



Community Handbook



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1. History

Chugach Optional Elementary School opened its doors in September of 1973. A group of parents recognized the need for an alternative learning environment and they worked closely with teachers to launch the school as an open concept pilot program. The founders of Chugach Optional envisioned a strong school community that included students, teachers, and parents. The founding group spent much of that summer planning and setting up classrooms designed to accommodate multi-age grouping and flexible learning situations.

The early ideals that guided the establishment of Chugach Optional live on to this day and are reflected in the school's first handbook from 1976. For additional information about Chugach Optional through the years, please see *Chugach: A History of Our School*, which is available in the Chugach Optional library.

Any family that is interested in Chugach Optional is encouraged to participate in a school tour. The tour is critical in understanding the Chugach Optional philosophy and family expectations.

2. Chugach Optional Philosophy

The Chugach Optional philosophy is based on the following beliefs:

About the Child

- A child is naturally curious and wants to learn.
- A child who is treated with respect will learn to respect others.
- A child's natural enthusiasm for learning will thrive when learning is meaningful and relevant.

About How Children Learn Best

- Nurture the child and consider the child's physical, social, emotional, creative and intellectual needs.
- **Differentiate instruction** that is responsive to the interests, experiences, skills, knowledge and aptitudes of each child.
- Create concept-based and thematic content, which interrelates areas of knowledge such as science, math, reading, music, writing, physical education and art.
- Invite the child to develop responsibility for their own learning.
- Encourage the child to think independently and therefore grow in his or her ability to make responsible choices.
- Provide opportunities for self-evaluation and reflection along with thoughtful and substantive feedback from teachers and peers.

- Cultivate empathy and compassion by engaging with a healthy and supportive community and by working together in service to each other and to others outside the school community.

About the Optimal Educational Environment

- Include play! When a child's natural wonder is gently guided in a playful, safe and nurturing environment, every child's natural abilities will thrive.
- Foster honesty, trust, openness, respect, acceptance, responsibility and self-discipline while emphasizing cooperation.
- Encourage children to solve problems.
- Provide daily routines and organization to support and guide the child's choices, learning and participation.
- Offer assessment as a way to guide the child's growth in learning.
- Facilitate learning in the child. Develop a **child-centered** rather than adult-directed learning environment.
- Encourage active participation by the child's family, which will enhance the learning environment and foster a stronger learning community.
- Cultivate a home-like setting to provide a comfortable learning environment for both children and adults.

3. Family Participation at Chugach

Families are the thread that tie our educational community together. A family's participation in their child's school life plays a very important role in that student's development. A family's participation not only helps their own child, it fosters a rich and deep sense of community benefiting all students while providing an enriching experience for the parent and family members. Families who choose to place their children at Chugach Optional make a commitment to support the school by volunteering their time to keep the program strong. We expect families to participate a minimum of 36 hours per year, with an additional time commitment of 10 hours per year for each additional enrolled child in the family. We recognize that families have various schedules impacting how and when they help. There are many ways for family members to participate in the school both during and outside of school hours.

Our educational and philosophical goals regarding learning necessitate family support in and out of the classroom. Having extra adults in the classroom lowers the student/adult ratio and allows teachers to differentiate instruction. Furthermore, Chugach Optional teachers often weave a common theme through the curriculum. Successful instruction of **theme studies** requires substantial family support both at home and in the classroom. When families help out, they also provide teachers time to develop creative experiences and learning opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable.

In short, our learning environment is dependent on a strong community of involved families.

We encourage family members to seek out ways to get involved In Chugach Optional and to discover volunteer opportunities which match their skills, interests and schedule.

