

Reach Sudbury School Basics



reach
SUDBURY SCHOOL OF TORONTO

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WELCOME TO REACH SUDBURY SCHOOL OF TORONTO.....	1
THE SIX BASIC TENETS	3
OUTCOMES AT REACH.....	14
OTHER ENDORSEMENTS FOR A SUDBURY EDUCATION.....	16
TELL ME MORE ABOUT... ..	18
Academics and Curriculum	18
On “Doing Nothing”	21
Media and Technology at Reach.....	21
On Boredom	23
Open Campus	23
Discipline and Behaviour	24
The Role of Parents	26
Evaluation, graduation, and beyond.....	27
Post-Secondary	28
REACH-SPEAK.....	29
The School Meeting.....	29
Judicial committee.....	30
The Book	30
Clerks	30
Certification.....	31

Staff	32
Community at Reach	33
ENROLLMENT	34
What kind of students should or should not attend Reach? ..	35
Attendance	36
Tuition Structure	37
APPENDIX A: A PARADIGM SHIFT FOR PARENTS OF A CHILD IN A SUDBURY SCHOOL	38
APPENDIX B: A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A SUDBURY SCHOOL.....	50
APPENDIX C: HAPPY BRAIN, LEARNING BRAIN	54

WELCOME TO REACH SUDBURY SCHOOL OF TORONTO

Whether you are new to Reach Sudbury School, new to Sudbury-style schooling, or exploring alternatives to traditional schooling, we hope this booklet will help you in your journey to finding the right kind of education for your child.

At Reach, students discover their own life paths and how to follow them into adult society. We are part of an internationally growing community of democratic schools, with a 90-year old tradition. Reach is based on the original Sudbury Valley School in Framingham, Massachusetts, which has been running since 1968. Its graduates have gone onto post-secondary education and professional careers, and inspired over 30 schools around the world who are graduating similarly successful individuals. At these schools, education is **student-directed**; students decide what they will learn, as well as when, how and with whom. **Curriculum is individualized**, and **students assume full responsibility** for their education. The schools run as a **participatory democracy** -- students and staff each have one vote on all matters of the day-to-day running of the school.

Why Choose Reach?

- Students retain that 'spark'—their creativity, their confidence, their own unique way of seeing the world and their love of learning.
- Students learn at a pace that's just right for them.
- Students follow their own interests.
- Students learn both to speak up for themselves and to work with other people.
- Students can learn in ways that match their particular learning styles.
- Students are empowered by a democratic disciplinary system.
- Students help make and enforce the rules.
- Students can follow an 'unschooling' philosophy while building community on a daily basis.



THE SIX BASIC TENETS

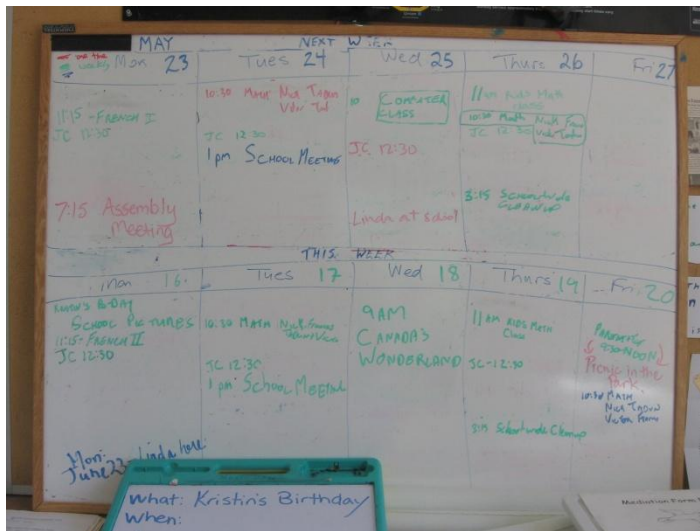
The program at Reach is based on six basic tenets: rigour, trust, rights and responsibilities, respect, age-mixing and participatory democracy.

RIGOUR

The institutions and processes of this school offer a rigorous education. Not everyone is cut out for this kind of rigour. Students are held to a high standard of trust and responsibility for themselves and for their education.

At our school, students are entrusted with their education, and they are expected to uphold that trust at all times. This requires being mindful of themselves, their interests, plans, goals, and

assuming the responsibility for achieving their goals. Only they can determine what they want to learn and how they will go about doing this. In so doing, students develop a rigorous personal curriculum that puts attitude before academics.



Of course, members of the school community are always there to help and encourage them, but the decisions are theirs and the responsibility for the outcomes of those decisions is theirs.

Observations of students at other Sudbury schools reveal that students do not take the easy way out. They choose to do things that are difficult for them. They struggle, but they do not give



up. What may appear as “giving up” may simply be a break from the struggle until they feel ready to tackle the task again. What appears to be “wasting time” may be an alternative way of tackling a problem that works for that individual child. Ideas sometimes need incubation, and students may indeed be incubating a problem while doing something else. Since no one can see inside another’s mind, who is to judge

what is difficult and what is easy? Only the student can make this judgment.

When students decide to tackle traditionally academic tasks, their way of going about it may look quite different from what is seen in typical schools. Sometimes, students ask for classes. Sometimes, they ask another person to teach them something specific, such as long division, or how to read an analogue clock. Sometimes, such interactions lead to other questions that lead to a long-term relationship between two individuals with respect to a particular subject matter. Sometimes, a student decides to study something on his or her own. Sometimes, a student ends up learning a traditional academic task on the way to learning something else.

What we do know is that a self-motivated learner is a quick and powerful learner. What takes six years to master in typical schools may only take four months at a Sudbury school.

As one former student said, “If you can do Sudbury, you can do anything!”

TRUST

Our students are entrusted with their education. At our school, this begins with placing trust in the individuals and institutions of the school community. Trust is not blind; it must be earned. Trust can be lost, but it can also be regained, and can always be deepened.

He comes home every day, saying “Today I learned.....” or “Guess what we did today?” He is excited by all that he is learning, even though it is unconventional. And why should I be surprised? As he put it, “You’ve just got to accept the fact that I’m unorthodox. I just don’t think the way you do.”

- a parent’s journal

At our school, we place a high value on trust. We ask parents to trust their children to make educational decisions for themselves. Seems like a tall order for a four-year old, or a 10-year old, or even a 16-year old. We ask everyone to trust in the institutions and processes of the school community, particularly those of the School Meeting and Judicial

Committee. We ask parents to trust the safety and well-being of their children to the staff. We ask the staff to trust the children to behave in a trustworthy manner, even when they are not directly supervised.

That's a lot of trust.

However, it is critically important to understand that the trust we practice is not blind trust. Rather, students are initially given the gift of trust and then continue to renew this trust as they learn and grow within the school community. Students learn that there are consequences to their actions and decisions. A fundamental principle of a Sudbury education is that students are entrusted with their education.

When students want to undertake activities that have an element of danger to them (cutting with sharp knives, going off campus without adult supervision, surfing the internet, watching videos with violence or sexual content), they must convince the School Meeting that they are ready to handle the potential dangers, and that they are trustworthy enough to behave in a responsible and ethical manner. Much conversation ensues, until the school community is satisfied that the



individual can be trusted to handle the situations or information they are likely to encounter responsibly.

