

Lower School Curriculum Guide 2017-2018



Our Mission:

Westside School prepares students for the world by challenging them to achieve academic success and by connecting their human spirit and imagination to learning.

WELCOME TO WESTSIDE SCHOOL

As an accredited NWAIS Independent School, Westside School prepares students for the world by challenging them to achieve academic success and by connecting their human spirit and imagination to learning.

Values

Joyful Learning

We believe children experience the excitement of learning through academic achievement, creative expression, and cooperation with others.

High Academic Standards

We believe that the cultivation of problem-solving, innovative analytical thinking, and complex communication skills provides a strong foundation for lifelong success.

Confident Learners

We believe that children gain confidence through positive support and clear behavioral guidelines within a safe learning environment.

Caring Community

We believe that students become caring members of a global community by treating each other honestly, with respect and generosity of spirit.

At Westside School, classrooms buzz with energy and curiosity. Teachers cultivate learning environments to celebrate students. Our program simultaneously supports and challenges students. It encourages each student – from preschool through fourth grade – to become confident contributors, critical thinkers, and empathetic friends.

Westside School's Lower School includes pre-school through fourth grade. Classrooms include a teacher and an instructional assistant, making our student-teacher ratio 10-1.

In our community, students learn to take care of each other, formally and informally, through activities such as Class Meeting, reading buddies, and Wolfpacks (a regular community gathering of groups of students preschool through 8th grade). Building community and interacting with a variety of peers across class settings is important in the Lower School years, as children learn to consider the ways in which our interactions influence one another.

At Westside School, the curriculum allows students to reflect upon and develop connections between language, literature and the study of the world. Through reading, writing, listening, and speaking, students learn how to think critically and creatively, make informed choices, and better understand their role as a global citizen.

Pedagogical Approach

Critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity are the foundation of our curriculum. We implement an integrated curriculum where one topic of study may incorporate a wide range of skills and subjects. Teachers guide students to examine topics from all sides and develop respect for multiple perspectives while forming their own opinions. In the classroom setting, Westside School students are expected to be engaged, active, and independent learners.

Outcomes and Assessments

Overview:

Westside school believes in assessing student learning through both formative assessment (qualitative ongoing assessment throughout the learning process with feedback intended to modify teaching and learning activities to improve student learning) and summative assessment (quantitative evaluation of student learning at the end of a instruction by comparing it against a standard or benchmark).

How do we communicate student progress to families?

There are seven formal points of communication on student progress throughout the school year. We provide three face-to-face meetings with parents (more are added as requested by teachers or families), three progress monitoring reports with individual student goals, and three narrative report cards throughout the year.

Timeline of family communication on student progress:

August - We hold parent conferences to learn more about our students from the parent perspective.

October - First round of progress monitoring with results and goal setting shared at the family conferences.

December - Narrative report card of student progress.

February - Second round of progress monitoring results are communicated to families.

March - Second narrative report card sent home.

April - Second family conferences.

June - Last round of progress monitoring results and final narrative report card sent home.

Components of Westside Student Assessment:

1. Family Conferences:

At Westside we believe that face-to face communication with our parents, both informally and formally, is vital to the success of our students. Throughout the year we have three formal conferences with families. One occurs before school starts to give us a chance to get to hear from our parent their goals for their child's year, as well as give us any information that may be helpful for us to know so we can better meet the needs of their child. The second conference occurs after the first round of progress monitoring so we can walk parents through information gathered during progress monitoring and the first month of school to share the goal-setting process. Finally, we have a third conference in April. In the middle school, these are student-led conferences, which gives our middle school students a chance to talk about their learning with their family. In lower school, our April conferences are a chance to connect one more time to articulate the learning for each child between April and the end of the year.

2. Progress Monitoring:

Student progress monitoring helps teachers evaluate how effective their instruction is, either for individual students or for the whole class. Progress monitoring is one component of our formative assessment. It helps us set individual goals for each student.

