



# THE GROVE COMMUNITY SCHOOL HANDBOOK

Version 3.0 February 2014 (DRAFT)

*This is The Grove's Handbook and it describes the curriculum, core values, and key commitments our community school. This document is a work in progress, and we understand that it will evolve as we build the school together.*

## Index

### 1. Core Values

- \*Equity, Diversity, and Social Justice p.2
- \*Ecological Sustainability and Environmental Justice p.3
- \*Community Engagement and Activism p.4

### 2. Key Commitments

- \*Community p.7
- \*Collaboration p.8
- \*Respect for Children's Voices p.8
- \*Holistic Education p.9
- \*Democratic Decision-making, Learning, and Practice p.9

### 3. Curriculum

- \*Anti-bias Curriculum p.11
- \*Inquiry-based Learning p.12
- \*Holistic Curriculum p.12
- \*Arts-Infusion p.13
- \*Kindergarten Program p.14
- \*Physical Education p.16
- \*Languages p.17
- \*Collaborative Assessment of Student Learning p.17
- \*Engaging, Authentic, Challenging Curriculum \*Examples p.18

# 1. 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](http://www.tdsb.on.ca)).

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 aspire 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 entire 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 shaped through meaningful dialogue.

The intended outcome is to support our community to be able to recognize and critically engage in 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.

A powerful example of our school's commitment to outdoor education and ecological sustainability was the creation of our **Community Garden**.

In 1908, the Province of Ontario's Ministry of Education proposed an "Improvement of School Grounds". It stated: "In neglecting so long to beautify schools and their surroundings, the people of Ontario have missed one of the best opportunities of implanting in the minds of the young a love for rural life and the beauties of nature, as well as for the order and simple neatness which makes for so much in everyday life, in either town or country."

Sharing a similar vision, parents, teachers and students came together in the spring of 2013 to push forward with establishing a school community garden. The garden would be one that is organic, sustainable and capable of producing herbs, flowers, vegetables and fruits. The goal was to create opportunities for hands-on learning, to promote children's health and local sustainability, to construct a positive, outdoor, social/learning environment, to connect with nature and to produce healthy food for community consumption.

It was the students who came up with the garden blueprints, designing the garden on paper and including which types of flora should be planted and where. Different student groups proposed their plans to the school community and a consensus was made. The building of the garden began in September 2013 using recycled wood donated to the school. The garden now boasts various bulbs, bird feeders, signage and student decorated raised beds. In the spring of 2014 the garden will develop into an outdoor space to be shared by students of all ages, across both The Grove Community School and Alexander Muir Gladstone. The school garden is developing into a tool that the entire community can use as a place for learning, resting, reflecting, observing and exploring.

(with ideas borrowed from "Asphalt to Ecosystems" by author Sharon Gamson Danks)

At The Grove, 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 acquire 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.

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 our first five years, we have worked collaboratively with AMG to create a variety of community events, including: the Kindergarten Wildflower Stomp, Lunar New Year celebrations, 100<sup>th</sup> Day of School activities, Play Day, and Pride Day celebrations, Yellow Fish Program, Jump Rope for Heart, Reading and Learning Buddies, Bicycle Rodeo, the Fall Fair and Eco-Club. Recently, we created a Community Garden, which will be shared by both schools.

Our local community offers many opportunities for collaboration and community activism. In 2011, our students worked with the staff at Dufferin Grove Park to plant a Children's Pollinator Garden. In 2012, as part of our "Seeds of Change" curriculum, our Grade 2/3 classes planted new trees at McCormick park and created signs to inform and inspire the community to care for

the new growth. In 2012, we visited our local MP's office to deliver letters that the students had written in solidarity and support of the children in Attawapiskat First Nations.

In this way, we strive to live up to our chosen designation as a 'Community School' and 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.

## 2. 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 Grove Gatherings), 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.

Our **Welcome Circle** is a powerful example of how we foster a sense of community at The Grove. We begin every day with a Welcome Circle inviting the community to celebrate the new day. Welcome Circle begins first thing in the morning outside in the middle of the playing field. At this time, we can share poetry, sing, make announcements, think and dream about our day ahead. Musician Rae Spoon and First Nations activist and artist, Danny Beaton, are some of the guests that have performed during our circle. During Welcome Circle we can reflect on ourselves, our family, our community and our environment. We can share whole school and/or community announcements, celebrations, birthdays, good byes, new teeth, and new babies. This is ritual that has grown into a Grove tradition and is cherished by many of us.

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 were actively involved in a research project through OISE to develop and implement **Peace Circles** in the classroom. Teachers 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 are part of 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.

