

**The Francis W. Parker
Charter Essential School
& Theodore R. Sizer
Teachers Center**

Parent Handbook

**Compiled BY Parker Parents/Guardians
FOR Parker Parents/Guardians**



Year 2006 – 2007

**Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School
& Theodore R. Sizer Teachers Center**

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THE TEN COMMON PRINCIPLES

1. The school should focus on helping adolescents learn to use their minds well. Schools should not attempt to be "comprehensive" if such a claim is made at the expense of the school's central intellectual purpose.
2. The school's goals should be simple: that each student master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge. While these skills and areas will, to varying degrees, reflect the traditional academic disciplines, the program's design should be shaped by the intellectual and imaginative powers and competencies that students need, rather than necessarily by "subjects" as conventionally defined. The aphorism "Less is More" should dominate: curricular decisions should be guided by the aim of thorough student mastery and achievement rather than by an effort merely to cover content.
3. The school's goals should apply to all students, while the means to these goals will vary as those students themselves vary. School practice should be tailor-made to meet the needs of every group or class of adolescents.
4. Teaching and learning should be personalized to the maximum feasible extent. Efforts should be directed toward a goal that no teacher have direct responsibility for more than eighty students. To capitalize on this personalization, decisions about the details of the course of study, the use of students' and teachers' time and the choice of teaching materials and specific pedagogies must be unreservedly placed in the hands of the principal and staff.
5. The governing practical metaphor of the school should be student-as-worker rather than the more familiar metaphor of teacher-as-deliverer-of-instructional-services. Accordingly, a prominent pedagogy will be coaching, to provoke students to learn how to learn and thus to teach themselves.
6. Students entering secondary school studies are those who can show competence in language and elementary mathematics. Students of traditional high school age but not yet at appropriate levels of competence to enter secondary school studies will be provided intensive remedial work to assist them quickly to meet these standards. The diploma should be awarded upon a successful final demonstration of mastery for graduation -- an "Exhibition." This Exhibition by the student of his or her grasp of the central skills and knowledge of the school's program may be jointly administered by the faculty and by higher authorities. As the diploma is awarded when earned, the school's program proceeds with no strict age grading and with no system of "credits earned" by "time spent" in class. The emphasis is on the students' demonstration that they can do important things.

7. The tone of the school should explicitly and self-consciously stress values of un-anxious expectation (“I won’t threaten you but I expect much of you”), of trust (until abused) and of decency (the values of fairness, generosity and tolerance). Incentives appropriate to the school’s particular students and teachers should be emphasized, and parents/guardians should be treated as essential collaborators.
8. The principal and teachers should perceive themselves as generalists first (teachers and scholars in general education) and specialists second (experts in but one particular discipline). Staff should expect multiple obligations (teacher-counselor-manager) and a sense of commitment to the entire school.
9. Ultimate administrative and budget targets should include, in addition to total student loads per teacher of eighty or fewer pupils, substantial time for collective planning by teachers, competitive salaries for staff and an ultimate per pupil cost not to exceed that at traditional schools by more than ten percent. To accomplish this, administrative plans may have to show the phased reduction or elimination of some services now provided to students in many traditional comprehensive secondary schools.
10. The school should demonstrate non-discriminatory and inclusive policies, practices, and pedagogies. It should model democratic practices that involve all who are directly affected by the school. The school should honor diversity and build on the strengths of its communities, deliberately and explicitly (challenging all forms of inequity and discrimination).

THE PARKER GLOSSARY

The following are some words and phrases that, over the years, have become commonly used:

Advisor

A Parker teacher who serves as a mentor, friend, and/or supporter of 10-12 students, in their advisory. Every student has an advisor.

Advisory

A group of 10-12 students that meets daily with their advisor at the beginning and end of the day, as well as at other times during the week. This sets up a foundation for strong relationships between students and teachers.

Chalk Talk

A group brainstorming session based on a reading, previous discussion, or other class activity where participants write their thoughts/ideas on the board. A “silent conversation” in which a group responds in writing on the board, to a prompt raised for their consideration.

Choice Block

A one-hour period during the school week, in which students may pursue individual interests through organized classes led by teachers or other students.

Co-advisors

Two students elected by and representing the entire student body in the Community Congress. They oversee much of the school governance and meet with the principal weekly.

Community Congress (C.C.)

A legislative committee of students, each representing his/her advisory, or a percentage of the whole student body. There are also teacher representatives.

Connections/Reflections

Sharing one’s own news, school or otherwise, in advisory time.

Divisions

Three levels of a Parker student’s education (replaces traditional grades). Each level has expectations, which each student must achieve in order to gateway to the next division and eventually graduate.

Domain

An area of study, such as Arts/Humanities (A/H), Math/Science/Technology (MST), Spanish and Wellness.

Essential Question

A broad question around which the year's main curriculum is based. It helps to focus and connect work across the domains.

Essential Schools

Members of the Coalition of Essential Schools, a national school reform organization built around ten common principles, as described by TheodoreSizer.

Exhibition

A public presentation usually accompanying written work, explanation and/or defense by a student of his or her work.

Feedback

A response to an idea or a piece of work; comes in warm, cool and other varieties.

Fishbowl

A form of discussion where one group is circled around another. The purpose is for the inside circle to discuss and the outside circle to observe.

Gateway

An exhibition where students are asked to show why they are ready to move forward to the next division either through the displaying of past work or a new independent project.

Habits of Learning

Qualities and characteristics identified as important to effective learning (e.g., organization, critical thinking).

I.E.P.

Individual Educational Plan, developed for eligible students with diagnosed special learning needs.

Justice Committee (J.C.)

Similar to the C.C. in representation, but different in purpose; they adjudicate student disciplinary issues and mediate conflict among members of the school community.

Just Beginning/Approaches/Meets/Exceeds

How a student's work is assessed against the standards of his/her division, indicating where he/she is on his/her journey to Gateway.

P.L.P.

Personal Learning Plan, a student's individual academic and social goals for a certain period of time, worked out with his/her advisor and parents/guardians, as a guide to his/her work and life for the year.

P.E.F.

The Parker Essential Fund is a group of parents/guardians who work tirelessly to raise money for Parker. All parents/guardians are welcome to participate.

Portfolio

A collection of one's work that has been assessed. Students have one portfolio for each class.

Rubrics

Guides for students in determining how to attain the expectations for a specific project or for the whole Division in general. The criteria used to assess your work.

Service Learning

Work done for others or for the environment that is integrated into the curriculum. This work emphasizes the social and academic benefits for the worker as well as for those being helped.

Socratic Seminar

Discussions based on commonly known texts, which emphasize wide participation; ways for students to gain further insight on a given topic.

Task Forces

Small groups of faculty/students/parents/guardians who devote time to organize solutions or programs for community issues.

Team Teaching

A pair of teachers who teach one class, dividing the students for assessment purposes.

Whip

The practice of asking each member of a class or meeting to give a brief response to a question.

THE PARKER SCHOOL HABITS OF LEARNING

These are the habits that the Parker community expects its students to develop and exhibit in their academic work and in daily life.

Inquiry

In both schoolwork and daily life, you show intellectual curiosity and wonder about the world. You ask thoughtful questions, and seek out their answers.

Expression

In both schoolwork and daily life, you communicate honestly what you know or want to know, and what you believe or feel.

Critical Thinking

In both schoolwork and daily life, you analyze, synthesize, and draw conclusions from information. You generate solutions to problems using both creative and rational thought. You keep an open mind and appreciate different points of view. You seek out excellence.

Collaboration

In both schoolwork and daily life, you contribute to the overall effort of a group. You work well with diverse individuals and in diverse situations, using effective communication skills (consulting, listening, speaking).

Organization

In both schoolwork and daily life, you sift through ideas and data, arranging them wisely and making sense of them. You come to school prepared with what you will need. You set reasonable goals, then plan and manage your time so as to meet them. You persevere in the face of obstacles.

Attentiveness

In both schoolwork and daily life, you focus on the task at hand, observing and taking in the information you need to do it well.

Involvement

Both in school and in the larger community, you take the initiative to participate in the process of learning. You contribute your questions, ideas, and actions in group discussions, activities, and projects.

Reflection

In both schoolwork and daily life, you review and think about your actions and the work you produce, with the purpose of learning more about yourself and the work.

WHAT IS THE CULTURE LIKE AT PARKER?

In an attempt to convey the feeling that students, teachers, staff and parents or guardians have about the school, a variety of people were asked to answer the following question.

“What for you, is the one aspect of Parker that makes it unique?”

