

Family Information Handbook

Michael Meechin, Principal
Dr. Debra Pace, Superintendent

To the Students and Families of the Class of 2022

Welcome to NeoCity Academy!

I would like to be the first to welcome the inaugural class and their families to NeoCity Academy; an inquiry-driven, project-based learning environment.

NeoCity Academy is a true partnership between the School District of Osceola County, the University of Central Florida, and our industry partner, BRIDG. Together, we will provide an unmatched educational experience for students as we prepare them to be contributing 21st Century citizens.

I want to acknowledge the choice you have made to help us build a school that we believe will offer a unique, transformative and powerful education for Osceola County students.

This handbook gives you an overview of the teaching and learning that students can expect at NeoCity Academy. Let it serve as an introduction to the philosophy of our school and to the specific courses students will take both next year and beyond. It should be considered a living document as we fully expect our plans to continue to be powerfully informed and changed by the student experiences in our classes and school.

We are excited to have you join our NeoCity Academy team. The families of NeoCity Academy come from all over our county and from many different schools. We now embark on the journey to bring together this diverse groups of students, families, and teachers to become one of the strongest communities of learners in the country.

Welcome.

Educationally,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Meechin', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Michael Meechin, Principal



NeoCity Academy Belief Document

NeoCity Academy Mission Statement

Our mission is to develop students who believe that the world can be a better place and that they can be the ones to make it happen.

NeoCity Academy Vision Statement

NeoCity Academy was founded under the belief that a school where students own their learning is fundamentally more impactful than one where they do not. NeoCity Academy is actively engaging students in inquiry-driven, project-based learning to make this possible, with the ultimate goal of graduating students ready to change the world.

Grade Level Themes + Guiding Questions

Grade Level Themes	Guiding Questions
Year One IDENTITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who am I?• What are my strengths?• What are my opportunities for growth?
Year Two IDEATE + CREATE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What do I need to successfully ideate?• How does design thinking further my ideas?• What can I create?
Year Three INNOVATE WITHOUT LIMITS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are my limits? How do I move beyond?• How can I apply innovation to my work?• How can I keep innovating?
Year Four PASSION + PURPOSE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What am I passionate about?• What is the purpose of my work?• How can I change the world for the better?

What Makes NeoCity Academy Different?

NeoCity Academy classes look and feel different than those of more traditional educational environments. Our learning environment is built to encourage high levels of student engagement. The classrooms at NeoCity Academy will buzz with activity. Our learning is built upon that foundation of inquiry, which generates this unique atmosphere. Classrooms reflect three distinct – but interconnected – components of teaching at NeoCity Academy: inquiry-driven, project-based learning; backward design of the curriculum; and 1:1 (laptop-to-student) based instruction.

In addition to regular work, NCA teachers identify special projects each quarter known as Benchmarks. For these major projects, the faculty uses a common rubric tailored to their particular subject. Benchmarks are assessed on their design, knowledge, application, presentation and process. Thus, NCA teachers are able to identify areas of growth and challenge for each individual student and shape their teaching in order to address areas of learning that need to be remediated. Student projects generate more student interest and involve multiple steps and drafts. They often require a great deal more effort than studying for a test.

Projects at NCA are different than traditional schools. The key to this difference lies in a concept called Backward Design. Teachers ask, “What are the enduring understandings students should have when they leave this class?” Teachers then create projects that can only be completed by showing both the skills and knowledge deemed to be critical to master the subject and demonstrate a deep level of understanding.

The day in and day out classes then become a series of exercises to make sure students have the tools to do the work required. This is why the design is considered backward. The outcome is the foundation, and the content is created to best enable students to reach the set goals. In short, in a traditional classroom, students might do many small projects along the way, but the final assessment of student progress is measured by a test. At NCA, there may be multiple assessments – including quizzes and tests – along the way, but the primary assessment of student learning is through their projects.

