

## Safety Nets



- Student partnerships with coaches
- In-class seminars, sharing, and written reflections
- Periodic conferences with teachers
- Opportunities for feedback and revision of reflective essays and practice presentations
- Selection of student-centered panelists who participate in a required training

## Swinging on the ROPES

As student progress to further academic experiences, they will carry with them a deeper understanding of themselves as self-directed, life-long learners who actively use the community as their classroom.



### What participating students had to say about their ROPES experience:

“I learned an incredible amount about myself.”

ROPES helped me be successful with learning more about my culture.”

“I like the independence and how people say ‘Okay, go out and do it,’ and I didn’t have many limits set on me.”

“This has been one of the best projects I’ve ever done and it is a real learning experience.”

### What community panelists had to say about their ROPES experience:

“The experience creates a missing link between educators and the community. I think this link represents to both educators and members of the community that we are all responsible for education, as well as responsible for monitoring its effectiveness.”

“It took a lot of courage for the students to share themselves. In doing so, the students hopefully are eager to continue evaluating themselves and making choices that will help them grow.”

“The students feel a real sense of achievement at what they have produced and several of them regard this as a start on a lifetime learning endeavor rather than just an end in itself.”

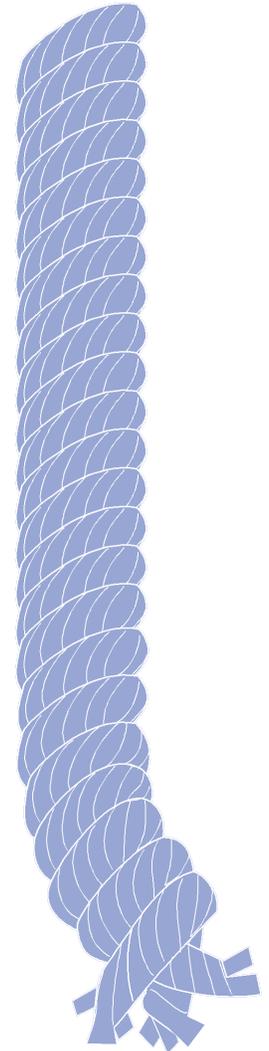
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# Rite Of Passage Experiences

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## Why ROPES?

The Rite of Passage Experiences (ROPES) program provides an opportunity for sixth graders to use the skills and knowledge acquired during their elementary school years in a meaningful, culminating set of experiences. As they complete projects, performances and exhibitions, elementary school youngsters begin to acquire the habits of mind necessary for middle school and beyond.

The focus of ROPES is on independent learning and connecting academic skills to real life experiences. ROPES is a required experience for our sixth grade students. The program goal is for students to demonstrate persistence, clear communication, creativity and innovation, taking responsible risks, and remaining open to continuous learning.

## Climbing the ROPES

ROPES requires students to individually design and complete an in-depth project during their sixth grade year. In September, each student begins the search for a project within his/her area of interest. This might be an investigation into an academic area, a potential career area, a form of art or craft, or a skill to be developed.

The next step is for the student to narrow the search. For example, if the area is music, the student might decide

to focus on music composition. The search will help him/her decide what type of music to compose, who will help guide the project to ensure quality, and how and when the work might be performed. The student might also prepare by listening to various types of music, attending concerts or interviewing musicians and composers.

Each project design must also include an element of challenge or responsible risk. The activities involved must represent a challenge for the student, or require him/her to try something new. The student must devote at least fifteen hours to this project.

The sixth grader also selects a trusted adult from the school or community or a family friend to serve as a guide. Each student is required to meet with this coach a minimum of four times. Each participant then creates a poster that reflects the student's search, element of risk and project design. Display of posters celebrates and publicly announces commitment to each project.

Project work continues from October through mid-April. Upon completion, students write reflective essays about themselves in class. They also prepare and practice a presentation that shares the journey of their projects including successes, difficulties, problem-solving strategies, and how their experience serves as a rite-of-passage.

## Knotting the ROPES

During an individual appointment in May, each candidate presents the results of his/her project to a panel of three trained community members. The trained panelists work to foster a "grand conversation" and provide each student with detailed feedback.



## Anchoring the ROPES

**Essential elements for success of ROPES are:**

- The school staff, parents, and community members serve as coaches for the students as they develop and complete their ROPE.
- ROPES is an integral part of the regular instructional program.
- There is a high degree of parent, community and administrative support.