

## The Grove Community School 2021 Open House Package

*Families of all compositions and backgrounds are welcome at our school. Please read the following information to think about whether or not our school is the right choice for your family.*



### **Who we are**

The Grove Community School is a public alternative elementary school in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), with students from Junior Kindergarten (JK) to Grade 6. We are a community of students, parents and teachers working together to support the core values of our school (our “three pillars”):

- Equity, Diversity, and Social Justice
- Ecological Sustainability and Environmental Justice
- Community Engagement and Activism

The Grove’s full-day JK program is popular and, as with all optional attendance schools in the TDSB, entrance is by lottery.

Our teachers have worked hard to incorporate an Indigenous perspective throughout the curriculum, and create new lesson plans around our core values (e.g., "Gender Splendour" week). Teachers have worked with parents, caregivers and community members to develop Black Excellence Month programming inspired by Black Lives Matter TO and the Freedom School.

We acknowledge that we do better in some areas than others, that our (un)learning is continuous, and that the work we need to do is always evolving.

### **What this means for students**

As a community of teachers and parents, we try to raise awareness of social justice and injustice by learning from the people most affected by oppressive systems in our society.

Students are encouraged to see how their individual experiences often mirror those in the larger world and how they can learn to have agency to make positive change. At The Grove, the whole community is our classroom. Learning can come from the experiences of students and teachers (as well as families and other community members) when combined with meaningful dialogue. This helps our school community recognize and critically engage with all forms of social injustice, and to learn and work together towards building a more equitable community and larger social change.

## Is this school right for your family?

As a community, we question the world we live in and encourage our students to do the same. Together, we try to think of ways in which we can contribute to making this world better. Part of our commitment to social justice is the recognition and reflection of the ways in which oppression, privilege, and opportunities are in our own lives, and the lives of those around us.

Parents are an integral part of the process of building our community collectively. We acknowledge that we as a community are continuously learning and part of that process is failing and making mistakes. We commit to learning together as a community of parents, students, teachers and administrators.

Some examples of issues we care about and work towards examining as a community are:

- We recognise that our country is founded on colonialist policies and those of us who are non-Indigenous settlers on this land are complicit in, and have benefited from, historical and contemporary systems of oppression
- We believe that Black Lives Matter
- We celebrate gender diversity and work to create safe spaces for LGBTQ2+ students and families, including advocating for and receiving a gender-free washroom for the school
- We challenge ourselves to think about the impact of our actions on the natural world and how that connects to a sustainable environment and society
- We possess full agency to do good and effect positive change
- We are open to examining the words that we use and their impact on others.
- We are committed to learning -- this school community is an imperfect work-in-progress

## Our core values in action:

With Covid-19, much of our programming has been altered or put on hold, but normally each year brings numerous examples of our core values in action. These change from year to year depending on teacher and parent capacity to organize them. Many of these examples/activities could not happen without dedicated parent volunteers.

Here are some examples of how our school curriculum has been enriched with our three pillars:

## Ecological Sustainability and Environmental Justice --

- ✓ During the fall of 2020, the majority of the school day for all grades was spent learning outdoors, both to increase Covid safety and to deepen inquiry-based outdoor learning
- ✓ We are a Platinum status Eco School (<https://www.ontarioecoschools.org/>)
- ✓ The Wildflower Stomp is a seed planting activity that connects JK/SK Grove and Alexander Muir/Gladstone students to their school and the natural world
- ✓ Students have joined in our yearly food garden projects through our garden club which includes a traditional medicine garden cultivated with guidance by Indigenous guest educators
- ✓ Students have participated in a school-year long study of water across the country
- ✓ Students have had environmental education field trips to High Park Nature Centre, Humber Valley (and many more!)
- ✓ The Earth Festival is a 1-day celebration of eco-stewardship that brings our entire community together as students work on curriculum-related themes in multi-aged groupings

