



**CHUGACH OPTIONAL
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

HANDBOOK



CHUGACH
O.P.T.I.O.N.A.L

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Chugach Optional Elementary School

1205 E Street

Anchorage, Alaska 99501

907-742-3730



"The joy of learning is as indispensable in study as breathing is in running."
Simone Weil



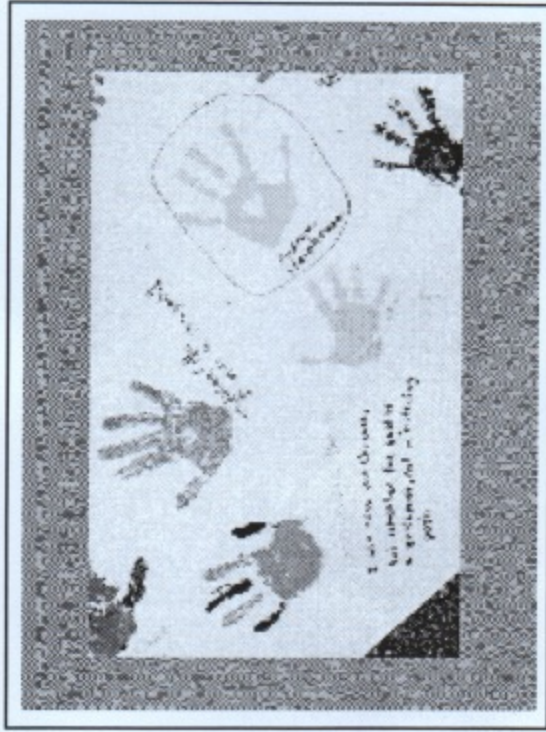
"Having parents in the school makes me feel warm and comfortable - like home."

Korbyn, Chugach student



The school must itself be a community life in all which that implies. Social perceptions and interest can be developed only in a genuinely social medium - one where there is give and take in the building up of a common experience.

John Dewey



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Anchorage School District Non Discrimination Statement

It is the policy of the Anchorage School District to provide equal educational and employment opportunities, and to provide services and benefits to all students and employees without regard to race, color, religion, disability, national origin, gender, marital status, change in marital status, pregnancy, parenthood or other prohibitions.

This policy of the Anchorage School District is consistent with numerous laws, regulations, and executive orders enforced by various federal, state, and municipal agencies, including but not limited to Executive Order 11246, Title 41, part 60-1, 60-2, 60-3, 60-20, Title VI and VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972. Inquiries or complaints may be addressed to the School District Equal Employment Opportunity Office, the Alaska State Commission for Human Rights, the Anchorage Equal Rights Commission, or the Director of the Office for Civil Rights, the Department of Education or the Department of Health and Human Services.

History Of Chugach Optional

In September, 1973, Chugach Optional was started as an open concept pilot program through the efforts of a group of parents who recognized the need for an alternative learning environment. They wanted a strong school community that included parents, teachers, and students. Together with a group of teachers, these parents spent much of that summer planning and setting up classrooms designed to accommodate multi-age grouping and flexible learning situations.

Philosophy

Our philosophy is based on the following beliefs and assumptions:

- children are naturally curious, want to learn, and can learn;
- instruction should be child-centered, that is, responsive to the special interests and aptitudes of each child;
- the learning environment should nurture growth of the whole child, emphasizing physical, emotional, and academic development;
- the joy of learning lies in meeting challenges, discovering new territory and gaining knowledge through experience;
- children who share responsibility for their own learning and are encouraged to think independently will grow into self-directed responsible adults.

Optimal growth takes place in an environment where:

- structure and order are used as tools fostering the growth of children;
- children are responsible for directing at least some aspects of their learning. This level of self-direction varies from child to child, depending on how much responsibility the child has learned to assume;
- individual differences are respected;
- students are encouraged to solve problems;
- all opinions are valued;
- there is an emphasis on cooperation;
- there is a diverse learning community which includes students with a wide range of learning styles, cultural backgrounds, and ethnicity.

Learning at Chugach

Learning is a function of students interacting with their environment. Teachers act as facilitators, helping children guide their own learning, rather than dispensers of knowledge. To this end, the teachers create an environment rich in resources and materials. They use practices that discourage passivity and rote learning and encourage critical thinking, risk-taking and curiosity.

Students are encouraged to take an active part in their own learning process. Teachers set up regular opportunities for students to make decisions. While they may not always have the freedom to decide what topic to study, students may, within a given topic, have a choice about specific questions to explore or how to express their learning. Children may also choose to some extent how, when, where, or with whom to learn. They may spend some time working alone and other times working in small or large groups, or collaborating on an activity with a peer.