The final component of what makes NeoCity Academy classes different is the 1:1 laptop environment. This creates the ability for students to incorporate a world of knowledge into their projects. Textbooks are sometimes used, but teachers usually want students to search for answers outside of the confinement of a single source. Classes at NeoCity Academy often take the form of students working with one another in small groups with their laptops open. Instead of being at the front of the room, the teacher monitors student learning going from group to group providing ideas and support for students to complete their assigned tasks. The one to one environment means each student is responsible for topic inquiry and ultimately the presentation of their findings. Thus, each student has the ability and responsibility to show what he or she knows in the most sophisticated manner possible. Just as there are not a set number of right answers to earn a passing grade for students who struggle with material, there are also no limits for those who are truly talented in that subject area. Differentiated learning (teaching to the ability and needs of each student) becomes inherent.

NeoCity Academy Summer Reading for Incoming Freshmen

Welcome to NeoCity Academy! Before coming to campus in August we would like you to read one of three books:

Learning to Swear in America by Katie Kennedy

ISBN: 978-1619639119

Common Sense Media Review: <http://bit.ly/swearinamerica>

Slated by Teri Terry

ISBN: 978-0142425039

Common Sense Media Review: <http://bit.ly/slatedbookone>

Catcher in the Rye by J.D. Salinger

ISBN: 978-7543321724

Common Sense Media Review: <http://bit.ly/catcherinthe>

While you may get the book from your local library, we strongly suggest that you purchase your choice text, as we will be using it in your English course in August. Of course, feel free to read more than one title!

Below are some questions to help navigate your novel and help you prepare to discuss it with your classmates and teachers. As you may already know, NeoCity Academy utilizes guiding questions that help focus our studies and make learning more meaningful for us all.

As you read, think about the following larger questions as they apply to the characters, actions, conflicts, and resolutions in your choice text and also as they apply to your life. Part of the active reading includes some writing. You should prepare a reading journal consisting of at least eight entries, each one around 250 words. Before you write, consider the following questions to explore in your reading journal. Include your own personal responses to these questions, and how these questions might apply to your choice text. Integrate as many questions as you see fit into your responses. These journals will be used in your English class in August.

- What is family?
- What is the power of friendship?
- What does it mean to be a caregiver/mother/father?
- What is education and where can it exist?
- What is love?
- How does a person become evil?
- In what ways can the line between good and evil be blurred?
- How do you justify the idea that a person can be both good and evil at the same time?
- Who is considered a survivor? Why?
- What does it mean to be human?
- How can students create their own paths in a world run by adults?

A person who won't read has no advantage over one who can't read.

- Mark Twain

The Year One Experience

The Year One Experience is focused on identity. At NeoCity, it is important for students to know who they are and what they are capable of as they embark on a project-based curriculum. Students will look deep at themselves, their skill set (both strengths and growth areas), and the work that they are passionate about.

The analogy of the Year One Experience can be compared with that of building a foundation. Building a foundation of knowledge that will launch students into a system where they begin to own their learning and customize their work to fit their strengths – ultimately having a positive impact on someone's life, the community they live in, or the world.

In Advisory, students will focus on the concepts of family and relationships – working on defining their role within the group.

Individualized Learning Plans: Real-World Experience for 10th and 11th Grade Students

Our vision is built upon the idea that a school where students own their learning is fundamentally more impactful than one where they do not.

Our Individualized Learning Plan, or ILP, is completed during Year Two and Year Three. The concept is simple – students develop goals that they want to achieve, and through their ILP, they connect with our university and industry partners to achieve those goals.

The learning is driven by the student.

Year Two

Mentoring

- Establish relationship with an Industry or University partner
- Students develop goals and/or questions that drive their ILP
- Quarterly meetings with mentor to discuss progress toward goals
- Support is focused on student interests, feedback on projects, attendance at competitions, tutoring and/or preparing for industry certification exams

NEOC Advisory

In Advisory, students will be focusing on email communication, time management using calendars, and professional networking.

