

Natural Science Academy
Student/Parent Handbook
2011-2012



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NSA VISION: To develop a "green" school for children where the facility, operations, and educational program reflect a commitment to the natural environment.

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Table of Contents

NSA Staff/Board	4
Letter from the Director	5
NSA Vision/Mission	6
Handbook Purpose	6
Daily Schedule - Late Arrival/Early Pickup	7
After-School Plans	7
Contacting Teachers	7
Emergency School Closing	7
Attendance	8
Dress Code	9
Recess/Outdoor Education	9
School Visitors/Volunteers	9
Staffing Structure	9
Kindergarten Program	10
Multi-age Grouping	10
Special Education/Inclusion	10
Student Progress: Goals, Conferences, Progress Reports/TRAILS	10
Behavior Expectations/Responsive Classroom	10-11
Building Behavior Plan	12
Medication Guidelines	12
Special Occasion Treats Brought To School	12
Lunch/Snacks	12
Food Allergies	12
Transportation	13
PAC (Parent Action Committee)	13
Board of Directors	13
Internet Policy	13
Homework Guidelines	14-15
NSA Curriculum	16-17
Appendix A - Problem Solving Plan (PSP)	19
Acceptance of NSA Computer Use and Internet Safety	21
Handbook Signature Page	23

**Natural Science Academy
STUDENT/PARENT HANDBOOK**

2010-2011

920 Holley Avenue, Suite 3

St. Paul Park, MN 55071

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Fax # 651.925.5051

Office Hours: 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Kirsten Kinzler, Director

email: info@naturalscienceacademy.org

DISTRICT #4187 SCHOOL BOARD

Jane Husnik	Chairperson/Parent
Jim Gleekel	Treasurer/Parent
John Cavalieri	Secretary/Community Member
David Glick	Community Member
Terrence Bro	Parent
Kendra Hunding	Teacher
Penny Barnes	Community Member

NSA STAFF

Kirsten Kinzler	Director
Pat Esparza	Administrative Assistant
Traci LaFerriere	Business Manager
Jennifer Wolfe	Kindergarten Teacher
Laura Ferguson	1-3 Teacher
Aaron Benes	1-3 Teacher
Kendra Hunding	4-5 Teacher
Rachel Blank	Special Education Teacher

To contact a staff or board member by Email, address your message as follows:
firstname.lastname@naturalscienceacademy.org

Dear NSA Families,

Welcome to the 2011-2012 school year, our fourth year of operation at Natural Science Academy! Thank you for entrusting your children to us. We look forward to working in partnership with you throughout the coming year. We recognize that you, as parents, are your child's first and most significant teachers. As school staff, we are pleased to have the opportunity to help your child gain new skills, both academically and socially, during the coming year. We thank you for your on-going reinforcement of these skills at home.

NSA is a school that ensures growth and success for each learner and promotes courtesy and respect. We are proud to be creating a safe and nurturing learning environment for the children of NSA, and we are committed to providing your child with opportunities for success. NSA is a place where individual differences are celebrated and appreciated and each child is valued as unique and special.

We are committed to providing your children with a quality education focusing on instilling an appreciation of nature and environmentalism in the kids, and using the natural world as a basis for education. At this school, No Child Left Behind also means no students left indoors.

As the Director of Natural Science Academy, I look toward the new school year with eager anticipation for another very successful partnership with parents, students, staff, community members, and volunteers. Please know that the staff of NSA is strongly committed to continuous improvement as we teach and guide your child. Remember, if you have questions or concerns, we are only a phone call (or an email) away. Thank you for your continued support of NSA!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Kirsten K. Kinzler".

Kirsten K. Kinzler,
Director

NSA Vision

The vision of Natural Science Academy is to develop a "green" school where the facility, operations, and educational program reflect a commitment to environmental sustainability and to preparing our young citizens to become leaders and models of exemplary, responsible citizenship, and stewards of the natural environment.

