

# Rising Tide School lets students guide their own way.

by John Bates

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For most kids, school involves sitting in a classroom, listening to a teacher and following a set curriculum. But things are a lot different at Rising Tide School, a new community-based democratic school in Olympia for ages 4-18.

Started by a group of parents and The Evergreen State College students, Rising Tide is one of more than two dozen U.S. schools based on the "Sudbury Method." Pioneered at the Sudbury Valley School in Framingham, Massachusetts, this approach gives students complete responsibility for their own education—deciding for themselves how to spend their time, and learning from their activities and personal experiences rather than through standardized instruction.

"Experiencing this type of education as a young person lent hope and meaning to my life," says Ben Lucal, a Rising Tide staff member and co-founder who is also an alumnus of the original Sudbury Valley School. "I was trusted to make my own learning decisions, and valued for my unique contributions to my school community."

At Rising Tide School, students pursue their unique interests in their own way and on their own time, learning through conversation, the free exchange of ideas, game playing, self-study, and apprenticeships. All ages mix together, with younger students learning from older ones and vice versa. And

students and staff participate equally in making decisions about running the school, hiring staff and dealing with conflict. "In the time I've been at Rising Tide, I've grown so much as a person," declares 13-year-old student Orianna Clarke. "I feel like it's a better system, a better way to have kids learn."

The school uses no tests or evaluations and does not compare or rank students, who are eligible to graduate when they prove to the school community that their are ready and able to make their way in the world as responsible and contributing adults. "Nobody has to fit in a box here," notes Abbe Vogels, another staff member and co-founder and the mother of a seven-year-old student.

Rising Tide admits students regardless of their family's ability to pay tuition. And while the school leases space from St. John's Episcopal Church, it has no religious affiliation and is Olympia's only secular private high school. Now in its first academic year, there are currently 10 students who range in age from 5-17 years old, and the staff's goal is to eventually increase enrollment to 100 students.

To remain accessible to families of all income levels, Rising Tide depends on community support. In addition to accepting tax-deductible financial contributions, the school welcomes donations of all kinds, including services, art supplies, office supplies, books, and other equipment. The school also offers volunteer internships and is recruiting Board members who are interested in helping the school grow and eventually purchase a permanent home.

For those interested in finding out more, Rising Tide School is hosting an Open House this Sunday, February 28th from 1:30-3:30pm at 114 20th Avenue SE, Olympia. The event is open to parents,

prospective students, people interested in volunteering and all members of the community.■

*To find out more about Rising Tide School, volunteer opportunities and how to donate, visit [www.risingtideschool.org](http://www.risingtideschool.org). You can also send tax deductible contributions to Rising Tide School's mailing address at 512 Central Street NE, Olympia, WA, 98506.*