



Preparing Students for 21st Century Experiences

SCE Element Descriptions

Cedar River Academy
Enumclaw, Washington

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Student-Centered Education (SCE) Model Element Descriptions

The Cedar River Academy SCE is based in brain research defining how humans learn. Research demonstrates that the richness of our environment effects human mental development, especially during a child's early life, and physiological changes occur as a result of experience.¹ Neuroscience indicates that affective learning environments must be meaningful to the learner. The greater the number of association that the human brain elicits, the more firmly the information is “woven in” neurologically.” This results in a larger quantity of meanings and more associations and depth per meaning.

School-Wide Themes

Educators teach and integrate their classwork plans based on conceptual year long and term themes. Students show a genuine interest when activities in their classroom relate to their world. In order to teach to these interests, themes are used to not only integrate, but inspire students to do their personal best.

At the beginning of each school year, teachers meet and discuss concepts each age group is expected to learn in either social studies or science, what is going on in the world, and particular areas of student interest teachers may have observed. A broad-concept yearly theme is selected and then a more specific theme is planned for each term of the upcoming year. Students become ‘experts’ in their area of study in relation to the school themes and develop deep concept understandings.

Multi-age Classrooms

SCE classrooms include students of multiple ages. The common class configuration includes students of ages (not grades) 3/4 (pre-k), 5/6, 6/7, 7/8, 8/9, 9/10, 10/11, and 11/12/13/14 (middle school). These configurations encourage social consistency and support while creating a heterogeneous environment for the teacher to organize individualized small groups and individual instruction plans.

Being-There Experiences

SCE students make frequent excursions to sensory rich venues to support student connections between classroom learning with real-world applications, and provide students with vocabulary rich background knowledge. These excursions also allow teachers to observe student interests, leading to the definition of individualized thematic learning plans that include interest-centric projects. Typical Being-There Experience venues include parks, beaches, the school’s playground, the local community, museums, mountain trails, local businesses, and local and state government facilities.

Flexible Schedules

The SCE school day is not divided into fixed time periods. Rather the school allows the teacher to define a daily plan, sequencing planned activities, and then allows students to complete these activities at, generally, their own pace. This approach benefits students by encouraging them to work at their own pace, applying their own learning style.

Pre-Kindergarten Program

SCE schools offer a pre-kindergarten program to provide early childhood development services focused on preparing students in social, language, and mathematics skills development. This early preparation supports student success as they progress along knowledge continuums. This PK program is funded by student families and existing government subsidies.

Extended Calendar

SCE schools might be in session approximately 200 days each ten-month academic year. School begins in the fall the day after Labor Day and ends the last week day of June. Students have a winter break which begins two days before Christmas until the day after New Year's Day. The school also observes a five school day spring break in April. CRA observes major national holidays and provides its teachers with three to five inservice days during the school year.

For K-8 grades, school begins each day at 8:30am and ends each day at 3:30pm. For pre-kindergarten students, school begins at 8:30am and ends at 2:30pm.

Integrated Thematic Instruction

Teachers identify targeted learning standards for individual students, or groups of students. They then define a learning unit of activities that support students as they construct knowledge and mastery of these standards. A typical unit would integrate three or more subject matter areas. Students complete projects and activities that require multiple subject knowledge, for example, reading, writing, mathematics, science, social studies, and art. Basic skills are developed in whole group, small group, and individual work settings as dictated by the level of student understanding as observed during independent student activities.

MathQuests

MathQuests are integrated, hands-on math activities and projects defined by teachers for students in groups, with a partner or individually. These activities are based upon literature that is being used in classroom theme studies and include a building and writing piece. Students use a variety of math manipulatives to solve the problem(s).

MathQuests are generally open-ended and never include exact descriptions of what students should do to solve the problem. Many MathQuests ask students to exercise inferential reasoning to extract the problem from the story.

Students often demonstrate lower math ability, lack of interest in math, science, and technology, and a lack of confidence in these subjects. The MathQuest process is a solution to this issue by engaging the students in hands-on projects that are meaningful to these students, and helps all students succeed in and enjoy math.

SCE educators define MathQuests for every developmentally aligned student group, making math skill development interesting, fun, and permanently embedded in student minds.