What happens when they break that trust?

The Judicial Committee is the body that enforces the Laws and arbitrates disputes. Breaking trust typically results in a restriction of freedoms, since the individual did not behave in a responsible and trustworthy manner. Trust must be regained before additional freedoms are granted.

Parents who can trust their children to direct their education will be delighted, and often pleasantly surprised, at what their children are learning. The success of Sudbury education depends on parental trust, as students look to their parents for cues about their own abilities. Students who do not trust themselves will not take the intellectual and emotional risks that a Sudbury education requires.

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Rights are balanced with responsibilities. The right to choose one's method and content of education is the foundation of our school. All school members are responsible for maintaining an environment in which individuals' rights are protected.

The right to choose one's method and content of education is the foundation of our school. This right is balanced by the responsibility to contribute one's time to the running of the school and building the school community.

Whereas each student has the right to choose activities and materials, those rights end when they bump into the next student's right to do this. For example, if two people want to use the computer at the same time, each might each argue that they have the right to use the computer (and for unlimited amounts of time). However, it is obvious that they will have to work out a solution so that both will be able to use the computer, and clearly, for a limited amount of time. Each person is responsible for being part of that solution.

School rules have been worked out so that some guidance is given for problem solving. For example, in the above computer situation, one person might argue that s/he needs to use the computer to update the school meeting budget (a benefit to everyone), whereas the other might want to do research on YouTube (a personal benefit). The school meeting might have a rule that says that priority goes to the activity that benefits the entire school, and therefore, the person who is working on the budget will have priority for 30 minutes. Another possible solution might be for a sign-up schedule to be posted so that people can sign up for slots of time, and manage their activities around that time slot. In this way, individuals' rights are protected, but the expectation that individuals are also responsible for the well-being of the school is upheld.

School members are responsible for speaking up to defend not only their own rights, but also the rights of others. In this way, problems associated with bullying are eliminated, as no individual can be a "bystander." Being able to balance personal and social responsibility are hallmarks of a mature person.

Students are supported and nurtured into this responsibility by the very nature of the social environment of the school.

RESPECT

Self-respect, respect for others and respect for the institutions of the school are expected of all members of the school community. Like trust, respect must be earned, and it can be lost (but re-gained and deepened).

Children learn self-respect by being given respect – not because they are older or bigger or wiser than another, but because they are individual beings. We all, children and adults, expect to be listened to, and expect our opinions to matter. In a democratic environment, no self-respecting person will waste either time or energy on matters that are not important to them. It is, therefore, only when members of the community are respected that they can be effective members of both the School Meeting and the Judicial Committee (see below).



It is expected that everyone in this community will have and exhibit respect for others. One can respect others while disagreeing with them. When one knows that one is respected by others in the community, the fear of being ridiculed, bullied,

or otherwise disrespected goes away because the power plays that accompany bullying go away.

It is important that all members of this community respect the institutions of the school: the School Meeting, the Judicial Committee, and the rule of law. In this democratic community, the one-person-one-vote rule ensures that all opinions are both heard and respected. While we encourage consensus where possible, we believe that consensus decision making forces people who disagree to swallow dissenting opinions for fear of rocking the boat. This expectation dis-empowers those with a minority opinion, and effectively disrespects their right to express their opinion.

AGE-MIXING

Because exposure to a variety of experiences and viewpoints enhances opportunities for teaching and learning, students are not separated into grades or classes by age. School members of all ages have the opportunity to both teach and learn. Age-mixing promotes an appreciation of each person's unique talents and abilities.

Children naturally are attracted to other children with similar interests. To some extent, they will tend to play with other children of similar age. However, not only can younger children learn from older children, but older children can also learn from younger children. An all-ages environment reduces peer pressure and teasing. It is very clear that students of vastly



different ages cannot be compared with each other and this in turn helps show that each community member has unique skills and is working on unique challenges. Therefore, children all learn that they are worthy of respect

because everyone has something to offer.

An all-ages environment allows every student to be both a leader and a follower. Younger children tend to look to older children as role models. Young students learn many skills when they are challenged to keep up with their slightly more advanced schoolmates. In addition, shy students who may be reluctant to take on leadership roles in a group of peers their own age can confidently mentor younger students.

Therefore, it is incumbent on the older children and adults to set good examples of responsibility, trust, and self-direction. Through learning to take the point of view of others, students develop empathy for other members of the community.

Because of the democratic structure of the school (one vote per person), it is possible for younger members to out-vote older members on any particular issue, even against the “better judgment” of the older members. If the outcome of such a vote proves to be untenable (as the older members might have predicted), it is the responsibility of *anyone for whom it is untenable* to revisit the issue. The younger members may come

to this conclusion on their own. The older members do not, simply because of their age, have the right to force any issue on the younger members.

PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

While casual conversations and consensus decision-making play a large role in the daily life of the school, ultimately decisions are made on a one-person, one-vote basis. Each person who is at school regularly (students and staff) may vote on any issue affecting the daily life at the school. Being part of a functioning democracy from an early age prepares citizens to be actively engaged in our democratic society.

Involvement in a participatory democracy demands that the members be informed of the issues pertaining to that community. As such, the only people who can truly participate



at the School Meeting level are those who attend school on a regular basis: the students and staff. As a result, rules and procedures have the authority of everyone-- all the students and all the staff -- rather than authority resting in the hands of only a few adults. Students who have difficulty with

authority figures are more willing to listen to authority when they participate in that authority.

One might wonder how young children can be informed adequately enough to make budgetary or staffing decisions.



Yet, students at all other Sudbury schools have been doing this successfully, including for 40 years at the original Sudbury Valley School. Are these children particularly bright, gifted, or precocious? A few might be, but all know how their schools work, they have strong relationships with their staff, and they are able to listen and make well-reasoned arguments for what they need to succeed at school.

During the course of a typical school day, discussions abound about everything from rules and procedures to conflict-resolution, to figuring out how to accomplish something. Issues and underlying principles are often brought to light. The work which both staff and students do to understand issues serves to develop communication skills in many different ways.

Children will participate to the extent that issues interest them. Discussions about computer games often draw a wide swath of the school population; buying a new refrigerator tends

not to. Voting on suspension/expulsion of a student typically draws the entire school community.

OUTCOMES AT REACH

As in any educational endeavour, students get out of their experiences what they put into them. Over 40 years of Sudbury graduates have gone on to successful, productive adult lives. The original Sudbury Valley School in Massachusetts has published two studies of their own graduates, *Legacy of Trust* and *Pursuit of Happiness* along with numerous other books, CDs and DVDs (available at sudburypress.com).

A Sudbury education is very much about process rather than product. There are no guarantees that each student will know the same body of knowledge. However, through the structures and processes of a Sudbury school, students develop the following characteristics which last them a lifetime:

- Self-knowledge.

Students develop knowledge, skill sets and habits of life-long learning relevant to their passions

- Responsibility.

Students develop responsibility for themselves, and shared responsibility to both the school and the wider community in which they live.

- Respect.

Students develop mutual respect for themselves, others and the community, regardless of age.

- Trustworthiness.

Students develop into trustworthy individuals.

- Creativity.

Students develop creative solutions when given trust, respect and opportunities to solve problems that matter to them.