“I think that the ability students have to work at their own pace is so important.”

Margie Williamson – parent

“Parker gives the illusion of not being structured, but in fact, it is much more structured than any other schools my four children have been in. Also, I love that there isn’t any busy work!”

Isabel Geller – parent

“The people here respect each other and the teachers never yell!”

Evan Hayward – student

“The most incredible thing about Parker is the commitment of the entire community to each student.”

Wayne Stockwell – parent

“I appreciate the huge amount of respect they have for the students and they cherish our children.”

Deb Marple – parent

“My son is very comfortable here and socially integrated. He wouldn’t want to be any place else.”

Wendy Johnson – parent

“There is a tremendous amount of respect between teachers and students.”

Maura Barstow – parent

“At Parker I find that there is so much freedom to talk to my teachers and get help when I need it.”

Jessi – graduate

“There is always the willingness and the feeling that it’s a safe place to try new things and take risks and learn something totally new! At all levels, this is encouraged and supported.” - Tracy Duncan – parent

“The student/teacher relationships are most unique. I can talk to teachers almost as peers and we interact personally. We seem to begin and end on the same level.”

Jeremy – graduate

“One thing that makes Parker unique (and special) is the quality of the relationships. It is a real community, where relationships are based on personal connections and a sense of respect, not on traditional school roles. Teachers and students get to know each other as full people – not just as authority figures in the classroom and as beings to be filled with knowledge. This creates a culture of support and respect that enhances everyone’s learning. And, parents/guardians play an important role in the community – they are an essential part of the educational journey of their children.” - Matt Smith – teacher

“I am so grateful to Parker because they appreciate my son as a whole person. His weaknesses are identified in a thoughtful and meaningful way and he is a partner in the work that needs to be done. At the same time his strengths are fostered and celebrated among the entire community!” - Sheila Hayward – parent

“I really appreciate the freedom and level of responsibility that Parker gives to the Division 3 students.” - Jess – graduate

*“At Parker I feel comfortable and free to be myself around both my students and my colleagues. It’s a place that just seems to fit with my personality and my beliefs.”
Ann Colligan – teacher*

“There is a sense of community with a common interest.” - Cheryl Lekstrom – parent

“I like the way the Parker community is open to each other’s opinions. There are cliques but everyone accepts each other.” - Zack – student

“Parker is a very thoughtful environment.” - Martha Shethar – parent

“At Parker, they’re interested in the whole child – it’s about the child not just what they teach.” - Mimmu Hartiala-Sloan – parent

PARENT/GUARDIAN VOLUNTEERING

A Critical Component of Parker's Success

The Parker School charter states that parent/guardian involvement is considered critical both for educational and for financial reasons and the school will create an environment where parents/guardians (or other child advocates) will be encouraged to contribute some substantial amount of time in the manner best suited to parents'/guardians' capabilities and talents and the needs of the school.

All parents and guardians pledge twenty hours of service to the school each year upon registering their child at Parker. The need for all types of support, assistance, and involvement is on-going. You may account for your hours by logging on to the Parker website and under the volunteer section fill out the form, or if you would rather, you may submit these hours to the front office. Please try to let us know once a month so that we may keep track of your hours. The number of hours volunteered by parents/guardians over the course of the school year is submitted to the state in the annual report. This information is used as evidence of community involvement in the life of Parker.

The following are ways parents/guardians have supported the school in previous years. If you have other ideas for yourself as a volunteer within the school community, please contact Teri Schrader, Principal or Nicky Dudensing, Assistant to the Principal.

Volunteering During School Hours

- General office help
- Attendance 8:50 am - 10:00 am daily
- Collate/copy Friday Announcements (Fridays)
- Library (no experience needed) 2 to 4 hours per week
- Student tutor
- Classroom Assistant (no experience needed)
- Advisory parent/guardian representative (one needed for each advisory).

Volunteering for Special Events and/or Short Term Needs

- Chaperone (field trips, dances, community service, travel clubs...)
- Organize advisory events
- Locate and schedule resources (materials, presentations, speakers or performers) to supplement curriculum at faculty request
- Substitute teacher
- Health office assistant (beginning late August) for screenings, field trip coverage
- School Nurse coverage (must be an RN)
- Career Day

Volunteering Outside of School Hours - Ongoing Needs

- School library monitor (no experience needed) 3:30 pm - 5:00 pm Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and 1:30 pm - 4:30 pm on Wednesdays

Volunteering for Task Forces

- Athletics at Parker
- Technology and Internet Safety
- H.A.C. (Health Advisory Council ... advises on health, safety and curriculum issues)
- Life After Parker (finds resources for career planning for our graduates)
- P.E.F. (Parker Essential Fund organizes fundraisers and allocates those monies)
- Miscellaneous task forces – as needs arise

Volunteering for various Fundraising Events including the following:

- Wrapping-paper Sale
- Auction (Autumn)
- Holiday Craft Bazaar (December)
- Parker Classic Road Race (May)
- (We welcome suggestions for additional fundraising events.)

Volunteering for various Specials Events and/or Short Term Needs including the following:

- Staff Appreciation event planning
- Grant Writing
- Refreshment Coordinator (for information meetings, special guests, advisory events, gateway celebrations, "The Big End," and other farewells)
- Refreshments preparation/donation

AFTER SCHOOL AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

Parker Jazz Band and Chorus

The band and chorus practice will be held after school on Wednesdays, from 1:30 pm to 2:30 pm. All band students with at least one to two years' experience on their instrument and a working knowledge of basic scales are welcome to join the band. Any student is welcome to join chorus, no previous singing experience is necessary. We are asking students to make a serious commitment to the band and the chorus, and to attend practice on a regular basis. A fee is charged for both band and chorus.

Theatre at Parker

At least one major production takes place each year. Theatre at Parker is open to all students, by audition. Rehearsals take place after school and as opening night nears, evenings and weekends. Recent productions have included *The Primary English Class*, by Israel Horovitz, *The Metamorphosis*, by Frank Kafka, *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder, *The Water Engine*, by David Mamet, *Antigone* by Sophocles, *Interview* by Jean-Claude Van Itallie – part of the *American Hurrah* trilogy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare and *Dragonwings* by Lawrence Yep.

PARKER ATHLETICS MISSION STATEMENT

Fall Sports

- Soccer (*colored mouth guards must be worn by all soccer players at every practice and every game. This is an MIAA rule and will be strictly enforced.*)
- Cross Country

Winter Sports

- Basketball (*colored mouth guards must be worn by all soccer players at every practice and every game. This is an MIAA rule and will be strictly enforced.*)

Spring Sports

- Baseball
- Softball
- Track and Field

Parker's athletic program is, most importantly, where students learn the value of good health, collaboration, fun, and building relationships. The athletic program provides opportunities for instruction, participation, and growth and strives to promote healthy competition characterized by sportsmanship and teamwork. Athletics at Parker enhances the academic experience and, while fostering respectful relationships among the students, strengthens the community. Students are encouraged to strive to compete at the highest level their ability and performance will allow. Accordingly, Parker provides varied levels of competition for each athlete. The goals of the athletic program relate to the following common principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools: requiring students to demonstrate mastery through exhibition, personalizing teaching and learning, emphasizing depth over breadth, embracing the metaphor "student as worker, teacher as coach," stressing un-anxious expectation, trust and decency, considering teachers as generalists with a commitment to the entire school, and modeling democratic and equitable practices.

As a community, we meet the challenges of our athletic philosophy through the cultivation of the following values:

- A commitment to age- and skill-appropriate coaching and competition at every level;
- A commitment to achieving individual and team goals;
- A commitment to diligent preparation, fair play, and self-discipline;
- A commitment to exercise and competition that contributes to the development of an athlete's mental, emotional, and physical well-being.

GUIDELINES for play:

Middle School Teams:

- Every student is provided an opportunity to play on a team. The Middle School has a no-cut policy.

- The emphasis at this level is on instruction, development, teamwork, fair play, and sportsmanship.
- Participation is a key component for Middle School teams. At this level, it is anticipated that all team members will play in every game.
- With the Athletic Director's approval, eighth-grade students who are exceptionally proficient in a sport may try out for an Upper School team.

Junior Varsity Teams:

- The Junior Varsity level stresses learning and refining fundamental skills, game strategies, game knowledge, and rules.
- The Junior Varsity teams are a building block for the Varsity teams.
- Participation is the hallmark of the Junior Varsity level. At this level, it is anticipated that an effort will be made for all team members to receive reasonable playing time over the course of the season.

