



# Curriculum Guide

Lower & Middle School Program  
(K-8th Grade Academic School Year)

*Hickory Hill Academy cultivates children's growth in a stimulating and compassionate environment. Our supportive teachers engage the curiosities and needs of each child, fostering self-esteem, the confidence needed to benefit from our robust academic programs, and the interest to embark on a journey of lifelong learning. Our focus on empathy, character, and individual well-being encourages our children to envision how they will serve their community beyond the expanse of our campus.*

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# Our HHA Curriculum & Program

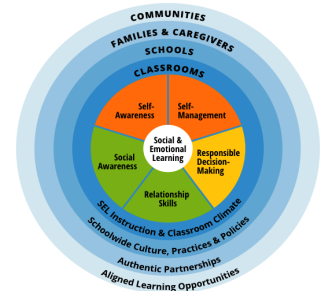
## *Cultivating Compassionate Leaders*

The curriculum at HHA supports our vision of Cultivating Compassionate Leaders through an intentional focus on the deep development of both character and academic skills for students. We believe that a program of strong character development can serve as the foundation from which all other skills can grow. The evidence-based practice of social and emotional learning serves as a vehicle for cultivating essential skills for comprehensive character development through both explicit and embedded learning. Research demonstrates that students who develop character skills like perseverance, determination, compassion, and empathy are more well positioned to experience successful academic learning, as their character skills are key drivers of their identity as a learner and their approach to academic tasks. The curriculum at HHA aims to provide standards-based, developmentally appropriate, and engaging learning experiences that are responsive to learners' current needs while also offering a challenge that pushes learners toward continued academic growth and development. The combination of a curriculum that values both strong academic learning and character development is the key to the comprehensive and successful development of students as learners and as members of a Community.

## Character Education & Social and Emotional Learning

### *What is social and emotional learning?*

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is an integral part of education and human development. SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. - CASEL



### *What is character-based education?*

Character education is an approach to teaching and learning that emphasizes the positive development of moral and ethical qualities and behaviors like those represented in the HHA LEADERS values system.

### *How are SEL and character education connected?*

Social and emotional learning provides a vehicle for the development of positive character and pro-social behaviors. Character is the *what* and SEL is the *how* with regard to curriculum and student learning.

### *How do SEL and character education support academic learning?*

Social-emotional learning (SEL) and character-based learning support academic success by fostering emotional regulation, resilience, and a growth mindset, which help students stay focused and motivated while feeling their inherent value as individuals and as members of a school community. These approaches build interpersonal skills, such as empathy and communication, enhancing collaboration and creating a positive school climate. SEL and character education also teach life skills like self-discipline, responsibility, and effective decision-making, which are essential for academic and personal success.

Research shows that integrating these practices improves academic performance and boosts engagement. Together, they nurture well-rounded, confident, and capable learners.

LEADERS - Our HHA Values System

Listeners - Empathetic - Accepting - Disciplined - Ethical - Respectful - Selfless

### *LEADERS & Learning*

HHA students have dedicated time each day for explicit instruction and learning experiences with a standards-aligned, nationally accredited curriculum. Students explore core competencies through a defined scope and sequence, offering opportunities to grow social and emotional skills alongside and in support of academic development.

### *Our Curriculum - RULER*

RULER is an evidence-based approach to social and emotional learning (SEL) created by the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence. Through training in the RULER approach, teachers and leaders learn the skills to create and sustain a positive emotional climate, as well as support individual development of emotion skills for students and adults.

## **Evaluation of Learning**

### **Assessment**

The purpose of assessment in learning is to gather information about a student's progress and understanding of material, allowing educators to tailor instruction, provide feedback for continuous development, and ultimately guide students towards achieving learning goals relative to benchmarks, standards, and their own unique learning needs; essentially, it helps monitor, diagnose, and direct student learning to ensure they are on track with the curriculum. HHA students are assessed in a variety of ways, including both formative (during the learning process) and summative (at the end of a unit of learning) methods of evaluation. Assessment can include observations, student self-reflection, and standards-based evaluations. Middle school students also include portfolio assessment and student-led conferences in their evaluation of learning.