In sum, a successful life depends on the ability to think creatively and problem-solve as the need arises. Reach is a place where students direct their own education (including creating their own curriculum and activities), develop authentic relationships and figure out who they are. These experiences will put our graduates in a unique position to meet the new realities of the 21st century.

OTHER ENDORSEMENTS FOR A SUDBURY EDUCATION

"I've traveled two million miles over the past 12 years searching for answers to how we might fix schools to help us in the creation of good people, good citizens, and good individual lives. No model encountered is more promising than the Sudbury model. I would urge parents to give this method a close look. Trust your kids, they will surprise you."

[John Taylor Gatto](#), Author, NY Teacher of the year 1989

"The Sudbury Valley School model respects each child's innate joy of learning and natural developmental path through childhood. Respect for the child is balanced with the creation of a community supporting freedom and democracy while rejecting permissive license. One of the most powerful aspects of the model is the absence of an imposed structured academic program and the presence of an environment in which children can be imaginative, creative, and self-directed. The Sudbury Valley School model, when faithfully executed, allows these adults of tomorrow to grow and blossom into strong individuals of integrity, joy, and positive purpose."

[Win and Bill Sweet](#), Authors [Living Joyfully with Children](#)

As a society we have come to the conclusion that children must spend increasing amounts of their time in the very setting where they least want to be. The cost of that belief, as measured by the happiness and mental health of our children, is enormous. It is time to re-think education....

Anyone who looks honestly at the experiences of students at Sudbury model democratic schools and of unschoolers--where freedom, play, and self-directed exploration prevail--knows that there is another way. We don't need to drive kids crazy to educate them. Given freedom and opportunity, without coercion, young people educate themselves. They do so joyfully, and in the process they develop intrinsic values, personal self-control, and emotional wellbeing.

[Peter Gray](#), Research Professor of Psychology, Boston College, from a [blogpost](#) in Psychology Today.

TELL ME MORE ABOUT...

Academics and Curriculum

We believe that "living = learning; learning = living". Reach students set their own goals and develop their own activities. Because there is no single academic curriculum that is appropriate for all children all the time, students may leave Reach with a good education without ever having taken a class.

Children are free to pursue knowledge that is important to them in ways that are important to them. No student will be required to master specific academic domains, in terms of either scope or sequence. The school is neither "pro-academics" nor "anti-intellectual".



We live in an information age. Therefore, children will easily perceive the need to know how to read, write, and do basic math, and will acquire this knowledge as a by-product of daily living in the literate

and numerate community of the school. Given the amount of information that exists, the rate at which this information expands and changes, and the ready availability of both

information and “dis-information”, it is vitally important that children learn how to evaluate information for veracity and reliability. Therefore, it is more important for children to know how to access information than to remember specific bodies of information.

Children who are interested in specific domains will naturally learn and remember information that is important to that domain. Students who are interested in pursuing entry into specific fields will seek out the necessary academic preparation for such entry.

When requested and by mutual agreement, the staff will either teach directly or help the student(s) find appropriate academic instruction.



“My daughter loves to write. She taught herself to write by tracing letters from other sources when she was four. Nobody told her to do so. She spent hours doing this. I have the feeling that if it had been forced, it would have been a chore which she would have learned to hate. Also, again, nobody tells her that time's up and she must do something else as required. She is now seven and continues to write at school and at home.”

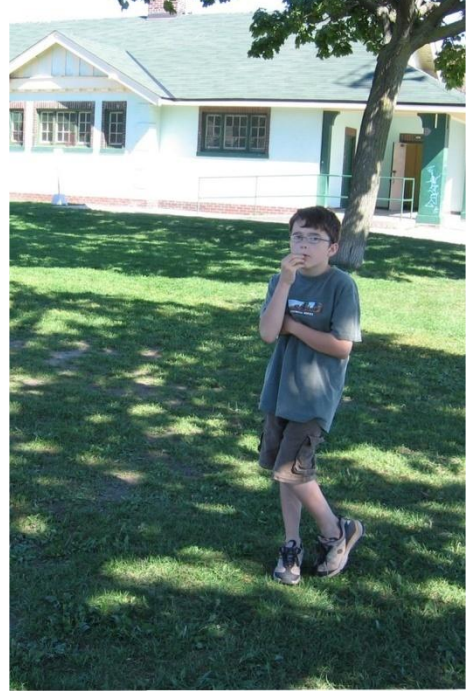
--a parent

WHAT IS A “SUDBURY” CURRICULUM?

Cooking, Sewing , Clothing design, Knitting, Crocheting, Reading, Literary criticism, Film criticism, Telling time, Counting money, Budgeting, Shopping, Debating, Web design, Colouring, Painting, Sculpting, Mask making, Movie making, Animation, Play writing, Novel writing, Resume building, Video gaming, Video game design, Robotics, Cleaning , Organization, Origami, Sign language, French, Arithmetic, Algebra, Geometry, Piano, Guitar, Child care, Baking, Cake decoration, Office administration, Democracy, Crafts, Jewellery making Gardening, Cooperation, Sharing, Patience, Ethical reasoning, Initiative, History, Geography, Civics, Record keeping, Keyboarding, Sorting, Filing, Recycling, Environmental Responsibility, Composting, Skateboarding, Computer gaming, Board gaming, Card gaming, Statistics, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Carpentry, Electronics, Fort building, Tree climbing, Hiking, Time management, Conflict resolution, Skiing, Snowboarding, Overnight camp, Drawing comics, Composing music, Writing lyrics, Essay writing, Spanish, Nutrition, Conditioning and strength training, Yoga, Hip hop, Irish dancing, Ballet, Technological troubleshooting, Cycling, Fundraising, Public speaking, Acting, Theatre tech, Swimming, Research skills, Independence, Goal setting, Self-evaluation, and more...

On “Doing Nothing”

Our students are responsible for their education, which means that they have no one to tell them what to do next. They need to figure this out on their own. A person who appears to be doing nothing may actually be deep in thought. In addition, the process of figuring out what you want to do takes place on many levels. People who think they are doing nothing are often simultaneously engaged, at a deeper level, in contemplating their direction in life. “Doing nothing” may be a break from “doing something”. Resting and having a change in pace is essential to maintaining mental health.



Media and Technology at Reach



Electronic media and technology are part of life in our 21st century world. In the course of almost everyone’s lives, media literacy will be necessary. Technology can be a very useful educational tool, often in

unexpected, imperceptible ways (just like other activities). As well, many aspects/areas of media have been clearly shown to be beneficial in various ways. Some media are not appropriate for all viewers (just as some books are only for certain readers). Exploring the idea of personal and community limits is extremely important. Reach has a media policy that recognizes restrictions on media use by children (e.g. ESRB and OFRB ratings) but allows for this exploration, in consultation with families and the school community.

My son was struggling with reading when he enrolled. He was very motivated to learn to read and felt he should be able to by this age. Typically, he asked friends and staff for help reading, but found that he wanted to play an on-line computer game with his friends at school. This game involved a lot of reading and writing. Instructions and negotiations were all done through print. He got tired of asking for help and learned to read quickly on his own. He learned when he was ready, in manner that worked for him. Moreover, he learned how he learns; what helps him, what doesn't; how to go about learning a new skill and how to be persistent in learning something difficult.

