

Powerful Literacy

Abandoning functional literacy

Long before the state-mandated Standards of Learning (SOL) tests... before President Bush's "No Child Left Behind" legislation... Norfolk Public Schools was committed to providing every child with a quality education. And, it is our belief that a quality education... one that will prepare students to become life-long learners... must encompass more than test scores and merely meeting standards.

This focus on minimum competency is what we call "functional literacy." It is that kind of learning where students merely memorize facts, answer multiple choice questions, and accept others' conclusions. The goal is to change this scenario and ensure that all children are equipped with the skills needed to compete and to succeed after they leave the school district.

Embracing powerful literacy

Norfolk Public Schools is committed to providing "world class" educational opportunities. But, if we truly want all students – regardless of race, gender, or socio-economic status – to grow into capable and productive adults who not only know how to read, write, compute, and pass tests but also know how to make sound decisions, analyze situations, and have the skills to become leaders of their generation, we must equip them with a level of literacy that moves beyond functional skills. We must equip our students with "powerful literacy."

Each stakeholder group – educators, parents, and community members – must provide the kind of learning experiences that will allow today's youth to become powerfully literate. It is the belief, the mission, and the passion of everyone in Norfolk Public Schools to provide each child with learning experiences designed to impart powerful learning. It is this level of learning that will empower them to pursue exciting futures and participate fully in democratic life.

In keeping with our Philosophy of Teaching and Learning and joining hands as stakeholders, each of us should embrace the intellectual and social/emotional characteristics of powerful literacy.

A powerfully literate person:

- Reads a wide variety of self-selected materials for both



enjoyment and information.

- Makes connections between learning and life and evaluates the impact of current issues.
- Formulates and defends ideas and opinions from an interdisciplinary perspective (i.e. applying knowledge gained from a variety of subject areas).
- Manages complex information by analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating.
- Seeks, accepts, and overcomes challenges using critical and/or creative thinking and problem solving.
- Uses Standard English effectively in speaking and writing to inform, persuade, and entertain.
- Demonstrates mastery of content by creating original stories, poetry, role plays, illustrations, non-linguistic representations, or other creative means.
- Applies divergent thinking skills and creates order from disorder.
- Activates metacognition (or "thinking about thinking") to maximize learning and evaluates one's self-knowledge.
- Creates new meaning from various sources.
- Understands social issues and demonstrates empathy, acceptance, and tolerance in diverse settings.
- Demonstrates personal responsibility for learning.
- Demonstrates appreciation for the arts.
- Persists to develop personal meaning from information that is indefinite or inconclusive.

Norfolk Public Schools is committed to providing powerful literacy for all students...

All Means All.