

MIDDLE SCHOOL | 6-8

CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

The Middle School curriculum emphasizes wide-ranging exploration and skill development in specific disciplines, taught by teachers who understand and genuinely care for students at this age. Organization and accountability are emphasized, and students learn to take responsibility for managing their work. Block scheduling allows students to investigate deeply and absorb concepts in each discipline. Students work collaboratively with each other, and teachers are able to design differentiated strategies to meet the needs of individuals and groups. Technology is a critical component of the Middle School, with a 1:1 laptop program integrated into all disciplines. Time is taken to talk with students about appropriate use and online safety through Wellness and Technology classes.

Based on the *Developmental Designs for Middle School* approach, community norms, strong student/teacher relationships, and responsibility to the group are principal features of the Middle School curriculum. Advisory groups of 10-12 students and one faculty member meet every morning and two to three additional times per week, allowing students to interact socially under the guidance of an adult. Advisors oversee their students' entire school experience: they advocate for the students, facilitate student-teacher meetings, explore how the students learn best, and help students set and meet academic goals in each discipline.

By the time they enter the Upper School, Middle School students are prepared academically for the rigors of advanced study. They have learned to manage their time, make good choices, and advocate for themselves and their ideas.

ENGLISH

Middle School English features a workshop model in which students become independent, passionate, habitual, skilled, and critical readers and writers. Reading choice, awareness, depth, comprehension, and engagement are valued every step of the way. The English Studio workshop allows students focused, regular class time to build their writing and analytical skills while working collaboratively through peer-review, one-on-one teacher conferences, whole-group mini-lessons, and frequent discussions of shared mentor texts. Grammar instruction is both geared to the whole class and individualized. The Middle School English curriculum guides students to meet high expectations for time management and investment in literature as they set their own goals and are nudged toward authentic independence, curiosity, and awareness as readers, writers, and citizens.

WORLD LANGUAGE

In Middle School, all students have the opportunity to start a new language of their choosing in Spanish, French, Chinese, or German. Students with prior language experience, including those moving up from the Lower School's Spanish program, may choose to continue their study of a specific language based on their skill level and placement test results. Middle School students also have the option to pursue accelerated language courses in the Upper School, when appropriate.

Middle School world language study emphasizes communication, culture, and personal connections to language. Lessons focus on conversation, reading and listening, and writing for presentation.

SOCIAL STUDIES

The Middle School social studies program encourages appreciation of people from different periods and cultures while developing analytical research, critical reading, discussion, and writing skills. In Grade 6, students study contemporary and historical Minnesota from its earliest inhabitants to its most recent immigrants through thematic units that touch on a variety of social studies disciplines. In Grade 7, students explore sustainability and civic engagement, including a comprehensive, interdisciplinary unit on water issues. In Grade 8, students explore 20th-century U.S. history and contemporary political and social issues. Students are taught to formulate and articulate their own interpretations of the material. They learn to work independently through major research projects in each grade and present their research to teachers, peers, and the community—another step in acquiring the public-speaking and communication skills that will serve them as they advance to the Upper School.

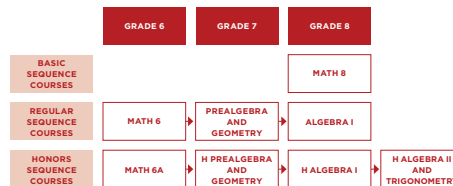
SCIENCE

Middle School students experience an iterative trial-and-error process in their roles as developing scientists, engineers, and computer programmers. The theme of Grade 6 science is homeostasis: how living things maintain internal equilibrium through changing external environmental factors. Students learn about biomes and the adaptation of living things, including how organisms are adjusting to climate change. At the end of the school year, they design, build, and test-launch rockets. Throughout the year, students practice experimental design and the methods that scientists use to share their results, including written reports. In Grade 7, the theme of the year is environmental science, with deliberate connections to the Grade 7 Social Studies curriculum. Students start their year learning about local water resources and pollution, connected to their study of place in social studies. As the year progresses, students create simulations and models, as well as design solutions for environmental issues such as pollution, climate change, and loss of habitat for pollinators. Grade 8 science immerses students in the skills and practices of being a scientist and engineer. The broad base of transferrable lab skills and chemistry content introduced in the first trimester allows students to master the content related to the characteristic properties of matter while becoming confident scientists in the lab. Their experience as lab scientists in the fall will then lead into an immersion experience in robotics and computer science in the spring.