Participating at Chugach Optional

- **Working in the Classroom**—From kindergarten on, there are opportunities to work directly in the classroom with students. Some examples include providing a listening ear to budding readers, helping as a spelling coach, helping students practice math concepts, assisting in the computer lab, leading student book clubs, acting as the classroom photographer and coaching students in Writer’s Workshop. Other in-class ways to help include chaperoning field trips, planning class celebrations, helping with student publications and distributing mail. Some family members might help briefly in the classroom several times a week while other families might dedicate longer blocks of time but less frequently.
- **Helping Teachers in the Workroom**—Volunteering “behind the scenes” in the parent-teacher workroom provides vital support to teachers. Some tasks include sharpening pencils, cutting shapes, photocopying materials, helping decorate classrooms for **theme studies**, displaying student work on classroom and hallway walls and laminating art projects. Each completed task, small or large, supports the flow of daily learning activities.
- **Completing At-Home Tasks**—Some families find it easier to help out with tasks that can be completed at home. Some examples of this include gathering materials for classroom projects, correcting math activity books, preparing materials for classroom activities, helping with sewing projects, washing napkins, compiling Scholastic book orders, building carpentry projects and editing the school **Memory Book**.
- **Help with Schoolwide Events and Activities**—There are a number of ways to get involved in efforts that benefit the entire school. Some examples include the following:
 - Organize or participate in schoolwide events such as **Art Night**, **Spring Fling**, the Halloween Carnival, school dances and **Science Share**.
 - Help with fundraising efforts such as the *Fall School Auction* and the **Big Simple**.
 - Teach a *Mini-course*, coach a *Battle of the Books* team, coordinate the *Book Fair* or *Spirit Wear* sales, shelve library books, or tie ice-skates.
 - Get involved with activities that take place after school such as *Running Club*, *Garden Club* and *Lego League*.

- **Participate in Community Assembly**—Participation in the **Community Assembly** or the **Chugach Educational Corporation (CEC) Board of Directors** sends a strong message to our children about the importance of speaking up and being involved in collective decision making to improve our school.

4. Learning Practices at Chugach Optional

Chugach Optional uses a variety of practices to create an environment consistent with our learning goals and philosophy. The kindergarten, primary (first/second), middle (third/fourth) and upper (fifth/sixth) teachers work in respective teams to plan and prepare the learning experiences, which often includes planning integrated **theme studies**. This collaborative process can also include other teachers and staff, parents, family members and students. Team planning and staff development take place two Fridays a month on **Early Release Days**. We strive to practice the following:

Nurturing the Student’s Intrinsic Desire to Learn

Children are naturally curious and have an inherent desire to learn. One of our goals is to nurture this curiosity and interest in learning in each child. To do this, teachers and staff create a learning environment that is rich in experiences, warm and nurturing, an environment which allows students to explore their physical space. Teachers observe and guide students while also encouraging critical thinking, responsible risk taking and self reflection in each student.

Encouraging Students to Take an Active Part in Their Own Learning Process

Teachers create regular opportunities for students to make appropriate decisions and choices. While the students may not always have the freedom to decide what topic to study, students may, within a given topic, have a choice about specific questions to explore or how to express their learning. Students may also choose, to some extent, how, when, where, or with whom to learn.

The opportunity to make choices helps the student direct his or her own learning, teach decision-making and develop time-management skills. We call this becoming an **in-charge learner**. Students are expected to follow through on the choices they make while receiving support at school as well as at home. As they demonstrate the ability to handle increased responsibilities, students are given more choices. A student moves toward becoming an in-charge learner as he or she demonstrates the following characteristics:

- Takes on increased responsibility incrementally each year
- Takes personal responsibility for creating their own productive learning environment.

- Learns to identify good listening friends and becomes aware of the day's agenda and goals as written on the board
- Learns to work as a member of a team
- Finds creative and innovative solutions
- Communicates clearly in a variety of ways
- Thinks critically
- Evaluates his or her own work, values and available choices
- Cultivates appropriate risk-taking and re-framing failures or mistakes into positive opportunities to learn new things
- Makes decisions and feels empowered to make positive changes in his or her own life, the school community and the world

