



Cogito Alternative Program

The Cogito program offers an expanded curriculum in structured classrooms to support high levels of academic success. In each subject, elements are added to ensure students develop a broad base of knowledge. Additional emphasis is placed on mastery of basic mathematical facts/principles, history, geography, grammar and penmanship. Early literacy is developed through explicit teaching of letter-sound relationships and letter formation, beginning in Kindergarten. French as a Second Language instruction begins in grade 1.

Classroom structure and high standards are characteristic of Cogito. Teacher-directed instruction to the whole group is emphasized. Student uniforms reflect the structure of the program and foster a “dress for success” attitude. Students are expected to complete assignments that reflect high standards for grammar, penmanship, accuracy and pride in their work. Regular homework begins from earliest school experience and parents are expected to support, encourage and be involved with their child’s learning.

Cogito students are supported in developing effective work habits. Diligence, effort and high achievement are valued and reinforced. Increased attention span and ability to focus are fostered through such strategies as memory development and recitation. Routines and regular homework encourage consistency.

Yellow bus transportation is available to eligible students attending their designated school. Students attending an alternative program or a school other than their designated school may be eligible for a bus pass if there is an existing bus route serving the area. Please contact Transportation Services at 460-3712 for information.

The purpose of this document is to provide some information about the philosophy of the program. For further information or to register your child, please call

Elmer S. Gish School

Phone: 459-7766

E-mail: garrisona@spschools.org

Or call our St. Albert Protestant Schools District Office at 60 Sir Winston Churchill Avenue, by calling 460-3712, or on our web site at www.spschools.org.

- **What is an "Alternative Program"?**



The School Act of Alberta, in section 21, defines an “alternative” program as one that

- emphasizes a particular language, culture, religion or subject matter OR
- uses a particular teaching philosophy.

Cogito is the latter type of alternative meaning that it is distinguished from a regular education program by its philosophy of teaching.

- **What is the philosophy of teaching set out for the Cogito Alternative Program?**

The Foundational Principles for Cogito formed part of the background upon which the Board of Trustees authorized establishment of the program.

Foundational Principles

1. Cogito upholds academic excellence for all students and encourages their best possible work. Standards of achievement and measurable outcomes are clearly laid out for each grade level. The curriculum systematically builds the strong knowledge base essential for formulating meaningful opinion, analysis and processes.
2. Cogito actively fosters an orderly, disciplined and secure school environment based upon clear, ethical principles (focused on learning) that are firmly adhered to and enforced. Standards will be set for dress of both students and staff (which may include uniforms), classroom organization (desks in rows), as well as other features of effective schools.
3. Cogito approaches subjects as separate but interrelated disciplines that are necessary for a broad liberal arts education. The program focuses on an early mastery of English, mathematical concepts and other basic academic skills, as well as seriously attending to sciences, history, second language, fine arts and physical education. Complementary courses are set and designed to complement and enrich the core, often showing the connections between disciplines.
4. Cogito challenges and encourages students to always produce the best work they can. Teachers assign, correct and return in a timely fashion, regular homework that reinforces and applies what has been explicitly taught. Homework is meaningful and in measured amount. Systematic attention is paid to teacher marking of student work and correcting errors, thus promoting accuracy and precision in expressive language, mathematical solutions, penmanship and spelling, in addition to curricular content.
5. Cogito provides clear, timely and objective reporting of students’ progress and individual achievements to grade level, district and provincial standards and norms in a quantified fashion. Student marks will be reported as percentages.
6. Cogito recognizes that diligence, effort and scholastic achievement generate self-esteem, attention span and powers of concentration by providing a classroom environment where students work hard, spend their time on task and are actively engaged in learning.
7. Cogito limits instructional methods and practices to those that fit the school’s philosophy and are supported by *Effective Schools* research. Whole group, teacher directed instruction is stressed. Cogito does not allow technology to be the focus of education.
8. Cogito holds the teachers and principal who leads the program accountable for effective teaching of a sound knowledge-based curriculum, the ability to maintain an orderly,

emotionally secure and productive environment, adherence to the Cogito philosophy and the measured performance of their students. Parents recognize that the principal is the primary decision-maker on all instructional matters.

