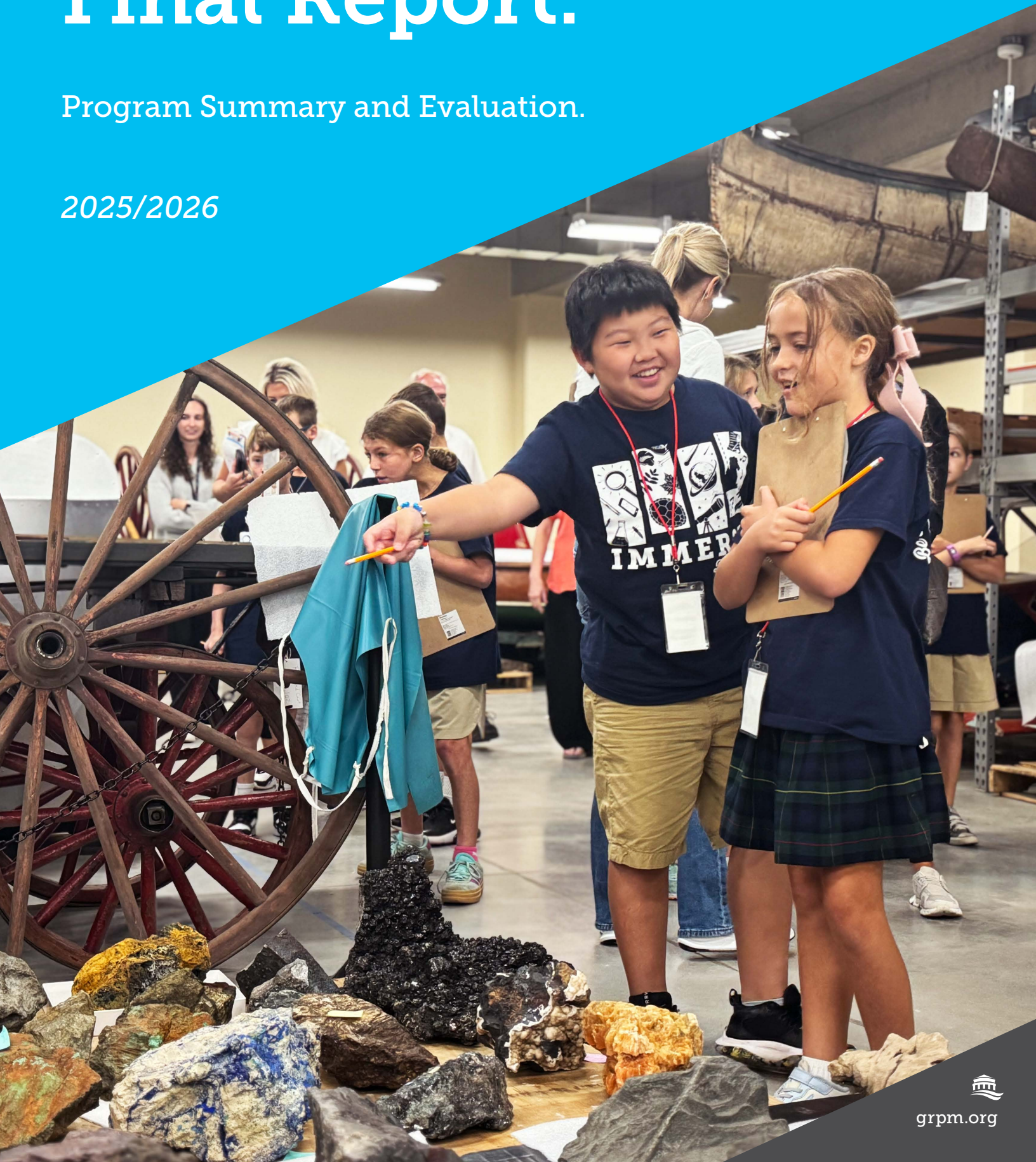


Immerse Final Report.

Be curious. | GRAND
RAPIDS
PUBLIC
MUSEUM

Program Summary and Evaluation.

2025/2026



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 14 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 2025/2026 Immerse cohort included:

- 57 classes, grades 2nd through 10th
- 1,499 students from 28 different schools

Charter School	Grand Rapids Child Discovery Center
East Grand Rapids Public Schools	Wealthy Elementary
Forest Hills Public Schools	Pine Ridge Elementary
Godfrey-Lee Public Schools	Godfrey Elementary
Grand Rapids Public Schools	Burton Elementary, Campus 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-religious Schools	Lake Michigan Academy, Thrive Learning Center
Private, Religious Schools	Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary School, Living Stones Academy, St. Anthony of Padua, St. Patrick Parnell, St. Robert Catholic School, St. Thomas the Apostle
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 2025-26 school year, the GRPM presented four phenomenal temporary exhibits: [Backyard Adventures](#), [The Clapp Family Mastodon](#), [Fashion + Nature](#), and [Tyrannosaurs: Meet the Family](#).

