

THE GROVE COMMUNITY SCHOOL HANDBOOK

Version 2.0 February 2011 (DRAFT)



This is The Grove's Handbook and it is very much a work in progress. We see this as an important document to frame how we want our school to function but understand that it will evolve as we build the school together. It is a collective effort and draws inspiration from other schools' handbooks including Hawthorne, Alpha Alternative, and the Whole Child School. It will be revisited and revised periodically.

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1. Introduction: A brief history of The Grove

In the spring of 2007, a group of families initiated discussions to start a public alternative elementary school in the west-end that would focus on social justice and ecology.

After contacting TDSB school trustee Chris Bolton we learned that an application would need to be made to the TDSB by September 30th 2007 if we hoped to have a school start in September 2008. A public meeting was organized at College-Shaw Library on May 28th with approximately 100 people attending, including children. From this meeting more than 20 people volunteered to be part of an organizing committee in order to prepare an application to the TDSB.

From this organizing committee, sub-committees were organized, including: outreach, philosophy, location, governance, etc. Soon we articulated other key features of our school; these included arts infusion, peacemaking & cooperative learning, democratic decision-making, educational excellence, and collaborative assessment of student learning.

Another well-attended public meeting was held on July 19th at Brock Public School in Ward 9. In mid-August, a community BBQ was held at Dufferin Grove Park where suggestions were taken for the school's name. Small groups were created to address TDSB application items including curriculum, mission, values, objectives, rationale for generation of students (which grades to include), letter of intent, etc.

On September 1st 2007, "The Grove Community School" was chosen through a community-based democratic process as the name for the proposed new public alternative school. Shortly thereafter, our application draft was submitted to Sandy Best from the TDSB. Our final application was submitted to the TDSB on September 25th.

After almost a year of back and forth with the TDSB and an intensive effort to find space, the steering committee determined that we needed to invigorate our efforts and continue pursuing the school opening in September 2009. We held a family Jamboree in Dufferin Grove Park attended by hundreds of interested and supportive families. That same week we were invited to meet with a team of TDSB officials and the administration of Alexander Muir Gladstone, and it was deemed an appropriate place to locate The Grove for a September 2009 opening.

In September 2009, we opened our doors to 71 students and created two Junior & Senior Kindergarten classes, a Grade 1, and a Grade 2/3 classroom. Our first year began with three classroom teachers and a rotary Expressive Arts teacher. In September 2010, we opened a new classroom and extended our community to Grade 4. Each year, we will add a new classroom until we reach Grade 6. Together, with administration and parents, the teachers began to implement the vision of The Grove Community School Handbook. This current DRAFT version of the

Handbook includes our original vision, as well as concrete examples of what this vision looks like in practice in our classroom and school community.

2. Core Values

Equity, Diversity, and Social Justice

The Grove's approach to equity affirms the TDSB's *Equity Foundation Statement and Commitments to Equity Policy Implementation* (see www.tdsb.on.ca & search for equity policy)

In particular, at The Grove we "recognize ... that certain groups in our society are treated inequitably because of individual and systemic biases related to race, colour, culture, ethnicity, linguistic origin, disability, socioeconomic class, age, ancestry, nationality, place of origin, religion, faith, sex, gender [gender identity], sexual orientation, family status, and marital status. Similar biases have also impacted on Canada's aboriginal population. We also acknowledge that such biases exist within our school system." (from TDSB's *Equity Foundation Statement and Commitments to Equity Policy Implementation*)

At The Grove, we aim to create curriculum to counter such biases. As much as possible, our curriculum "accurately reflects and uses the variety of knowledge of all peoples as the basis for instruction; ... it actively provides opportunities for all students to understand the factors that cause inequity in society, and to understand the similarities, differences, and the connections between different forms of discrimination; and ... [our curriculum] helps students to acquire the skills and knowledge that enable them to challenge unjust practices, and to build positive human relationships among their fellow students, and among all members of the society." (from TDSB's *Equity Foundation Statement and Commitments to Equity Policy Implementation*)

The Grove is committed to critical pedagogy, an approach to teaching and learning that seeks to raise learners' awareness of social justice and injustice. The aim is to enable learners to recognize connections between their individual experiences and the social contexts in which they occur. We are particularly concerned with reconfiguring those remnants of the traditional student/teacher relationship where the teacher is the 'one who knows', and the students are the passive recipients of the teacher's knowledge. At The Grove, the whole school is a classroom and a space where new knowledge, grounded in the experiences of students and teachers (as well as families and other community members), is produced through meaningful dialogue.

The intended outcome is to support our community to be able to recognize and critically engage all forms of social injustice, and to learn and work together towards democratic transformation and positive social change.

Ecological Sustainability and Environmental Justice

The Grove is founded on the belief that the quality of children's learning and their ability to realize their life potential is intimately related to the health and wellness of their interconnected ecological and social environments. As a result, we see sustainability and social justice education as inextricably linked.

The community-centred, experiential, and democratic nature of the School's pedagogy is evident in our approach to environmental education. Students learn *in, about, and for* the environment. Environmental education at The Grove is inter and multi-disciplinary. It is about values, attitudes, ethics and actions, rather than a subject or a separate 'add-on'. It is a way of thinking and a way of practice. As the School develops its unique curriculum, students at The Grove increasingly will learn the principles of ecological literacy through concrete experiences and community engagement. Moreover, the curriculum will *take students beyond human-centered communities* and will strive to connect students and their families with the natural communities in which they are embedded.

Over the last two years, since The Grove's inception, the Kindergarten class has explored ecological literacy using an inquiry-based approach. Students in both Kindergarten classes have spent a large amount of time in the Classroom in the Courtyard, exploring, inquiring and investigating the various questions they had about nature. The children developed a stronger relationship with and appreciation for nature, and when the Classroom in the Courtyard was mulched at the end of the year, all the children wanted to draw pictures of what would make it an even better natural place.

