



Exceptional Senior Program

Big Picture South Burlington

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Do you want to craft a senior year that allows you to...

- delve deeply into learning experiences that you create
- gain independence and self-awareness through internships and travel
- extend your classroom into the community and world
- pursue your passions
- stand apart from the crowd in the college application process

Then, the Exceptional Senior Program may be for you!

THE BIG PICTURE SOUTH BURLINGTON EXCEPTIONAL SENIOR PROGRAM

This is a program for motivated, independent, passionate students who want to do something innovative for Senior year. Students who have been successful in their first three years of high school can apply to this program for the opportunity to craft the senior year of their dreams. It will have aspects of an “Early College” year during which students earn college credit and skills. It will have aspects of a “Gap Year” during which students experience the openness and independence of real-world experiences that help them grow as people.

Exceptional Seniors will be part of Big Picture South Burlington, a school-within-a-school at South Burlington High School, that gives students an opportunity to approach learning in a new and exciting way. Each student participates in a democratic school community and creates an individualized curriculum based on his/her passions, strengths, challenges, and goals.

The Exceptional Senior Program includes*:

- **Senior Thesis Project:** A project in which each student uses her/his passions and expertise to give back to a community. This year-long project requires students to partner with community members to make a positive difference through a complex project.
- **College Level Courses:** Students will take at least two college level courses at local colleges or through Vermont Virtual Learning Collaborative which offers online AP courses.
- **Internships:** Students will have two substantive internships experiences, each

accumulating over 100 hours. Students gain skills by being part of real businesses and organizations and do projects that contribute to their internship site. Internships sites can include farms, local businesses, educational programs, or any other site of interest.

- **Service Learning:** Students will engage in a month-long term studying a community need and doing a service learning trip to address it. Past trips have been to North Carolina to work for Habitat for Humanity, the Boston Zoo, and Nicaragua.
- **Independent Studies:** Students design their own learning projects, and the sky is the limit. Want to start your own business? Support a political campaign? Build a computer? Put on a concert? You can choose whatever projects interest you and lead to deep learning.

** The motto of Big Picture is "One Student at a Time." Therefore, students can be granted flexibility if they propose alternatives ways to meet the goals of these requirements.*

South Burlington High School has been recognized by the Vermont Department of Education as an inaugural member of the League of Innovative Schools, largely because of the Big Picture Program. Our flexible, individualized path towards graduation is a model throughout New England.

Will I be on my own or part of a group?

- Yes to both! Students are part of the close-knit Big Picture community and also have tremendous opportunities for individualized learning experiences.
- Students participate in the Big Picture community through weekly community meetings, committee membership, and advisory, a "family" group of 15 students and one staff member that meets daily.
- Students develop organization, self-motivation, and time-management skills, and gain increasing levels of independence for designing individual projects and having self-structured time.

What do the calendar and weekly schedule look like?

- The year is divided into terms, including group terms such as orientation and service learning trips, and open terms when students choose their learning experiences.
- During open terms, all students and staff participate in weekly experiences including community meeting and advisory time (group time which could be a discussion, work critique, or other learning experience).
- One student's weekly schedule could include a day-long internship twice a week and independent work time for self-designed projects on the other three days. Another student's weekly schedule could also include a college class, participation in an interdisciplinary course to put solar panels on the school, and a college essay workshop.

What projects can students do?

Student learning opportunities are as endless as students' passions and determination. In the past, Big Picture students built a computer in a briefcase; taught dance, wilderness skills, and art; volunteered in India, Nicaragua, and Israel; designed and made their own clothing. Here are just a few examples:

- Neyna wanted to return to her birthplace in the Marshall Islands to reconnect with her family there and help the community. She fundraised, solicited donations, and wrote a grant in order to make this possible. During her trip, she distributed art supplies to local schools.
- Kristen drew upon her knowledge of horses to develop a nutrition and training plan to prepare a horse for sale. She learned about the business of selling horses and made marketing materials including online advertisements to sell the horse to a new owner.
- Jordan interned at the Regional Educational Television Network (RETN) and helped create the award-winning television program, *Student Work Zone*. He was recognized in a regional awards ceremony in New Hampshire for his work.
- Emina became a featured artist for Flashbags, a local company that creates bags with compelling images. Emina's work can be found at local businesses and at the Shelburne Museum store.
- John is interested in public speaking and is passionate about sharing his Big Picture experience. He has done numerous presentations at conferences, for visitors, for the State Board of Education, and for

the Vermont Department of Education.

How will this help me with college?

- There are many highly qualified students applying to colleges these days. Colleges are looking for students who have done something unique such as delving more deeply into areas of passion while continuing to pursue academic coursework. The Exceptional Senior Program allows for students to do both of these things. It provides the freedom to determine one's area of interest while also providing the structure and support to create authentic products representing all that a student has learned and can do.
- A key factor in determining college success rests on a student's ability to think creatively, organize themselves, and manage their time. Students in the Exceptional Senior Program will become well versed in these skills.
- We have worked closely with college admissions officers to develop a transcript that highlights the exceptional learning experiences of BPSB students.

"When hearing the students present their learning outcomes, from their practicum, I was blown away with how the students could easily make connections between academic theory and real-world practice; something that colleges and universities are striving for given the unfortunate gaps between theory and practice at some institutions."

- Ian Mortimer, Director of Admissions, Champlain College

How can I get additional information and apply?

Have a conversation with your school counselor if this sounds interesting to you. S/he can let you know about upcoming informational meetings for students and parents/guardians. You can find additional information and an application on our website (<http://bigpicturesb.net>).