Pinewood
PREPARATORY SCHOOL

Statement on Teaching and Learning at Pinewood Preparatory School

Culture of Collaboration

As a faculty, we meet the needs of our students most effectively by fostering an environment of active collaboration in which we work. We can accomplish this by working:

- together within departments to delineate a carefully sequenced curriculum
- within departments to avoid redundancies and omissions in content, and to identify and focus on essential knowledge
- with departmental colleagues to exploit the collective expertise in determining how concepts are best presented and assessed
- with grade level colleagues to ensure that the expectations of students are appropriate and coordinated
- across departments to ensure that students have ample opportunities to see connections

Habits of Mind

We want to prepare our students to be successful at the next level of education, and to foster the intellectual skills and personal characteristics they will need for a successful and fulfilling life. These skills and characteristics are:

- a commitment to learn and explore
- the courage to take intellectual risks and articulate one's own point of view
- the confidence to attempt challenging, unfamiliar investigations independently
- the mental flexibility to entertain alternative ideas or approaches and revise one's thinking to reflect new information
- the curiosity to ask questions, to probe truths and meanings, and to seek to know
- the humility to seek and respect the ideas of others, to listen attentively with an open mind
- the ability to use analytical or problem solving processes they have been taught and rehearsed
- the perseverance to persist in the face of lengthy or complex tasks and learn from failure
- the creativity to develop or to discover a fresh way of presenting or thinking about their findings
- the integrity to complete tasks with honest effort
- the seeking of viewpoint of those with different perspectives
- the ability to reflect on one's own learning process

21st Century Learning Skills

Our primary academic purpose is to foster students' ability to think critically, to relate abstract ideas to their own experiences, to seek connections to previously learned ideas and to integrate knowledge from other disciplines. This will involve engaging students in using the following analytical skills:

- questioning deeply, pursuing essential questions
- reading critically
- collecting relevant data and information
- evaluating the credibility of sources
- making plausible inferences and interpretations
- evaluating evidence or alleged facts
- recognizing contradictions
- tracing multiple causality
- examining and evaluating assumptions

- refining generalizations, avoiding oversimplification
- developing one's own perspective
- constructing support for arguments
- transferring and applying insights to new contexts
- moving beyond learned knowledge and creating the new
- articulating one's views in compelling, thoughtful ways, in various modes of discourse.

Methods for Promoting Critical Thinking

While some skills may be taught in isolation, others must be taught in the context of a smaller number of rich, complex problems or investigations. Inquiries should be framed to stimulate students' curiosity. Teaching students independent critical thinking skills involves:

- the explicit instruction and modeling of thinking processes
- the use of a shared vocabulary
- opportunities to reflect on successes and failures in reasoning

Methods for Teaching Skills

The ability to think critically is dependent upon mastery of an array of underlying basic skills. Successful mastery of these skills is most likely when they are taught:

- with teacher awareness of the student's current level
- with students' awareness/understanding of teacher's expectations
- sequentially, from introduction, reinforcement, remediation to mastery
- with increased independence in new and more complex contacts
- in a variety of modalities and materials that engage students' learning styles
- in a way that promotes students' understanding of how to maximize their strengths and compensate for their weaknesses

Methods for Promoting Student Engagement

Because students learn best when they are engaged, teaching for student engagement requires a variety of learning experiences and pedagogical methods. This will mean allocating substantial classroom and homework time to:

- pursuing the essential questions of a given discipline
- learning new facts and information in the context of a larger conceptual framework
- experiencing concepts through hands-on learning
- discovering through doing, reading, researching, experimenting
- engaging in both student and teacher-led discussion
- providing opportunities for students to learn from each other
- training students to formulate complex responses to engaging questions
- employing a mix of whole class, small group, and individual activities
- providing experiences for application of concepts to new contexts
- offering opportunities to learn through primary sources and artifacts
- reading secondary sources to learn different critical approaches
- engaging in cross-disciplinary or thematic inquiries
- using technology and other tools to pursue investigations
- recognizing the genuine successes of each student

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The Content of the Curriculum

Fostering these critical thinking skills and habits of mind is best accomplished by covering content thoroughly and more thoughtfully. In selecting content, our criterion should be to choose content most likely to promote student engagement. While mastery of content in a number of disciplines is a precondition for higher level thinking, it is important that students understand facts and ideas in the context of conceptual framework, and organize knowledge in ways that facilitate retrieval and application. In general, memorization should be limited to information where higher order skills are dependent on speed/ease of recall. Content should:

- lend itself to exploring essential questions, those related to the most important issues or themes within a given discipline
- promote the development of higher level thinking
- encourage students to make connections with the social, economic, political, and cultural issues of our society and of the world at large, particularly issues of social justice
- enable students to make connections across disciplines
- be developmentally appropriate for the range of students in the class

Assessment Practices

Assessment of students' progress should include:

- a sensible and age-appropriate balance of assessment of recall/memorization and complex evaluations of higher order skills
- opportunities to apply what has been learned in new, creative contexts
- varied assessment types to accommodate different learning styles, multiple intelligences, and developmental levels
- student presentations, including a mix of individually assessed and group projects
- meaningful projects created and presented to authentic audiences

Student Performance is best assessed and most effective when students:

- receive evaluation criteria in advance
- are asked to employ these criteria in meaningful self evaluation when it is developmentally appropriate to do so
- have some opportunities to revise their work based on peer and teacher feedback
- take part in designing assessments/projects where developmentally appropriate
- have opportunities to reflect on the success/failure of the learning strategies they used to complete the given task

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Learning Environments that Promote Student Engagement

Promoting intellectual inquiry and risk taking requires a classroom culture that:

- is based on a mutual understanding of class goals
- is safe and comfortable for all students, allowing each to express him/herself
- respects students' efforts and responds to them in a fair-minded manner
- provides recognition for students and validation of their work
- fosters mutual respect among teachers and students
- promotes investigation and the growth of ideas
- provides timely feedback, praise or concerns

This kind of atmosphere is best created when teachers:

- know their students well, both in and out of the classroom
- design classroom activities sufficiently varied to meet the needs of all of our students
- model a love and enthusiasm for their subject
- show their belief that all their students can succeed
- are accessible to their students
- listen effectively
- show fairness and flexibility
- see themselves as part of a team
- hold colleagues in high regard and actively support them
- respect colleagues' efforts in other disciplines
- support the value of other teachers' assignments and projects
- mentor new teachers in the school's values and priorities
- communicate in a timely fashion with parents and students