As The School grows to include junior grades and our unique curriculum develops, groups of learners such as a class or a division, or possibly the whole school, might choose to spend extended time on a focal theme or issue such as the evaluation of green space in our local neighbourhood, and then participate in a new or existing project taking place in our community, such as the planning and development of a community garden. With family and community support, the students might also decide to advocate at the local level or beyond for increases in safe green spaces in which children can play. Through participation in such projects, our students could learn a variety of subjects including earth science, history, natural science, the arts, math and human geography, while also helping realize important local environmental initiatives.

Our approach to environmental education will include strong linkages to community activism and social justice and will incorporate much more outdoor education than most schools, including regular nature hikes and field trips to natural spaces. We will try to link the “whys”, “whats”, and “ways” of earth education with a wide array of environmental education and social justice principles.

❖ **The Whys**

- **Preserving** – The belief the earth as we know it is endangered.
- **Nurturing** – The belief that people who have broader understandings and deeper feelings for the planet as a vessel of life learn to be wiser and healthier and happier.

- **Training** - Earth advocates are needed to serve as environmental teachers and models, and to champion the preservation of the planet
- ❖ **The *Whats***
 - **Understanding** – It is important to develop in people a basic comprehension of the major ecological systems and communities of the planet.
 - **Feeling** - We must instill in people deep and abiding emotional attachments to the earth and its life.
 - **Processing** - It is important to develop new ways of living on the earth that respect the fragility of our planet.
- ❖ **The *Ways***
 - **Structuring** – Our school will strive to build complete programs with adventuresome, magical learning experiences that focus on specific outcomes.
 - **Immersing** - We believe in including plenty of rich, firsthand contact with the natural world.
 - **Relating** - We are committed to providing individuals with time in natural settings where they can reflect upon all life.

(Adapted from the Institute for Earth Education Canada)

Community Engagement and Activism

While The Grove seeks to nourish the individual needs of all students, it is a community-centred school in which *students, parents/guardians/extended families, teachers, and community members work together in a cooperative, consensus-building way to learn from each other and to solve real problems* that are important to all. The Grove both supports the needs of students enrolled in the school and endeavours to build a hub of community learning. We encourage family members to contribute to a culture of investigation, curiosity, and involvement that includes adult learning circles, adult education classes, town halls, book clubs, parenting support groups, and yoga classes.

The Grove's community-centered education prepares students and the broader school community to learn for deep understanding by moving them beyond memorizing facts to evaluating the social and environmental significance of what they are learning. Student learning will focus on real, authentic problems and solutions that encourage collaboration and cooperation because students will experience the reality that real-life problems often are too complex for one person to solve alone.

Action projects at The Grove are designed to meet the multi-faceted needs of students and families and promote positive relationships with and in the local community. The school will consider a variety of criteria when project planning, such as:

- Children feel empowered: Do children feel like they are making a difference and can make decisions about their local environment and act upon those decisions in their communities?

- Activism beyond the project: After their involvement in the project, do children become engaged in other social and/or environmental justice programs or activities?
- Children see results: Can the children see the results their activities have, for both the short- and long-term?
- Community and school relationship: Does the community have a positive or negative opinion of the school, and vice versa?
- Activism beyond school grounds: Are children involved in projects beyond the borders of the school grounds?
- Community participates: Are community citizens involved in the program and working with the students?

We also seek to collaborate with the parents/guardians/extended families of Alexander Muir/Gladstone (AMG) on a variety of projects, thus extending The Grove's sense of community as we all learn from each other. For example, it is our school's desire that, whenever feasible, any projects, field trips or educational resources of The Grove Community School will be open to AMG as well, so that all students benefit from any foundation grants, fundraising, and other resources that may accrue to us at The Grove due to the activist nature of our School. In our first two years, we have worked collaboratively with AMG to create a variety of community events, including: the Kindergarten Wildflower Stomp, Lunar New Year celebrations, 100th Day of School activities, Pride Day celebrations, Yellow Fish Program, Reading and Learning Buddies, whole school assemblies, guest speakers, and concerts.

For example, in November 2010, The Grove invited their AMG Grade 4 class learning buddies to work with the Grade 1 Grove class on the Yellow Fish Road environmental program. Students, teachers, and family volunteers learned about local storm drain systems, how rainwater gets polluted, and the species that are affected by pollution. The classes worked together in groups of four to mark over one hundred local storm drains in The Grove/AMG neighbourhood. Together, the two schools delivered anti-pollution messages to hundreds of local homes.

In this way, we strive to live up to our chosen designation as a 'Community School' and will play a vital role in the life of our neighbourhood — as a dynamic hub for social justice, culture, and community service, as well as environmentally-focused education.

3. Key Commitments

The Grove has a unique approach to the Ontario curriculum. Our key commitments emerge from our core values, and include the following components: community, collaboration, respect for children’s voices, holistic education, as well as democratic decision-making, learning, and practice.

Community

Fostering a sense of community is the cornerstone of The Grove. Children and their families will experience and contribute to a sense of community in the school through activities, organized events throughout the year (such as potlucks or concerts), and volunteerism.

Relationships are valued and strengthened in the interest of developing a safe, supportive learning environment that values diversity and that helps students to excel.

The Grove values, respects, and fosters equity and diversity in our school community. The Grove provides a community where children from diverse families (including communities of colour, immigrant families, working-class families and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or queer families) feel safe and see themselves and their families reflected and valued.

The classroom is the child’s first experience of community. The teachers at The Grove take the time to build a cohesive classroom community. The Grove is well on its way to building a school-wide, community-building program that provides a common language and classroom routines and rituals to build community throughout all the grades in the school. Some of the key elements of this program are regular classroom meetings, a common language for conflict resolution, cooperative/collaborative learning activities, and developing a common vocabulary for relating respectfully with others.

