



Falk School

Wishes for our
Children



What do we wish for our children?

This question is the foundation of our vision. The 21 statements that follow attempt to articulate that vision—to bring clarity to the question. Having a clear picture of what we want for our children will help guide us in all that we do. We will use this document to measure and guide our actions.

Falk School

On a hill overlooking the campus of the University of Pittsburgh stands a beautiful gray stone building with an old English slate shingle roof. Inside is a school with an excellent faculty and a diverse student body. It is the campus laboratory school of the University of Pittsburgh.

Established under a charter agreement between the University and Leon Falk Jr. and Marjorie Falk Levy in 1930, the school has a unique status among American laboratory schools. It is the only one that is known to have a legal charter that stipulates its purpose and functions. The school was named the Fanny Edel Falk Elementary School in honor of the donors' mother.

The original charter designated the school as a progressive experimental school for demonstration purposes; however, in 1946 the charter was amended to include practice teaching as one of the school's functions. Over the years the faculty added to the school's original functions the development of new and innovative educational practices, the in-service education of experienced teachers, and educational research. Most recently, Falk School has adopted inquiry as the defining characteristic in its educational philosophy.



“The hardest part about gaining any new idea is sweeping out the false idea occupying that niche. As long as that niche is occupied, evidence and proof and logical demonstration get nowhere. But once the niche is emptied of the wrong idea that has been filling it, once you can honestly say, ‘I don’t know,’ then it becomes possible to get at the truth.”

—Robert A. Heinlein

“What children learn does not follow as an automatic result from what is taught, rather, it is in large part due to the children’s own doing, as a consequence of their activities and our resources.”

—Loris Malaguzzi

1 ... to understand that any learning endeavor depends primarily on them.

Only when we make a payment through effort do we receive something real and permanent. What we receive, then, is commensurate with our effort, and everything we really possess we have earned. If we do not help our children move toward internal self-determination, we move them toward external dependency.



“Everything that is really great and inspiring is created by the individual who can labor in freedom.”

—Albert Einstein

“The creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect but by the play instinct acting from inner necessity. The creative mind plays with the objects it loves.”

—Carl Jung

“It is not so important to have all the answers as to be hungry for them.”

—Carol Ann Tomlinson

2 ... to have a deepening relationship with something that arises out of their own personal interests.

The lives and interests of our students outside school is a significant part of who they are. When school becomes so important that it leaves little or no room for their interests, they are doubly harmed: first, their personal interests are silenced, and second, their schoolwork loses its vitality. They become unbalanced.



“If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up people to collect wood and don’t assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.”

—Antoine de Saint-Exupery

“I am still learning.”

—Michelangelo

3 ... to have a growing and deepening intellectual interest in at least one curricular area.

Intellectual development is critical to a complete education. Academic success is the foundation for this development, but discovering and following an authentic interest that springs from the self leads to the intellect’s fruition. It is our hope and wish that each of our students will find a sincere interest in what we teach and what we share with them.



“Beyond every effort put first, lies an undiscovered opportunity.”

—Cassia Lewis

“The highest reward for a person’s toil is not what they get for it, but what they become by it.”

—John Ruskin

“Men give me credit for some genius. All the genius I have lies in this: when I have a subject in hand, I study it profoundly. Day and night it is before me. My mind becomes pervaded with it. Then the effort that I have made is what people are pleased to call the fruit of genius. It is the fruit of labor and thought.”

—Alexander Hamilton

4 ... to make their best effort in their academic course work.

When academic school work is meaningful, when it is seen as a relevant endeavor, students are invested whether or not it is “practical.” Best effort is possible when children have a wish to discover meaning and find relevance in what they are studying.



5 ... to have a successful organizational style.

What organized people have in common is not the same method but a method. What works for one person may not work for another person. Personality, developmental maturity, background, learning style, and time constraints all affect how a person is able to organize himself or herself. We must work to help all our children find their own organizational style.