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. This school year,

we added *Dinosaurs: A Story of Survival* to the menu of presentations, pairing seamlessly with the *Tyrannosaurs* traveling exhibit.

[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.

GRPM Education staff meet with each teaching team, helping them connect their learning objectives and creative ideas into a great week of GRPM programming and experiences.

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 2025, 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:

▼ *A deeper understanding of how learning connects to the real world. How history, science, culture, and curiosity come together to tell meaningful stories. I want them to walk away not just with knowledge, but with a sense of wonder, ownership of their learning, and the confidence to ask questions, explore, and think critically about the world around them.*

▼ *I want my students to slow down and look at artifacts and exhibit while reflecting and asking the questions. I want my students to wonder and apply what they have learned in a hands-on experience.*

▼ *That they are capable learners no matter where they are at with reading and that the world is a lifelong classroom.*

“

The Immerse program lead was always available virtually to collaborate and would often send resources as she found them in connection to how I was hoping to use the museum, or what we are learning about in class. She has such knowledge of how best to connect what we are learning to the museum guided lessons!

– Sarah McCormack

3rd/4th grade teacher,
West Oakview Elementary

▼ *I would like them to make the connection that learning happens no matter where you are and that as we learn our curiosity and questioning takes us to even more learning experiences. I want students to feel connected to where they live and the people in their community who can guide their learning beyond their classroom teachers.*

▼ *I would like students to feel immersed in history through exploration. My hope is that this will get them excited about learning and to think outside of the box.*

▼ *Expose them to the world outside their own, to develop critical thinkers who question where we are today based on things happening for many years prior.*

▼ Immerse Project Showcase 2026

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.



1,369 community members attended this free, after-hours Education Showcase Event on May 12, 2026! There were many creative projects, and a diverse range of formats. Concepts explored and project titles include: Historical Figures That Shaped America, Dioramas and Mystery Stories, Seeing through the eyes of Immigrants, Constellations Through the Year, Digging for Answers!, A History of Me, Terraforming Mars, State Research Newcomer Project, Habitats & Animals of West Michigan, and Solar Symphony.

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

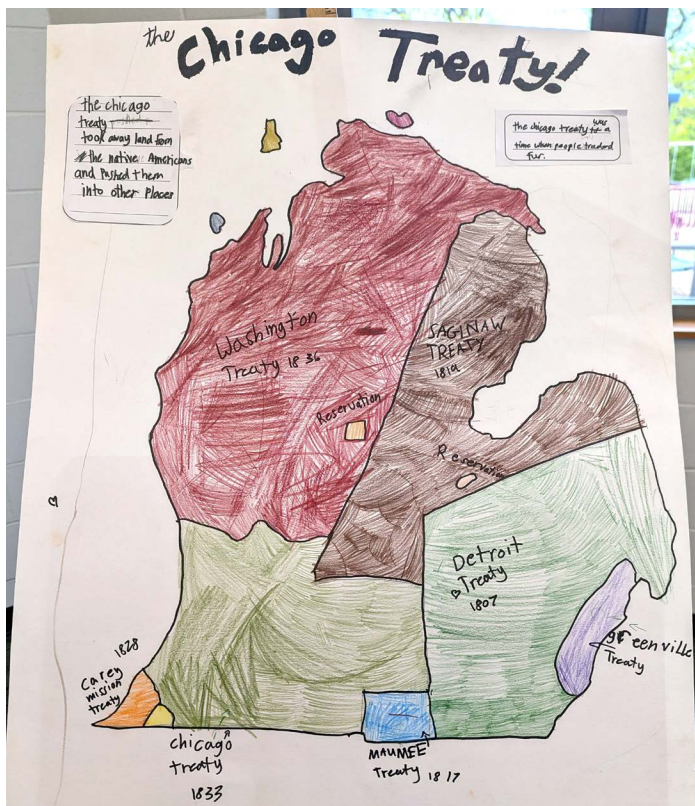


▼ *West Michigan Habitats Dioramas,* **North Park Montessori, Grand Rapids Public Schools** (4th-6th grade)

Students were asked to choose a habitat from the West Michigan Habitats exhibit and research/study them to create a final product where they showcase how the four spheres interact and human impacts that are a part of their habitat. Students learned how to properly walk through an exhibit and ask questions to help research their project. Through the activity we did with West MI habitats, students were able to clearly see each habitat and how to interpret it.

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.



