



## Lower School Curriculum Guide

### Pre-Kindergarten

The primary goal of our pre-kindergarten program at Cascades Academy is to create a richly engaged classroom community that provides students with the tools and opportunities to be the authors of their own learning. To best serve each student in our class we look to be guiding members of our classroom learning community while giving each student's voice the prominence and respect every individual deserves. We welcome input and communication with families to help us develop an integrated community that reflects the mission of our school.

We take a constructivist, Reggio-Emilia inspired approach to learning in our classroom that focuses on the whole child. We hold a strong image of the child, meaning our practices and thinking are guided by the belief that each child is a capable, vibrant, and intelligent individual with the inborn ability and drive to learn. It is our job to include each child at their own level and support the diverse abilities each child brings to the classroom. We listen and observe to understand what our students' languages of learning are, and then provide experiences and opportunities for them to expand and delve further into their self guided learning.

Academic areas of development are amply provided for in our classroom; however, as research has indicated, it is of significantly higher importance to focus on what we call 'intellectual goals' in early childhood education. There is nothing inherently wrong with learning specific academic skills as they are key in learning to read, spell, calculate, etc. However, they are essentially meaningless without the critically important development of a strong intellectual foundation. Research has shown "intellectual dispositions may be weakened or even damaged by excessive and premature formal instruction." School readiness comes not from ensuring early learners have academic skills as early as possible; instead, a child is ready for school when they have had time and space to practice social-emotional skills, self-regulation, problem solving strategies, critical and creative thinking, and collaborating with others, to name a few.

Katz, L. G., (2015) Lively Minds: Distinctions between academic versus intellectual goals for young children. Defending the Early Years. <https://www.deyproject.org/>

## Kindergarten - Grade 5

### Reading

The lower school reading program strives to turn each child into a lifelong reader where they can find solace and love in discovering the printed word. In all grades, students engage in a workshop or centers model and learn to become confident readers through experiences in shared reading, interactive read-alouds, small guided reading group instruction, book clubs or novel studies, independent reading, and individual teacher/student conferring. Formal reading assessments take place three times per year with the Fountas and Pinnell Literacy Benchmarking System in order to gauge student interest and readiness. The basis of these formal assessments, as well as more observational and informal assessments, help guide instruction in specific reading skills and strategies.

In the lower elementary grades (K-2nd), students are *learning to read*, whereas in the upper elementary grades (3rd-5th) students are *reading to learn*. Regardless of their age or developmental readiness, the instruction is centered on a combination of the essential elements of reading: phonics, accuracy, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Kindergartners through fifth graders are exposed to and read books from multiple genres at their instructional and independent reading level. In the same class, students can be found reading poetry, realistic fiction, informational texts, historical fiction, graphic novels, science fiction, and biographies just to name a few. Most importantly, children read to learn and the more they learn the more compassionate and connected they will feel to others and to their world.

### Writing

The writing program provides a supportive, interactive, and challenging environment that focuses on helping children to hear their own voice, write with confidence, and find joy in written expression. *Handwriting Without Tears* provides a solid foundation for successful printing, cursive, and keyboarding skills. A combination of *Story Workshop*, Lucy Calkins' *Units of Writing*, and *The Daily Five* provide the framework for the writing curriculum. This workshop approach to writing is based on four guiding principles: students will engage in writing when they write about their own lives, they will use a consistent writing process across the grades, they will work in authentic and meaningful ways, and they will develop independence as lifelong writers.

Writing lessons often begin with a whole class mini-lesson followed by independent writing time where the teacher is conferring and modeling writing techniques with students as they move through the writing process. The workshop usually ends with a short celebration of student work. Students in all grades publish original pieces within three distinct genres: narrative, informational, and opinion, and oftentimes these pieces are tied into the Storyline curriculum as well as other content areas.