- a parent of a 9 year old boy

Experiencing media within a multi-age environment requires that people think about what are fair and appropriate guidelines, It means considering the effects media can have on a wide variety of people. The strong sense of community also ensures that media is often used socially, leading to bonding, practicing sharing and getting along during competition, and so on. As well, it means there are often many



discussions about media (with diverse viewpoints), which help people to evaluate media messages critically.

On Boredom

Boredom is a part of life. By working through their boredom, students learn what truly motivates them, what their passions are, and how to take responsibility for themselves. Staff and others in the community will support students through their boredom, but will not take responsibility for solving the student's "boredom problem". That is for the students themselves to solve. A well-meaning adult who rescues a student from boredom with an interesting activity disempowers that student by short-circuiting his or her own problem-solving process.

Open Campus

Reach Sudbury School is not a haven which shelters students from society, but rather is a safe place from which to explore the resources and negotiate the challenges of the world at large. Indeed, our urban location is easily accessed by families from various parts of the city by public transportation as well as by car. The urban location of our school allows members to take advantage of the resources of the city.



Our core campus consists of all indoor spaces of the school. Within this core campus, students are expected to be responsible for their behaviour without direct supervision. With parental permission, students may be certified to leave the core campus. The certification procedure entails demonstrating to staff (or older student “certifiers”) that they are “street smart” enough to be in the community without direct adult supervision. Students may earn different levels of certification, typically corresponding to how far afield they may go without supervision. Each student’s certification level will be posted so that spontaneous field trips may be planned with appropriate levels of supervision in mind.

Our school will maintain a vibrant, positive presence in the larger community. Students are expected to comport themselves in a manner that conveys a positive impression of Reach Sudbury School.

Discipline and Behaviour

Everyone is held accountable for their behaviour by those who are affected by it. We view “discipline” primarily as the development of *self*-discipline, rather than as punishment. It is important that all members of this community respect the institutions of the school: the School Meeting, the Judicial Committee, and the rule of law (see section on “Reach-speak”). All students and staff are expected to take responsibility for maintaining a positive school atmosphere by addressing

problems they see rather than standing back and expecting someone else to fix them. Everyone's skills are built through participation in JC as well as through informal problem-solving.

All members of the School Meeting are held accountable for their behaviour by those who are affected by it. In cases where unacceptable behaviour occurs, students are accountable to the Judicial Committee, and in cases of appeal, to the School Meeting. Suspension for repeated breaking of rules is seen as an opportunity for the suspended student to learn or re-learn the rules of the school, reflect on whether s/he really wants to attend a Sudbury school

(and Reach Sudbury School in particular), and if so, whether s/he is ready to accept responsibility for his/her behaviour. Students who repeatedly demonstrate blatant disregard to the structures and processes of the school will be expelled.

“I probably learned the most during the three weeks I was on probation. I learned that I really wanted to be there and to do that, I really had to contribute to the community and to cooperate with everyone. I learned to take responsibility for myself. I also figured out that since I wasn't ready to be responsible about certain things, I asked to be de-certified and to always ask someone else to supervise me when I used certain school belongings. I once got suspended from my public school. It felt like a punishment and I learned nothing. This way is much better because it makes you think.”

--student, 17

The Role of Parents

Parental support is critical for students to succeed in a Sudbury school. Students are forging their own educational paths and need to know that their parents believe in their capacity to do this.

In order for their children to benefit maximally from the Sudbury experience, parents must become as familiar as possible with the Sudbury philosophy and to ask as many questions about the philosophy as they need to gain a full understanding of it. Parents help children assume responsibility by encouraging them as they navigate their way through life at the school.

While parents naturally want to know that their children are thriving at school, it sometimes happens that parents hear stories from their children about happenings at the school that are less than positive. It is especially crucial in these situations for parents to allow their children to *assume full responsibility* for their own education in the school environment in order for their children to benefit the most from the Sudbury experience. Parents must allow their children to experience all the bumps on the road that living in a Sudbury community entails so that the children will learn how to use the democratic institutions and processes of the school in the pursuit of their education. Just as parents at traditional schools are encouraged to help their children with homework but should not actually do the homework for them, parents at Sudbury schools are expected to support their children's work as self-directed learners and

democratic community members but should not circumvent their learning by rescuing them from challenges they encounter.

As a small non-profit business, Reach appreciates the time and expertise that parents may be able to put towards administrative tasks and supporting the school. Many volunteer opportunities are available in business-related areas and we are grateful to everyone who makes it possible for Toronto's children to access a Sudbury education.

Evaluation, graduation, and beyond

Students are encouraged to set personal goals and practice ongoing self-evaluation. We believe that meaningful learning happens when students are engaged in activities that are important to them. Self-evaluation promotes intrinsic motivation and a love of learning that students can carry with them throughout their lives.

Reach does not issue report cards but communicates to parents about student progress through family meetings. Parents are encouraged to set up a meeting with staff at any time. Staff and students may also initiate family meetings. The student is always invited to such meetings and is encouraged to attend, as the meetings' purpose is to discuss the student's own education.

At Reach, we want our students to have the opportunity to reach beyond a pre-set curriculum and explore their own paths. Reach will develop its own graduation criteria that reflect the unique educational experiences of its students. At many Sudbury schools, this includes the writing and defending of a thesis that describes how the graduation candidate has prepared for

adulthood. Contrary to what many people think, a high school diploma is not necessary for post-secondary admissions.

Post-Secondary

There are a number of ways that students from a non-traditional educational background, such as Reach, can access post-secondary institutions. Reach students who would like help preparing for post-secondary admissions should talk to staff about which method would best suit their individual circumstances. These students do need to prepare themselves for university- or college-level work and they need to be able to show evidence of their readiness and past achievement to admissions officers. This does not mean they need to complete the OSSD. Homeschoolers have paved the way for non-traditional students in this regard. More information on this topic is available at our website (reachsudbury.ca).

REACH-SPEAK

The School Meeting

All decisions affecting daily life in the school will be made by the School Meeting, made up of students and staff, on a one-person, one-vote basis. The School Meeting's right to make these decisions lies at the heart of the school. The School Meeting generally meets weekly. Among other things, it makes school rules, deals with discipline through its Judicial Committee, administers its own budget for program-related expenses, elects Clerks and the Board of Directors, and hires staff.



Judicial committee

The J.C. is rather like the conscience of the school, where school members are reminded that they must live up to the ideals outlined in the rules. The J.C. generally meets daily to deal with issues brought to its attention. J.C. participation is one of the only mandatory requirements for students. All students and staff serve on the J.C. in turn. In some ways, it is the heart of the school and is key to community building.

The Book

All the rules of the school which are passed by the School Meeting are kept in the Law Book (commonly referred to as “The Book”). The J.C. uses this book in deliberations.

Clerks

The School Meeting establishes clerkships as it deems necessary. The clerks report to the School Meeting, and various committees report to their respective clerks. Unless otherwise specified by the School Meeting, clerkships are only open to its members. However, in the absence of enough School Meeting members who are able to run the school, at least one “external” clerkship will be open to Opt-In general members, who will be charged with specific responsibilities by the School Meeting.

Examples of clerkships include the School Meeting chair, the J.C. chair, Attendance clerk, School Meeting treasurer,

Technical/Media clerk, and Communications clerk. The school establishes clerkships at it deems necessary.

