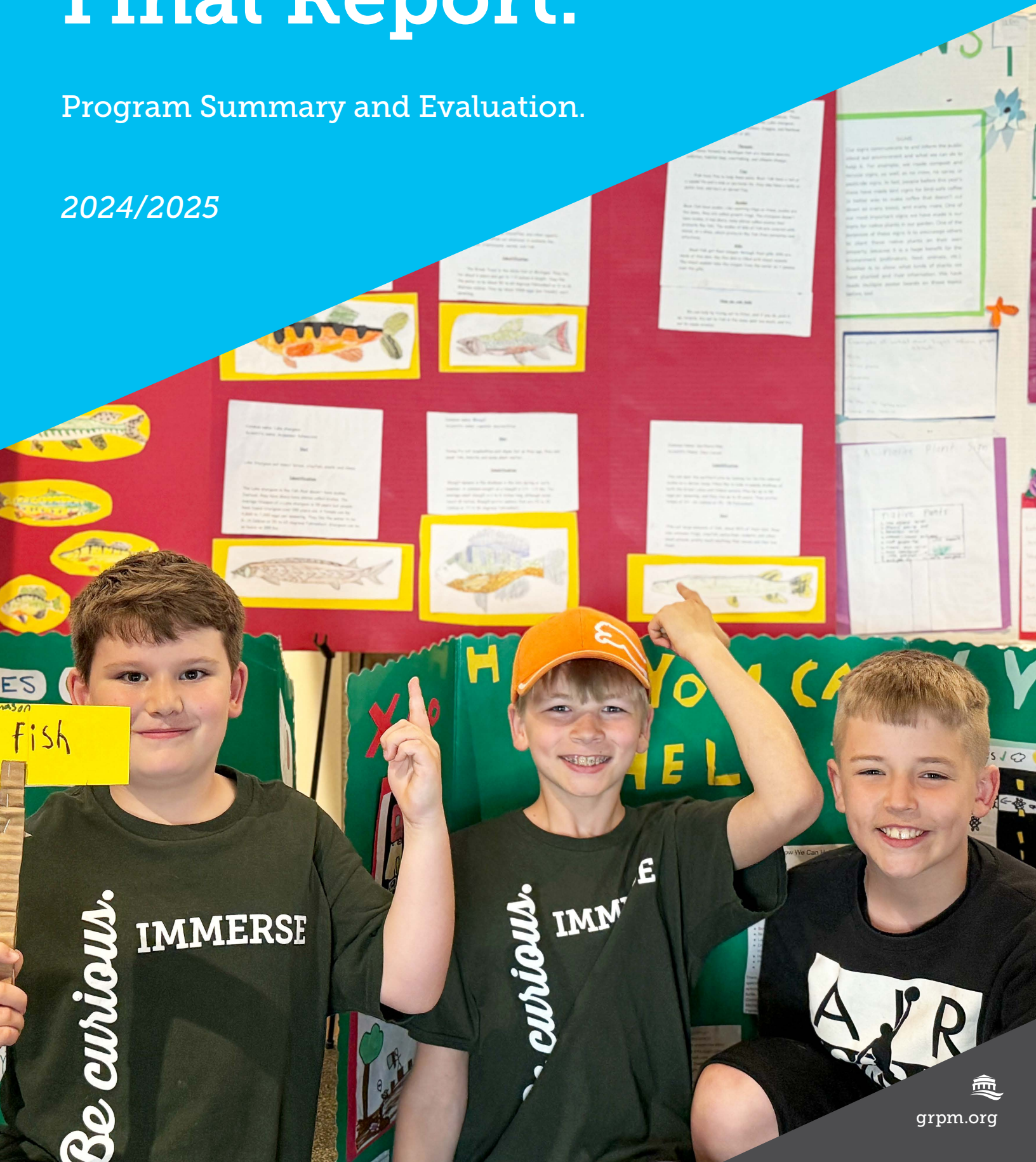


Immerse Final Report.

Be curious. GRAND
RAPIDS
PUBLIC
MUSEUM

Program Summary and Evaluation.

