



SOUTHSIDE FAMILY CHARTER SCHOOL

EDUCATING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is Southside Family Charter School?

Southside Family Charter School (SFCS) is a small urban K-8 program that meets the needs of a culturally and ethnically diverse population by engaging children in critical thinking and problem solving, involving children in political and social activism, encouraging creative expression, offering a wide range of electives and advocating for children and families. We are dedicated to academic excellence, innovation in curriculum, and family and community involvement. We focus on a social justice curriculum that teaches students to be independently-minded citizens who respect themselves and others. Our commitment to civil rights and social justice has fostered a curriculum that develops children who are leaders in their communities and the world. Our small size allows us to build strong relationships with students and families, while our use of the community as a classroom exposes young people to many learning opportunities outside the school's walls.

2. What are our values?

Our goal is to create a learning environment that reflects our values:

- Freedom from racism, sexism, classism, homophobia and cultural biases
- An opportunity for educational excellence regardless of income
- Involvement in issues of social justice
- Diverse cultural identities are honored
- Our community as an extension of our classrooms
- Community members are encouraged to participate in our programs

3. How long has Southside been around?

Southside Family School (SFS) opened its doors in 1972 as a demonstration project supported by the University of Minnesota and a federal Model Cities grant. Our involvement with the federal Model Cities program ended in 1975. A group of parents and teachers felt that the school had great promise and so looked for money to keep the school open as an independent school. From 1981 until September 1989, SFS functioned as a private school. In 1989, SFS became an official "contract alternative" of Minneapolis Public Schools which provided us with a stable source of funding. In 2004, the board of directors of SFS voted unanimously to end operations as a private contract alternative school and pursue charter school status. The newly formed charter school opened successfully in 2006, keeping our vision, mission and values of the "old" SFS intact, and becoming Southside Family Charter School.

4. What are the demographics of students that attend Southside?

Southside has an enrollment capacity of 107 students. While the majority of our students come from the Phillips and Powderhorn communities of South Minneapolis, we are able to provide transportation to students living anywhere within the city of Minneapolis. Of the children who attend Southside, 49% are children of color and 53% are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Southside is noted for its ability and willingness to serve diverse student needs.

5. Why do parents choose to send their children to Southside?

Parents choose Southside because they value our unique social justice curriculum, hands-on approach to learning, small class sizes (16:1 average student-to-teacher ratio), and the chance to be more involved in their children's education. In addition, parents choose Southside because we honor diverse family arrangements (i.e., foster families, GLBT families, extended families and multiracial families).

6. What is a charter school? Do parents have to pay for their children to attend Southside?

Being a charter school simply means we are a public school of choice and that we have a specific focus, ours being social justice. As with all public schools, enrollment is on a first come, first serve basis. There

are no admissions requirements or tuition fees to be able to attend Southside. Southside Family Charter School does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, gender, age, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, sexual orientation or disability.

7. Who is Southside’s charter authorizer?

Southside reorganized as a charter school in 2006-2007 authorized by Hamline University Graduate School of Education. Hamline University School of Education (renamed in 2008) renewed our charter in 2008-2009 for another three years. However, new state regulations and procedures led the administration at the university to remove themselves from the role of authorizing any charter schools. After months of research, exploration and application, Southside was approved to transfer authorizer authority to Volunteers of America-MN’s charter schools program beginning July of 2011. We will be eligible for renewal of our authorizing contract in June of 2014.

8. How many staff and teachers does Southside have?

Southside employs seven teachers and five paraprofessionals, an executive director, a school director, an office director, and a program associate. Southside has a part-time ELL teacher, and a social worker on contract from Washburn Center for Children. Our Board of Directors, which meets 10 times per year, is composed of a parent majority, a staff-elected teacher, and community at-large positions. In addition, Southside works with a very diverse group of interns and volunteers from the University of Minnesota, Augsburg College, Hamline University, Macalester College, Minneapolis Community & Technical College, and the community in general.

9. What is a social justice curriculum?

The Southside social justice curriculum educates children and the larger community about the underlying social problems that foster racism, sexism, classism and homophobia. By addressing these issues at an early age, Southside encourages children to see themselves as citizen activists who can change the world and helps children avoid internalizing the effects of discrimination by teaching a history of organized non-violent opposition to injustice. Our social justice curriculum motivates children to improve their basic skills, study history, think critically, and aspire to the achievements of the many role models they will study and meet. As with all Minnesota public schools, our unique social justice curriculum is aligned with Minnesota academic standards.

