

Essential Agreements | *How We Teach*

INTRODUCTION

This document outlines the essential agreements of how “best practice” is defined at Houghton Academy regarding the methodology of teaching (i.e., instruction, assessment, curriculum, and learning environment). Although individual teachers will undoubtedly be at varying levels of competence in each method articulated, these practices serve as the guideposts to ensure students receive high educational experience regardless of the classroom.

ROLE OF THE TEACHER

The teacher is more than a conduit of knowledge, more than a conveyer of facts. While it is true that information must be taught and learned in the classrooms, it is also true that because of the unique situation and calling upon each faculty member, teachers' responsibility towards their students goes far beyond the transfer of information from one mind to another.

Each Houghton Academy teacher remembers that their focus as a faculty member is upon the student's whole life and the development of that life to its full potential. Indeed, curriculum facts and figures will aid and are even essential to that process. Still, to fulfill their calling, each teacher seeks to become a counselor, adviser, Christian mentor, and confidant to the students under their care (i.e., a *Living Curriculum Educator*).

As teachers constantly keep students and their needs as their primary focus, they can apply Christian principles to the unexpected problems and questions of life that occur throughout the day. This way, their teaching and mentoring are accompanied by modeling wisdom and ethics, and the students' lives are immeasurably enriched through this relationship.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM CLARIFICATION

The teacher is encouraged to exercise his or her talents in developing a classroom learning environment conducive to the mutual growth and development of the student and the teacher. Thus, the classroom teacher is free to capitalize on their strengths to produce the highest level of learning possible for the students. Teachers are permitted latitude in designing lesson plans and utilizing varying teaching practices that embrace our stated *Essential Agreements* as long as they cover the desired learning outcomes of the course curriculum guide.

EVERY CLASS IS A LANGUAGE CLASS

As a significant segment of our school student population consists of English Language Learners (ELLs), every teacher of every content area approaches the instruction as a language class. Thus, for example, an emphasis is placed on vocabulary specific to the subject area curriculum as foundational to supporting the success of all students.

CURRICULUM BEST PRACTICES

Houghton Academy Teachers:

1. Consistently begin lesson planning by identifying the desired learning outcomes or standards.
2. Design assessment tools before identifying learning activities (i.e., backward design).
3. Tag learning standards and benchmarks to assessments.
4. Build all unit plans around enduring understandings, key concepts, or competencies rather than content.

5. Ensure the curriculum appropriately meets current students' identified needs (i.e., not just teaching through a textbook).
6. Ensure the curriculum is broken down into simple, doable parts.
7. Integrate cross-curricular skills standards into all unit plans (e.g., note-taking, library research).
8. Regularly seek opportunities to integrate cross-curricular learning standards with other teachers (e.g., language arts and science teachers assigning a shared student project).
9. Promote active student engagement and ownership in the learning process whereby the curriculum is "living" and regularly modified based on student input.
10. Incorporate reading about the learning into every unit.
11. Incorporate writing about the learning into every unit.
12. Incorporate speaking about the learning free of notes and other prompts into every unit.
13. Implement inquiry-driven elements to foster higher-order thinking (i.e., creating, evaluating, analyzing).
14. Recognize that learning experiences and classroom activities may be of greater value than course content itself.
15. Focus on teaching students how to learn so that they can mature into authentic life-long learners.
16. Ensure student reading, listening, and thinking connects directly to writing and speaking.
17. Consistently maintain and update curriculum maps.
18. Record suggested curriculum revisions and recommended needed resources upon completion of each unit.