2024/2025



grpm.org

▼ Overview:

The Grand Rapids Public Museum's (GRPM) Immerse program provides a week-long learning experience for schools from the West Michigan region. The experience is crafted and led by the visiting teachers, leveraging exhibition spaces, Museum artifacts and various enrichment programs. Teachers are trained and supported through a rigorous orientation program in the summer and an individualized planning session with Museum Education staff.

The opportunities for teachers to achieve customized learning objectives are endless. Classes can select from a variety of staff-led [guided education programs](#) and fascinating [planetarium presentations](#), all aligned with grade-level curriculum standards. Immerse teachers also have access to 13 thematic [artifact kits](#) with lessons and background information that they can use in their own classrooms. All together, the GRPM Immerse experience provides students with local, hands-on examples of history, science and culture. These experiences connect them deeply to their curriculum and community.



▼ Numbers:

The 2024/2025 Immerse cohort included:

- 53 classes, grades 3rd through 10th
- 1,387 students from 24 different schools

Catholic Schools	Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary School, St. Anthony of Padua, St. Patrick Parnell, St. Thomas the Apostle
Charter School	Grand Rapids Child Discovery Center
Christian School	Living Stones Academy
Forest Hills Public Schools	Pine Ridge Elementary
Godfrey-Lee Public Schools	Godfrey Elementary
Grand Rapids Public Schools	Burton Elementary, César E. Chávez Elementary, Congress Elementary, Grand Rapids Montessori, Martin Luther King Jr. Leadership Academy, North Park Montessori, Shawmut Hills, Southwest Elementary School - Academia Bilingüe, Union High School
Grandville Public Schools	South Elementary
Kentwood Public Schools	Explorer Elementary, Glenwood Elementary
Northview Public Schools	West Oakview Elementary (Field School Program)
Private Non-Public School	Lake Michigan Academy
Rockford Public Schools	Crestwood Elementary School, Roguewood Elementary

▼ Immerse Programming

While classes are at the Museum, they have self-guided access to all of the educational GRPM exhibits, both [core](#) and [regularly updated temporary exhibits](#). Supplementary materials such as self-guided scavenger hunts, student worksheets and teaching guides offer inspiration on how to leverage the exhibit spaces for instruction. In the 2024-25 school year, the GRPM presented two phenomenal temporary exhibits: [Fashion + Nature](#), and [The Nature of Color](#).

[Planetarium presentations](#) in the Roger B. Chaffee Planetarium are also available for Immerse classes. Teachers can schedule up to 5 planetarium presentations within their week. All of the shows feature the latest Digistar projection technology and immersive surround sound, creating unforgettable experiences where students can discover the wonders of outer space while learning grade-level science content.

[Guided Education Programs](#) are curriculum-aligned lessons taught by Museum staff educators. Immerse teachers select up to 5 programs throughout their week that connect to their learning objectives. GRPM educational programs are centered on a constructivist, student-centered learning philosophy that aims to highlight unique historical artifacts and scientific specimens to provide concrete connections to classroom topics at local, national and global levels. This approach utilizes inquiry-based instructional strategies, allowing students to grapple with the content and generate understandings individually and as a class—a process that is accessible and inclusive of the varying perspectives and cultural differences learners bring into the Museum.

▼ Menu of Guided Education Programs:

Explore – These guided explorations will help students hone their skills to become museum learners for life.

▼ *Explore: Exhibits, Community Archives and Research Center Tour*

Investigate – Hands-on primary source investigations help students unveil the stories held in the Museum's artifact and specimen collections.

▼ *Anishinaabe Cultural Artifacts, Civil War Artifacts, Historical Grand River Artifacts, Plant & Animal Adaptations*

STEAM – Students learn about a variety of science, technology, engineering, art/design, and math concepts, utilizing innovative Museum technology and inquiry-based experiments.

▼ *Design with littleBits, Grand River Community Decision-Making, Grand River Water Quality Lab, Making Sense of your Senses*

Discover – This series of diverse, place-based programs emphasize where local examples of history, culture, and science can be found in the Museum and in the city of Grand Rapids.

▼ *The First People of this Place, Grand Rapids Then & Now, Habitat Connections, River of Time, West Michigan's Newcomers*

Connect – Storytelling, empathizing, perspective-taking and augmented reality push students to engage at a deep level with GRPM exhibits.

