

Roots Community School Guiding Principles for the Classroom Experience

Holistic and Balanced Education

Using a holistic education model, the purpose of the Roots environment and daily flow is to prepare students to meet the challenges of living as well as academics. Emphasis is placed on the social, emotional, and physical health of the child, along with a balanced academic program. We believe that a holistic approach to learning will build both resilience and an aesthetic approach to life. Resilience entails overcoming difficulties, facing challenges and learning how to ensure long-term success. An aesthetic approach to life describes an ability to see and appreciate the beauty in each day and its experiences. At Roots we believe that children must learn about *themselves*. This includes learning self-respect, self-esteem, self-motivation, and self-regulation. Children must also learn about *relationships and social interactions*. Every child benefits from intentional instruction and reflection surrounding social awareness, collaboration and contributing as a community of learners. Children also need time for physical exercise throughout the day so that learning can be optimal and enjoyable. Our program incorporates one hour of recess daily, along with a yoga and physical education program.

At Roots we believe that a balanced education is important for creating meaningful daily experiences and a love of learning. A balanced daily flow weaves in multiple learning modalities (visual/seeing, auditory/hearing, kinesthetic/moving and tactile/touching) throughout the day. It also weaves creative art opportunities into traditional subject lessons with the desired outcome of increased retention of and appreciation for learning.

Foundations for Multiage Education

Our classrooms are multiage configurations with either a two or three grade span. The benefits of multiage educational practices are plentiful. The classroom community is strong and family-like as children of varying ages, teachers, and parents support each other. Every child is challenged at just the right level so learning is thrilling, motivating, and enjoyable every day. No student is bored waiting for others to catch up and each child is taught at their individual instructional level. Our children are able to develop over time within a supportive community according to their unique abilities. As a result, each child leads her/his own learning. While older children benefit from the ability to teach younger students, younger students view more sophisticated and complex problem solving. There is an atmosphere of nurturing rather than one of competition in which children pressure one another to fit an arbitrary norm. The teacher finds himself or herself supporting each individual child as to their own complex set of needs rather than trying to lead a group of students to complete an age-based step.

- Extra month of teaching time
- Easier transition into next classroom because all teachers know all the kids
- Relationship with parents helps parents feel comfortable talking with their child's teacher and helps them feel part of their child's team
- Deeper teacher-student relationships lead to increased learning across academic and social/emotional areas

Project-Based Learning

Our educational structure is centered around project-based learning. Project-based learning refers to students designing, planning, and carrying out an extended project that produces a publicly-exhibited output such as a product, community service project, publication, or presentation. We believe that children have increased ownership of and pride in their work when learning is purpose driven with an end product in mind. We have

chosen to focus on project-based learning because displaying quality work and effort is a tremendously powerful motivator.

Developmentally appropriate classroom environments and daily flow

We believe each developmental stage is unique, a wonder, and to be honored, and we design our classrooms and daily flow to accommodate and celebrate a range of developmental levels. This means we emphasize depth over breadth, allow for time to learn and let learning sink in, and adapt curriculum to fit children's emotional, social, cognitive, language and physical needs. This approach creates an environment where children innately love learning, creativity, and problem-solving.

Authentic Assessment and Progress Reporting

We believe in authentic assessment measures in which students are asked to perform real-world tasks that demonstrate meaningful application of essential knowledge and skills. Project-based learning products and student portfolios are two assessment measures used at Roots. When students embark on a project, they are aware of learning targets and success "criteria" and understand that their evaluation will be based on this criteria. Students participate in self-assessment and evaluation and write reflections at the culmination of projects. These reflections and assessments go into student portfolios and are used to track progress over the years.

We believe that it is more important to give elementary students experience in critical thinking and problem solving than test taking. As Jo Boaler, a renown math "guru" from Stanford, states: *Students with no experience of examinations and tests can score at the highest levels because the most important preparation we can give students is a growth mindset, positive beliefs about their own ability, and problem-solving mathematical tools to equip them for any mathematical situation.* While Jo is referring to math here, we believe her statement is true across subject matter.

Roots teachers know that it is important for parents to understand their child's learning progress. Our report cards are progression based and in alignment with the Common Core State Standards. They are used to facilitate communication and conversation between teachers and parents on student progress and next steps.

Student Portfolios Across the Elementary Years

We track student progress and learning through student portfolio collections. These portfolios are compiled from year to year so students, parents, and teachers can review progress and see trends. In thoughtful portfolio collections, students are asked to reflect on their work and to engage in self-assessment and goal-setting. These are two of the most authentic skills students need to develop to successfully manage in the real world. Research has found that students in schools that emphasize improvement, progress, effort and the process of learning rather than grades and normative performance are more likely to use a variety of learning strategies and have a more positive attitude toward learning. Our portfolio collections include student work that

- Includes best work showing growth over time
- Illustrates experiences as a learner
- Shows evidence of reflection
- Helps students find depth and gain new perspectives
- Represents the uniqueness of the individual student
- Identifies next steps in learning progressions

Literature-Based Reading Instruction

In literature-based instruction, authors' original narrative and expository works are used as the core for experiences to support children in developing literacy. The types of activities done with the literature are the natural types of things children and adults would do when reading and responding to any good book. For example, it is natural to share and talk about a good book after reading it; it is not natural to answer ten questions about the book. The teacher's role becomes one of planning and supporting authentic learning experiences.

