

## Anything Grows Community School Community Covenant

1. All participants, adults and children, are honored, and all are considered to be learners.
2. Enjoyment is essential to the success of the program.
3. People are involved because they want to be and enter into relationships based on mutual choice, collaborative effort, and mutual gain.
4. A declaration of learner rights and responsibilities will be established, including the learner's right to choose and direct the nature of his/her learning and assessment.
5. Both adults and children will be included in decision making. We will make decisions democratically based on consensus.
6. Administration and authority will be shared. Roles will be established by community decisions with the intention to honor individual strengths and interests.
7. All resources are shared and diverse perspectives are sought out (acknowledging the importance of various intelligences/talents, ages, cultural and economic backgrounds and physical settings).
8. There will be a balance of academic and non-academic activities.
9. We will evaluate our learning and progress according to our own sensibilities; we have the right to request and the responsibility to include the evaluation of others.
10. The program will rely on theme and project development and on the exploration of our ties to our cultural and physical environments.

## PUTTING THE COVENANT TO WORK: A Sampling of how we go about our days at *Anything Grows Community School*

### Example #1 – Rights and responsibilities

At the beginning of each program year we work together, adults and children, to decide on a list of rights and responsibilities that will help us create the type of environment we'd all like to be a part of. During the year this list can be changed if the group finds something to add or take away.

For example, one of the rights we came up with this year is the right to have fun and along with that come the responsibility to help others have fun.

Pairing rights with responsibilities helps learners understand that they have freedoms within each day and with those freedoms come the challenges of making sure the freedoms of others are protected and cared for as well.

### Example #2 – Collaboration and consensus

Decisions are made collaboratively. For example, decisions about themes (what we're going to study) are made with the children. Together, we brainstorm questions and topics we are interested in exploring. Everything is written down and we then group similar ideas into categories. We then discuss which topics we think would be best for the group to study. In a recent session, after a half day of deep discussion and compromise amongst a group of nine learners, we identified four topics that everyone agreed to study for the rest of the year.

In these decision-making processes we seek consensus. In our discussions (facilitated by one, or sometimes two, of the participants) we think and talk about how things could benefit the group as well as the individuals. This might mean the group will agree that a particular decision is best overall even though there is not unanimous individual enthusiasm. Sometimes the consensus is that the issue is not yet resolvable and we will gather more information or put it off to another time.

### Example #3 – Matching jobs and people

We're very interested in building an effective community and allowing learners to become competent citizens by way of actual practice. We therefore share administration and authority and pay close attention to each individual's interests and

strengths in order to gain maximum participation and a good match between jobs and people. Any community member, adult or child, who displays interest and skills for a particular job is encouraged to take on that work.

For example, an adult with construction abilities might be encouraged to be our community's building authority. Another individual with only limited skills, perhaps a child with a strong interest in construction or design, is supported by being given limited, conditional, shared responsibility. In some cases, a certification process is utilized to allow children especially to gradually gain higher levels of responsibility and authority (in the use of tools for example).

#### Example #4 – Multi-purpose trail project

We are planning the creation of a foot path that will cover approximately 1500 feet along the perimeter of our outdoor learning site near Lake Whatcom. This trail will pass through a meadow, along a creek and around (or over) a pond and through a couple of wooded areas.

Our intention is to develop a path which offers and ties together a diversity of challenges and opportunities. We want the building process and the results to capture the interest and talents of everyone in our community as well as appeal to all the senses. So far, we've identified a great many trail features we wish to establish, including: opportunities for quiet reflection (a bench overlooking the pond, a labyrinth, a writing platform); a weather station, a bird watching enclosure (and numerous birdhouses); planting of trees (e.g., willows along the creek) and edible plants (for wildlife and us); a climbing structure (perhaps a tree house); a windmill; a rope swing; a sundial; a terraced flower garden; a watercourse; a campsite; an art studio (using an existing or newly-built cabin); a weather-proof game box (e.g., containing a chess set, marbles, etc.); and numerous locations for the creation and display of environmental artworks.

#### Example #5 – "What did you learn today?"

We've often been asked to describe a typical day at our school. It is difficult because we don't strive for sameness; in fact, we hope that each day will be as unique as your child. However, there are constants and rituals and rhythms. Our everyday commitment is to such things as adventure, imagination and curiosity, creativity, fun, learning by doing, community and commitment, compassionate communication, individual attention, close observation, an ecological perspective, seeing and taking advantage of opportunities, self-discipline, depth of study, providing different perspectives and much more. We want each child, each learner, when considering the question "What did you learn today?" to perhaps be thinking, "Where do I even start?"

We do strive for overall balance and some predictability. We want to cover all the academic bases as well as create ample opportunities for social, physical, emotional and spiritual growth. But we don't expect to do all of this every day and certainly not in the same ways. The idea is to generate opportunities and apply our resources so that over time – a month, a year, five years – we will fully support each learner in his or her (and our) quest to be successful, as a citizen, a scholar, a life-long learner.

In our Community Handbook, you will find several sample schedules accompanied by descriptions of our primary activities including choice time, council, writer's workshop, integrated math, P.E., field days, project and theme work, individual journals, and cleaning and care of our facilities. However, please keep in mind that what we are mainly interested in is creative freedom, strong individuals and strong community and we believe these interests or goals are best served by openness, flexibility, reflection and self-direction. We are opposed to coercion, rigidity (for example, in the segmenting of time and subjects), imposed discipline, grading, standardized testing and an emphasis on competition. Our schedules and what we learn each day reflect these views.