



# Exemplary Instructional Practices

**Wachusett Regional School District**

**Spring 2003**

## **FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT**

**The Wachusett Regional School District shall:**

- **promote stimulating optional programs and activities that will promote superior achievement**
- **promote a child-centered approach that regards the success of each student as the primary focus of all activities**
- **provide an academic culture that ensures that all students can achieve to their highest potential**
- **provide an environment that validates students' needs to feel valued, safe and secure as a prerequisite to learning.**
- **foster critical and independent thinking throughout the District.**

*Excerpts from Wachusett Regional School Committee Goals adopted May 11,1996*

**The Wachusett Regional School Committee, through the adoption of its May 11, 1996 goals, is committed to providing a safe environment within which students shall be given quality educational opportunities.**

**This booklet of Exemplary Instructional Practices was developed by the Wachusett Regional School District administrative team to provide clarity, continuity and to answer questions related to areas of critical thinking, learning-styles, school culture, learner-centered classrooms, social responsibility and safe schools. This document is not intended to be inclusive but is rather a synthesis of information intended to provide descriptors of a quality educational service center. The document will be continuously updated and has been placed on the District's administrative Internet page in order to maintain current and updated information.**

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# Table of Contents

<b>I.</b>	<b>Critical Thinking</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>II.</b>	<b>Learners' Needs</b>	<b>7</b>
	<b>II-A. Inclusion</b>	<b>7</b>
	<b>II-B. Learning Styles</b>	<b>9</b>
	<b>II-C. Assessment</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>III.</b>	<b>School Culture</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>IV.</b>	<b>Students' Interests</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>V.</b>	<b>Learner-Centered Classroom</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>VI.</b>	<b>Social Responsibility</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>VII.</b>	<b>Safe Schools</b>	<b>24</b>

# **I.**

## **Critical Thinking**

- produces educated people
- promotes recognition of individual learning styles
- facilitates analysis of how one learns
- is synonymous with an educated person
- provides self confidence to utilize skills/solve problems
- is a process that applies to any context
- facilitates the transfer of skills/applications
- promotes interdependence (group skills/process to think about the needs of the larger community)
- provides the ability to deal with real-world problems, leading to theories, leading to solutions
- stimulates meaningful learning, absent of rote memorization

**What does a classroom look like that utilizes critical thinking/  
problem solving as an integral part of the curriculum?**

**Organizational Factors**

- Time is adequate and flexible.
- The instructional design is relevant to the learning goals.
- Students are encouraged to identify problems and questions for which they want answers.
- New and old learning is linked.
- The teacher role shifts from imparting knowledge to becoming a learner.
- Real-world/student-relevant themes are integral to activity.

**Physical Environment/Resources**

- The classroom is a large bright work area, adaptable to student mobility and multiple grouping patterns.
- Tools and materials are readily accessible.
- Technology/software is available for multiple informational access.

**Product/Outcomes**

- Students are able to illustrate what was learned.
- Student products illustrate synthesis and complexity of the process utilized.
- Students can apply learning.
- Students are encouraged to share what they have discovered, even if it is not a finished product.
- Activities result in solutions to problems as well as more student – generated questions.
- Students use technology as a supportive tool.

### **Teacher Style**

- The teacher promotes self-directed learning by offering activities adaptable to individual learning styles.
- The teacher is a coach, less active than students.
- The teacher poses questions rather than provides answers.
- The teacher encourages risk-taking, broad parameters, debate.
- There is no "one right answer".
- The teacher supports student decision making.

### **Student Behavior**

- Students relate and cooperate with each other and the teacher.
- Students interact across grade and age levels.
- Students illustrate respect for each other/ideas.
- Students assume various roles in groups.
- Students are involved in student-centered learning.
- Students take risks.
- Students solve real world problems.
- Students invent/create solutions and/or questions.
- Students explain and defend their ideas.
- Students reflect on how/why they learned.

## **II. Learners' Needs**

### **II-A. Inclusion**

- All children are welcomed and challenged.
- There are high standards for all children.
- There are equal opportunities for learning.
- Regular ed./specialist teams take responsibility for and co-teach all the students.
- The focus is on ability and teaching to strengths.
- Support for special needs/disabilities is "invisible".
- Everyone takes responsibility for a child's success, e.g., child, parent, teacher, administration, community.