Varsity Teams:

- The Varsity level is an advanced level of play: students should start the season in proper condition, have the appropriate fundamental skills, and know basic strategies and all rules.
- Parker's goal at this level is to field the strongest, most competitive team. (Players may not play in every game at this level).
- This level provides an opportunity for players to play at a collegiate level after Parker.

Sports Fees

Athletic fees of \$200.00, per sport, are due at the time your student is placed on a roster. Sports fees are capped at \$800.00, per family per year. Financial assistance money is available; these fees must be paid before the student is eligible to play. Applications for assistance may be submitted to Student Services. Scheduling changes do occur during the season, please check with the coaches and Friday Announcements for changes. Sports schedules and directions to game sites are posted on the Parker website, www.parker.org. Students must have a current physical exam (within the past year) on file with the school nurse and a parent/guardian permission/waiver form signed in order to participate in any interscholastic sports.

GENERAL COMMUNITY INFORMATION AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

Who's Who and Who's Where?

The Parker School is divided into three domains and three divisions. The domains represent the subject areas of study and are roughly equivalent to “departments” in other schools. The divisions mark the “grade” that a student is in. The domains are as follows: A/H = Arts and Humanities, MST = Math Science and Technology, Wellness = Physical Education and Health Education, and Spanish. The divisions are commonly referred to as Division 1, Division 2 and Division 3. There is an alphabetical listing of all staff members, including teachers, support personnel and administrators with their e-mail addresses in the back of the Student Directory. **This directory is extremely useful and can be purchased for a nominal fee from the front office.**

The Advisory Program

There is a detailed section on the Advisory Program at Parker on page 25. The following is a brief description of some key components. Every full time teacher serves as an advisor with a maximum of 12 students per advisory. The group is co-ed and based on the age of the student, not determined by the academic division the student is in. For example, an “8th grade” or Division 1 student who gateways early into Division 2, (9th and 10th grades) remains in her Division 1 advisory until she completes her first two years at Parker. To the extent possible, the advisor is one of the student’s teachers. A student may request a particular advisor and/or a teacher may request that a certain student be in his/her advisory. The group meets for a total of three hours per week. The advisory serves as the primary avenue through which student’s voices are heard. Each advisory elects one representative to the Community Congress and one representative to the Justice Committee.

The Essential Question

The Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School is a member of a national organization called The Coalition of Essential Schools. The Coalition promotes the idea of cohering the curriculum around an essential question. At the end of every school year, the Parker community participates in a public chalk talk in the hallways. Everyone is welcome to write their ideas on the paper covering the walls. The teachers then meet and use the chalk talk to help them narrow down the choice to two or three questions. On the final day of school there is a whole-school vote that will determine what the essential question will be for the upcoming school year. The practice has been very successful at Parker. Each year the teachers use the essential question to develop curriculum, to form the academic program, organize units of study, and develop focusing and related questions for their students. These are some examples of past Essential Questions, *What is Community?*, *What is Change?*, *What is Balance?*, *Where are the Patterns?*, *What's the Limit?*, *What Really Matters?*, *Where's the Truth?*, *What are the Possibilities?*, *What's Next?*, *What is Unique?*, *What is Universal?*, *What is Overlooked* and *What is*

Friday Announcements

Every Friday a newsletter is distributed to all students. This is called the Friday Announcements. This document keeps families informed about school related activities such as field trips, upcoming events, sports schedules as well as a weekly synopsis of classroom work from every teacher. Parents and guardians must make a habit of reading the Friday Announcements each week. You can also access the Friday Announcements from the website, (www.parker.org)

Community Forums

Periodically throughout the school year, there are evening forums scheduled for community members to attend. The topics are varied. They may address a specific and timely issue at the school such as a new computer use policy or they can be of a general nature such as a workshop that demonstrates how teachers at Parker assess student work. The forums are always informative and worthwhile.

Wednesday Morning Gathering

Every Wednesday morning, students proceed to the gymnasium instead of their morning advisory classroom. The Wednesday Morning Gathering is led by students and is highlighted by a featured student performer(s) who share work from a class and/or extra curricular experience(s). Community members can make announcements, share news, enact skits or listen to guest speakers and performers. This forum has also been used to engage students and community members in discussion about high-interest and important world events.

Café Wednesday

Café Wednesday began as an informal opportunity for community members to share special talents. It is organized by students and has an advisor from the staff. Café Wednesday remains rather informal but it has become quite popular and the auditorium is usually filled with students, teachers and family members. Performers volunteer beforehand and a program contains anywhere from 16-20 acts. The atmosphere is very supportive and the audience is entertained by a variety of performers such as musicians, comedians, poets, storytellers, dancers, and maybe even magicians! The evenings occur approximately four times during the school year and the only request is that you contribute a snack to share for intermission and help clean up at the close of the program (9:00 pm).

The Big Beginning and The Big End

These events mark the beginning and the end of each school year at the Parker School. They are times set aside for students and staff to get to know each other or to say farewell. Parents and guardians are invited to attend the morning session of the Big Beginning to listen to welcoming speeches by various school leaders. The Big End commences with a gateway certificate ceremony that parents/guardians are also welcome to attend and stay to join or volunteer in the morning events. These are festive occasions with games, food and celebratory activities.

The Parker Website (www.parker.org)

The Parker website is maintained by staff members and always contains important information for all community members. There is general information about the school, the Friday Announcements, homework assignments, photos of student activities, athletic schedules, directions to game sites and all relevant news at the school. You are encouraged to visit the website as often as necessary!

SCHOOL POLICIES

Lunch Policy

The entire school takes lunch together for approximately one half hour. The students may eat lunch outside, in the courtyard, in the hallways and some classrooms, or in the auditorium. Lunch is served every day. Wednesday is ‘Pizza Day’ and is available for purchase as a full lunch or by the slice. Tickets for the complete meal may be obtained from the cafeteria or when the cafeteria is closed from the front office. Cash can be used to purchase the complete meal or to buy any additional items.

Parker School Policy on School Closing Due to Inclement Weather

We announce school closings and two-hour delayed openings on WCVB TV5, WBZ (Radio AM1030 and TV4), and WHDH TV7. Please use your own common sense and good judgment when deciding whether or not to drive to school. It is difficult for us to be aware of weather conditions in all the 40+ communities where our students reside. We try to make the decision before 6:00 am, after consulting with various faculty “snow experts.” We also put our announcement on the school’s answering machine and on the Parker web site, www.parker.org.

When bad weather develops during the school day, you should always feel free to come to school early to pick up students. Make sure you come to the office and sign out all the students you take home. If Parker makes a decision to dismiss early, we will notify the media and put an announcement on the telephone answering machine and on our web site. We will not call parents/guardians but you are welcome to call us! A faculty member or administrator will stay at the school until all students are picked up.

Special Information for Students Who Drive to Parker: Student drivers and their parents/guardians are responsible for making all decisions about whether or not a student should drive in inclement weather. Please discuss this now, before the first flakes fall. Remember that, when a sudden snowfall begins, our school telephones become very, very busy. We will give student drivers priority in making calls, but there may still be difficulty in reaching you. Student drivers may not leave school early unless we get permission from a parent/guardian.

Student telephone use on “bad weather” days will be very limited. Student drivers will have first priority for contacting their parents/guardians. We need to keep our telephone lines available for incoming calls and for emergencies.

Procedures for Calling in Absences

School attendance is taken and records are reviewed daily. *Parents or guardians must notify the school of a student's known absence, or late arrival to school on a daily basis. Please let the office know of an absence before 9:00 am. You may call at any time and leave a message on the answering machine.* In the case of a prolonged absence the student's parents/guardians should notify the Principal or her designee, or the school nurse in a timely manner. **If a student is under the age of 18, it is not appropriate for the student to call himself or herself in late or absent.**

Parents/guardians are notified if their child is not present and the school has not received any prior notification regarding the absence. Teachers take attendance in every class and notify the Main Office of students that are unaccounted for.

Procedures for Student Visitors to the Parker School

Parker students who wish to bring a guest to school must first come to the Main Office and request a "Student Visitor Form". Using this form, the student must obtain written approval from the office first, and then from all of the student's teachers and advisor. This must be done three days in advance of the visit. The signed form along with permission slips from both the parent/guardian of the host and the parent/guardian of the guest (including an emergency contact phone number) must be brought to the office on the morning of the visit. If any of the student's teachers withholds permission for a visitor, then the visitor will not be able to come to school that day. All school rules and expectations apply to visitors.

