

LAB SCHOOL

For Innovation and Career Exploration

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY®

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER

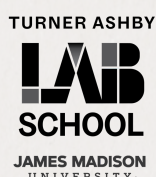


JMU LAB SCHOOL
NEWSLETTER



2026

OUR PARTNERSHIP



Welcome to JMU LAB School 26-27

The **JMU LAB School** is a place where innovation, collaboration, and learning come together to reimagine what is possible in education.

Our Mission

Our mission is to create a space for innovation where educators and students can explore, apply, and learn from best practices in teaching and learning. Through collaboration and experimentation, the LAB School serves as a space for continuous learning, reflection, and improvement.

Our Vision

The vision of the LAB School is to become an innovation hub for career exploration and workforce development, where students engage in interdisciplinary, problem-focused learning that addresses authentic community needs. Through these experiences, students develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for college, career, and community readiness.

Entering Year 3

As we enter Year 3, the **JMU LAB School** continues to build momentum both inside and beyond the classroom. This year, we welcomed a new cohort of 9th-grade students, expanded our team of educators and staff, and developed new community partnerships and place-based learning experiences.

With **400 students in grades 9-11** and **27 educators**, the LAB School is experiencing significant growth while continuing to strengthen and refine its innovative approach to teaching and learning. As we look ahead, we are excited to build on this momentum and deepen our impact on students, educators, and the communities we serve.



UPCOMING EVENTS

- * **LAB School**
September
23rd – Welcome to LAB School-9th Grade Celebration-JMU Farm
24th – Governance Board Meeting
28th – Rockingham County School Board Update



- * **Broadway**
September
1st – 9th Grade Student Presentations
22nd – 9th Grade Restaurant Project



- * **East Rockingham**
September
18th – 10th Grade River Study

- * **Spotswood**
September
18th – 9th Grade Teambuilding- JMU Ropes Course



- * **Turner Ashby**
September
16th – 9th Grade Water Testing
25th – 9th Grade Teambuilding- JMU Ropes Course



Summer Professional Learning: Building a Stronger Lab School Experience

While students were enjoying their summer break, our LAB School teachers were hard at work preparing for an even stronger year of learning! Over the summer, teachers came together to collaborate, reflect, and build resources designed to create a more integrated, connected and engaging experience for our students.

The work began with a collaborative day at the JMU Farm, where teachers were placed into teams to focus on key areas of the Lab School experience. From there, teams met several times throughout the summer to develop resources and products that will directly impact teaching and learning this year.

Integrated Curriculum Pacing Guides

One team focused on developing integrated curriculum pacing guides for grades 9, 10, and 11. Their goal was to strengthen connections across courses and ensure that students experience learning as an interconnected journey rather than as separate subjects.

Project Rubrics

Another team worked to revise the rubrics connected to each unit's projects. The goal was to create clear, consistent expectations that help students understand what quality work looks like while providing meaningful feedback throughout the project process.

Literacy & Literature Circles

A third team focused on infusing more literacy into the Lab School classroom. Teachers developed literature circle resources and routines that can be used across content areas to support reading, discussion, critical thinking, and student voice.

The Lab School Portfolio & Power Skills

The final team reimagined the culminating Lab School portfolio project. A major focus was ensuring that students have opportunities to develop and demonstrate the "power skills" employers value—including communication, teamwork, problem-solving, leadership, adaptability, and collaboration. The updated portfolio will give students a meaningful way to showcase not only what they have learned, but also the skills they have developed along the way.

The summer work culminated in a professional learning day at JMU during Teacher Work Week. Teachers shared the products their teams had created, explored how the pieces fit together across the Lab School experience, and began thinking about how these resources will come to life in their classrooms.

The day concluded with teachers setting student engagement goals for the year, continuing our commitment to creating classrooms where students are active participants, thoughtful collaborators, and owners of their learning.

This summer's professional learning was a powerful reminder of what makes the LAB School special: our teachers are continually learning, collaborating, and innovating to create meaningful experiences that prepare students not just for the next step, but for whatever comes next.