### **Standardized Assessment**

HHA uses iReady diagnostics three times per academic year to provide norm and current criteria-referenced math and literacy data. HHA uses iReady in place of other forms of standardized testing since iReady diagnostics receive higher ratings on EdReports with a perfect score for the three Gateways for evaluating standardized systems of assessment: Focus and Coherence, Rigor, and Usability. iReady diagnostics directly connect to our instructional tools, providing real-time data to inform instruction and personalized learning.

### **Overview**

Teachers formally report on student learning four times per school year, with two family/teacher conferences (fall/spring) and two report cards (winter/summer). The purpose of grade reporting is to note student progress and growth over time. At HHA we consider grade reporting to be an opportunity to build relationships with families and partner in support of positive student

development. Progress reporting is informed by a variety of sources of data as referenced in the assessment section of this Curriculum Guide.

### Standards-Based Grading

HHA uses standards-based grading (SBG) to report student progress. Standards-based grading is a developmental approach to assessing student learning that focuses on measuring a student’s mastery of specific learning standards or skills, rather than assigning a traditional letter grade. Unlike letter grades, which often combine achievement, effort, and behavior into a single score, SBG provides a clear picture of what a student knows and can do relative to defined benchmarks. This method encourages growth by offering specific feedback that helps students and teachers identify strengths and areas for improvement. By aligning assessments to learning goals, SBG fosters deeper understanding and ensures grades reflect actual learning, making it a best practice in assessment and evaluation of student learning over time.

Progress Reporting Learning Progression		
<b>1</b>	<b>Beginning</b>	<b>Beginning</b> to acquire knowledge, skills and strategies toward grade level standards.
<b>2</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>Developing</b> the ability to apply knowledge, skills, and strategies towards the objective.
<b>3</b>	<b>Applying</b>	<b>Applying</b> knowledge, skills, and strategies towards the objective consistently.
<b>4</b>	<b>Extending</b>	<b>Extending</b> knowledge, skills, and strategies creatively and strategically towards the objective.
<b>N/A</b>	<b>Not Applicable</b>	The standard was not addressed this grading period or the student was not part of the program for long enough to accurately assess.

# Kindergarten

## Academic Learning

As the first year of learning in our Lower School program, kindergarten is a very special year for students' academic, social, and emotional growth. Kindergarteners experience an approach to learning that honors the needs of young children to learn through both play and structured learning in core content areas, including math, English language arts (reading, writing, phonics/phonemic awareness), social studies, and social and emotional learning. Our approach to learning leverages the best of a variety of curricular resources to curate a truly unique and impactful experience for HHA students.

## Math

In Kindergarten, students develop number sense by counting to 100 by ones and tens, representing and comparing numbers, and exploring addition and subtraction within 10. They use math manipulatives like counters and ten-frames to compose and decompose numbers and to describe and compare measurable attributes like length and weight. Students engage in inquiry-based projects to identify and describe 2D and 3D shapes and use positional language to explain their relationships. MyPath personalizes foundational skill practice, supporting students in mastering early math skills through individualized pathways.

## English Language Arts

In Kindergarten, students begin their literacy journey by building a strong foundation in reading skills, including phonemic awareness, letter-sound relationships, and early word recognition. They develop reading fluency by working with carefully chosen decodable texts that align with their developing skills. Writing activities focus on expressing ideas through drawing, labeling, and forming simple sentences, nurturing creativity and communication. Students are regularly assessed to monitor their progress toward key early literacy benchmarks and frequently share their work with peers, fostering collaboration and a love for learning.

## Social Studies

### *Me and My World*

Kindergarten students explore the concept of community by learning about themselves, their families, and the people around them. They develop an understanding of rules, cooperation, and the roles of family members. Students begin to recognize symbols and traditions, such as the American flag and holidays, fostering a sense of belonging and cultural awareness. HHA students extend and apply their learning in various projects and events throughout the school year, including World Culture Week and Kindness Week.

## Social & Emotional Learning

Students begin their journey into social-emotional learning by exploring foundational skills like recognizing and naming basic emotions (happy, sad, mad, scared). They learn to identify how emotions feel in their bodies and use the Mood Meter to connect colors to feelings. Through storytelling and role-play, they practice expressing emotions in healthy ways and building early

empathy by recognizing others' emotions. Students connect SEL learning across disciplines and begin to learn how to leverage self-awareness as a driver for academic learning.