NSA Mission

Natural Science Academy will provide innovative, inquiry-based and place-based learning opportunities for K-5 students utilizing the unique environmental assets of the community and through a variety of community partnerships. NSA will promote academic achievement in the areas of science, math, technology, literacy, music, and the arts. NSA will develop students' social responsibility through experiential education, interdisciplinary environmental studies, and inquiry-based learning projects. NSA will strive to develop the capacity in all students for working cooperatively with others, for empathy and compassion, for thinking critically and creatively, and for becoming adept learners, community leaders, independent thinkers, and lifelong environmental stewards.

Handbook Purpose

This handbook provides information to you about certain terms and conditions of attending the school. NSA is a public school and is funded by the state of Minnesota on a per-pupil rate. Due to this fact, our school must adhere to several state and federal guidelines, which will ensure safety and fair treatment for all students in attendance.

While NSA will make every effort to keep your school handbook current, the information and policies described in this handbook may be changed in any way at any time at the sole discretion of the NSA Administration/Staff. Your family is responsible to comply with current NSA policies at all times. These policies apply to all students at NSA.



Daily Schedule - Late Arrival/Early Pickup

School Day: 9:20 a.m.-3:50 p.m.

Students are allowed in the school at 9:00 a.m. Students arriving before 9:00 a.m. will wait until 9:00 a.m. Any student arriving after 9:20 a.m. must report to the front office **accompanied by a parent** to check in. We must ask that students arriving late **not** be dropped off outside the building. Any student needing to leave before the end of the school day is asked to bring a note to their classroom teacher at the start of the day. Parents arriving to pick up students early are asked to enter the building to sign the checkout at the office before departure. We thank you for your cooperation in carrying out our building security plan.

After-School Plans

If a student wishes to go home with another student, plans **must** be made in **advance** and **both** students must **bring notes from home**. **We do not allow students to make phone calls during the day to arrange after school plans.** We ask that these arrangements be made in advance with parents to avoid any mid-day confusion and miscommunication. In the event that your child will be picked up by an adult other than a parent, please send a note with specific information. **PLEASE NOTE: an e-mail or voicemail on the day of request is not acceptable. You need to speak with school personnel directly to avoid any miscommunication.** Our building security plan is focused on the safety of the children in our care and requires extra time for planning and communication. Thank you for your support.

Contacting Teachers

Should you need to contact your student's teacher you are encouraged to call the school before 9:00 a.m. or within 30 minutes after school is dismissed. Parents are urged to make use of this opportunity if consultation with the teacher is necessary. Please check with your student's teacher to find the best method of communication. Please contact the office if you need to get a message to your student's teacher during school hours. Parents may also communicate with teachers via email as follows:

firstname.lastname@naturalscienceacademy.org

If communicating via email, please keep in mind that emails are not routinely read during the course of the school day. So if a more immediate response is warranted, please call the school office.

Emergency School Closing

Since NSA students are transported by South Washington County (ISD 833) buses, our school will not be open if South Washington County Schools are closed. Listen to or watch KARE 11, WCCO 4 or WCCO 830 radio for South Washington County Schools (which would include NSA) for late opening, early closing, or cancellation of school due to emergency conditions. **Our school will always follow the announcements for South Washington County Schools since we participate in their transportation program.** Each family is required to submit to the office at the beginning of the year a "Student Emergency Information" form, giving school personnel instructions regarding the family's emergency plan. These forms are **absolutely necessary** as we do not, under these emergency circumstances, have time to phone each parent. If we do not have such a form on file, students will return home as they normally would.

Attendance

Regular school attendance is one of the most important ingredients in achieving a successful education. Minnesota law requires students to attend school.

If your child will not be attending school on a given day or will be tardy, please call the office between 8:00 and 9:45 a.m. If we do not hear from you, we will contact you at home or work to verify your child's absence. If you send a note or e-mail the school about your child's absence, please send to the NSA office. (pat.esparza@naturalscienceacademy.org) If your child becomes ill or injured during the day, the school will contact you at one of the numbers you have provided on the **emergency card**. We do require that families provide an additional emergency contact person in the event that the parent cannot be reached. Students arriving between 9:20 and 10:20 a.m. will be counted as tardy.

Attendance Policy and Procedures

EXCUSED ABSENCES are:

- Illness of the student, which causes him/her to remain home or go to the doctor
- Medical/Dental appointments
- Death of a family member or near relative
- Religious holiday (Please inform the office ahead of time.)
- Family vacations on a limited basis

Some examples of absences that are NOT EXCUSED:

- Parents who do not call the attendance line to report their child's absence or send a note about the absence when the child returns
- Overslept
- Missed the bus
- Car trouble
- Baby-sitting
- Needed at home

Unexcused Absences:

1 day - contact by phone informing parent of policy

3 days - note to parent and a copy is given to the classroom teacher

5 days - letter to parent requesting a doctor's note for any further absence

6 days - conference request with parent, director and classroom teacher

7 days - Educational Neglect/Truancy Report filed with Washington County and a letter to parent informing them about report filed

Excused Absences:

*8 days of excused absences per trimester - a letter will be sent to the parent, on a case by case basis. A copy of the letter will be given to the classroom teacher.

*24 days or more per school year may warrant an Educational Neglect/Truancy Report to Washington County. This will be determined on a case by case basis.

Excessive Tardies:

5 tardies - phone call/e-mail to parent about our concerns

8 tardies - letter to parent

More than 8 tardies per school year may warrant an Educational Neglect/Truancy Report to Washington County. This will be determined on a case by case basis.

Dress Code

Students are expected to be clean, neat and dressed appropriately for the school day. Clothes are expected to cover the student's body and undergarments (i.e. no bare midriffs, no exposed underwear, no spaghetti straps, no short skirts or shorts, pants must be worn at an appropriate waist level, no wheeled shoes, no caps or stocking hats, etc.). Articles of clothing or word/symbols on personal property that are inappropriate or cause disruption will not be allowed. Baseball caps and stocking hats are not permitted to be worn inside the school building unless an exception has been made.

In support of NSA's commitment to tobacco free and drug free schools, words or symbols that advertise products which are illegal or harmful for students will **not be permitted**.

Outerwear coats and hats are not to be worn during the school day because of health and safety reasons. Sweaters and sweatshirts are recommended for use during the school day by students who may feel chilled.

Parents, please cooperate in checking the clothing that your child wears to school. Please label all clothing, such as jackets and snow pants, as this is very helpful!

Recess/Outdoor Education

All children should be dressed properly for the weather conditions of the day. If a student is to be excused from recess, he or she will need a note from the parent/guardian. Students at NSA go outside everyday as part of our mission. Please help your child have the appropriate attire at school.

Outdoor/Recess Attire: Boots, scarves, jackets, mittens, snow pants, rain boots, extra pair of outdoor shoes and other appropriate seasonal clothing is required. Please mark your child's outerwear with their name for identification purposes. All children are expected to go outside.

School Visitors/Volunteers

NSA welcomes visitors at any time during the school day! In order to provide a safe environment for the children, **we request all visitors to stop at the office and sign in**. This is for the safety and protection of everyone in the school. All volunteers who work with students in the classroom are required to fill out a background check.

Signing in at the office is certainly not meant to discourage parents or community members from volunteering and/or visiting the school, but only to assist personnel in knowing who is in the building. We are very happy to have parents, grandparents, guardians, and community members visit the school. You can observe for yourself the educational process in which children are participating.

Staffing Structure

The Leadership Structure at Natural Science Academy varies from the traditional top-down approach in that all staff are involved in the decision-making process of running the school. While NSA employs a Director, the job of the Director is to enhance the skills and knowledge of the school staff, create a common culture of expectations, develop productive relationships with each other and hold individuals accountable for their contributions to the school community. Teachers and staff are empowered to take responsibility not only for their classrooms, but for the overall well-being of the school. Decisions that have typically been left to an administrator are made by teachers and staff on a daily basis. At NSA, all the adults work together to create an academically-rich environment that supports the NSA Vision/Mission.