9. The principal ensures students, teachers, and parents understand their roles, responsibilities as detailed in the *School Act* and all foundational Cogito documentation.
10. Cogito realizes that the primary responsibility of the teacher is to deliver the curriculum, not to function as a social agency or as an instrument of social engineering. The work of teachers is compromised when they assume the role of parent, nurse or social worker.
11. Cogito recognizes that while schools are set up to teach students, parents have a primary stake and rightful interest in the education of their children and in the operation and performance of those schools in which their children are enrolled. Parents are true and valued partners in their children's education and can look to the teacher and administration to foster this important role.

• **What is a Cogito classroom like?**

Cogito classrooms provide a working environment that is disciplined and non-distracting environment. Generally, students' desks are organized in rows for most of each school day. Lessons are designed to teach specific and carefully sequenced skills or concepts. When teachers are not teaching the class, they circulate through the rows, checking for understanding and providing help as required.

The teaching approach values the acquisition of knowledge. Recitation, memorization and practice exercises are included. These strategies are utilized to develop high levels of proficiency.

Instruction is delivered in the overall atmosphere of firm but fair discipline. Good manners are modeled and mutual respect is expected. Praise is given when due and encouragement is given to persevere. Particularly at the beginning of the school year, pro-social skills are taught. Students learn skills such as how to listen, make good decisions, follow directions, apologize, ignore distractions and share. Throughout the year, the same skills are modeled and consistently reinforced.

• **What type of instruction is utilized?**

Cogito uses a teaching approach that values acquisition of knowledge. Whole group, direct instruction is emphasized. Each lesson is designed to teach the student a specific, carefully sequenced skill or concept. The teacher focuses student attention on the concept and purpose of the lesson through explicit instruction, provision of examples and modeling. The teacher outlines the activities, directs the events, guides the lecture and discussion, and monitors the progression of the lesson.

With guided practice first, students learn from the corrected responses provided within the large group. Independent practice of the instructed material is provided. Competency is achieved as students correct their work.

Recitation, memorization and practice exercises are included in the student's academic preparation. These strategies support development of high levels of proficiency. They are also intended to increase attention span and powers of concentration, both indicators of future success.

- **Why is homework important?**

Homework contributes to student success in these important ways:

- reinforces and applies teachings
- enhances personal responsibility and time management skills
- extends student time on learning tasks
- involves parents in the learning process and helps to keep them informed.

The Cogito program utilizes homework on a daily basis.

The Foundational Principles for Defining Methods and Practices of a Cogito Program include the following statement with respect to homework:

Teachers assign, correct and return in a timely fashion, regular homework that reinforces and applies what has been explicitly taught. Homework is meaningful and in measured amounts.

As well as reinforcing and applying curricular outcomes and providing additional opportunities for enhanced academic growth, homework teaches personal responsibility and time management skills.

Parents sign a commitment statement at the time of registering their child in the Cogito Program. It contains the following statement with respect to homework:

I/We have read the Cogito information material and understand that this requires parent commitment to the following: . . .

- * *Supporting homework expectations by:*
- * *Providing a suitable space;*
- * *Agreeing to and providing a suitable time;*
- * *Reviewing my/our student's homework;*
- * *Signing my/our child's homework book;*

All teachers in the Cogito program will provide parents with information that describes homework expectations for the student's specific grade level. Some examples of communication tools and strategies are: homework books, agendas, newsletters, schedules and timelines with due dates. If a student is experiencing difficulty with the content, process or time requirements of the homework, parents should contact the teacher for clarification and assistance.

The appropriate amount of time that an individual student can expect to spend completing homework depends upon a number of factors. The student's age, ability to focus, time on task and efficiency are important. The complexity of the material and the length of an assignment are also relevant. Time requirements may also vary over the course of a year as higher levels of thinking, preparation for exams, and other factors arise.

There are many sources of information for parents regarding these and other school related issues. A primary source should always be the child's teacher. Another source is the Alberta Learning web-site, www.learning.gov.ab.ca/parents.

- **What is a Cogito student like?**

Cogito students are expected to consistently do their best possible work. They are also expected to spend their time on task during the school day and demonstrate increasing attention span and powers of

concentration. They are also expected to complete homework assignments appropriately and in a timely manner. Cogito students are expected to develop personal responsibility and effectively manage their time. They are expected to demonstrate their learning on the range of assessment tools and strategies that comprise the assessment plan of their teachers.

- **Why do the students wear uniforms?**

Student uniforms have been adopted to enhance the orderly environment and promote a neat and tidy appearance. In conjunction with high standards, the uniform will help students to perceive themselves as successful. As well, a uniform has been shown to minimize peer pressure and reinforce an academic atmosphere.