## First Grade

### Academic Learning

As a critical year in our Lower School program for learning and development, first grade builds upon the foundational skills established in kindergarten while introducing more complex academic concepts and independent learning strategies. First graders experience an integrated approach to learning that combines structured academic instruction with opportunities for collaborative problem-solving and critical thinking. Students engage in more advanced work in core content areas, including mathematics operations and algebraic thinking, expanded literacy skills (reading comprehension, fluency, and written expression), in-depth social studies investigations, and exciting STEM exploration. Our approach continues to emphasize both individual growth and community engagement, preparing students for increasingly complex academic challenges while nurturing their social and emotional development.

### Math

First graders deepen their understanding of place value by working with numbers up to 120 and develop fluency in addition and subtraction within 20. They solve simple word problems and use math manipulatives like base-ten blocks and number lines to build strategies for solving addition and subtraction equations. Hands-on projects encourage students to measure lengths with non-standard and standard units, tell time to the hour and half-hour, and work with data representation in charts and graphs. MyPath supports individualized practice to reinforce these foundational concepts.

### English Language Arts

First graders focus on strengthening their reading skills by working with texts that reinforce phonics and decoding while promoting fluency and comprehension. Writing instruction emphasizes crafting sentences and short paragraphs to develop clear and creative expression. Reading and writing activities are designed to inspire a love for literacy while building foundational skills. Students' progress is assessed regularly, ensuring they meet developmental benchmarks. Opportunities to share their work with peers help cultivate confidence and pride in their accomplishments.

### Social Studies

#### *My School and Family*

First graders deepen their understanding of community by studying their school and family structures. They learn how rules and responsibilities contribute to a functioning community and explore maps and globes to locate places they live and learn. Students identify significant historical figures and events that shape the world around them.

### Social & Emotional Learning

First graders deepen their understanding of emotions by learning how emotions change throughout the day and exploring strategies to regulate them. They begin developing active listening skills and practice using "I" statements to communicate feelings effectively. Students

are introduced to simple problem-solving techniques to navigate peer conflicts and learn how to seek help when needed. First graders continue to learn and implement the RULER tools, including the Mood Meter.

## Second Grade

### **Academic Learning**

Second grade marks a significant transition in our Lower School program, as students move from learning to read to reading to learn. This year emphasizes increasing independence, critical thinking, and complex problem-solving skills. Students engage in more sophisticated academic work that requires them to apply their foundational skills to new challenges and deeper learning experiences. The curriculum focuses on developing strong analytical abilities, advanced literacy skills, and mathematical reasoning while continuing to nurture students' social-emotional growth and character development. Second graders are encouraged to take ownership of their learning journey while building stronger connections within their academic community.

### **Math**

Second-grade students extend their understanding of place value to three-digit numbers, fluently add and subtract within 100, and solve word problems involving money, time, and measurement. Using tools such as number bonds, rulers, and clocks, students explore concepts of measurement, including length and time to the nearest five minutes. Geometry focuses on partitioning shapes into equal parts, and students begin to use multiplication concepts such as repeated addition. Collaborative projects and MyPath provide opportunities for personalized and inquiry-based learning, helping students build confidence and deepen understanding.

### **English Language Arts**

Second grade emphasizes advancing reading comprehension strategies and building fluency with increasingly complex texts. Students engage in writing activities across various genres, focusing on personal narratives and informative writing, while honing their skills in organization and revision. Creativity and critical thinking are integral to the writing process. Regular assessments ensure students meet grade-level expectations, and opportunities to share and celebrate their work with classmates foster a sense of community and achievement.

### **Social Studies**

#### *My Community*

Second graders investigate the characteristics of their local community, focusing on its history, geography, and diversity. They explore how different communities function, examining roles such as workers, leaders, and helpers. Students use basic economic concepts to understand goods, services, and decision-making processes in their neighborhoods.

