PARK STREET
SCHOOL

Overview of *Core Knowledge* at Park Street School

Park Street School is grounded in a *Core Knowledge* philosophy of education. Our curriculum lays a solid foundation of knowledge which is built upon and expanded in each subsequent grade. In this process of progressive knowledge acquisition, students will be challenged to think creatively while solving problems methodically. Such an approach to education develops students who are culturally literate and able to express themselves in a broad range of contexts.

Our academic program focuses on core subjects and enriches the students' learning experience with the arts. Hallmarks of our curriculum includes an in-depth exposure to early phonics training, immersion in classical literature, and a comprehensive study of history beginning in preschool. As students master the basic elements of math and science, they apply their knowledge through the use of manipulatives and experimentation. Also included in our curriculum is the exploration and utilization of technology and engineering.

Great care is taken to provide a stimulating learning environment that develops each child's cognitive abilities and self-esteem. Because children learn by experiencing, interacting, observing, and communicating, our faculty employ a variety of teaching techniques, learning resources, and discovery opportunities for their students in diverse, educational settings.

Core Knowledge

The rhetoric of "excellence in education" is freely tossed back and forth among the many voices that speak to the subject of educating children. It always appears in the pages of text used to promote most competitive schools in the Boston area. Our own school is no exception. What does it mean to be excellent in education? What makes the teaching and curriculum at any given school excellent or even acceptable? Many educational trends popular over the last 20 years have merit, but the desired attainment of educational goals remains elusive. Some argue that "learning how to learn" should be the primary goal of education and that specific knowledge is not necessary to obtain that goal. This overlooks what is most basic and fundamental to learning at any age: gaining knowledge requires the mastery of content.

Why is it so important to provide content, especially in the early grades? Children acquire knowledge by building on what they already know. In the early grades, they are innately inquisitive and inherently receptive: they love to learn. As E. D. Hirsch, Jr., has demonstrated, however, mastery of a significant body of specific knowledge (i.e. a core of knowledge) is an indispensable prerequisite for developing critical thinking skills. With these tools of interesting and relevant knowledge, students begin to "learn how to learn." For example, first graders at the Elementary School study ancient Egypt. They ponder the

wonder of the pyramids, discuss the rule of a pharaoh, and build models of the Nile River. They engage in activities that enable them to discover new ways of thinking, while they reflect on important historical events which have shaped who we are today. This unit is part of a well-thought-out curriculum that builds upon knowledge accumulated throughout the elementary years.

The curriculum developed at Park Street School utilizes the *Core Knowledge* approach and meets and exceeds the standards for elementary education set forth by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.* As stated in the *Core Knowledge* website: "Only a school that clearly defines the knowledge and skills required to participate in each successive grade can be excellent and fair for all students. For this reason, the *Core Knowledge* Sequence provides a clear outline of content to be learned grade by grade. This sequential building of knowledge not only helps ensure that children enter each new grade ready to learn, but also helps prevent the many repetitions and gaps that characterize much current schooling." Accumulating knowledge sequentially is imperative in all subject areas as students learn the basic principles of constitutional government, important events of world history, essential elements of mathematics and of oral and written expression, widely acknowledged masterpieces of art and music, and stories and poems passed down from generation to generation.

With a curriculum based on the *Core Knowledge* Sequence, students encounter many topics several times again in subsequent grades in order to broaden and expand their knowledge of those topics. For this reason, it is important that the goals for each grade be specific. The same principle of building on previously acquired knowledge applies to learning within each grade. The beauty of the *Core Knowledge* Sequence is that it affords a depth to learning that is often lacking in other curricular approaches. In mathematics, for example, a spiraling and sequential approach is absolutely necessary for students to master the basics. Park Street School has found that content-rich curriculum stimulates creativity, rather than stifling it. In particular, a curriculum that is specified in detail frees up teachers to devote their attention to developing activities which illustrate and expand on topics. The result is that the curiosity of students is piqued so that they are always eager to learn more.

Park Street School attempts to provide "excellence in education" by implementing the *Core Knowledge* Sequence, but that is not all. It also desires to foster a community where children are loved unconditionally and learn to love one another. In addition, it seeks to promote an environment that develops self-worth based on the truth that each child is uniquely and wonderfully made by God. Nearly 2,000 years ago, one of the main authors of the Bible, the Apostle Paul, wisely exhorted the church at Philippi: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things" (Philippians 4:8).

** For the Core Knowledge website, see www.coreknowledge.org.*