

WELCOME TO WESTMOUNT - Gifted from the Inside Out

Hal Curties, Principal

- Westmount is a charter school; not to be confused with a private school
- We are fully publicly funded and have no tuition charges. We do have school fees at our mid-high, but those are in line with other public mid and high schools

CONGREGATED SETTING

- We are a congregated setting, which means all of our students are gifted.
- We believe many gifted learners – not all – thrive best in an environment of like peers where they see themselves reflected in the population. This is not the experience of some gifted kids who may be the only ones in their classes in other schools.

NOT CBE

- We are not a part of the CBE. We do rent space from them, but we are not a part of the CBE.

BRIEF HISTORY

- We are just about to complete our 26th year in operation.
- We left one campus in 2011 and moved into two separate campuses: the Elementary Campus for grades k – 4 and the mid-high campus for grades 5-12.
- K-4 has a constant population of 420 students
- 5 – 12 is now nearing 900 students

MISSION AND VISION

- We believe in diversity and have a range of races, gender identities and expressions, languages, cultures and learning needs.
- Our primary goal is to help students develop into well-rounded and balanced human beings. Our primary goal is not marks, however, we find that if we live our mission of fostering gifted education from the inside out well, the marks always follow.
- So what is gifted from the Inside Out?

RELATIONSHIPS

- It all starts with relationships. Before we can meet our students' needs, we must first know as much as we can about them. The first few days of our teachers' year is dedicated to reviewing Student records to get a sense of who they are and what their needs are.
 - We have looping at the following grades:

- Our grade 1 teachers will move up to grade 2 with their students
- Our grade 3 teachers will move up to grade 4 with their students
- This is also true at the mid-high where grade 5 teachers move to grade 6 with their students.
- Looping allows for longer term, deeper relationships between teachers, students and families.

SUITABLE TEACHERS

- We hire our teachers based mostly on their suitability to work with gifted kids. We also value knowledge and experience. Specialized knowledge can be taught and experience can come with time, but if teachers are not well suited to working with gifted kids, we can't teach that.
- To be well suited, teachers must have empathy for the needs of their students, be curious about the needs and behaviours of their students, not prone to making snap judgements about student behaviour, but determined to understand what is behind the behaviour, optimistic that with the right supports, all of our students will be successful according to their abilities, be passionate about teaching gifted kids, be enthusiastic about continuous, lifelong learning, have very flexible egos, work well together, see parents as important partners, and be excellent communicators.
- There are many excellent teachers who are not suited to working with gifted students.
- Gifted practices are good for all learners, but all practices are not good for gifted learners.

GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

- We spend the first part of the year assessing our students' academic levels in math and language arts
 - We then regroup our students based on their knowledge and skills in those two subjects
 - We'll explain this more elaborately in September
- We pre-test students in other subject areas so that we don't end up teaching kids a lot of what they already know

DIFFERENTIATION

- We differentiate our instruction, that means
 - Written materials may be changed to suit student interests, knowledge and skills.
 - Students may be re-grouped within homeroom classes in response to knowledge and skill, interests and learning styles.

- Students may be required to do fewer questions to acquire and demonstrate a particular skill. Sometimes typical students need to do 10 questions to master a concept, where gifted students may only need to do 3 questions.
- Teachers will vary how student knowledge and skills are presented. Some students enjoy writing, while others really struggle with it. What is most important is we find out what the student knows in the way that works best for them.

SUPPORTS

- We have supports for students based on needs
- EAL supports for those whose first language is not English
- Teaching and learning assistants for those with identified mild to moderate or severe learning needs
- Student Services for those who, from time to time, need support with:
 - Emotional upsets
 - Organizational challenges
 - Friendships
 - Anger management
 - A place to go when their frustration in the moment makes learning difficult

INSIDE OUT VS OUTSIDE IN

- Outside In focuses primarily on marks and achievement.
- Inside Out is interested in who a student is and what they need.
- Outside in is focused on what a student can produce.