### **Social & Emotional Learning**

Second-grade students focus on understanding the causes and consequences of emotions in themselves and others. They expand their vocabulary for describing feelings and practice using the "Blueprint" tool to resolve conflicts. Lessons emphasize perspective-taking and kindness, helping students develop stronger interpersonal relationships and cooperation skills.

## Third Grade

### Academic Learning

Third grade represents a significant developmental milestone in our Lower School program, marking the transition from primary to intermediate elementary education. Third grade students are becoming more aware of their peers and learning environment, which can lead to students making exciting connections between academic and social and emotional development. This important year in the lower school journey challenges students to become more independent learners who can analyze complex texts, solve multi-step problems, and engage in deeper critical thinking across all subject areas. Students develop greater academic independence and metacognitive awareness, learning to monitor their own understanding and apply various strategies to overcome challenges. The curriculum emphasizes making connections across disciplines, developing strong academic habits, and fostering intellectual curiosity while continuing to support students' social-emotional growth and leadership development.

### Math

In third grade, students focus on multiplication and division within 100, explore fractions as numbers, and solve real-world problems involving perimeter and area. They use tools like fraction strips and area models to develop a conceptual understanding of these topics. Students measure and interpret data through line plots and bar graphs and classify shapes based on their attributes. Inquiry-based projects, such as creating blueprints or analyzing data sets, encourage application of skills. MyPath provides individualized practice to strengthen areas of need and support advanced learners in exploring more complex concepts.

### English Language Arts

Third graders deepen their comprehension by analyzing themes, characters, and structures in a variety of texts. Collaborative discussions encourage critical thinking and engagement with diverse perspectives. Writing instruction focuses on developing well-structured paragraphs, emphasizing topic sentences, supporting details, and transitions. As the year progresses, students expand their skills by organizing these paragraphs into short essays. Students are regularly assessed to monitor progress, and opportunities to share their work with peers reinforce collaboration and a sense of accomplishment.

### Social Studies

#### *Our Community and Beyond*

Third graders expand their horizons by studying communities from different regions and cultures. They learn how geography, climate, and resources influence lifestyles and economies. Students explore historical events and cultural traditions that connect communities globally, fostering respect and curiosity for diverse ways of life.

### Social & Emotional Learning

Third graders build emotional awareness by analyzing how different situations can evoke multiple emotions. They focus on self-regulation strategies, such as mindfulness and positive

self-talk, to manage stress and frustration. Collaboration exercises help them practice teamwork, recognizing individual contributions, and building trust within groups.

## Fourth Grade

### Academic Learning

Fourth grade is an exciting year at HHA as students are firmly rooted in their upper elementary school years. Students in the intermediate grades are capable of deep learning and thoughtful social connection with peers and adults alike. Fourth grade students are curious, and they have the skills to explore their curiosity to greater depths than in previous years. Moreover, this year marks significant growth in analytical thinking, problem-solving, and synthesis. Students begin to master more complex academic concepts while developing stronger executive functioning skills that will serve them throughout their academic careers. The curriculum challenges students to think critically, work collaboratively, and take increasing ownership of their learning journey. Fourth graders begin to take on meaningful leadership roles within the school community while continuing to develop their character and social-emotional competencies, thereby fortifying the foundation for future learning, development, and leadership.

### Math

Fourth-grade students expand their understanding of multi-digit multiplication and division, fraction equivalence, and operations with fractions and decimals. They use protractors to measure angles, explore symmetry, and classify geometric figures. Hands-on inquiry projects encourage students to interpret data from line plots and graphs, apply measurement concepts to solve real-world problems, and explore area and perimeter relationships. MyPath offers targeted practice to support individual learning paths, helping students meet their unique academic goals.

### English Language Arts

In fourth grade, students explore both literary and informational texts, focusing on analysis and interpretation while connecting their reading to broader contexts. Writing instruction emphasizes clarity and detail, with students crafting narratives and expository texts. Collaborative discussions and peer reviews enhance their ability to communicate effectively and refine their ideas. Regular assessments ensure students are progressing relative to standards, and sharing their work helps foster pride and mutual learning.

### Social Studies

#### *Regions of Our Country*

Fourth-grade students focus on the regions of the United States, examining their physical features, natural resources, and cultural diversity. They study state and national history, including Native American cultures and key events that shaped the country. Map skills and the ability to analyze primary sources are emphasized throughout the year.

