

Introduction to the Lesley/Cambridge Summer Compass Program

For over thirty years, Lesley University and the Cambridge Public Schools have collaboratively offered a summer program that provides a child-centered academic seven-week summer program for Cambridge School children in grades preK-6, extending and reinforcing the children's learning during the school year. It also satisfies the practicum requirement for Lesley students in the Specialist Teacher of Reading program, and one-half of the practicum requirement for Lesley students in the Early Childhood Education, Elementary, Moderate Disabilities, and Technology in Education programs.

The program offers an exciting inclusive school environment using a thematic curriculum format, and prepares Lesley students in a setting where specialists and general educators develop and implement programs together.

The student population is determined by the Cambridge School Department. Approximately 125-175 children from the Cambridge Public School system, grades PreK-6, attend the program. They are selected to insure racial balance and citywide attendance, and approximately 30% of the children are identified as having special needs. The student population reflects the cultural and linguistic diversity of Cambridge. The average class size is 20-25 students, and classes are organized in multi-age groupings. Each classroom has a team consisting of a mentor teacher and up to three student teachers, and often includes both general and special education practitioners in a co-teaching model. A reading consultant also serves each classroom.

Student teachers are closely supervised by Lesley University supervisors, who are on site several days a week. Weekly two-and-a-half hour seminars are held on site for student teachers, to reflect on their teaching and discuss issues related to the Compass program and their licensure areas. Classroom teams meet for an hour after school, four days a week, for curriculum planning and discussion of educational strategies for individual students.

Several staff members from the Cambridge Public Schools and Lesley are involved in planning and supporting the Compass Program. In addition to mentor teachers, on-site staff include: a director, curriculum coordinator, language arts consultant, staff assistant, computer teacher, library aide, integration specialist, health aide, and several teens from the Mayor's Kids summer employment program.

Before the Cambridge students begin the program, all staff and student teachers have a week of orientation and set-up. During this time, teams design the classrooms, develop curriculum, meet with special educators from Cambridge to plan for inclusion, and attend several workshops on such topics as classroom management, cultural diversity and English language learning, and the reading/writing connection.

Each classroom chooses a theme for the summer and designs an interdisciplinary, developmentally appropriate curriculum related to this theme. The curriculum emphasizes hands-on, activity-based learning in language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and the arts. Other program components include computer lab, theme-related field trips, and library. Student teachers in the reading program serve as language arts consultants to the classrooms and work on whole-school activities, such as newsletters.

In addition to the strong academic component of the program, the children have access to weekly swimming lessons. Breakfast and lunch are also provided. Parents and families are involved in the program through activities like potluck breakfasts.

At the end of the summer, the mentor teachers prepare narrative reports describing each child's progress over the course of the summer. Throughout the program, there is an emphasis on collaboration, cooperative learning, interdisciplinary teaching, and building a sense of community. These priorities benefit all participants.