### Math:

The lower school math curriculum strives to foster a lifelong enjoyment of number relationships and thinking based in logic and reasoning. *Everyday Math*, developed by the University of Chicago School Mathematics Project, is the foundation of the mathematics program which offers students a broad and differentiated approach that explores mathematical content beyond basic arithmetic. Through whole

class, small group, and individualized instruction, students use a problem-based approach to everyday situations and are exposed to a variety of formats for practicing basic skills. Students explore numbers, patterns, place value, number stories, data and chance, computation, measurement, basic facts, geometry, algebra, money and fractions. Young mathematicians are encouraged to explore their environment in both a qualitative and quantitative manner.

### **Storyline (K-5):**

One of the most engaging programs in the Lower School is Storyline, a teaching method developed in Scotland that integrates a theme across curricular subjects. During Storyline, students become characters related to a theme and are asked to respond to various incidents using teamwork, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills. In past Storylines, lower school classrooms have come to life as a rainforest, medieval castle, the Oregon Trail, a research ship, art museum, invention factory, restaurant, hospital and many more. In addition, each teacher brings the Storyline theme into the classroom by integrating related topics throughout other curriculum areas. Students are active participants in the Storyline via their characters; they are engaged and invested in the learning process.

Students at Cascades Academy participate in at least two Storylines per academic year and they are generally co-taught in the corresponding grade level teams: kindergarten and first grade, second and third, and fourth and fifth grade. Throughout the Storyline, students work individually and cooperatively on various projects. These projects may include research, construction, art, science experiments, brainstorming, inventions, guest speakers, or musical performances. Storyline topics culminate with a showcase of the student's knowledge through performances, topic books, service learning projects, or celebratory activities.

### **Experiential Education:**

Experiential learning at Cascades Academy is implemented at all levels of curriculum (PK-12) and revolves around the central idea of *learning by doing*. The tenets of this learning methodology include engaging students in a cycle of (1) *activity / experience*, (2) *reflection*, (3) *conceptualization*, and (4) *application* of and on the desired learning outcomes. In the Lower School, students are involved in experiential education both inside and outside the classroom. Experiential learning is manifested through a variety of programs: **Specialist Classes** (PK-5), **Storyline** (K-5), **Outdoor Education** (PK-5), **Traveling School** (2-5), **Service Learning** (PK-5), and **Social-Emotional Learning** (PK-5).

### **Studio Art:**

In art class, students build on the seven elements of art: line, shape, color, value, form, texture and space. A deeper understanding of art as a visual language, and how it helps us communicate and connects us, is an overarching theme of the lower school art program. As children progress through the program, more challenging art media and techniques are introduced and they continue to gain inspiration from different art forms and concepts from a variety of cultural and historical sources. Students are encouraged to discuss, interpret, and critique art as a means to expand on their personal connection and reaction to different forms of art.

**Music:**

Students explore musical concepts such as beat, volume, speed, and pitch, and practice these concepts using voice, percussion instruments, strings, and barred instruments. They are exposed to and participate in the music of other cultures and explore historically significant composers and musicians from all over the world.

**Spanish:**

Through lessons, games, songs, stories and art projects, students are engaged and having fun while learning the Spanish language. They learn basic Spanish vocabulary, some verb usage and conjugation, and prepositional phrases. Students learn to use increasingly complex phrases to describe things in Spanish.

**STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math):**

The Lower School STEM program is an integrative course that provides hands-on instruction into standards-based science and math topics through the use of technology and engineering challenges. This special program in Cascades Academy's IDEA lab engages students in thinking critically about real-world problems, applying their learned knowledge to larger projects, working collaboratively with various teams, and constructing new ideas with their minds, hands, or digital technology. Whether it be constructing Rube Goldberg machines to explore the use of simple machines or programming a LEGO robotic animal to consider the adaptations of animals, the intention is for students to be constantly engaged in lessons and projects that challenge them to think in innovative and cross-curricular ways.

**Physical Education:**

In P.E. class, students learn a variety of games and activities that focus on effective manipulative skills (catching, bouncing, dribbling), as well as motor skills (agility, reaction time, balance, speed). The class engages in team games and traditional team sports that encourage cooperation with others and the value of safety and procedures (following rules, fair play). P.E. offers students an avenue to encourage joy of movement, skill competence, self-confidence, self-expression, and accepting challenges.