▼ *Augmented Reality Adventure to Victorian Grand Rapids, Practicing Empathy, Sturgeon Excursion, Trade & Transformation*

▼ Accessibility

The GRPM respects, values and honors the unique attributes, characteristics and perspectives that make each person who they are. We strive to prioritize both physical and cognitive accessibility in all programming, designing experiences that are inclusive to the broadest range of people in the communities we serve. Visit grpm.org/accessibility for a complete list of accessibility features.

▼ Teacher Enrichment and Training

An important aspect of Immerse is teacher professional development and the program's ability to bring together a collaborative community of practice. Teachers in the cohort learn how to leverage exhibit spaces, primary sources and objects in their instruction. They are able to collaborate with museum professionals and other educators to bring their creative ideas to life.

The Education Department offers two options for orientation, designed to meet the varying needs of teachers based on their level of experience with the program. All teachers are invited to a comprehensive in-person orientation, but teachers with 3 or more years of experience have the option to complete a condensed virtual, asynchronous orientation. Both options include a reflection for teachers—allowing them to consider how they will apply their learning.

Teachers also have access to a shared resource folder which includes materials related to object-based learning and exhibit exploration strategies, activity packets, thought organizers and planning tools. There is also a compiled resource bank of teacher-created materials, allowing classroom teachers to learn from and teach each other.

Educators seek out the Immerse program as a one-of-a-kind experience, knowing it will have a major impact on their students. At our kick-off orientation in June 2024, we asked teachers to answer the prompt, ***"What's the most important takeaway you'd like your students to get out of the GRPM Immerse program?"*** Here are a few of their answers:

▼ *Curiosity and desire to learn more...never ending fun in learning! Instill a love for museums as they move on in school and after graduation, too.*

▼ *I always look forward to how much science and social studies are integrated - there is nothing like the planetarium shows to bring space science to life! I want students to see the real world connections to what we are learning and to have those hands-on experiences that make learning come alive.*

▼ *I hope that students will realize how much fun learning can be and that learning can happen outside of the classroom. What I love about the IMMERSE program is that it gives students a chance to be curious and get excited about topics that might be new to them or that they weren't excited about before going to the museum.*

“

The education team at the GRPM is amazing! From the beginning, they make sure all participating educators have what they need to make their Immerse experience engaging and productive. They are extremely organized and very easy to work with. I have always felt prepared for my week of learning. Honestly, this program reminds me of why I became an educator and why I love teaching. It re-energizes me. Seeing my scholars so engaged, curious, and excited to learn reminds me of the bigger picture. I've learned how to bring more of that energy and exploration into my classroom. And every year, I come away with new ideas and a fresh perspective.

– Kristina Morton

5th grade teacher,
Burton Elementary, Grand Rapids Public Schools

▼ *I would like my students to develop empathy for people who lived in the past and increase their interest in studying history!*

▼ *I would like my students to think deeper and use inquiry questions to push their thinking further about social studies, science, and literacy concepts.*

▼ *I want my students to find something at the museum that sparks their imagination for what is possible for their future. I had a student last year, Mayra, who watched the show from the planetarium that showed the Spanish-speaking women in Chile that were aerospace engineers. She told me at the end of the program that she wanted to be one because it was the first time she saw someone that looked and talked like her doing STEAM!*

▼ Immerse Project Showcase 2025

Our talented Immerse teachers are tasked with incorporating Museum-themed project-based learning into their curriculum. They are trained in project-based learning approaches and are prompted to develop a project that combines curricular objectives with some aspect of their time spent at the GRPM for Immerse. This student-driven project requirement is a crucial component of Immerse. Scholarship in the field of education has demonstrated that museum field trips are much more academically beneficial and meaningful when they connect to classroom work.^{1,2} Classroom projects that integrate Museum concepts or resources allow students to perceive their time on field trips as an essential part of their learning experience rather than an auxiliary bonus.



