



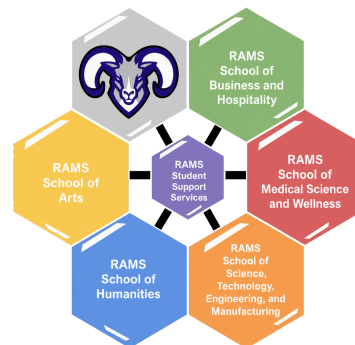
OLD SAYBROOK MIDDLE SCHOOL

**Exploration, Voice, and Skill Development in the
PK–12 Pathways Strategic Plan**

Old Saybrook Middle School: Where Pathways Take Shape

Pathways becomes real for students at Old Saybrook Middle School.

While the district's Pathways vision is often associated with high school course offerings and future career opportunities, the middle school plays a critical and intentional role in the PK–12 system. As outlined in the Old Saybrook Public Schools 2026–2031 Strategic Plan, OSMS represents the exploration stage of Pathways, the point at which students begin actively discovering interests, developing their voice, and connecting learning to the world beyond the classroom.



At this stage, students are not asked to choose a pathway. Instead, they are given structured opportunities to explore, reflect, and grow academically, socially, and personally. The initiatives highlighted in this booklet demonstrate how OSMS is building the bridge between Goodwin's strong foundations and the focused opportunities that await students at Old Saybrook High School.

OSMS's Role in the PK–12 Pathways Journey

The Pathways Strategic Plan is designed as a coherent progression:

- Goodwin School (PK–4): **Foundations**
- Old Saybrook Middle School (5–8): **Exploration**
- Old Saybrook High School (9–12): **Direction & Opportunity**

At OSMS, Pathways is defined by exposure, voice, skill development, and identity-building. Students experience a broader range of disciplines, begin reflecting on their strengths and interests, and learn how academic skills apply in real-world contexts.

Through new specials, student-led conferences, integrationist support, community partnerships, and Naviance implementation, OSMS ensures that students arrive at the high school prepared to make informed, confident choices academically and personally.

How the Work at OSMS Advances the Pathways Vision

The initiatives highlighted in this booklet align directly with the district's four Pathways pillars. Together, they ensure that Pathways is experienced daily by students and not just discussed conceptually.

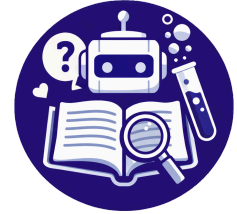
1. Belonging & Ram Identity

Student-led conferences, advisory structures, and consistent expectations strengthen student voice and ownership. These practices help students see themselves as capable learners and valued members of the Ram community, building confidence that supports engagement and persistence throughout the Pathways journey.



2. Interest Discovery & Exploration

Expanded specials, electives, and experiential learning opportunities allow students to explore a range of disciplines aligned with high school Pathways without requiring early commitment. These experiences help students identify interests, develop curiosity, and begin forming a sense of direction that will guide future coursework and opportunities.



3. Academic Skills & Readiness

Through integrationist support, differentiation, and aligned expectations across content areas, OSMS ensures that exploration is grounded in strong academic skills. Students develop literacy, numeracy, executive functioning, and problem-solving skills essential for accessing rigorous Pathways coursework at the high school level.



4. Real-World Learning & Partnerships

Partnerships with local organizations, businesses, and cultural institutions help students connect classroom learning to authentic applications. These experiences reinforce the relevance of academic skills and introduce students to how their interests and abilities can contribute to the community.



Together, these efforts ensure that Pathways is not an abstract concept, but a lived experience for every middle school student.

Why This Matters

Middle school is a pivotal time in a student's development. Without intentional structure, exploration can become fragmented or overwhelming. The Pathways-aligned work at OSMS ensures that students are supported as they navigate this critical stage.

By intentionally aligning exploration opportunities with academic readiness, student voice, and real-world learning, OSMS helps prevent disengagement, strengthens transitions, and ensures that every student has access to meaningful experiences that shape future decisions.

This work also supports districtwide goals of student retention, program coherence, and long-term success by ensuring that students see value in staying within Old Saybrook Public Schools as they progress toward high school.

Exploration Worth Celebrating

The initiatives highlighted in this booklet reflect a year of purposeful, student-centered work at Old Saybrook Middle School. More importantly, they demonstrate how OSMS is delivering on the district's Pathways vision in tangible, measurable ways.

Through structured exploration, academic alignment, student voice, and community connection, OSMS prepares students, not only for the next grade, but for the next phase of their Pathways journey.

As students move forward to Old Saybrook High School, they do so with:

- A clearer understanding of their interests and strengths
- Strong academic skills and learning habits
- Confidence in their ability to reflect, communicate, and grow
- A deepening sense of Ram identity

Pathways does not rush students to choose. It prepares them to choose well.

And at Old Saybrook Middle School, that preparation is intentional, aligned, and worth celebrating.

Pathways Connection: Academic Skills & Readiness

OSMS Integrationists play a central role in the Pathways system by ensuring that students develop the literacy, math, science, and executive functioning skills required for high school coursework and Pathways electives.

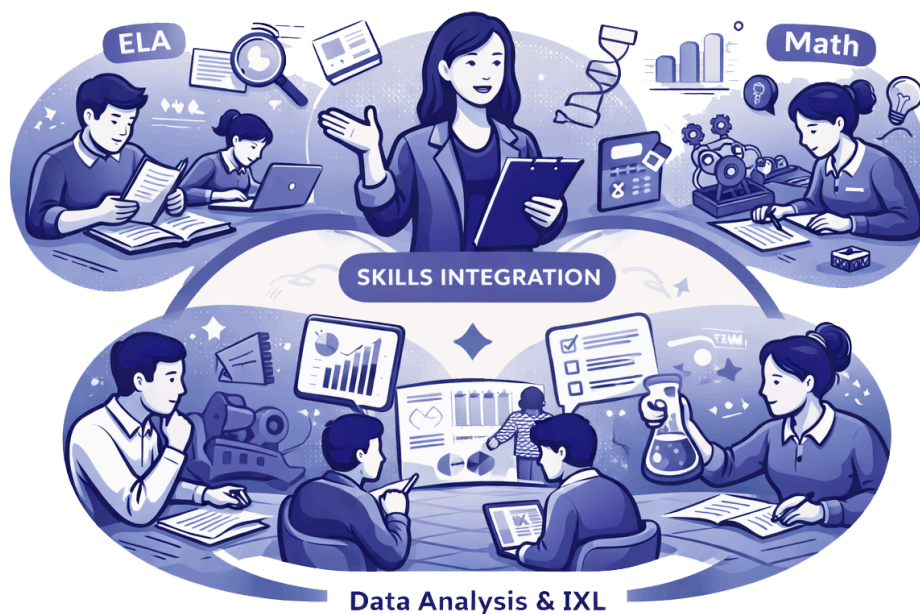
By aligning instruction across content areas, supporting data-driven small groups, and collaborating vertically with Goodwin and OSHS, Integrationists ensure that exploration is built on strong academic foundations.

Pathways Pillar Alignment:
Academic Skills & Readiness



A. Integrationists: Strengthening Learning Through Alignment, Collaboration & Targeted Support

OSMS's Integrationists play a transformative role in ensuring that students experience high-quality, consistent learning across all subjects and grade levels. These educators serve as instructional bridges by connecting ELA, math, and science curriculum, aligning practices across teams, and creating the kind of continuity that students need to thrive academically. Their work strengthens the middle school's entire instructional ecosystem by weaving together research, reading, writing, math, science, data analysis, and hands-on enrichment into a cohesive learning experience.



Integrationists amplify literacy across the curriculum by helping students apply essential skills such as research, nonfiction reading, and informational writing in every content area. They design cross-disciplinary units, co-teach lessons, run learning stations, and support students in small-group settings. In math and science, Integrationists help students understand how concepts reinforce one another by creating STEM investigations, guiding inquiry-based learning, and supporting mathematical reasoning that deepens scientific understanding.



OSMS Integrationists

One of their most important responsibilities is data analysis, which drives everything from grouping practices to instructional strategies. Integrationists regularly review IXL data, screening assessments, and classroom performance to create targeted small groups that accelerate growth for all students, such as those who need foundational support, those on grade level, and those ready for enrichment. This approach is powerful: **82% of students** who participated in Integrationist-led small-group instruction showed growth on the state ELA assessment, a clear indicator of impact.