Throughout the year, the students at The Grove work collaboratively in multi-aged groups on a variety of engaging activities related to current curriculum themes. Working in multi-aged groupings 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.

**Grove Gatherings** are special events that bring the whole school together to explore, discover and share our learning. Some examples of our Grove Gatherings include: Peace Week, Gender Splendour Week, Earth Festival, and the International Day for the Elimination of Racism.

On March 21, the school gathers on the International Day for the Elimination of Racism to share our learning related to anti-racism, power, and privilege. This event has always included guest speakers and performers, such as the White Pine Dancers and Lillian Allen. The students have worked collaboratively to: create a quilt inspired by maps, sing songs about the Civil Rights movement, share biographies about African-Canadians, write stories about Viola Desmond, and role-play a community meeting about Africville.

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, Summer Solstice, and Winter Carnival.

Teachers regularly meet with parents in **Planning Meetings** to brainstorm ideas, share resources and organize whole-school events.

## **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 struggles.

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 are invited to share announcements at Welcome Circle every day, during Classroom Meetings, and students have shared feedback at a Parent Council meeting about the Snack program.

There are also opportunities for students to voice their opinions, outrage, or concern for an issue when it is brought before a **Community Unity Meeting**. These are full school meetings that involve every class when there is an issue that needs to be discussed and often voted on. Community Unity Meetings have seen an array of issues from planning a food garden, a student action to bring Welcome Circle indoors during cold days, and rethinking the national anthem lyrics.

### **Holistic Education**

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.

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.

We encourage students to think of themselves as multi-faceted individuals in relation to each other, the school community, and the world, and to think about these commitments, while examining the many strands of the TDSB curriculum. Within this holistic approach, students are imagined as thoughtful, active, participatory learners capable of forming strong and positive human relationships. Examples of this include: learning about and being supportive of each other's strengths, intelligences and struggles, learning to be allies to one another as we partner up with different age groups in Reading Buddies and Grove Gatherings, engaging in action projects in the community, studying the systems (environmental, economic, cultural) we live in, and thinking of alternatives to support a more sustainable future. The Grove nurtures students to think of their responsibility to each other, and to the planet beyond the classroom.

### **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.

Students 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 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 co-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.

### 3. 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.

**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. The following section provides further detail about The Grove curriculum.**

#### **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.

## **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.

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; and defining priorities. Teachers also play a vital role facilitating the research process; helping students conceptualize and articulate thoughts; and 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 began to investigate the five senses and expressed strong interest in discovering what life was like for a person who was blind. The students' questions provided direction for their inquiry and research. With the support of their teacher, they generated questions, 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.

## **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. Students at The Grove are 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).

In 2011, both AMG and The Grove participated in an exploration about different learning styles and (dis)abilities called, “**Strengths and Struggles**”. Teachers created meaningful opportunities for students to name and celebrate their own strengths, and to acknowledge and accept their own struggles. Junior classes completed surveys, engaged in self-reflection, and worked together to collect, organize and record data about the students’ multiple intelligences. Students researched biographies of famous artists, actors, scientists and musicians who discovered successful strategies that helped them to overcome learning disabilities. As students learned about different (dis)abilities, they engaged in academic and social goal-setting, and created action plans to help them meet their goals. Students and teachers openly shared their struggles, their strategies, and their successes throughout their learning.

### **Arts Infusion**

As much as possible, teachers at The Grove will enact student learning *through* the arts. The school recognizes that many children love learning and expressing themselves through storytelling and the Arts, including Visual and Dramatic Arts, Music and Dance. At The Grove, we have integrated the Arts throughout the curriculum in many ways.

Children have explored Math concepts through textiles, creating quilts and Kente cloths. Storytelling is used to connect the children to diverse cultural heritages. Myths, legends, folktales, and history from around the world are integrated throughout the curriculum. Students have worked collaboratively with parents to co-create large Art projects, including a dragon for Lunar New Year, a peace mural and two dramatic stages for the Kindergarten classrooms. Every spring, the students, teachers and parents work towards a community celebration of the Arts.

In 2010 and 2011, we celebrated the arts with **The Children’s Art Show** at the Gladstone Hotel. Planning, organizing, executing, and hanging artwork was a collaborative process.

Students give art talks during the opening night to express their voices about this important process. In 2012, we celebrated the Arts and ecological sustainability with a musical theatre production called “Look, Look, All Around”.

In addition to being infused throughout the curriculum, 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 and 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.

We will also enrich our Arts program with special guests. As part of our Music program, students have worked with a singer-songwriter and several guest musicians. Guest dance instructors have been invited to teach students various styles of dance such as hip hop, break dance, ballet, line dancing, modern free form, and creative movement. 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.

