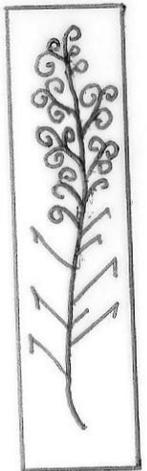
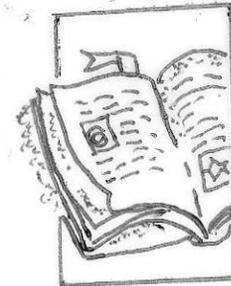
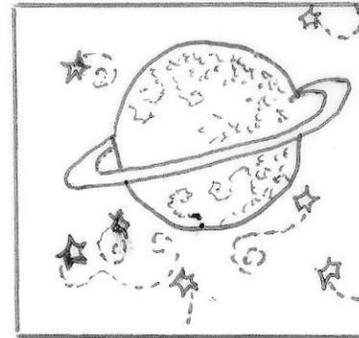


Willard L. Bowman Elementary





**WILLARD BOWMAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**  
Anchorage School District  
11700 Gregory Road  
Anchorage, AK 99516  
742-5600-main  
742-5611-fax



*Dear Parents,*

*Thank you for considering Willard L. Bowman Open Optional Program for your child's education. We are proud of the education and activities available to the children and families in our Open Optional Program.*

*Here is a brief overview of our program and what we offer your child and family. Please take the time to read this booklet and discuss the possibilities with your family. In addition I encourage you to tour our program as this can provide a great opportunity to see if the Open Optional philosophy is best for your child. Check with the office staff for the next available tour date and time.*

*Choosing an educational program is one of the most important decisions you can make for your child. If you feel the Willard L. Bowman Open Optional Program is right for your child and family, please fill out a lottery application online. The first lottery is held in March for the following fall. For more information about applying to our program go to <https://lotapp.asdk12.org/apply/?step=0&academy=12> or give us call in the office.*

*Thank you again for considering the Willard L. Bowman Open Optional Program.*

*Sincerely,*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patrick Freeman'.

*Patrick Freeman, Principal*

## HOW DID BOWMAN'S OPEN OPTIONAL PROGRAM GET STARTED?

Bowman's Open Optional Program has a long history in south Anchorage. It started as the Abbott Loop Open Optional Program in 1975 at the urging of parents. South Anchorage parents wanted educational opportunities for their children similar to those offered downtown by the optional program at Chugach Elementary. After a successful start at Abbott Loop, the program was transferred to the new Willard L. Bowman School when the school opened in fall 1991. Our program has operated at capacity ever since.

## WHAT IS OUR PHILOSOPHY?

We believe academics, social skills and respect are important. Real life should be integrated into the classroom to make learning meaningful. We value communication, creativity, flexibility, cooperation, small and large group participation, community service, goal-setting, leadership and family involvement.

We see personal growth occurring along a continuum of expanding abilities, awareness, and attitudes.

### EXPANDING FROM ..... MOVING TOWARD

Competition .....	Cooperation/ Collaboration
Extrinsic motivation.....	Intrinsic motivation
Knowing.....	Understanding
Learning facts.....	Application and learning how to learn
Single texts.....	Multiple resources
Classroom learning.....	Life-long learning
Passive learning.....	Active learning

## WHAT IS THE BOWMAN OPEN OPTIONAL PROGRAM LIKE?

As a child moves through our program from kindergarten through sixth grade, s/he benefits from working with teachers who **share common beliefs and values** about education. Children are grouped into four **"family groups"** – kindergarten, first-second, third-fourth, and fifth-sixth. Kindergarten is full-day with one teacher. Each other family group consists of two combined classes and two teachers. The mixed age and grade groupings support our philosophy of children as learners and as models for other children.

Having seven teachers work closely with the same children year-to-year allows them to better know the children and their families, as well as following and guiding their progress through the grades. When children stay with the same teachers for two consecutive years (often referred to as "looping"), they benefit academically and socially. When they start their second year with the same team, they already are familiar with the expectations and classroom procedures, and they can be peer coaches and role models for their younger classmates. In addition, their two teachers can share observations, perspectives, opinions and expertise in supporting each child. Two heads are better than one!