## **What does an inclusive classroom look like?**

### **Organizational Factors**

- All kids are important
- Student-centered philosophy
- A learning profile and academic plan for every child
- Depth and breadth of curriculum
- Variety of opportunities for students to learn
- Structured flexibility
- Expectations and consequences visible
- Published itinerary
- Group work - respectful interaction
- Respect, openness, open communication
- Clear and fair routines

### **Physical Environment/Resources**

- Safe environment - safe to succeed
- Flexibility of room design and furniture
- Learning centers
- Variety of materials and equipment to facilitate communication and learning
- Multiple use of resources (personnel, equipment, space, materials)

### **Product/Outcomes**

- Clear and high expectations for all students
- High quality work from all students
- Variety of products, projects, performances
- Multiple types of assessments for equivalent learning

### **Teacher Style**

- Teacher has a personal connection with children.
- Teacher is a facilitator and coach.
- Teacher is moving throughout the classroom.
- Teacher is interested in students.
- Teacher enjoys job, likes kids, works hard, attends extra curricular activities, is prepared, fair, consistent.
- Teacher adjusts teaching methods according to a child's needs.
- Teacher has self-confidence, self assurance.
- Teacher takes responsibility for safe classroom.

### **Student Behavior**

- Constructive active learning
- Every child engaged
- Student-initiated learning
- Peer teaching
- Children understand and accept disabilities

## **II-B. Learning Styles**

Everyone has a preferred learning style. When new learning is presented in a way that conforms with an individual's learning style, the learning is easier; when it is presented in a way that does not meet the individual learning needs of an individual, the learning is more difficult.

There are a variety of characteristics or conditions that define an individual's best learning style:

- Sensory characteristics, such as auditory, visual, kinesthetic, tactile or a combination of two or more
- Cognitive approaches, such as abstract/concrete, sequential/random
- Action orientation, such as receiver/presenter, leader/follower
- Processing orientation, such as thinking/doing; acting/reflecting
- The variety of multiple intelligences

### **What impacts on an individual's learning?**

- Environment: sound, light, temperature, position, time, mobility
- Design: motivation, persistence, responsibility
- Structure: self, pairs, peers, teams, adult, varied
- Hemisphere: left brain or right brain activities
- Perception: global, analytical
- Processing: impulsive, reflective
- Goal: process, product

## **What does a classroom look like that responds to the learning styles of students?**

### **Organizational Factors**

- High standards with clear expectations
- Student-centered philosophy
- All children welcomed and challenged
- Equal opportunities for learning
- Success is the focus of teaching, testing, learning
- Variety of learning opportunities
- Respect, openness, open communication
- Everyone takes responsibility for learning
- Itinerary for learning
- Structured flexibility
- Constant feedback from teacher, students, parents, administrators

### **Physical Environment/Resources**

- Student-centered classroom where each student has a learning profile/plan
- Safe environment that promotes student respect
- Students feel safe, respected
- Variety of activities that meet the learning styles of students
- Use of rubrics
- Time for planning and assessing together

### **Product/Outcomes**

- Variety of activities that meet learning standards of students
- Students demonstrate their knowledge
- Multiple types of instruction and assessment
- Hands on demonstrations of what has been learned
- Students working on projects to learn and present their projects to peers

## **Teacher Style**

- Teachers strive for excellence
- Success of the child is the focus of teaching, testing, learning
- Constant observation, monitoring and feedback
- Connection with children, observation, monitoring, nurturing
- Teacher is self-confident and self-assured
- Teacher willing to risk modifying the instruction and assessment to conform with a child's learning styles
- Teachers stretch children in areas where they do not naturally do well
- Teachers communicate that children learn in a variety of ways
- Teachers are collegial and share reflective practice

## **Student Behavior**

- Students experience discovery
- All students are engaged in learning
- Students know their own learning styles
- Multiple roles for students and teachers
- Groups process and produce
- Students stretch into new domains
- Students perform to demonstrate knowledge after doing a project

## **II-C. Assessment**

**What does assessment look like that responds to the learning needs of all students ?**

- Constant feed back
- Project oriented
- Group / exhibits / exhibitions
- Rubrics
- Portfolios
- Multiple opportunities/choices
- Checklists: growth on a continuum - recording - anecdotal records
- Feedback - comments
- Parent feedback: teacher/parent communications, home visits, support of parents
- Team meetings - involve children
- Constant monitoring
- Time for planning and assessing together
- Common space to interact
- A physical structure and schedule that facilitates communication
- Involvement of all staff in the assessment. e.g., nurse, administrator, psychologist, teacher, specialists, etc.