These skills will help set them apart from other students when securing internships or attending admissions interviews at the post-secondary level.

Year Three

Real-World Experience

- Continue to build and strengthen relationship with an Industry or University partner
- Students refine goals and/or questions that drive their ILP
- Monthly meetings with mentor to discuss progress toward goals
- Support is focused on opportunities for job shadowing, internships, and real-world experience
- Students will have the opportunity to leave campus early to participate

NEOC Advisory

In Advisory, students will be focusing on next steps for college admissions – focus will shift to essay writing, entrance interview skills, and marketing themselves.

Senior Passion Project: A 12th Grade Culmination of Studies

The Passion Project at NeoCity Academy is an opportunity for students to demonstrate the culmination of their intellectual growth in high school. The Passion Project capstone represents a synthesis of the NeoCity Academy mission and vision as students attempt to answer the questions:

- What am I passionate about?
- What is the purpose of my work?
- How can I change the world for the better?

The Passion Project is a self-selected and designed independent project. As with everything we do, the project embodies NeoCity's core values. The Passion Project will look different for each student, just as each student has a unique perspective and approach to learning.

Through the Passion Project students leave NeoCity Academy with an original piece of work showcasing the students' skills of inquiry and investigation of a topic of interest. During their four years as NeoCity Academy, students move towards becoming an independent and self-directed learner who can contribute meaningfully to his or her community. Together with their Passion Project capstone advisory panel, students have the freedom to design a project that reflects their unique, individual interests. Students adopt an interdisciplinary approach and demonstrate a complexity of thought about their chose topic, both during the proposal phase and as they begin to execute the project.

NeoCity Advisory Curriculum

The NeoCity Advisory Program is the guiding force that ensures student success while at NeoCity Academy. Advisory is a four-year relationship between a NeoCity faculty member, twenty students and their family that ensures that every student in the school has a champion – one teacher to whom they know they can always go for help.

For parents or guardians, Advisory is a bridge to the school. It gives them a point person for communicating with the school. In addition, there are two report card conferences each year at which parents, advisors, and students can address academic and social achievements and challenges.

Advisory programs promote healthy student development, support academic and personal success, and provide an ideal setting to teach and practice important life skills. At NeoCity Academy, one of the major goals of the freshmen year advisory program is to help ensure each student has a healthy, productive and enjoyable transition to high school.

For students, it is a time of searching inwardly to find who they are and searching outwardly to find their place as a member of a new community. Students learn best when they have a sense of community, feel heard and known, and feel safe enough to take risks. Many students will be challenged academically for the first time and will need to quickly develop skills to ensure a successful high school career.

In the upper grades, the advisory program continues to support students' academic and personal development, with an emphasis on assisting students with their Individualized Learning Plan and their post-secondary planning. Advisors collaborate with the Individualized Learning Plan Coordinator and school counselor to ensure that students successfully complete their internship programs and guide students through the college admissions process. Advisory classes meet twice per week for 30 minutes. Students are given school-related information and have the opportunity to participate in discussions, exercises and activities that assist them in developing competencies critical to achieving optimal academic and personal success.

NeoCity Advisory Program Curriculum Includes:

School Orientation	Adjustment to new school, school design, acquaintance to school community and scheduling issues which arise
Academic Skills Support	Goal setting, study skills and time management strategies
School Culture	Communication and implementation of student government initiatives, academics and club promotion
Peer Relations and Social Skills	Discussions on adolescent issues such as, coping strategies, bullying prevention, self-esteem building and good decision-making
Career Exploration	Interest inventories, research, projects, interviewing and resume writing
Current Events	Philosophical inquiries, discussions and reflection on issues that affect and shape our thinking

Science Curriculum

The science curriculum is guided by NeoCity's core values:

Inquiry	Students will learn how to ask good questions
Research	Students will design experiments based on the scientific method
Collaboration	Students will work together to gather data and compare results
Presentation	Students will use a variety of strategies to share their research
Reflection	Students will consider how their research can be used to extend inquiry

Reflection is one of the most important aspects of the science curriculum at NeoCity Academy. Reflecting on our work allows us to see how the different fields of science – such as life and physical sciences – are interconnected. Reflection is also essential as we examine how science is useful when integrated with other content areas such as social sciences, mathematics and language studies.