### **Kindergarten Program**

Our Kindergarten Program balances a child-centred, emergent approach with intentional, teacher-driven programming. We integrate the core values in an age-appropriate, interactive way.

Throughout the Kindergarten day, we give the children choices about where they will play and with whom they will work. Many of the activities and centres are co-created with the children. We have a great deal of respect for the children’s voices and interests. We believe that including their ideas and point of view in our planning supports the children to feel empowered and to be more engaged in their own learning.

We work to integrate reading and writing into the play that the children are involved with. We pay close attention to what the children are showing an interest in and find ways to encourage their learning through that topic. In the 2010-2011 school year, the children showed an interest in why the water in the courtyard disappeared from under the bridge. In the 2011-2012 school year, the children showed a particular interest in parachutes. In the 2013-2014 school year, the children initiated an inquiry about the construction on Dufferin Street. In response to their interest, we went for a walk to get a closer look at the construction, we took photos of the construction, read books about roads and construction and we talked to the construction workers.

We also ensure that the children learn foundational academic skills such as letter sounds, emergent and early reading and writing, counting and other Math concepts so that they are academically ready for Grade One.

### **Ecological Sustainability and Environmental Justice**

In Kindergarten, our goal is to build a connection between the child and their local natural environment. To quote Environmental Educator David Sobel, “we need to give them [children] time to connect with nature and love the Earth before we ask them to save it”. We base our Ecological Education work on David Sobel’s ideas. We use our schoolyard and local community to teach the children, not only about ecology but also about how communities work.

To that end, the Kindergarten children spend time playing and exploring outdoors on a daily basis. During this time, they have the opportunity to participate in both small and large inquiry projects. Teachers support the children in asking questions, making hypotheses, and investigating to find answers to their questions. Over the years, the children have investigated trees, worms, bugs, flowers, leaves, sticks, rocks, berries, birds, nests, snow and ice. We notice that they feel protective of the pigeons, ladybugs and robins that are around them. We take field trips to natural settings within the city. During these field trips, the children are encouraged to play, question, and explore.

### **Social Justice**

In Kindergarten, we address real issues in age-appropriate ways. In our anti-classism curriculum, the children learn that money comes from jobs and that there are a variety of reasons why people don’t have jobs. We have conversations about which things are “needs” and which are “wants”. The children learn that not everyone has everything that they need. Although, it may feel intuitive to shelter the children from the reality of poverty in our world, it is important to have these conversations with our kids in age appropriate ways in order to give them a context for the poverty that they see around them. We know that when families live in poverty, it may be due to a lack of work, illness, and deeper systemic issues.

We are working to support the students as they learn that the issue of poverty is systemic and not individual. We feel that it is important for all children-to gain an understanding of poverty and to begin to understand experiences other than their own. Children are more flexible in their thinking about poverty than adults are. We feel that early, age-appropriate learning about poverty can support the children in breaking down assumptions that lead to classism, as they get older.

Children’s ideas surrounding gender is another main focus of Kindergarten at The Grove. We believe that there are no rules about what makes us boys, girls, both, or neither. We teach the children that you can’t assume someone’s gender based on how they look and that people are the experts on themselves. It is our belief that exclusion based on difference is unacceptable and that all children (all people) choose how to dress, decorate their bodies, and what they will play with.

### **Community Activism**

We use class meetings in order to co-create solutions to challenges in the classroom. This empowers the children and teaches them that systems can be changed and that they can play a part in those changes. In addition, we have written letters as a whole class when the children have ideas about how something in the school or local community can be done better.

### **Peace Building**

We invest a great deal of time in Kindergarten working with children to resolve conflicts. For many children, Kindergarten is the first exposure to group dynamics. Social settings can be difficult to navigate for all of us, young children in particular. We believe that supporting the children to say how they feel and what they need supports them in building peaceful relationships. It is important to remember that peace is not necessarily the absence of conflict, but rather a way of resolving conflict that both respects everyone involved and allows everyone to be heard. While it is messier and more time consuming to delve so deeply into the conflict, we believe that it is invaluable. We are teaching the children skills that they need in order to express themselves, cope with disappointment, ask for what they need, see things from another person's point of view, reflect on their choices, use creativity in problem solving, and to change their behaviour in future situations.

### **Social/Emotional Development**

In Kindergarten, the children's social and emotional development is as much of a focus as the academic parts of our curriculum. In fact, it takes up an entire section on the report card. That means that when we are supporting a child to join in with play or to find ways to cope with strong feelings, we are covering Ontario provincial curriculum expectations. We support social/emotional development through play-based learning, modeling through role play, baby visits, community circle, life, and learning skills.

