



Live. Learn. Lead

Hello Aldo Families,

We wish to take this opportunity to introduce our experiential education program to all of you who are new, and to refresh the idea of how we will approach this in an online setting for all who have been with us for a while. **Our experiential learning program is essential and central to our curriculum in so many ways, and it is part of the unique fabric of the holistic education we wish to provide for your child.**

Let us start with the curriculum. We work throughout the process of planning and implementing our experiential program to maintain connections to our work within the classroom. Often the class work occurring before and after an experience may come to life in a new setting. This goes both ways. Consider our recent Mini Village Project and the potential for connecting to social studies concepts throughout the year as one example. At other times we have had kids measuring and applying geometry in the field with multi age support. Concepts that are more abstract on paper can suddenly make more sense in real world application.

We see our curriculum as so much more than the four core subjects of math, science, language and social studies. Art appreciation and being saturated with beauty in nature are just some examples that anchor and enrich the student experience and the curriculum we wish to provide. Importantly these become shared experiences that are part of the ongoing narrative of the students' community and learning.

Other currents that run through our program intentionally attend to developmental growth. The multi age nature of their collaboration builds a sense of being part of a long range process. The peer mentor relationships that naturally develop continuously recreate the foundation of what becomes a dynamic learning community. This feeling of being part of a community larger than themselves is a healthy and functional part of social development at this age. Measuring oneself against the peer community, practicing conflict resolution, building resilience, and establishing one's own moral code all occur within the safety net of the experiences we provide. Students are at a time of life where they need deep peer group discussions and interaction as they become more self aware. This is a challenge in an online format, but please know that we will continue to work with this at the heart of our intentions.

Another goal of our program builds a sense of place for your child within the human and natural communities in which they dwell. Young adolescents need to be valued and recognized for their ideas and contributions more than ever. They need to feel of use in real world ways. In the past we have had kids helping with local food distribution and even doing manual labor on small local farms. Good old fashioned work, along with their complaints help to serve important developmental needs! Even the mental mapping that occurs as we walk various routes through town contribute to building a sense of place. The same goes for local hikes and learning the local flora and fauna of this place called home. We have also learned not to discount the value in learning to stop, slow down and lie in the grass looking up at the clouds.

We apply many strategies for all of this within our Experiential Education Program. We recognize the challenge of maintaining the high level of enrichment we desire in an online setting. **This is precisely why we**

want all of you to be fully aware of our intentions. More than ever we hope to pull you and your families into what we do.

Please know that we recognize that many families are in no position to jump in on Friday activities due to an array of other life obligations. We ask for no more than taking a moment to ask your middle schooler and listen about how it went on a given day, or perhaps sharing and discussing a journal response to an activity in a time that fits.

We have had some families asking about creating their own Experiential Activities on Fridays. We love the potential and interest in this idea while we are online, but we also have concerns about creating the impression that people should feel free to opt out of our Friday plans. We have had to deal with the persistent idea that Fridays are “just a field trip” that can be easily missed compared to other school days. Hopefully you see why this is just not so.

Please, if your family wishes to create their own Experiential Education events, communicate with your teachers so we can plan together on how to keep this successful and connected. We wish to be flexible and encourage creativity, but we must maintain the strength and integrity of this central part of our shared school experience. We hope you can see that we intend to provide much more than just a field trip.

For families that are interested in doing this, we would like to **provide support and build in accountability** since this is instructional time. We will be providing schedules for our Friday events as we go, and would request that you find ways to connect with the type of activities we are requiring of all students.

We also will support choosing assignment products that match the experience you may have with your child. For example, on hikes we often have native plants that we set out to learn. Students make journal notes on the identifying characteristic, natural history and fun facts regarding the species. This could be broadened to include any organism, geologic feature, cultural history, map reading skill, or anything that matches your experience. Journal reflections containing art, poetry, analysis and reflection are encouraged. Old fashioned paper and pencil journaling is great, but photojournalism added to Google Slides, or Google Draw are some examples of ways that learning can be shared. One hint to remember, the experience is the priority, some layers of learning are better applied before or after the experience, with time to process in between.

To sum things up:

- 1. Our experiential program is connected and central to our curriculum.**
- 2. The experiences are the heart of the active and continuous community building we do as a school.**
- 3. If your family wishes to create their own Experiential Education events, communicate with your teachers so we can plan together.**
- 4. We need your help to maintain the strength and integrity of this central part of our shared school experience.**

Thank you for your support,
Your Aldo Middle School Staff