Certification

Just as not all media or all books are appropriate for all ages, not all equipment or access to certain materials is appropriate for all ages. For example, in order to use the stove or a hot iron, students must be able to read and understand the controls and how to use the equipment safely. Certification is a procedure for access or permission to use potentially hazardous or fragile equipment or for access to materials and information (e.g., internet) that might be appropriate for some people and not for others. The School Meeting develops certification procedures for these situations and all members must pass the certification procedures before being allowed to use these pieces of equipment or materials.

September 16: “Hey, Mom! Today I got certified on sharp knives!” Ulp. Sharp knives? You’d never hear this in public school.

September 21: “Hey, Mom! Today I got certified on hot stove.” Uh-huh.

September 22: “Hey, Mom! Today I got certified on the blender!” He took the kitchen by storm that week, and got certified on most of the equipment.

--from a parent’s journal

Staff

Staff are the backbone of the school. They ensure the Sudbury philosophy is carried out in practice and they support parents and students in exploring this educational approach. The adults who have been elected by the school community to be a part of its daily existence are known as ‘staff’, not ‘teachers’. This is because their job encompasses much more than teaching, and in fact may involve no teaching at all.

Staff are hired by the School Meeting to ensure the smooth running of the school's democratic community and serve as resources and role models of adult responsibility and life-long learning for students. This includes providing expertise to fulfill clerkships as well as ensuring good institutional management.

Staff build relationships with students by supporting the learning of basic life skills, executive skills, and community building through organic learning. Staff provide specific help in response to requests in ways that reinforce self-directed learning. Staff practice “benign neglect” (availability without continuous presence) to instill in students a trust in themselves.

Staff model professionalism in all their school activities. All our staff have experience in achieving mastery in something and are willing to share this experience with students. Support in achieving mastery can include fostering curiosity, exploration, goal-setting, hard work, boredom, overcoming failure and self-evaluation.

Finally, the staff defend and enrich the school culture as well as deepen understanding of, and disseminate, the Sudbury model. Through sharing their adult experience and demonstrating lived democratic experience, they provide stability and cohesion to the school and give the community a sense of continuity. They model the excellence to which the students can strive.

Community at Reach

Community is central to Reach. The school is not a bubble to shelter students from society but is rather a safe, supportive environment from which to explore the world. Reach students acquire a strong sense of ethics and broad communication and problem-solving skills.

There are many layers of community at Reach. The students and staff involved in the daily school program lie at its core. Around this core, parents and friends of the school support a rich community environment where young people are trusted with real responsibility.



ENROLLMENT

Reach's program encompasses students from ages 4 to 19. Students are not divided into age groups. They mix freely with all members of the school community.

Step 1: Learn about Sudbury model education and Reach Sudbury School in particular. Read our website (reachsudbury.ca), especially the pre-reads and the FAQ pages. Read the website of Sudbury Valley School and related schools around the world (sudval.org).

Step 2: Make contact: come to an information meeting, get your name on our [e-mail list](mailto:reachsudbury@gmail.com). Information meetings are announced at reachsudbury.ca, our [Facebook page](#), and our [discussion listserve](#).

Step 3: Fill out the [Request for Admissions Interview](#) on our website to begin the admissions process. Alternatively, you can call 647-238-5748 or e-mail us (reachsudbury@gmail.com) to arrange an interview.

Step 4: Come for Visiting Weeks.

Your child's first two weeks at the school are called "Visiting Weeks". We use the time to see whether your child and family are a good fit for the school, and conversely, if the school is a good fit for your family. At the end of the Visiting Weeks, we schedule a Family Meeting to discuss how things are going, and to make the final decision about enrolment.

Step 5: Enroll! And watch your child reach his or her full potential.

Still not sure? Come to another information meeting, schedule a second interview, or visit again. We can also put you in touch with a Parent Liaison, a veteran Sudbury parent who will be glad to support you in making this important decision.

What kind of students should or should not attend Reach?

Do you have a special needs child, or a gifted student? The only requirement for students at Reach is that they must be capable of taking responsibility for themselves. Reach is a good fit for students who are or would like to become independent thinkers and problem-solvers. Reach students must be open to both introspection and teamwork. It is a place for people who want to forge their own paths while participating in a close-knit community and are willing work for change when something is not working for them.



Reach is not a good fit for families who want their child to adhere to a particular academic curriculum or who are looking for a high degree of adult direction in their child's school experience. As

students are not necessarily under direct adult supervision at all times at school (although staff are always available on campus), students who might pose a safety threat to themselves or others are not appropriate for Reach. As community building and conflict resolution are major components of Reach's program, students who do not have the patience to work within a democratic structure to solve problems are not a good fit for Reach.

Reach's program works by giving students a high degree of responsibility and autonomy. This program can work very well for people with certain kinds of special needs but may not be appropriate for others. The school will consider each application on a case-by-case basis.

Some students who, for example, have been diagnosed with learning disabilities or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder may excel in an environment where they can learn their own way and on their own timetable. On the other hand, Reach's program is not a good fit for students who need regular adult/expert assistance or intervention.

Attendance

Reach will follow a traditional school calendar very similar to the public school boards. This is because many families have other children who attend public school or children whose friends attend public school. This allows maximum “together time” outside of the regular school calendar. The official school calendar will be posted on the website and distributed in a family handbook upon registration.

The school is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. Core community students (Full-time and Part-time) are expected to spend at least two hours per day on campus from Monday through Thursday. Attendance is optional on Fridays for students who spend at least 20 hours (10 hours for part-time) on campus from Monday through Thursday.

Flex-time students may book hours on Wednesdays and Fridays.

Tuition Structure

Substantial discounts are available for siblings, part-time and flex-time students.

Full-time: 20+ hours/week	1 st child	100%
	2 nd child	80%
	3 rd child	60%
	4 th + child	Free
Part-time 10-15 hours/week	1 st child	50%
	2 nd child	40%
	3 rd child	30%
	4 th + child	Free
Flex-time 3-10 hours/week	All children	\$15/hour

APPENDIX A: A PARADIGM SHIFT FOR PARENTS OF A CHILD IN A SUDBURY SCHOOL

Alan White¹

We grow up making assumptions, which are derived from our culture. We build on these assumptions to form our view on how the world works. Many are self-correcting because of new information. But some of these assumptions are so obviously true, so much a part of our culture, of what we are, that it takes a great effort on our part to question them carefully. It is one of the major reasons we follow in the religion of our parents, why we are patriots of the country of our birth, why we are conservative or liberal in our political views.

What would be the consequences of a mistake made in tagging newborns in an obstetrics ward in a hospital? Assume that the babies were given to the wrong parents and that hospital was in Jerusalem which has both Palestinians and Jews as clients. What if that hospital were in Halifax, NS, and a conservative Protestant family went home with a baby whose natural parents were liberal Catholics? What assumptions would the children make, growing up in the “wrong” family?

¹ This article originally appeared in the *Sudbury Valley School Journal* and can be found electronically at http://www.sudval.com/05_parentsandschool.html#04. Permission to freely copy and distribute this document is given by the Sudbury Valley School Press®, provided that the text is not modified or abridged and this notice is included. Other articles can be found at the Sudbury Valley School® website www.sudval.com.