Creating a Collaborative and Multi-age Learning Environment

Students learn through their interaction with others, which helps prepare them for a future into adulthood. At Chugach Optional, children of different ages interact and work collaboratively. This cooperation and collaboration are emphasized over competition. When competition occurs, it is taught to be inclusive and with the purpose to challenge oneself. Teachers allow students to be active participants in decision-making and problem-solving within their *Family Groups*. This cooperative and democratic process gives each child ownership and a sense of belonging in the group, much like in a family. Therefore, classrooms at Chugach are known as **family groups**. Except in Kindergarten, family groups combine grade levels (grades 1-2, grades 3-4, grades 5-6). The older students are **elders**. Most elders have a year of experience in their family group, so they help set the tone of behavior and the expected academic standard for the younger students. Though **youngers** may have just entered the family group, the mentor/mentee relationship is mutual. This multi-age model allows teachers to teach and model leadership through respect—not just age. Multi-age classes provide a diverse spectrum of learners. An additional benefit of the multi-age classroom is the two years each student gets with the same teacher. Teachers, students and family members bond, creating a stronger group and more trusted learning partnerships. Also, the two-year curriculum cycle supports in-depth, multi-year, **inquiry-learning** projects.

Another opportunity for collaborative learning is through **learning partners**. Upper groups (grades 5-6) are paired with primary groups (grades 1-2) while middle groups (grades 3-4) are paired with kindergartners. Time is set aside within the school schedule for learning partners to work together, building rapport between students of various ages throughout the school while reinforcing a sense of community and caring.

The learning environment provides many additional opportunities for collaboration among students, families, teachers and staff:

- Students may work on an activity in small or large groups. Collaboration within groups allows students to pool talents and learn the benefits of cooperation.
- **Family groups** provide a safe place to idea share and problem solve and allow a democratic process for decision making and discussion.
- Student Council provides opportunities for student representatives from each family group to collaborate on community goals.
- Family members may collaborate with students by leading a small group, working with a child one-on-one, or sharing a unique talent or area of knowledge.
- Chugach teachers, staff and administration work to employ similar methods and philosophical goals. Teachers at each grade level work as a **teaching team** in partnership to implement shared plans and learning goals in the classroom, while the specialist teachers work with classroom teachers to support these plans and learning goals.

Using Integrated Thematic Instruction

At Chugach Optional we believe that knowledge and learning does not always fall neatly into separate subjects. Therefore, Chugach Optional teachers often integrate instructional curriculum within a common **theme study**. Thematic instruction connects many areas of study so the student's learning flows naturally between topics. The student's interest will grow as he or she discovers meaningful and exciting content.

One example of a **theme study** is a Middle Group study on the Middle Ages:

- **Social Studies**—learn history, geography and compile research on life during the time period for peasants, kings, merchants and craftsmen.
- **Mathematics**—explore the mathematical ideas of ratio and scale while designing and building a castle.
- **Science**—study technological advances such as the development of siege machines and learn about diseases of the period, such as the plague.
- **Language Arts**—write creative stories about life in Medieval times and read a variety of nonfiction and fiction books that inform about life during the period.
- **Art**—study and create historical dress, crafts and recreation and showcase these items at a student created Medieval Fair.

- **Music and Dance**—learn and perform traditional Medieval songs and folk dances.

Thematic units are implemented by every grade level **teaching team** based on topics of interest to many students of that age. While thematic unit topics may change through the years, the core idea of using thematic teaching as an approach for in-depth learning remains at Chugach Optional.

Practicing Inquiry Learning

Inquiry learning encourages students to ask questions and explore interests rather than a teacher telling the student facts. Learning through discovery encourages creativity and is more relevant and meaningful to students. We provide experiences requiring students to pose questions, analyze the questions, research the answer and arrive at their own well-considered solutions. Chugach teachers, staff and family members help instill inquiry learning in our students by guiding them to find their own answers through posing questions back to the student:

- Would you tell me a little more about...
- Let me see if I understand...
- So you are saying/suggesting...
- Tell me what you mean when you....
- To what extent...
- I'm curious to know more about...
- I'm intrigued by...
- It would help me understand if you gave me an example...

