Parent Frequently Asked Questions

Overview

In 2018, the administration and teachers at Barlow Park began advocating for a charter to better meet the needs of the children than what the current system allows. After much research, professional development, and collaboration, the idea for Barlow Park Charter grew. In the summer of 2019, the Ripon-Area School District received a five-year grant to plan and operate Barlow Park Charter School. Two of the foundational methods at this charter include competency-based learning and play-based learning.

What does Competency-Based mean?

Competency-Based Learning means that teachers will create a personalized learning experience that is organized based on how your child learns, what your child currently knows and understands, and what your child wants and needs to learn next. This will allow flexibility so learners will receive instruction that is “just right” for them. Instruction will be tailored to each student’s strengths, needs, and interests to ensure students are becoming proficient and demonstrate mastery in target skills. When a child masters a skill they will move to the next skill set. Children who catch on quickly will continue to be challenged and those that might need a little more time won’t be rushed. Group teaching will be responsive to what your child needs when they need it rather than teaching to all levels during the same learning block (like it is now).

Competency groups in math and reading may be multi-age for example in a group of ten math students 3 might be 1st graders and 7 are 2nd graders. The rest of the day students will be with their grade-level peers.

Research Link: https://www.ed.gov/oli-news/competency-based-learning-or-personalized-learning
What if a second grader is grouped with kindergarteners or vice versa?

Students may be in a multi-age group only during math and reading (about 30 - 40% of their day). Personalized learning is based on how your child learns, what your child currently knows and understands, and what your child wants and needs to learn next. Focused instruction at a similar level for longer portions of the day will help your child reach proficiency more readily. Think of it like swimming lessons. The child who hasn’t learned how to put their face in the water would not be in the same group of swimmers who are learning how to dive. As soon as they master a skill, they move on. The beauty is that the groups are fluid, not set for the whole school year.

Wait a minute! There will still be grade levels?

Yes. There will still be kindergartners, 1st-graders, and 2nd-graders who have a homeroom, grade-level teacher (just like it is now). Your child will spend the majority of their day (60 - 70%) with their grade-level peers. Students will stay in the same homeroom for the entire school year (just like it is now).

What does play-based learning look like?

Children are children and our youngest students learn best through play which is developmentally appropriate. The key is that the play will be guided and with a purpose. Your child will be in a group with other students in the same grade who have similar social and emotional learning needs (the same competencies). During Play Workshop, the teacher will plan lessons that are personalized to the learners in the group. Play workshop includes a whole group mini-lesson, small group instruction, and 1:1 conferences with the teacher. Teachers will continuously monitor progress and move students into a group that will best support their continued development. This flexibility allows for “just the right fit” instruction.

Research Link: https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/142/3/e20182058

How can you “grade” play?

Students will have clear learning goals to match their developmental readiness so that they are engaged and challenged but not frustrated. Children are able to grow their social-emotional skills through play. Each student will be given equal opportunity to master the necessary skills to be
successful because they are taught to their strengths. In turn, as their strengths increase they will move on to master new skills. Research shows play-based programs for young children can provide a strong basis for later success at school.

Why does Ripon need another charter school?

A charter is required in the State of Wisconsin to provide competency-based instruction rather than age-based instruction, allow play-based and competency-based curriculum, and the ability for teachers to grade on a continuum of skills (allowing students to easily move from one group to another based on their mastery of skills). In addition, the funding that comes with a charter provides crucial training for staff outside of their normal professional development so that they can become highly-qualified in the instruction that they deliver. Student curriculum and materials will be purchased with charter funds as well.

How different is this school? What will look different next year in terms of what my child does in a typical day?

Much of your child’s learning day will look the same as it does right now. Students will be with grade-level peers in homerooms for 60-70% of their day to receive instruction in science, social studies, SMART large and fine motor skill development, specials such as library time, Music, Physical Education, and Art as well as guided play workshop. They will also be with grade-level peers during recess and lunch. For 30-40% of their day, students will be in competency-based flexible multi-age groups to receive instruction in math and reading.

Will my child have one main teacher?

Yes. Students will have a homeroom teacher for the entire year just like they do now.

Will there be a report card?

Yes. Your child’s homeroom teacher will provide you with a report card to indicate their proficiency within the State of Wisconsin Common Core Academic Standards which has been approved by our Board of Education.
What happens at the end of second grade?

At the end of a school year each student will move to the next grade level the following year. Kindergarteners to first grade, first to second and second graders will move to third grade with their same-aged peers as they do now, but better prepared. By receiving instruction in the areas that they need when they need it, and at their level for longer portions of the day, students will have a solid foundation of skills mastered and the teachers will have a greater understanding of the strengths of each student.

In our current system, students move to third grade with a wide range of abilities, the goal with this new system, is for more students to be better prepared for the third grade curriculum.

What about kids who are really advanced?

Students who need to be challenged will truly benefit from competency-based instruction because the teacher can devote more time to take them to the next level of learning.

What is SEL?

SEL stands for Social Emotional Learning. That is a fancy, academic word for how people understand and manage emotions. Our students are people first and everyone needs to learn these skills. Little ones sometimes take more time and support. Through SEL curriculum students can set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. These basic skills enable learners to make the most from their academic learning blocks.

What curriculum will my child be taught?

Your child will be taught the same curriculum that they are currently being taught. The content will not change. The difference is the delivery of how that content will be presented. Staff is still required to use the State of Wisconsin Common Core Academic Standards which has been approved by our Board of Education.

What does “It takes a village” mean?
We chose this popular phrase because a sense of community will be an integral part of the culture at BPES Charter School. Students will be encouraged to develop friendships with all the members of the school community, to support one another, encourage one another, and celebrate our accomplishments together. The BPES community must not stop at our school walls, parent support of this new way of learning is crucial to its success. Parents are a huge part of our village.

What if I have more questions?

Please reach out to any member of the planning team if you would like to learn more about the charter school.

Contact Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tanya Sanderfoot</th>
<th>Pamela Mumm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal, Barlow Park/Journey</td>
<td>Chair, Barlow Park Charter Governance Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>920-748-1550</td>
<td>920-290-1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:sanderfoott@ripon.k12.wi.us">sanderfoott@ripon.k12.wi.us</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:mumm.pamela@gmail.com">mumm.pamela@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>