



**Passion  
Projects**



## **What is a Passion Project?**

At Helios, a Passion Project gives students an opportunity to explore what they are most passionate about while being guided by an experienced research advisor.

A typical day in Herons/Egrets' passion projects finds our students engaged in conducting independent, high-quality research, interviewing an expert in the field of their topic, and producing a high-quality project that applies their knowledge and budding expertise in new and unique contexts.

## Why are Passion Projects important?

Helios students are introduced to a significant number of research techniques and skills throughout the year, and we feel the best way to engage our students in this learning process is to encourage them to choose a topic they feel passionately about.

Why? Because we feel that learning something difficult is much easier when it is something we are passionate about.

Think of Mary Poppins: “A spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down.”

## **What skills will my student build further through Herons/Egrets Passion Projects?**

The 7/8 grade band continues to build on and refine the research and project creation techniques they learned as a Condor. The students already understand how to:

- create proposals with high-quality guiding questions
- accept and incorporate feedback
- identify high-quality and reliable sources
- and conduct high-quality research.

As in past years, students need to:

- Apply executive function to work independently with technology and online resources in an appropriate and effective manner.
- Incorporate depth into their research.

# What is new in Herons/Egrets Passion Projects?

Herons/Egrets students will:

- continue to work on time-management and executive functioning skills
- learn how to conduct an *interview with an expert* in the field of their topic
- and create a *practical application*.

The *practical application* is the golden jewel of our Heliosian passion projects and gives our students the opportunity to take their extensive research and create a project that reaches beyond the walls of our Helios.

Past projects have included environmental awareness campaigns, drives for menstrual equity, and experimentations on water quality in local bay area streams.

The goal of all of these tools is to give our students the skills they will need to organize and create effective, high-quality research projects throughout the remaining years of their studies.

## What it looks like

Herons/Egrets complete one passion project per year.

- Students work independently on topics of their choice to propose, research, and present their findings.
- Some examples of the diverse topics chosen in the past were: Mythic Storytelling, Ethics of the Death Penalty, Experimental Music, and Bee Keeping to name a few.
- Students conduct interviews with experts in their field of study.
- Students create a practical application that should have significance beyond the Helios community.



## What it looks like

- Each week students work through one of the primary modules of the research project (Proposal, Research Tracker, Interview, Practical Application, Presentation Preparation) and receive mini-lessons to learn key research tools based on where they are in the process.
- Some of these weekly mini-lessons include talks on MLA format, interview techniques, the importance of reliable, high-quality sources, and substantiating their claims.
- Advisors provide high quality feedback and students learn to address the feedback and re-submit their work as needed.
- Students will work on their project for most of the school year.



## **What does my student need from me?**

Parents should understand that this is an independent project. There are times when your student will have to discuss a few items with you at different points along the way, but generally speaking, this is their project and your assistance will only be needed occasionally, for example to purchase necessary supplies, set aside time to conduct their interview, or provide space for their experiments at home.

## How Passion Projects Prepare Students

- Refine students' abilities to articulate their perspectives on topics.
- Refine students' ability to substantiate claims.
- Reiterate that high quality sources are key to high-quality research.
- Experiment with new skills.
- Experience failure in a safe space.
- Navigate time constraints to complete a long term project.

EVERY DAY  
IS A GOOD  
DAY TO  
LEARN.



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