

SAN FRANCISCO DAY SCHOOL

Curriculum and Instruction Goals for 2008-2009

I. Embracing the Founding Values of SFDS – The Reason

The SFDS founders envisioned a family school, an intellectually rigorous co-educational independent institution which included boys and girls, all children in a family, and families from a wide range of racial, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. Their vision is implemented very specifically in the School's admission's policy, which admits nearly all siblings. This commitment to families results in a distinctly inclusive and heterogeneous student population, including a diversity of learning styles that animates a rich, varied and dynamic learning environment.

Each generation is obligated to deepen its commitment to the School's founding values by ensuring that they are manifest in the design and implementation of our programs. We believe that in order to fully embrace the promise of a family school, we must further expand the range of instructional methods so that we can optimally educate all of our students. To this end, we are committing ourselves to implementing differentiated instruction over the course of several years.

II. Differentiated Instruction - The Goal

We have adopted the motto “No Threshold/ No Ceiling” to describe our approach to differentiated instruction. No threshold means that every student will be provided access to mastery of basic skills, understanding of major curriculum content, and development of critical thinking skills. Instructional methods will be designed to meet students' needs. No ceiling means that all students will be challenged to high levels of accomplishment; students who are capable – based on interest, effort, preparation and capacity - will advance to very high levels of accomplishment.

There are two key dimensions of differentiated instruction.

1. Teachers utilize many different modalities to help each student access information, ideas, basic skills and thinking skills. This approach allows students with different learning styles many different ways to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding.
2. In the design of lessons, each student is challenged to different levels of accomplishment based on interest, effort, preparation and capacity. Following are the ways we can differentiate instruction in our lesson design.
 - a) Levels of advanced work may be within a given assignment.
For example, students may be asked to revise an initial draft of a writing assignment, challenging them to obtain more complex sentence structure, vocabulary and compelling language within the context of the same assignment.

- b) Levels of advanced work may be extensions of an assignment.

This technique is referred to as horizontal enrichment. Students who have completed the original assignment well are given advanced work that challenges them to apply the information and ideas to different situations.

- c) Levels of advanced work may be for groups of students to proceed to more advanced skills and content.

This technique is referred to as vertical enrichment. Students that have mastered a basic skill, such as multiplication of simple fractions, will then be instructed on advanced skills, such as multiplication of complex fractions, and then onto division of fractions. Our approach to grouping for advanced instruction will be flexible. We understand that students do not grow at a steady rate. In learning, there are often plateaus and spurts; a student's interest and effort might be minimal one year and develop later.

III. Differentiated Instruction – The Means

The School has developed six distinct programs through which we will implement differentiated instruction.

A. Student Study Teams

Teachers meet under the direction of the Division Principal to discuss a student's difficulties using a multi-disciplinary protocol. Classroom teachers, art, music, science teachers, counselors, and learning specialists each describe what the student can do without special instruction, what they have difficulty with, and what they can accomplish with specific teaching accommodations.

B. Homework Center

This program is aimed at students who have trouble getting started on their homework due to lack of understanding or organizational skills. Two teaching assistants work with students to provide guidance, scaffolding and a supportive place for study during the afternoon from 3:30-5:00 pm. As an initial and small intervention, this newly launched program has already had a significant impact.

C. Learning Resource Program

Next year we will dramatically expand the Learning Resource Program from two staff members to eight-and-a-half. Learning specialists will be embedded in the grade level classrooms so that they are integrated into the day-to-day classroom program. No learning specialist will have more than twenty students as a case load. Every student who needs supplemental instruction will have a learning specialist who is his/her contact person.

The Learning Specialists will provide supplemental instruction to students in small groups, coordinate supplemental instruction with the classroom curriculum, and assist classroom teachers in the design and implementation of differentiated classroom instruction, task analysis, and other teaching accommodations to enable the students to succeed academically. The Learning Specialists will also be the key contact with parents and insure that the recommendations of the Student Study Teams are implemented.

D. Differentiated Classroom Teacher Staffing Model: Lead Teacher, Co-Teacher, and Associate Teacher

Building on the success of our associate teacher program, we are implementing a new, multi-tiered teaching structure. Previous to this year, all associate teachers terminated their work at SFDS after two years. Beginning next year, the associate teachers who demonstrate an understanding of SFDS curriculum and high level of instructional skills will be invited to become co-teachers working in collaboration with head teachers. With a minimum three-year commitment, the co-teachers will provide continuity as the second teacher in the classroom. This change will increase the faculty's capacity to implement differentiated instruction.

E. SFDS Summer Institute on Teaching and Learning

Teachers will be attending workshops, seminars and summer curriculum development projects supporting their professional development. Teachers will learn and practice enhanced teaching techniques and revise curriculum for implementation in the 2008-2009 school year. Faculty proposals to attend conferences and/or conduct curriculum development workshops at SFDS were reviewed and approved by a committee of their peers.

F. Lesson Study –

Working with a group of their peers, teachers will participate in the following ongoing process:

- i) Teachers prepare a lesson exemplifying Differentiated Instruction and present a model lesson to peers.
- ii) Peers critique and revise the lesson design.
- iii) Teacher uses lesson in class with several peers observing.
- iv) Teachers meet afterward to assess and review lesson.
- v) Other teachers repeat the cycle.

Lesson Study provides teachers with an opportunity for peer review and peer-to-peer accountability, establishing a mechanism to integrate the design of differentiated instruction into the day-to-day operation of the School. Curriculum Coordinators will be responsible for leading and organizing this process.

IV. Curriculum

Next year, the School will focus on two curriculum areas:

A. Math

We are currently conducting a review of our math curriculum with the goal of preparing nearly all SFDS students to complete Algebra I by the end of eighth grade. Students will then qualify for the freshman high school course that will lead to calculus in their junior or senior year of high school. The curriculum review will plan backwards from algebra so that by sixth grade students will have learned the pre-algebra skills.

Additionally, the math coordinators will be working with teachers to redesign and implement differentiated instruction. We will focus equally on both the “No Threshold” and the “No Ceiling” issues. Our goal is for every one of our students to be confident and competent with computational algorithms, abstract reasoning, and problem solving.

B. Beginning Reading

The structure, content and calendar of grade one and kindergarten screening will be revised so that the information can inform instruction in our beginning reading programs. Faculty will develop curriculum materials and instructional methods for a balanced program that includes language-based (phonics) and literature-based instruction, and nurtures a life-long love of reading.

V. Diversity: Purpose & Goals

Our diversity initiative is the essential context for achieving “No Threshold – No Ceiling” for all students. Without our shaping the qualitative character of the learning environment at SFDS to enable students to feel psychologically safe, students will be inhibited to put forth sustained effort on challenging and difficult tasks. They will be reluctant to take the intellectual risks necessary for learning to think critically, and our efforts at implementation of enhanced instructional methods will be less effective.

- The fundamental purpose of education is to teach **CRITICAL THINKING**.
- **DIVERSITY OF POINT OF VIEW AND EXPERIENCE** is a precondition of learning to think critically, a true indication of academic excellence.
- A learning environment that is **TRULY OPEN AND WELCOMING** encourages the expression of everyone’s thoughts and does not silence the voices of students from diverse backgrounds or shape their opinions to conform to the dominant culture.
- A learning environment is truly open and welcoming when a child and his/her family feel comfortable **BRINGING THEIR WHOLE SELVES TO SCHOOL**.