Providing Differentiated Learning Opportunities

Differentiated instruction is an approach to instruction that takes into account the needs of diverse learners. Differentiation allows teachers to look at students as individuals and honor their learning needs and potential. Since each student's learning and development proceeds at different rates, teachers give consideration to student readiness, individual interests and learning profiles when shaping instruction for the whole class. A Chugach classroom may have the following evidence of differentiation:

- Students will work with teachers to establish whole-class and individual learning goals.
- Students will help other students and the teacher to solve problems.
- Teachers will empower students to promote self-reliant learners.
- Teachers will regularly assess learning so that instruction responds to learner needs.

Creating Meaningful Learning Opportunities

Chugach teachers and staff want to create meaningful learning opportunities for students so that students become lifelong learners. Good learning habits are developed when students are given opportunities to discuss, share and appreciate each other's ideas about meaningful, real-world subjects. To that end, we provide opportunities such as field trips, classroom speakers and events such as **Outdoor School**. These rich experiences excite the students about the world outside the school. Community service is also an integral part of the Chugach Optional learning experience, providing an authentic learning opportunity. We aim to build learners that have empathy and care about others.

Educational Technology

The Chugach Optional community embraces the need for differentiating curriculum based on a student's skills, readiness and interests. We work to meet this challenge for all learners. While we believe in the importance of hands-on and real-life learning, educational technology may be used sparingly as a tool to help us meet the diverse needs of each student. The applications of educational technology vary from age group to age group and are based on appropriate developmental readiness. Generally speaking, younger students experience less exposure to technology. Our younger students need concrete, hands-n experiences. Technology is used with older students as a tool to create projects and conduct research through inquiry.

5. Assessment and Student Growth

At Chugach Optional, students are not given traditional report cards with grades. We believe students should be motivated by their work and interests, not by an external reward such as a grade. The benefit of this approach is that students focus on learning during assignments, rather than on how to get a certain grade. Without grades, students develop an ability to evaluate their own progress. They become aware of their own capabilities. They earn a greater stake in deciding when work is satisfactory. Students usually work to their potential and we see them doing well when they move on to an environment with grades, in middle school.

You may wonder then, "How will I know how my child is doing?" At Chugach Optional, we communicate student growth and progress, without grades, in various ways:

Portfolio Shares—An opportunity for students to share their learning by displaying a portfolio full of representative work that shows student growth and development. Portfolios give students opportunities for self-reflection, student ownership of their work and provide a basis for teacher/student/parent dialogue.

Projects—Student projects, such as building a castle, demonstrates the student's ability to research information, learn vocabulary, plan, create and execute a design and manage time.

Emails and Newsletters—Teachers will share learning goals and topics with parents through ongoing written communications with parents.

Face-to-Face Dialogue—Teachers are readily available to discuss student progress. This is done through ongoing informal and formal conversations between parents and teachers.

Additionally, if you choose to send your child to Chugach Optional, it is important to understand how the relationship between teachers, students and families supports assessment and student growth.

Teachers:

- Observe each child's strengths and needs
- Encourage students to engage in goal-setting and self-evaluation
- Encourage students to reflect on their learning
- Coach students to learn from their own experiences
- Utilize formal assessment tools when necessary to support unit instruction

Students:

- Communicate their knowledge back to teachers and in doing so discover possible adjustments for their work
- Share ideas within **family groups** and receive constructive feedback from peers
- Self-evaluate and reflect on their own progress
- Learn to evaluate their own progress by comparing past work to current work
- Communicate what they've learned at home daily with their families and in twice-a-year student-led portfolio shares

Families:

- Spend time in the classroom
- Observe learning in action
- Check-in with teachers at the beginning or end of the day
- Communicate via email with teachers and staff
- Engage with children daily about their individual learning experience
- Foster **in-charge** learning
- Encourage teamwork
- Encourage setting and meeting individual goals
- Celebrate their child's educational growth from a starting point, throughout the year

A family's commitment to the Chugach assessment process allows students to be confident with their educational experience. The education and assessment process at Chugach Optional may differ from assessment experiences found at other ASD schools. Although Chugach Optional honors the Anchorage School District requirements, Chugach Optional does not use formal assessment tools alone to define our students' whole intelligence and capabilities.