### Social & Emotional Learning

In fourth grade, students delve into emotional complexity, recognizing that people can experience conflicting feelings simultaneously. They apply the "Blueprint" tool to more nuanced

social situations, fostering accountability and empathy. Through intentional activities and group discussions, they learn to reflect on their emotional growth and identify personal strengths.

## Fifth Grade

### Academic Learning

Fifth grade serves as the culminating year of our Lower School program, preparing students for the significant transition to middle school. This capstone year emphasizes mastery of elementary concepts while introducing advanced academic skills that will be essential for success in middle school and beyond. Students demonstrate sophisticated critical thinking and complex problem-solving across all content areas. The HHA 5th-grade curriculum focuses on developing strong learning practices, self-management, and advocacy skills while fostering intellectual curiosity and academic resilience. As the senior leaders of the Lower School, fifth graders take on leadership roles and model the character traits and learning practices that exemplify our school's values as HHA LEADERS. This final year of Lower School synthesizes all previous learning while building the confidence and competence necessary for a successful transition to middle school.

### Math

Fifth graders master operations with fractions and decimals and explore volume as they calculate and analyze the measurements of 3D shapes. They plot points on a coordinate plane to solve problems and classify two-dimensional shapes based on properties. Students use hands-on tools like 3D models and graphs to interpret data and engage in inquiry-based projects such as designing surveys and analyzing results. MyPath delivers personalized skill practice, ensuring all learners are supported in developing their mathematical reasoning and problem-solving abilities.

### English Language Arts

Fifth-grade students engage in advanced reading activities, analyzing complex texts and exploring diverse themes and perspectives. Writing projects include research, essays, and reflections, with an emphasis on clarity, argument development, and creativity. The iterative writing process, including planning, drafting, and revising, is central to their learning experience. Assessments guide their growth toward meeting or exceeding grade-level benchmarks, and opportunities to present and discuss their work build confidence and collaborative skills.

### Social Studies

#### *America's Past*

Fifth graders embark on a study of American history, tracing the nation's development from its early beginnings through the formation of the United States. They explore colonization, the Revolutionary War, and the Constitution, while examining the roles of diverse groups in shaping the nation. Critical thinking and civic responsibility are highlighted as students analyze historical sources and current events.

### Social & Emotional Learning

Fifth graders explore how emotions impact decision-making and performance, such as in academics or sports. They practice strategies for setting personal goals and managing peer



pressure. Students also learn to analyze social dynamics, fostering inclusivity and respect for diverse perspectives in their peer groups.

## Middle School Approach to Learning

Hickory Hill Academy believes that an intentional and effective middle school program addresses the unique developmental, cultural, social and emotional needs of students in grades 6-8 and provides a learning environment that is characterized by the following:

1. **Challenging:** Young people in this age group are capable learners. They are ready to explore and step up to challenges that incorporate critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and connections with the community and world. Interdisciplinary challenges that require problem solving and project management provide an integrated learning experience that reflects the real world.
2. **Engaging:** Relevant, participatory, collaborative, and efficacious learning envelopes students in opportunities to explore their passions and pursue answers to self-generated questions, while also interacting with other young people who have differing perspectives. This allows everyone in the environment to socially construct deeper understandings of the world around them and explore challenges as a team.
3. **Empowering:** At Hickory Hill, middle school teachers act as guides and facilitators of learning. The goal is for students to take ownership of their own learning and contribute positively to the community and world around them.
4. **Responsive:** Using the distinctive nature and development of young adolescents as the foundation, educators work with students to make decisions and build learning adventures that meet the needs of all learners. Establishing structures like advisory and collaborative project-based learning ensures this attribute.
5. **Equitable:** Young adolescents are becoming aware of the society around them. Their concepts of justice and fairness are keen. Creating and exploring social concepts across the school, community, and world inspires critical thinking and provides opportunities to investigate multiple perspectives that inform personal and academic development.

In order to foster a learning community and culture of shared ownership, curriculum is designed with student voice and input, guided by the following priorities:

- Curriculum is challenging, exploratory, integrative, and diverse.
- Health, wellness, and social-emotional competence are embedded.
- Instruction fosters learning that is active, purposeful, and intentional.
- Varied and ongoing assessments inform and measure learning.