Arrival and Departure

There is no formal supervision for students before 8:30 am or after 3:30 pm unless a student is participating in an official school activity or working with an individual teacher. In the morning, students may wait in the lobby or the halls until teachers open their classrooms. In the afternoon, students who are not picked up at 3:30 pm may work quietly in the main lobby or they may wait outside the school. If a student is participating in a supervised after-school activity, they must go directly to the main lobby or outside to wait for their ride as soon as the activity is completed. The library is sometimes open before and after school (depending on staffing and parent/guardian volunteers) for students who wish to work.

The Parking Lot

The school parking lot, especially at dismissal time, is a very busy place. Parents/guardians should speak with their children about safe behavior around the cars. Students should use the crosswalk when walking to the grass circle. Parents/guardians who pick up children in front of the school should pull to the right and stop before letting kids into their car. Students should only enter and exit cars on side away from traffic. If you observe any unsafe behavior, either by drivers or by pedestrians, please let someone in the Main Office know.

Late Pickup

If you will be late picking up your child, please try to call the Main Office and leave a message. It is not always easy to locate students after school, but office staff will try. It is helpful if your child knows your work and cell phone numbers. There is a custodian on duty in the building until 10:00 pm but he is not responsible for students left after school hours. **Please pick up your children on time.**

Student Telephone Use

Please consider giving your child a telephone card for emergency use. In general, office telephones may not be used by students unless there is an important reason.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PERSONAL LEARNING PLAN (PLP)

What is a Personal Learning Plan (P.L.P.)?

The P.L.P. is a document that articulates goals for the student and strategies that can be used to attain those goals. The document takes a whole child perspective, also describing the student's strengths, interests, personal attributes and accomplishments. It also lists the student's teachers and advisor for the year.

Who gets a Personal Learning Plan?

Every student at the Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School has a Personal Learning Plan.

Who uses the P.L.P.?

Students, parents, guardians, teachers and advisors all use the P.L.P. Each constituency should be doing routine check-ins on the student's progress towards his/her goals. Students and parents/guardians are encouraged to keep a copy of the P.L.P. visible in the home and are encouraged to check in with each other on the student's progress towards his/her goals. Advisors are expected to do routine P.L.P. updates/reviews with their advisees to monitor progress. Teachers should be addressing relevant P.L.P. goals in progress reports.

How is a Personal Learning Plan developed?

Early in the fall, a day is set-aside in the calendar for Parent/Guardian-Student-Teacher PLP conferences. Please check the calendar in the Friday Announcement to find out the date in October. Parents/guardians sign up with advisors for conference times prior to that date. At the conference, parents/guardians, student and advisor (along with advice from teachers) discuss and come to consensus on 3-4 attainable and measurable goals for the student. Along with goals, strategies for achieving those goals are discussed.

Who writes the Personal Learning Plan?

Ultimately, the advisor is responsible for writing the PLP. However, as students get older, many advisors will have the student write the initial draft of the document. When this route is taken, the advisor is responsible for being sure the document is completed with all of the necessary information, and filed appropriately.

What types of goals do students set in their P.L.P.?

The P.L.P. should take a whole child perspective. P.L.P. goals can be academic, social, or behavioral. They can be domain specific or relate to more wide spread habits of learning. The key to developing good goals is that they should be attainable and measurable. As you brainstorm goals, it is encouraged that you also think about how one would measure achievement of that goal.

What are common strategies used to achieve these goals?

Strategies are specific tasks that a student will do to take steps towards meeting his/her goal. These need to be very measurable.

How is achievement of a student's goals evaluated?

Advisors are expected to do routine P.L.P. updates/reviews with their advisees to monitor progress. Teachers should be addressing relevant P.L.P. goals in progress reports. In March, there will be a second Parent/Guardian-Student-Teacher Conference, to evaluate progress of the student in regards to his/her goals.

Parent/Guardian Guide for Helping Your Student in Division 1 MST

Helping Your Child with Homework

One goal in helping students learn is to assist them in figuring out as much as they can for themselves. You can help by asking questions that guide them without telling them what to do. Good questions and good listening will help students make sense of math and science, build self-confidence, and encourage communication and problem solving skills. A good question expands a problem and supports different ways of thinking about it. Here are some questions you might try; notice that none of them can be answered with a simple “yes” or “no”.

Getting Started

- What do you need to find out?
- What do you need to know?
- How can you get the information?
- Where can you begin?
- What terms do you understand or not understand?
- Have you solved similar problems that would help?

While Working on a Problem

- How can you organize the information?
- Can you make a drawing (model) to explain your thinking?
- Are there other possibilities?
- What would happen if...?
- What do you need to do next?
- Do you see any patterns or relationships that will help solve this?
- How does this relate to...?
- Can you make a prediction about...?

Reflecting About a Solution

- How do you know your solution/conclusion is reasonable?
- How did you arrive at your answer?
- How could you convince me that your answer makes sense?
- What did you try that did not work?
- Have you answered the question(s)?
- Can you make the explanation clearer?

Responding-Helping Your Child Clarify and Extend His or Her Thinking

- Tell me more.
- Can you explain it in a different way?
- Is there another possibility or strategy that might work?
- Help me understand this part.

Helping Your Child Get Organized

An important part of being successful in math and science is taking responsibility for one's own learning. In Division 1 MST, students are expected to use a notebook to record class discussions on problems and reflections about their learning. Students are also asked to maintain a folder for class handouts and problems. These will serve as a resource for the student throughout the year. The following suggestions can help you encourage good organizational and study habits.

- Provide a study place. If possible have materials readily available in that place (calculator, paper, rulers, pencils, dictionary, graph paper, etc.)
- Many kids need assistance in organizing and maintaining a notebook and folder system. Help them develop this system.
- Help your students develop the habit of writing assignments down in a clear and organized way. Check to make sure their system is operating effectively throughout the year.
- Help your child develop a system for taking meaningful notes. This may be just a matter of seeing whether your child is taking and using their notes.
- Encourage your student to identify study buddies or other students that they can call to work on assignments, get clarification, and find out about make-up work.
- Encourage and expect your child to get work done on time, to stay caught up, to get help in a timely manner, and to correct errors in their work. You may want to help your child go over incomplete or incorrect work and talk about how the work could be improved.

- It is generally expected that middle school students know the basic addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division facts as well as whole number and fraction computation. If your child is not proficient with these skills, help him or her master the needed skills.

Doing Math and Science At Home with Your Child

The following suggestions provide some practical ways to help your child learn math and science at home:

- Math and science are everywhere, yet many kids don't see it. Look for ways to point it out and reinforce skills at home (how do you use math or science at work, at home, try involving them in tasks which require problem solving or computation).
- Encourage your child to participate in games and activities that teach or reinforce math and science skills.
- Share your problem solving strategies and techniques, mental computation strategies, and estimation strategies. Have your child teach you some. Work on the same problem, then compare strategies as well as answers.
- Invite your child to explain what was learned in math or science and have them teach it to you. This type of interaction provides an opportunity for your child to help clarify his or her thinking, to practice new skills, and to practice communicating.

The above ideas were taken from the *Administrative Notebook for Middle School Mathematics*, Plano Independent School District, Plano, Texas and adapted for use at the Parker Charter School.

ADVISORY PROGRAM

Philosophy and Purpose

The Advisory program exists to enable advisors and students to know each other well so that students make the most of their experiences as members of the Parker community. The specific purposes of advisory are:

- Academic Advising: The advisory is a place to develop Personal Learning Plans (P.L.P.s), to monitor student progress in general and toward specific goals, to discuss teachers' assessments with students and parents/guardians, and to build upon the habits of learning.
- Community Service: The advisory is a place to practice being an active member of the broader community by designing and implementing community service projects.
- Community Conversations: The advisory is a vehicle for school-wide conversations about community issues, including school governance, and about being a community member.
- Recreation: The advisory is a place to have fun and to learn about group process and dynamics.

Program Organization

We believe that the organization of the Advisory program should be informed by the purposes to be achieved.

- Advisor to advisee ratio is 1:12 or less so students can be known well.
- Students are placed in advisories each year using the following set of criteria.
 - A student is placed in an advisory based on her age with secondary consideration given to the academic Divisions she is in.
 - To the extent possible, a student is placed in an advisory in which his advisor is also one of his teachers.
 - A student may request to be placed in a particular advisory.
 - A teacher may request placement of a student in her advisory.
- Advisory groups should be gender-balanced and should be representative of Parker's diversity.
- All full-time teachers serve as advisors. Some co-advising relationships exist.
- Advisories meet approximately three hours each week with morning connections (8:30 - 8:45 am), afternoon reflections (3:20 - 3:30 pm), and extended time on Wednesdays (12:30 - 1:30 pm). Additional meetings outside of the regular school day are at the Advisor's discretion with approval from the Division/Administration.
- In our school building, most Advisories share a room with another Advisory and therefore it is important to be conscious of the dynamic this creates and of the importance of establishing some shared norms.
- Advisory serves as one of the primary avenues through which students' voices are heard and through which students have ownership of the school. Each Advisory elects one member to our Community Congress and each Advisory elects one member to our Justice Committee.
- One faculty meeting every six weeks or so is devoted to Advisory issues and for teachers to reflect on their practice as advisors. Summer planning time is also dedicated to the Advisory program as a full faculty or task forces.
- Each Advisory has a parent/guardian who volunteers to be the Advisory Parent/Guardian Representative. The role of this parent/guardian is to provide support to the advisor in achieving the four purposes. Regular interaction between Advisory Parent/Guardian Representatives and Advisors is scheduled throughout the year.

Advisory Program Content

It is our hope that the deliberate curriculum designed by each advisor is aligned with the four stated purposes of the Advisory program. Certain curricular elements are common among all advisors, such as connections, reflections, and the personal learning plan. How each of these elements is actually delivered in the Advisory, however, will depend on the individual advisor and the needs of his/her group. On some occasions, all of the Advisors in a Division will collectively design curriculum, e.g., a Division-wide special presentation will be debriefed in Advisory groupings. A variety of resources (both paper and human) are available to all Advisors as they do this work.

Assessment/Evaluation

Individual students are assessed in Advisory primarily in two ways: through progress made in their Personal Learning Plans (P.L.P.s); and by meeting the stated criteria on the Advisory Check-In, a document which is mailed home 3-4 times a year. Advisory groups are assessed on the completion of their community service by having to submit a community service plan for the year and by providing evidence of their work.

Leadership

The Advisory Program is supported by an Advisory Coordinator, Debbie Osofsky. Please feel free to contact her with any questions or concerns. Her email address is debbieo@parker.org.

Advisory Parent/Guardian Representative

Every advisory at Parker has one parent/guardian who volunteers in the role of Advisory Parent/Guardian Representative. The role of the Advisory Parent/Guardian Representative is to aid the advisor in meeting the four purposes of the advisory program (academic advising, community service, community conversations, and recreation) and to facilitate communication among the families of advisory members.

In the past, Advisory Parent/Guardian Representatives have helped to coordinate advisory community service projects; arranged for special speakers to come in to advisory; organized advisory breakfasts for advisees and their parents/guardians; driven to advisory outings; coordinated division-wide events with the Advisory Parent/Guardian Representatives from other advisories; and made phone calls to notify families of upcoming community forums. Advisory Parent/Guardian Representatives are specifically asked to create an advisory Communication Chain. The Communication Chain should have contact information for each family in the advisory. Copies should be distributed to each family and given to the Main Office.

The Advisory Parent/Guardian Representatives work closely with the advisor with whom they are matched to best support that advisory's work. They are also encouraged to keep in contact with the Advisory Coordinator, Debbie Osofsky, who can provide a variety of resources and support.

COUNSELORS AND MENTORS

School Counselor

Joan Shulman, the School Counselor, is available 20 hours per week, and she welcomes parents/guardians who would like to discuss concerns about their child. Joan provides short term, individual counseling for students and will make appropriate referrals when necessary. The counselor also serves as a liaison between home and school, especially when family issues may be affecting a student's performance. In addition, Joan is a Faculty Co-Advisor of Parker's Peer Mentor Program and an active resource for the Gay Straight Alliance. The counseling/nurse's office holds a large collection of reading material on adolescent development that you are welcome to browse through and borrow.

You may make an appointment with Joan by telephoning her directly or stopping by when her door is open.

Some of the concerns Joan discusses with parents/guardians include:

- Depression
- Academic Stress
- Social Issues
- Conflict Resolution
- Eating Disorders
- Family/Divorce
- Self Harm
- Sexuality/Gender Identity
- Addiction
- Student-Teacher Communication

The College/Transition Counselor

Susan Whalley, the College/Transition Counselor at Parker, establishes and maintains the program and services to ease the student's move from secondary school to the next chapter of life. She provides resources and disseminates information about post-secondary options for students and their families. Susan also maintains transcripts and takes responsibility for all paperwork associated with applications to programs after high school. She helps students match interests with career goals.

See more information about the College/Transition Office at the Parker website, www.parker.org.

Parker School Peer Mentor Program

The peer mentor program at the school matches Division 3 students with Division 1 advisories. Division 3 students who wish to use their service hours as a peer mentor must apply and attend mandatory training sessions offered by Student Services staff. Division 1 students are encouraged to discuss any concerns they have regarding their transition to the Parker School with their Division 3 peer mentors. Faculty advisors for the Peer Mentor program are the school counselor, Joan Shulman and the School Nurse.

HEALTH INFORMATION

School Nurse Services

The School Nurse is available during the school day to assist students with their health concerns. The School Nurse provides health education and counseling to prevent illness and promote healthy lifestyles. She is able to provide acute, episodic and emergency care to students and staff.

It is important that the Emergency Information Card be completed and signed at registration on an annual basis. Please make sure it has a home, work, cell phone or pager number listed on it where an adult, that can assume responsibility of your child,

including yourself, can be reached in case of illness or serious injury during the school day. Your signature on this card indicates permission to treat in the Nurse's Office. It is important to remember that if any home or work contact numbers change throughout the year that the School Nurse be notified of this change. If you are planning to be away from home for an extended period of time, please inform the School Nurse's office of the individual(s) assuming responsibility for your child in your absence.

Your child must remain at home or be dismissed if:

- They do not have the required immunizations mandated by the Department of Public Health (DPH).
- They have vomited or have diarrhea. The student may return to school six hours after the last episode.
- They have a fever of 100° or higher. Students need to be free of fever for 24 hours before re-entry.
- They have lice or nits. They must be lice free for re-entry to school.
- They have a rash of unknown origin. They may return to school when written authorization from their health care provider is submitted to the school nurse.
- They have conjunctivitis or impetigo. They may return to school when there is no drainage or redness and/ or have been on antibiotics for 24 hours.
- They have a contagious disease. DPH protocols are followed.
- They are acutely ill or injured.
- They have an uncontrollable cough.

This list is a guideline. The School Nurse reserves the right to dismiss students, who in her professional opinion, are possibly contagious or are too ill to be in school. Parents/Guardians are also responsible for notifying the School Nurse if their child has a contagious disease. Parents/Guardians should inform the School Nurse if their child is returning to school after an extended illness or surgery.

Every student must have a physical examination upon entering the Parker School. The State of Massachusetts also requires that immunizations be up-to-date when entering school. For entering seventh graders these immunizations include:

- Three doses of the Hepatitis B vaccine
- One Tetanus booster (within the past 5 years)
- Two doses of the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine
- And a physician documented history of chickenpox or one dose of the varicella vaccine.

If your child plans to participate in the after-school sports program, they must have a current (within the past year) physical examination completed by their health care provider on file in the School Nurse's office. You also must complete and sign a Sport's Waiver/ Health form on an annual basis.

The school physician has given permission for students to receive acetaminophen (Tylenol®) at the school with a signed emergency information card. A brief health assessment will be done by the School Nurse to determine need. This will include checking for fever, pain from an injury or orthodontic procedures, headache, etc. Other

medications to be administered during the school day (both prescription and over-the-counter) need to have written parent/guardian permission and physician authorization and must be supplied by the parent/guardian. Medications (including inhalers and epi-pens) must not be brought to school or used by any student without the written permission of the student's parents/guardians and the School Nurse. If a student requires over-the-counter medication or prescription medication while in school, it should be brought to the Nurse's Office at the beginning of the day in the original container. No student is permitted to self-administrate any medication at school (including inhalers and epi-pens) without written parent/guardian permission and prior authorization by the School Nurse, unless the student is over the age of 18 (eighteen).

Mandated periodic health screenings for vision, hearing, posture and growth checks are done during the school year. The School Nurse is able to provide referrals to primary care providers and other appropriate community health agencies, including mental health clinicians. The School Nurse is also able to assist with obtaining health insurance for ALL students and their families through the Children's Medical Security Plan and Mass Health.