## **Community Engagement and Activism –**

- ✓ Our daily Welcome Circle invites families to participate in school activities and is a symbol of our commitment to community building and an opportunity for collaboration and connection
- ✓ Grove gatherings and special events use multi-age groupings to promote community
- ✓ Weekly Community Unity meetings with multi-aged groupings
- ✓ Students used a letter-writing campaign to advocate for clean drinking water in Grassy Narrows First Nation
- ✓ Students prepared welcome cards for refugee families that were delivered to Parliament Hill by a Grove student representative
- ✓ Successful benefit concert for the Wet'suwet'en land protectors featuring student and parent performers
- ✓ After a week of workshops by Leslie McCue, artist and educator from Curve Lake First Nation, students, teachers and parents from The Grove and Alexander Muir/Gladstone participated in a 500-person round dance for National Indigenous Peoples Day
- ✓ We are working towards restorative practices in the classroom

## **Equity, Diversity, and Social Justice –**

- ✓ Our school year begins with a Peace Week devoted to a variety of activities, projects and presentations exploring issues of conflict resolution and social justice
- ✓ A school-wide honouring of residential school survivors takes place on Orange Shirt Day
- ✓ We celebrate Black culture and achievements inspired by the Black Lives Matter - Toronto Freedom School throughout Black Liberation Month
- ✓ We examine and challenge gender stereotypes and their link to homophobia and oppression using age appropriate games/texts/activities during our Gender Splendour week (learn more here: <http://thegrovecommunityschool.ca/gender-splendour/>)
- ✓ Our teachers use Anti-bias curriculum to challenge discrimination and oppression, including anti-Black racism, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, anti-Asian racism, homophobia, transphobia, and the discrimination faced by students with physical and intellectual disabilities
- ✓ Families who join our school will have many opportunities for learning (e.g., workshops and a parent lending library of books reflecting our core values):

## **Examples of other events/programs at The Grove:**

- Activities and clubs offered during lunch and before/after school can include Rainbow Club, Newspaper, LEGO Robotics, Choir, Soccer, Gardening, Chess, Track & Field, Eco Club, Art Club, Knitting, (the list changes every year depending on parent and teacher skills and volunteer capacity – new families are welcome to suggest and volunteer to run new clubs!)
- Afternoon snack program: We partner with Foodshare and Ontario Natural Food Company to deliver a low allergen whole food healthy snack every afternoon, subsidized through parent contributions and grants, and balanced according to our dietician.
- Yearly concert: each year, students showcase their talents in a concert, parent and teacher volunteer time permitting
- Skating party: After our yearly hand-me-down skate exchange, parents and caregivers who are able join for a school-wide community skate at our neighborhood rink.

## **Open House: Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is an 'alternative school'?**

Toronto has the highest number of 'Alternative Schools' in North America. Part of the TDSB, they are free public schools that offer something different from mainstream schooling. Each alternative school has their own unique mandate, approved by the TDSB which students and families are expected to support. The Grove, like most alternative schools, is a smaller school (approx. 130 students), has a commitment to innovative and experimental programs, and depends on families to help fulfill their mandates.

### **Do children still learn what they would in a regular (non-alternative) TDSB school?**

Yes. Teachers deliver Ontario Core Curriculum and students are encouraged (and expected) to meet curriculum requirements. Our teachers are continuously working to weave the three pillars of social justice, environmental sustainability, and community activism into the curriculum, and shape the direction of the school. This work cannot be done without parent volunteers.

### **What is expected of Grove parents?**

Parent involvement is key to the success of our school (and our goal as a "community" school). We need families to do this work with us. The work we do as a community can sometimes be challenging. It involves a commitment of time, a willingness to work together, and personal reflections on our historical and individual privileges, but it is also very rewarding. Parents work with teachers and administration, and with the larger community to support our three pillars of social justice, environmental sustainability, and community activism.

There are many different ways that parents support our school, both during and outside of regular school hours. We are committed to working with new families to help identify ways they can contribute to the school without impacting their work and family commitments.

If your family joins the school and you wish to help implement additional free, accessible after-school programming or other changes at the school, please contact our parent council.