These choices help children to direct their own learning, and teach decision-making and time-management skills. As they demonstrate the ability to handle increased responsibilities, students are given more choices.

Our goal is to help children become lifelong learners, in charge of their own education.

As "in-charge learners," Chugach students

- learn to take on more responsibility incrementally each year;
- learn to be self-directed;
- relate well to others, and learn to work as a team;
- are able to communicate clearly in many ways;
- know how to think critically and creatively;
- know how to learn and are excited about learning;
- are able to clearly evaluate their own work, values, and the choices before them;
- make decisions and feel empowered to make positive changes in their lives and in the world.

Students are expected to follow through on the choices they make with support at home as well as at school. Chugach emphasizes family responsibility and commitment.

Chugach Optional Parents

Parents are the thread that ties our educational community together. As an essential part of the educational team, adult family members work in the school to provide a wider array of personal, individualized experiences for the children. They also enrich the program by sharing their areas of expertise.

Parents' participation and involvement in the school life of their children plays a very important role in the development of the child. It can also be a richly rewarding experience for the parents and the entire family. Enrolling your children in Chugach constitutes a commitment to support the program with your time and abilities in a number of ways. It is important for parents to know, understand and feel at ease with this program, and be willing to trust staff and students as they work toward common goals.

We expect a minimum of 36 hours of volunteer time per year for one child, and ten more hours for each additional child.

Parents who bring their children to Chugach Optional make a commitment to use their efforts to keep the program strong. Every family does a little, so the burden is not great on any one family. At the beginning of the year, all parents fill out a form indicating how they will do their fair share. No special talent is required as long as you are willing and dependable. Examples of how parents are involved include:

- Classroom tasks — helping with small groups, assisting with preparation of materials, distributing mail, chaperoning field trips, planning class celebrations, helping with student publications, etc.
- At-home tasks — gathering materials for classroom projects, mending books, telephoning, typing, building carpentry projects, etc.
- Community tasks — planning and working at the Halloween Carnival and Spring Feast, coordinating volunteers for each family group, teaching a special interest mini-course for students, etc.

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Social Responsibility

While recognizing the importance of concepts, knowledge. Learning together involves honesty, trust, acceptance, responsibility and self-discipline on the part of everyone. We focus on the development of positive attitudes towards people, the environment and learning. At Chugach, children and adults work together, listening to each other and demonstrating that they value what is said. The open physical design of the school fosters a sense of interdependence and connectedness encouraging a sense of social responsibility.

There are two basic guidelines for behavior at Chugach:

1. Respect - Students and teachers have respect for their own and other's physical and emotional well-being, ideas, work, and property. We expect courteous behavior between everyone, students and adults.
2. Cooperation - Teachers and students help each other when working and playing.

The emphasis is on helping children take responsibility for their own behavior.



Teachers, acting as facilitators, encourage children to work out their own solutions to problems, either individually or in groups. While this is demanding and at times frustrating, it is more beneficial for children to realize they are capable of working out their own solutions. Problems involving several children or the whole school are discussed during family group meetings, during the day or in assemblies.

Teachers, students, and other adults are on a first name basis. Children learn to respect other people for the attitudes, capabilities and knowledge they demonstrate, rather than on the basis of a name or title. Children learn respect when they, in turn, are treated respectfully.



"The role of teachers is to teach children how to learn, the role of parents is to teach children how to work."
—Mel Levine

The emphasis at Chugach is on cooperation. Competition is generally deemphasized. At times students may choose to participate in schoolwide or ASD sponsored competitions, either individually or as teams. During these events, fair play and good sportsmanship, as well as academic excellence, are emphasized.

Parents and community members at Chugach offer many enriching activities. These include various mini-courses, guest speakers or instructors, field trips, assemblies, sports, fine arts and community service projects.

Methods Of Implementation

“...The teacher does not play an authoritarian role but is rather a participant in the living and learning situation in the classroom. The teacher has the final responsibility for making decisions and setting boundaries between what is acceptable in the room; but the discipline of the group is based on mutual respect between the teacher and the child, and between child and child, and is gradually assumed as a group responsibility...”

M. Brown and N. Precious



Children are naturally curious and want to learn. One of our major goals is to nurture this natural curiosity and drive to learn in each child, so the Chugach program provides a challenging, engaging curriculum that will prepare the students to be informed, compassionate,



ethical citizens for a global society. At Chugach we believe that basic research skills and a keen desire for discovery will better prepare children for our rapidly changing world than the mere accumulation of a bag of facts which may soon become outdated.

We recognize that learning involves risk-taking. Opportunities are provided to choose, plan, do, and evaluate. Knowledge is a function of all the experiences a child encounters during the day. It does not fall neatly into separate categories or disciplines. We, therefore, try to integrate curriculum areas within a single focus of study.

For example, during a study of the Middle Ages, students might explore the mathematical ideas of ratio and scale while



Services and Support Programs

Chugach is a public school in the Anchorage School District, and the same district rules and regulations apply to this school as to any other. Chugach is not a neighborhood school. There is no bussing, so parents are responsible for transporting their children to school. Many families choose to carpool.

Chugach Optional School has all the programs available to qualified students that would be available in any other school in the District. Services include Speech/Language, Gifted Education, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Hearing Impaired, Migrant Education, Indian Education, Bilingual Education, and Special Education Resource.

Educational Technology Integration

The Chugach community embraces the need for differentiating curriculum based on students' skills, readiness, and interest. We work to meet this challenge for all learners. Educational technology is an excellent tool to help us accommodate the diverse needs of our students. The applications of educational technology vary from age group to age group based on appropriate developmental readiness.

We aspire to create a classroom in which children have the freedom to engage in their own inquiries and actively participate in the conversion of information into knowledge. "In revisiting Dewey's progressive philosophy today, it's clear that new technologies have tremendous potential to support [discovery learning]" —Gordon, pp. 16. Chugach has been developing concept-based integrated units of study for over 30 years. It is a natural fit and essential development to include the integration of educational technology into our units of study.

We live in a media-saturated society. The media have a huge impact on our lives, affecting everything from how we dress and what we eat to how we vote, and even to what we believe about who we are. Our students learn to analyze, interpret, evaluate and create media messages.

Teacher Specialists at Chugach

All students participate in Art, Music, and Physical Education classes provided by specialists. These teachers work to integrate their content into the Chugach curriculum through collaboration with classroom teachers. For example, when classes focus on Alaska Studies, the physical education teacher may teach Native games and the art teacher may teach Native mask-making, and the Music teacher may teach Native drumming.

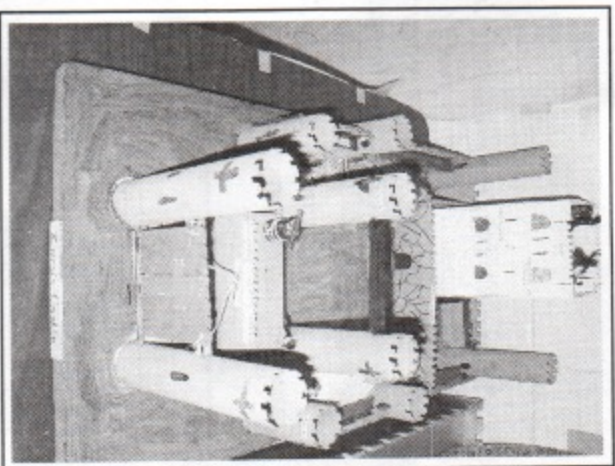


designing a castle that they will build. They research life in the Middle Ages and write about life in their castle. Students study technological advances such as the development of siege machines. Students study dress, recreation and crafts during the Middle Ages as they prepare for their Middle Ages Fair.

While memorization of some facts is necessary, this is most effective when preceded by an understanding of the ideas underlying the concepts. For example, before memorizing multiplication facts, students develop a solid understanding of the concept of multiplication. They demonstrate their understanding using diagrams and manipulative materials like blocks, and reinforce it through in-class explanations to their peers. Basic skills become tools rather than ends in themselves, encouraging learning experiences that require critical and creative thinking.

We value a process of inquiry, so we provide experiences requiring students to pose questions, analyze them and arrive at their own solutions. Children learn through self-discovery and individual exploration. Learning becomes more meaningful and children become more creative and inventive when they discover, rather than merely absorb, knowledge.

Students learn through interaction with others. At Chugach, children of different ages work together, helping each other learn, much like in a family. Therefore, classes at Chugach are known as "Family Groups". Except at kindergarten, family groups combine grade levels (1-2, 3-4, and 5-6) to include diverse learners as well as create continuity by work-





“I like having two grades in the class at a time because when you’re in third grade you have more teachers and when you’re in fourth grade you are a teacher.”