Their work also extends beyond the middle school. Integrationists collaborate vertically with OSHS and Goodwin to align expectations, language, skills, and routines. This ensures that students experience smoother transitions, reducing learning gaps and reinforcing confidence as they move from grade to grade.

Whether through hands-on STEM challenges, writing conferences, project-based learning, or curriculum design, Integrationists bring coherence, precision, and creativity to OSMS instruction. They are central to the school's mission: ensuring all students are supported, challenged, and deeply engaged in meaningful learning every day.

Pathways Connection: Belonging, Voice & Ownership

Student-led conferences empower students to reflect on their learning, articulate goals, and take ownership of their progress. These skills are essential for Pathways exploration, future internships, and high school capstone experiences.

This model strengthens family partnership while reinforcing student identity and confidence.

Pathways Pillar Alignment:

Belonging & Ram Identity
Academic Skills & Readiness



B. Student-Led Conferences (Grades 5–6): Empowering Voice, Ownership & Family Connection

Student-led conferences have redefined the way OSMS partners with families and engages students in their own academic journey. Rather than a teacher-led discussion, these conferences place students at the center, giving them the opportunity to present their work, reflect on their growth, identify challenges, and set meaningful goals. This approach builds confidence, agency, metacognition, and communication skills that extend far beyond the classroom.

Students prepare for these conferences by selecting work samples, analyzing their progress, reviewing rubrics, and reflecting on their strengths and next steps. This self-assessment deepens their understanding of expectations and helps them practice academic language as they prepare to speak authentically about their learning. Families hear directly from their child, creating a more honest, meaningful conversation that bridges home and school.



The results have been overwhelmingly positive. Families expressed high levels of satisfaction, noting that they appreciated hearing about their child's progress "in their own words." Teachers observed stronger student investment in learning and noted that their students began taking more ownership of assignments, goals, and executive functioning skills. Students themselves reported feeling proud, confident, and "more aware of what I need to work on," highlighting the model's developmental power.

To prepare, OSMS educators researched best practices, visited other districts, and co-created shared templates and expectations to ensure consistency across teachers and grade levels. This professional collaboration resulted in a smooth implementation that honored research, elevated student agency, and strengthened communication with families.

Moving forward, OSMS plans to expand the model to Grades 7 and 8, explore longer conference windows, and further refine student-led reflection tools. This initiative has become a cornerstone of OSMS's culture that recognizes students as articulate, capable partners in their education.

Pathways Connection: Interest Discovery & Exploration

Expanded specials allow students to actively explore disciplines aligned with the district's high school Pathways, including STEM, the arts, and communication.

These experiences help students discover emerging interests while developing collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving skills.

Pathways Pillar Alignment:
Interest Discovery & Exploration



C. New Specials: Robotics & Musical Theater — Expanding Creativity, STEM Skills & Student Expression

This year, OSMS expanded its Specials offerings with two innovative courses, Robotics and Musical Theater, giving students new pathways to explore creativity, collaboration, problem-solving, and real-world application of academic skills.

Robotics immerses students in hands-on engineering, coding, and design thinking. Working with true robotics kits, students assemble functioning robots, troubleshoot mechanical and programming challenges, and engage in coding tasks that reinforce logic, math, and physics. The class culminates in interactive challenges such as maze navigation and engineering competitions, helping students develop resilience, creativity, and technical competency. Robotics directly supports the district's growing emphasis on STEM literacy and aligns with emerging high school pathways.



Musical Theater offers an equally dynamic, expressive experience. Students learn the history of the genre, from early Vaudeville through modern Broadway, while actively participating in acting, singing, improvisation, choreography, and scene work. The class blends artistic expression with communication skills, collaboration, confidence-building, and risk-taking, all of which are essential competencies for adolescent development. Students conclude the trimester by performing original scenes that integrate acting, movement, and music.

Both classes open doors for students who may not always see themselves reflected in traditional academic subjects. They foster joy, curiosity, self-expression, teamwork, and perseverance. For some students, Robotics may spark interest in engineering or computer science; for others, Musical Theater may ignite a lifelong passion for performing arts or boost confidence in public speaking.