Kindergarten Program

There are two Kindergarten options - a half-day, morning program (9:20 a.m. - 12:20 p.m.) and an all-day, afternoon enrichment program which is fee-based. The current daily charge for Kindergarten is \$16/day. For the afternoon enrichment program, families have the option to pay in one installment or in monthly installments through January. Kindergarten students follow the regular school calendar.

Multi-age Grouping

Natural Science Academy utilizes Multi-age Grouping in the classroom with the exception of Kindergarten, which is a self-contained classroom. (Within Grades 1-5, students are assigned to multi-age core group classrooms.) At NSA we have found multi-age classrooms to be an effective way to teach to a variety of learning abilities. Differentiated Instruction is the key to its success.

NSA Multi-age Classrooms: Kindergarten, Grades 1-3, Grades 4-5

Here's what some of the research says:

Multiage teaching has positive characteristics that relate to students' social skill development; it provides opportunities for enhancement of learning in the lower grade level group through exposure to upper grade level work, it offers reinforcement of earlier learning for upper grade level students, and it provides opportunities for children to learn through peer tutoring and example (Gaustad 1992, 1993, 1997; Katz, 1995; Veenman, 1995, 1996). Miller (1999) notes that students in multiage classrooms show increased self esteem, more cooperative behavior, better attitudes toward school in general, increased pro-social (caring, tolerant, patient, supportive) behavior, enriched personal responsibility, and a decline in discipline problems.

Special Education/Inclusion

NSA practices "Inclusion" with all of its learners. Special needs students on official IEP's (Individual Learning Plans) are served primarily within the regular classroom. Teachers work collaboratively to devise teaching and learning strategies that meet the needs of these and all students within the regular classrooms.

Student Progress: Goals, Conferences, Progress Reports/TRAILS

Parents, the student, and teacher work together to develop each student's goals. Students are involved not only in the development of the plan, but also in the evaluation of progress made toward the goals identified. The NSA calendar identifies Fall and Spring conference dates. In the Spring, students prepare to conduct their own conference and share their progress with their parents. Student Progress Reports for all areas of the curriculum are issued three times per year. This report is called "TRAILS - Teacher Reflective Assessment of Individual Learning" and includes a comprehensive narrative of student progress.

Behavior Expectations

Responsive Classroom®

Creating Safe, Challenging, and Joyful Classrooms and Schools

At Natural Science Academy, all staff is trained in the *Responsive Classroom* approach. The *Responsive Classroom* approach is a widely used, research-backed approach to elementary education that increases academic achievement, decreases problem behaviors, improves social skills, and leads to more high-quality instruction.

(Behavior Expectations continued)

NSA expects everyone to work to the best of their ability and to treat all people and property with respect. At NSA, we celebrate and appreciate our individual differences and expect the following behaviors:

- **Treat yourself, others and property with respect**
- **Work to the best of your ability**

Responsive Classroom[®]



Guiding Principles

The *Responsive Classroom* approach is informed by the work of educational theorists and the experiences of exemplary classroom teachers. Seven principles guide this approach:

- The social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum.
- How children learn is as important as what they learn: Process and content go hand in hand.
- The greatest cognitive growth occurs through social interaction.
- To be successful academically and socially, children need a set of social skills: cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control.
- Knowing the children we teach—individually, culturally, and developmentally—is as important as knowing the content we teach.
- Knowing the families of the children we teach and working with them as partners is essential to children's education.
- How the adults at school work together is as important as their individual competence: Lasting change begins with the adult community.

