

Excerpts from  
**The Basic School**  
A Community for Learning  
by Ernest L. Boyer

**There are four priorities, or building blocks:**

**THE SCHOOL AS COMMUNITY**

- ***A Shared Vision.*** The Basic School has, as the first requirement, a clear and vital mission. The school is a place where everyone comes together to promote learning. Every classroom is, itself, a community. But in the Basic School, the separate classrooms are connected by a sense of *purpose*, a climate that is *communicative, just, disciplined, and caring*, with occasions for *celebrations*.
- ***Teachers as Leaders.*** In the Basic School, teachers are empowered. Working together as teams, they serve as mentors to their students and have the time and resources needed to be professionally renewed. The principal in the Basic School is *lead* teacher, the one who guides the institution more by inspiration than directive.
- ***Parents as Partners.*** In the Basic School, the circle of community extends outward to embrace parents, who are viewed as the child's first and most important teachers. A vital partnership is created between the home and school, one that begins during the preschool years, is strengthened when the child formally enrolls, and continues from kindergarten through grade five.

**A CURRICULUM WITH COHERENCE**

- ***The Centrality of Language.*** In the Basic School, literacy is the first and most essential goal. All children are expected to become proficient in the written and spoken word. But language in this school is defined broadly to include words, numbers, and the arts, the essential tools of learning which, taken together, help create a curriculum with coherence.
- ***The Core Commonalities.*** In the Basic School, all students become well informed. They study the various fields of knowledge, which are organized, thematically, within a framework called "the Core Commonalities." These eight commonalities, based on shared human experiences, integrate the traditional subjects, helping students see connections across the disciplines and relate what they learn to life.
- ***Measuring Results.*** The Basic School is accountable to parents, to students, and to the community at large. Academic standards are established both in language and the Core Commonalities, with benchmarks to monitor student achievement. The personal and social qualities of students also are observed and evaluated informally by teachers. Assessment in the Basic School is, always, in the service of learning.

## A CLIMATE FOR LEARNING

- ***Patterns to Fit Purpose.*** In the Basic School, every student is encouraged to become a disciplined, creative, well-motivated learner. Class size is kept small, the teaching schedule is flexible, and student grouping arrangements are varied to promote learning. Connections are made across the generations, to strengthen community and enrich the lives of students.
- ***Resources to Enrich.*** The Basic School makes available to all students rich resources for learning, from building blocks to books. Libraries, zoos museums, and parks in the surrounding community become resources, too. Students are given access to the new electronic tools that connect each classroom to vast networks of knowledge.
- ***Services for Children.*** The Basic School is committed to serving the whole child, acknowledging that a student's physical, social, and emotional well-being also relates to learning. Beyond a solid academic program, the school provides basic health and counseling services for students, referrals for families, and a new calendar and clock, with after-school and summer enrichment programs for learning and creative play.

## A COMMITMENT TO CHARACTER

- ***The Core Virtues.*** The Basic School is concerned with the ethical and moral dimensions of a child's life. The goal is to assure that all students, on leaving school, will have developed a keen sense of personal and civic responsibility. Seven core virtues, such as respect, compassion, and perseverance, are emphasized to guide the Basic School as it promotes excellence in living, as well as learning.
- ***Living with Purpose.*** The core virtues of the Basic School are taught both by word and deed. Through the curriculum, through school climate, and through service, students are encouraged to apply the lessons of the classroom to the world around them.

### In a nutshell...

**Community** – focuses on how people relate to one another.

**Curriculum Coherence** – considers what all students should learn.

**Climate** – deals with effective teaching and learning.

**Character** – considers how the school experience shapes the ethical and moral lives of students.

# The Core Commonalities:

## THE LIFE CYCLE

All Basic School students understand that human life has a beginning, a time of growth, and an ending. They acquire a basic knowledge of the body's needs and its functions, and adopt personal habits that promote wellness. They develop an appreciation for the sacredness of life, and understand how life experiences differ from one culture to another.

