Philosophy of Teaching & Learning

Norfolk Public Schools is committed to developing students who value learning and the “habits of the mind” (a mental discipline practiced so that it becomes a habit or natural process) that will enable them to adjust successfully to the changing world. We will accept the responsibility for engaging the entire community in preparing life-long learners who are able to understand the world in which they live and have the skills needed to learn and succeed throughout their lifetime. We will recognize, value, and build upon both the individual differences and the similarities in our students.

Students will have learning experiences that respect and address the strengths and needs of ALL students. These learning experiences will be like those found in day-to-day life and based upon broad concepts flowing from the general to the more specific. Students will learn to make responsible choices, overcome challenges, and take responsibility for their own learning. Students will attain academic proficiency as defined by local, state and national standards. Students will have many opportunities to internalize and demonstrate their understanding of newly acquired information, skills, and processes that are tied to rigorous academic standards.

Each stakeholder has a role to play. All stakeholders will approach their relationships with students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community members with respect to promote a positive learning experience.
Administrators will provide support and instructional leadership by creating and maintaining a clear focus on student achievement driven by the district’s vision. Well-prepared teachers, safe and secure school facilities, sound and rigorous curriculum, adequate resources, and appropriate support services will be needed to create and maintain this focus. Administrators will be advocates for all students. Keeping the focus on student needs will ensure that educational opportunities to meet world-class standards will always be available for all the students.

Teachers will be knowledgeable of and competent in the content areas they teach and have the ability to relate this content to the students’ past, present, and future learning experiences. Teachers will utilize effective classroom management and teaching strategies to ensure learning at high levels for all students. They will use various assessments to determine students’ understanding and to plan classroom instruction.

Students must assume responsibility for their own learning if they are to be successful. Therefore, we expect that students will come to school prepared to learn. We expect all students will follow the established rules and contribute to a disciplined learning environment. Most importantly, each student will be an active participant in the learning process.

Parents must be active partners with schools to provide the support and assistance that will ensure the success of their children. Parents’ responsibilities include supporting school rules, programs, and goals, championing homework, showing an interest in their child’s educational experiences, and never giving up on their child.

Community members must embrace and support ongoing efforts to provide rigorous academic opportunities to children. The progress and condition of the community is dependent upon the educational success realized by its citizens.

By implementing this philosophy, Norfolk Public Schools will meet its vision to provide a world-class education for all of its students—

*All Means All*
Powerful Literacy

Abandoning functional literacy

Long before the state-mandated Standards of Learning (SOL) tests... before President Bush's "No Child Left Behind" legislation... Norfolk Public Schools was committed to providing every child with a quality education. And, it is our belief that a quality education... one that will prepare students to become life-long learners... must encompass more than test scores and merely meeting standards.

This focus on minimum competency is what we call "functional literacy." It is that kind of learning where students merely memorize facts, answer multiple choice questions, and accept others' conclusions. The goal is to change this scenario and ensure that all children are equipped with the skills needed to compete and to succeed after they leave the school district.

Embracing powerful literacy

Norfolk Public Schools is committed to providing "world class" educational opportunities. But, if we truly want all students — regardless of race, gender, or socio-economic status — to grow into capable and productive adults who not only know how to read, write, compute, and pass tests but also know how to make sound decisions, analyze situations, and have the skills to become leaders of their generation, we must equip them with a level of literacy that moves beyond functional skills. We must equip our students with "powerful literacy."

Each stakeholder group — educators, parents, and community members — must provide the kind of learning experiences that will allow today's youth to become powerfully literate. It is the belief, the mission, and the passion of everyone in Norfolk Public Schools to provide each child with learning experiences designed to impart powerful learning. It is this level of learning that will empower them to pursue exciting futures and participate fully in democratic life.

In keeping with our Philosophy of Teaching and Learning and joining hands as stakeholders, each of us should embrace the intellectual and social/ emotional characteristics of powerful literacy.

A powerfully literate person:

- Reads a wide variety of self-selected materials for both enjoyment and information.
- Makes connections between learning and life and evaluates the impact of current issues.
- Formulates and defends ideas and opinions from an interdisciplinary perspective (i.e. applying knowledge gained from a variety of subject areas).
- Manages complex information by analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating.
- Seeks, accepts, and overcomes challenges using critical and/or creative thinking and problem solving.
- Uses Standard English effectively in speaking and writing to inform, persuade, and entertain.
- Demonstrates mastery of content by creating original stories, poetry, role plays, illustrations, non-linguistic representations, or other creative means.
- Applies divergent thinking skills and creates order from disorder.
- Activates metacognition (or "thinking about thinking") to maximize learning and evaluates one's self-knowledge.
- Creates new meaning from various sources.
- Understands social issues and demonstrates empathy, acceptance, and tolerance in diverse settings.
- Demonstrates personal responsibility for learning.
- Demonstrates appreciation for the arts.
- Persists to develop personal meaning from information that is indefinite or inconclusive.

Norfolk Public Schools is committed to providing powerful literacy for all students... All Means All.

For more information, visit our website at: www.nps.k12.va.us.