MATHEMATICS

Middle School mathematics courses emphasize the nature of mathematical thought as well as the development of facility with the applications of mathematics. SPA's math program emphasizes the "why" behind the "how"—students explore, discover and make sense of concepts before applying them; they investigate the significance of concepts in addition to using them to solve problems. With three sequences of math available, students proceed at the pace and with the level of abstraction that best fits their mathematical development and understanding.

When students leave the Middle School they typically have completed a rigorous first algebra course, which is the essential foundation of the Upper School mathematics program. Please see the Upper School mathematics sequence chart, at right, for detailed information about the Upper School mathematics program.



STUDENT VOICE AND COMMUNITY

In Middle School, students are becoming more independent and figuring out who they are as individuals. Spending time with peers doing activities they enjoy is an important part of this process, and the Middle School student life program reflects that.

Much of our student life programming takes place during the school day. The advisory program is where academic life and student life come together, and the work students do in advisories defines life and community in the Middle School. Our experiential learning opportunities are tied to the curriculum and some, like the week-long Grade 7 retreat to Camp Widiwagan, are significant rites of passage. Middle School "Activities" are similar to the Mini program in the Lower School, and offer students a wide range of electives that are a fun change of pace from their academic subjects.

The vast majority of Middle School students—almost 80%—participate in one or more of our interscholastic athletic teams, and many students also take advantage of the Private Music Lesson program that offers individualized instruction at the Randolph Campus before or after school. Additional programming after school includes three theatrical productions, Lego League, and a supervised program offering care until 6 p.m. on school days.

FINE ARTS

All Middle School students take drama, art, and music courses, and may audition for three annual theater productions. The Grade 6 studio art course covers various media and techniques; Grade 7 studio art courses introduce two-dimensional art techniques and three-dimensional ceramics. In Grade 8, students may opt to take elective courses in two- and three-dimensional art.

The required Grade 6 drama class prepares students for later electives, including acting, stage design, and scriptwriting. All Grade 6 students participate in choir or beginning instrumental classes; advanced instrumentalists in Grade 6 may audition to participate in advanced band or orchestra. In Grades 7 and 8, students continue in choir or in the instrument and ensemble of their choice.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Students take PE two times per six-day rotation in Grades 6 and 7. The curriculum includes cooperative games, health/nutrition units, and sports. Emphasis in sports units will be placed on developing skills, form, and teamwork.

In Grade 8, students take a one-trimester course, Fitness 8, which supports students in developing personal fitness plans through exposure to weight training and cardio classes; students learn about nutrition, heart rate, physical health, and injury prevention.

COMPASS

In Grades 6 and 7, the Compass course is team-taught by the Learning Specialist, the Counselor, and the Director of Intercultural Life. Students explore social skills, academic strategies, human relationships, healthy communication, identity development, and personal values. In Grade 8, health-related topics are explored, such as substance use and abuse, stress management, nutrition, and sexuality.

COMPUTER SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING

All Grade 6 students take Computer Science 6, a one-trimester course in which they explore the core concepts of computer science. The course begins with programming in a block-based environment. When students are ready, they transition to syntax-based programming. In Grade 7, students take Computer Science 7 in which they apply computer science skills to program simulations related to thematic topics. In Grade 8, students have a challenge-based robotics engineering unit in Science 8 in which they integrate computer science concepts with science content knowledge to collaboratively address a challenge. By the end of Grade 8, students have the foundation to enter the introductory Upper School Computer Science electives.

TECHNOLOGY

In Grade 6, each student is assigned a school-owned laptop for use in school and at home during the school year. This laptop is reassigned to the same student annually throughout Middle School and is used across classes as an essential tool for content creation, research, organization, and collaboration. Necessary technology skills are developed in the context of academic classes where they are needed, often taught collaboratively by the content teacher and an integration specialist. Strategies encouraging responsible use of technology, both personally and academically, are emphasized in all grades through Advisory and Compass/Wellness courses.

By the end of Grade 8, students are prepared to transition from using school-owned technology to more independent use of personal technology in the Upper School and are prepared for Upper School Computer Science electives.