

Middle 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 eighth grade – to become confident contributors, critical thinkers, and empathetic peers.

Westside School's Middle School includes fifth grade through eighth grade. Classrooms have a student-teacher ratio 20-1.

In our community, students learn to take care of each other, formally and informally, through activities such as Community Meetings 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 Middle School years as students 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.

Middle School Mind

Middle School is a profound time in the development of the adolescent body, mind, and spirit. Our approach at Westside School recognizes the significance of this by offering a variety of opportunities for students to develop, learn, and explore skills and interests relevant today. We believe in being active, engaging the students in the conversation about their own development and learning, and offering opportunities for students to investigate interests they might not have considered otherwise. Throughout the rigorous core and exploratory courses offered at Westside School Middle School there is an emphasis on fostering critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity through hands-on and minds-on projects and activities. Students at Westside School will present their learning through student-led conferences, performances, and exhibitions of learning where they can get feedback from authentic audiences that include peers, parents, and the wider community. The process of refining work through critiques and other forms of feedback in anticipation of public displays and performances promotes a culture of striving towards excellence and producing quality work.

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 what information that we got for the progress monitoring and then share in 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 the 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.

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.

Advisory Program-

Each middle school student belongs to an advisory. The purpose of the advisory program is to help build a community where every Westside Middle School student is able to connect with an adult mentor as well as with a small group of peers.

The advisory program has two main points of focus:

1. As a home base where students have a smaller community to connect with and build a relationship with an adult teacher who provides support and mentorship.
2. As a checkpoint for communication, the advisor is the main point of communication with parents and other teachers for all academic and social/emotional concerns with a student. The advisor should be regularly checking in with their advisees as well as parents, student support, and MS teachers regarding their advisee.

Curriculum Overview

Core Classes

Language Arts, fifth through eighth

At Westside School, the language arts curriculum allows students to reflect upon and develop connections between language and literature. 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. Each grade level is theme-based, with an emphasis placed upon understanding, application, analysis, evaluation and students' active involvement in their own learning.

Social Studies, fifth through eighth

At Westside School, the social studies curriculum allows students to reflect upon and develop connections between themselves 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. Each grade level is theme-based, with an emphasis placed upon understanding, application, analysis, evaluation, and students' active involvement in their own learning.

Science, fifth through eighth

The Middle School science curriculum is based upon the idea that science is an active, curiosity-based endeavor. The science program is designed to foster critical thinking and problem solving skills through scientific explorations that will encourage students to pursue science at higher levels, as well as engage as active, thoughtful global citizens. Building from the themes at each grade level, students develop new understandings upon the foundations of earlier studies. Whether building a dam, creating a scale model of their own digestive tract, or exploring an old growth forest, science at Westside School is about working together to ask questions and seek understanding.

Math, fifth through eighth

Our Middle School math program strives to provide a solid foundation that prepares students for advanced computation, comprehension, and problem-solving in high school and beyond. Students deepen their understanding of the core mathematical concepts learned in lower grades (numbers and operations, geometry, measurement, and data analysis) and develop new strategies for algebraic thinking and problem-solving, working with ratios and proportions, and other topics. Learning math is an active process, and classes are built around a dynamic mix of real world applications, hands-on learning projects, and guided lessons. At all levels, science courses provide additional opportunities for students to build and extend their math knowledge through experiments, models, and explorations. Therefore, by the end of eighth grade, most Westside School students who complete our math program in good standing will enter high school on an accelerated, college prep track. We use the [Bridges math curriculum](#) in fifth grade and [Connected Math](#) in grades sixth through eighth.

World Language

World Language is part of the core curriculum at Westside School for Middle School students. Language study prepares students to become global citizens and enhances a student's intellectual growth. Students who complete the Middle School world language sequence in good standing will be able to enter high school on an accelerated, college prep track.

Mandarin Chinese

The Middle School Mandarin Chinese program at Westside School is a three-year series of structured courses. Students learn to communicate in Mandarin Chinese by developing the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. They cover important aspects of Mandarin Chinese including pronunciation and tones, vocabulary and grammar, everyday conversation patterns, the PINYIN phonetic pronunciation system, the history and development of Chinese characters, as well as reading and writing Chinese characters. Classes include such activities as: songs, poems, celebrating Chinese holidays, and exploring Chinese culture and traditions. Homework, such as character writing, online practice, and reading is essential to steady language progress and is assigned daily.