“For every minute spent in organizing, an hour is earned.”

—Benjamin Franklin

“Our goals can only be reached through the vehicle of a plan. There is no other route to success.”

—Pablo Picasso



6 ... to use educational tools in developmentally appropriate ways to deepen understanding.

A primary child cutting out geometric shapes with a pair of scissors and a middle school child exploring three-dimensional models on the computer are both involved in manipulating educational tools. There is a movement in learning from the concrete to the abstract, including the body as well as the mind. When this happens, a deeper understanding is possible, an understanding that is more permanent.

“Someday, in the distant future, our grandchildren’s grandchildren will develop a new equivalent of our classrooms. They will spend many hours in front of boxes with fires glowing within. May they have the wisdom to know the difference between light and knowledge.”

—Plato

“He that would perfect his work must first sharpen his tools.”

—Confucius

7 ... to have balanced perspective on contemporary trends and world issues.

We come to every issue with our own set of assumptions, perspectives, history, and bias. Authentic open-mindedness is difficult to achieve. We need to help our children develop an open attitude by looking at multiple perspectives on issues that face our school, community, country, and world.

“The significant problems of today cannot be solved at the same level of thinking that created them.”

—Albert Einstein

“Familiar things happen, and mankind does not bother about them. It requires a very unusual mind to undertake the analysis of the obvious.”

—Alfred North Whitehead

“To inquire and to learn is the function of the mind.

By learning I do not mean the mere cultivation of memory or the accumulation of knowledge, but the capacity to think clearly and sanely without illusion, to start from facts and not from beliefs and ideals. There is no learning if thought originates from conclusions.”

—Jiddu Krishnamurti





8 ... to have reverence for the natural world.

To have reverence for the natural world is to affirm life. To care for a plant, to appreciate the change of seasons, to marvel at a butterfly is to be also connected to what is open and free within ourselves. Through contact with nature, and with growing awareness of the interconnectedness of life, we come to know respect in its purest form. Today, as we find ourselves increasingly in relation to manufactured products and pastimes, we need to help children cultivate a relationship with the out-of-doors.

“In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks.”

—John Muir

“Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts.”

—Rachel Carson

“You must understand the whole of life, not just one little part of it. That is why you must read, that is why you must look at the skies, that is why you must sing, and dance, and write poems, and suffer, and understand, for all that is life.”

—Jiddu Krishnamurti

“Think of all the beauty still left around you and be happy.”

—Anne Frank

“Develop interest in life as you see it; in people, things, literature, music—the world is so rich, simply throbbing with rich treasures, beautiful souls, and interesting people. Forget yourself.”

—Henry Miller

9 ... to have a deepening understanding of the aesthetic dimension of the world.

If we could be better aware of the beauty that is around us, what effect would this have on the quality of our lives? Such awareness is significant. By helping our children keep alive their natural wonder for the world, we keep them open to all experience.



"I like to see a man proud of the place in which he lives.
I like to see a man live so that his place will be proud
of him."

—Abraham Lincoln

"We should try... to teach that respecting property does
not mean never touching what is not yours, but means
treating objects carefully, using them as they are meant
to be used, and putting them back where they belong."

—John Holt

"Education is for improving the lives of others and for
leaving your community and world better than you
found it."

—Marian Wright Edelman

10 ... to be aware of the space around them and share in its maintenance.

When we feel connected to the place we
work and play, this place becomes a natural
extension of our well-being. Our health,
then, is inextricably connected to the
health of the place we live. When our
children see their own environment as a
part of them and not apart from them,
they will become caretakers.



“The thing to do, it seems to me, is to prepare yourself so you can be a rainbow in somebody else’s cloud. Somebody who may not look like you. May not call God the same name you call God—if they call God at all. I may not dance your dances or speak your language. But be a blessing to somebody. That’s what I think.”

—Maya Angelou

“You have to do your own growing no matter how tall your grandfather was.”