INSTRUCTION BEST PRACTICES

Houghton Academy Teachers:

1. Actively engage students throughout the entire class period (i.e., minimal time dedicated to lecture or direct instruction).
2. Visually display the learning objective for each lesson in language students understand.
3. Frequently reference the lesson objectives throughout the instructional time.
4. Implement a pre-assessment of the learning before introducing a new unit of study.
5. Include an introduction with an anticipatory set of exemplars in lesson plans.
6. Utilize task analysis, chunking, or scaffolding.
7. Plan and implement smooth transitions between learning activities.
8. Differentiate instruction based on individual student interests, learning profiles, and readiness to meet all learners' needs.
9. Make connections of content and skills with real-world applications to support enduring understandings, key concepts, or competencies (i.e., authenticity).
10. Use explicit instruction, among other methods, to teach skills and strategies (e.g., summarizing, comparing, and contrasting) as part of every unit plan.
11. Guide and engage students in the exploration and discovery of learning.
12. Foster student conversations among themselves about the learning.
13. Implement strategies and tasks to develop memory skills and automaticity (e.g., multiplication tables).
14. Collaborate with other teachers, counselors, and learning specialists to ensure that students with emotional or cognitive difficulties receive support and guidance within the classroom.
15. Integrate digital tools/technology into the classroom to gather, evaluate, or present learning.
16. Ensure students can use digital tools/technology to solve problems, create original works, or work collaboratively.
17. Model learning outcomes and processes and guide students through practice activities before requiring students to engage in independent practice.

18. Refine teaching strategies through ongoing internal and external professional development and peer observations.

ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK BEST PRACTICES

Houghton Academy Teachers:

1. Use various assessment tools and types (e.g., formative, performance, oral, visual, common, and standardized).
2. Provide students with assessment tasks, criteria, rubrics, or benchmarks to evaluate learning before conducting any summative assessment or judgment.
3. Review exemplars of high-quality work with students.
4. Use student self-assessments.
5. Use student peer evaluations.
6. Assess enduring understandings, key concepts, or competencies.
7. Differentiate assessments based on the student's interest, learning profile, and readiness, implementing necessary classroom adaptations to meet all learners' needs.
8. Use daily formative assessment results with little to no grade value to modify instruction to meet student needs better.
9. Provide specific, timely, and individualized feedback on all tasks completed by students.
10. Break long-term projects into separate tasks with multiple check-in dates.
11. Guide students through each task.
12. Provide time and opportunity for students to revise and improve their work in class.
13. Create summative assessment and judgment tools similar in structure to formative assessments used throughout each unit of study.
14. Submit summative assessment and judgment tools to their instructional team leader for timely review before implementation with students.
15. Provide in-class review time of all summative assessment and judgment tools.
16. Assign summative grades at the end of each unit to communicate the student's current level of learning with the learning objectives being assessed without averaging earlier assessments that would penalize the learning process (i.e., grading is for communication, not compensation).
17. Provide opportunities for students to showcase their learning (e.g., class presentations, literacy celebration, science fair).
18. Provide positive and specific reinforcement and celebrate the progress of every student.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT BEST PRACTICES

Houghton Academy Teachers:

1. Ensure all students know and understand classroom rules and routines.
2. Provide students the opportunity to develop and define classroom behavioral expectations.
3. Utilize a progressive discipline plan to reinforce the appropriate behavior of all students.
4. Serve as a positive role model, maintaining high professional standards and upholding the school's values.
5. Include community-building discussions and activities regularly.
6. Remain positive at all times with students, providing an emotionally safe learning environment.
7. Reinforce the school's core values with students inside and outside the classroom.
8. Set high expectations for all learners that are challenging yet attainable.
9. Contribute to the Academy's success by sharing their expertise, experience, and work with faculty colleagues.
10. Create community spirit through collaboration and cooperation with all school personnel (i.e., faculty, staff, and administration).
11. Demonstrate solidarity with the community through active participation in various school events.

12. Dedicate time and effort to involve colleagues, students, and parents in community-building initiatives.
13. Take care of the physical environment and resources of the school.
14. Demonstrate respect and open-mindedness toward all cultures and differences.
15. Provide opportunities for students to learn about their own and others' backgrounds, cultures, and differences.
16. Accept challenges and changes with an open mind.
17. Maintain timely, frequent, and open communication with parents throughout the school year.
18. Maintain timely, frequent, and open communication with their supervisor.

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