The 21st Century Learning Academy

While understanding that educational experiences can be very diverse and that every group of designers will offer up a different dynamic to learning, we feel as a group that the adherence of our 10 core beliefs will help preserve and maintain the momentum we have achieved with our 9th grade students during the 2009-2010 school year:

1. **Teacher as Leader and Designer -** We believe that teachers must be at the forefront of design. Our core business in the 21st Century Learning Academy is designing challenging and meaningful work for our customers, which means it is critical for us to know them and their needs very well. Teachers must be committed to achieving collective action when designing learning experiences. We view collective action as a shared effort in which the decision of the group is binding on all its individual members. Without this unity, the integrity of design will be lost.

2. **21st Century Skills -** We believe our students must be equipped with the skills to compete and succeed in our emerging global economy. In order to gain these competencies, we believe it is imperative that we infuse 21st century skills into our academic curriculum. We embrace the framework set forth by The Partnership for 21st Century Skills:

   o Mastery of Core Subjects
   o Global Awareness
   o Financial, Economic, Business and Entrepreneurial Literacy
   o Civic Literacy
   o Health Literacy
   o Environmental Literacy
   o Creativity and Innovation
   o Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
   o Communication and Collaboration

   o Information Literacy
   o Media Literacy
   o ICT (Information, Communications & Technology) Literacy
   o Flexibility and Adaptability
   o Initiative and Self Direction
   o Social and Cross Cultural Skills
   o Productivity and Accountability
   o Leadership and Responsibility

3. **Project-Based Learning -** We believe a project-based approach is the best avenue to achieve the much needed 21st century skills listed above. Unlike some misconceptions of project-based learning, we do not believe that a project is a supplement to the curriculum; the project is the curriculum. All projects should be driven by inquiry and include and product and presentation that demonstrates learning.

4. **Engaging Work -** We believe that profound learning is facilitated by engaging and meaningful work. We believe that work is most engaging when that work includes the 10 Design Qualities set forth by the Schlechty Center:

   - Product Focus
   - Clear and Compelling Standards
   - Protection from Adverse Consequences for Initial Failures
   - Affirmation Of The Significance of the Performance
   - Affiliation

   - Novelty and Variety
   - Choice
   - Authenticity
   - Organization of Knowledge
   - Content and Substance

5. **Presentations of Learning -** We believe that presentations of learning are crucial to maintaining relevance, rigor, and meaning to learning experiences. Presentations of learning may happen small scale (classroom and Academy-wide presentations), but we feel that the greatest benefit comes from high stakes events that involve presentations to the community at large.

6. **Academic Integration -** We believe that profound learning is best retained when the academic curriculum is integrated. Simply put, we do not believe learning should happen in a vacuum. Learning is richer and more dynamic when students can see the connections across academics.

7. **Excellent Work -** We believe that excellent and beautiful work is truly transformational. We understand the power of reflection and revision in learning. As Ron Berger states in his book, An Ethic of Excellence, "One of the first things a school or classroom can do to improve the quality of student work is to get off the treadmill. This doesn't mean an end to deadlines – the real world is full of deadlines – but rather a clear distinction between rough research, rough drafts, and finished, polished final draft work." The first draft will never be the best draft. As Mr. Roberts so eloquently puts it, "No more junk!"

8. **Common Mission -** We believe that common goals and expectations should be applied to all students.   Learning is rigorous and qualifies all students for college and success in the world of work. All students create digital portfolios. Assessment is performance-based; all students develop products, solve problems, and present their findings to others in the school and surrounding community.

9. **Personalization -** We believe that a personalized approach to student learning is one of the cornerstones of our academy. Students learn best from teachers who know them well and allow them to pursue personal interests through product-based assessments. Students with special needs and English speakers of other languages receive individual attention in a full inclusion model. Classes are tailored to support individual and small group learning.

10. **Real World Connections -** We believe students experience some of their best learning outside the confines of the school building. Students participate in projects that involve impacting and contributing to the community. Experts in many fields are used to provide students with relevant and real world applications of their learning. Students' learning should reflect work performed in the real world.