—Abraham Lincoln



11

**...to appreciate
the uniqueness
of individuals
and celebrate the
differences.**

All people are the same; all people are different. This simple lesson we teach our children is one of the most important lessons they will ever learn. Seeing ourselves in others awakens empathy, understanding, tolerance, and forgiveness. Imagine a community that shared these four attributes.



12

**...to grow in the
experience of
doing for others.**

One way to grow in our understanding of responsibilities beyond ourselves is by volunteering some time and energy to provide a service to others. The issues that face those in need might await us in the future. The appreciation given for a sincere service is an important formative experience for all children.

“This is the miracle that happens every time to those who really love; the more they give, the more they possess.”

—Rainer Maria Rilke

“Consciously or unconsciously, every one of us does render some service or other. If we cultivate the habit of doing this service deliberately, our desire for service will steadily grow stronger, and we will make not only our own happiness, but that of the world at large.”

—Mahatma Gandhi

“Fashion your life as a garland of beautiful deeds.”

—Buddha

13 ...to acknowledge their debt to the work of others.

When students come to school, they are still working through the stage of self-centeredness, the notion that the universe revolves around them. How do we help them to grow and develop through this stage without negativity and with a growing concern and understanding? Being grateful for others' work is an important aspect of this process. To gradually mature from the feeling of being owed to the feeling of being in debt is critical.

"One generation plants the trees; another gets the shade."

—Chinese Proverb

"I have learned silence from the talkative, tolerance from the intolerant, and kindness from the unkind; yet, strange, I am ungrateful to these teachers."

—Kahlil Gibran

"What you leave behind is not what is engraved in stone monuments, but what is woven into the lives of others."

—Pericles





14

**...to understand
how to make
and maintain
a friendship.**

No one questions the importance of friendships, and for most students they arise so naturally that we don't consider how we might help those who have difficulty making friends. Friendships help define us and help form the foundation for our social and emotional well-being.

"There's not a word yet for old friends who've just met."
—*Jim Henson*

"I don't need a friend who changes when I change and who nods when I nod; my shadow does that much better."
—*Plutarch*

"In the End, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."
—*Martin Luther King, Jr.*

"A friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of nature."
—*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

15 ...to know how to handle themselves appropriately in social situations.

Social conventions have their basis in honor, respect, and self-responsibility. Considering others and not just oneself is the guiding principle. Our students need to learn social behaviors that respect both themselves and all those around them. They also need to come to know and feel that they represent not only themselves but also their school, their family, and all their social relationships.

“Education is the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper.”

—Robert Frost

“Politeness is a sign of dignity, not subservience.”

—Theodore Roosevelt

“It takes something more than intelligence to act intelligently.”

—Fyodor Dostoyevsky



A young boy with curly brown hair is sitting on a red swivel chair in a library. He is wearing a dark green t-shirt, blue shorts, and black sneakers with white socks. He is looking down at a book in his lap. The background shows tall wooden bookshelves filled with books. The lighting is soft and warm.

16

...to understand the validity of their feelings and their responsibility for their actions.

Our feelings come upon us from complex causes: our health, how much we slept, what we ate, what happened recently, what someone said to us, what expectations we are presented with, and so on. We don't choose our feelings, nor can we control them. We can, however, choose our actions, which in part proceed from our feelings. We must model this concept in our own behavior as well as help students to practice, reflect upon, and understand it.

“There's no ‘should’ or ‘should not’ when it comes to having feelings. They're part of who we are, and their origins are beyond our control. When we can believe that, we may find it easier to make constructive choices about what to do with those feelings.”

—Fred Rogers

17

**...to know how
to make healthy
decisions
concerning diet
and nutrition.**

Self-observation shows us that what we eat and drink affects our mood, our alertness, and our ability to be attentive. For children, a healthy diet is important for their physical growth and well-being, yet we also must acknowledge its impact on their learning and their social and academic interaction in the school environment.