Spanish

The Middle School Spanish program at Westside is a three-year series of structured courses. In the Spanish program, students acquire language through a communicative approach. The program stresses meaningful communication,

cultural awareness, and grammatical proficiency. Students learn Spanish by developing the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Spanish classes are developed around cultural units; students learn about daily life and traditions in Spanish-speaking countries and about famous Spanish-speaking people. Class activities include: dialogues, listening comprehensions, songs, poems, legends, and grammar and vocabulary activities.

Arts and Actives Exploratory Overview

Arts and active exploratory classes are graded and are included in the trimester report cards. Each student will have two arts exploratories and one active exploratory per trimester.

5th and 6th Grade

In 5th and 6th grade, students take a rotation of arts and active exploratory classes that provide a foundation for further study, as well as providing students with greater context and tools for making elective choices in 7th and 8th grade. Arts classes meet three times a week and Actives meet twice a week. In the first trimester, 5th grade focuses on a theater performance, while in trimesters two and three, students take either visual arts or vocal ensemble. All 5th graders take PE for their active class. In 6th grade, students take either visual arts or digital arts during trimesters 1 and 2, and end the year with the entire grade participating in a musical performance. 6th grade students take a rotation of yoga, strength and conditioning, and PE for their active classes.

7th and 8th Grade

In 7th and 8th grade, exploratory classes meet twice a week. Students are able to choose from a variety of arts and active-based classes, including visual arts, digital arts, music, and P.E. in order to explore their interests and develop new skills and ways of thinking. 7th and 8th graders will have the choice of performing in a full musical in trimester 2.

Athletics & Physical Education

Middle school physical education at Westside focuses on three main elements which are all incorporated in a typical PE class. Fitness is the first and most important element. Cardio, strength, and flexibility training improve and maintain students' overall physical fitness. Athletic skill building is the second main element. Students work on general athletic skill building (throwing, catching, striking), as well as sport specific skill building (basketball skills, volleyball skills, etc.). Games are the third main element. Students play competitive and cooperative games throughout the year.

Sports are a great way to increase physical fitness, build athletic skills, confidence and leadership, and to learn to work together as a team. Westside's Middle School will once again be competing in the CYO (Catholic Youth Organization) league. Students will have the opportunity to participate in cross country in the fall, basketball in the winter, volleyball in the early spring, and track and field at the end of the school year. All middle school students are highly encouraged to participate in at least one sport. Westside has a no-cut policy and will try to place teams in divisions where they will be competitive.

Performing Arts

Performing Arts in middle school focuses on building strong vocal, instrumental, acting, and movement skills. Students will learn to develop goals and interests in the performing arts that interest them through active participation in various performing arts electives, such as instrumental ensemble, vocal ensemble, musical theatre, acting, and dance. Students will have the opportunity to explore different aspects of performance in these electives, while learning the essential terms and concepts that they will need as they move into more advanced performances both in and beyond Westside School.

Visual Arts

The visual arts curriculum focuses on building a vocabulary of skills and understanding used in conjunction with design principles. Through the explorations of line, form, color, negative space, texture, shading, 3-dimensional forms, and a variety of materials and techniques, middle school students will develop an array of skills they can expand upon in the various exploratory offerings as well as in other classes where presentations of work benefit from an understanding of design and presentation developed in the visual arts. The visual arts curriculum also encompasses digital media where digital photography, filmmaking, and the use of apps and other emerging technology is explored.

Technology

Technology is an integral part of the Westside curriculum. Throughout their time at Westside, students are challenged to develop critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creative skills. The Middle School is complimented by a one-to-one iPad program, which enhances student learning by enabling authentic integration of technology into classes and promotion of 21st century skills and thinking. Throughout middle school, students use technology to support and enhance learning, research effectively, and as a tool for creative self-expression.

Personal and Community Development

Personal health & wellness, Respect, Inclusion, Diversity, and Excellence

In order to best serve our population and develop a middle school community of respect, inclusion, and positive personal behavior, this personal health and community development exploratory is compulsory for all students, all trimesters. Students will develop academic habits, personal competencies, and interpersonal skills at all grade levels. Personal development topics will include character strengths, goal-setting, autonomy, motivation, self-efficacy, resilience, grit, personal and physical well-being. Community development topics include: developing a positive scholarly community and bully-free environment, diversity and cultural competencies, stewardship, communication and respect, human-rights and social justice, and developing high-quality relationships.