In our first two years, Grove teachers have been actively involved in a research project through OISE to develop and implement Peace Circles in the classroom. Teachers have also worked with Peace Builders’ International to receive professional development and support to create strategies for using a restorative justice model for resolving conflicts in the classroom.

In addition to Peace Circles and community meetings, the teachers are committed to developing and implementing curriculum that explicitly supports students to learn cooperative learning skills and strategies. For example, in order to work effectively as a community, students need to be able to: listen attentively, work cooperatively, ask questions, be positive, set goals, disagree respectfully, etc.

Community building in the classroom will be founded on concepts of social justice that will get built upon and expanded in the social studies program and beyond. Children are

encouraged to develop empathy and to feel a connection to their local and global communities.

Children will be exposed to and experience the power of community and collective action and as a result, feel empowered to take social action and work towards creating a more equitable and just world.

Collaboration

The Grove provides a non-competitive and collaborative environment for children.

As a community, teachers, parents, caregivers, families, staff, and children collaborate and create opportunities, to support and enable children to excel. The practice of calling teachers by their first names is an important expression of collaboration.

Every two weeks, the students at The Grove work collaboratively in multi-aged groups on a variety of engaging activities related to current curriculum themes. Grove Gatherings are a wonderful opportunity for older students to demonstrate leadership and mentoring skills, and also help to create strong and positive relationships across the school community. The Grove Gatherings have included opportunities for: weaving, playing co-operative games, writing, singing, patterning, reflecting, drawing, and re-telling stories using art and drama.

Collaboration is also modeled through inclusive and democratic decision-making. At The Grove, teachers encourage all students to share their ideas, opinions and feelings, to develop their own voice, and to explore different points of view. Students shared their suggestions and feedback about our Snack program at a Parent Council meeting. Recently, we have created opportunities for students to choose a monthly special event, called “Wacky Wednesday”, which honours the children’s own interests, such as Toy Day or Pajama Day.

Collaboration is reflected within the classroom and at school-wide initiatives. The teachers and families at The Grove are committed to working collaboratively to create several whole-school community events throughout the year. It is our hope to strengthen our connection and relationship to Dufferin Grove Park as we bring many of our celebrations to the park. Our community events have included: Stone Soup, The Wild Rumpus, Earth Festival, and Winter Carnival.

There are optional opportunities for friendly competition through games and sports. When students participate in competitive activities they are held to a high standard of respect toward their teammates as well as opposing teams.

The Children’s Art Show at the Gladstone in March 2011 is an example of parent/teacher/student/community collaboration. Planning, organizing, executing, and hanging artwork is all part of the collaborative process. Students give art talks during the opening night to express their voices about an important process.

Respect for Children's Voices

Child-centred education is about respecting, recognizing, and responding to a child's needs and rights and providing a safe and nurturing learning environment where each child can flourish. Child-centred education rejects stereotypes and enables children to be themselves and find their own voices. The Grove is a school where differences are the norm! Girls with buzz cuts and boys who wear skirts are welcomed here!

The Grove offers a child-centered educational approach in which each child is understood holistically as a unique learner with his or her own process of maturation and his or her own individual capabilities, including strengths and weaknesses.

For example, in Kindergarten, many of the activity centres are co-planned by the children. At Community Meetings, children share what they love about Kindergarten, and what they do not like, or want to change about the program/classroom. Often children share ideas of how to change the centres in the classroom (e.g., change the dramatic centre into a restaurant, a mail office in the writing centre, etc.). We consider it important to have the children's ideas integrated into the planning of the program, not only because it makes the children more excited, but also because they become more engaged in the classroom activities, and in turn, the learning becomes deeper and more meaningful.

The Grove's **holistic approach to teaching and learning** develops all aspects of a child's being from the intellectual to the emotional, from the artistic to the spiritual, and encourages a sense of self-awareness and community.

Holistic Education

At The Grove, we believe that education should sustain and nurture the multiple dimensions of human beings – physical, intellectual, aesthetic, emotional, and spiritual. The ultimate purpose of holistic education is to transform the way that we look at ourselves and our relationship to the world from a fragmented perspective to an integrative perspective. This shift in perspective is also an important part of ecological and social justice education at The Grove.

As we strive to support the all-round development of learners we draw on the work of Howard Gardner, and take a broad and multi-faceted approach to the development of students' multiple capabilities (see Curriculum, below).

Through holistic education our school aims to enable each child to flourish and develop fully 'what it means to be a human being'. Within this holistic approach, students are imagined as thoughtful, active, participatory learners capable of forming strong and positive human relationships.

Democratic Decision-making, Learning, and Practice

The Grove's vision includes helping students acquire a wide range of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that prepare them to participate in democratic decision-making. At The Grove we want to prepare students, especially those in the junior grades, to share significantly in making decisions about their education, including the curriculum. For example, our goals include offering students ongoing and regular opportunities (e.g., via weekly class meetings, weekly and monthly school-community forums, and other teacher-student/adult-child co-facilitated dialogues) to help shape the agenda and direction of their individual and group learning. In some cases, this includes substantial input into determining topic and project choices, and the depth and breadth in which various issues and themes are explored.

Students also share power with teachers and other adults in making decisions about how their classes operate in an ongoing, age-appropriate, and developmentally-appropriate way. The teaching/learning process incorporates democratic elements. For example, students help assess and evaluate their own learning (anecdotally and more formally) in relation to goals they themselves have helped determine, and work with each other and other adults in the school and beyond to meet them. Teachers and other adults in the school place a high priority on helping to support learners in acquiring meta-cognition (thinking about thinking).

As this dimension of The Grove's unique curriculum develops, democratic skills will be taught increasingly, explicitly and implicitly, both inside the classroom and in whole school settings. For example, especially in the junior grades, students will specifically be taught and have many opportunities to practice chairing discussions, working cooperatively in small groups, disagreeing respectfully, negotiating compromises, and so on.

