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# **Position Statement on Elementary-Level Education**

Adopted June 5, 1996

The elementary school is a learning community where students, staff members and parents are full partners. These partners share an understanding of the school's purpose and a responsibility for its success in ensuring that every child will become a confident, effective, imaginative, lifelong learner. The elementary school provides a smooth transition from informal learning in the home to a formal learning experience and lays the foundation for future, successful learning in school and in life. Therefore, it is critical that all students are guaranteed a safe, secure and orderly environment where they have the opportunity to grow and learn and to achieve their own individual excellence. High standards must exist in an atmosphere where students feel they belong, are willing to take risks, can explore alternatives, and are challenged to reach their highest potential. The learning environment must nurture students' unique talents at different stages of development and understand, respect and incorporate the diversity of their experiences.

## **Learning Environment**

The learning environment provides for productive, engaging activities such that:

- high, consistent expectations for learning are clearly set for all students;
- resources of time, space and activities are distributed to meet the needs of each child;
- a variety of settings and grouping patterns are continually adjusted to meet students' instructional needs;
- opportunities are provided for students and teachers to work both collaboratively and independently;
- students assume responsibility for themselves and others and participate in decision making; and
- teacher and student behavior reflects honesty, integrity and mutual respect.

## **Curriculum and Instruction**

The major tasks of curriculum and instruction in the elementary school experience are to develop literacy and the ability to solve problems in a broad range of core subject areas; to develop computational skills and an understanding of mathematical concepts; to encourage inquiry so that students can ask questions and find answers in all fields of learning; to help students make interdisciplinary connections that bring together knowledge, skills and methods of inquiry from various subject areas; and to respond to different learning styles and levels of ability and development. The school principal supports and provides for the organization and implementation of student-centered instruction such that:

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- students are allowed to work at their own pace in acquiring skills which are defined by high performance standards;
- students learn concepts in a meaningful context where materials and activities build upon the positive and enriching aspects of their cultural and family backgrounds;
- activities are designed to respond to students' questions, challenge their thinking, and encourage them to inquire further;
- students reflect upon prior knowledge and link new ideas to familiar ideas;
- students learn to evaluate their own work;
- students have access to, and are instructed in the use of, print, nonprint and technological resources which accommodate different learning styles and abilities;
- students have frequent opportunities to locate, evaluate and use information and technology resources;
- students are offered a consistent, challenging curriculum with accountability for high standards;
- students learn and master key concepts and skills;
- students learn how to organize and present ideas and materials;
- student assessment is a daily, ongoing activity and is used to make informed instructional decisions for optimum student growth in all subject areas; and
- student assessment is multidimensional and open to students' diverse means of demonstrating competence while maintaining high standards.

## **Community of Learners**

As a community of learners, the elementary school includes students and their families, the staff and the principal, and all other groups and service agencies that support the health and well-being of children. Ongoing communication and cooperation between home and school programs and services provide continuity and security for students and families alike. The school itself is a hub of activity throughout the year, opening its doors to provide programs and to support activities that contribute to building purposeful connections between the home, the school and the community at large. School facilities and grounds are used to provide activities and programs that offer educational opportunities and support the efforts of the family and community at large.

The school staff, the family and the community at large are all contributing partners such that:

- everyone, collectively and individually, is responsible for students' learning;
- every student can rely on the support of at least one advocate, both at school and at home;
- school staff members and parents and guardians establish respectful and productive relationships through ongoing communication;
- the school staff collaborates and communicates with the community at large, using technology when appropriate;

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- the school staff ensures that necessary services are provided for students and their families;
  - the school staff, in conjunction with other community agencies, provides information and ideas to families to help them in their roles of provider, nurturer, disciplinarian and first teacher; and
  - the school staff works with the home and the community to ease transitions and address special needs and situations.

Success in the elementary school is derived from several sources: the student, parents, teachers and principal, the learning environment, the curriculum and the community. The challenge for the elementary school community is to ensure that the content of the curriculum is taught so as to take optimum advantage of the student's natural abilities, interests and enthusiasm for learning. As students progress in the elementary grades, the emphasis on content gradually expands in preparation for transition into the middle school learning environment. In order to ensure a successful journey through this next stage of lifelong learning, a strong foundation of essential skills and habits of learning must be established during the elementary school experience.