About the Museum School

Kevin Holohan

Grand Valley State University

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The Grand Rapids Public Museum School (GRPMS) occupies the newly renovated fourth floor of the Van Andel Public Museum Center in the heart of downtown Grand Rapids. It currently serves 120 sixth and seventh grade students (60 per grade). One grade will be added each year through twelfth grade, and the school eventually will provide a distinctive educational experience for more than 500 Grand Rapids Public Schools students. Resting upon three pillars—Design Thinking, Place-based Education (PBE), and Museum Studies—the GRPMS represents a shift toward 21st Century Thinking and Learning in both form and function. As a result of its strong emphasis on collaboration, unique approach to teaching and learning, and willingness to think outside the educational box, the GRPMS has gained national recognition. In October 2016, the XQ Super School Project awarded GRPMS one of ten $10 million grants for the vision it put forward to reimagine and reinvent the American high school.

Community Collaboration

From its inception, the GRPMS has been a model of what is possible when strong organizations and passionate individuals work together to serve students and enhance communities. Representatives from GRPS and the GRPM were the first to envision a school that could reside in and utilize the rich educational environment and artifacts of the museum. They also realized the school could be even more vibrant and innovative through direct partnership with neighboring educational institutions, including Grand Rapids Public Schools (GRPS), Grand Valley State University (GVSU), and Kendall College of Art and Design (KCAD). KCAD faculty contributed their expertise in Design Thinking while GVSU College of Education faculty brought their thorough understanding and application of Place-based Education.

Starting with a simple idea and an ambitious vision, these creative collaborators and problem solvers designed a school to provide diverse students with the same skills the partners used to make the idea a reality. People involved with the school continue to view collaboration as key and work with the City of Grand Rapids, Downtown Grand Rapids, Inc., and the national XQ Super School Project. Working together and drawing from one another’s strengths to solve problems is a consistent characteristic of students’ experiences within the school, as well.

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By Kevin Holohan, GVSU Faculty
school saying is, “The Community is the Classroom”. Students frequently go out into the surrounding community to identify problems or issues and collectively develop solutions. Teachers and administrators work with one another to create interdisciplinary units and culminating projects, and parents and community members are invited to share knowledge, skills, and passions in after-school learning opportunities referred to as Lyceum. The diverse web of connections between community organizations, students, faculty, staff, and community members runs deep and serves as the glue of the school’s approach to teaching and learning.

**GRPMS Curriculum**

The vision of the GRPMS is to engage students in a relevant and rigorous curriculum that prepares them with the academic, social, and innovation skills to be leaders and engaged community members. To realize this vision, the school design team, teachers, and administrators have drawn from Design Thinking, Place-Based Education, and Museum Studies as the central frameworks for delivering curriculum and assessing student growth and development.

- **Design Thinking**, as defined on the Grand Rapids Public Museum website, is “a widely valued creative problem solving process…with frequent [opportunities for] reflection and feedback” ([http://publicmuseum-school.org/curriculum/](http://publicmuseum-school.org/curriculum/)). The process is non-linear, values open exploration, and allows students to provide different answers to a question by drawing from a variety of perspectives. This instills within students the skills and capacities for lifelong learning.

- **Place-based Education (PBE)** pushes learning out into the community in which the school is embedded. Within a PBE framework, students are provided with opportunities to learn traditional academic content in authentic community contexts and to engage in identifying and addressing local issues of mutual concern. The goal of PBE is to situate learning in the places where students live, work, and play in order to foster a sense of responsibility to those places and the skills and agency to improve them.

- **Museum Studies** is the very fabric of the school. Museums tell stories, preserve culture, generate curiosity, and illustrate connections between past and present. Students are well-equipped to be storytellers, preservers, and problem-solvers through immersion in a museum environment and learning about the practices and processes museums use to perform these functions.

These three frameworks intersect with one another in unique ways, promote thinking outside of the “educational box”, and cultivate 21st Century skills and competencies.

**21st Century Learning**

The Grand Rapids Public Museum High School is scheduled to open to the first freshman class in the Fall of 2018. The work of designing and implementing a comprehensive high school curriculum and a teaching and learning model grounded in Design Thinking, Place-based Education, and Museum Studies continues to be a work in progress. However, this process accelerated and began to take shape with the impetus of national recognition and a $10 million grant supporting the project. Through the diligent collaboration between the Grand Rapids Public Schools, Grand Rapids Public Museum, and the City of Grand Rapids, the previous site of the Grand Rapids Public Museum at 54 Jefferson in downtown Grand Rapids is being renovated.
and will house the new Museum High School. The building will offer a state-of-the-art design studio and maker space, an artifact lab where students will engage with the thousands of artifacts preserved by the Museum's curators, and collaborative and instructional spaces for use by students and community partners.

Museum High School Curriculum Plan

Like many educators, those involved in designing and developing the GRPMS began with the end in mind. In other words, what knowledge, skills, and capacities should a student possess after attending this school? Through much work and deliberation, visits to other innovative high schools around the country, and support from the XQ Super School Team, the Museum High School design team developed a curriculum intended to foster literacies and skills around Design and Innovation, Global Awareness, and Ecological Sustainability. Students will be engaged in learning experiences inside the school and out in the community intended to develop fundamental literacies, foundational knowledge, creative thinking, and collaborative skills. Learning will take place in a variety of different formats and venues from college-like lectures to individual internships with local businesses and organizations. While providing students with essential reading, writing, numerical, and digital/technological literacies, much of the teaching and learning will be engaged, hands-on, messy, and interdisciplinary. These learning experiences, along with the skills and dispositions they are intended to nurture and grow, are a reflection of life and work outside of the confines of the school walls – the world the GRPMS wants its students to be prepared for, engaged with, and equipped to embrace.

GVSU Faculty and Staff—Key Contributors to Success

- Dr. Kevin Holohan has been a part of the core design team for the GRPMS since almost the beginning. He continues to help develop the high school curriculum and is assisting in the conceptualization of each thematic strand in preparation for the opening of the high school. In the collaboration, he utilized his research and expertise in place-based education and environmental justice to inform the design of the school.

- Dr. Erica Hamilton introduced GVSU teacher candidates to the GRPMS and project-based learning by conducting College of Education courses on-site in the GRPMS. She has provided pre-service teachers with opportunities to interact with, mentor, and tutor GRPMS students.

- Dr. Monica Harris seized the opportunity to expose COE teacher candidates to the unique approach to teaching and learning within the GRPMS. She also held COE courses within the school and consulted with teachers and administrators.

- Dr. Paula Lancaster is director of the Teacher Education Program at GVSU and a strong supporter and contributor to the partnership between GVSU and the GRPMS. She has assisted in placing COE students in the unique GRPMS classrooms and supports efforts to better prepare students for PBE instruction.

- Dr. Chris Hanks is a former COE faculty member. He was involved in planning the school and was chosen as the school’s first principal in 2015. He was instrumental in moving the school into the national spotlight through the XQ Super School Project. Since then, he has been on the ground as the school’s instructional leader.

- Michael Posthumus is a COE former employee and part of the GRPMS’s core design team since its inception. He currently is the Vice President of Product Management at the Grand Rapids Public Museum and plays a vital role in connecting the GRPMS with the museum staff, resources, and community connections.

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