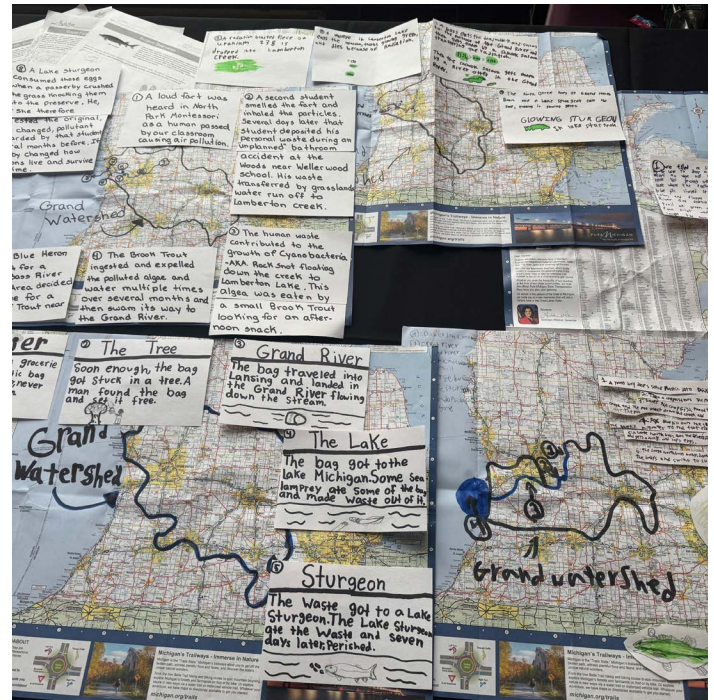
The showcase event is a celebration of the work that students, teachers and chaperones have done over the course of the school year. It is an opportunity to show the community what they learned. Each class is challenged to create a culminating project to demonstrate how Museum learning extended back into the classroom.

1,176 community members attended this free, after-hours Education Showcase Event on May 13, 2025! There were many creative projects, and a diverse range of formats. Project titles and concepts explored include: Taking Care of Our Place - Our Community, Our Watershed; Fossils; "Shawmut Hills Museum;" Historical Figures of Grand Rapids; Constellations; Time Periods in Early Michigan History; Commercials for businesses in Streets of Old Grand Rapids; Animal adaptations; Immigration Perspectives; Science of Color; Poetry inspired by exhibits.

Explore some of this year's project highlights below as teachers describe the story of their Immerse project in their own words:

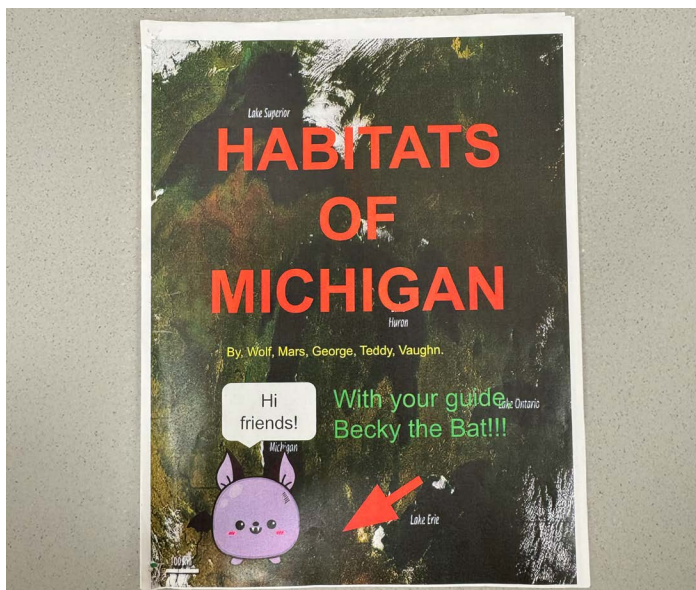
▼ A Dive into Freshwater Ecosystems, North Park Montessori, Grand Rapids Public Schools (4th-6th grade)

Hands-on, immersive learning in museum exhibits and programs inspired our ecosystem project which blended scientific inquiry, environmental stewardship, and creativity! Students designed and built their own water ecosystem models to simulate a connected land-water environment, helping them visualize and explore the interactions between terrestrial and aquatic systems. Student groups researched specific Michigan freshwater ecosystems, identifying native plants, macroinvertebrates, and water quality indicators. Each group planned and constructed a model to simulate realistic environmental interactions, considering soil composition, aquatic organisms, and human impact. They added living elements and observed how nutrients, water, and organisms moved through their system. Over time, students recorded changes in water clarity, plant growth, and the behaviors of aquatic organisms. They made connections to ecosystem dynamics like nutrient cycling, the water cycle, and the impact of pollution. Students analyzed the results of their models and reflected on the health and sustainability of their ecosystems. They presented their findings through posters, slide decks, or videos, linking back to what they learned at the GRPM.