What assumptions are the vast majority of people in my country or yours making about education? Let me list a few that I grew up with.

The more classes I took the better educated I would be. Taking classes was how one learned.

My parents and teachers knew what was best for me.

The younger you were when you began any activity the more proficient you would be.

Tests measure the degree of mastery you have acquired in any subject.

Play is your reward when work is done; to play instead of work was being frivolous and irresponsible.

Talking in class, unless answering a teacher's question, interfered with your ability to learn and the teacher's ability to teach.

There are prerequisite courses that you must take if you are going to be able to do college level work.

The agenda that experts choose for children is for the child's and society's good.

The paradigm shift I made was the result of abandoning every one of the assumptions that I have listed above. It was very difficult and it took me years of agonizing soul searching. This was true partly because making a paradigm shift is always very difficult and partly because I had a successful career in

public school education, which was based upon the assumptions listed above.

It was my Sudbury Valley School experience that slowly but surely caused me to abandon every one of the assumptions.

If you are to be a supportive parent to your child enrolled in a school practicing the Sudbury model you too will have to reexamine your assumptions to find if they conflict with the Sudbury model. As a parent you are the most influential person in your child's life. If you are unable to make the paradigm shift that is required, you will constantly be undermining your child's attempt to use the freedom afforded them in a Sudbury school as they try to figure out what is needed to become an effective adult in the 21st century.

We are undergoing a major transformation from an industrial society to a society based on information. As parents you are in the middle of that transition with one foot in the past and one in the present. Your child has one foot in the present and one in the future. When they reach my age, three quarters of the 21st century will be over. The experts who are currently directing the agenda for children in traditional education will be ancient history. The model of education that they are promoting is a model designed for the industrial society and therefore totally obsolete.

On the one hand making a paradigm shift is very difficult, but there is an extensive literature that has addressed the questions that every responsible parent will need to ask if they are considering sending a child to a Sudbury school. It will bolster

their confidence as they struggle with the anxiety of their decision in going against the perceived wisdom of the majority. The literature addresses educational issues in the context of our history and our economic and social condition. It is a fascinating journey and a useful one if you are to give your children the support they will need to take seriously the idea that they are in charge of their life and responsible for their own education. A Sudbury school is most effective if every child has the support and understanding of their parents.

It took me the better part of ten years to become convinced that the Sudbury model was appropriate for this time in our socioeconomic development. I am a generation older than most of you and I did not yet have the advantage of the thirty-four years of experience that is embodied in the Sudbury Valley School model.

What was it about the Sudbury experience that caused me to abandon the assumptions that I listed above? I first heard about the model in 1966 when the school was in its planning stage. At that time I was an Elementary School Principal and had been pioneering in many of the innovations that were attempting to improve education. It was an exciting time and there were many bright, articulate, university professors who were developing programs in math, science, and social science, and devising organizational strategies like programmed instruction, team teaching and team learning. By 1967, I was becoming increasingly aware that these programs worked reasonably well for about 1/4 of the school population but were very disruptive and ineffective for the majority of students. Moreover, even the

successful students had to be coerced or bribed to learn what the experts had chosen for them. It went against my understanding of the ideals of a democracy. Freedom and coercion are contradictions and in a free society they have to be examined and reexamined whenever they co-exist.

The Sudbury model was based upon a view of human nature that assumed children want to become effective and responsible adults. This view also assumed that evolutionary processes had prepared children to be efficient problem solvers. Most observers of children in their preschool years saw that young children solve some of life's most difficult challenges. Most educators that I knew also recognized that self-motivation is by far the most effective ingredient in learning. The experiment of the Sudbury model created a laboratory to test the validity of these propositions. If reading, writing, and arithmetic were essential skills children would recognize this fact and sooner or later would learn these skills. Children steeped in our culture would, on their own, become aware of those disciplines we value as a society and would select out those aspects that they personally wanted to pursue.

When the experiment was first proposed most people felt it was a utopian pipe dream. Fortunately, a few brave souls had the courage and the foresight to pursue this dream that was so consistent with the ideals of our English heritage. For my part, I hoped it would work but I was prepared for failure. Yet, even if it was a failure, I felt we would learn a great deal that was valuable.

The assumptions being tested had their roots deep in the soil of our cultural heritage. Aristotle had observed, over two thousand years ago, that humans were naturally curious and driven to explore. Long before there were schools, in the far reaches of our prehistory, our species survived and flourished because children were driven to become effective adults. Before the Industrial Revolution and the schools it spawned, children learned through apprenticeship programs. Children watched, listened, asked questions, used play to simulate adult roles, and slowly became aware of what they needed to do to survive and become contributing members of their family and society.

Why were the founders of Sudbury Valley so convinced that the prevailing educational model was unsuited to the reality of our country in the mid-sixties? Not only was it unsuited but it was doing extensive harm because we were no longer preparing for an industrial society. In all the Western democracies computers and communication were transforming society. We were entering the Information Age. Schools that served us well when we were an industrial society were counterproductive for the demands of the Information Age. The founders of Sudbury Valley were not alone in their awareness of the changes that were taking place but they were alone in recognizing that traditional schools could not be modified to meet the challenge. Those schools had to be completely scrapped and a new model for education developed.

When I said we were not alone let me quote from a few well-respected writers who were voicing their concerns. Albert North Whitehead, a professor of philosophy at Harvard in the 1920's

and a world renowned mathematician, in his book *The Aims of Education*, had this to say:

What I am now insisting is that the principle of progress is from within: the discovery is made by ourselves, the discipline is self-discipline, and the fruition is the outcome of our own initiative.

Another quote from Whitehead from the same book: *The basis of the growth of modern invention is science, and science is almost wholly the outgrowth of pleasurable intellectual curiosity.*

Albert Einstein, a contemporary of Whitehead had this to say:

It is in fact nothing short of a miracle that the modern methods of instruction have not yet entirely strangled the holy curiosity of inquiry; for this delicate little plant aside from stimulation, stands mainly in need of freedom; without this it goes to wreck and ruin without fail. It is a very grave mistake to think that the enjoyment of seeing and searching can be promoted by means of coercion and a sense of duty.

Ralph Waldo Emerson writing in mid-nineteenth century: *The secret to education lies in respecting the pupil.* This secret is central to the Sudbury model of education.

Traditional schools had been necessary in order to obtain the benefits of industrialization. Alvin Toffler, in his book *The Third Wave*, is very insightful:

As work shifted out of the fields and home, moreover, children had to be prepared for factory life. The early mine, mill, and factory owners of industrializing England discovered, as Andrew Ure wrote in 1835, that it was “nearly impossible to convert persons past the age of puberty, whether drawn from rural or from handicraft occupations, into useful factory hands.” If young people could be profited to the industrial system, it would vastly ease the problems of industrial discipline later on. The result was another central structure of all Second Wave societies: mass education.

Built on the factory model, mass education taught basic reading, writing, and arithmetic, a bit of history and other subjects. This was the “overt curriculum”. But beneath it lay an invisible or “covert curriculum” that was far more basic. It consisted – and still does in most industrial nations – of three courses: one in punctuality, one in obedience, and one in rote, repetitive work. Factory labor demanded workers who showed up on time, especially assembly-line hands. It demanded workers who would take orders from a management hierarchy without questioning. And it demanded men and women prepared to slave away at machines or in offices, performing brutally repetitious operations.