Basic skills are developed in whole group, small group, and individual work settings in response to teacher observed deficiency in student understanding.

LearningQuests

SCE educators integrate all areas of study whenever possible and reasonable. To help ensure all students are working at their ability and genuinely interested in their learning, integration using a focus on social studies or science is used in a teacher created LearningQuest. LearningQuest is a block of time where students work at their level on a term long project directly related to the term and year long theme. Students may choose LearningQuest options from teacher created menus of topic choices, with vocabulary, writing, art, history, experiments (if science), technology, presentations, and some type of building project. Students may choose from the options given, and are expected to meet due dates and expectations set by the teacher and student. LearningQuests are planned after the school wide term theme kick off Being-There Experience. It has been demonstrated that students work best when they are given both choices and the freedom to showcase their abilities in multiple subjects based on their own learning style.

Knowledge Fair

The SCE calendar includes three academic terms. Each term is focused on a particular element of the teacher-selected year-long theme. During the term, students work on a number of projects that are aligned with their interests. Some weeks before the end of each term, students select the project they want to feature at their booth in the end-of-term Knowledge Fair.

Knowledge Fairs are held in the evening just a few days before the end of the term, and before report cards are published. Parents, relatives, and the general public are invited to attend Knowledge Fairs where students describe and defend their work. These events help students develop self confidence, practice speaking to adults about topics that are important to the student, and engage parents with the students' experiences.

Plan-Do-Review

Every student is guided through ever increasingly comprehensive plan-do-review cycles to encourage higher level critical thinking processes. Beginning with middle school, students are required to produce a weekly status report in email format. These reports include the student's plan for the past week, the activities completed during the week, any issues with which the students need assistance, and their plan for the following week. These status reports are emailed to their parent(s), their teacher(s), and the school principle.

Response to Intervention (RTI)

When a teacher assessment of an individual student's knowledge or skill development for an individual student expectation finds the student is either struggling with a concept or needs additional challenge, the teacher initiates an RTI activity. This activity is recorded in the student's NextGen database. The intervention might be within the classroom, or it may employ a teaching resource outside of the classroom. These intervention actions are monitored carefully, adjusted as appropriate, and terminated as soon as the student meets the specific expectation. Nearly every CRA student is involved in interventions from time-to-time and, therefore, there is no social stigma associated with these activities.

Art and Spanish

Art and Spanish classes support SCE school's whole-child education goal. Art and Spanish programs are directly connected to the student's classroom projects to reinforce student knowledge construction processes. In addition, these classes give the classroom teachers time to plan, collaborate, and work with small group, individual instruction, or intervention activities.

Electives as Co-curricular Programs

SCE schools offer a one hour elective each day starting at 2:30pm. Each teacher is responsible for one or two electives each week and proposes the elective content.

At the end of each term, students respond to a survey, selecting the electives they will participate in during the upcoming term. The elective offerings vary from term-to-term. Example electives include sewing, technology club, knitting, marathon training, baseball, soccer, cooking, volley ball, young entrepreneurs club, school annual, girl scouts, general activities, dance, and study hall. The elective period is very popular among parents and students and gives teachers another opportunity to observe student interests.

Meaningful Real-World Projects

Beginning with middle school, students are engaged in meaningful community service projects and internships with private sector and governmental enterprises.

Formative Assessments

SCE teachers observe students at work during center-time, on projects, and activities that require students to meet defined standards/expectations. Teachers are expected to document enough pieces of evidence of student understanding of knowledge elements to "prove" the student level of understanding. This evidence might be in the form of anecdotal notes, photos, documents, or video recordings. This evidence is stored in the student's NextGen record, and later used in the preparation of progress reports or report cards.

Summative Assessments

In the late spring of each year, OSPI defined summative standardized tests will be administered. The date of these tests are announced just before the test administration date, and the teachers are not expected to make special preparations for the tests, except for showing students how to fill in the answer sheets correctly and otherwise follow directions.

Student / Teacher Ratios

SCE schools limit the student / teacher ratio to 18 to 1 for K-8 classes, and 10 to 1 for pre-kindergarten classes.