¹ Kisiel, J. (2006). Making field trips work: Strategies for creating an effective learning experience. The Science Teacher, 73(1), 46-48.

² Moisan, H. (2009). Partners in process: How museum educators and classroom teachers can create outstanding results. The Journal of Museum Education, 34(1), 23-40.

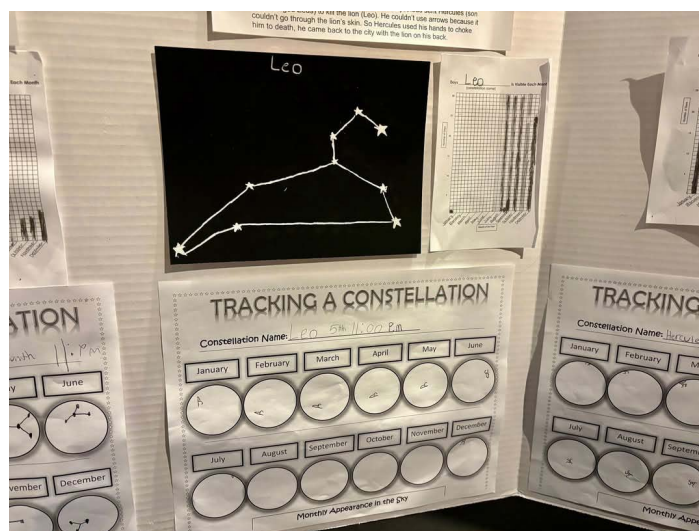
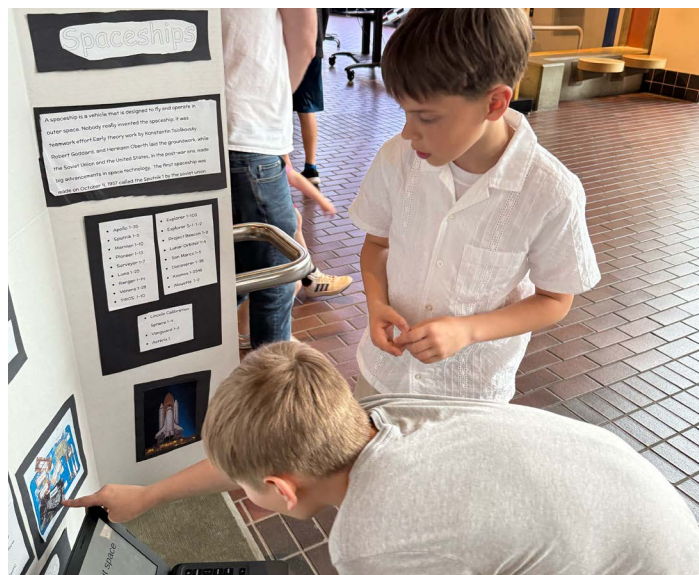


▼ **Museum Magazines, North Park Montessori, Grand Rapids Public Schools (4th-6th grade)**

Students are forming small editorial teams to create publications based on their favorite exhibits—*Fashion + Nature*, *West Michigan Habitats*, *Streets of Old Grand Rapids*, and *The Nature of Color*. They are wearing many hats as researchers, writers, artists, and designers while developing these creative magazines. I was particularly amused when they perked up with excitement after I reminded them that they needed to make advertisements for their magazines. Immediately someone asked about selling ad space! This project beautifully aligns with Montessori philosophy by allowing students to follow their individual interests while collaborating on something meaningful to share with others.