“The wise man should consider that health is the greatest of human blessings. Let food be your medicine.”

—Hippocrates

“To ensure good health: eat lightly, breathe deeply, live moderately, cultivate cheerfulness, and maintain an interest in life.”

—William Londen



“Movement, or physical activity, is thus an essential factor in intellectual growth, which depends upon the impressions received from outside. Through movement we come in contact with external reality, and it is through these contacts that we eventually acquire even abstract ideas.”

—*Maria Montessori*

18

...to engage in physical activities that become meaningful in their lives.

The health and fitness of the body is a major factor in students' identity, which directly affects their learning. Our wish and responsibility to our students will be to help them develop certain physical skills that could become the foundation for all future physical activity and lifelong fitness.





“Work with the hands is the apprenticeship of honesty. ... No one is by nature exempt from the necessity to work with his hands.”


—*Mahatma Gandhi*

“The chief characteristic of handcrafts is that they maintain by their very nature a direct link with the human heart, so that the work always partakes of a human quality.”

—*Soetsu Yanagi*

19 ...to experience the satisfaction of working with their hands.

To work with one's hands, to make, to fashion, to create with the body in concert with the mind and emotions is a fundamental experience that grounds all of our learning and understanding. Students need opportunities, guidance, and encouragement to engage in work with their hands so that it becomes an enduring practice in their lives.



20

**...to see quiet
and relaxation
as necessary
components
of learning.**

With the business of each day, there is an endless stream of noise, thoughts, and information. It is difficult to find the time or space to experience quiet. Yet, for learning to resound within us, to deepen, and take root, there must be an open receptivity that is characterized by a quiet relaxation. We must help our students into this experience.

“Take rest; a field that has rested gives a bountiful crop.”
—Ovid

“During periods of relaxation after concentrated intellectual activity, the intuitive mind seems to take over and can produce the sudden clarifying insights which give so much joy and delight.”
—Fritjof Capra

“Only in quiet waters do things mirror themselves undistorted. Only in a quiet mind is adequate perception of the world.”
—Hans Margolius

21 ...to develop the ability to be attentive.

Attention is an ability that needs nurturing and development. Children can develop the ability to be attentive, and this attention is often naturally cultivated through their own active interests. (Listening and observing are two activities that help develop attention.) Learning in an academic setting presents new demands on attention that need deep consideration to help this potential grow toward fruition.

“We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aid, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn...”

—Henry David Thoreau

“Concentrate all your thoughts upon the work at hand. The sun’s rays do not burn until brought to a focus.”

—Alexander Graham Bell



What we **Wish** for our **Children**

1

We want our children to understand that any learning endeavor depends primarily on them.

2

We want our children to have a deepening relationship with something that arises out of their own personal interests.

3

We want our children to have a growing and deepening intellectual interest in at least one curricular area.

4

We want our children to make their best effort in their academic course work.

5

We want our children to have a successful organizational style.

6

We want our children to use educational tools in developmentally appropriate ways to deepen understanding.

7

We want our children to have a balanced perspective on contemporary trends and world issues.

8

We want our children to have reverence for the natural world.

9

We want our children to have a deepening understanding of the aesthetic dimension of the world.

10

We want our children to be aware of the space around them and share in its maintenance.

11

We want our children to appreciate the uniqueness of individuals and celebrate the differences.

12

We want our children to grow in the experience of doing for others.

13

We want our children to acknowledge their debt to the work of others.

14

We want our children to understand how to make and maintain a friendship.

15

We want our children to know how to handle themselves appropriately in social situations.

16

We want our children to understand the validity of their feelings and their responsibility for their actions.

17

We want our children to know how to make healthy decisions concerning diet and nutrition.

18

We want our children to engage in physical activities that become meaningful in their lives.

19

We want our children to experience the satisfaction of working with their hands.

20

We want our children to see quiet and relaxation as necessary components of learning.

21

We want our children to develop the ability to be attentive.