These new courses reflect OSMS's commitment to offering diverse, engaging, and future-ready learning opportunities that develop the whole child. As pilots, both courses will continue to evolve based on student feedback and outcomes, but their early success demonstrates the value of expanding the Specials program to meet the needs and passions of today's learners.

Pathways Connection: Academic Rigor & STEM Readiness

Advanced Science deepens inquiry, discourse, and analytical thinking, preparing students for rigorous high school coursework and STEM-aligned Pathways.

By emphasizing data analysis, scientific reasoning, and interdisciplinary application, this course strengthens readiness without limiting future options.

Pathways Pillar Alignment:
Academic Skills & Readiness



D. Advanced Science (Grade 8): Deepening Inquiry, STEM Readiness & Academic Discourse

The Grade 8 Advanced Science course represents a major step forward in developing high-level scientific thinking and preparing students for honors-level coursework at OSHS. Designed for students who demonstrate strong aptitude and interest in science, the course goes beyond the standard curriculum by incorporating enriched mathematical applications, higher levels of inquiry, and robust opportunities for academic discourse.



Students in Advanced Science tackle core concepts across physical, life, and earth sciences but with deeper complexity and more opportunities for hands-on investigation. They analyze data sets, apply formulas, interpret graphs, and use quantitative reasoning to support scientific explanations. These mathematical extensions reinforce STEM integration and help students understand how scientific and mathematical thinking work together in authentic contexts.



A key feature of the course is its emphasis on scientific discourse. Students engage in collaborative discussions, refine their thinking through evidence-based reasoning, and participate in the engineering design process. Projects require students to synthesize multiple skills across content areas, strengthening problem-solving, creativity, and independent inquiry.

Because this year is a pilot, teachers are collecting feedback, monitoring outcomes, and preparing to refine the curriculum over the summer. Planned enhancements include additional engineering challenges, extended activities, and expanded opportunities for independent research on real-world scientific issues.

The early impact is clear: students are becoming more confident, more articulate in explaining scientific reasoning, and more prepared for the demands of high school STEM pathways. Advanced Science exemplifies OSMS's commitment to challenging students, promoting curiosity, and ensuring each learner has opportunities to excel at high levels.

Pathways Connection: Equity of Access Through Differentiation

Targeted small-group instruction and flexible grouping ensure that all students can access challenging, engaging learning experiences, a core principle of the Pathways model.

Differentiation ensures that exploration and opportunity are not reserved for a select few, but available to every learner.

Pathways Pillar Alignment:

Academic Skills & Readiness
Belonging & Ram Identity



E. Increased Rigor Through Differentiation & Small Group Instruction

OSMS is strengthening instructional rigor through a comprehensive approach to differentiation, ensuring that every student is both supported and challenged at their appropriate level. Differentiation is grounded in the belief that students learn best when teachers intentionally adjust content, process, and learning tasks based on readiness, interest, and skill.

Through targeted small-group instruction, flexible grouping, and strategic use of assessment data, OSMS teachers are creating personalized pathways that help all students grow. Integrationists, SRBI specialists, and interventionists collaborate to analyze IXL data, screeners, and classroom performance to design small groups that meet three times per year (September, December, March), as well as ongoing flexible groups throughout the year. These groups support struggling students in reaching grade-level expectations and push advanced learners into deeper, more complex work.

Professional learning has been central to this initiative. Teachers participate in ongoing workshops focused on differentiation, formative assessment, and small-group instructional practices. IXL consultants provide PD that strengthens teachers' ability to pinpoint student needs and design instruction aligned to state and national standards.

The impact has been meaningful: students are experiencing more targeted instruction, teachers feel increasingly confident in adjusting rigor, and high-need areas are being addressed more quickly and effectively. Differentiation ensures equitable access to learning. Students are no longer given the same task regardless of readiness; instead, they encounter challenges that push them forward and support that lifts them up.

This work represents a shift in mindset: from teaching the curriculum to teaching students. OSMS will continue refining these practices as teachers deepen their skills and as data reveals new opportunities for growth.