This model for education is counterproductive for the Information Age.

What was happening at the Sudbury Valley School forced me to abandon my assumptions:

There are prerequisite courses that you must take if you are going to be able to do college level work.

The more classes I took the better educated I would be. Taking classes was how one learned.

Some of the first students who enrolled, transferred part way through their high school program. They reveled in the freedom available at Sudbury and did not take the courses that are considered a prerequisite to college level work. Two things happened that surprised me. First, they were able to gain admittance to prestigious colleges. Second, they were able to compete successfully against their contemporaries who had followed a traditional curriculum. This phenomenon has continued and now we have graduates who had never attended any other school. There was little interest in having classes as a way to learn and the little interest that there was came mostly from students who assumed (as did the vast majority of adults) that classes were the royal road to learning. Nevertheless they have been successful in gaining admittance to college and were able to do college level work. Moreover those who chose not to go on to higher education found other avenues to being productive and responsible citizens in the Information Age. They were not stigmatized as people who were intellectually disabled nor are they.

Tests measure the degree of mastery you have acquired in any subject.

Since classes were never popular at Sudbury Valley grades were not given or tests required. The degree of mastery was a

subjective evaluation made by the student when they were satisfied that their progress had accomplished what they had set out to do.

Play is your reward when work is done; to play instead of work was being frivolous and irresponsible.

Talking in class, unless answering a teacher's question, interfered with your ability to learn and the teacher's ability to teach.

From my frequent visits to the school and many conversations with the staff my impression was that students spent most of their time playing games of all sorts and in endless sessions of conversation with other students and staff. An industrial society had to downplay “play” to condition children to conform to the “real” world. An information society has to encourage play because it is the child’s way of simulating the “real” world. For a wonderful account of the importance of play read the chapter by that name in *Worlds in Creation* by Daniel Greenberg published by the Sudbury Valley Press. For a deeper understanding of the importance of conversation read *Children and Grownups* another chapter in that same book.

My parents and teachers knew what was best for me.

It is central to the Sudbury Valley experience that children decide what they want to learn and when they choose to learn it. The only agenda they follow is the one that they choose for themselves. How else can you feel that you are in charge of your own life, how else can you be truly responsible, how else can

you learn to trust yourself, how else can you be intellectually independent?

The younger you were when you began any activity the more proficient you would be.

At Sudbury Valley children varied greatly as to age when they decided that reading was an essential skill in our culture. Once they made that decision they learned to read in a matter of months. Compare this to the seven years it took for children in my charge as an elementary school principal. It took years and we still had 20% who needed additional help once they went to junior high school. At Sudbury an early start did not seem to give any advantage. Why should this surprise us? Freedom and an absence of coercion are essential for a democracy.

With very few exceptions all young children learn to speak and speaking is a much higher order of difficulty than learning to read. Again it is worth quoting Whitehead, taken from *The Aims of Education*:

The first intellectual task which confronts an infant is the acquirement of spoken language. What an appalling task, the correlation of meanings with sounds. It requires an analysis of ideas and an analysis of sounds. We all know that an infant does it, and the miracle of his achievement is explicable. But so are all miracles, yet to the wise they remain miracles.

And, last but not least:

The agenda that experts choose for children is for the child's and society's good.

I will not question motives but the results will handicap children in this age that is radically changing our lives. Quoting again from Whitehead,

Culture is activity of thought, and receptiveness to beauty and humane feeling. Scraps of information have nothing to do with it. A merely well-informed man is the most useless bore on God's earth.

I would like to end by quoting one of the founders of Sudbury Valley School, Hanna Greenberg. This quote comes from “Why a Curriculum is Counterproductive”, *Reflections on the Sudbury School Concept*, Sudbury Valley School Press, edited by Mimsy Sadofsky and Daniel Greenberg:666

It boggles my mind that the attributes we cherish in ourselves and in our friends – being interesting, insightful, creative, and independent – is what we are willing to sacrifice in children in exchange for the acquisition of knowledge that some of us deem it necessary to learn.

APPENDIX B: A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A SUDBURY SCHOOL

Kristin Simpson²

Every day is different at this type of school, and each student has a unique school experience. For some students the day is free-flowing; others like to schedule themselves or participate in more organized activities. Without bells enforcing changes in activities, students can immerse themselves in something for as long as they like and easily experience a "flow" state. They learn time-management, goal-setting, and initiative. Here are some things you might see during a day at Reach:

The school opens at 9 a.m. Some students arrive promptly, while others take advantage of the school's flexible hours and trickle in throughout the morning. When students arrive, they sign in on the posted attendance sheet and notify the Attendance Clerk of their arrival. They stow their lunch (or their lunch ingredients, if they intend to cook today) in the fridge and place the various books, games, toys, art supplies, sports equipment or whatever else they may have brought to school in their cubbies. Some students have arrived just in time for a class, meeting or other scheduled activity with which they are involved. They hurry off to rehearse the school play they helped to write, discuss proposed new rules for the use of gaming systems at

² Kristin Simpson is a co-Founder of Reach Sudbury School. She also was a founder of The Beach School, Toronto's first Sudbury school, and served as a staff member there for five years. She is the parent of a three-year old daughter.

school, or check their homework with other members of their math class. Some students have no scheduled activities but nevertheless they know exactly what they are going to do today. They set off to join their friends in the latest installment of a week-long fort-building game, or they settle into the art room for hours of creation, or they sign out to join the skateboarders who are perfecting their tricks outside, or they sink into a chair with a good book. As usual there is a crowd clustered around a computer, teaming up to help their friend conquer the next level of her on-line game. Someone rushes through the school, drumming up interest for a walk to the lake in the afternoon. Someone else checks the ever-changing schedule of events written on a large whiteboard and suggests the trip happen after the day's Judicial Committee meeting, which will involve many school members of all ages.

By noon, everyone is at school. The kitchen is humming with "Can I use that pot when you're done?" and "Does anyone want to finish my macaroni?". The large table in the centre of the room is packed with people eating, talking, and, in one case, playing a guitar. "Who left their dirty dishes out?" "Maybe we need to amend the dish washing rules, again! I'll put it on the School Meeting agenda for next Tuesday." Outside the window, the skaters are still going strong. There is no set lunch hour, so they will eat when they get hungry.

At 1 o'clock the Judicial Committee meeting begins, as it does most days. The elected J.C. clerks organize the records from yesterday's meeting, skim through today's business, and call together all the necessary participants. Today the J.C. has

only one issue to deal with: a student who likes to read on the couch has complained that the fort-builders have been using the couch cushions all week for their own purposes. Everyone involved files into the J.C. room and sits alongside the clerks and today's voting members: a staff member, an older student and a younger student, selected at random. The reader and the fort-builders each tell their version of the story. Everyone agrees on the facts and the clerks record them. Then there is a discussion about whether what happened was fair. How does everyone feel about this situation? Were any school rules broken? If not, should there be some rules about who gets priority use of the couches, or some time limit on how long one person can use them? For now, the fort-builders agree to return half the cushions to the couch today and the rest by the end of the week. The reader accepts this but decides to propose some new guidelines for couch use at the next School Meeting.