At Westside, teachers use progress monitoring to develop goals that can be measured and tracked, and that can be used to divide what the child is expected to learn by the end of the year into shorter, measurable steps. Once the teacher sets the goals and begins instruction, then he or she continues to measure progress using formative assessment strategies.

Progress monitoring occurs three times a year at Westside (September/October, January/February, and May/June), and results are shared with families after each round of progress monitoring.

What tool do we use to monitor student progress?

The tool we use for monitoring progress is called [MAP Growth](#). This test measures a student's growth over time and will be administered three times a year to help us know where a student is in their learning and what the next steps are to support them in moving forward. It is important to note that although the test is a standardized tool, it is meant to be used to inform instruction not to measure outcomes. This tool allows us to see where students are and what their projected growth should be, not only throughout the year, but over multiple years.

3. Narrative Report Cards:

Every student has a story behind their data and numbers. At Westside we believe that it is really important to provide context around each child's learning. The narrative report card gives us a chance to share a deeper look into each student's learning process. We are able to give some details as to the "why" behind scores on projects and tests. Narrative report cards come out three times a year: December, March and June.

Learning Support

Westside School values individual learners and appreciates their distinct strengths and challenges. Westside School teachers strive to meet the needs of each student, whether they need more challenge or extra support in a particular area of their school life.

Westside School takes a team approach to learning support; teachers, students, families, administration, and our learning support team (Director of Learning Support, Student Support Specialist, and Community Wellness Coordinator) work together to find the ideal path for individual student success. We acknowledge learning differences can be closely connected to the social and emotional side of school life, and we work at cultivating a safe, nurturing learning environment.

Westside School offers many different instructional approaches in order to appeal to the wide variety of learners. We assess academics frequently to monitor growth and development. Our goal is to promote student success in every area of their life.

Character Education

Our Community Wellness coordinator works with our school community to support children in achieving confidence, esteem, and self-actualization in a safe and caring environment, where they feel a sense of respect, belonging, and overall well-being.

Our vision is to cultivate a caring and safe community of respectful and responsible global citizens and confident learners who joyfully aspire to high academic and personal achievement.

We use research based on positive psychology to create a curriculum that will empower our learning community through the development of character fluency using the virtues of wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence.

Another aspect of our Character Education is our school-wide community-building program called “Wolf Packs.” Each month, all students (pre-kindergarten through eighth grade) meet in cross-age groups to engage in projects and activities that correlate with our monthly focus on character strengths. Students have opportunities to teach and learn from each other while forming friendships throughout every grade level.

Relationship between home and school

Teachers and parents work as a team to create a supportive environment for students. Classroom activities are shared via a weekly grade level newsletter. This opens up a dialogue between parent and student about what takes place in their classroom. Homework is assigned on an as needed basis. It is designed to practice skills that have been presented in the classroom.

Literacy

A dynamic language and literacy curriculum provides many daily opportunities for students to independently read books of their choice, to read more challenging material with teacher guidance, and to hear teacher-selected and grade appropriate texts read aloud.

Learning deepens when students engage in reading, talking and writing about texts across different instructional contexts. Literacy curricular examples kindergarten through fourth grade include:

- Lucy Calkins’ [Writer’s Workshop Model](#). Our writing program uses a workshop approach that progresses on a developmental continuum from pre-kindergarten through fourth grade. We use Lucy Calkins’ [Units of Study](#) developed by Columbia University.

- A balanced reading curricula, which includes [Reader's Workshop](#), Interactive Read Aloud, Shared Reading, Independent Reading, and Guided Reading experiences.
- Handwriting skills with the [Handwriting Without Tears](#) curriculum. Cursive instruction begins in 1st grade.
- [Words Their Way](#) phonics, word study, and vocabulary instruction.