### **III. School Culture**

#### **What attitudes and behaviors communicate confidence in the potential for success of all children?**

- Every child brings talents to the classroom
- The child is not the problem
- All kids can learn
- All kids can be successful in my classroom
- Failure is OK. It is just feedback on the learning process.
- Openness to self-reflection, change, and self-criticism
- Ability to look at own behavior relative to how it affects kids
- Ability to realize the extent of teacher influence on students
- Students are regarded as contributing members of community
- Students can produce high quality
- Expectations for students are clear and reasonable, but also challenging
- Building from student strengths, not weaknesses
- High level of enthusiasm

**What does a classroom look like that demonstrates an academic culture which provides for the highest level of student engagement?**

**Organizational Factors**

- Clear reasonable, challenging expectations for students
- Less adult direction, more hands-on
- Cooperative learning
- Elimination of obstacles to learning
- Individual opportunity for each student to learn

**Physical Environment/Resources**

- A safe environment where children feel safe to take intellectual risks
- Variety of management techniques
- Strategies to manage conflicts in dealing with students that limit the intensity of conflict

**Product/Outcomes**

- Students can provide high quality work relative to individual abilities
- Multiplicity of assessment approaches

**Teacher Style**

- Teachers provide high quality experiences for students
- Teachers promote students as contributing members of community
- Teachers develop opportunities for students to reflect on learning
- Creative lessons
- Positive communication to parents and students

**Student Behavior**

- Independent student learning opportunities



## **IV. Students Interests**

**What does a classroom look like that addresses student interests?**

### **Organizational Factors**

- Use of examples and models of excellent products to set high expectations and standards for all students
- Flexible grouping and instructional techniques to address a variety of learning styles, interests and intelligences
- Acknowledgment of learning beyond school day

### **Physical Environment/Resources**

- Resource-rich environment including school and
- Community-based mentors
- Opportunities to work inside and outside of the four walls of the classroom/school on in-depth studies in areas of individual compelling interest

### **Product/Outcomes**

- Students work with challenging real world issues, solving real life problems and carrying our real-world tasks
- Dynamic activities - multicultural, interdisciplinary, multi-age
- Multiple types of assessment: authentic (portfolio and performance) traditional; self, peer and teacher evaluation
- Opportunities to demonstrate and celebrate success
- Opportunities to explore areas of compelling interests as well as to stretch into new areas

### **Teacher Style**

- Teacher is facilitator, mentor, coach, and learner
- Monitoring of student interest throughout the process

### **Student Behavior**

- Student ownership in every phase of the process
- Every student develops expertise in an area of interest

### **What are the characteristics of programs that motivate learner's interests or define areas of compelling interests?**

- Dynamic activities - multicultural, interdisciplinary, integrated, thematic, speakers, trips, presentations
- Interest development centers where student work is on display
- Teacher is facilitator, guide, mentor, coach, learner
- Variety of resources to address learning styles and multiple intelligences (use of multi-media and multi-sensory learning)
- Students working in a variety of groups (independently, in pairs, in small groups and whole class)
- Students working with real world issues and solving real life problems, carry out real world tasks
- Students brainstorming, debating, synthesizing, information bridging (developing real products)
- Use of surveys, interest inventories to guide learning activity options, a planning tool for learning.
- Multiage groupings
- Enrichment clusters based on student interest in school day and after school

- Portion of time allotted purely to pursue interests
- Concept of expertise development for each student
- Self/peer assessment, authentic, performance and portfolio-based assessment
- Inventory assessments - interviews, surveys, questionnaires
- Opportunities for in-depth studies in areas of compelling interest
- Development of higher level thinking and feeling processes, e.g., critical thinking, problem solving, inquiry training, divergent thinking, creative and productive thinking, research skills

**What are the characteristics of programs that provide Independent Learning Opportunities?**

- Student ownership in every phase
- Way/place to demonstrate expertise and celebrate success
- Resource-rich environment
- Opportunity to work on project inside/outside four walls
- Mentors. . .school and community based
- Management plan - learning contract
- Teacher as facilitator
- Examples/models of excellent products
- Rubrics – self-assessment

## **V. Learner-Centered Classroom**

A learner-centered classroom is one where the students determine the way they will pursue learning. The teacher provides curriculum guidance, but the students are offered a multitude of options for learning and assessment.

In addition, students are encouraged to pursue answers to questions and solutions to problems that naturally arise from the content and are of particular interest to them individually.

### **What is active learning?**

Active learning can be defined as a high level of student engagement in the activities of the classroom. Hands-on learning in itself is not necessarily active learning; it becomes active learning when the content, subject matter, presentation, or activity is so interesting to students that their active desire to learn is recognizable to even the most casual observer.

### **What is experiential/applied learning?**

Experiential/applied learning is the application of conceptual ideas and textbook learning to real life/real world problems. Project-based learning by itself is not experiential/applied learning; but a project that involves exploring an authentic real world issue or that uses real life data to draw conclusions offers the opportunity for students to see that there is a reason for learning and actual use for it in daily life.