Care has been taken to ensure that the uniforms are comfortable, non-restrictive and non-distracting. Dark grey pants (for K to 6) or black pants (for 7 to 9), white shirts, cardinal red sweaters, a plaid tie are required. Other choices include, “golf” shirts, skirts, tunics and vests.

- **How are parents involved in their child’s education?**

Cogito recognizes that parents have a primary stake in the education of their children. Parents work in conjunction with the staff to ensure the most effective learning possible for their children. They accept the responsibility for providing a time and place that is free from distraction, providing encouragement, reviewing for completeness, signing the homework book, assignments or tests as appropriate, and participating as fully as possible in the Cogito community.

Any parent is welcome to contact the school at any time to express concerns to their child’s teacher or to the principal. Case conferences involving a range of staff or one-on-one meetings can be arranged as appropriate.

A Steering Committee has been established. Its purpose is to support and enhance student learning in the Cogito Program. All parents of students in the program are members of this committee and are welcome to attend any or all meetings. The committee is advisory in nature and provides input to the principal of the school. Input from all parents is valued and need not be channeled through the committee.

- **What is included in the academic program?**

The Cogito Program utilizes a well-developed scope and sequence that honours Alberta Education curricula. Beyond that minimum, foundational elements are incorporated in each subject area. This enables students to develop a very broad basis of knowledge and academic skills. Thus the program is said to have an *expanded curriculum*.

The scope and sequence for instruction in the Cogito program is distinguished by planned progression of specific knowledge in language arts, mathematics, science, humanities and fine arts. Students are presented with a coherent core of challenging, interesting and interwoven knowledge. This knowledge provides a foundation for later learning.

In the context of the Cogito program, knowledge is not defined in the simplistic sense of mere facts. Knowledge includes facts, the relationships between them, thinking about or reflecting on them, and the effort to understand and connect them. In that sense, a sound base of foundational knowledge is emphasized. Critical thinking is stressed.

Language Arts instruction emphasizes both receptive and expressive skills and uses a systematic approach to the teaching of phonics, spelling and grammar. Accuracy, precision and fluency of written and spoken expression are supported by the teaching of grammar and vocabulary and are further encouraged by systematic correction of student work.

A standardized handwriting method is taught. Neatness and legibility of penmanship are stressed. The visual appearance of written work is considered important, encouraging a high level of care and attention.

Classical and modern literature that has stood the test of time and which reveals the human spirit and encourages acquisition of virtue is used from the earliest stages of the child's reading. Meaningful literature introduces to students the world of ideas and furnishes them with an excellent model for their own writing.

French as a Second Language is included as a course of study beginning in Grade 1. Reading, writing, speaking and listening are emphasized. This study enhances learnings in the students' first language and contributes to awareness of cultural diversity.

In **Mathematics** students follow an expanded program that emphasizes sequential development and understanding of mathematical concepts. Basic facts are learned and practiced through use of oral drill, written practice sheets and memorization. Problem solving is an important part of the math program and strategies are systematically taught. Efficiency and effectiveness of calculations are enhanced by regular review and performing mental math exercises.

Sciences

The scope and sequence for Cogito include the physical, earth and biological sciences. The premise behind these components is that there is a specific set of concepts, skills and facts that form a knowledge base for the discipline. Careful instruction in the most basic principles behind scientific concepts and the history of the development of scientific ideas are included. Direct instruction precedes investigation. Lab procedures include instruction in the scientific method. Students are encouraged to interrelate science concepts with other disciplines and to think and reason as they interpret the world around them.

Social Studies

In the Cogito program, Social Studies is taught within the context of history and geography. Interrelations and connections between history, geography and literature are explored and will be used to cultivate the broadest possible understanding of citizenship.

Health and Physical Education

Cogito's physical education and health programs promote life-long physical activity as part of a healthy lifestyle. They also provide direct instruction to develop the student's athletic abilities and their knowledge of the health sciences.

Fine Arts

The fine arts contribute profoundly to the intellectual development of children and are essential parts of a well-rounded education. Cogito provides students with the opportunity to develop practical skills and a deep appreciation for the cultural legacy and history of the fine arts.

Technology

Technology is explicitly taught with the knowledge applied where and when appropriate in Cogito classes. It does not become the focus of education. Calculators are not used until (late in) junior high mathematics.

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