

What is Differentiated Instruction, And Why is It So Important?

As Head of School at Peninsula Heritage, Patricia Cailler explains, “Each child is unique! Each child learns in a different way, and we personalize the learning experience in order to have happy children who are successfully learning. Research shows that when a child’s day is filled with frustration and failure, very little learning takes place. “

Under Patricia’s leadership, Peninsula Heritage School offers differentiated instruction at many levels. For children who excel in mathematics and language arts, there is the Enrichment Program where students can be working at one or even two grade levels above their individual grade. While enjoying the challenge of advanced material, these students also benefit from the socialization of their same age peers in their regular classrooms for other subjects and at recess, lunch, and physical education. Students who need remediation or re-teaching receive additional instruction in small groups and individually, since Peninsula Heritage School has trained instructors for this specific purpose.



Within any classroom, there are two instructors—the Lead Teacher and the Teacher Support instructor—so when the Lead Teacher is presenting a lesson, the Teacher Support person can be assisting individual students in following the instruction. When a portion of the class is in the computer lab or in library time, the balance of the class can be divided into even smaller groups at learning centers for a 1:3 ratio of teacher to student in a personalized learning environment.

One-Size-Fits-All Teaching

Differentiated Instruction*

Every student writes on the same topic

Students choose from a variety of topics

Tests are all multiple-choice questions.

Tests have different sections that offer multiple ways to demonstrate learning.

Everyone reads the same book.

Students choose books according to their interests and reading levels.

Teachers give only verbal instructions.

Teachers give both oral and written directions; teachers provide sample of project so students can see expected outcomes.

Class time is spent doing one kind of activity the entire time.

Class is broken down into seven-to-ten minute chunks with new activities for each chunk.

Students read in class and work on projects outside of class.

Students work with others in class and do things they can do on their own when they are not in class.

Teachers answer all the questions.

Teachers redirect questions to students.

* Taken from *The Differentiated Instruction Book of Lists* by Jenifer Fox & Whitney Hoffman. Copyright 2001 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc.