

TEACHING FOR UNDERSTANDING

Amazing Grace and Renton Prep uses a comprehensive standards-based curriculum in which we teach for understanding. We align curriculum, instruction, and assessment to allow students to demonstrate understanding. Students understand when they:

- 1) Acquire important new knowledge and skills
- 2) Make meaning of big ideas related to the knowledge and skills
- 3) Transfer this learning to new and authentic situations (Wiggins & McTighe, in press)

The Understanding by Design (UbD) model, which seeks to structure teaching for understanding, guides us in the formulation of our written curriculum. Core principles of teaching for understanding include the following:

- 1) Units of study and the classroom environment are structured around major concepts and principles known as enduring understandings. These understandings, derived from the standards and benchmarks, extend beyond a single subject area and have lasting value outside the classroom. These big ideas are abstract, not obvious, and require inquiry rather than limited coverage.
- 2) Essential questions are used to raise student interest in the content of the unit and lead to development of the enduring understandings. Such questions are central to the curriculum and do not yield a single answer.
- 3) Essential questions are explicitly stated for students at the outset of the unit and remain the focus throughout the unit's duration.
- 4) Specific knowledge and skills are taught so students learn requisite subject knowledge. These are aligned with the enduring understandings and essential questions.
- 5) Multiple forms of assessment are used to allow students to demonstrate their understanding in various ways.
- 6) Formative assessments are used to guide instruction and student goal-setting.
- 7) Summative assessments, tasks and accompanying evaluation criteria are made explicit to students as developmentally appropriate.
- 8) Classroom instructional activities are all designed to engage students in building knowledge and skills and acquire understanding. Activities are differentiated to meet the needs of diverse learners