



# **Traut Core Knowledge School Covenant**

May 29, 1998

## **Vision**

Our vision is educational excellence in knowledge, skills and character with strong parent-teacher-student partnerships.

## **Mission**

Our mission is to provide excellence and fairness in education for elementary school children. Excellence in education means raising academic standards and achieving success for all students. Fairness in education means providing equal opportunity to learn for all students. We accomplish this by teaching:

1. A common foundation of organized knowledge based on the Core Knowledge Sequence.
2. The learning skills which enable student success.
3. The values of a democratic society by integrating character education during classroom instruction.
4. Student acceptance of responsibility for one's own learning.

Our mission depends on:

1. Site-based management built on a full partnership of parents and teachers.
2. Regular assessments of individual student, class, and overall school progress.

## **Beliefs**

High academic and behavioral standards are a key part of our school values. We believe that all children can learn and behave properly, and that it is in their best interest to be expected to give their best in both areas. High academic standards include a thorough grounding in knowledge and the skills of learning, while high behavioral standards are derived from sound training in character education.

1. Choice in public education promotes the ownership and individual family commitment that is essential for achieving excellence in education.
2. Both skills and knowledge are important. The best way to teach the necessary skills of reading, writing and thinking is in the context of a rich, interesting knowledge-based curriculum.
3. Every child's first and most important teachers are his or her parents. Our school exists to supplement and support the learning that is started in the home.
4. Learning to act in a respectful and responsible way is crucial. The development of character is so important that it must be taught directly and not left to chance.
5. It is essential for our students to understand and accept their responsibility for their behavior and learning. This means students will meet classroom expectations, including turning in completed assignments on time.
6. Homework is essential for reinforcing daily lessons, developing study habits, converting knowledge to skills and providing another opportunity for parents to be involved in their children's education.
7. Reading is the most important academic skill for elementary students to learn. The development of literacy is a primary focus of our school.

## **Declaration of Principle**

1. The skills of learning (e.g. reading, writing, speaking, listening, calculating, problem solving and critical judgment) are best taught through the content of the curriculum.
2. To thrive in work, citizenship and personal growth, our children must be taught the values of a democratic society. These include:
  - a. Respect for others, their property and their rights.
  - b. Responsibility for actions, honesty and social justice.
  - c. Readiness to learn, to serve and to share.

3. Parental choice is fundamental in responding to the diverse needs of children and raising academic standards.
4. Parental partnerships with teachers in and out of the classroom are essential in providing our children with the attention they need and deserve.
5. The principal determinants of individual academic success are individual ability and effort. The policies of the school (grading, discipline, homework, and pedagogy) must support the student's adoption of a personal quest for academic growth (using the clearly marked path of expectations) in knowledge, skill, and character. The guiding philosophy of the school acknowledges that children can and should be held accountable for their own schoolwork and behavior.

## **Knowledge**

Children need a solid foundation of knowledge in order to understand and make sense of their world, to develop mature literacy, and to be able to think critically. They will build further knowledge on this foundation base as they continue to grow and learn.

This school will use the Core Knowledge Sequence for kindergarten through 6th grade. The Core Knowledge Sequence is a planned progression of specific knowledge in history, geography, mathematics, science, language arts and fine arts.

Only by specifying the knowledge all children should share can we guarantee equal access to that knowledge. This knowledge not only provides a foundation for later learning, but also defines a common heritage and makes up the common ground for communication and cooperation in a diverse society. This knowledge leads to effective classrooms as well as cooperation and respect among students. Knowledge that lasts makes it possible for generations to communicate with each other.

Children gain new knowledge by building on what they already know. Teachers can rely on the shared background knowledge of students to build sequentially on that knowledge year by year. The Core Knowledge Sequence discussed above may well be called the extensive curriculum – cultural literate knowledge, the network of associations that should be known by every child. Supplementing the Core Knowledge Sequence will be selected components of the Poudre School District Curriculum, such as Fort Collins and Colorado history, physical education and technology. Artistic expression will be encouraged through classes in art and music that relate to the extensive curriculum.

## **Skills**

The skills of learning are best taught through the content of the body of organized knowledge. The development of literacy will be one of the main focuses of our school. Literacy instruction is based upon the premise that students need a strong foundation of systematic phonics instruction along with plentiful opportunities to read meaningful text in order to become mature, competent readers.

Explicit, systematic phonics instruction in grades K-2 facilitates the fast, relatively effortless recognition of words necessary for reading comprehension. Abundant opportunities to read, and be read to, from a variety of high quality, engaging literature (both fiction and non-fiction) satisfy students' yearning for meaning, while fostering growth in reading ability, and in the vocabulary and cognitive development necessary for mature literacy. During grades 3-6, the need for direct phonics instruction decreases. Reading instruction is further integrated with Core Knowledge topics through the inclusion of classic works of literature, historical fiction, biographies, and a wide range of non-fiction materials.

Writing is important for teaching children to think critically and independently. Students will be taught to write and speak through example and guided practice in all subject areas. Grammar and spelling will be learned from real literature as well as specialized supplemental programs. Our children will be presented with a balanced approach to writing, emphasizing both good writing mechanics as well as interesting content.

The study of math will include the use of manipulatives, mental math and problem solving to develop a firm grasp of computational skills. While it is important to work toward development of higher order problem-solving skills, it is equally important to have a sound grasp of basic facts and an automatic fluency of fundamental operations. The integration of math with other subjects, especially science, gives the symbols and processes of math practical meaning.

Science instruction will focus on a balance of content, hands-on experiments and the use of the scientific method to draw conclusions and validate experimental results. Both the rich history of scientific discoveries in their historical context as well as the scientific process used to create and verify new scientific knowledge will be taught to assure a firm scientific foundation.

## **Values**

Learning to act in a respectful and responsible way is crucial to high academic achievement, and we have identified twelve character traits or qualities that we incorporate into our classroom instruction. These are respect, responsibility, citizenship, self-control, honesty, patience, kindness, humility, integrity, perseverance, cooperation, and an appreciation of individual strengths and cultural backgrounds. These character qualities are taught proactively by our school staff as they fit naturally during classroom instruction, as well as on the playground and in the lunchroom. The staff of our school will teach, reinforce and support the character qualities through the content of the Core Knowledge Sequence. All adults in this school community are expected to model our twelve character qualities, and to hold children accountable for exhibiting these qualities.

The family bears the key responsibility for character instruction. Our school will not use programs, presentations, surveys, curricula, or other practices that undermine these character qualities, or which disregard the privacy of the family. Specific approaches or pull-out programs such as values clarification, situational ethics, peer mediation, group meditation techniques, DARE, Pumsy, SOAR, or Quest will not be used at this school. We will not use group approaches in which children are encouraged to share with others information which they or their parents feel is private. Instead, our students' emotional needs will be addressed through the support given by sensitive and caring teachers, staff members, and parent partners. Self-respect comes from confidence in abilities developed from students acquiring knowledge and skills rather than artificially structured situations or unmerited praise.

## **Parental Involvement**

The Traut Core Knowledge School is characterized as a School of Choice. This means that parents have options, and can select an educational philosophy for their children. Given a choice in public education, we believe parents will play a stronger role in our schools. When parents and teachers choose the kind of education they prefer, the energy, time, and resources they have to devote to their children's education can be directly engaged in tutoring, coaching, classroom instruction, home-based instruction and other necessary and invaluable assistance. This aligns the goals of parents and teachers, and results in successful partnership.

