



## **Instructional Methods and Philosophy**

Students at Community Roots Charter School are part of an educational community where rigorous curriculum is made engaging and accessible and where students meet high expectations by being given the support they need and deserve. Our educational model addresses the individual needs of students and ensures that all students meet their potential.

We believe that people learn best by doing things embedded in meaningful and interesting contexts and that children need direct instruction in the content area in order to develop the skills necessary to be active participants in learning experiences.

Key components of our educational program are outlined below.

### **Curriculum and Instruction**

**Integrated Studies:** Integrated studies engages students through social studies content and allows them to experience reading, writing, listening and speaking as well as exploring concepts through art, music, and science in a context that is rich and meaningful. Literature is used to compare and contrast our own experience with a wide range of experiences that can be unlocked through reading. Through social studies meetings, writing, responding to readings, and hands-on learning experiences (such as model making and service and action), students learn to question and persuasively communicate their own ideas as well as respect and understand those that are different.

The Community Roots integrated studies curriculum begins with concepts that are close to students such as home and family. Students will then use what they have learned about their own cultures, neighborhoods, and belief systems to learn to look outward to far away places as well as events, places and people in history. Students are taught the skills to formulate meaningful questions and look for answers that lead to deeper understanding of content.

**English Language Arts:** The largest part of the day at Community Roots is devoted to developing literacy and communication skills necessary to gain understanding. At Community Roots we use a balanced literacy approach, a researched and proven method which recognizes the need for both the explicit teaching of skills and the opportunity for children to participate in activities that are designed to build comprehension and meaning. The fundamental components of literacy; reading, writing, listening, and speaking are the foundation of the Community Roots education. Students learn to read, write, listen, and speak for a variety of purposes and practice these skills in all curricular areas. At Community Roots we believe that students need intensive instruction in reading and writing in order to develop the skills they need to be literate members of society.

**Math:** Community Roots uses the EngageNY, A Story of Units math curriculum, designed by many of the same educators involved with the development of the Common Core Math Standards. This curriculum puts making sense at the center of mathematical thinking and instruction and also encompasses a central focus on building fluency and fluency practice on a daily basis. The sequencing of this curriculum and duration of topics is designed to highlight the new depth of central mathematical ideas around which the common core math standards are designed.

**Science:** At Community Roots children go to the science lab and are taught by our Science teachers. We use the Full Option Science System (FOSS) curriculum. FOSS provides an inquiry-based, hands-on approach to science consistent with the Community Roots mission. This approach guides teachers in teaching children important scientific concepts while developing the habits of mind or skills of real scientists, including meaningful observation and exploration, testing hypotheses, and analyzing new information, while learning about the natural world.

Students investigate, experiment, gather data, organize results, and draw conclusions based on their own actions and scientific experiences. These processes enhance the development of scientific thinking. FOSS inquiries ask students to make use of all five senses for observation. This multi-sensory approach makes content accessible for all learning styles.

Collaboration is central to the enterprise of science. In K-2nd grade students are taught to work together but investigations allow for each student to have everything they need to work independently. Beginning in 3rd grade students will work in groups of four with each member contributing to management, data collection, data analysis and reporting of results.

**Visual and Performing Arts:** At Community Roots all students experience visual expression and problem solving through design in our Art and Design Studio and are taught by our two Art teachers. Students work with a variety of media and materials and are encouraged to take creative risks and try new approaches in their work.

The art curriculum is tightly woven with the integrated studies curriculum and the content of our students' art making is directly linked with the study that is taking part in their classroom. This connection between art and integrated studies creates a context for meaningful art making by utilizing our students' rich common experiences and tapping into their enthusiasm for the learning that is going on in the classroom. The art curriculum has been developed to meet and exceed the New York State standards and to provide all students with the knowledge and option to pursue visual arts in their future.

Our music curriculum, taught by our Music teacher, actively engages students in making music with their voices, bodies, and a variety of percussion instruments. Music at Community Roots is largely informed by the Kodály concept of music education. This philosophy holds that singing, particularly traditional folk music of various cultures, is the foundation of music learning. Community Roots' emphasis on experience, skill building, and exploration is echoed in the music program. From their singing experiences, students make observations about the elements of music and how music works. They are then able to apply those ideas as they play and create. With this understanding, students then begin reading and writing music.

In addition to visual art and music we have a partnership with the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM). This partnership allows our students to receive dance instruction and to experience the performance arts at the exhibition level.

**Physical Education:** At Community Roots we understand the importance of physical education. Physical education is a time for students to learn and practice fine and gross motor skills, to learn how to actively participate in large group games and to develop habits that lead to staying physically fit. Students go to Physical Education twice a week and are taught by our Physical Education teacher.

**Conflict Resolution and Community Building:** It is through the study of people and different cultures, traditions, and daily living that students gain a sense of varying points of view. Conflict resolution is one way in which groups of students learn to work together collaboratively and develop strategies to solve problems that arise. Through programs such as the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP) and Responsive Classroom and the study of our core values, students at Community Roots develop communication skills, the ability and willingness to listen to

their peers, to take turns and share responsibilities in order to accomplish a project greater than one person could do alone.