



CALGARY ARTS ACADEMY

POLICY MANUAL

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

The Calgary Arts Academy

Vision:

Children and community that value arts and learning. (Revised Spring, 2005)

Mission

Calgary Arts Academy will be an innovative school that engages children through Arts Immersion and research to become confident learners and spirited citizens. (Revised Spring, 2005)

Calgary Arts Academy Profile

At the Calgary Arts Academy students are provided with instruction in all elements of the mandated Alberta Curriculum at all grade levels. The curriculum is delivered through Arts Immersion so that all concepts being presented begin with an art form as the foundation of learning. Artists and Educational Assistant/Artists work directly with teachers to plan and deliver the curriculum for students. Students receive instruction in at least three art forms (art, music, dance, visual or literary arts) each day. Student performances at regularly scheduled school assemblies or public performances for parents and community are curriculum based and strive to demonstrate learning of concepts from the various subject areas. The philosophical bases for learning are centered on concepts defined in the Circle of Courage, Democratic Discipline, Developmental Assets and Brain Theory, all of which are more fully explained below.

As an Arts Immersion school, the Calgary Arts Academy endeavours to build strong connections to the broader community, particularly the Arts Community and related organizations and businesses. In addition, we accommodate practicum students with a specialization in the fine and performing arts from the University of Calgary Master of Teaching Program, Mount Royal and Bow Valley Colleges.

The charter for the Calgary Arts Academy was approved in 2003 for a maximum of 325 students. The charter was amended in 2007 by the Minister of Education to accommodate a maximum of 450 students. The charter proposal also called

for accommodation of artist groups in the school to ensure a context for arts immersion and ability to build true partnerships in learning with artists from the community.

Learning through Arts Immersion

In implementing the Calgary Arts Academy mission and vision we begin with the end in mind. A key element in our implementation plan is the concept of providing stability and continuity of program for students in kindergarten to grade nine. The school population is comprised of three divisions:

Division I: Kindergarten to year 2

Division II: year 3 to year 5

Division III: year 6 to year 9 (essentially junior high)

As the Arts are the focus of our core curriculum, artists are employed on a permanent basis to work with professional staff in planning and delivering the Alberta curriculum through Arts Immersion. Additional artists are employed on short-term contracts throughout the year as appropriate.

Learning is not divided up into pre-scheduled time periods. Collaboratively, teachers, artists and parents plan to deliver the program based on student need, rather than on a prescribed timetable. Students may have extended learning periods to focus on a particular curriculum concept. As mastery is achieved, learning groupings and curricular focus may change, coordinated by the teachers. The provincial requirements for hours of instruction in all subjects are met by the school.

Each day begins with students working in multi-aged groupings assigned to particular teacher/facilitators for a pre-determined period of time. Learning is generative and accommodates learning styles and provides for remediation and enrichment. Students are engaged in the creation of learning contracts that include parents as partners in the learning process. Senior citizens are involved as “elders in the community” and engage in the educational process with students and staff.

At the conclusion of each day, all participants have the opportunity to share their learning and successes. Evaluation of student goals, teaching goals and parent involvement are discussed, providing all stakeholders with a sense of accomplishment.

Performances incorporating curriculum concepts illustrated through the various art forms occur frequently throughout the year as a celebration of learning.

The Research Component

The research component of our program is intended to enrich the learning experience for all participants. The objective of the research component is to examine aspects of the teaching/learning process in an Arts Immersion environment in a structured manner, so that the insights gained can be applied to improve program delivery and student achievement. Learning and new understandings garnered through analysis of data collected will be shared publicly as a requirement of the mandate for all charter schools.

Students participate in action research projects and develop the capacity to document research in all forms. Students maintain a portfolio of their research involvement. Research assistants from the University of Calgary or similar institutions will be contracted as the need arises to set up research frameworks and data analysis. A fulltime Arts/Research Coordinator is responsible for ensuring that appropriate and timely data is collected for accountability purposes.

Definitions

Democratic Discipline

A democratic environment means that a firm, fair and consistent approach to learning and behavior expectations will be implemented. The goal of this approach is to encourage increased development of student responsibility for self-discipline and for learning. Curriculum delivery and evaluation will demonstrate democracy as staff, students, artists and parents collaborate to ensure student success.

The Developmental Assets Approach

Protecting young people from many different problem behaviours and promoting positive attitudes and behaviours will be accomplished through the developmental assets approach. With this approach, the focus on addressing student growth and achievement is based on identifying a student's strengths and assets and working from there rather than working from a deficit model where the student's shortcomings are identified and addressed through remediation programs.

Circle of Courage

The Circle of Courage is a native philosophy designed to provide a common language and understanding of four key components that act as a foundation to the development of our school culture:

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- Belonging; Shared community and employment of cooperative strategies of learning
- Mastery: Encouragement for competency
- Independence: Assisting students to separate and manage to make positive choices on their own.
- Generosity: Caring for others

Brain Theory

Calgary Arts Academy uses the most recent brain research strategies to assist with student learning. Students participate in exercises at least three times each day to facilitate the manner in which the left and right hemispheres of the brain function together during learning activities.