While much of the learning will be integrated into projects and challenges that require educators and students to draw from across disciplines, specific content standards will be reinforced as priorities, and taught to mastery for every student.

### ***Integrated Learning***

Integrated learning is an educational approach where students actively connect concepts and experiences across different disciplines, allowing them to apply knowledge and skills to complex situations by drawing connections between seemingly separate areas of study, essentially creating a holistic understanding of a topic rather than learning in isolated silos; it emphasizes the ability to transfer learning to new contexts and real-world problems. At HHA, learning is both

explicit and embedded in daily teaching and learning, affording students the opportunity for deep learning within academic content and broad connections across disciplines.

## Academic Learning

### Math

Hickory Hill Academy Middle School Mathematics focuses on ensuring students acquire the knowledge, skills and identity necessary to confidently engage in mathematics during high school and beyond. Students build upon what they have learned in elementary school to develop confidence in themselves as mathematicians. To do this, the curriculum intentionally builds conceptual understanding and procedural skills through deliberate practice and application in authentic contexts.

**Conceptual understanding:** Students will develop conceptual understanding of key content necessary for success in high school. Students must be able to access concepts from a number of perspectives in order to see math as more than a set of mnemonics or discrete procedures.

**Flexible and efficient procedural skills:** Students will efficiently and accurately calculate. Flexible and efficient procedural skills build from an initial exploration and discussion of number concepts to using informal reasoning strategies and the properties of operations to develop general methods for solving problems.

**Application:** Deep math learning requires students to use math in situations that use mathematical knowledge. Correctly applying mathematical knowledge in integrated problem or project-based scenarios builds on students conceptual understanding and procedural flexibility and efficiency.

**Priority Content in grades 6-8 builds knowledge and skills essential to high school success, including:**

- Expressions and Algebraic Equations
- Ratios and Proportions
- Statistics and Probability
- Geometry

**Content is facilitated through the use of high leverage mathematical practices that guide students to:**

1. Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them.
2. Reason abstractly and quantitatively.
3. Construct viable arguments, and appreciate and critique the reasoning of others.
4. Model with mathematics.
5. Use appropriate tools strategically.
6. Attend to precision.
7. Look for and make use of structure.
8. Look for and express regularity in repeated reasoning.

**Grade 6:** In sixth grade, students build a deeper understanding of ratios, rates, and proportional relationships, laying the groundwork for algebra. They explore operations with fractions, decimals, and integers and solve real-world problems involving percentages and unit rates. Geometry concepts include calculating area, surface area, and volume of shapes, while data analysis focuses on statistical measures like mean, median, and variability. Inquiry-based

projects, such as designing scale models or analyzing data sets, encourage collaboration and critical thinking. MyPath provides individualized learning opportunities to address skill gaps or challenge advanced learners.

**Grade 7:** Seventh-grade students deepen their understanding of proportional relationships, applying these concepts to real-world contexts like scale drawings, percent increase/decrease, and simple interest problems. They work with operations involving rational numbers, linear expressions, and equations, while also exploring geometric concepts such as angle relationships and the properties of triangles and circles. Students analyze and compare data sets, focusing on probability and statistical reasoning. Hands-on activities and inquiry-based projects, such as creating and testing geometric designs or conducting probability experiments, support experiential learning. MyPath ensures personalized practice tailored to each student's needs.

**Grade 8:** Eighth-grade students focus on developing a solid foundation in algebra, working with linear equations, functions, and systems of equations. They explore geometric transformations, congruence, and similarity and apply the Pythagorean Theorem to solve problems. Students delve into data analysis, interpreting scatter plots and two-way tables, and apply mathematical modeling to real-world scenarios. Collaborative inquiry projects, such as designing practical solutions using algebraic models or exploring geometric patterns, foster deeper engagement. MyPath supports individualized growth, ensuring students are prepared for high school-level mathematics.

