



What Does Academic Rigor Look Like?

When parents are considering a school, the one thing they have told us that can make or break a school is whether they feel like their student will be challenged. In other words, do they see evidence of academic rigor? But as parents, we may not know exactly what academic rigor looks like. Academic rigor is not about giving students more classroom work or homework. It's about ensuring that every student has the opportunity to reach a higher level of learning, no matter what their academic level is. According to education expert Dr. Barbara R. Blackburn, academic rigor is defined as creating an environment in which each student is expected to learn at high levels, each student is supported so he or she can learn at high levels, and each student demonstrates learning at high levels.

Here are some examples of what academic rigor might look like in a classroom, so that parents can identify whether students are being encouraged to reach a higher level of learning:

- Teachers respond in a positive way to students and indicate that they believe the students can do it (this is referred to as a “growth mindset”).
- Students are engaged in the learning process.
- There is evidence of critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, oral and written communication, analyzing information, and encouraging creativity and imagination.
- At elementary, teachers and students are engaging in reading and writing in a variety of settings, including reading and writing workshops, reading aloud, phonics, and small group instruction.
- When a teacher asks a question, all students are expected to answer whether that's through peer sharing or another form of response.
- There is evidence that students are given multiple ways to demonstrate learning and understanding.
- Evidence of higher level questioning by the teacher which includes open-ended questions.
- Teachers ask extending questions, so that students are encouraged to think more deeply.
- If a student doesn't know an answer, the teacher continues to guide the student to the answer. If they ask other students' to assist, they then follow-up with the original student to check for understanding.
- Teachers use academic language in the classroom.
- There is evidence of small group work.
- Teachers work with groups of students while other students work independently.
- Evidence of student learning is posted around the classroom (projects, essays, etc.)
- Students feel safe to take risks by asking questions and speaking up in class.