6. Specialist and Support Services at Chugach Optional

Specialists

Students enjoy classes taught by specialists throughout the week in the form of art, music, physical education/health and library. The specialists' curriculum honors our philosophy at Chugach Optional.

In **Physical Education** we incorporate lifelong fitness goals and skills into games, team challenges and individual activities. The Physical Education classes always emphasize cooperation and the students are encouraged to problem solve, whether that is through strategies, team initiatives, or other activities. We work a lot on social skills such as teamwork, getting along with others and how to be inclusive in everything we do.

In **Music** we explore many different areas such as music history, dancing, singing, instruments and music composition, often connecting our lessons with the student's classroom theme-studies. In addition, students enjoy numerous performance opportunities. Students often perform musicals with their **family groups** and students can join performance groups, which meet after school. Band and Orchestra are offered to all sixth grade students in addition to classroom music.

In **Art** the unique artistic potential of every child at Chugach is encouraged and rewarded allowing for individuality, sequential motivation, imaginative creation and self evaluation. The art teacher collaborates with the classroom teacher ensuring integration of classroom **theme studies** as well as providing the regular ASD Arts Curriculum. The love of the arts in our community is fostered by constant support and respect of ideas.

The **Library** is the heart of our school and an extension of the classroom. As well as scheduled librarian-led classes, students are welcome to read and work independently in the library throughout the day. Our **in-charge** learners engage in activities such as classwork, research, book clubs, or just enjoy a good book.

In keeping with Chugach Optional's integrated thematic approach, specialists often collaborate with classroom teachers to incorporate grade-level themes into their content. For example, when grades 3-4 work on Alaska Studies, the physical education teacher may teach Alaska Native games, the art teacher may

teach Alaska Native mask making, the music teacher may teach Alaska Native drumming, while the librarian supports researching information about Alaska Natives.

Support Services

Chugach Optional provides support services that are normally available at schools in the Anchorage School District, including services for gifted education, speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy, bilingual, visual and auditory disabilities and special education resources. Special education services are available to all students attending alternative, optional and charter schools of the district; however, not all resources and services available in neighborhood schools are necessarily available within each alternative or charter school. For more information on lottery schools and special services, please refer to the Anchorage School District (ASD) website.

Since Chugach Optional is an alternative school and students are admitted by lottery only, ASD does not provide busing service. Families that attend Chugach come from all over the ASD, mostly driving their children each way, or participating in self-organized car pools.

Extra Curricular Activities

Parents and teachers provide activities after school throughout the school year. The activities often rely on parent involvement, even if a teacher orchestrates the activity. The activities are often parent-driven, guided by their interests and expertise. Parents can look for and post announcements of upcoming activities in **The Scoop** (our school newsletter), or on flyers posted throughout the school.

7. Expectations for Community Interactions

We have two important concepts that guide our community

Respect—students, staff and families have a mutual respect for each other's ideas, work, feelings, bodies and property.

Cooperation—students, staff and families cooperate with and help each other as much as possible.

Respect

Respect comes in many forms. At Chugach Optional, students and adults work together, listening to each other and demonstrating that they value what is said. Learning together involves both students and adults demonstrating honesty, trust, acceptance, responsibility and self-discipline.

One way we show respect at Chugach Optional is having staff, students and families address each other with first-names. Besides creating a friendly atmosphere, this practice has a deeper purpose: we believe that a child learns

respect from adults who treat him or her with respect. When students are respected, they tend to value themselves and their abilities and therefore are more inclined to take on responsibility for their own learning and behavior. In treating both students and adults with a similar respect, we express our expectation to them that they will behave as responsible, autonomous and purposeful members of our community. Additionally, we don't believe that an adult gains a child's respect by utilizing a formal title; rather, a child learns to respect an adult for the attitudes, capabilities and knowledge that adult demonstrates.

Cooperation

Cooperation is a hallmark of learning and life at Chugach Optional. Like respect, cooperation is exhibited in many ways at our school. A tangible expression of the spirit of cooperation is the open physical design of the school, a design which fosters a sense of interdependence and connectedness and thus encourages a sense of social responsibility.