## **English Language Arts**

English Language Arts includes four distinct domains of learning: reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language. In order to make this learning relevant for students at Hickory Hill Middle School, curriculum design will integrate and connect these areas into authentic learning contexts. Goals will include understanding of the human experience, analyzing and creating text, grappling with moral, philosophical, and aesthetic facets of humanity, through literary exploration which informs, persuades, and narrates our lives and helps us understand the experiences of others. Critical thinking and problem solving, communication, collaboration, and creativity will be accentuated.

**By the end of eighth grade, students at Hickory Hill Middle School will learn how to:**

**Build strong content knowledge:** Students learn the mechanics of reading, writing, and language use by applying skills across disciplines to deepen understanding of subject matter and to share what is learned. They learn to employ technology thoughtfully to enhance their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language use, tailoring their searches online to acquire useful information efficiently, and integrate it with what they learn in other ways. They become self-directed learners, effectively seeking out information, evaluating bias and validity, and using multiple resources to develop deeper understandings and perspectives.

**Adjust and respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline:** Students set and adjust purposes for reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language as warranted by the task. They learn to appreciate nuances, such as how the composition of an audience should affect tone when speaking and how the connotations of words affect meaning. They demonstrate command of standardized English to meet communicative goals and acquire and use a wide-ranging vocabulary in both speaking and writing to match both discipline and purpose.

**Comprehend as well as critique:** Students engage as open-minded, but discerning, readers and listeners. They work to understand what an author or speaker is saying, and question assumptions. They value evidence when assessing the validity of claims and reasoning. Students comprehend and evaluate complex texts across a range of types and disciplines, and construct effective arguments to convey intricate or multifaceted ideas. They work to discern a speaker's key points, request clarification, and ask relevant questions, build on others' ideas, articulate their own ideas, and confirm that they have been understood.

**Come to understand other perspectives and cultures:** Students appreciate that the 21st century classroom, community, and workplace are settings in which people from often widely divergent cultures representing diverse experiences and perspectives must learn and work together. Students actively seek to understand other perspectives and cultures through reading and listening. Students are able to communicate effectively with people of varied backgrounds and are able to explain their intentional language choices to achieve their communicative goals.

## **Social Studies**

### **The United States and the World**

In middle school, students engage in a deeper exploration of history, geography, civics, and economics, focusing on how societies evolve and interact. They study the foundations of the United States, from indigenous cultures and European colonization to the Civil War and Reconstruction, emphasizing the causes and effects of key events. Students analyze the U.S. Constitution and government systems, exploring the balance of rights, responsibilities, and freedoms in a democracy. Globally, they investigate the interconnectedness of civilizations, examining trade, conflict, and cultural exchange across regions and eras. Critical thinking, research, and discussion skills are developed as students analyze primary and secondary sources, draw connections between historical events and contemporary issues, and engage in debates to foster civic and global awareness.

Priority Content across the middle school years at Hickory Hill Academy include:

- **Behavioral Sciences:** by examining cultures, students are able to compare our ways of life and those of other groups of people in the past and present. As citizens, students need to know how institutions are maintained or changed and how they influence individuals, cultures, and societies.
- **Economics:** individuals, families, businesses, and governments must make complex economic choices as they decide what goods and services to provide and how to allocate limited resources for distribution and consumption. In a global economy marked by rapid technological change, students must learn how to be better producers, consumers, and economic citizens.
- **Geography:** by studying the earth and the interactions of people with places where they live, work, and play, knowledge of geography helps students to address the various cultural, economic, social, and civic implications of life in earth's many environments.
- **History:** students learn their historical roots and those of others, and how past events have shaped their world. In developing these insights, students begin to consider what life was like in the past and how things change and develop over time. Reconstructing and interpreting historical events provides a needed perspective in addressing the past, the present, and the future.

- **Political Science:** Knowledge about the structures of power, authority, governance and their evolving functions in contemporary society is essential if young citizens are to develop civic responsibility. Young people become more effective citizens and problem solvers when they know how local, state, and national governments and international organizations function and interact.