Teachers design our literacy program using both informal (reading conferences and anecdotal observations) and formal assessment tools. We use the following formal Assessments to help inform our curriculum development:

- [Fountas and Pinnell](#) Benchmark Assessment System
- Words Their Way Spelling Inventories
- MAP Growth tool
- Lucy Calkins writing rubrics

Math

In kindergarten through fifth grade we use the [Bridges in Mathematics](#) curriculum, which emphasizes a balance between problem solving and computational fluency. It is built on a continuum from kindergarten through fifth grade in a way that is engaging, and accessible to all learners. The curriculum focuses on developing students' understanding of mathematical concepts, proficiency with key skills, and ability to solve complex problems. It blends direct instruction, structured investigation, and open exploration. This is accomplished through whole group, individual, and small group activities. For more information, please visit [The Math Learning Center](#).

Science

Westside School believes all children come to school with a rich background of experiences that shape their understanding and ways of thinking about the world. Students use new and interesting materials to investigate phenomena and explore a scientific theme in depth. Students develop thinking and process skills by observing, questioning, trying out ideas, and making mistakes. By discussing, analyzing, and communicating their thoughts and discoveries they develop a deeper understanding of the scientific method. Throughout their time in kindergarten through fourth grade, students explore a variety of topics in Life Science, Physical Science, and Earth Science.

Social Studies

Social studies is a core component of an integrated curricula in the lower school. While our themes and explorations may change, our studies center around NCSS' identified [social studies strands](#):

- Individual development and cultural identity
- Civic ideals and Practices
- Role of diversity in and among cultures
- Relationships between people, places, and environments
- Development movement and interaction of cultures
- Time, continuity, and change
- Cultural and global connections
- Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- Power, authority, and governance
- Science, technology, and society

Technology and Literacy Program

Westside School's Technology and Literacy program has been established to support our mission and values. Technology and Literacy is intentionally integrated into the curriculum of all classroom teachers to enhance student learning. Our school offers a variety of devices, including Windows, iMacs, and iPads, as well as a purposefully designed space known as the Technology Literacy Commons (TLC).

The TLC is an area for all students to explore, create, work, and research. The TLC houses our diverse library collection, as well as a commons where students have opportunities to engage in learning through technology, such as our Lego Wall, LCD printer, and a variety of devices.

An integral part of the Technology and Literacy program at Westside is digital citizenship. Students from Kindergarten through eighth grade learn about digital citizenship with a focus on rights and responsibilities as well as internet safety in order to be responsible users with their devices. PK-4th classes use iPads to integrate technology to enhance student learning.

Health and Fitness

The Health and Fitness program at Westside School's Lower School promotes and encourages healthy living through three key factors:

Physical Development: Body awareness starts in pre-kindergarten, as students begin to develop their coordinated movements, gain a heightened sense of spatial awareness, and experiment with various locomotor skills. These skills are continuously refined throughout the Lower School grades and are incorporated into sports, activities, and games that target specific areas of physical ability development. Students also focus on sport-specific skill development. Each grade elaborates on their previous instruction in kicking, catching, throwing, pivoting, starting and stopping, and jumping. These skills are built through age-appropriate drills, activities, or variations of the sport being learned.

Sportsmanship: Throughout all activities there is heavy emphasis on sportsmanship, positive team interactions, and growth of individual confidence. Students learn to encourage and support each other, to work as a team to reach a common goal, and to focus on their own personal improvement rather than being in competition with their classmates.

Healthy Lifestyle: The culminating objective of the Health and Fitness program is that students end up with a genuine appreciation of, and passion for, healthy living skills. This appreciation may present itself as a love of participating in sports, an independent practice of making healthy choices, or an enjoyment of setting and achieving physical goals. All students will continuously strengthen their appreciation and understanding of the importance of leading a healthy and active life in ways that are safe and appropriately challenging.

World Language Instruction

In order to navigate the 21st century, our students need skills to prepare them to work and live in a global society. Whatever they choose to do with their lives, it is clear they will want to interact in a more comprehensive way. Knowing other languages and having appreciation for other cultures will give them a solid foundation for growth and continued learning in their lives.

