



*Our Founders, Marion Grassley and Susan Anderson, envisioned a program where students are immersed in the past while being challenged for their future.*



## The Odyssey Program Ten Essentials

The Odyssey Program is designed around the ten essential components of our education model, developed, tested and successfully implemented since our beginning at Chapman Elementary School in 1994 and now at the Hayhurst K-8 School since 2004.

### 1. Team teaching

When teachers collaborate, students receive many benefits. Two or more teachers working together create the opportunity to pool personal and instructional resources, increasing their creativity and their ability to meet the needs of individual students. Children are in flexible groups and teams, flowing to different groups for art activities, math, literature and many components of their day. Teachers flow between groups, too, allowing them to teach to their strengths.

### 2. Multi-age Classrooms

In a classroom with blended grade levels, students progress at their unique developmental rate, which is often very different than their chronological rate. For math, reading and literature, students are placed in groups according to their assessed needs. For all other

subjects, students work in mixed-age teams, which always include both older and younger students at a variety of academic levels.

### 3. Cooperative Learning

Research shows that cooperation is more effective than competition in improving academic achievement. Cooperative learning provides the opportunity for older students to learn and practice leadership, helping younger children who look up to them. Students benefit from constructing knowledge together, as a team. As in mixed-age learning, students contribute at their unique level. They can be leaders in their areas of strength, and receive assistance in areas where they are less confident. Cooperative learning in a non-threatening environment supports problem solving, and effective communication and collaboration. Participating families tell us that mixed-age teams are one of the most important features of this program, benefiting students along every point of the academic performance continuum. Graduate Aaron Finger explains, "This program gives people a chance to speak. Every person has a different

perspective. Working in teams does this. If we disagree, we work out problems by consensus."

### 4. Community Support

This program welcomes and encourages parent and community involvement in the classroom, on field trips, during curriculum activities, and in many ways both during and outside of the school day. In this way, teachers, students, and families join together to foster learning, creating a community school. Parents participate in the community school in the way each chooses—everyone is needed and valued. This approach creates a strong and engaged learning community. Parents connect to what their children are experiencing, allowing them to play a stronger role in their child's education. Dedicated community support helps the teachers accomplish their educational goals. All children in the program feel supported by a group of adults who care about them, creating benefits for all students.

### 5. Differentiated Instruction

Students come to the classroom with distinct cultural and language backgrounds and uniquely different needs.

Individual students also learn in a wide variety of ways and have different interests. To meet all the needs of a diverse student population, The Odyssey Program differentiates instruction, reaching out to individuals to embrace their unique learning styles, interests, readiness, and needs in order to create the best learning environment possible. All learning is designed to use scaffolding activities, engaging students' areas of strength (i.e., visual, auditory, kinesthetic) and moving them to mastery of areas of need.

#### **6. Open-ended curriculum**

The learning format has no bottom or top, focusing on student acquisition of the higher order thinking skills. Questioning and student activities are open-ended, fostering the development of creative and critical thinking skills in all subject areas. This is why students at all academic levels experience so much growth during the school year. Even the most gifted student is challenged, while those needing to master the basics are supported toward success. The open-ended curriculum helps students view learning as an ongoing, life-long process. All students are encouraged to amplify and deepen their learning through appropriate extensions.

#### **7. Theme-based education**

The Odyssey Program is based on integrated curriculum and enrichment centered around historical themes based on Oregon learning benchmarks. When asked why they have chosen historical themes as a means to integrate their curriculum, Marion Grassley and Susan Anderson like to refer to a "wonderful and compelling article" written by a prominent American educator and consultant in American elementary curriculum, Dr. Mary Beth Klee. Dr. Klee argues that, 'For too many years we have undershot with

America's elementary school children. They come to us with their fresh minds, their keen curiosity, their enthusiasm for learning, and for far too long we have served up pabulum. They come to us longing to connect with the broader world, the world they do not know, but hunger to know.' In our program, we strive to satisfy this "hunger."

#### **8. Enrichment**

Hands-on learning activities meet the needs of a wide range of students and appeal to their specific interests. Art, writing, science, language arts, and social studies are integrated into the curriculum for each unit. Performing arts also enrich the curriculum. Singing, dancing, and drama are emphasized in a culmination performance for each unit, including the Native American Pow Wow, the Colonial Harvest Celebration, the Colonial Guild Faire, the Industrial Revolution Faire, and the Civil War Cotillion, the Greco/Roman Festival, the Renaissance Faire and the American Invention Fair. Students keep a Heritage Garden, developing their Internet skills by researching the plants of the theme period, ordering historical seeds, and learning about early cultivation methods and food preparation. Enrichment through the fine arts is also important. Students make masks, sculpt medallions, and create pottery associated with historical themes. Pastels, watercolors and acrylic paints are used for portraits, landscapes, still life designs, and drawings of flora and fauna. Craft projects include weaving, quilt making, rug hooking, tin smithing, basket making, needlework, and projects in wood and leather. Field study is also important, proving the opportunity for students to apply, extend, integrate, and internalize everything they have

learned in the theme unit while experiencing learning in exciting locations such as the Yakima Indian Reservation, Fort Clatsop, Redwood National Park, the Ashland Shakespeare Festival and many others.

#### **9. Integrated curriculum**

Education is more effective when students know why they are learning something, and are offered a context for new information. Studying rivers, mountains, and rock formations becomes much more meaningful when a child also learns how this topography affected Lewis and Clark's expedition, or the lifestyles of the Northwest Indian tribes. Spelling words are easier to remember and practice when they come directly from literature relating to the theme. Integrated study at The Odyssey Program mean that subjects will naturally flow together. Students won't have to stop thinking about science and start thinking about spelling just because a bell has rung. In fact, they might not realize what "subject" they learned on a particular day, but will be able to describe a wealth of knowledge gained and tell a fascinating story of why it is important.

#### **10. Interactive learning**

In this educational model, no child is a passive learner. During each unit of study, students take on the identities and lifestyles of persons from the theme period, wearing the clothes, learning the music, collecting the artifacts, and engaging in other highly motivational, interactive simulation activities where learning comes alive. This approach appeals to the imagination of every child. Learning is never isolated and abstract, but always meaningful and exciting.