▼ Grand Rapids: Journey Through Time, Living Stones Academy (3rd grade)

Our project was directly inspired by our time at the GRPM, where students explored the city's history through artifacts, exhibits, and guided inquiry. During our visit, students built background knowledge about their assigned time period, then selected a specific person, event, and development to research more deeply back at school. They worked collaboratively to synthesize their learning and chose how to present it – through posters, visual displays, and short presentations – contributing to a larger, chronological “walk through” of GR history that we held at our school for families to attend. The guided education programs and planetarium experiences helped deepen students’ understanding of how geography, innovation, and community shape a city over time. These experiences gave students concrete examples and engaging visuals that enriched their thinking, helping them make connections between past and present as they developed their projects.

▼ Stitching Together Michigan's History, West Oakview (Field School), Northview Public Schools (3rd-4th grade)

We went about creating our final product by learning all about the Underground Railroad through Picture Books. We noticed that legend has it that quilts were used to communicate with enslaved people on their journey to freedom. We studied the quilt blocks, then worked with our local grandma's to create the quilt itself! Students were involved in everything from the patterns used to the design of the quilt. Students operated the sewing machines, pressed, cut and measured all fabric. We then discussed how we can share information with people about all that was learned connecting to the quilt. Students broke into teams and created posters to go alongside our quilt. They said “this takes it from just a quilt to an exhibit! People will learn from it while they are looking at it.” Our students really connected with our tour at the Archives and loved seeing an authentic quilt from the 1800s. Our project nicely connected to the underground railroad painting at the museum and the Newcomers exhibit. They loved seeing an authentic quilt from the 1800s.



▼ Program Evaluations

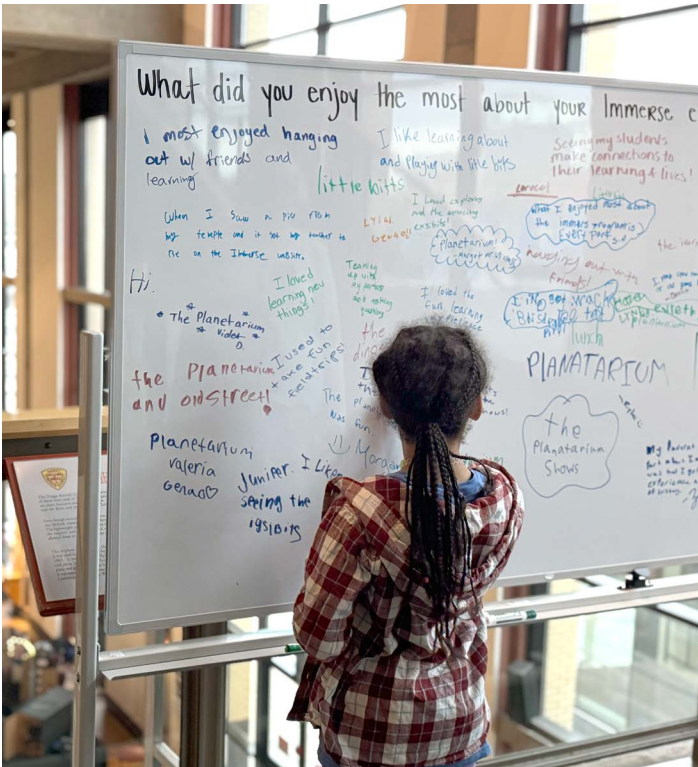
2025/26 Immerse participants completed surveys to provide qualitative and quantitative feedback on the program. The next few pages provide information on the data and stories collected through this evaluation process.

▼ 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 48 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.	4.39
The individual planning session with GRPM staff was helpful.	4.85
The students were engaged and interested in museum learning.	4.69
The Immerse program was beneficial to my students academically and supported classroom learning objectives.	4.69
Material was age / grade level appropriate.	4.79
The GRPM educators were prepared and professional.	4.90
The classroom space was clean and comfortable.	4.85



▼ Teacher Testimonials:

“

The Grand Rapids Public Museum Immerse program is a valuable resource for young people in our community because it provides hands-on, active learning experiences that connect students to the history, science, and culture of West Michigan. Students are able to slow down and closely study artifacts and exhibits that relate directly to our local area. This allows them to take what they have learned in school and apply it to real-world objects and experiences. The museum encourages curiosity, critical thinking, and inquiry-based learning through interactive exhibits, educational programs, and primary source exploration. Students are not just reading about history or science, they are actively engaging with it. These experiences help deepen their understanding and make learning more meaningful and memorable. In addition, the museum helps students build a stronger connection to their community by exposing them to local history, culture, and traditions. Programs at the museum inspire creativity, collaboration, and lifelong learning while giving students opportunities they may not experience in a traditional classroom setting.