When Conflicts Arise

At Chugach Optional we emphasize helping students take responsibility for their behavior. Teachers and staff facilitate and support students to solve problems individually or in groups whenever possible. While this may challenge the student, we believe it is ultimately more beneficial for the student to realize he or she is capable of working out his or her own solutions to problems rather than always depending on a teacher or another adult.

Family groups may come together to problem solve classroom or schoolwide issues. When problems arise that involve the entire school, we prefer to solve the problems cooperatively, as a community. Venues for cooperative problem solving include **Community Assembly** meetings, Parent Coordinator meetings, the Chugach Education Corporation Board meetings and through student input. The principal is also a resource and should be involved to help guide the process.

Building and Supporting Emotional Intelligence

At Chugach Optional we work toward building the fundamentals of emotional intelligence—the capacity to be aware of, control and express one's emotions and to handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically. Along with concepts, knowledge and skills, teaching emotional intelligence is part of educating the whole child. This also leads students to persist in the face of setbacks, learn from criticism and find inspiration in the success of others.

Students at Chugach Optional practice life-related skills that promote strategic reasoning, insightfulness, perseverance, creativity, problem-solving and craftsmanship. These skills are necessary to effectively operate in society. In the

context of social behavior, this includes managing impulsivity (thinking before acting) and listening with understanding and empathy.

At Chugach Optional we teach students to practice the 4 B's:

Be Respectful

Be Kind

Be Safe

Be Productive

8. Governance

The Community Assembly

Chugach Optional's version of a "PTA" is called **The Community Assembly**. The group is a gathering of families, teachers, staff and students. Everyone in our community is invited to the monthly meetings. At the meetings we discuss typical school topics such as school activities, fundraising and community needs. In addition to these topics, the Community Assembly is one of our best venues for the ongoing and important work of cultivating the school philosophy. It is a place to listen to others and have your own ideas heard. At its best, the meeting is a democratic and collaborative experience. Joining the Community Assembly discussions helps keep Chugach Optional the very special school that it is.

The Chugach Educational Corporation

Each year the Community Assembly elects individuals to serve on the board for the **Chugach Educational Corporation (CEC)**. The **CEC** is a 501c3 nonprofit corporation, a status which allows for fundraising. The elected board works closely with the school principal and the Community Assembly to oversee the money we raise throughout the year as well as addressing any other important school topics. The CEC upholds the approved bylaws and follows best practices for a nonprofit corporation.

9. Glossary of Terms

Art Night

Art Night is a schoolwide event in support of the Mauni Primary School in Malawi. Chugach Optional students, families, school groups, classrooms and community members donate pieces of art. The donated artwork is sold on Art Night at a fixed price or by silent auction. Past art pieces have included paintings, jewelry, wall art, pottery, quilts, knitted garments, stained glass, garden art and furniture. Some of the artwork is created by established artists; other artwork is created by amateurs, students or determined rookies. Additionally, craft tables at the event allow kids to try their hand at a new skill. All funds raised go directly to the Mauni Primary School in Malawi, Africa.

Big Simple

The Big Simple is a **once-a-year fundraiser** for Chugach Optional. Contributions from families are divided equally among Chugach teachers/classrooms to pay

for field trips, performances, special projects and classroom subscriptions such as Scholastic News. The Big Simple is solely used to pay for classroom needs. By contributing once, at the beginning of the year, families are spared having to 'pony up' for each activity during the year and teachers and staff are able to budget for their highest needs. Chugach Optional does have other fundraising events that pay for schoolwide needs.

Child-centered

Child-centered learning is based on the child in a developmentally appropriate setting. Teachers aim to develop learner autonomy and independence while considering the child's voice and perceived abilities at a given time in their education. The role of the teacher is to facilitate discovery and utilize less adult directed instruction than in a traditional education setting.

Chugach Educational Corporation (CEC) and Board of Directors

The CEC is a non-profit organization that manages the Assembly finances with community input. The Community Assembly votes for new CEC board members each spring. The CEC Board of Directors works closely with the school principal on schoolwide issues. The Board of Directors upholds the approved bylaws and follows best practices for a nonprofit corporation.