### **Physical Education**

As part of a holistic education, The Grove Community School strives to deliver a physical education program to all of our students that;

- \*Enhances health and well-being;
- \*Fosters self-esteem and empowerment;
- \*Facilitates social inclusion and integration;
- \*Challenges gender norms and stereotypes;
- \*Provides opportunities for leadership and achievement;

Our program delivers an active and integrated experience for all students, regardless of skills, confidence level or athletics background. We foster a love for movement and creativity; fitness and fun; skill building and team building; individual goal setting and cooperative play. We integrate music, age-appropriate games, diverse dance styles, skill building activities and sports strategies into the school year.

Physical education periods are broken down into four parts.

1. A warm-up stretch, a yoga session or music movement
2. A skill building activity or drill that connects to the sport being taught



3. A co-operative game (e.g. inspired by “Teaching Games for Understanding”)
4. Cool down and review and reflection of the session.

There are opportunities throughout the year for friendly competition through extra-curricular teams like Cross Country, Slo-pitch, Track and Field and Soccer. Teachers and parents work together to help the students set goals, train, practice and compete. When students participate in competitive activities they are held to a high standard of respect toward their teammates as well as opposing teams.

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. Beginning in Grade 4, the Grove will follow the provincial curriculum for French instruction. Students are introduced to French through poems, songs, plays, and the gesture approach, while learning French grammar.

In the Junior grades, teachers engage students in French by instilling a sense of purpose for learning French and an appreciation for the French language and cultures. Teachers use a variety of techniques and resources: songs, poems, art, performance, plays and make connections to the Social Studies curriculum to make French meaningful and fun for students. In the past, students have created French characters and marionettes and made presentations, created and recited poems, researched Francophone areas of Canada, recreated a medieval French street using French vocabulary, organized menus and prepared dialogue to have crepe breakfasts in French.

AMG offers optional Heritage language programs in Portuguese and Mandarin. Several of our students attend these after school classes.

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.

### **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. 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.

The teachers will write one Progress Report and two Report Cards throughout the year to communicate with parents about their child's achievement. In addition to report cards, the teachers will work with students and parents to implement collaborative assessment strategies to evaluate students 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 beginning or 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.

### **Engaging, Authentic, Challenging Curriculum**

Here are some examples of how the core values and key commitments have been integrated into our curriculum at The Grove:

#### **Gender Splendour Week!**

“Gender Splendour Week” is an annual event at The Grove that celebrates all of the different ways that families are created, and explores and validates the multiple ways that people express gender in our community. During Gender Splendour Week, students work in multi-aged groupings to explore 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.

### **Spare Change?**

In 2013, families at the Grove worked with the teachers to develop resources and experiential activities to explore the systemic issues related to economic justice, class, wealth and poverty issues. This curriculum was inspired by a community project called “The Abundance Program” which supports families in crisis with donations. Our community responded by supporting the teachers to work with the students to co-construct our understanding of these complex issues with guiding questions: “What is poverty?”, “Who lives in poverty?”, “How can we make change?” Students were encouraged to ask questions and explore these issues in age-appropriate ways. Primary students read picture books, such as Those Shoes, and discussed the differences between “needs” and “wants”. Junior students looked at statistics from Campaign 2000, and used data management skills to represent the data in concrete ways.

### **First Nations and Early Settlers**

Another example of how our curriculum connects equity and excellence is the Grade 3/4 thematic, integrated, unit on ‘First Nations and Early Settlers’ in 2011. This unit 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. The class also explored the experiences of Black early settler communities and read biographies of African-Canadian settlers, picture books such as The Rough Face Girl, and Chief Seattle's most famous speech. The intention of this integrated unit was 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.

### **Seeds of Change**

“Seeds of Change” is a Science and Inquiry integrated curriculum where social justice, environmental justice, and community activism are infused throughout. (The title was inspired by a picture book about Wangari Maathai.) During Seeds of Change, students pose questions,

identify the problems, build knowledge, and decide how to take action. Teachers and students have developed curriculum and action projects to address: water sustainability, vermicomposting, local food security and gardening, gender education and equity, anti-poverty activism, anti-racism, Indigenous rights, and anti-ableism.

### **Africville**

As part of our Grade 2/3 Social Studies and Science curriculum in 2012, students used inquiry and research skills to learn about the early settlement of Black Canadians in Seaforth, Halifax, which is also known as “Africville”. Our research involved examining different media texts, such as photographs, videos, music and poetry. As students learned more about this important community in Canadian history, they asked questions about what a community needs, and how a community should respond when their needs are not being met. Students used Drama to explore different points of view when they took on various roles to communicate their opinions at a mock community meeting.