Literature-based instruction is much more than giving students quality literature; it is doing the authentic things with the literature that all writers and readers would naturally do, and giving students support with these activities as they need it. Children develop literacy (reading, writing, thinking) by having real literacy experiences and getting support from more-experienced individuals, who may be adults or peers. Research clearly shows that literature-based instruction helps all students become better readers, writers, and thinkers.

At the foundation of our reading program we believe:

1. Children learn to read by reading!
2. Self-selected reading is more meaningful than teacher/program selected, and children will learn true and valuable reading behaviors when they read material they choose.
3. Children need to be taught how to choose appropriate books for their interests and abilities.
4. Similar reading strategies are used at all ages and must be modeled and taught.

Big Ideas we will address and implement throughout the years at Roots:

1. Readers read to get smarter and to learn about themselves, other people, and the world
2. Reading is something you can do independently that empowers you to control your life and make the world a better place
3. Smart is something you get, and through hard work and effort and determination, you can accomplish your goals
4. Readers read, write, think, and learn with purpose and enthusiasm and see themselves as problem posing, problem solving citizens of the world who have what it takes to figure things out
5. Readers engage in conversations and discussions about big ideas with open hearts and minds. Readers are willing to share their own thinking and to appreciate and learn from and respect the ideas and opinions of others
6. Learning is for always; it's lifelong, ongoing and vital

Writing Program

We teach writing in a workshop model that consists of mini-lessons, long blocks of time to write, and time to share our work. Our big Ideas for writing include:

1. Writing is an important form of communication and we use it regularly throughout each day.
2. Writing is an extension of our thinking and a fun way to share our ideas, thoughts, and opinions.
3. Writing challenges us to think more deeply and more thoroughly. At times we have to take initial thoughts and push our thinking to dive deeper into what we are trying to say and why. Therefore, writing makes our minds grow.
4. Writers see amazing stories in common events.

5. Writers notice injustices and inconsistencies in life, articulate their observations, persuade others to care, and offer solutions.
6. Writers have a writer's heart and mind and notice the beauty in the ordinary and the extraordinary.
7. Writers understand that reading and writing go hand-in-hand. They respond to reading in a variety of writing genres.
8. Writers understand that writing is an important avenue for passing on new learnings, discoveries, inventions, research findings, etc.

Math

We believe...

- Learning math is a collaborative and social endeavor.
- Learning is a process of constructing meaning to make sense of concepts.
- Seeing, touching, and sketching ideas create pictures in the mind's eye, helping learners to construct, understand, and apply mathematical ideas.
- Learning requires perseverance and willingness to experience disequilibrium.

Our teachers...

- Encourage students to be responsible for their own learning.
- Use good questioning strategies to draw out student thinking and promote understanding.
- Promote discourse while creating a safe learning environment.
- Understand the developmental continuum of mathematical understanding and assess student progress on that continuum.
- Challenge each student at his or her developmental level to create a meaningful and fun learning environment for all.
- Create lessons that move from the concrete to pictorial to abstract.

Our students...

- Solve problems using visual models and manipulatives.
- Make and test conjectures while recording their thinking.
- Talk and move around the classroom as they actively engage in learning.
- Track their progress along developmental continuums.

Science and Social Studies are Woven into Themes and Literacy

Science and social studies are integrated daily into thematic studies. This year our school theme is Communities. Related topics of study include: classroom, animal habitats, life cycles, challenges, etc; westward expansion and early frontier life in the Chelan Valley, human body systems, healthy eating: healthy lives. The Eagles will study how our water resources, Lake Chelan and the Columbia River, impact our community and connect us with others. The Bears and Wolves will study local farming and agriculture and will pay special attention to how simple machines help us live.

Teacher Qualifications, Expectations and Supports

We hire highly qualified teachers who have a passion for teaching that aligns with the Roots Guiding Principles. We hire teachers with current teacher certifications or teachers who are highly qualified in the subject matter they teach. We value professional development and budget money towards ongoing teacher training and PD. We believe our teaching staff should be valued and honored for their expertise and we support them by:

- Trusting, encouraging and expecting our teachers to be creative in their teaching methods and current on best practices.
- Trusting their expertise in designing and implementing best instruction to support all students
- Providing and expecting yearly opportunities for PD
- Paying a competitive salary
- Embedding time for planning and collaboration into the weekly schedule.
- Supporting them in problem solving by implementing a framework for communication through board, parents and staff to minimize conflict.
- Providing them yearly time and opportunity to evaluate their practice (What do they need to become a more powerful/effective practitioner?) and the school's "health" (How are we doing in relation to our core values and guiding principles?)