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9th Grade Highlights



Each year, we are excited to welcome a new cohort of 9th-grade students to the LAB School community. Last year marked an important milestone as we officially expanded the LAB School model across all four Rockingham County high schools. Building on that momentum, this year we are focused on creating a meaningful and engaging learning experience for our newest students—one centered on project-based learning and an interdisciplinary curriculum that brings together English, World Geography, Environmental Science, and Health & Physical Education.

Throughout the year, students will have opportunities to connect their classroom learning to the world around them through place-based experiences, career exploration, and meaningful interactions with community and industry professionals. These experiences are designed to help students see the relevance of their learning, explore potential career pathways, and develop the skills and confidence to engage as active contributors to their communities.

10th Grade Spotlights

With a year of high school experience behind them, our 10th-grade LAB School students are ready to take their next steps into new territory. Building on the foundation established during their 9th-grade year, sophomores engage in a more advanced and integrated learning experience that brings together English, Biology, and science-focused Inquiry. A highlight of the year is the Inquiry Expo, where students will have the opportunity to showcase their learning, thinking, and growth.

Having already established a strong sense of community during their 9th-grade year, students enter 10th grade with greater confidence and a deeper understanding of the LAB School experience. This continuity allows them to engage more fully in meaningful, collaborative learning and take greater ownership of their work.

As they build on the accomplishments of their first year, students are encouraged to set new goals, pursue their interests, and expand their skills. 10th grade represents an important next chapter in the Lab School journey—one that challenges students to think more deeply, explore more broadly, and take greater ownership of their learning.



Broadway LAB School students jumped right into the school year with a fun and interactive biology activity!



Spotswood LAB School sophomores connected with their new team of teachers and started the school year ready to learn, collaborate, and grow.



East Rockingham LAB School students kicked off their first day with a round of "Who Is Who?" Bingo—getting to know their classmates while building community.



Turner Ashby LAB School 10th graders took advantage of the fresh air during their first week back, building connections and enjoying time together outside the classroom.

11th Grade-Making Memories in Memorial Hall

Memorial Hall, home to the JMU College of Education, proudly welcomed Lab School students this year as they embarked on the next phase of their educational journey. The Lab School wing in Memorial Hall was intentionally designed to serve as an innovation hub—creating a collaborative space where students can engage in interdisciplinary learning, explore new ideas, and connect their learning to real-world experiences.

This year, we welcomed our inaugural cohort of 11th-grade students from Broadway and East Rockingham High Schools to Memorial Hall. Building on their Lab School experience, students are engaging in an innovative 11th-grade curriculum that integrates English and History while incorporating a Design Thinking framework to support inquiry, creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving.

These dual-enrollment courses are taught through a unique collaboration among Blue Ridge Community College faculty, JMU X-Lab faculty, and a JMU Teacher-in-Residence. This multi-institutional partnership exemplifies the collaborative spirit at the heart of the Lab School, bringing together educators and institutions to create meaningful and innovative learning experiences for students.



LAB School Teacher Spotlight

Welcome **Kristden Oliver** to LAB School! Ms. Oliver is serving in the role as our first Teacher in Residence. A Teacher in Residence is more than a classroom educator. This position serves as a mentor, advocate, and coordinator, ensuring that students remain supported and connected while learning in nontraditional settings. By providing consistent oversight and fostering strong relationships, Ms. Oliver helps students successfully bridge academic learning, career exploration, and real-world experiences while reinforcing the shared commitment of the LAB School and Rockingham County Public Schools to innovative, engaged education. **Welcome to the LAB School family, Ms. Oliver!**

Get Involved!

Interested in being a part of Lab School? We're currently looking for a parental representative to serve on our Governance Board Chair.

Our Governance Board, includes members across James Madison University, LAB School Leadership, Rockingham County Public Schools, and community & industry partners. Its function is to oversee policy, help establish goals, and offer feedback and insight on decisions for LAB School. This board currently meets twice a year.

Our next official meeting is September 24th at 6:00pm in Memorial Hall (Room 6125). Please reach out to Dr. Donica Hadley, Executive Director of LAB School, jmulabschool@jmu.edu, if interested.