Pathways Connection: Real-World Learning & Community Connection

OSMS's community partnerships introduce students to authentic applications of learning in business, arts, wellness, and civic spaces.

These experiences help students understand how their skills matter beyond school and begin forming a sense of purpose within their community.

Pathways Pillar Alignment:

Real-World Learning & Community Partnerships

F. Community Connections for Real-World Learning: Deepening Partnerships & Expanding Opportunities

OSMS is redefining community engagement by building meaningful partnerships that connect classroom learning to the real world. These collaborations provide students with authentic experiences that nurture curiosity, build essential skills, and strengthen the bond between school and community.

The initiative began with an audit of existing partnerships and opportunities, followed by outreach to organizations such as The Estuary, local businesses on Main Street, health and wellness providers, artists, and nonprofit groups. These partnerships have resulted in hands-on experiences such as Main Street Math explorations, book clubs with older adults, Blackout Poetry workshops, visits to The Kate, participation in community service projects, and events celebrating local history such as the Witness Stones Project.



OSMS Students in the Community

These collaborations expose students to new career paths, develop soft skills like communication and teamwork, and help them understand how academic skills apply in real-world contexts. Students experience firsthand the relevance of math, literacy, science, art, and wellness through interactions with professionals and local organizations.

The impact of this work is substantial:

- Students develop confidence navigating public spaces and interacting with adults in professional settings.
- Families and local businesses feel more connected to the school, fostering a sense of shared responsibility for student success.
- Students gain an increased sense of belonging and pride as community members invest in their learning.

Early data shows strong engagement: students visited five businesses for Main Street Math, eight additional community partners contributed to classroom learning, and participation in wellness and experiential programs has grown across grade levels.

Pathways Connection: PK–12 Alignment & Transition Readiness

Alignment work across Goodwin, OSMS, and OSHS ensures that students experience a predictable, coherent Pathways journey.

Clear expectations, shared language, and consistent structures reduce transition stress and strengthen readiness for high school Pathways.

Pathways Pillar Alignment:

Academic Skills & Readiness

Belonging & Ram Identity

G. Building Alignment: Creating a Cohesive PreK–12 Experience for Students & Families

Building alignment across schools is one of OSMS’s most strategic and important initiatives, ensuring that students experience a smooth, consistent, and supportive academic journey from elementary school through high school. Alignment improves communication, clarifies expectations, and strengthens student readiness at every transition point.

This year, OSMS has worked closely with Goodwin and OSHS to align practices in SRBI/Consult, executive functioning, grading, and academic expectations. Meetings among building leaders and instructional teams have helped identify gaps, create shared language, and ensure that students build on prior knowledge rather than encounter unnecessary repetition or missed concepts. Adjustments such as adding traditional grades to Algebra and Spanish, piloting midterms in Grade 8, and coordinating course selection processes with the high school have strengthened the middle-to-high school transition.

Feedback from teachers, families, and students has shown that alignment reduces stress, increases confidence, and helps students understand what is expected at each level. When skills, routines, and expectations are consistent across buildings, students experience more independence and success, and families receive clearer, more predictable communication.



The work is ongoing. Next steps include continuing to align SRBI/Consult practices across schools, strengthening transitions between Grades 4–5 and 8–9, and expanding shared structures that help students master the “student skills” needed for academic success. This initiative embodies the district’s vision: ensuring that every student experiences a coherent, supportive, and empowering journey through Old Saybrook Public Schools.

Looking Ahead: From Exploration to Direction

The work highlighted in this booklet reflects a pivotal stage in the Pathways journey.

At Old Saybrook Middle School, students move beyond foundational skills and begin discovering who they are as learners, collaborators, and community members. Through intentional exploration, student voice, academic alignment, and real-world experiences, OSMS prepares students to enter high school with confidence and clarity.

As students transition to Old Saybrook High School, they do so with:

- A deeper understanding of their interests and strengths
- The academic skills required for rigorous coursework
- Experience reflecting on goals and growth
- A strong sense of belonging as Rams

Pathways does not ask students to choose too early. It asks them to explore thoughtfully.

Old Saybrook Middle School ensures that when students are ready to choose a pathway, they do so with preparation, purpose, and pride.