The family provides the most influential and effective context for basic life-long learning and teaching. While relying on the training and expertise of the professional staff, the fundamental significance of the parent-child relationship to the educational process must be maintained and fostered. Through cooperation between a governing council of a Teacher Advisory Board and a Parent Advisory Board of equal voice, all school policy decisions shall be made. All parents of the school shall have a voice in the decisions made that affect their own children which includes voting to select representatives and influencing decisions made by that elected body. In addition, parents will be invited to teach or assist with lesson plans or learning projects in all subjects depending on their interests and expertise. Parents will also be encouraged to spend time reading aloud to children at school, coaching them in skill development, and otherwise contributing time

and talents in a variety of ways at the school and on committees. We will encourage all adults – parents, relatives and community members – to take a special interest in the lives of our young people, to act as mentors and tutors and to instill in every child a love of learning. As partners in education, parents are expected to understand our school philosophy and are strongly encouraged to become informed about educational issues.

The development of skills requires time, thought and active engagement. We believe excessive television watching stifles cognitive development, undermines values and discourages creativity. Consequently we encourage students of this school to replace excessive TV watching (greater than 10 hours per week) with activities which foster cognitive development, creativity and skills. Children learn to understand the world when they are actively engaged in reading, writing, talking, listening, playing games, sharing hobbies and discussing special events.

Above all we recognize that parents are the child's first and most important teachers. At Traut Core Knowledge School, parents will be in full partnership with the staff in all aspects of the school ensuring the most effective education possible for their children. This partnership includes the responsibility to support the school staff and provide good examples of behavior and work habits for their children.

## **Student Responsibility**

All students are capable of learning to accept responsibility for their own education. We will encourage and help our students develop a desire for excellence and the discipline to achieve that excellence through the habits of thoroughness, diligence and perseverance.

The philosophy and practices of our school hold students accountable for their actions and learning. School policies regarding grading, discipline and instruction will promote self-discipline, hard work, cooperation and decision making in which students accept the natural consequences of their actions. Such policies and a clear understanding of academic expectations help a student choose a personal quest for intellectual and personal growth. Aligning personal goals with those of the school further reinforces students' responsibility for their education. Ultimately students are expected to accept the charge to reach their full potential.

Student achievement increases significantly when teachers regularly assign homework and students conscientiously do it. Homework assignments provide students an opportunity to reinforce the principles, knowledge and skills they have learned in the classroom. Homework also encourages responsibility, promotes good study habits, and allows students time to practice the concepts learned during class. When thoughtfully assigned, carefully completed and regularly checked by the assigning teacher, homework increases the retention of what the student has learned and improves the students' understanding of the principles involved. The use of homework allows a teacher to maximize classroom time for instruction and guided practice by assigning the independent practice for completion at home. It also provides parents with an opportunity to participate in their child's learning.

When teachers prepare written instructions and discuss the assignments with the students, homework is taken more seriously than when it is simply announced. Homework should be useful and treated as an important part of the instruction and counted as part of the student's grade.

## **Assessment and Accountability**

The determination of academic competence for the purpose of student grading and promotion to the next grade level will be based on the assessment of knowledge and skills, not on behaviors or attitudes.

A variety of ongoing assessments will be used to evaluate student academic performance and progress. The result of those assessments will be used to improve instructional quality, provide feedback on student performance and provide input for determining student and school goals.

## **Adoption, Amendment and Interpretation**

This covenant represents the framework of principles making up the policy that will guide this school. To amend this covenant requires a three-fourths affirmative vote of the Parent Advisory Board and a three-fourths affirmative vote of the Teacher Advisory Board, followed by a vote of the entire school community with one vote per parent and staff member. Its adoption shall require that two conditions be satisfied. First, there must be a majority affirmative vote by the entire school community. Second, of the votes cast, three-fourths must be affirmative. These conditions ensure that the change has support of a majority of the overall community and has overwhelming support by those that vote.

For example, if there are 500 eligible voters there must be 251 affirmative votes to meet the first condition. And, if 400 people actually vote, at least 301 must be affirmative to meet the second condition.