A student also benefits from our **strong sense of community**. This community develops

through the many activities shared by students, families and teachers across the grades. Children read and write together, do math, and other activities with “buddies” in another family group. They work in K-6 groups on community service projects. Children from one family group may share research projects or plays with children in other family groups. All-optional student meetings, mini-courses and field trips occur. Because of active **parent involvement**, children’s support network (their “village”) is broadened. Several fun family events occur through the year, strengthening ties between families.

Children are respected as individuals. We want a child to know we honor his/her ideas and that his/her individuality is valued. We incorporate the development of **life skills** (create and critical thinking, self-direction, decision making, time management, cooperation, and conflict resolution) into the structure of our family groups. We provide a safe, supportive environment where children are encouraged to **challenge** themselves and actively participate and take risks in their own learning. Student self-evaluation and goal-setting are crucial components of the learning process. Because we recognize that children have different learning styles, we strive to provide them with choices in their learning along with student movement in the classroom.

Teachers combine textbooks with trade literature, primary sources, hands-on exploration, and field experiences to integrate the district curriculum. A search for curriculum materials may send children and teachers to libraries, the internet, community experts, family members, newspapers, magazines and various other sources. Special projects integrating the curriculum areas may allow students to pursue their own interests. We believe that the most meaningful education occurs in classrooms that encourage interactions with the larger community. That is why our program is characterized by parent involvement, multi-age groupings, use of community resources, community service projects, field trips, guest speakers, and cross-program activities.

As with all school district programs, our mission is to provide students with a strong foundation in all academic areas, adhering to the Anchorage School District’s adopted curriculum, at the same time offering a child-center, holistic approach to learning that honors the individual.

The Optional Program is often referred to as “a school within a school” because we share the building with Bowman’s neighborhood students and special education pre-school programs. Principal, teachers, parents and students are dedicated to the concept of Bowman Elementary as **one school**. PTA meetings and projects involve families and teachers from all programs. All children may participate in assemblies, carnivals, music and sports events, and special school-wide activities. Parent volunteers are also greatly relied upon to enhance these opportunities for learning.

## DOES THIS SCHOOL RECEIVE SPECIAL TREATMENT?

Our program does not receive any special funding, privileges, equipment, or transportation from the district. Students may enter the Optional Program regardless of where they live in Anchorage. However, bus transportation is not provided unless the student resides in Bowman’s attendance area and qualifies for bus service. Optional students depend heavily

on carpools or parents for transportation.

The same district rules and regulations apply to our program as to any other program in the Anchorage School District. Special services available to all Anchorage schools are also available to students in our program. These include a resource program for children with learning challenges, a gifted program, speech/language support, and bilingual and psychological services.

### WHAT TYPE OF CHILD IS MOST SUCCESSFUL IN THIS PROGRAM?

We would like to believe that any child can thrive in our program, but the fact is that the open optional setting may not be for everyone. Students who are enthusiastic about learning flourish in this atmosphere. Parents should understand and support our philosophy and goals. Parents need to trust the teachers and the program and believe that their student will learn and thrive in this child-centered setting.

A child who has not experienced success in other school settings may blossom in this environment. We try to accommodate a range of interests and skills by allowing students to work at different rates in some subjects. We may adapt expectations and requirements for students, depending upon their abilities and needs.

While we do not expect all children to arrive as self-motivated learners, students are expected to develop self-management and independent working skills. Children with developed self-discipline usually fit quite readily into our program. Others unaccustomed to making decisions may need more adult guidance and time to develop these skills.

### CAN A CHILD CHOOSE WHATEVER HE OR SHE WANTS TO LEARN IN THIS SCHOOL?

The optional program adheres to the standards and curriculum required by the Anchorage School District. The basics of language arts (reading, writing, listening and speaking), science, math and social studies are of central importance. Each child is expected to become proficient in these areas as he or she progresses through the program.

A child's day at school is planned by the teacher. Within the structure of required activities, however, children may have some choice as to how and when they will do each activity. They may choose a small area of study within a larger "umbrella" topic. These choices help children give direction to their own learning. On any given day, a child may spend time working independently, with another student, and/or with assigned or self-chosen groups, as well as receiving direct instruction.