World language instruction at an early age allows children to develop enhanced levels of proficiency in a new language and in other subject areas. Children possess the capacity to develop near native pronunciation and intonation. Their innate curiosity encourages them to explore other worlds and different ways of doing things with simplicity.

Experiencing other languages has been shown to enhance a child's cognitive development by increasing critical thinking skills, creativity, and flexibility of mind in young children. This cognitive problem solving is shown to have direct transference to other subject areas, including math. (ACTFL.org)

At Westside School, students study Spanish and Mandarin from pre-kindergarten through fourth grade. They make a choice to concentrate in one language and have core language classes in either Mandarin or Spanish from sixth through eighth grade. We follow the standards as set by the [American Council for Teaching of Foreign Languages](#).

Spanish Language

Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten:

At this age, Spanish is taught with games, songs and music, stories, rhymes, movement, and FUN! Listening and comprehension skills are strengthened and verbal skills are practiced through rote learning of rhymes and songs. Simple communication takes place in the target language. Kindergarten students will perform simple writing tasks, such as labeling pictures, in Spanish.

First and Second Grade:

Listening and comprehension skills are strengthened and more writing is encouraged. Understanding of the alphabet (symbols and sounds) will assist the students with speaking, reading, and writing. Simple Spanish stories about familiar themes will go home with the children to share with family members. Songs, games, and movement assist with vocabulary acquisition. Second grade students will receive Spanish instruction all year long. Cultural themes, such as Day of the Dead and La Navidad will be presented. We follow the standards as set by the American Council for Teaching of Foreign Languages.

Third and Fourth Grade:

We will tackle more speaking, writing, and reading in Spanish. All previous academic themes will be covered and will be extended by combining the vocabulary with adjectives and some verbs. Cultural topics, such as National Spanish Heritage Month, the Day of the Dead, La Navidad, and others will be discussed. Informal assessments may be given in third grade, and fourth grade will have some recorded assessments. Homework practice will be assigned to fourth grade on a weekly basis. The fourth grade will partner with the Middle School for some assignments. (This age group meets all year long for both Spanish and Mandarin.) We follow the standards as set by the American Council for Teaching of Foreign Languages.

Mandarin Language Instruction

The Lower School Mandarin Chinese program is designed to integrate Chinese language into all subject areas, aiming at helping students develop their age-appropriate language skills and raise cultural awareness. The students will learn basic spoken Chinese to greet, seek, interpret, produce, and exchange information. They will also develop initial Chinese character literacy to recognize, understand, and write words and phrases commonly used in everyday life. In addition, they will explore various aspects of Chinese culture, such as history, creative arts, festivals and celebrations, games and foods. The courses will be organized around fun activities and cultural projects to engage students in meaningful learning.

Visual Arts

The Visual Arts curriculum encompasses pre-kindergarten through fourth grade and provides students with a well-rounded and cumulative understanding and knowledge of the elements and principles of design affiliated with visual arts. Starting with our four and five-year-olds, we begin by helping them to develop a basic understanding of color, shape and line and teach them how to appreciate art. As we go through the grades, the students begin to explore key concepts of art on a more challenging level. In addition to exploring key concepts and ideas, students will also use a range of mediums that will give them a new perspective on working with their hands and creating their own art. By the end of their Lower School visual arts career, students will have not only new experiences in a multitude of lessons, but they will enter Middle School ready to face challenges as young artists.

Performing Arts

The performing arts program in Lower School brings music, creative movement, drama, and dance alive in the hearts and lives of our children. Our students have the opportunity to meet twice a week with their performing arts specialist to explore rhythm, creative movement, play instruments, act, sing, dance, and perform. Our instrumental music curriculum begins with simple rhythmic instruments in the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten years, followed by pitched percussion in first and second, recorder in third, and ukulele in fourth grade. Our vocal program begins by finding voice and dynamics and grows to more complex part singing by fourth grade. Movement and acting take a similar course of growth as we develop the whole child as a confident performer and presenter to fully prepare them for their Middle School years and beyond.