– Alissa Alkema
4th grade teacher,
St. Anthony of Padua



“

The Immerse program is comprehensive, engaging and leaves nothing to be desired. Witnessing my students fully engaged and deeply curious about their own learning is one of my favorite highlights. It was inspiring to see their excitement sparked through the many opportunities, from hands-on exploration in the exhibits, to the captivating planetarium shows, and the exceptional museum-led programs. The energy and enthusiasm they brought to each experience made each day unforgettable. The museum staff does an outstanding job with the Immerse program! From their expertly led instructional sessions, to the planning and preparation, the experience is truly exceptional.

– Charity Webbley
5th grade teacher,
Congress Elementary

“

The Immerse experience doesn't stop after the week long field trip. For the rest of the school year, students are relating what we learn in class back to what they witnessed at the museum. When we learn about patterns in space, they bring up the planetarium shows we saw. When we learn about interactions between European settlers and Native Americans, the students reference the trade and transformation program we did. When we talk about ecosystems, the students refer back to the habitat exhibit. What they learn at the museum stays with them!

– Joline Andrews
5th grade teacher,
Southwest Community Campus

▼ 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 1090 student survey responses we received.

Question	Responses
Have you been to the Grand Rapids Public Museum before this week?	194 students (18%) 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. As is fairly consistent each year, the Planetarium is a stand-out experience for students! They also mentioned hands-on or engaging exhibits or specific guided programs they enjoyed. The most commonly referenced programs in student responses were STEAM: Design with littleBits and Connect: Augmented Reality Adventure in Victorian Grand Rapids. ▼ The planetarium show... it was very unique and amazing. It felt so real when it was dark. ▼ Tyrannosaurs because you can touch stuff and go on the big screen... it had so many interesting fossils. The exhibit was my favorite because you could learn and play. ▼ LittleBits because I loved that we got to basically code a robot. In the program you could really stretch your mind. ▼ It was really cool trying to figure out the clues and finding items and prices... you get to hang out with your friends while doing riddles and it gets your brain working hard.



▼ 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. Top categories that are mentioned demonstrate environmental literacy, science understandings across disciplines such as astronomy, paleontology and biology, and historical understanding that helped them make comparisons between the past and our modern communities. A sample of representative answers: ▼ <i>I learned that every single thing on the planet is necessary to make a habitat thrive. For example, without wetlands things get a lot more damaged with flooding. Before, I didn't think they mattered.</i> ▼ <i>I learned that the northern lights are there because of the sun's heat flames. They travel into the openings of our poles because the Earth has a magnetic field to protect us.</i> ▼ <i>The engineering day inspired me a lot. I learned about infinite patterns and the DART mission. It made me want to be an electrical architect or fly a plane.</i> ▼ <i>I liked looking at the Anishinabek stuff and seeing how their inventions were made. It was cool to see how those ideas evolved into many of the things we have now.</i> ▼ <i>The most interesting thing was the Streets of Old Grand Rapids. It was interesting seeing how prices and communities were different in the past. At the grocery store, the worker had to shop for you, but now you shop for yourself. Prices were anywhere from 5 cents to 5 dollars for groceries. The show tickets in the early 1900s were only \$.20!</i> ▼ <i>About how the Grand River and different transportation innovations brought people to Grand Rapids. In the beginning of our city, lots of immigrants lived in Grand Rapids.</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:

“

It was the best week of my life. I hope many generations get to go.

”



“

The educators make you see the museum in a whole new way that really makes you think and imagine what it was like being there in the moment with the history and cultures we're learning about.

”



“

I would say it is an experience that I could not imagine before with dream jobs you could actually grow up to do.

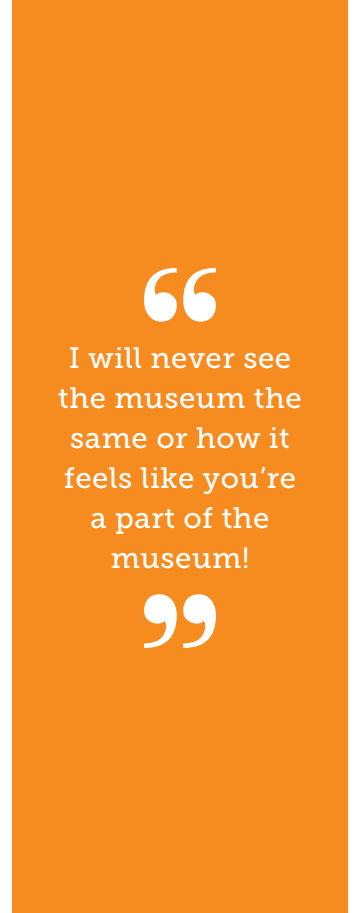
”



“

I will never see the museum the same or how it feels like you're a part of the museum!

”



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How to Donate

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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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Grand Rapids Public Museum
272 Pearl Street NW
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49504