Community Assembly

The Community Assembly is Chugach Optional's version of a Parent Teacher Association (PTA). The Community Assembly is comprised of family members, staff, teachers and students.

Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction is a systematic approach to planning curriculum and instruction for academically diverse learners in a way that honors individual student learning needs while maximizing each student's learning capacity.

Early Release Days

Early release days occur on fourteen Fridays of the school year. School is dismissed at 11:15 a.m. on these days. In the afternoons teachers work on team collaboration, schoolwide coordination and staff development. Our regular school days are lengthened to accommodate this extra time for staff.

Elders

Elders are the older students in a multi-age classroom (i.e. the second, fourth and sixth graders).

Family Group

Family Group is Chugach Optional's name for a multi-age classroom. Each family group is known by its teacher's name.

Kindy–Chugach Optional’s term for kindergartner

Primary—the combination of the three multi-age classes consisting of first and second graders

Middle—the combination of the three multi-age classes consisting of third and fourth graders

Upper—the combination of the three multi-age classes consisting of fifth and sixth graders

In-Charge Learners

The in-charge learner is a student showing responsibility in the educational environment. An in-charge learner shows initiative, completes tasks in a timely manner, asks questions when he or she needs help and contributes to the community of learners.

Inquiry Learning

Inquiry learning engages learners by using open-ended questions, research, dialogue and problem solving. Teachers pose questions back to the student. Rather than simply presenting established facts or portraying a smooth path to knowledge, teachers facilitate a process to develop students’ thinking skills.

Learning Partners

Learning partners connect students of various ages. Throughout the year, fifth and sixth graders pair with first and second graders while third and fourth graders pair with Kindergartners. Learning partners play games, read to each other and share Chugach experiences to establish a sense of community.

Memory Book

The Memory Book is Chugach Optional’s yearbook.

Outdoor School

Outdoor School is a learning opportunity for Upper Group students to learn through being outdoors. Currently, this includes a two-year rotation of learning. In one year, students learn outdoor winter survival skills over the course of several days outdoors without the overnight experience. In the alternating year, students learn art, science and outdoor skills during a two night overnight camp.

Science Share

Science Share is a schoolwide event in which students design an experiment at home, replicate it and present their findings (usually on a poster) to share during Science Share week. There is also an evening event during Science Share week where the student presents their project to a “Science Share Mentor.”

Scoop

The Scoop is Chugach Optional's monthly newsletter. The Scoop includes current news about what's happening at our school, an updated event calendar and a note from our Principal. Additionally, the Scoop may include the Community Assembly Agenda, articles by students, parents or staff and information regarding after-school activities. The Scoop is mainly available electronically, but hard copies may be obtained. Copies are stored on the school's website.

Spring Fling

Spring Fling is Chugach Optional's annual talent show featuring acts by students, staff and families.

Theme Studies

A theme study is an integrated unit of study that incorporates a concept or big idea about a topic. Most often teachers select a science or social studies-based concept with achievable objectives or learning goals. An integrated curriculum includes any combination of writing, reading, math, science, social studies, music, art, physical movement and collaboration.

Teaching Team

A teaching team refers to the collaboration among teachers who teach the same multi-age grade levels.

Younger

Youngers are the younger students in the multi-age classroom (i.e. first, third and fifth graders).

10. Suggested Reading

If you are interested in reading more about the thinkers who have shaped our school philosophy, we recommend the following authors:

Mortimer J. Adler	Michael Gurian	Justine O'Keefe
Anne Bingham	Bena Kallick	Jill Ostrow
Sylvia C. Chard	Lilian G. Katz	Charles Rathborne
Arthur Costa	Alfie Kohn	Kathy Stevens
Paula Denton	Molly McClaskey	Carol Ann Tomlinson
Peggy Dorta	Jay McTighe	Grant Wiggins
Carol Dweck	Deborah Meier	Chip Wood



Anchorage School District
Educating All Students for Success in Life