

**Breakwater School**  
**K-5 Philosophy**  
**April 6, 2006**

**Kindergarten**

A large part of each Kindergarten child's experience is social. The activities and opinions of peers take on unprecedented importance, often eclipsing that of adults, and drawing the child further from his/her egocentric or self-centered stage of development. We work to enhance the development of each child's personal identity socially, emotionally, physically, intellectually, and creatively, by offering opportunities for every student to develop his/her strengths while supporting his/her areas of need.

Our balance of academic, physical, social and artistic activities provides opportunities for well-rounded growth. Our classroom structure allows for individual choice and responsibility, to encourage the growth of each child's independence and self-confidence. We also work to support each child's emerging social skills: the understanding of cooperation, consideration for others, and caring for the classroom environment.

The physical layout of our classroom environment is designed to encourage these skills. The use of both partners and small and large group activities further enhances each child's emerging understanding about being part of a community. Children develop a sense of group membership and identity through daily discussions, sharing during meeting times and whole class activities, and through the care and maintenance of the classroom environment.

Early literacy, math, science and arts experiences are abundant in our kindergarten curriculum. At this age, a child's emerging understanding of spoken language continues to develop and our curriculum builds on this skill while introducing concepts in written language or print. Literacy activities focus on the sounds letters make, the sequence of a well-told story and fine motor skills necessary to communicate using written symbols or letters.

Geometry, patterns, graphing, estimating and activities which teach the concept of measured quantities are presented as a foundation for mathematical understandings. Children are introduced to Cuisenaire Rods, Pattern Blocks, and measurement tools, the math materials they will use throughout their elementary school years.

Science, French, Gym and Art are available as special classes beginning in the Kindergarten year. Children work both inside and outside of their own classroom with Breakwater staff who specialize in these areas.

**First and Second Grade**

### **Third and Fourth Grade**

The upper grade years at Breakwater are an exciting time of transition and growth. Children are bridging or leaving the "primary block" of elementary school and are progressing through the stages of middle childhood. During this stage children work at solidifying knowledge and skills, while learning to apply them to the mastery of more complex tasks.

Our curriculum provides experiences which enable students to gain increased awareness of their own learning pace and progress. Cursive writing, multiplication and division, and standard spelling symbolize this flow into a more "grown up" world. Third and fourth graders are eager to embrace more conventional ways of spelling, for example, or take on longer, more challenging books.

A strong emphasis on meta-cognition (thinking about one's thinking or learning process) is apparent in the upper grades at Breakwater. Children are asked to reflect upon their experiences and to draw conclusions about their preferred styles of learning, their problem-solving strategies, and their own, unique learning process. "How did you get that answer?", "What are your goals for this week?", "How do you feel about your work during the last hour?", and "What do you plan to do next?" are a few of the questions you'll hear frequently in our classrooms.

### **Fifth Grade**

Fifth grade is an exciting time, and marks the culmination of elementary school. In addition to what has been described in the third and fourth grade program, Fifth graders are engaged in many special experiences designed both to keep them involved in the community life of the school and to acknowledge their accomplishments as graduating "seniors". They volunteer as helpers on a weekly basis in the Pre-school and Kindergarten classrooms. They take a leading role in school-wide multi-age activities like Learning Buddies, Multicultural Travel Week, and Earth Week. They camp out together on a Survival Overnight experience. They plan, design, and fund-raise for their own end-of-the year Field Trip. And they are honored at Fifth Grade Graduation, when each student presents a speech before a large crowd of well-wishers.

The fifth grade program is designed to teach students to become critical thinkers. By fifth grade, students are in the wonderful position of having the basic skills - reading, writing, and arithmetic - in place. This means they are ready to be more analytical in their reading, more reflective in their writing, and more theoretical in their mathematics.

Fifth graders are described by Chip Wood of the Northeast Foundation for Children as the "most actively receptive learners of factual information" for whom "ordering their world is central." These children are solidly in the stage of middle childhood, so they demonstrate a strong need for mastery and organization as well as an ability to become critical thinkers.