Dismissal Policy

Parents/Guardians should be aware that school health office policy states that students may not be dismissed early without parent/guardian authorization. This applies to ALL students under the age of 18, including those who may drive themselves to and from school. If a student becomes ill or injured at school, they should report to the Nurse's Office, where, if necessary, transportation home will be arranged. If the student has driven themselves to school, the School Nurse will make an assessment of the student's health status and notify a parent/guardian when dismissal is recommended. If the student is considered too ill or injured to drive home safely, a parent/guardian must arrange alternate transportation home before the student can be dismissed. This is also necessary because of the danger of a student being home alone without parent/guardian knowledge and his/her health condition worsening. Because of these and other health and safety risks, no student, including Division III students, will be dismissed early from school without receiving parent/guardian permission. A blanket statement for such permission is not acceptable. Parent/Guardian cooperation with this policy is appreciated.

For the same health and safety concerns, it is school health office policy that a parent or guardian must notify the school of a student's known absence, or late arrival to school on a **daily** basis. Prolonged absences due to health concerns should be reported to the School Nurse. Parents or guardians are notified if their child is not present and the school has not received any prior notification from a parent or guardian regarding the absence. If you have any questions or concerns, please notify the School Nurse.

School Nurse Confidentiality Policy

A separate fax machine is available in the School Nurse's Office to protect confidential health information. All student health records are kept separate from academic records to protect confidentiality of health information.

Student Support Fund:

Financial assistance is available for all school related activities, including field trips and after school sports fees and school supplies through a grant from the Parker Essential Fund administered through Student Services. An application for assistance is available by contacting the Student Services. All scholarship requests and application information are confidential and kept separate from all student records.

Health Advisory Council

Parents/Guardians are invited to join with other Parker faculty and students to fulfill the mission of the Health Advisory Council (HAC): to examine health, safety and environmental issues within the Parker Community, to provide recommendations to Parker's faculty and staff including the Board of Trustees, and to organize special events within the school that assist in meeting these objectives. The HAC is a strong example of parent/guardian and community involvement at the Parker School. This committee began its initial operations at the Parker School as the Health Task Force in March, 1995 when the school was still in its planning stages.

The HAC is comprised of a cross-section of the Parker community, a community that draws students from over 40 different cities and towns. Although a diverse community, this committee remains committed to being a working group of involved parents/guardians and faculty that contributes to the development of curriculum, policies and procedures for the Parker School. It serves as an advocacy group concerning student health and safety and environmental issues at the school.

The HAC at Parker developed the Parker School's health education curriculum. It has been responsible for the complete environmental review of the present facility that houses the Parker School. It has been involved in such issues as ensuring adequate coverage for first aid at Parker sporting events, developing policies concerning the use of mercury and pesticides, animals in the classroom and monitoring of internet usage at the school. It has a varied agenda that in the past has included condom availability, critical incident management, and consultation concerning Division III discretionary time and school service. The School Nurse serves as coordinator of the HAC.

If you would like to join in the work of this action-oriented committee, please contact the School Nurse, HAC Coordinator, at the school (978) 772-3293. This is a great way to fulfill your parent/guardian volunteer hours!

MEDICATION ADMINISTRATION POLICY

Any medication, prescription or over-the-counter, that needs to be administered during school hours, must be done so with the authorization of the School Nurse. No student may carry either prescription or over-the-counter medication including inhalers, at school without the permission of the School Nurse.

All medication brought to school must be properly labeled and in its original container. A doctor's order must accompany all medication brought to school. A parent/guardian

must also complete and sign a Medication Authorization Form or other note with the following information:

- Name of student and date of birth
- Name of medication
- Reason for administration in school
- Dosage
- Dosage interval (i.e., every 4 hours)
- Duration of administration (i.e., one week)
- List of food or drug allergies
- Name of student's physician (or prescribing healthcare provider)
- Potential side effects (if any)
- Parent/Guardian emergency telephone contact numbers.

With parent/guardian permission, the School Nurse can administer acetaminophen (Tylenol) to students under the age of 18 (parent/guardian permission is not required for students over the age of 18). The School Nurse or other designated school personnel will do a nursing assessment and brief health history update to determine need. This will include observation for possible fever, pain from injury, orthopedic or orthodontic procedures, headache, etc. The dosage of the medication has been determined by the protocol established by the School Physician and is on file in the Nurse's Office. Please note: *ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, etc.) is not administered without special parent/guardian permission and unless it is supplied by the student's family.*

If your child requires long term administration of medication while at school (i.e., Ritalin, insulin, inhalers, etc.) or emergency medication treatment (i.e., Epi-pen) please contact the School Nurse for further information and forms necessary for administration. Please contact the School Nurse with any additional questions or concerns you may have.

AGE OF MAJORITY

18-year-old information

Under Massachusetts State Law, students are considered adults and competent to make many of their own decisions at age 18 (Age of Majority). Students at age 18 have the right to make their own educational and health decisions and must sign all consent forms. Students who have reached the age of majority become the primary participant in developing their educational program and are held responsible for making other decisions that are required of adults in our society.

In accordance with these state regulations, the Parker School must ask each student to complete a form stating their understanding of these rights and to make some choices about exercising them. Your student will be asked to complete this form when he or she turns 18 years old. You can find more information concerning this law under:

G.L. c. 71, s. 34E and at the Department of Education website at:

http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr23/cmr23_qa.html#. If you would like to discuss how this impacts your child specifically, please contact your student's advisor.

HOW ASSESSMENT WORKS

How Assessment Works

Welcome to the “Parker Way” of assessing your child's progress in learning! You may have heard that...

- Parker does not give A-B-C-D-F grades.
- Parker does not have traditional report cards.
- Parker does not use conventional “subject areas” as a way to describe academic progress.
- A student does not move into a new “grade” at Parker simply because she or he comes to school from September to June. In fact, students are not grouped by “grades” at all.

But what does Parker have instead?

As you know by now, Parker organizes instruction into integrated “**Domains**” that include all the conventional subject areas.

- **A/H** – Arts and Humanities includes History, Philosophy, Social Sciences, Literature, and Visual and Performing Arts.
- **MST** – Mathematics, Science and Technology includes Mathematics, all the Sciences, and Technology.
- **Spanish** – The primary goal of the Spanish program at Parker is to provide instruction in Spanish language and culture to enable our students to communicate effectively and respectfully in a culture where Spanish is spoken. Spanish is a required component of our curriculum through Division 2
- **Wellness** – Wellness at Parker is an integrated curriculum combining aspects of both traditional health classes with physical education, adventure programming, fitness skills and other mind-body connection skills.

Because no one can ever master all the content in each of these Domains, the Parker curriculum instead chooses a few content areas to explore in greater depth. For example, when we are studying American history, we may focus on the United States Constitution and explore it through several historical case studies from different points in U.S. history. We do not attempt to “cover” all of U.S. history (or any other subject, like life science) in a year-that would be impossible!

But ...we do believe that in the process of exploring a few content areas in depth, we can teach all the essential skills that an educated person needs to know to keep learning new content in new situations all during his or her lifetime.

So ...when your child is assessed, each Domain focuses primarily on certain Essential Skills. Your child’s Personal Learning Plan, progress reports, and Year-End Assessment report will all describe how she or he is doing on these Essential Skills.

Parker's Essential Skills

- Reading
- Writing
- Oral Presentation
- Listening
- Artistic Expression
- Research
- Spanish Language
- Mathematics Problem-Solving
- Mathematics Communication
- Scientific Investigation
- Systems Thinking and Mathematical Modeling
- Technology
- Wellness

Each of these skills comes with a set of “Criteria for Excellence” developed by Parker teachers.

These criteria describe what good work looks like in a particular skill area, no matter what your age or what grade you are in. They are the same for little kids and seasoned professionals. They are the same across Parker's three Divisions. You and your students can read them in the brightly colored posters on the walls of every classroom.

How do students demonstrate that they are ready for promotion?

At the end of every year, in each Domain, all students assemble a Year-End Portfolio that demonstrates where they stand in Parker's Essential Skill Areas.

They go back over their year's work with their teachers, and when possible their parents/guardians, to reflect upon the skills they practiced in each piece. They look at their teacher's comments and assessments, and they rate themselves as to whether they “meet” the expectations of their Division.

With their teacher's and parent/guardian's help, they select a number of pieces that show progress over the year. These pieces are then put into a special Portfolio which will be the permanent record of their learning.

When a student “Meets” our expectations in all of the skill areas assessed by a particular Domain (A/H, Spanish or MST) ... it is time to move on to bigger challenges.

Typically this happens at roughly two-year intervals, which is why we organize our curricular challenges into three Divisions over six years:

- Division 1 (roughly, grades seven and eight)
- Division 2 (roughly ninth and tenth grades), and eventually
- Division 3 (the final years before graduation from high school).

