



NSA West Elementary School Program (Kindergarten-5th Grade)

NSA West will mirror the curriculum and policies implemented at North Star Academy, located in Parker, with the goal of building another high quality charter school in Douglas County. The school will provide a rigorous educational program driven by high standards and research-based curriculum. The program will provide K–5 students with an academic approach in three key areas:

1. A deep knowledge in core discipline areas (language arts, math, science, and social studies) through the use of E. D. Hirsch's Core Knowledge (CK) curriculum.
2. Integrated foreign language instruction (Spanish) that goes beyond the standard foreign language program, integrating Spanish across the curriculum and encouraging an understanding and appreciation of various cultures and traditions.
3. A focus on character education and service learning enabling students to reach beyond the classroom into their communities and become responsible and respectful members of society.

Music, art, physical education and technology are also essential components of NSA West's educational program.

I. Core Knowledge

The "Core Knowledge" (CK) movement is an educational reform based on the premise that a grade-by-grade core of common learning is necessary to ensure a sound and fair elementary education. The movement was started by Professor E. D. Hirsch, Jr., author of *Cultural Literacy* and *The Schools We Need*, and is based on a large body of research in cognitive psychology, as well as a careful examination of several of the world's fairest and most effective school systems. Dr. Hirsch has argued that, for the sake of academic excellence, greater fairness and higher literacy, early schooling should provide a solid, specific and shared core curriculum in order to help children establish strong foundations of knowledge. Students learn new knowledge by building upon what they already know. The CK Curriculum clearly defines the knowledge and skills students will master at each grade level and raises the bar for student accomplishment. Additional information is available on the National CK website at <http://www.coreknowledge.org>.

NSA West will implement the CK Sequence exposing students to a broad range of historical, scientific, and cultural topics. The CK curriculum covers language arts, history and geography, mathematics, science, art, and music. Students will develop cultural literacy as well as a strong vocabulary necessary for reading comprehension.

II. Integrated Foreign Language Program: Spanish

NSA West will implement a content-based Foreign Language in Elementary Schools (FLES) Spanish program beginning in Kindergarten. This program provides full immersion instruction for 30 minutes daily (kindergarten students will receive 15 minutes daily). NSA West's program is unique because there is a focus on subject content instruction rather than on language instruction alone.

NSA West will use Viva el Espanol, Realidades and CK content materials and lessons to deliver Spanish instruction. NSA West will use the SOPA (Spanish Oral Proficiency Assessment) and ELLOPA (Early Language Listening and Oral Proficiency Assessment) developed by the Center for Applied Linguistics tests to assess student progress and proficiency. NSA West also plans to work with a private consultant, Martie Semmer, on the implementation of the school's program. Ms. Semmer is a nationally recognized expert on foreign language program development who serves on the ACTFL Board and works closely with the Center for Applied Linguistics.

Students will acquire junior intermediate mid-level proficiency in speaking, listening, reading and writing according to the ELLOPA assessment. Additionally, students will acquire an understanding and appreciation for other cultures as well as an appreciation and knowledge of language for future language learning opportunities.

Research shows that the younger a child can begin learning a second language the better. Studies indicate that "young children in foreign language programs have tended to demonstrate greater cognitive development, creativity and divergent thinking than monolingual children." (Bruck, Lambert, and Tucker, 1974; Hakuta, 1986; Weatherford, 1986).

III. Character Education and Service Learning Program

Character education and service learning activities teach students the skills needed to make responsible and intelligent choices. The five character traits that NSA West will model and teach are: respect, integrity, excellence, responsibility, and citizenship. Teachers will reinforce these character traits within the content of the school's curriculum.

Character education and service learning is taught on a weekly basis by the Principal. The curriculum is centered on great historical figures such as Helen Keller, Benjamin Franklin, Anne Frank, the Wright Brothers, etc., who show the fundamentals and the importance of strength of character. Materials from Nest Publication, as well as other research-based materials, will be used for direct instruction. Each month, the school's Principal will directly teach a different character in a structured setting. The students extend their learning into the regular classroom through required essays expanding what they learned from the study.

In addition to the direct lessons, character study is matched with a service learning activity. As an example, when students study Anne Frank, they could work with The Six Million Penny Project in memory of the Holocaust victims. In extending these studies, the students will see the importance and the result of applying their knowledge to a real life situation.

Research suggests that when children learn to make good choices they are more committed to the work they do. They also acquire habits that make them life long readers, writers, and continuing learners of math, science, and social studies (Hyde, 1998). Research also shows that students engaged in service learning activities strengthen their academic skills, civic attitudes and skills for active citizenship (Brandeis University, 1997).

