

Alternative Elementary Programs

The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board supports a range of programs to challenge all students to achieve their personal best. One such program is the Alternative Elementary Program, alongside the English/Core French and French Immersion programs. With strong community support and parent involvement, the Alternative Elementary Program is based on a concept of student-centered learning and this philosophy translates into all aspects of a student's experience at school. The program provides students opportunities to meet Ministry expectations with flexibility to allow greater concentration in areas of their own interest and aptitudes.

The Alternative Philosophy

While the following characteristics are found in many of the programs at the elementary level across the District, collectively they form the foundation of the alternative education philosophy:

- Cooperation and teamwork are emphasized instead of competition in all aspects of the school. The core belief is that children who are motivated from within, instead of by rewards, will become lifelong learners, eager to take on challenges.
— *Look for: Everyone's contribution is valued, no awards or prizes given.*
- A commitment to innovative approaches to teaching and learning through a shared responsibility among staff, students, and parents.
— *Look for: Community projects, unique and creative units of study, outdoor classrooms and other non-traditional learning environments, mixed age group project-based learning.*
- A balance between student-directed and teacher directed learning: the teacher acts as a facilitator/mentor/guide of the child's learning; enhances self-concept, enthusiasm for learning, and personal responsibility.
— *Look for: Classrooms arrangements foster collaboration (groups of students working together).*
- Multi-aged groupings: interaction among children of different ages and at different stages of development provides an environment wherein students learn from each other as well as from the teacher.

— *Look for: Intentional use of mix-grade classrooms where possible, inter-class collaboration on projects, buddies, mentoring and student leadership.*

- Integrated curriculum: this provides a natural progression from whole to parts and stresses the interrelation of all learning and subjects.
— *Look for: Interconnectedness amongst subjects, taught in context.*
- A family & community-centered school environment wherein parental involvement is essential for the partnership between the home and school, which in turn fosters self-respect, respect for the ideas and the opinions of others, and an appreciation for people's differences.
— *Look for: Collaboration with parents and community members.*
- Assessment and evaluation is on-going using multiple strategies which include student self-evaluations and student led conferences. The primary focus of this process is personal growth, as well as being used as a tool for program planning and assessment, student goal setting, growth & assessment.
— *Look for: Portfolio creation, anecdotal reports, acknowledgment of individual learning styles in reference to assessment, reduced emphasis on grades and traditional tests.*

Alternative Elementary Program Structure

An Alternative Elementary Program is structured to ensure that each child has the opportunity to complete the core curriculum specified by the Board and the Ministry of Education. Parents and teachers help students develop their own interests. This approach to learning helps children develop positive study habits and attitudes that will carry them through the rest of their school career, and the rest of their lives.

Who Can Attend an Alternative Elementary Program?

An Alternative Elementary Program is open to everyone — programs are offered in different parts of the city — and operate within Board policies and provincial statutes.

Published by Communications and Information Services
in collaboration with Curriculum Services — September 2012



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