



## OPAL CHARTER SCHOOL AT-A-GLANCE 2010-11

### Opal Charter School

Opal School is a public charter school of the Portland Public School District and a program of the Portland Children's Museum. Opal School opened the fall of 2001. It currently serves children ages 5 through 10 years, grades K through 5.

### Opal Museum School

The Portland Children's Museum offers a tuition-based preschool for children age 3 years 6 months by September 1<sup>st</sup> and a tuition-based early kindergarten for children age 4 years by September 1<sup>st</sup>. Information and applications for these classes are available online at [www.portlandcm.org](http://www.portlandcm.org) and at the front desk of the Museum. Children who attend these programs must enter the Opal Charter lottery if considering enrollment in the Charter.

### What is a public charter school?

A charter school is a public school that operates under a written agreement (a charter) between a local school board (Portland Public Schools) and the charter school operator (Portland Children's Museum). The purpose of the 1999 Charter School Legislation Act is to encourage the creation of innovative and more flexible ways of educating children within the public school system. Student enrollment is determined through an open lottery system.

### What makes a charter school different from a neighborhood school?

Charter schools have more flexibility in determining their curriculum, teaching methods, discipline approach and in hiring staff. Charter schools develop policies on these topics but do not have to follow district-adopted policies or materials.

### What is the relationship of Opal School to the Children's Museum?

The Portland Children's Museum is a non-profit community organization with oversight by the Museum Board of Directors. The Museum delivers its mission through exhibits, studios and education programs, including the Opal Museum and Charter Schools and the Center for Children's Learning. The Center is the research arm of the Museum. Its purpose is to document the experiences of children and families within the Museum and school environments and to use this research to continually enrich all programming and educational offerings. The Center also provides professional development and products to supports educators and parents. All Opal School families receive family memberships to the Museum.

### Philosophy and Curriculum

Opal School strives to be a learning community of children, families, and teachers who organize their work by listening to each other and where teachers pay close attention to children's thinking, creativity, and ways of learning. We believe every child brings a perspective that the school, community, and the world needs.

The responsibility of Opal School is to evoke, provoke, reveal, and support the gifts of each child, making them visible and accessible to the child and to others.

Academic excellence is pursued through the arts and sciences as "languages" to support children's ideas using written and spoken words, drawing and painting, mathematical symbols, computer technology, physical movement and dance, dramatic and musical interpretation, natural materials, clay and sculpture, and other

ways of expressing one's thinking. Basic skills are always introduced and practiced within a context that has meaning and purpose to the child.

To quote the late founder of the early childhood schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy:

*"The child has a hundred languages, a hundred hands, a hundred thoughts,  
a hundred ways of thinking, of playing, of speaking...and a hundred, hundred more."  
Loris Malaguzzi*

Opal School strives to support the one hundred languages of children and more.

### State benchmarks

Charter schools are required to meet the state benchmarks. Opal students consistently perform very well on state tests. Opal School received a rating of outstanding for the 2008-09 school year on the state report card. However, we do not believe that standardized tests alone are sufficient to determine a child's achievements. Opal School uses a wide variety of tools in addition to standardized tests to provide information about the progress of each child.

### What if my child is "advanced" for his/her age? Can he/she be enrolled in the next grade level?

Opal School is a mixed-age program where children have opportunities to interact and work collaboratively with others, not always peers of the same age. The teachers consider the cognitive and emotional development of each child and plan the curriculum accordingly. The intention is to provide a rich and varied curriculum of high challenge, yet low risk, appropriate to the developmental level of each child. Opal School does not accept early entry applicants to kindergarten. Children must be 5 by September 1<sup>st</sup> to apply to the lottery for kindergarten.

### Classes and Staffing

Opal Charter School has three mixed-age classrooms.

Class sizes:

K-1 class, no more than 25 students

2-3 class, no more than 27 students

4-5 class, no more than 28 students

Our staffing also includes studio specialists in the arts, sciences, and physical education. Special Education services are provided on-site through Portland Public Schools.

### Staff Qualifications

Opal School staff exceeds charter school requirements that at least half of the total teaching staff be licensed by the Oregon Teachers Standards and Practices Commission. One of our most important goals is to have highly qualified teachers who continually strive to improve their skills and abilities through ongoing practice, research and professional development.

### Nutrition

Opal Charter School provides a daily healthy snack for all students. In addition, we have a lunch menu for families to pre-order a healthy meal, including an entrée, vegetables, fruit, and milk.

### Volunteer Opportunities

There are a number of ways to participate at Opal School. We welcome parents as classroom volunteers, reading buddies, snack and lunch helpers, and committee members.

### Schedule, Hours, Fees

Opal Charter School generally follows the Portland Public Schools calendar year. Opal Charter School is a K-5 public elementary school that offers a morning Kindergarten program from 8:30 to 11:30 at no charge. An afternoon Kindergarten program is available from 11:30 to 2:45 for a monthly fee of \$300. This does not apply

to children in grades 1-5. If you are interested in participating in the afternoon K program, but the monthly fee would be an economic hardship, you may apply for reduced or free status through the Opal Office.

Materials fees - \$38/month per child is for the following: all K-5 school supplies, snacks, fieldtrip expenses and a school photo. Reduced and free status also apply to materials fees.

Daily Schedule – School begins at 8:30 and ends at 2:45 Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. Every Wednesday is an Early Dismissal Day for teacher planning. All children leave school at 1:30pm on Wednesdays (except AM Kindergarten students).

#### Transportation

Families use a variety of transport options including public transport, car-pools and self-transportation.

#### Who is eligible to attend Opal Charter School?

Opal School students are selected through an open lottery process. **The lottery opens March 1 and closes March 31.** Applications are available March 1<sup>st</sup> online, at the front desk of the Children’s Museum, or may be requested from the Opal Office (503.471.9917). Any child who lives within the Portland Public School District may enroll in the Opal School lottery. **Out-of-district applications are considered only if there are fewer PPS applicants than spaces available.** No priorities are given *except* to children enrolled in the previous year, or to siblings. Opal School follows the Portland Public School District grade-level eligibility cutoff date of September 1: To enter the Opal School Kindergarten in the fall of 2010, a child must be 5 years of age by September 1, 2010.

#### When will I know if my child was selected by the lottery?

When the lottery season closes on March 31<sup>st</sup> we enter all applicants into a computer program that generates a random list that we use to fill vacancies. If we have a vacancy and your child is next on the list, we invite you in to tour the school to determine if Opal is the right fit for your child. Once all vacancies are filled, we notify the remaining families of their place on the waitlist. This process is usually complete by the end of May. Sometimes vacancies arise during the summer and fall. We refer back to the waitlist for each grade when filling any additional vacancies.

#### What are my chances in the lottery?

Every year Opal School has some openings. Availability in each grade level is contingent upon the number of returning students and whether they have siblings eligible to attend. Siblings have priority for any available spaces.