When a student is ready to move through the gateway to a higher level of curricular challenge, he or she demonstrates that by selecting from their Year-End Portfolios to make a special **Gateway Portfolio**. In a Cover Letter to the Portfolio, Gateway students describe and reflect on their progress over a two-year cycle, as shown in the work the Portfolio includes. Then they present their Gateway Portfolio in a Public Exhibition, before a small audience made up of their advisor, teachers from both Domains, their parents/guardians, other students, and members of the community. They answer questions about their work and talk about what matters most in their learning, either in or out of school. The Gateway Exhibition is a moment of celebration at the Parker School. Parents/guardians often bring food or flowers to make the occasion personal and special.

What happens when a student passes through the Gateway into a new Division?

The Criteria for Excellence remain the same across all three Divisions. But the work gets harder.

In Division 1, a student might read a novel at a level of difficulty suitable for late middle school. Division 2 might go on to another book that explores a related theme in the deeper waters of high school level reading. But the Criteria for Excellence in Reading still apply to both, whether you are in Division I or Division II. You will “connect your reading to other texts, to your own experience, or to its historical and social context.”

Assignments look harder in Division 2, but they too use the same criteria. For example, in both Divisions you might be asked to “organize and evaluate the information in your notes” (one of the Criteria for Excellence in Research), but in Division 2 you will be taking notes on more complicated and difficult sources, so organizing and evaluating them will take a higher level of skill.

The Holistic Rubrics may look very similar, too, across the Divisions.

If you are reading *Crime and Punishment*, in Division 3, for example, there may well be a point at which you are again “Just Beginning.” You have not yet generated questions or a point of view about the text as the Holistic Rubric describes it.

At every stage, at every age, the challenge is to reach for the Criteria for Excellence as well as you can, given the particular task that you face, and your level of development.

Using selected “exemplars” of good work that are appropriate to his or her Division level, each student will be striving for the best he or she can realistically achieve.

How can parents/guardians help students keep up with the challenge?

1. Read through the Criteria for Excellence in each Skill Area.
2. Whenever you see good work in any context - in the newspaper, at the movies, or on homework assignments - talk about what makes it so good!

3. Don't compare "Just Beginning," "Approaches" and "Meets" (or "Exceeds") to letter grades. They are as different as night and day. Instead, think of your student's progress the way you would think of progress in a sport, or on a musical instrument. Everyone is a novice at some point, with coaching and practice and plenty of exposure to good work in the field everyone can learn.
4. Come to see Parker students when they show off what they can do! We have regular Exhibitions and an audience of parents/guardians and community members are an important part of this. Your presence and your questions make it clear how important your student's work really is.
5. Volunteer as an "assistant coach." If you have talents that could help our students learn to do better, let us know. Parents/guardians are always welcome in Parker classrooms, and as mentors in special projects both during and after school.

How a Student Shows She/He is Ready to Gateway

- Puts forth maximum effort on assignments and in class.
- Is self-motivated and takes the initiative to complete work on his/her own.
- Comes to class on time and prepared for class.
- Completes nightly homework assignments and long-term projects on time.
- Revises work.
- Communicates with teacher(s) about his/her work and progress.
- Works on areas of need (as identified in progress reports or PLP) and shows improvement in them.
- Participates positively in class activities and discussions.
- Makes progress in Habits of Learning and Academic Skills.
- Respects and learns from others (including peers and teachers).
- Consistently meets Division standards on assignments.

Criteria for Satisfactory Completion of Wellness

All Division 1 and 2 students (as determined by their advisory placement) must satisfactorily complete the four-year Wellness curriculum program for those Divisions. If students fail to satisfactorily complete these four years, then they must continue to participate in this program during Division 3.

- Students must come prepared for all Wellness classes. This includes appropriate dress, having all classroom materials needed and all homework assignments completed.
- Students must demonstrate effort during all Wellness classes by participating willingly in classroom discussions, in-class projects and physical activities.
- In all Wellness classes, students will practice the Parker School Habits of Learning.
- Students must satisfactorily meet the skills areas for Wellness as defined by the Criteria for Excellence.

All Division III (as determined by their advisory placement) students must satisfactorily complete the two-year Wellness curriculum for that Division. This consists of:

- Attendance at Wellness seminars as scheduled throughout the year.

- Participation in Division 3 Wellness/ Movement classes during each year (Junior and Senior) of Division 3. This will consist of five classes per semester of their choosing offered in the Division 3 program throughout the year.
- Students may select to do a Wellness Independent Study Project to satisfy requirements for Wellness during one semester of Division 3 study.
- Students who do not satisfactorily complete the junior year of the Division 3 Wellness program, must satisfactorily complete twenty classes (ten per semester) of Wellness/ Movement classes during their senior year of Division 3 to meet the graduation criteria.

DIVISION III PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Program Overview and Design

Students at the Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School compile portfolios and complete exhibitions in order to demonstrate their mastery of the skills and proficiencies necessary for them to advance to the next level of study. Under this performance-based promotion model students are organized into Divisions rather than traditional grade-levels, and the process of moving from one Division to the next is called “gatewaying.” The highest level of the school, Division 3, is roughly equivalent to 11th and 12th grade, although there are “10th graders” who have advanced to this level of study as well. Division 3 is a program that encompasses a variety of components suited to address the developmental needs and increased autonomy, initiative, awareness, and complexity of older adolescents.

The design of Parker’s Division 3 program addresses two essential philosophical aims: (1) the school’s commitment to authentic, performance-based promotion with its inherent accountability, and (2) the need and desire to transition our oldest students into the opportunities, responsibilities and independence of adulthood. Therefore, our policies that guide the Division 3 program, focus on providing our students with opportunities to act autonomously and make independent decisions for which they are held accountable. Students therefore have the chance to practice good decision-making in a safe and supportive environment. When these kids leave high school and enter what we call “Life after Parker” (whether that be college, work, community service, travel, or any other option), they are considered by society to be “grown-ups” in many ways; we feel that in addition to learning to write well or graph a sine curve, they should have the chance to learn the skills required for the next phase of life, especially time management and balancing “free time” with commitments.

The major components and operating policies of the Division 3 program are as follows:

- *Completion of a graduation portfolio:* All students must compile a portfolio of work that fulfills nine of the school’s twelve essential skills.
- *Senior Seminar & Senior Project:* All seniors engage in an independent senior project, which is a component of the year-long course, Senior Seminar.
- *Alternate course and independent work policy:* Although many schools allow students to take courses in other places (in fact, the state facilitates it through Dual Enrollment), we have a policy that encourages students to try new

things and/or go more deeply into areas of study, including leaving the school for segments of the day or year to pursue learning in other places. Students then bring that work and learning back into the school by including elements of it in their graduation portfolios or by doing small exhibitions in school.

- *School Service and discretionary program:* All Division 3 students participate in a school service program in which they complete two hours of service inside the school each week. The increased responsibility they demonstrate in fulfilling this service is balanced by two hours a week of discretionary time, which students may use as they wish.
- *Off-campus policy:* Eligible students may go off campus during discretionary time and lunch. Although many schools have an “open campus,” our policy is designed as part of a developmental transition to self-structuring free time. We view it as part of their educational program.

Background and Course Structure

Although founded on the same philosophy and principles as the rest of the school, Parker’s Division 3 looks significantly different from Division 1 (roughly 7th and 8th grade) and Division 2 (roughly 9th and 10th grade). Certainly the content of courses and expectations regarding coursework change as students become older, but the actual design of the program is different as well. Instead of the team-taught, two hour blocks of integrated coursework that students experience for most of their first four years here (beginning in 7th grade), Division 3 students make choices about what courses they take, and they have the opportunity to include and exclude various areas of study. By gatewaying out of Division 2, students have demonstrated their proficiency in all of the 12 skill areas identified in the Parker School Criteria for Excellence. Although all students are expected to complete coursework in all domains (Arts & Humanities (A/H) Math Science & Technology (MST); Spanish; Wellness) throughout their high school years, there is more opportunity for individual students to specialize and pursue areas of interest once they get to Division 3. Accordingly, Division 3 is the first time that students are presented with a “course selection” process in which they must select the individual courses, offered in hour long blocks, they will take each semester. This is a new experience for students, as Divisions 1 and 2 offer a uniform, teacher-determined curriculum for the year.