Classroom Practices

At the heart of the *Responsive Classroom* approach are ten classroom practices:

Morning Meeting—gathering as a whole class each morning to greet one another, share news, and warm up for the day ahead

Rule Creation—helping students create classroom rules that allow all class members to meet their learning goals

Interactive Modeling—teaching children to notice and internalize expected behaviors through a unique modeling technique

Positive Teacher Language—using words and tone to promote children's active learning and self-discipline

Logical Consequences—responding to misbehavior in a way that allows children to fix and learn from their mistakes while preserving their dignity

Guided Discovery—introducing materials using a format that encourages creativity and responsibility

Academic Choice—increasing student motivation by differentiating instruction and allowing students teacher-structured choices in their work

Classroom Organization—setting up the physical room in ways that encourage independence, cooperation, and productivity

Working with Families—hearing families' insights and helping them understand the school's teaching approaches

Collaborative Problem Solving—using conferencing, role playing, and other strategies to engage students in problem-solving

Building Behavior Plan

In the event that inappropriate behavior continues, or if a behavior is severe, students complete a Problem Solving Plan (PSP). There is a section of the plan to be **completed at home with parents** which asks the student to identify a prevention plan. These completed forms **must be returned to school the following day or a phone call will be made to the parents**. The PSP provides parents, staff, and the students involved, the opportunity to work in partnership in bringing about positive behavior changes. Appendix A - PSP

We believe in building respect and a sense of community at NSA. *Responsive Classroom* and the Building Behavior Plan will be a strong contributing factors to the positive climate established at NSA.

Medication Guidelines

Medications (**prescription and non-prescription**) must be sent to school in the original container labeled with the student's name, prescription number, directions for administering, and the doctor's name. This includes Nebulizers. They must be accompanied by a **Medication Permission** form as well. To protect students, they are not allowed to bring aspirin or any other kind of medication to administer themselves.

Special Occasion Treats Brought To School

Parents are certainly **not** required to bring treats to school for birthdays and other special events. In the event that treats are brought to school, however, they must be store or bakery-bought, not homemade. This is a state guideline and we thank you for honoring it.

Lunch/Snacks

Currently, NSA does not have a hot lunch program. Students need to bring a snack/drink for morning break and a bag lunch for lunch time. We strongly encourage healthy snacks and food to help promote healthy eating habits. We are working on getting a hot lunch program in place and will let you know as it develops.

HEALTHY FOOD IDEA LIST - Fruits, Vegetables, Healthy Grains such as whole wheat bread, muffins, tortillas, pitas, rice cakes, popcorn, low-fat cheese, yogurt, low-fat pudding, nuts, trail mix, low-fat reduced-sodium lunch meat, water, 100% fruit juice drink.

Note: Soda pop is not allowed. Cookies, snack cakes, and chips should be saved for occasional treats, given their poor nutritional quality.

FOOD ALLERGIES

Due to a number of students who have severe food allergies, in particular, peanuts & nuts, at NSA we have Peanut-free zones where students can eat their snacks and lunches. Our tables are sanitized after each eating time and specific peanut-free tables are labeled "PAL" tables. Students with food allergies and those students who bring peanut-free snacks/lunches are able to be in the peanut-free zone. "PAL" stands for Be A PAL and **Protect A Life From Food Allergies**. All of our students are educated on food allergies and how to keep our friends with allergies safe.



Transportation

Transportation of charter school students in Minnesota is provided by the district in which the school is located. The South Washington County District #833 will transport all NSA students living within the district boundaries. They also have the authority to set all schedules and bus routes. Families residing in districts other than South Washington County District #833 are required to provide their own transportation. If you have questions or concerns about bus routes, pick-up times, etc., please call the transportation company at 651.768.5303 or e-mail: transportation@sowashco.k12.mn.us.

PAC (Parent Action Committee)

The purpose of the Parent Action Committee (PAC) is to provide a network of “Parents, Staff, Students and Community Members working together to create a sense of community that supports the students in their academic and social growth.” The goals of the PAC are: to support educational needs through fundraisers, recruit volunteers for classroom and extracurricular activities, to plan school community activities for students and families, to build community ties, and to strengthen communication between the school, community and NSA families. By developing the PAC, parents, staff, students, and community members will become more involved with NSA and enrich the education of our students. Community-wide events provide opportunities for participation by local residents and promote the development of a school community. The PAC meets on the first Tuesday of each month from 6:30-8 p.m. at the school.

