**Mockingbird Project Based Learning FAQ**

Q: Why do CISD elementary campuses have different strategic initiatives?

A: In 2008, CISD Superintendent Dr. Jeff Turner, challenged campus principals to research and study initiatives that were being effectively implemented in the world of education. Principals were given total autonomy to implement an initiative as long as it was based on current research and best practices in education. Knowing that the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS- the learning standards that the state of Texas has determined are essential for each student to learn) are the foundation for learner success in our state, principals were very intentional about the strategic initiative they chose for their campus.

Q: Why did Mockingbird Elementary choose Project Based Learning (PBL) as a strategic initiative?

A: Pam Mitchell, the principal at Mockingbird, was intrigued in Project Based Learning after visiting New Tech High @Coppell and observing learners so engaged in what they were working on that they barely glanced up even though there were several visitors in the classroom. Mockingbird educators were already designing challenging authentic learning experiences as well as outstanding service learning projects. PBL was a natural progression for the innovative educators. In addition, the PBL framework adds feedback from peers and an element of collaboration and communication that replicates the business world. The staff has conducted several campus wide PBL book studies and currently focuses their Professional Learning Communities on PBL.

Q: Exactly what is Project Based Learning?

A: PBL engages learners in authentic problem-solving opportunities that captures their interest to ensure that they acquire a deep understanding of the content and apply what they learned to real-world situations.

Q: Does Mockingbird use the PBL framework every day for every content area?

A: No. We follow the balanced literacy philosophy and use the Daily Five structure to teach reading, which includes read to self, read to someone, listen to reading, work on writing, and word work. We use math investigations, which are manipulative-based. We incorporate PBL into reading and math only when it supports the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) in an authentic way. Science and social studies naturally lend themselves to PBL, but it is appropriate across the curriculum.

Q: How long does it take to complete a PBL?

A: PBLs last between two weeks and a month, depending on the content, skills, and depth of learning that must take place.

Q: How often do our children do PBL?

A: Every grade level has at least one PBL going at all times, with the exception of transitions between projects. We have found that we typically shift to PROBLEM Based Learning in math; those projects last between two and seven days.

Q: What if my child does not like to collaborate with other children?

A: Even people that work from home have to communicate and collaborate at times; no one works in isolation. Everyone must learn to produce in non-preferred as well as preferred modalities. However, when learners express a desire to work alone that request is often granted. Once they have tried to work alone, they typically ask to go back to work with the group.

Q: How are PBLs graded?

A: Through a variety of assessments (rubrics, Thinking Maps, quick checks, etc.), work products, and reflections based on the content of the PBL. Learners must demonstrate their understanding of every skill and concept that is taught during the PBL.

Q: Does my child receive the same grade as everyone else in the group?

A: Every child is graded individually according to their performance. Learners are empowered to expect group members to contribute appropriately. They are taught to problem-solve and/or seek out an adult for advice or to intervene.

Q: How can I be sure my child is learning as much as he or she would if the teachers used traditional instructional methods?

A: PBLs are much more rigorous than completing multiple choice worksheets or completing the questions at the end of a chapter in a textbook. Children learn the TEKS taught in mini-workshops and then have to apply what they learn as they complete tasks and make presentations. Not only do learners have to demonstrate what they learned, they must articulate their thinking, take knowledge beyond just a factual level, question to make meaning, and they want to know the “why” behind the learning. Teachers actively monitor and reteach as necessary.

Q: How does technology fit with PBL?

A: While PBL does not require technology to be effective, it is typically seen throughout the project. Whether learners are researching, collaborating with peers through Google Apps, Skyping with other learners in classrooms in Coppell or people in other countries, evaluating information from around the world, or creating multimedia presentations, they are taught to use digital media appropriately and with integrity.

Q: Will Mockingbird Elementary always be a PBL campus?

A: Mockingbird Elementary is committed to PBL and the continued iteration of that learning design practice.