Chandler, Chugach Student



ing with the same teacher for two years. In addition, Upper groups (5-6) are paired with Primary groups (1-2), and Middle groups (3-4) with Kindergarten as learning partners. This develops rapport between students throughout the school and reinforces a sense of community and caring.

Family groups hold regular meetings in which children may share their work, experiences, concerns and feelings. Students and teachers use this opportunity for problem solving, role-playing, evaluation and planning.



activities, the librarian enriches the learning and fosters the joy of reading. The librarian also maintains a resource collection for parents and staff.

The entire collection is constantly updated through scheduled and unscheduled acquisitions as well as donations. There is no limit to the number of books that students can check out (within reason) or the number of library visits they can make each week.



- student projects, e.g. building a castle demonstrates ability to research information, learn new vocabulary, make decisions about materials to use, plan, create, and execute a design, and manage time;
- student self-evaluations, both in the form of checklists and narratives;
- reading logs showing understanding of written material;
- anecdotal records of teacher observations;
- student interviews which allow insights to the student's thinking process;
- diagnostic testing;
- ASD mandated standardized testing.

This information can be reviewed by the parents any time throughout the year and is part of an ongoing conversation between parents and teachers. There are no formal report cards or letter grades at Chugach.

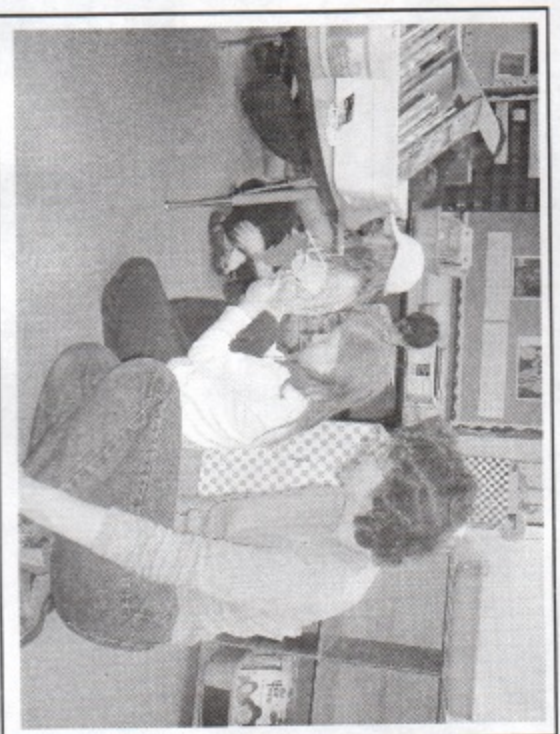
The Chugach Library

The library at Chugach is an extension of the classroom. The librarian collaborates with teachers to provide the necessary skills and resources to explore topics currently studied in the classroom, and encourages students and families to use its space and resources both independently and in groups.

Formal library instruction includes how to research and evaluate information, use library resources, explore different genres of literature and think critically about books.

The librarian also meets with individual students and small groups for book discussions, plans literary events and coordinates guest speakers. Student work is displayed in the library for the entire community to enjoy. Through these

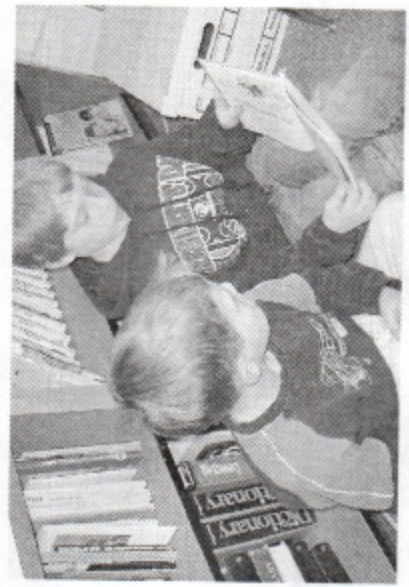
Assessing and Monitoring Student Progress



The best measure of a student's work is the student's work. Children are constantly encouraged to evaluate and improve their own work and to compare their present performance against that from the past. They have many opportunities to share work with the group, so the children are aware of what other students are doing. This gives them an opportunity to share their strengths and learn from one another.

Since learning is best assessed by teacher and student over time and in relation to the student's actual work, teachers, and in some areas students, keep ongoing records to monitor and assess progress. This can take many different shapes and may vary with individual abilities and growth of the students:

- student-led conferences, held at least twice a year to share a portfolio of work that is representative of the student's growth and development;



“Once children learn how to learn, nothing is going to narrow their mind.”

~ Marva Collins