10. What are history trips?

Students ages 11-14 take two 3-4 day history trips each year to study living history through presentations, interviews, and active student participation in current events. To promote self-esteem, a broad world view, and a life-long love of learning, Southside students explore the world through field trips designed to expand their social and cultural awareness. Some of our more recent trips took us to White Earth Indian Reservation to learn about the White Earth Land Recovery Project (WELRP), to Pipestone, MN and the Pine Ridge & Rosebud Reservations in South Dakota to study Lakota culture and history, and to Milwaukee to learn about housing desegregation, African American History, Urban Farming, and college access programs.

The triennial Civil Rights History Trip and curriculum is the proudest and most public expression of our social justice mission. Beginning in 1993 and every three years since, Southside middle school students and staff embark on a 12-day tour of the southern United States exploring the Civil Rights Movement. To prepare for this trip, students study the civil rights movement intensively and interview local civil rights veterans living in Minneapolis and St. Paul. The focus of the trip is on “Children As Actors in History”. Students meet and interview people who played an active role in the Civil Rights Movement, people who were children and teenagers themselves at the time. Now adults, these inspiring role models continue the struggle for racial and economic justice. The trip demonstrates vividly the power of children to lead us towards freedom and justice.

During our most recent civil rights trip in spring of 2011, we traveled to Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, Arkansas and Mississippi. We are in the early stages of planning for our 8th triennial civil rights trip scheduled for spring of 2014.

11. What is the SAACP?

The Student Association for the Advancement of Children as People (SAACP) was founded by students who participated in the very first civil rights trip in 1993. Inspired by the many civil rights leaders they had met on this trip, these students wanted to form their own organization that would address concerns relevant to children, and to become involved in local issues of social justice. The SAACP fights against racism, poverty and injustice of all kinds. The students analyze issues, speak publicly and call for needed social and policy changes. Members of the SAACP have been invited to present at rallies and community meetings on welfare reform, affordable housing and issues of world peace, as well as to co-teach an undergraduate-level course in social justice alongside Hamline University professor, Colleen Bell. Members of the SAACP develop a slide show with highlights from each civil rights trip to use as a tool to educate college students, peers at other schools, and local organizations on how the fight for social justice continues on.

12. How does Southside really measure up at giving children proper basic skills?

Very well! Although we are an urban school with a high population of children eligible for the free or reduced-meal program, Southside students consistently achieve proficiency on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments reading tests at a higher rate than Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) students, and equal to the State of Minnesota as a whole. As you can see below, Southside outperforms MPS students on the MCA-II & III Math tests as well. During the 2012-2013 school year, four of our teachers are enrolled in the Augsburg College program, “Essential Math Understanding”, which will result in Southside realigning our math curriculum, “Think Math” & “Impact Math” to the state standards, and will improve the quality of math instruction school-wide.

Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments – Series II & III

	2011-2012		2010-2011		2009-2010		2006/07 thru 2008/09*	
	Reading	Math	Reading	Math	Reading	Math	Reading	Math
Southside	75%	46%	80%	48%	79%	65%	77%	57%
MPS	57%	39%	56%	37%	52%	48%	49%	46%
State	75%	61%	75%	58%	72%	66%	70%	62%

*Numbers reflect percentage of all proficient students over the school years 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009

13. Does Southside have any plans to increase enrollment?

Southside is an intentionally small community. We believe that to increase the number of students would mean sacrificing what makes us so unique – our intimate relationships with our students and their families, and the ability to travel and take advantage of the community as a classroom. Although we would love every child in Minneapolis to be able to experience what we have to offer, we have no plans to increase our size.

14. How do I enroll my child?

Kindergarten students are admitted through a random lottery that takes place on or around March 15th for the upcoming fall. If your child turns 5 years old by September 1, they may participate in the enrollment lottery. Children in 1st through 8th grades are admitted on a rolling basis as space permits. You can submit an application for your child by going to our website and printing and mailing in a completed [New Student Application Form](#) or by contacting our School Director Tania Montgomery at Tania@southsidefamilyschool.org or (612) 872-8322 x452 to request a form be mailed to you. When your completed application is received, your child’s name will be placed on our waiting list.