Currently, in an ongoing way, students also engage in many collaborative activities that encourage reflection, active listening, problem-posing, problem-solving, analysis and other critical thinking skills. For example, Grove students are actively involved in creating the success criteria for a variety of learning skills and activities, including discussions about what it looks like, sounds like, and feels like to work cooperatively, to be respectful, and to solve problems. Students are encouraged to use the success criteria to reflect, self-assess, and to celebrate their own achievements.

As our school develops, students at The Grove will have many opportunities to practice democracy as members of the larger school community. They will play authentic and meaningful roles in the governance of the school, alongside teachers, other staff, parents/guardians, and the broader community. Particularly in the older grades, they will be supported to help set and revise school policies through committees and school-wide conversations.

4. Building Community

Family Involvement

At The Grove, teachers, families, and staff work collaboratively toward the common goal of educating our children according to our core values.

Family involvement at The Grove is vital to our success and is requested of all families; families are strongly encouraged to volunteer 2-5 hours a month. There are many ways to be involved in the school that accommodate work obligations and changing family structures.

Some examples of involvement:

- Working on a Committee
- Organizing and participating in special events
- Volunteering in the classroom (e.g., helping an emergent writer, or working with a child on a writing piece either by helping scribe, or assisting the child with computer technology)
- Sharing cultural traditions
- Sharing information with other families through phone calls
- Leading an after school or noon hour club or program
- Teaching a song in a language other than English
- Making signs and posters for the school and classroom
- Helping with the walking school bus

Volunteering in the Classroom

Families are a dynamic and valuable part of the classroom experience. Parental and family involvement in the classroom fits into two general categories: families with a specific expertise to share (music, visual arts, crafts, gardening) and families interested in providing the teacher with assistance in carrying out his or her lesson plans or in providing one-on-one support to the students (such as assisting a child who may be a struggling reader).

Teachers have different working styles and needs in the classroom, and families can communicate directly with their child's teacher to plan how to contribute. Teachers may also request volunteers for specific tasks and may communicate these opportunities through newsletters, blogs, or through the Classroom Representative.

Each classroom has a Classroom Representative ('Class Rep. '), who supports the classroom teacher to strengthen the Home-School connection and to communicate with families about the on going needs of the classroom. All volunteer scheduling in the classroom is arranged through the teacher.

Some volunteer jobs in/for the classroom include:

- performing, teaching, presenting or leading activities
- assisting on field trips
- collecting materials from the community such as art materials
- reading to children and listening to reading
- volunteering in the library
- playing math or language games with small groups
- facilitating groups with work to do
- helping set up gym equipment
- preparing and supervising art projects
- photocopying
- organizing book club orders for the teachers
- one-on-one tutoring
- Organizing resources/materials and maintaining an orderly environment

Helpful Reminders for Volunteering in the Classroom:

- Respect the leadership of the teacher
- Respect the privacy of the students in the class
- Consider the needs of the classroom first
- Assist children and let them complete their own projects with a stronger sense of accomplishment and satisfaction

Attendance

Regular attendance is encouraged. Because The Grove is a community-centered school where learning takes place in a collaborative environment, regular attendance is important. If children are not at school on a regular basis, we cannot form the strong community which is the foundation of our vision, we cannot foster strong relationships, and we cannot support the development of the necessary skills and culture necessary for meaningful cooperation, conflict resolution, and restorative justice.

Regular attendance is also important because much of the learning will be project-based. Students need to be present to move and develop as the curriculum and community moves and develops.

It is for these same reasons that students are also encouraged to arrive at school on time.

Rights and Responsibilities/Community Guidelines

The Grove's Community Guidelines reinforce The Grove's values of respect, collaboration, community, and peace making.

The Grove emphasizes a proactive approach to problems and stresses the importance of dialogue between and among families, teachers, and students.

Consequences should not be seen as a way of controlling behavior or shaming children, but rather as a way of enabling young people to make responsible choices and develop self-discipline.

Implementation of the statement of Rights and Responsibilities, or Community Guidelines, is the responsibility of every member of The Grove community. Families and students are strongly encouraged to review the Statement together so that everyone knows what their rights and responsibilities are. Our Community Standards reflects the community nature of our school, our cooperative learning process, and Toronto District School Board policies,

Students Have the Right to Expect:

- fair and respectful treatment from peers and staff;
- a high standard of education;
- freedom from physical and verbal harassment;
- a safe and supportive learning environment;
- sensitivity to their academic, social and emotional needs;
- the opportunity to help shape rules and procedures (e.g. By having the chance to provide input about them at school meetings);
- the right to be listened to when they express disagreement respectfully;
- a non-violent environment;
- a high standard of education.

Students are Responsible for:

- respecting the rights and feelings of others;
- resolving (or managing) problems (conflicts) using words;
- completing work to the best of their ability;
- showing respect and self-discipline in actions and words;
- knowing and following rules and understanding why they are important;
- respect for the school space, including spaces we share in common with AMG (the Library, Schoolyard, Basement, etc.);
- peaceful behaviour (no war games or violent toys).

Staff Have the Right to Expect:

- respect, co-operation and support from students and families;
- appropriate and considerate behaviour from all members of the school community;
- students to show a conscientious attitude towards learning;
- completion of assignments to the best of a student's ability;
- students who make good efforts to come to class prepared to contribute and learn.

Staff are Responsible for:

- planning and teaching an effective, stimulating program that reflects The Grove's core values;
- creating positive learning environments that support students' self esteem;
- being sensitive to students' needs and rights respectfully;
- managing a productive, organized and safe classroom;
- encouraging of children's differences;
- on-going communication with families regarding concerns and achievements in a timely way (e.g. phone, e-mail, newsletters);
- supporting conflict resolution strategies.

Families Have the Right to Expect:

- a high quality of educational programming;
- a safe and supportive educational environment that reflects The Grove's core values;
- on-going communication regarding concerns and achievements relevant to their child(ren);
- feedback and support regarding their volunteer contributions.

Families are Responsible for:

- encouraging a positive attitude towards learning, and a supportive attitude to the school's core values and statement of community conduct;
- taking an active, supportive interest in their children's progress and school life;
- establishing timely contact with the school if there are specific concerns regarding their child;
- supporting conflict management/resolution strategies;
- actively engaging as community members in the life of the school;
- regular and punctual attendance;
- ensuring that students come to school prepared with the right clothing for plenty of extended time spent in the outdoors in all types of weather.

Conflict Management/Resolution, Peacemaking, and Restorative Justice

Developing skills in conflict management/resolution, negotiation, and problem solving is critical to building a vibrant and healthy school community.

We are in the process of learning more in this area, and in the future we will integrate additional work on peace building and restorative justice into the handbook. We will also work within the school community to set up a peer mediation program where students will get training on how to mediate playground disputes as the school grows.

At this time, The Grove social literacy program is exploring ways to incorporate the teaching of a number of skills and dispositions, including: communication skills (listening without interrupting), assertiveness, anger management, empathy, positive self talk, an expansion of vocabulary to describe feelings, learning how to handle criticism, recognition of unhelpful thoughts and changing them to helpful thoughts, managing stress through relaxation techniques, and using The Grove's three-step model to solve problems at the primary level.

Three-Step Model for Conflict Resolution/Management

This model is currently being used in our primary classrooms, and includes three simple steps for resolving or managing peer-to-peer conflicts. Each student engaged in a dispute is encouraged to state what happened, paraphrase what they heard or understood the other person to say, and finally to help build a solution.

In Grade 1, for example, students are being supported to work through conflicts with each other using the following steps:

Say what happened.
Say what you heard.
Say what you need.

Eight-Step Problem Solving Model

As The Grove grows, students in the upper grades will begin to learn a wider range of skills in relation to addressing conflicts, such as those elaborated below. (Note that the three-step model is consistent with this approach.)

Set guidelines:

Agree to solve the problem;
No blaming, name calling, or rude gestures;
Tell the truth;
Listen without interrupting.

Each person tells problem as she/he sees it and feels about it.
Each person repeats back what he/she heard the other person say.
Each person gets to include anything he/she left out or wants to clarify.
Each person gets to tell her/his ideal solution.
Each person gets to say what solution he/she thinks is attainable and will work.
Agree to a solution that both parties will try.
Check Up: agree to set a time for a follow-up meeting to see how things are going or, if necessary, to look at another solution.

For managing conflicts among community members, families are asked to abide by the following guidelines.

Student/Teacher Conflicts

If an issue or problem arises with a child, families are asked to:

- Discuss the concern thoroughly with your child.
- Make an appointment to discuss it with the teacher.
- If still concerned, speak to the Vice Principal or Principal.
- If resolution not reached, speak to the School Superintendent.
- The TDSB Trustee can also be consulted and involved but communication with staff is always the first step in a constructive process.

Please:

- Do not jump to conclusions or be unnecessarily negative.
- Do not undermine the teacher's relationship with the child.
- Be willing to hear all versions of the story.
- Follow the order in the procedure outlined above.

Parent/Guardians should avoid criticizing teachers, administrators or other staff in front of the children, at class meetings or at School Council meetings. Except where child welfare rules apply, families/guardians and staff must make every effort to respect confidentiality.

Family Member/Teacher Conflicts

Families/Guardians and teachers are asked to start by trying to resolve issues informally by making an appointment to talk face-to face with mutual consideration and respect. If an issue remains unresolved, either parent(s)/guardians or teacher is free to go to the Principal or Vice Principal to make an appointment for a meeting to help resolve the conflict. Difficulties that are unresolved at that level should be taken to the Superintendent. The School Council is not the appropriate place to discuss disputes.

Netiquette: The Grove's Code of Conduct for Online Interaction

The Grove uses email for a large portion of its communication. To that end we have developed a netiquette protocol that is sent out to families at the start of each school year and is posted on The School's website at <http://thegrovecommunityschool.ca/netiquette/> .

Non-Violent Toys At School

We try to maintain a school atmosphere that is collaborative and free from violence. Children are encouraged to resolve conflict peacefully. To this end, violent toys, including toy guns or swords are not allowed at school. Toy weapons found at school will be taken away and returned to parents.

For more information on violent toys please see:

<http://www.truceteachers.org/toyactionguide.html#intro>

<http://www.lionlamb.org>

Electronic Media

A Grove School policy on electronic media and bringing “stuff to school” will be developed and added to the handbook. More information to come.

5. Curriculum

Our goal as educators is to present a sense of hopefulness to students, and the competence to act on that hope," he says. "That's different from wishful thinking-- ignoring problems or assuming that somehow technology or some mythical 'they' is going to figure it out. We will have to figure it out. A whole set of diverse disciplines, for example, come together in the building project, suggesting a very different curriculum and pedagogy.

David Orr, Environmental Educator

The Grove will satisfy Ontario Ministry of Education requirements with respect to curriculum expectations, but it will also go beyond them and be guided by and infused with the School's core values. These include a commitment to social justice, environmentalism, and community engagement/activism (see above).

The following sections provide further detail about The Grove curriculum.

Holistic Curriculum

The Grove strongly believes that education is about the development of all aspects of a person's being. We approach holistic learning as a commitment to developing all aspects of the learner from the physical to the artistic, the spiritual, the body, and developing a sense of social responsibility and emotional awareness.

Drawing on the work of Dr. Howard Gardner, we will strive to build upon the development of multiple dimensions of students' capabilities, or intelligences.

- Linguistic intelligence ("Word smart"):
- Logical-mathematical intelligence ("Number/reasoning smart")
- Spatial intelligence ("Picture smart")
- Bodily-Kinesthetic intelligence ("Body smart")
- Musical intelligence ("Music smart")
- Interpersonal intelligence ("People smart")
- Intrapersonal intelligence ("Self smart")
- Ecological Intelligence ("Nature smart")

Our commitment to holistic learning further includes understanding and **embracing that learners differ in their learning styles**. A variety of teaching and learning strategies will therefore be used to present curriculum. For example, in the Grade One class, students were supported to reflect on their own learning styles, and to recognize that there are multiple ways of knowing and being in the world. At The Grove, teachers will strive to create opportunities for students to demonstrate their thinking and show their understanding in a variety of ways, using their multiple capabilities (intelligences).

A commitment to holistic learning also includes a strong emphasis on arts-infusion and

story telling. At The Grove, we are committed to developing curriculum that explores story telling through the arts. Students will have many opportunities to explore stories and narratives in creative ways. For example, in 2011, the whole school used a Japanese paper theatre technique, called Kamishibai, to re-tell a variety of hero stories using visual and dramatic arts. Students used music and visual arts to express their feelings about the song, “Follow the Drinking Gourd”.

Arts-infusion

At The Grove, the arts—including visual and dramatic arts, music and dance (creative movement)—help to bring almost every lesson to life. The school recognizes that most children love learning through the arts. As much as possible, teachers at The Grove will enact student learning *through* the arts. In our first two years, we have integrated the arts throughout the curriculum in many ways. For example, the Grade One students explored patterning, geometry, and visual arts to create Kente Cloth designs. Students have worked collaboratively with parents to create many art projects, including a dragon for Lunar New Year, water colour paintings, a robot made with recycled materials, and a peace mural.

The arts will also be taught in their own right as subjects. We are very fortunate at The Grove to have several classroom teachers with expertise in and enthusiasm for Music, Drama, Dance, and Visual Arts. The children will be taught painting and drawing techniques throughout the grades and with high quality art supplies. We will follow the TDSB music curriculum as this program offers an excellent music education. We will strive to include specialized programs like the Orff music program. We have an active choir that meets once a week at lunchtime. This choir has performed at a number of school assemblies and Grove Gatherings. Drama and dance/creative movement are infused throughout the curriculum. We will also draw on the vibrant arts community in the neighbourhood surrounding the school as well as the artistic gifts within The Grove Community School community.

Storytelling (Narrative Approach)

Stories that are told orally (perhaps, but not necessarily, read from a book) usually capture children's imaginations. An imaginative story brings concepts to life. At the primary level at The Grove, new concepts are often introduced through stories and story books (e.g., picture books). Concepts across the whole range of subject areas (math, science, social studies, geography, and so on) are introduced through real life examples and stories at The Grove.

Storytelling (a ‘narrative approach’) is also a way to connect the children to diverse cultural heritages. Myths, legends, folktales, fairytales, history from around the world are told orally to the children throughout the grades to connect the children to global traditions and knowledge that has been passed down through every culture through the art of storytelling.

As they get older Grove students learn the art of storytelling and have opportunities to share their talents with each other, adults, and younger children in the school. For example, they may tell stories about their ancestors through role-play or re-enact a historical event as well as have regular opportunities to share stories from their own lives in the form of drawings and personal writing.

Engaging, Authentic, Challenging Curriculum

The curriculum is designed to tap into and further stimulate children's curiosity, imagination, creativity, love of learning, and sense of personal, social, and ecological responsibility.

The Grove's engaging curriculum focuses on authentic issues that are relevant and meaningful to the students and the (multiple) communities of which they are a part. It is a curriculum that balances attention to the local and the global, the familiar and the unfamiliar. At The Grove, children will be encouraged to be active participants in the learning process – to explore, discover, and create. The school's curriculum is connected to the real world, so it does not shy away from exploring authentic social and ecological issues in age-appropriate ways. It reflects and builds upon the lives and experiences of the young people who co-construct it, and it helps develop in learners a strong sense of their own dignity and self worth, and the dignity and worth of others in their community and world.

For example, in 2010-2011 the Grade 3/4 Class's thematic, integrated, unit on 'First Nations and Early Settlers' was designed to be engaging, challenging, and to support The Grove's commitment to social justice by amplifying the voices of those who are not always heard in similar units of study. For the teacher, important elements in the planning process for the unit included the students' learning and social needs and goals; their expressed interests; and the demands of the provincial curriculum. Students investigated First Nations and pre-contact Aboriginal culture in Upper Canada and the experiences of European settlers, but also analyzed class photos from schools following contact to determine which students were missing and why. Additionally, the class mapped residential schools throughout Canada, and had a student talk about her family's experience in residential schools. Currently, the class is exploring the experiences of Black early settler communities and will be reading biographies of African-Canadian settlers, [The Rough Face Girl](#), and Chief Seattle's most famous speech. The intention of this integrated unit is to have students journey beyond knowing historical events and to become able to deconstruct them and what they read: to recognize points of view; to develop their senses of time, space, language, and history; to deepen their understanding of the social relationships that existed during other eras; and to recognize the ways in which those relationships and conflicts persist and/or have been transformed in the present.

Our curriculum connects **equity and excellence** together as educational goals, and our community views all children as competent learners. We are committed to

communicating and supporting well the attainment of high and realistic learning expectations of our students.

Inquiry-based Learning

One of the ways that teachers create authentic learning opportunities is through inquiry-based learning. Inquiry is at the centre of all learning. Inquiry-based approaches provide a framework for teachers to actively engage students. Inquiry-based methods encourage students and teachers to co-construct knowledge, and provide opportunities for students to generate and explore their own questions about a topic. Inquiry-based methodologies also provide an opportunity for children to take ownership of their learning and gain real life skills as problem-posers and problem-solvers. Questions naturally draw children into the learning process. Children feel that their ideas and understanding counts. Although teachers may pose key questions, it is not about the teacher telling the children what they should know but the children expressing what they have understood and what connections they have made to their lives and experiences.

The Grove embraces a unique approach to Kindergarten learning inspired by the Reggio Emilia schools in Italy. Our approach emphasizes inquiry-based learning and promotes our core values within the context of an emergent curriculum. The Kindergarten Program at The Grove is planned around the children's current interests and questions. The children in the class spend a large amount of time thinking about and sharing their questions on a variety of topics, and then spend extra time planning how to find the answer to their questions. For example, in 2009-2010, the children were curious about why there was no water under the bridge in the Classroom in the Courtyard. We spent a good part of the year sharing our questions and theories and figuring out experiments that would answer our questions (e.g., seeing if water would evaporate from a container more quickly with the lid off or on but with a tube in the lid, etc.). Currently, in the 2010-2011 classes, some of the children are curious about parachutes, and have been experimenting with a variety of materials to see which one works best. They will look at pictures of parachutes on the Internet, and also have access to books about parachutes to find out any other information they need.

In the primary and junior grades at The Grove teachers often facilitate inquiry-based learning by prompting students to ask and answer questions to guide their "research". This might begin with the naming of students' own experiences with a topic or issue. Students often identify, investigate, and pose 'problems' that come from within their own life experiences. Here students play a powerful role generating knowledge about a problem; brainstorming how to learn more; defining what is most important to investigate; defining priorities. Teachers also play a vital role facilitating the research process; helping students conceptualize and articulate thoughts; asking provocative questions about issues and their connections to students' lives. As The Grove continues to develop its unique approach to curriculum, students and teachers will increasingly decide together how to solve the problems they have identified, and then act to do so.

For example, an activism-themed, inquiry-based unit of study came to life when students in our Grade One Science class expressed strong interest in discovering what life was like for a person who was blind. (The class had begun to study human sensory organs.) The students' questions provided direction for their research or inquiry. With the support of their Science teacher, they researched the issue, invited guests in to speak and answer questions, found a newspaper article about disability rights activist Donna Jodhan, discovered inequities in social attitudes and government policies, wrote letters of protest to government representatives, and shared their findings –as well as an invitation to speak—with the sight-impaired activist. This unit exemplifies how inquiry can engage students in authentic, cross-curricular learning that supports The Grove's commitments to social justice and community engagement and activism.

Anti-Bias Curriculum

The Grove is committed to infusing equity, diversity, and social justice into all areas of the curriculum. Currently, [Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves](#), by Louise Derman-Sparks & Julie Olsen Edwards, is serving as an inspiring resource that is helping to guide our practice. (See <http://www.naeyc.org/store/files/store/TOC/254.pdf>)

Anti-Bias Education names four goals that we aspire to fulfill at The Grove:

1. Each child will demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities.
2. Each child will express comfort and joy with human diversity; accurate language for human differences; and deep, caring human connections.
3. Each child will increasingly recognize unfairness, have language to describe unfairness, and understand that unfairness hurts.
4. Each child will demonstrate empowerment and the skills to act, with others or alone, against prejudice and/or discriminatory actions.

Experiential and Thematic Curriculum

At The Grove, we provide children with **authentic** and real-life learning experiences. Hands-on learning where students experience things for themselves is evident in all subjects. For example, math manipulatives (objects students can hold and manipulate, such as blocks) and concrete activities are used as much as feasible to teach math-related concepts across the curriculum. Science utilizes hands-on experiments and observation, and in some units of study (e.g., earth science) is frequently taught outdoors through our outdoor education program.

Curriculum at The Grove is taught using **themes**, or big ideas and is organized in integrated units. The goal is to take the time that is needed to deepen the children's

understanding of the curriculum by recognizing the connections across the various subject areas, and to recognize and identify the real-world applications. Themes will be linked to the core values of the school and will integrate the arts in multiple areas of study.

An example of how parents and teachers are working together at The Grove to develop inclusive curriculum that reflects the lives of our diverse population is “Gender Splendour Week”. This weeklong event will celebrate all of the different ways that families are created, and will explore and validate the multiple ways that people express gender in our community. It will also seek to make February 14th a more inclusive community celebration of love, friendship and pride. Students will be actively involved in a variety of activities, including: celebrating “Think Pink Day”, reading stories that express different perspectives and points of view, sorting activities that challenge how toys, games and colours are sorted by gender, inviting guest speakers and families to share their own stories, creating art and singing songs that express our themes, using drama to role-play different scenarios and practice problem-solving strategies, unpacking images from the media about families and gender.

Physical Education

The Grove program includes daily physical activity as an essential part of holistic education.

Our Physical Education teacher has developed an active and integrated Physical Education program that integrates the arts in several ways.

In 2010-2011, most gym periods are broken down into four parts. Activities are planned to foster a co-operative, rather than competitive atmosphere. 1) A warm-up stretch or yoga; 2) a skill-building activity or drill; 3) a co-operative game (e.g., drawn from Teaching Games for Understanding) that reinforces the skill that is being taught; 4) the last part of the class is a sprint, skipping, or running activity, to give the heart a good workout. Students also get many opportunities and much encouragement to dance. (We play fun, expressive, inspiring music, and cheer each other on.) Respect, co-operation, participation and enjoyment are reviewed and discussed each class. Positive language is modeled and encouraged, and appreciations are given by students at the end of each class.

Students have the opportunity to participate in extra-curricular physical activities, including cross-country running and house leagues soccer and other sports teams at AMG and TDSB events.

Children will also be exposed to outdoor activities as much as possible as part of the integrated curriculum. Children in Grades 1-6 at The Grove will have three outdoor recess times in the yard. This is a shared time with AMG students and teachers, and helps to strengthen the whole-school community. Kindergarten students participate in daily outdoor activity time.

Languages

The Grove is committed to facilitating exposure to a diversity of languages and language instruction. The Grove will follow the provincial curriculum for French instruction. In 2010-2011, we have begun to integrate the AIM program to enrich the curriculum with the Grade 4 class. (www.aimlanguagelearning.com) Students are introduced to French through poems, songs, plays, and the gesture approach.

Currently, our French Committee is developing an after-school French program for students at The Grove. They will also be meeting with the French teacher to discuss ways that The Grove can bring French culture to our school to create a positive tone and context for French language learning.

AMG offers optional after school heritage language programs. We are eager to work with families to assess what kind of interest there is to provide heritage language instruction at the school.

Grove families may also be interested in making additional languages available at the school. For example, a few families have discussed starting an after school circle that teaches songs and stories in a particular language.

Special Education

Students having difficulty functioning at grade level expectations will have an Individual Education Plan (I.E.P.) developed. Any student can be designated with an exceptionality and have an I.E.P. to support and/or enrich learning. Students have access to 'resource' and 'home/school' programs through AMG special education staff. Students also have access to Assistive Software through the TDSB license, such as Read, Write, Gold for practice at home and in the classroom.

Collaborative Assessment, Report Cards, and Testing

The Grove uses assessment and evaluation primarily to promote student learning. Assessment serves various purposes: setting goals; recognizing student accomplishments; ensuring students' needs and interests are being appropriately supported; and promoting students' further academic and social development. The School avoids the use of high-stakes, graded testing, rigid standardization, and any evaluation instruments designed to promote competitiveness and the ranking of students. A founding value of the school was to discourage families from over-valuing, or even looking at, traditional report cards.

The Grove offers families frequent opportunities to exchange thoughts about a child's learning experiences. The Grove encourages teachers, parents/guardians, and other family members to work together with the student to assess each child's learning in an on-going manner through regular descriptive feedback and open communication. This is also an

excellent opportunity for students to identify goals they wish to set and to reflect on their learning. Alternative, more collaborative, flexible, and non-standardized forms of sharing information about students' learning will be used (as an alternative) to traditional report cards.

In our first two years, the teachers have been supported and encouraged to develop collaborative assessment and evaluation strategies to implement in the classroom. Collaborative assessment means that teachers, parents, and students are actively involved in the learning and evaluation process together. In the classroom, collaborative assessment might look like any of the following:

- Parents writing an introduction letter about their child and identifying their own hopes and goals for the year;
- Students and teachers involved in a shared discussion about generating success criteria for academic tasks and learning skills;
- Students setting short-term goals for themselves, monitoring their own progress, and celebrating their achievements;
- Students engaging in self-assessment and/or peer-assessment;
- Teachers and students giving descriptive feedback to guide and support the learning process;
- Teacher-student conferences;
- Students choosing work samples for their student portfolio that demonstrate growth and/or illustrate different learning goals, and reflecting on their achievement;
- Students facilitating a student-led conference at the end of the year;
- Parents reflecting on their child's portfolio;
- Parent-teacher interviews in the fall and winter;
- A progress report in the fall, and two report cards throughout the year.

6. Community Life at The Grove

Registration

Children who live anywhere in Toronto and who share a commitment to the school's core values can attend The Grove. In January/February before a child begins Junior Kindergarten, families are invited to an Open House, including classroom visits and orientation. Families should assess their own commitment to alternative education, family involvement, and the school's core values at this time.

Start Of School Day And Safe Arrival

Families are welcome to come into the school to drop-off and pick-up children, to witness the classroom space and student work on display, and to connect with other Grove families.

The school day starts with 15 minutes of staff supervision before classes begin. Families can drop children off or are welcome to stay until the school day begins. All students should be in the yard at 9:00 a.m. or in their classrooms when announcements begin.

Every morning at The Grove, we gather outside to begin our day as a school community in a Welcoming Circle. The Welcoming Circle is a place where students, teachers and parents can make announcements, share ideas and poetry, sing or listen to O' Canada. It usually lasts 10 minutes, and helps to create a transition from home to school that is warm, friendly, and musical.

The Grove has a Safe Arrival Program. The program accounts for each child each morning. Families must notify the school by 9:15 am if your child/children will be late or absent that day. In the event a child does not arrive at school and no phone call is received from the family, the Administrative Assistant will attempt to contact the family. The safe arrival line is: 416- 393-9150 in the a.m., 416-393-9140 in the p.m.

If you arrive after 9:30 a.m., you must sign in with the Administrative Assistant before you take your child to his or her class. Please also sign out at the office when leaving school early.

Lunch Program

The Grove offers a supervised lunch hour. Families are welcome to join. Children bring their own packed lunches. Please provide a nutritious and litterless lunch (reusable containers and cutlery). For more information on litterless lunches, go to <http://www.wastefreelunches.org> . Any waste brought to school in lunch containers will be returned home.

The Grove also has established a tradition of serving Stone Soup on Tuesdays and organic hot dogs or pizza every other Friday, in a fun-filled Friday Frolic.

7. Governance

There is a school council in which everyone is welcome to participate. It makes decisions striving to use a consensus model whenever possible. If the School Council is unable to reach a decision by consensus we then go to two-thirds majority vote. Council is open to all parents at The Grove and includes representation from the school's administration and the teachers. It can also include broader community membership such as students and community members and representation from AMG. Every year the parents elect an executive committee which includes two co-chairs, a secretary, and a treasurer. Elections have been held within the first 60 days of the school year.

Teachers, families, and administrators work collaboratively on bringing the vision of the handbook to the life and practices of the school. In our first two years, parents developed a number of committees to work on key school-wide issues and initiatives (e.g., Social Justice Committee, Arts Infusion Committee, etc.). Families are invited to join committees at any point in the school year. Committee representatives and the class representatives meet monthly with teachers and administration to help develop and implement curriculum and events that are in keeping with The Grove philosophy.