Board of Directors

As a charter school, we are governed by a seven to eleven member board of directors comprised of parents, teachers, and community members. The board meets monthly at the school on the second Tuesday of each month from 6:15-8 p.m. The meetings are open to the public. A roster of Board members can be found on page 2 of this handbook.

Internet Policy

This is a summary of how we use the Internet with students in our classrooms. If you still have specific concerns, please contact the school.

We believe that the Internet can be a valuable tool in research, especially in the modern age. In fact, inclusion of technology education is a key component of the Minnesota State Standards. However, we know that students need to be guided and taught appropriate uses of this technology. Before using the Internet for research, we will have a discussion about basic Internet safety. **Student do not “surf” the Internet.** Web sites are pre-selected and they are bookmarked through the student server. Any “searching” on the Internet will be under staff supervision, using a “kid-friendly” search engines. Please read and complete the acceptance form for the *NSA Computer Use and Internet Safety Policy* located at the end of this handbook.



Natural Science Academy Homework Guidelines

Research examining time spent on homework, including large-scale international studies, shows a wide variation in the amount of time spent on homework and the associated academic benefits. However, overall, it seems that some homework is better than too much or none at all as it helps to establish study habits in students that will be helpful in the future. The time spent on homework needs to consider the student's age and development. Please note that we will not do homework for the sake of having homework (busy work). The work sent home will directly compliment what is being done at school. In addition, students of all ages should have opportunities for free time, leisure and physical activities outside of school.

Parents at Natural Science Academy are encouraged to show interest in their child's daily instructional effort by reviewing all school papers and making sure a nightly check-in time is established. **PLEASE CHECK YOUR CHILD'S TAKE-HOME FOLDER/PLANNER DAILY FOR IMPORTANT HOME/SCHOOL COMMUNICATIONS.**

Homework will be given according to the following criteria:

- To complete any incomplete daily assignments.
- To enrich and/or reinforce the concepts being taught in the regular classroom.
- To strengthen and improve self-discipline and/or concentration skills.
- To prepare for tests.
- To improve reading and math computation skills.
- To complete work following a student absence.

The four main types of homework are:

- 4.1. Practice exercises which will provide students with opportunities to review, revise and reinforce newly acquired skills, such as:
 - practicing for mastery – spelling
 - finding information about a current topic
 - practice exercises – math facts, etc.
 - reading for pleasure
 - essay writing
- 4.2. Preparatory homework which will provide opportunities for students to gather background materials for a unit of study, making them better prepared for future lessons, including:
 - background reading
 - researching topics for a class unit of work
 - collecting items
- 4.3. Extension assignments which will encourage students to pursue knowledge individually and imaginatively, including:
 - writing
 - making or designing an art work
 - investigating
 - researching
 - information and retrieval skills such as using a home computer to find material on the Internet
- 4.4. Study/Preparation for Tests - It is important that sufficient time be set aside for exam preparation and study. As part of regular homework, all students should be consistently reviewing new learning from each of their subjects. This review is essential preparation for tests. Families will be notified of upcoming tests in classroom newsletters and student planners.

(Homework Guidelines continued)

Kindergarten Homework

Parents of Kindergarten students are asked to read to or with their child each evening. This could include bed-time stories, student take-home reading books, or fun reading. Students should be exposed to as much new vocabulary as possible during the day and during evening reading. Guided Reading books and math work are sent home with the students each week. Students also have “frequently used words” on a binder ring that should be practiced. Math, Science and Social Studies work will be sent home as needed.

Grade 1-2-3 Homework

First, Second and Third grade students at Natural Science Academy should have a nightly study time divided between the following activities:

- practicing weekly reading/spelling words
- practicing math facts (addition, subtraction)
- reading practice from any type of an assigned Guided Reading book, library book, book from home, classroom reading, etc.