### **Why do I have to fill in the parent/guardian questionnaire?**

This form is to help prospective families clarify **for themselves** whether the school will be a good fit. It will not be reviewed prior to the lottery, and does not determine who is entered into the lottery. There are no wrong answers. After you have accepted a spot at The Grove for your child, the information that you provide in this contract will be shared with our Parent Council so they can help identify ways that your family may contribute to The Grove community.

### **Is there extended care (before & after school)?**

Yes, we have three programs: (i) YMCA operates on the main floor and provides before and aftercare for children in junior kindergarten through grade 6, (ii) Boys and Girls Club operates on the main floor and provides aftercare for children in grade 1 through grade 6, and (iii) Mary McCormick Recreation Centre provides offsite aftercare for children in grade 1 through grade 6.

### **My child is Indigenous, Black or a Person of Colour, is The Grove as diverse as regular public schools?**

Like other optional attendance schools and alternative elementary schools in the TDSB, The Grove does not have the same diversity of racialized students that regular public schools have. We know we have work to do on this front as a school community. Some of the ways we are attempting to change this are by improving the culture within the school and also by advocating for with the TDSB for an equity admissions pilot project that began in 2019 and continues today; 25% of our spots for children entering JK are held for BIPOC and Gender Independent children.

### **What if I want to send my child to French Immersion in SK (which means leaving The Grove)?**

We strongly encourage families who wish their children to attend French Immersion in senior kindergarten to consider that if your child takes a spot at The Grove, then leaves after one year, another child who did not get in for JK may not have another opportunity. It can also be a challenge for families who plan to stay only one year to feel they are able to engage meaningfully in the type of community building that the school strives for.

### **What if my child has special needs and/or needs extra support in the classroom?**

All learners are welcome to The Grove. Teachers will make the best possible efforts to modify and accommodate for students that require extra support in order to access the curriculum. However, resources are allocated according to the number of students, and as a small school, The Grove has only one half-time resource (special education) teacher that supports all of the students who have Individual Education Plans (IEPs). If you have specific questions around your child's learning needs then please contact our Vice-Principal Catherine Munro (catherine.munro@tdsb.on.ca) to answer any specific questions that you may have.

### **What if I (or my child) needs accommodation to access the building?**

We regret that The Grove Community School is not an accessible school for those using mobility devices. Alternative elementary schools in Toronto have no say over where the TDSB locates them, and The Grove is located on the third floor (only accessible by stairs) of our host school, Alexander Muir/Gladstone, which has one accessible door at ground level and all other doors with multiple steps. The school was originally built in 1888, with renovations/additions in 1925, 1954 and the most recent in 1961. Like many schools in the TDSB, the building has a long-standing and overdue list of repairs and accessibility improvements for which we continue to advocate. (For context, <https://www.tdsb.on.ca/About-Us/Accountability/Renewal-Needs-Backlog-and-Facility-Condition-Index/Renewal-Needs-Backlog>)

### **What if my child is not “toilet trained”?**

Toilet training is not a prerequisite for entry into school. Children do not need to be completely independent with toileting in order to attend the Kindergarten Program. TDSB Principals ensure that children receive the respectful support that they need in order to be safe and comfortable throughout the day. Each of our two kindergarten classrooms has a washroom. If a child has an accident, they can be assisted to change into their extra clothes kept in their cubbies.

### **How do applications work for twins?**

If parents choose to have twins attend together and only together, they submit ONE application that counts for both twins. This must be made clear on the application form. Should that application be drawn, two pupil placements in the class will be taken. If parents choose to have twins apply as separate students, regular lottery rules apply. If in the case of the latter choice, one twin is chosen, the other twin is not automatically granted acceptance by virtue of being a sibling.

### **Is my child likely to get in, given that there is always a lottery?**

Historically, there is a good chance of getting in, even if you are fairly far down on the waitlist. We often have spaces open later in the summer, after the start of the school year, or in subsequent years.