▼ **Long-term Project Showcase, Explorer Elementary and Glenwood Elementary, Kentwood Public Schools (4th grade)**

We spent significant time working on a Long-Term Project that was inspired by different exhibits in the museum. Students were asked to create an extension for specific exhibits that highlighted their ability to understand how the museum gave information to its patrons and extend that thinking in unique ways. While at Immerse we focused on different ways that the museum presented information in order to replicate that in our own projects. It was a great design thinking challenge that encouraged students to be creative and use multiple formats to tell stories and engage 'visitors' within their own exhibit design.



▼ **Stars and Their Stories, West Oakview (Field School), Northview Public Schools (3rd-4th grade)**

Our project was inspired by my students' connection to the Planetarium. Every day that was one of their favorite parts. They loved every show, and left wanting to know more. For our final product, our students chose a major constellation, researched it, and then crafted an informational writing piece. For an art connection the students hammered the main stars in their constellation. We then strung them up with string to make the constellation's shape more visible.

▼ Program Evaluations

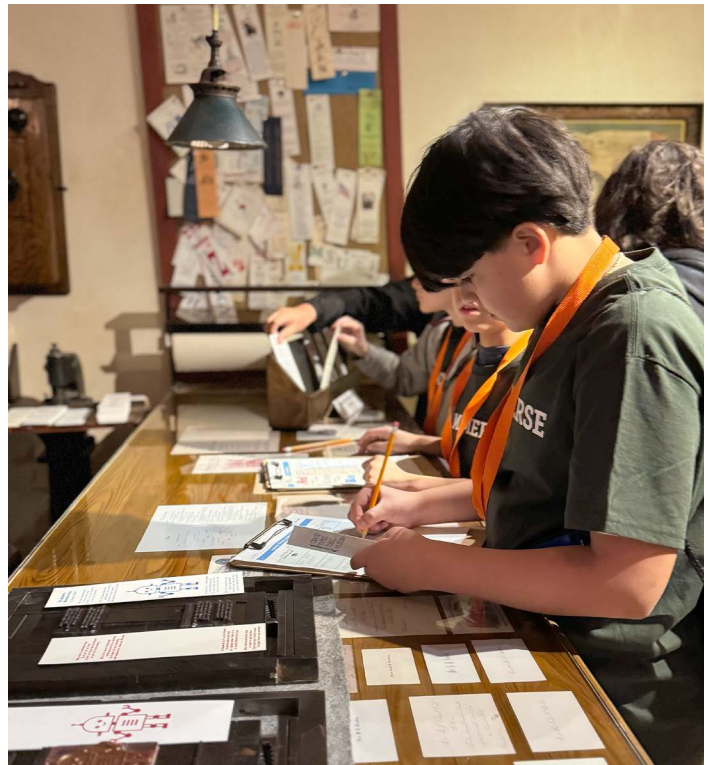
2024/25 Immerse participants completed surveys to provide qualitative and quantitative feedback on the program. The next few pages provide information on the data and stories collected through this evaluation process.

▼ Teacher Surveys

Teachers were asked to provide feedback to improve the effectiveness of GRPM education materials in addressing learning objectives and engaging all learners. Surveys were administered on the final day of the weeklong Immerse experience. The information below is based on the 37 teacher survey responses we received.

Teachers rated their experience on a Likert scale and their responses were converted to a number value

The conversion is: completely disagree - 1, somewhat disagree - 2, neutral - 3, somewhat agree - 4, completely agree - 5.



Question	Average Score
The Immerse PD / program orientation was informative and useful.	4.37
The individual planning session with GRPM staff was helpful.	4.94
The students were engaged and interested in museum learning.	4.84
The Immerse program was beneficial to my students academically and supported classroom learning objectives.	4.92
Material was age / grade level appropriate.	4.81
The GRPM educators were prepared and professional.	4.97
The classroom space was clean and comfortable.	4.92



▼ Teacher Testimonials:

“

This experience was so much more than a regular field trip! The GRPM educators were flexible, moved at a good pace and had high expectations for my students. They asked them big, meaningful questions.

I loved these types of questions, deep, while also leaving stepping stools for all students to access the question. I feel like I am walking away from this experience with activities and strategies I can use in my own classroom. Immerse leveled up my teaching by reminding me to lead with questions, to answer a question with a question, to push students to think at a higher level, use evidence and be prepared to explain the “why”. GRPM Educators encouraged the students to think critically, drawing connections and conclusions.