Grade 4-5 Homework

Fourth and Fifth grade students at Natural Science Academy should have a nightly study time divided between the following activities:

- reading from a Guided Reading book or other book
- vocabulary and spelling practice
- math facts practice (addition, subtraction, multiplication, division)
- homework sent home to reinforce skills learned during the school day
- review Student Planner and include parent signature

Student Planners – Each student in grades 4-5 has a Student Planner that is intended to help with the organization of assignments and homework tasks. Each student is expected to have their planners at school. All homework and special events should be recorded in the planner. The Student Planner is a guide for parents to check on the work in the classroom and may also be used for communicating with the teachers.

How Parents Can Help

- Give encouragement and support.
- Ensure that there is a dedicated time and place set aside for homework.
- Read to/with your child every day.
- Minimize distractions while homework is being done – no TV, phone calls, messages, loud music, etc.
- Monitor what students are doing on the computer
- Students need to do their own work. Parents can assist their children with the assignments, but should not do their homework for them.
- Communicate with teachers any concerns or when things are going well.
- Check and sign the Student Planner/Take-home Folder DAILY.
- Balance homework with other important areas like sports, music and family.

NSA Curriculum 2011-2012

Literacy



Literacy by Design by Harcourt Achieve is a complete literacy program that connects whole class, small group, and independent instruction through a common comprehension strategy. The K-5 program links literacy skills to standards-based science and social studies content through the use of fiction and nonfiction texts and themes. Instruction focuses on listening, speaking, reading, and writing within content-specific themes, which simultaneously builds reading and content-area competence among students. *Literacy by Design* utilizes a built-in acceleration system that allows teachers to differentiate instruction based on students' individual needs.

Guided Reading – Guided reading is only one part of the literacy program. Guided reading is an instructional setting that enables the teacher to work with a small group of students to help them learn effective strategies for processing text with understanding. The purpose of guided reading is to meet the varying instructional needs of all the students in the class, enabling them to greatly expand their reading powers. Guided reading gives students the opportunity to read at their just right level, which means that the books provide them with a moderate challenge. They are grouped with students who are similar in ability, needs, and strengths. Instruction is then finely tuned to the needs of those particular students. Without teaching at the point of need, many students will not progress. By providing small group instruction that allows children to discover how to think about a text, they will be able to use their strategies in other classroom reading throughout the curriculum. A guided reading lesson is also your opportunity to talk about story elements such as character, setting, plot, metaphors, point of view, and vocabulary, etc. It is also a great time to talk about effective decoding strategies. The purpose of guided reading is to teach individuals to read increasingly difficult texts with understanding and fluency.



Math

Math Expressions by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt is a comprehensive standards-based K-5 mathematics curriculum that offers new ways to teach and learn mathematics. Combining the most powerful elements of reform mathematics with the best of traditional approaches, **Math Expressions** uses objects, drawings, conceptual language, and real-world situations to help students build mathematical ideas that make sense to them.

Environment as an Integrating Context (EIC)

EIC programs employ the environment as a comprehensive focus and framework for learning in all curriculum areas, thinking and problem-solving and life skills such as cooperation and interpersonal communication and last but not least, an understanding of and an appreciation for the environment. EIC programs attempt to provide students with the opportunity to connect and integrate what they are learning to their surroundings.

Artist in Residence

As part of our curriculum, we use local artists to develop experiences for NSA students. Artists work with students to develop their artistic intelligence and creativity within natural settings. In the past we have had a Movement Specialist, Scientist, Herpetologist, and Book Maker visit and work with our students.

Outdoor Education

NSA students spend a portion of each day outdoors. Our outdoor spaces function as both our play space and outdoor classroom. While our physical education does not include organized sports, it does include running and strategy games, endurance, strength and team building. We have no minimal playground equipment but our students enjoy chasing around our outdoor space, imaginary play, and cooperative games. Fresh air and open-ended play are the order of the day during recess at NSA.

Work as well as play takes place out-of-doors at NSA. Our environmental focus is interdisciplinary, meaning that it spans all curricular areas including math, literacy, social studies, the arts, and of course science. Students write, read, measure, investigate and explore outside. The natural world compliments and informs our learning indoors.