## THE USE OF SYMBOLS

All Basic School students understand that people communicate with each other through symbol systems. They explore the history of language, consider the purposes of communication, learn about new technology, and discover how mass communication can enhance or diminish human understanding. And they discover that integrity is the key to authentic human interaction.

## MEMBERSHIP IN GROUPS

All Basic School students understand that everyone holds membership in a variety of groups, beginning with the family. They consider how organizations shape our lives, how we, in turn, can shape institutions, and they develop, in the end, a sense of civic and social responsibility.

## A SENSE OF TIME AND SPACE

All Basic School students learn that people everywhere have the miraculous capacity to place themselves in time and space. Students explore our shared sense of time through history and through intergenerational connections. They learn about our nation's history and study the traditional of other cultures. And they gain perspective, as well, about where they are located, spatially, on the planet and in the universe.

## RESPONSE TO THE AESTHETIC

All Basic School students understand that people respond to beauty and can be expressive in the arts. They explore the rich variety of artistic expression, learning about the various works of art, recognizing the benefits of making art, and knowing some of the ways in which visual and performing arts have evolved in different cultures.

## CONNECTIONS TO NATURE

All Basic School students recognize that everyone is connected to the natural world. They learn about the scientific method and, in the process, increase their understanding of the world around them. Above all, students discover the beauty and wonder of nature and develop a profound respect for it.

## PRODUCING AND CONSUMING

All students learn that people, as a part of being human, engage in making and using things. They recognize the value and dignity of work, distinguish wants from needs, and understand the importance of becoming creative producers, informed consumers, and responsible conservers.

## LIVING WITH PURPOSE

All Basic School students learn that all people seek meaning and purpose for their lives. They understand the importance of values and ethics, learn how religious experience has consequentially shaped the human experience, and begin to see the significance of service.

# The Seven Virtues:

## HONESTY

Each person carries out his or her responsibilities carefully and with integrity, never claiming credit for someone else's work and being willing to acknowledge wrongdoing. Students and staff share their ideas openly, in a climate of trust, with confidence that what is written and spoken is honestly expressed and that all people are trustworthy.

## RESPECT

Each person responds sensitively to the ideas and needs of others without dismissing or degrading them. Differences among people are celebrated, and all members of the community are able to accept both praise and constructive suggestions from others. While affirming individual freedom, the rights of the group are also fully honored.

## RESPONSIBILITY

Each person has a sense of duty to fulfill willingly the tasks he or she has accepted or has been assigned. All work is conscientiously performed. Members of the community feel comfortable asking for help and agree that they must be held accountable for their behavior.

## COMPASSION

Each person is considerate and caring. There is a recognition that everyone, from time to time, feels hurt, confused, angry, or sad. Instead of ignoring such conditions, people reach out to one another. In the case of conflict, members of the community seek reconciliation and try to understand each other, even forgive.

## SELF-DISCIPLINE

Each person agrees to live within limits, not only the ones mutually agreed upon, but, above all, those established personally. Self-discipline is exercised in relationships with others, especially in the way people speak to one another. Self-discipline also applies to the use of time. At the simplest level, self-control reflects habits of good living.

## PERSEVERANCE

Each person is diligent, with the inner strength and determination to pursue well-defined goals. It *does* matter that a task be completed once begun, and to persevere not only teaches discipline, but brings rewards as well. Each person pushes hard to complete assignments, and all members of the community willingly support others in their work.

## GIVING

Each person discovers that one of life's greatest satisfactions comes from giving to others, and recognizes that talents should be shared, through service. Rather than waiting to be asked, members of the community look for opportunities to respond positively to the needs of others, without expectation of reward.

**At the end of the Basic School, students will have started to think about life's most important questions. They will have discovered that what they learn in school really does make a difference in their lives, that it will touch their deeper selves and help them become more knowledgeable, responsible human beings.**

Boyer, Ernest L. The Basic School: A Community for Learning. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1995