IV. Music, Art and Physical Education.

NSA West values a well-rounded education and recognizes the many benefits of creative learning opportunities. Music and art are integrated into the CK Sequence and will be offered to all of NSA West's students on alternating days in the elementary program. NSA West will have a music and art teacher who will collaborate with the other teachers creating an interdisciplinary approach to teaching.

Physical Education will be an integral part of NSA West's curriculum focusing on life-long wellness activities and healthy life choices and will be taught on alternating days. The curriculum will include a prevention focus in terms of healthy life choices related to diet, exercise and activity, and drugs. Students will work on building coordination, motor skills, teamwork and cooperation.

Studies have shown that children who are exposed to consistent music and visual arts programs in school do better in both math and reading as well as on standardized tests. Music and Visual arts programs have also been shown to help under-achievers do better in school. <http://manila.pasadena.k12.ca.us/arts/>

V. Technology

NSA West will develop a state-of-the-art technology lab allowing for the integration of technology into the curriculum. Students will have opportunities to access information, organize data, explore, create and problem solve with classmates and faculty. All students will participate in the NWEA assessment, a state-aligned computer adaptive test that measures student achievement and growth.

NSA West will provide modern technologies to staff that improve efficiencies, enhance learning, engage students and enable collaboration with peers. Staff will have access to computers to develop lesson plans, reports, design handouts, keep track of student progress, facilitate classroom presentations and share instructional strategies with other teachers. Teachers will also have access to smart boards and other computer programs to enhance instruction including Learning Ware, which enables teachers to develop interactive games, and Study Island, which enables students to access curriculum from home.

Research has shown that computer use can help students develop a sense of purpose and enable them to make connections between their work and the world around them (Heide, 1994).

VI. Supplemental Programs

NSA West will supplement the CK Sequence with the following curriculum:

- ★ **Saxon Math** will be implemented as the school's primary mathematics program through instruction and curriculum beginning in kindergarten. Saxon Math is a unique, effective and research based approach to learning math. Research has shown that the Saxon Math approach has produced significantly higher levels of student learning than massed presentations such as those found in programs with a chapter-based approach. (www.saxonpublishers.com, 2007).
- ★ **Saxon Phonics** (grades K-2) will be used for phonics instruction that provides the building blocks for students to develop a solid reading foundation. Saxon Phonics is a supplemental series that explicitly teaches phonemic awareness, phonics and fluency in a way that is supported by years of scientific research and has been proven effective by years of classroom success.
- ★ **Open Court** (grades K-6) is a literature rich language and arts reading program. Research shows the achievement of students taught with Open Court Reading has been exceptional on state-mandated tests, national standardized tests, district tests, and many other specific measures.
- ★ **Shurley English** is a research based English program that uses motivation, retention, transfer, and reinforcement to teach grammar and writing. In the Shurley Method, there is a step-by-step

way for teaching concepts that reaches the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles of students. To ensure mastery of each concept taught in grades 1-6, Shurley English skills are presented in a logical learning order with necessary repetition.

- ★ **Pearson History and Geography** will be used for social studies instruction. This program, edited by Core Knowledge founder E.D. Hirsch, Jr., follows the CK Sequence to teach key history and geography topics at each consecutive level.
- ★ **Pearson Scott Foresman Science** provides students with a proficient understanding of scientific inquiry as they learn the scientific method and conduct simple investigations. Pearson provides inquiry-based science content in Life, Earth and Physical sciences with scaffolded activities that are correlated to standards and presented in rich, interactive media.

VII. Literacy

According to a study by the Partnership for Reading, the objective of phonics instruction is to help children learn and use the systematic and predictable relationships between written letters and spoken sounds. Knowing these relationships through phonics helps readers to recognize familiar words accurately and easily decode new words which creates a more confident reader.

NSA West teachers use Saxon Phonics to teach phonics and phonemic Awareness and Open Court for whole group reading instruction. The combination of the two programs is currently in use at North Star Academy in Parker and is working well and showing growth in the acquisition of reading skills.

Additional supplemental programs the school will utilize for reading include: Shurley English (www.shurley.com), Sitton Spelling (www.sittonspelling.com), Junior Great Books (www.greatbooks.org), Word Masters (www.wordmasterschallenge.com), Accelerated Reader (www.renlearn.com/ar) and Study Island (www.studyisland.com). These programs are research-based, grounded in systematic, explicit instruction of phonemic awareness, phonics and word knowledge, comprehension skills and strategies, inquiry skills and strategies, and writing and language arts skills and strategies.

**For additional information on NSA West,
please visit our website at www.nsawest.org**