And now students head out to explore the city. Some younger students choose to stay at school along with one staff member. They spend the afternoon playing board games and drawing while the staff member, who happens to be the Communications Clerk, works on an article for the next school newsletter. The skaters, now fed, decide to take advantage of the school's open campus policy and go on their own excursion to the local skatepark. They let the Attendance Clerk know where they are going and when they plan to be back. She checks her records to make sure the skaters all have parental permission for this unsupervised outing. The rest of the school leaves for the lake. The accompanying staff remind the students that they must be directly supervised during field trips (unlike on the school

campus, where students may roam freely). The group quickly brainstorms some guidelines for the expedition and they set off to explore the beach and climb trees.

By 4 o'clock, the first parents start to arrive to pick up their children. Students and staff find their chore partners and perform their daily clean-up duty. People check tomorrow's schedule or make plans with their friends. Parents urge their offspring to "Please hurry up!" When school ends at 5 o'clock, the last students are whisked out the door by the staff. "Go home! School's over! You can come back tomorrow!"

APPENDIX C: HAPPY BRAIN, LEARNING BRAIN

C. Tane Akamatsu, Ph.D., C.Psych.³

To simplify a complex field, neuroscience tells us that the brain learns best when it is in a calm, emotionally regulated state. The frontal lobe, in particular, is responsible for what is known as executive functioning – the regulation of attention, memory, behaviour, impulses, planning and organization – all necessary to learn effectively. The amygdala is primarily responsible for forming memories that have emotional attachments and, together with the hippocampus, for general memory consolidation and learning. Therefore, we can conclude that a calm, happy brain is a brain that learns well.

It is also clear from neuroscience that “intelligence” is not a fixed commodity. In fact, the brain changes, depending on the amount and kind of activity it engages in. The in-joke among psychologists is that “intelligence is what intelligence tests measure”, but they have known for years that the profile of strengths and weaknesses in specific cognitive processes result in different learning profiles. Some of these profiles work well in traditional industrial-era schools, where sitting still and book learning are the privileged forms of learning. Children who

³ Dr. Tane Akamatsu is a co-Founder of Reach Sudbury School. She is a parent of a student who attended The Beach School, Toronto’s first Sudbury school, for four years and where she served as a part-time volunteer staff member for two years. She works as a registered school psychologist for a public school board, and in that capacity, gets to meet children and families for whom traditional public education does not fit well.

have different profiles might be diagnosed with learning disabilities or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. What intelligence tests don't measure – social/emotional intelligence, musical ability, athletic ability – is often found in spades in children with learning disabilities. Change the context, and these disorders seem to disappear.

Since a Sudbury education may or may not include traditional academics, a direct comparison between kids who do well in a traditional academic setting and kids who do well in a Sudbury setting is like comparing apples and oranges. However, we do know that executive function is not part of a traditional curriculum. Could it be said to be part of a Sudbury “curriculum”?

Some parents choose a Sudbury education for their children because their children are “shutting down” in school. They are not happy. They may be anxious. They may not be learning in the same way or pace as the teachers or the curriculum demands. Anxiety and depression (clinical or not) are the enemies of learning. Any situation that causes too much anxiety or sadness can cause the amygdala to “close the gates” on incoming information to protect the child.

Because Sudbury school provides a non-coercive environment, children are free to engage in activities of their own choosing, with the proviso that these activities do not interfere with or impinge upon other people's right to engage in activities of *their* choosing. In a non-coercive environment, children choose what gives them joy. Interestingly, they also

choose activities that are personally meaningful and challenging. In this sense, a Sudbury education is quite rigorous. Children do not take the easy way out. Choosing personally meaningful challenges while respecting other's people similar right is not easy. Choosing the first fun thing to do might be easy, but making these choices all day, every day is exhausting. No wonder Sudbury kids are both exhausted and exhilarated at the end of each school day! Isn't that what you would want for your kid?

A Sudbury curriculum is anything a child wants it to be. It is as individual as the students themselves, for it is they who determine how they will spend their time. Successful functioning within a Sudbury community requires the regulation of attention, memory, behaviour, impulses, planning and organization in order to be able to live and let live. Students who are not able to problem solve, whether through conversation or the formal JC or school meeting processes, do not last long at Sudbury schools. They may not even gain admission in the first place. Problem solving, whether academic or social, requires people to be able to understand other people's perspectives, disagree without being disagreeable, remembering previous solutions to problems, planning for preventing problems in the future, and organizing the carrying out of solutions or restoring the peace.

Beyond problem solving, however, are other life skills such as goal setting, working toward a goal, persevering despite setbacks, concentration and focus, delaying gratification, and dealing with boredom. These are skills that are practiced daily,

across any number of activities. Whether the next goal is to get to the next level in a computer game, to climb to the next branch on the big oak tree, or to do well on a college admission test, the same kinds of learning/work skills are needed.

Neuroscientists have devised “the marshmallow test” to test some of these ideas. The marshmallow test goes like this. You put a marshmallow in front of a kid and say s/he can have it now. But you have to leave the room to do something. If they are willing to wait 15 minutes while you’re gone, when you come back, they can have two marshmallows. Research shows that the kids who can wait do better academically years down the road.

What executive functions are required here? Resisting the impulse to take the marshmallow, for one. Being able to keep the ultimate goal of two marshmallows in mind. Perhaps being able to distract oneself or deciding to do something else in the meantime so the temptation to take the marshmallow does not become too great.

Food for thought, literally.

A Sudbury education engages the whole child – body, mind and spirit. How can it not? Children who want to run and play will run and play, in a manner and time and duration of their choosing. They will do this with purpose, to achieve a goal, whether that goal is to make it to the other side of the field in less than 10 seconds, to climb to the next higher branch in the oak tree, or to make it down the snowboarding hill without

falling down. Quiet play? Yes, that too -- Board games, computer games, pencil and paper games. Yes, people will wonder whether all those computer games the kids play these days will produce permanent unwanted changes in the brain. The question is: unwanted by whom? And what about beneficial changes in the brain? Surgeons – people who we trust with our lives – have been shown to perform better *after* playing certain computer games. University students training to become pilots are assumed to have beaten every commercial flying simulation game *prior to university entry*. Passion drives these people, both at work and at play. Passion leads to engagement, which leads to learning. And who would want a life without passion, anyway?

NOTES

At Reach Sudbury School of Toronto, students discover their own life paths and how to follow them into adult society. The only requirement for students at Reach Sudbury School is that they must be capable of taking responsibility for themselves. Reach Sudbury School is a good fit for students who are or would like to become independent thinkers and problem-solvers. The program at Reach is based on six basic tenets: rigour, trust, rights and responsibilities, respect, age-mixing and participatory democracy. Reach Sudbury School students must be open to both introspection and teamwork. It is a place for people who are want to forge their own path while participating in a close-knit community and are willing work for change when something isn't working for them.

Reach Sudbury School is a place where students direct their own education, develop authentic relationships and figure out who they are. These experiences will put our graduates in a unique position to meet the new realities of the 21st century.

Come for a visit and see if Reach Sudbury School is right for you.



reach
SUDBURY SCHOOL OF TORONTO

📍 reachsudbury.ca 📍