They helped students see themselves as builders of their own knowledge. My colleagues in Field School have a motto that we use to guide us: “We learn not for school, but for life.” Learning at the Museum is just that: a way to show students that learning is happening everywhere, always. All they need to do is be curious.

– **Sarah McCormack**

3rd-4th grade teacher,
West Oakview Elementary (Field School),
Northview Public Schools



“

I have nothing but positive things to say about Immerse. Working on our curriculum while also giving students an opportunity to expand and challenge how they THINK is so powerful. This year, I had a few kids that have significant learning struggles, and I was so impressed by the GRPM educators’ abilities to pick up on those and engage them in other ways. My favorite part of the whole experience is seeing the excitement of my students. At the showcase event, they love to show off their project, of course, but the way that they strut around like the GRPM is THEIR museum just really hits me in the feels. This program is the highlight of my year and our school really values it!

– **Elizabeth D’Aurora**

3rd grade teacher, St. Patrick Parnell

“

The Immerse program offers something unique: a combination of hands-on learning and also expert presenters guiding learners as they discover new connections to their local community. Immerse connects to both Science and Social Studies standards for my 3rd grade level. The program has amplified the learning experience for my students each year beyond that of a traditional field trip by giving them shared experiences that launch their thinking to concepts, time periods, and skills that we learn in class. The children are engaged and participating in their learning with multiple access points to the information and showing their understanding in a variety of ways. The opportunity of Immerse has enhanced my students’ learning, engagement, and sense of belonging. Children often make new connections to each other as the week of Immerse progresses and they have a new found understanding of another classmate’s strengths or knowledge that they bring to a conversation. Each year our Year Long Project has been impacted or inspired by an experience that our classroom community has experienced while at Immerse. The children will remember Immerse and often say that it is their favorite thing that we did together all year.

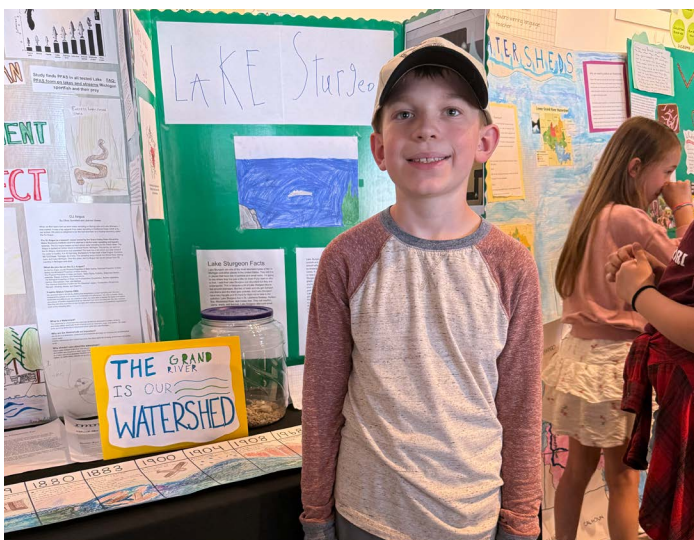
– **Harmony Perry**

3rd grade teacher, Grand Rapids Child Discovery Center

▼ Student Experience Surveys

Participating students were asked to reflect on their experience with a short survey. Surveys were administered on the final day of the weeklong Immerse experience. The information below is based on the 988 student survey responses we received.