The Optional Program promotes personal accountability, responsibility, self-direction, and commitment. As children demonstrate growth in these areas, they are given more options.

### WHAT ARE THE BEHAVIORAL EXPECTATIONS OF THIS PROGRAM?

Students are expected to follow school and "family group" rules. Guidelines for behavior are reinforced through group and individual discussions with children and through established consequences. Children are expected to show respect for themselves, each other and for

adults. Children are treated with dignity and respect. Teachers model this behavior and strive to focus on the positive whenever possible.

Students are often involved in developing family group rules and the consequences for both negative and positive behavior. They are encouraged to talk about how things are working. This can be one of the activities in family group meetings.

Children are taught specific conflict resolution and problem-solving skills and are given opportunities to practice these skills, with the help of the teachers as needed.

We feel that children need to learn that consequences follow all kinds of behaviors. We try to see that consequences for breaking rules are not punishments but are natural and/or logical and are related to the rule. We believe that positive discipline does not interfere with student motivation, and that we always strive to preserve a child's dignity.

### WHAT ABOUT COMPETITION?

In competition with others there may be the element of "If I win, you lose" or "If you win, I lose." Because of our strong commitment to building self-esteem, we emphasize cooperative interactions to foster learning how to work with others and to practice and experience positive interdependence. Competition is viewed as healthy when it is freely chosen among equals.

Children are encouraged to improve their work and compare it to their own past efforts. They also engage in individual and group efforts designed to meet specific standards. Teachers incorporate cooperative learning strategies into daily work sessions and classroom activities.

### HOW DO WE ASSESS YOUR CHILD'S PROGRESS?

Students develop portfolios of their work to showcase progress, rather than receiving letter grades and report cards. These portfolios include student learning goals, work samples, and evaluations. Written self-evaluations assessing social skills and work habits go home quarterly with teacher comments. Portfolio conferences are led by each student for parents and teachers at the end of first and third quarters.

We do administer the standardized assessments required by the Anchorage School District and the state of Alaska.

Because parents are encouraged and welcomed into our classrooms, they have many opportunities to observe their child's social and academic progress, as well as their child's educational activities.

Parents may also phone, email, or make an appointment to talk with their child's teacher.

### HOW DO STUDENTS ADJUST AFTER LEAVING THE OPTIONAL PROGRAM?

Great! Former students, their parents, and middle school and senior high teachers tell us that Bowman Optional students adjust well to their new educational settings, whether it be

optional or neighborhood secondary programs. This is not surprising, since a child with a positive self-image, who enjoys learning and has self-discipline and independent learning skills, is well equipped to handle new situations.

### ARE PARENTS ASKED TO CONTRIBUTE TIME TO THE OPTIONAL PROGRAM?

Parents are encouraged to contribute time to the program in various ways. One-half day per child per month is strongly recommended.

Parent participation at Bowman is a fundamental feature of our program. Enrolling your child in our program constitutes a commitment to support the program with your time either in the classroom or in other ways. An organized Optional parent group meets once a quarter, and all parents are encouraged to attend.

### HOW CAN MY CHILD BE ENROLLED IN THIS PROGRAM?

There is a prescribed process that families are asked to go through to have their child enrolled in our program. Generally, we ask that parents tour the school with a parent guide and view a slide or video presentation describing the program. All students must submit an application. All prospective students' names are then placed in a lottery, which establishes their places on a waiting list. Lotteries are conducted several times during the year and follow standard district policies and procedures.

Prospective students, particularly those entering during the school year, are encouraged to schedule a visit to the school with a parent.

As you tour our program, you may notice some of these characteristics of our Open Optional classrooms:

- multi-age activities
- small-group collaborative work
- a flexible learning environment
- no letter grades
- quarterly student-led portfolio conferences and frequent student self-evaluations
- teachers called by first names
- extensive parent involvement and commitment
- many opportunities for children to make choices
- no (few) desks, many tables, some couches

As you tour our program, you might ask yourself:

- Do the teachers' styles match my parenting style?
- Do I feel comfortable here? If so your child will most likely experience similar feelings.

Revised June 2005