**What does a classroom look like that is learner-centered and reflects active, experiential, and applied learning?**

**Organizational Factors**

- Content areas are integrated with one another, with technology
- Student-generated inquiry, real-world problems/issues
- Collaboration, improvisation, experimentation, risk-taking, choice
- Activities that engage students individually or in groups as facilitators and learners
- Curriculum compacting

**Physical Environment/Resources**

- Flexible room arrangement, e.g., furniture, tables, etc.
- Flexibility in grouping patterns and scheduling
- Varied learning materials and resources, including technology, that provide multiple, hands-on activities to meet divergent needs of all learners and extend beyond the classroom
- Community partners - sponsors, town, colleges, businesses, etc.
- Productive "noise"

**Product/Outcomes**

- Real world problems/issues
- Technology connections
- Varied resources, extensive library of materials
- Hands-on activities, projects, performances

## **Teacher Style**

- Teacher actively engaged with students
- Teacher modeling learning rather than directing
- Teacher as learner, coach, guide, risk-taker
- Teacher providing options for student selection
- Teacher provides opportunities for application of knowledge to real life
- Teacher promotes an understanding and appreciation of the importance of active learning in enhancing student achievement to parents and the community
- Teacher promotes the development of community – business partnerships
- Teacher as a positive model showing respect for others and enthusiasm for learning, flexible, adaptive and constantly learning

## **Student Behavior**

- Students act as teachers
- Students engage with each other and with tasks
- Students pursue answers to questions/problems of individual interest
- Students choose among options for learning
- Students choose options for products, projects, performances
- Students choose methods of assessment
- Student generate inquiry, individually or in groups
- Students self-assess, reflect on their own learning

## **VI. Social Responsibility**

- Any educational activity, program or curriculum that seeks to promote student learning through experiences of volunteerism or community service.
- Shared ethical values that transcend every barrier of sect, race, and culture. Some version of five core values emerges: Honesty, Fairness, Compassion, Respect, Responsibility.
- Good character consists of understanding, caring about, and acting on core ethical values.
- A strong, mutually supportive relationship between character education and academic learning.

### **What does a school/classroom look like that exemplifies social responsibility?**

- Educational leadership sets the tone by expressing expectations
- Clear goals and purposes for program
- Proactive effort to develop good character in kids
- A set of identifiable core values with links to the curriculum
- Observable cooperative activities
- Meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects and supports all learners
- Schools recognize that their purpose is to prepare students to live in a democracy
- Community alliances with higher ed., business/industry, community agencies
- Awareness of career options and avocations

- Established volunteer program with opportunities for community participation
- Opportunities for support of families to maximize learning
- Opportunities in the curriculum to offer all students authentic learning experiences in the community
- Opportunities in school/community for all to participate in collaborative decision-making
- Collaboratively developed code of conduct that exemplifies fairness, respect, and responsibility
- Meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects and supports all learners
- A culture that promotes caring and tolerance and respects diversity
- Time for reflection to discuss school culture

### **What is an appreciation of diversity?**

*Appreciation* goes beyond gaining understanding and awareness. To appreciate diversity is to recognize its value, importance, and magnitude, hold it in high esteem and regularly express gratitude for it. In order to "promote tolerance and equal opportunity for all students," diversity should be addressed throughout the curriculum on a K-12 basis.

Differences may include, but are not limited to:

gender, religion, sexual orientation, appearance, national origin, race, age, socio-economic status, intelligences, learning styles, handicap, emotional stability, interests, unique behavior.



## Safe Schools

*School* is defined as the **total student experience**. A safe school is one in which a student or adult (teacher, aide, administrator, secretary, custodian, etc.) is free of actual or fear of physical, psychological, or emotional harm that impedes learning.

- The **Physical Plant** is clean and in good repair. There isn't any graffiti or other signs of vandalism. The facility meets building codes, and the environment is free of hazardous materials.
- **Security measures** begin with the leadership, which rates personal safety as a high priority. Visitors are monitored. There is zero tolerance for violence. Personal and school property are secure.
- A **caring and accepting environment** begins with students who are not afraid to ask questions. People know and help each other with courtesy and respect. Individuals are valued; therefore, there is a strong sense of self-worth. Harassment, bullying, and profanity are not permitted. Privacy is respected.
- There are **no illegal** activities. Drugs, alcohol, weapons, and tobacco are not tolerated.
- There are a multitude of **support systems**, exemplified by an adult presence throughout the school. Trained medical people work collaboratively with community members and agencies to provide additional support. Crisis programs and protocols are in place. There is a high level of student and adult cooperation.
- A clearly defined discipline program provides a **framework for safety and order**. As a result, good, effective, appropriate, and consistent discipline is administered fairly. There are well-defined policies and procedures in place. All rules are obeyed and consistently enforced. All places in the facility are orderly.