Methods & Strategies

The most effective learning occurs when students directly experience their subject matter. Therefore, the science curriculum is grounded in laboratory activities where students hypothesize, predict, measure, assess and evaluate scientific phenomena.

Application of Science Content

An example of inquiry and project-based learning in science at NeoCity Academy includes students' inquiry into acids and bases, ecology, pollution and chemical reactions are anchored into an environmental impact study project. Students gather soil and water samples from a nearby construction site, analyze these samples in the lab, evaluate the class' data, and synthesize this information into an argument for or against the proposed construction.

Science Content

The enduring understandings guide students' inquiry with attention to state and national content standards. Our curriculum is flexible in that we spiral through science content as it meets student inquiry.

School Term	Engineering/Cyber	BioDesign	Mathematics Prerequisites
Summer Term 0	Biology Honors *		
Year 1	Chemistry 1 Honors		Geometry ∞
Year 2	AP Physics 1: Algebra-Based	AP Biology	Algebra 2
Year 3	AP Chemistry <i>and</i> AP Physics 2: Algebra-Based	AP Chemistry <i>and</i> AP Physics 1: Algebra-Based	Pre-Calculus ∞
Year 4	AP Physics C: Mechanics	AP Physics 2: Algebra-Based	Calculus

* Biology Honors must be taken during Summer Term 0, prior to entering freshmen year if the student does not earn the credit in Middle School. Students will be offered the opportunity to participate in a NeoCity specific summer Biology cohort.

∞ May take this course concurrently.

Mathematics Curriculum

The mathematics curriculum is guided by NeoCity's core values:

Inquiry	Students will learn how to ask good questions
Research	Students will design problems and solutions based on their own learning
Collaboration	Students will work together to gather data and challenge their thinking
Presentation	Students will use a variety of strategies to share their problem solving strategies
Reflection	Students will consider how their work can be used to extend inquiry

The common view of mathematics, particularly higher-level math, is that it is abstract and a discipline with little bearing on our daily lives. The study of mathematics at NeoCity Academy aims not only to transcend this view but also to reveal the potential of mathematics to solve problems, explain various phenomena, and inform decision making. We see mathematics, and the logical process involved in it, as a powerful tool for thinking about and understanding our lives.

Mathematics Curriculum Goals

The mathematics curriculum is designed to not only prepare students for higher-level mathematics but also to expand and strengthen their ability to think logically, flexibly, and critically using mathematics as a tool. The mathematics curriculum will challenge students to:

- Learn math in the context of real-world application
- Apply their learning of mathematics to solve problems faced in the completion of projects
- Apply their learning of mathematics to innovate products and deliverables beyond their current limits

Rigor of Mathematics Curriculum at NeoCity Academy

The demands of high-wage STEM related fields rely heavily on higher level concepts found in the most rigorous mathematics and science coursework. Our aggressive mathematics pathways offers students the opportunity to reach the highest levels of mathematics allowed in K-12 education, and with our partnership with the University of Central Florida, the ability to take their coursework even further.

Should students demonstrate strong skills in mathematics, they will be afforded the opportunity to accelerate their pathway through summer coursework in mathematics.