PAC Grades 5 and 6-

Students in our 5th and 6th grades have two separate class blocks that each meet once per week: Community Meeting (CM) and PAC PRIDE classes. During CM, students will build fundamental skills for success at Westside in organization, digital citizenship, team-building, communication, and issues current to the grade-level learning community. In PAC classes, students will focus on developing the personal and interpersonal skills mentioned above, in addition to a personal health and physical development curriculum that is supported by the Family Life and Sexual Health (FLASH) program, developed by the King County Dept of Health. FLASH topics include: puberty and development, reproductive systems, conception, pregnancy and early development, gender and sexual expression, safe choices, and advocacy.

PAC Grades 7 and 8-

Students in our 7th and 8th grades have a combined class block that meets once per week for Community Meeting (CM) and/or PAC PRIDE class. During Community Meeting time, students will build leadership and stewardship skills to support the success of our learning community. Community Meeting topics are generated by student ideas and concerns, as well as addressing issues current to their grade-level. The first semester will focus on the theme of creating and nurturing a positive, respectful, and inclusive culture. In the second and third trimesters, PAC classes will be alternated with CM's, as students will focus on developing the personal and interpersonal skills mentioned above, in addition to a personal health and physical development curriculum that is supported by the Our Whole Lives (OWL) program, a secular curriculum developed by the

Unitarian Universalist Association. OWL Topics include: personal goals and safe choices, reproduction, intimacy, contraception, STI's, drug and alcohol awareness, consent, and advocacy.

Flex Fridays

Each Friday students participate in a *flex* exploratory that allows them the opportunity to delve more in depth in a particular topic. Flex Fridays are approximately 90 minutes long and run the entire semester. The extended time allows for cross-grade level collaboration and off-campus activities, and provides opportunities for students that would not normally be available.

Examples of Flex Friday Exploratories include: full scale drama productions, debate classes, and weekly trips to a climbing gym.

Westside School Outdoor Program

Through challenging and inspiring outdoor experiences, the Westside Outdoor Program supports the school's mission through fostering individual growth, building teamwork and leadership skills, teaching wilderness skills, strengthening relationships within and between students and faculty, and providing opportunities for students to develop a love for outdoor adventure.

How We Teach On Trips

The outdoor program is a critical component of the academic experience at Westside School, and as such, we encourage all leaders to share their knowledge, enthusiasm, and expertise with students in a variety of ways:

- Direct - Instructing students in particular skills such as how to set up a tent, use a stove, or read a map.
- Experiential - Constructing and facilitating experiences that teach a given concept, idea, or skill. In many cases, the environment is the most effective teacher.
- Modeling - As adult leaders, we must do as we say, leading by example as we take on challenges, work through unexpected problems, and find fun even in difficult situations.
- Teachable Moments - Taking advantage of unplanned situations as opportunities for learning about community, the world around us, risk management, and other topics.
- Reflections/Debriefs - Trip groups generally come together at the close of each day to reflect upon the day, considering what went well, what could have gone better, and what we're looking forward to. Written reflections

- are also a part of many trips.
- Student Instruction - Teaching is often the best way to improve our learning. Whenever possible, students should be empowered and encouraged to share their knowledge.

Social Emotional Goals

In addition to teaching wilderness skills and making academic connections, each trip is framed around one of the following social emotional standards:

- **Self Awareness (I am):** Recognizing who I am and how I am feeling relative to the world around me. Awareness of emotions, personal traits, external supports, and a sense of personal responsibility
- **Social Awareness (I care):** Demonstrating an awareness of the value of others in the greater communities. Respectful of others people's emotions and perspectives- a desire to positively contribute
- **Self Management (I can):** Managing behavior in effective, constructive ways. Ability to manage emotions with honesty and integrity, use effective decision-making skills, set and achieve goals
- **Social Management (I will):** Interactive in meaningful, productive ways with others. Using positive communication and social skills to interact, develop relationships, and prevent / manage conflict

Curricular Reflections

The curriculum at Westside is a dynamic, growing, and evolving framework that supports student learning. The faculty and staff engage in ongoing, collegial conversations and reflections on our work of providing relevant, meaningful, and authentic learning opportunities for the students. The curriculum and curriculum guide will continue to evolve as we work collaboratively to implement best practices for student-centered learning in today's environment.