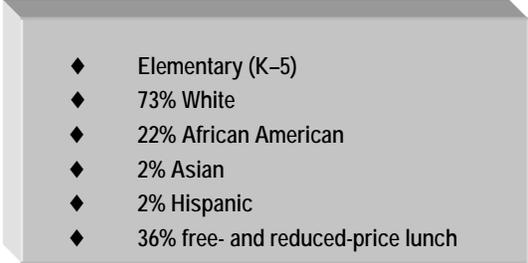


Normal Park Museum Magnet Elementary School

1009 Mississippi Avenue
Chattanooga, TN 37405
Principal: Jill Levine

Normal Park, located in downtown Chattanooga, Tennessee, was converted into a public museum magnet school in 2001 as part of an effort to turnaround Hamilton County's low-performing and under-enrolled urban schools. Since the conversion, achievement for all subgroups, including African American and economically disadvantaged students, has

seen significant gains; Normal Park now consistently meets AYP. The number of students scoring "advanced" has also increased in all subject areas over the past seven years. The school has no selective admissions criteria, and draws from all corners of the district through a lottery enrollment process that gives priority to students residing in the school's neighborhood zone.

- 
- ◆ Elementary (K-5)
 - ◆ 73% White
 - ◆ 22% African American
 - ◆ 2% Asian
 - ◆ 2% Hispanic
 - ◆ 36% free- and reduced-price lunch

Teachers use the backwards-planning method outlined in Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe's *Understanding By Design* to generate the curriculum. This approach uses what the authors call "essential questions" to engage students in learning about key concepts and promote "enduring understandings" that can be applied beyond the classroom. Teachers draw on state and district standards to plan these curricular modules, with two quarters focused on social studies and two quarters focused on science.

Museum staff collaborate with grade-level teams to plan weekly museum-based activities, or "learning expeditions," providing classes with common concrete experiences that help students understand abstract concepts and retain the material they learn. For example, during the schoolwide "A Day in the Life" module, kindergartners study the city of Chattanooga to answer "What makes people choose a place to live?" Students learn about services, attractions, laws, and civic responsibilities within communities. Visits to the Chattanooga Choo-Choo, the Regional History Museum, and the African-American Museum bring to life the history of transportation and social activity within their community. A week-long summer institute includes time to plan in grade-level teams and work with museum staff to develop these learning expeditions and connect them directly to key concepts.

Student learning is made public through quarterly Exhibit Nights where hundreds of visitors come to the school and serve as an audience for student exhibits and tours, which highlight each module's "essential questions" and "enduring understandings."

The kindergartners studying Chattanooga, for example, create a cardboard cityscape as one of their culminating activities, and on Exhibit Night, students guide visitors through the “town” and explain the various services and features of the community. These exhibitions of student learning help staff assess whether students have mastered or retained the important concepts, and encourage students to provide full explanations to an authentic audience.

Teachers use Socratic seminars to incorporate higher order questioning techniques into the modules. Using a text or piece of art to initiate discussion, teachers ask students a progression of questions that require students to explore ideas, agree or disagree with their classmates, and cite evidence to back up their statements. For example, a fourth-grade teacher may ask students to “Where is this place?” or “Do you think this is a real place? Why or why not?” when discussing M.C.Escher’s woodcut “Waterfall.” Students are expected to cite evidence from the artwork to justify their answers and respond to their peers. Staff engage in faculty seminars themselves as part of professional development to familiarize themselves with the practice and develop better questioning and discussion strategies.

Staff have also adopted guided reading and writer’s workshop techniques, providing students with opportunities to practice skills in small group or one-on-one conference settings. Teachers create individualized lesson plans, breakdown steps, and think-aloud to demonstrate strategies the students practice. For example, a teacher may model how to break down a word into its root and prefix before coaching a student to do the same on a reading task. Modeling and practice would continue throughout the lesson to support student mastery of the reading strategy.

Staff at Normal Park invest a significant amount time into curriculum planning and professional development around instructional strategies. They believe that teachers play a critical role in organizing instruction to maximize learning for all students. “Our model works because the depth and rigor of the curriculum transfers over to student understanding,” explains principal Jill Levine.