Mathematics Course Progression

School Term	Most Rigorous	More Rigorous
Summer Term 0	Geometry Honors *	Algebra 1 Honors *
Year 1	Algebra 2 Honors	Geometry Honors
Year 2	Pre-Calculus Honors	Algebra 2 Honors
Year 3	AP Calculus BC	Pre-Calculus Honors
Year 4	Calculus 2 or 3 via University of Central Florida Dual Enrollment †	AP Calculus AB

* May be taken during Summer Term 0, prior to entering freshmen year if the student does not earn the credit in Middle School. Students will be offered the opportunity to participate in a NeoCity specific summer cohort.

† Taken on the NeoCity campus via online course.

English Curriculum

The English curriculum is guided by NeoCity's core values:

Inquiry	Students will learn how to ask good questions
Research	Students will design questions and solutions based on their own learning
Collaboration	Students will work together to challenge their thinking
Presentation	Students will use a variety of strategies to share their learning
Reflection	Students will consider how their work can be used to extend inquiry

Year 1 English Curriculum

In their freshman year, students will read a diverse set of texts centered on a similar theme – **IDENTITY**. Students will be taught to become active readers, so that they can not only comprehend difficult texts, but also digest them enough to develop informed opinions. Reading strategies, note-taking skills, and vocabulary building will enable them to tackle even more complex text in future coursework.

Students will write often, with focused individualized coaching. With appropriate modeling, they will learn how to develop an original thesis, and how to support it with well-selected evidence from the text. Creative writing also plays a large role. Students are rarely asked to read a format that they aren't then asked to create.

For example, after reading memoirs, students write vignettes from their own lives and use literary elements like simile, metaphor, imagery, symbolism, and dialogue to make their writing come alive. Students will have the opportunity to produce written work for the Internet and more public venues which reinforce the notion that professionalism and polish are essential to one's best writing.

Students will also tune their communication skills through discussion and collaborative work. Students will be encouraged to listen to each other and push their classmates' thinking. Student ideas are respected, challenged, and refined by their classmates' attentiveness.

Application of English Content

Assignments and products will include online blogging, the five-paragraph analytical essay, memoir vignettes, podcasting, dramatic adaptations, poetry writing and performance, public speaking and debate, and creative projects accompanied by written self-reflection. Independent reading will also be required.

English Content Themes

Year 1	Identity	Year 3	Change in Self and Society
Year 2	Individual Within the Group	Year 4	Creation



English Course Progression

School Term	Coursework	English 1 Credit in 8 th Grade
Summer Term 0		
Year 1	Pre-AP English 1 Honors	Pre-AP English 2 Honors
Year 2	Pre-AP English 2 Honors	AP English Language & Composition
Year 3	AP English Language & Composition	AP English Literature & Composition
Year 4	AP English Literature & Composition	English Comp 1 and 2 via University of Central Florida Dual Enrollment †

† Taken on the NeoCity campus via online course.

Social Science Curriculum

The Social Science curriculum is guided by NeoCity's core values:

Inquiry	Students will learn how to ask good questions
Research	Students will design questions and solutions based on their own learning
Collaboration	Students will work together to challenge their thinking
Presentation	Students will use a variety of strategies to share their learning
Reflection	Students will consider how their work can be used to extend inquiry

Social Science Curriculum Application

NeoCity Academy students will take a variety of coursework in the Social Sciences. A majority of our Social Science content is driven by Advanced Placement.

Students will bring their Social Science content in Year 2, with Advanced Placement World History, and will continue into Advanced Placement United States History in Year 3. Students will take both Economics and AP United States Government in Year 4.

The Social Science content is driven by our core values and content is driven by the art of debate. Our students in their content will work to develop and deliver arguments that are clear, concise and well-thought out.

The art of oratory is essential for students to stand, deliver and defend the work that they create during their time at NeoCity Academy. Our Social Science coursework will prepare them for this.



Social Science Course Progression

School Term	Coursework	Additional Information
Summer Term 0		
Year 1		
Year 2	AP World History	
Year 3	AP United States History	
Year 4	US Government Honors (.5 CR) & Economics Honors w. Financial Literacy (.5 CR)	