

# Sarah Rawson Smith Elementary School Special Needs Policy

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## **Philosophy**

We believe that all learners have unique needs to consider when helping them to meet/exceed their academic and non-academic potential. To provide access to the IB Primary Years Programme at Smith Elementary we apply approaches and support systems that address the individual needs and varied learning styles of students, including those identified with special needs (special education and gifted and talented). By recognizing the diversity of our collective learning community, we support the development of internationally minded people.

## **Practices:**

At Smith students with disabilities and students identified as gifted and talented are educated in general education environments with appropriate support and services. Students identified with special needs receive support from special education teachers through a co-teaching model or through a pullout program for part of their instructional day. Students identified as gifted and talented receive support through a cluster and or collaboration model. Gifted standards, strategies, and pedagogy are applied to the core content areas through the PYP units of inquiry. We build positive learning communities in which a culture of collaboration encourages and supports problem solving for all students.

## **Differentiation:**

At Smith, all students receive instruction that enables them to succeed within the range of their approaches to learning, abilities, and interests. Differentiation is the process of identifying, with each learner, the most effective strategies for achieving agreed goals. Dynamic groupings within classrooms, tiered lessons, use of pre-assessments and formative assessments to discover students' strengths and areas to focus targeted instruction on, open-ended learning engagements, and provision of materials (*such as leveled reading materials, enrichment activities, and choice menus*) designed to address students level of readiness are some examples.

## **Assessment:**

Each unit of inquiry will allow students and/or teachers the opportunity to assess and reflect. Work samples collected in the portfolio are shared with parents at the spring conference. Every nine weeks the parents will receive a formal report card. If necessary, parents receive a mid-term report for each nine-week quarter. Students will assess their learner profile progress each nine weeks, to include in their IB portfolio. The state and the district administer individual assessments connected with reading, math, intelligence, and state accountability for 3<sup>rd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> grades.

## **Student Portfolios**

**Purpose:** The portfolio provides data for parents, teachers, and students concerning student progress, student conferences, parent-teacher interviews, and teacher reflection/data collection. Portfolios allow students to collect their work, reflect on their strengths, and plan for their own improvement. As a collection of work, portfolios give students the opportunity to identify what they understand, what they can do, and what they need or want to learn. Portfolios allow students and parents to celebrate learning and target future goals during student led conferences.

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## **Conferences**

**Purpose:** Positive and timely communication between teachers, students and parents is a Sarah Smith core value. Students are successful when we share our expectations and goals through teacher/parent, teacher/student, and student-led conferences.

## **Affirming Identity and Building Self-Esteem:**

We provide a variety of opportunities to affirm and support the diverse needs of students:

- Base their learning on real life experiences
- Celebrate learner profile strengths and target growth for profile weaknesses
- Set learning goals based on their own reflections, goal setting and expectations
- Use their own learning strategies and build on their own strengths
- Expand on multiple intelligences to enhance their understanding
- Build confidence in their own work and self
- Express their points of view and understanding
- Understand what their own needs are and how to improve
- Use their prior knowledge to build on and guide the inquiry process

## **Valuing Prior Knowledge:**

When planning units of inquiry, the teachers at Smith incorporate strategies used explicitly to activate and build prior knowledge for all students. Understanding each learner's level of prior knowledge in turn determines the differentiated tasks and activities for the learners to deepen their learning throughout the unit of inquiry.

## **Scaffolding:**

Teachers at Smith scaffold learning in order to foster each student's increasing independence in their own learning. The following are examples of how we scaffold instruction for learners.

- *Graphic organizers*
- *Visual aids*
- *Small group instruction*

## **Extended Learning:**

Learning extension for all students at Smith *occurs* through additional opportunities and resources. Students with disabilities as well extend their learning by accessing increasingly sophisticated texts using assistive technology and read aloud software when needed as indicated in IEP. These resources allow our students to extend their academic language and create additional student centered learning activities. Additionally students utilize software to assist with writing.