as a citizen organization seriously; we do not wish for our students or our faculty to work or live separately from the community at large.

In addition to serving as a learning and exhibition space for our students, our gallery, Liminal Station – Teaching Gallery and Project Space, hosts roughly four artist-curated exhibitions a year, with work ranging from local to international, from obscure to academically established in a non-commercial, intimate environment devoted to experimental work which our students would not be able to experience otherwise.

The June M. McBroom Theatre, CHS's on-campus 150 seat flexible theater space, is similarly committed to diverse and public programming. As an acoustically and visually rich performance space in the heart of downtown, it has been a draw for both touring organizations ranging from Bluegrass wizard James King to the American Shakespeare Company, and local arts organizations including theater companies, literary organizations, and medical lecturers. Service, of course, extends beyond intellectual programming. Our central location allows our students to intern or volunteer at a variety of institutions devoted to refugees, the elderly, social justice, and the environment. Collectively, we have undertaken several projects during devoted campus-wide service days. This year our students have also volunteered at T.A.P., the area's Rescue Mission and at Blue Ridge Literacy.