Further, for the first time in our history of educating students in multi-age, multi-level groupings, we’ve made a distinction between students in Division 3, based on anticipated year of graduation. We have slightly different expectations of Juniors and Seniors. In a school day with six hours of direct domain-based instruction, all Division 3 students choose the courses they will take. The typical “non-senior” (a junior or a sophomore who has advanced to Division 3 already) chooses one math course (for example, Trigonometry, Statistics, Calculus), one Science course (for example Physics, Information Technology, Genetics), two Arts & Humanities courses (for example, Color Theory, The American Dream, Morality in Global Politics, Ethics of Crime and Punishment), one Spanish class, and their Service/Discretionary block. Seniors have to find time for their daily hour of Senior Seminar in this schedule; they usually have either completed their Spanish requirements or they take one less A/H class in order to do so. It is in their academic classes that students create much of the work that fills their Division 3 (or Graduation) portfolios.

There are three documents available from Deborah Merriam, providing you with more detailed information on Division 3:

- “Division 3 Program: Transitioning Older Adolescents into Adulthood.”
- “Division 3 Handbook.”
- “Senior Project Handbook.”

PARKER GRADUATE ENROLLMENT AT COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

The list below shows some of the schools that Parker students have attended:

Parker Students Enrolled at these Institutions of Higher Learning

Allegheny College
American University
Amherst College
Antioch College
Assumption College
Bard College
Bates College
Becker College
Bay Path College
Beloit College
Bennington College
Bentley College
Berklee College of Music
Boston University
Bowdoin College
Brandeis University
Brown University
Bridgewater State College
Bryn Mawr College
Bucknell University
California College of the Arts
Clark University
Colby College
Colby Sawyer College
College of the Atlantic
College of the Holy Cross
Colorado College
Columbia College of Art in Chicago
Cornell University

Curry College
CW Post Long Island University
Daniel Webster College
Dartmouth College
Dean College
Delaware Valley College
Drew University
Duke University
Earlham College
Emerson College
Emmanuel College
Endicott College
Eugene Lang College
Evergreen State College
Fitchburg State College
Fordham University
Framingham State College
Franklin and Marshall College
Franklin Pierce College
Gordon College
Green Mountain College
Griffith College in Dublin
Guilford College
Hampshire College
Haverford College
Hobart and William Smith Colleges
Ithaca College
Johnson and Wales University
Keene State University

Kenyon College
Lesley College
Lyndon State College
Macalester College
Marlboro College
Massachusetts College of Art
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts
Massachusetts Maritime Academy
Merrimack College
Middlebury College
Middlesex Community College
Mount Holyoke College
Mount Wachusett Community College
New College of South Florida
New England College
New England Institute of Technology
Northeastern University
Norwich University
Oberlin College
Plymouth State College
Pratt Institute
Prescott College
Quinnipiac University
Reed College
Roger Williams University
Sacred Heart University
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
Sarah Lawrence College
Simmons College
Skidmore College
Smith College
Soka University (California)
Springfield College
St. Michael's College
Suffolk University
SUNY New Paltz

Swarthmore College
Syracuse University
Trinity College
Tufts University
Unity College
University of Chicago
University of Colorado Boulder
University of Connecticut
University of Hartford
University of Maine
University of Maine at Farmington
University of Massachusetts, Amherst -
Commonwealth Honors College
University of Massachusetts, Amherst
University of Massachusetts - Dartmouth
University of Massachusetts - Lowell
University of New England
University of New Hampshire
University of Rochester
University of Vermont
Vassar College
Vermont Technical College
Wake Forest University
Warren Wilson College
Wentworth Institute of Technology
Wesleyan University
Western New England College
Western Washington University
Westfield State College
West Point Military Academy
Wheaton College
Whitman College
Williams College
Worcester Polytechnic Institute
Worcester State College
Xavier University

Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School
July 2006 - June 2007
Yearly Planner

July 2006						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

	Faculty work days
	Registration
	Classes begin or end

August 2006						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

September 2006						
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October 2006						
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29	30	31				

November 2006						
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December 2006						
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17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

July, 2006

4 - Independence Day

August, 2006

16 - 18 - Faculty Summer Planning

21 - 25 - Faculty Summer Planning

28 - 29 - Faculty Summer Planning

30 - School Opens, Registration (1-4 pm)

31 - Classes begin

September, 2006

1 - School closed for long weekend

4 - Labor Day (no school)

19 - Open House/Back to School Night/

Annual Meeting (6 pm)

22 - Noon dismissal

October, 2006

TBA - PLP Conference Day (no classes)

9 - Columbus Day (no school)

November, 2006

10 - Veterans' Day observed (no school)

22 - Early Release (noon dismissal)

23 - 24 - Thanksgiving Break

December, 2006

1 - Parker International Gala & Auction,

22 - Early Release (noon dismissal)

25 - 31 Holiday Recess

January, 2007

1 - New Year's Day

2 - Holiday

3 - Faculty Planning (no classes)

4 - Classes resume

7 - Enrollment Information Session (1-4 pm)

15 - Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday -

No school

21 - Enrollment Information Session (1-4 pm)

28 - Snow date Enrollment Info. Sess. (1-4 pm)

29 - Faculty Planning (no classes)

30 - New semester begins

February, 2007

16 - Early Release (noon dismissal)

19 - President's Day (no school)

20 - 23 - Winter Recess

March, 2007

TBA - Spring Conference Day (no classes)

11 - Daylight Savings Time begin

14 - Noon dismissal - Faculty Planning

April, 2007

6 - Early Release (noon dismissal)

13 - Early Release (noon dismissal)

16 - Patriot's Day (no school)

17 - 20 - Spring Recess

May, 2007

25 - Early Release (noon dismissal)

28 - Memorial Day (no school)

June, 2007

6 - Noon dismissal - Graduation (6:00 pm)

22 - Last Day of Classes (or earlier)

25, 26, 27 - Faculty Work Days (or earlier)

January 2007						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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February 2007						
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25	26	27	28			

April 2007						
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29	30					

June 2007						
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10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

	Holiday – no school
	Half day

March 2007

May 2007						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5

Faculty Summer Planning - August 16 - 18 and 21 - 25 and 28 - 29, 2006

Student Registration and First Day of School - Wednesday, August 30, 2006 (1:00 - 4:00 p.m.)

Open House/Back to School Night/Annual Meeting - Tuesday, September 19, 2006 at 6:00 p.m.

8 Scheduled Faculty Work Days - January 3, January 29, March (date to be announced) and June 25, 26, 27, 2007

Early Release Day - Wednesdays, 1:30 p.m. dismissal, noon dismissal on September 22, November 22, December 22, February 16, March 14, April 6, April 13, May, 25, June 6 and the last day of school.

Graduation - June 6, 2007 at 6:00 p.m.

PLP (Parent/Teacher/Student Conference Days (no classes)) - (dates to be announced)

Last day of School - June 22, 2007 or earlier.

PLEASE NOTE: School is from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., except Wednesday, 1:30 p.m. dismissal
We are required by law to schedule 185 days. If we have fewer than (5) five snow days,
the last day of classes will be earlier than June 22, 2007.

If your child will be out of school or will be late arriving, please telephone the office before 8:00 a.m. to let us know. You may telephone 24 hours a day and leave a message on the answering machine. Please be sure to leave your child's name, reason for absence and expected date of return. (978) 772-3293

In case of school cancellation due to bad weather, we place a message on our answering machine and broadcast the announcement on WBZ (1030 radio and Channel 4 television), WBUR (radio) and WCVB (Channel 5 television), and WHDH (Channel 7 TV television). We try to make a decision by 6:00 a.m. Since our families come from many different communities it is not always possible to know what the weather is like where you live. Please use your own best judgment about driving in inclement weather.

School closings, delays and other important messages may also be found on our website, www.parker.org.

Faculty Summer Planning - August 17 - 19 and 22 - 26 and 29 - 30, 2005

Student Registration and First Day of School - Wednesday, August 31, 2005 (1:00 - 4:00 p.m.)

Open House/Back to School Night/Annual Meeting - Tuesday, September 20, 2005 at 6:00 p.m.

8 Scheduled Faculty Work Days – January 2, 3, 30, March (date to be announced) and June 23, 26, 27, 2006

Early Release Day - Wednesdays, 1:30 p.m. dismissal, noon dismissal on September 23, November 23, December 23, February 17, March ?, April 14, May, 26, June 7 and the last day of school.

Graduation - June 7, 2006 at 6:00 p.m.

PLP (Parent/Teacher/Student Conference Days (no classes) – Wednesday, October 20, 2005 and Wednesday, March ?, 2006 (dates to be announced)

Last day of School - June 22, 2006 or earlier.

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