**Winter Snowsports Program (K-5):**

Students take five all-day ski or snowboard lessons at Mt. Bachelor during the winter term. Students are grouped by ability and age and are assigned an instructor that will work with them throughout the five weeks. First timers are riding the lifts by the end of the program! The program not only teaches ski and snowboard skills, but it also affords students the opportunity to challenge themselves, gain confidence, be adventurous, and take responsibility for themselves and others in a winter environment.

**Outdoor Education (PK-5):**

Experiential learning is showcased through the outdoor education program and is facilitated around teaching *responsibility* for (1) *self*, (2) *others*, and the (3) *environment*, through participation in a host of outdoor activities and experiences. Outdoor activities take place in a variety of outdoor settings and occur regularly in the context of standard *Field Trips* (PK-5), the *Outdoor School Program* (PK-5), and the *Traveling School Program* (2-5).

### Field trips (PK-5)

Field trips afford lower school students with real-world hands-on learning experiences. Field trips are designed to enhance classroom curriculum, build culture, and expose students to new experiences. Examples of field trips include museums, local businesses, plays, musicals, art shows, and more.

### Outdoor School (PK-5)

Lower School Outdoor School occurs three times a year: one day in the fall, one day in the winter, and a final two-day outing in the spring. Outdoor school takes place at local parks and focuses on a central theme. Students participate in variety of experiential activities ranging from academic to artistic that connect students to self, others, and the environment.

### Traveling School (2-5)

There's no better way to bring the concepts of learning to life than through the school's unique traveling school program. Students take school "on the road" each spring semester to experience what they are learning first-hand. Teachers tailor course content and Storylines to make traveling school come alive. At Cascades Academy, students start traveling school as early as 2nd grade. Along with students' classroom teachers and a few parent chaperones, the 2nd and 3rd graders take an annual 4-day, 3-night trip to *Camp Collins* in Sandy, Oregon each spring while 4th and 5th graders spend two nights at the *Opal Creek Ancient Forest* in the fall as well as travel farther afield in the state of Oregon for a 5-day, 4-night trip in the spring. They learn to be independent and responsible as well as learn valuable life skills of traveling in a group.

### **Social Emotional Learning (PK-5)**

#### F.L.I.G.H.T.

FLIGHT is Cascades Academy's own and wholly unique multi-age social-emotional program. FLIGHT is an acronym that changes each year that represents a variety of character traits and values. In FLIGHT teams, teachers and student leaders explicitly teach "softer" skills such as friendship, levity, inclusion, grit, health, and tenacity. The community vision is to impart a common culture and language so that students feel empowered and safe.

Within each of these traits, students are encouraged to take 'flight' and investigate, determine, and experience for themselves and with their small groups the trait through various activities. The 5<sup>th</sup> graders are considered the FLIGHT Captains and the 4<sup>th</sup> graders are the 'captains in training', or co-captains. Each captain has a mixed grade group between Pre-Kindergarten and 4<sup>th</sup> grade. The intention of this program is to enhance the lower school community across all grade levels as well as provide leadership opportunities for our older lower school students. For each trait, students explore the meaning and the action behind possessing the trait for themselves.

### Responsive Classroom

In addition to F.L.I.G.H.T., the Lower School at Cascades Academy uses a program called *Responsive Classroom*. Responsive Classroom is an evidence-based approach to education that focuses on the strong relationship between academic success and social-emotional learning (SEL). The Responsive Classroom approach empowers educators to create safe, joyful, and engaging learning communities where all students have a sense of belonging and feel significant.

### **Service Learning & Community Partnerships (PK-5)**

Through service learning opportunities, students learn the value of giving back to the greater community. Lower school students mainly participate in service learning as a part of the Storyline theme. In the past, students have become stewards of Tumalo State Park as well as the school's own campus through weed pulling and native planting projects. Lower school students have packed food at a local food bank on traveling school, delivered canned goods through the *Neighbor Impact* program, organized food for animals at the Humane Society, and have also visited senior friends at the Fox Hollow retirement community.