Question	Responses
Have you been to the Grand Rapids Public Museum before this week?	215 students (22%) were able to visit the GRPM for the first time through Immerse!
Describe your favorite program or activity at the Museum.	All responses were reviewed through an informal thematic analysis. The most mentioned programs and activities in student surveys were: Planetarium Presentations, STEAM programs led by GRPM Educators (particularly the Design Thinking program with littleBits), and learning in the <i>Streets of Old Grand Rapids</i>. Students particularly enjoyed the interactive experiences in this exhibit, citing the Augmented Reality Guided Program, as well as self-guided scavenger hunts. ▼ The Water Quality Lab makes you feel like you are a real scientist and it's fun working with your friends. ▼ Little Bits because it pushed my brain to think harder than normal. ▼ Using the little bits because I LOVE making new inventions. I also love challenges so it was actually really fun for me! ▼ Probably the Planetarium because it is so cool, we learned about a lot there and we even did an interactive game with clickers. ▼ The planetarium because it was so fun and peaceful and relaxing & beautiful. ▼ Walking around the old streets of grand rapids. It felt like I was actually in Grand Rapids in the past and going into all of the different stores. ▼ My favorite thing was the old streets of grand rapids and we had the tablets and we had to find all the posters of famous people who lived in Grand Rapids and help our character immigrate to Grand Rapids. It was cool to scan the posters and see them come to life.



▼ Student Experience Surveys Continued

Question	Responses
Describe the most interesting thing you learned at the Museum this week.	All responses were reviewed through an informal thematic analysis. A few patterns emerged in their responses: ▼ Local connections and authentic artifacts. Students were deeply engaged by learning about Grand Rapids' past—particularly through the immersive exhibits and experiences with primary sources. These left strong impressions on students and gave them a solid understanding and perspective of history. ▼ Astronomy. The planetarium was a standout for sparking curiosity about space. Students recalled facts about constellations, star formation and death, black holes, solar system structure, and even discussed current astronomical theories. ▼ Natural History and Environmental Science. Many students were surprised by facts about lake sturgeon, animal adaptations, and the Grand River's water quality. Interactive programs such as water testing, handling specimens in Plant & Animal Adaptations, and exploring dioramas in West Michigan Habitats stood out as meaningful and memorable. ▼ Cultural Insight and Empathy. Students reflected on how much they learned about other cultures. Much of the learning centered around indigenous ways of life, legends, and the impact of colonization and discrimination. ▼ Representative comments: • <i>The programs were awesome because we got to compare and touch actual artifacts and it was incredibly informational. The archives blew me away because of all the detail and all the sources in there.</i> • <i>I didn't know that lumberjacks would cut down trees and send them down the river to the wood factories. I didn't know anything about that topic or about the great log jam in the Grand River.</i> • <i>About the star constellations and the reasons behind their names.</i> • <i>When two stars collide they make a supernova and sometimes a black hole.</i> • <i>That lake sturgeon can grow up to 7 feet long and that if you catch a lake sturgeon you have to put it back because it's an endangered species.</i> • <i>How fast fashion affects the environment.</i> • <i>I learned about camouflage and how different animals use it to survive.</i> • <i>The most interesting one was the Newcomers exhibit because there were so many people with different cultures to learn about.</i> • <i>The Native Americans are people with lots of core beliefs.</i> • <i>I liked learning about what life was like for Anishinaabe tribes.</i>

▼ Student Experience Surveys Continued

Students were prompted to share how they would describe the Immerse program to a friend or family member. Here are a few of their answers:

- ▼ *Exciting and fun. I like how there is a unique program every day so no day is the same.*
- ▼ *A week-long trip that teaches you about history, artifacts, animal habitats like swamps and forests, and about people who lived in the past in Grand Rapids.*
- ▼ *An awesome and exciting week filled with hands-on activities and fun. It is a great experience where you can ask questions and be yourself. I loved it.*
- ▼ *A week-long program that ingeniously allows you to immerse yourself into historical events that took place from here to China, and importantly, the history of Grand Rapids! It is truly an experience that is full of fun activities, memorable moments, and knowledge!*
- ▼ *It was one of the best field trips I have ever been on. It's the funnest place on earth. I think I learned more at the museum than at school.*
- ▼ *It was so cool and interesting to learn about the exhibits. I never even realised all the cool facts that are in the museum before. I LOVED going to the Archives. It was so interesting and awesome to see all the artifacts.*
- ▼ *It's a very fun learning experience which I strongly recommend to anyone who wants to join. We learn in an interactive way that keeps things interesting.*
- ▼ *This IMMERSE program was very fun. They taught us so many different things in an interactive way. They also let us see the behind the scenes things about the museum. I highly recommend being in the IMMERSE program.*



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Accreditation

The GRPM was the first public museum to be accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. www.aam-us.org

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