

Important Principles for Teaching and Learning at Cambridgeport

1. Curriculum is presented, discovered, explored and mastered as a community of learners.

Social skills, conflict resolution, respect and support for others and other perspectives are qualities, which strengthen learning of all kinds. Within this community, each person must take responsibility for his or her own learning.

2. Immersion in a topic or theme is a way of reaching children with a variety of learning styles, developmental levels and life experiences.

Immersion means that less is really more, that the more deeply children explore a theme, the more they know and the more different ways they can engage themselves. Immersion offers a way to use all the different "intelligences," or ways people learn. A theme is alive; it is like a springboard to more and more learning that is connected to meaning. Themes possess the following characteristics:

- based on curriculum frameworks, children's interests, teacher's passions, and priorities established for the whole school
- flexible enough to integrate the different curriculum areas, children's interests and developmental areas
- short or long
- a way of providing entry points to include family and community resources
- embedded in concepts and values, information, understanding and skill

3. Engagement is the gateway to learning.

Personal engagement - wanting to do something and to stay with it - is at the heart of learning. Being engaged is to ask questions, to be puzzled (even confused). It is wanting to find out, doing something over and over until it makes sense or is just right. Engagement is taking responsibility and working hard because the work (or play) is worthwhile, interesting, challenging and connects with our natural desire to learn.

4. Meaningful learning experiences result in valued "performances," or activities that show the student, teacher, family and community what the student knows and is able to do. High expectations are important for all students.

When we define what students should know and be able to do in broad and clear terms, we know where they should be going, and we can provide experiences that will help them reach the goals that we (and they) set. We can document the steps along the way, and we can expect that each student will be able to show us what (s)he knows by talking about his/her learning and by demonstrating it.

At the Cambridgeport School we keep a **portfolio** of each student's work so we can analyze it with the students and talk about what makes the work good or what could make it better. A collection of work, an oral presentation, a dramatic interpretation, an exhibition, a solution to a problem, a reflection on one's learning are all performances of knowledge, skills, and habits of mind. The eighth grade graduation requirements provide a community review process of several portfolio entries that the eighth grade students are required to present. Meeting learning goals is always important, but we must also be prepared to delight in the unexpected things our students learn along the way!

There are many kinds of data that demonstrate what students know and can do. The most powerful and useful **assessment data** come directly from the classroom where students provide oral, written, electronic, visual and other kinds of evidence of what they are learning. Teachers must be clear in describing the range of quality of work and students must work or surpass the standards of the classroom.

Other data give us a snapshot of students in comparison to the state curriculum frameworks or to other students in Cambridge, the state, or the nation. Students experience district level assessments in math, reading and writing three times per year. Students in grades 3-8 are also required to take the MCAS (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System) in English Language Arts, Math and Science/Technology.