With so much time spent outdoors in all seasons NSA students can naturally get a little dirtier than their counterparts at traditional schools. We encourage students to dress equipped for the weather and encourage parents to understand that it is only dirt and that the benefits of active, outdoor play out-weigh the extra laundry.

Place-Based Education

Place-based education is the process of using the local community and environment as a starting point to teach concepts in language arts, mathematics, science, and other subjects across the curriculum. Place-based education emphasizes real-world, hands-on learning experiences. It has been shown to increase student academic achievement and develops stronger ties to the community and natural world. Place-based education connects individuals with nature and culture in their place.

Project-Based Learning

A systematic teaching method that engages students in learning skills and knowledge through an extended inquiry process structured around authentic questions and carefully designed student products and tasks.



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NSA Problem Solving Plan (PSP)

Treat yourselves, others and property with respect and work to the best of your ability.

Name: _____ Date of incident: _____

Classroom Teacher: _____ Staff Witness: _____

1. Please tell what happened. What exactly did you do? Please don't use names but tell as many details as you can.

2. How did this action hurt other people? _____

3. What rule did you break? _____

4. How can you "fix" what happened? _____

5. Draw a picture or write what you will do next time.

Staff Signature: _____ Student Signature: _____

Families: Please talk about this PSP and decide on a "plan" to help avoid this situation in the future. Also include ways to "fix" any problems created by this situation. *A phone call will be made to the parent if this form is not completed, signed and turned back into school.* Thank you for your attention to this matter. Please fill out the bottom and return the **entire** form to school.

Our plan: _____

We agree that this plan was decided on to help avoid future problems. We discussed the incident together to come up with this plan.

Student Signature: _____ Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Date: _____

* Staff will follow up with the student in approximately one week to see if their plan is working.

Follow up date: _____ Staff initials: _____

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Natural Science Academy Computer Use and Internet Safety Policy 2011 - 2012

In order to use school laptops and network resources, students must understand and agree to the conditions in this policy. Students and their parent(s)/guardian(s) must sign this form to acknowledge that they accept these terms before they will be allowed to use *Natural Science Academy* laptops. The use of laptops and the Internet at school is a privilege, not a right. Any misuse or abuse of the conditions listed below will result in the loss of privileges.

Laptops are for academic purposes only. Any other activity is not allowed, including games, playing music, internet messaging, email, etc.

Students are only allowed to print materials related to their class work or project work, and must receive permission from a staff member before printing.

Students must take proper care of the laptops while they are using them. When finished, students must log off, shut them down completely, and plug them back into the cart, if applicable.

Students are not allowed to download files or programs from the Internet.

Students are not allowed to use the Internet unsupervised.

Any form of vandalism is prohibited. This includes any malicious attempt to physically de-face, disable, destroy, or hack into computers or the network, or to harm or destroy data of another user.

Students who do not comply with the above conditions will have their privileges revoked. On the first offense, the student will lose privileges for 2 weeks. For the second offense, the student will lose privileges for 1 month. On the third offense, the student will lose privileges for the remainder of the year. In cases of vandalism, students and their families will be responsible for any reasonable cost necessary for repair or replacement of the item, as well as potential legal consequences.

Please complete and sign the section below. Return this entire page to the classroom teacher.

Acceptance of NSA Computer Use and Internet Safety Policy

I have read the NSA Computer Use and Internet Safety Policy.

I understand the conditions listed in the policy, as well as the consequences for not following the policy. I agree to use the school laptops and computer network in a responsible, respectful manner.

Student Signature: _____ Date: _____

Grade: _____ Teacher: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

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Natural Science Academy Student Handbook Signature Page

We ask both students and parents to acknowledge the Natural Science Academy Student Handbook. **Please read and discuss it together, then sign and return this page.**

As a student at NSA I have read or my parent has read to me the NSA Student Handbook. I agree to follow it to the best of my ability.

Student signature

Date _____ Teacher _____

As a parent or guardian, I have read the NSA Student Handbook and have discussed it with my child. We agree to follow the handbook to the best of our ability.

Parent/Guardian signature

Date _____

Please return this signed form to your child's teacher. Thank you!