### **Social & Emotional Learning**

In middle school, students refine their emotional intelligence by exploring the role emotions play in decision-making, relationships, and leadership. They learn to identify emotional triggers, practice stress management strategies, and build resilience during challenging transitions, such as moving to a new grade or managing peer pressure. Through role-playing, discussions, and self-reflection activities, students deepen their self-awareness, improve their ability to regulate emotions in high-pressure situations, and enhance their conflict resolution skills. They also focus on empathy and inclusivity, learning to navigate complex social dynamics with respect, while setting personal goals for growth and developing strategies for advocacy and self-advocacy. These skills prepare them for successful social interactions and responsible decision-making as they transition to high school.

## Enrichment

### Strings

The Strings program at Hickory Hill Academy provides a well-rounded, vertically aligned musical experience for students across grade levels, with an emphasis on Strings education. The National Association for Music Education (NAfME) standards for General Music and Ensemble Music provide the framework for our program, allowing students opportunities to create, respond to, and perform in order to develop a deep and lasting understanding of music. At every level, students learn and use the language of music, first through solfege and rote learning, and later through standard musical notation. Students are also introduced to the history and cultural context of music, learning about musical eras, composers, instruments, and styles of music from around the world. Students begin to learn to apply their musical knowledge to the violin in Kindergarten, and may branch out to viola, cello, bass in 4th grade, learning at each level in the way that best suits their developmental level.

As students refine their musical skills through voice and instruments, they also develop a variety of lifelong skills. Through singing and playing as an ensemble, students exercise teamwork and leadership as they engage in an environment where individual and group success is equally celebrated. At each learning stage, students learn how to support one another by giving thoughtful, kind feedback and by valuing the success of their peers as much as their own. Students learn to view challenges as mere puzzles to solve and become excited to work collaboratively to tackle them. Music also uniquely engages students' cognitive development, enhancing memory, attention-span, and problem-solving skills. In Strings, we celebrate learning and musical growth in small ways, such as highlighting individuals in class who wish to perform for their classmates, and in large ways during concert performances. At each learning stage, Hickory Hill Academy's Strings program provides a dynamic engagement in the musicality which exists within each child and seeks to nurture that ability as children grow.

### STEM

The STEM program at Hickory Hill Academy provides a comprehensive and immersive educational experience for students. Aligned with the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), students explore a wide range of science topics spanning life science, earth science, and physical science including topics such as: cells, genetics, adaptations, ecosystems, space, planet Earth, weather, climate, forces, energy, waves, and matter. Emphasis is placed on real-world phenomena and scientific inquiry, encouraging students to ask questions, investigate, and draw conclusions through hands-on activities. This program also integrates advanced concepts like 3D modeling and printing, coding and robotics, as well as engineering principles which helps us foster an environment of creativity and innovation.

Through relevant and engaging projects, students tackle challenges that promote collaboration, critical thinking, and problem solving. These practical applications of STEM principles not only solidify their understanding of scientific concepts, but also develop key skills such as communication and teamwork. As students progress from kindergarten through 8th grade, they engage in increasingly complex topics and tasks. This approach not only supports academic growth, but also prepares students to be confident and resourceful learners as they transition to high school and beyond. By becoming adept in STEM practices, students gain skills that serve

them across all disciplines of study, providing a strong foundation for success in future academic endeavors and careers.

## **Physical Education**

The Physical Education program at Hickory Hill Academy encompasses many individual and team-oriented units within its curriculum to allow students to experience a variety of activities. Throughout the units, students will have the opportunity to develop their physical, social, and emotional skills in an educational and active setting. The P.E. curriculum is designed so that age-appropriate skills and activities are practiced during the units and gradually progressed each year as students advance. Furthermore, the P.E. curriculum at Hickory Hill Academy focuses on cardiovascular fitness, flexibility, and strength. These areas are worked on each class lesson, with growth being evaluated throughout the year and culminating with fall and spring Fitness Testing sessions.

Through engaging activities, students will learn and refine their physical skills. Major units within the curriculum include but are not limited to Playground and Team-Building Games, Floor Hockey, Baseball/Softball, Football, Parachute Games, Jump Rope, Tumbling, Volleyball, Soccer, Badminton, Pickleball, Dance/Rhythms, Basketball, Frisbee, and Yard Games. Students also learn the importance of being prepared, giving their best effort, and exhibiting good sportsmanship each lesson. Finally, the Physical Education Program at Hickory Hill Academy is designed to encourage students to be physically active inside and outside of school. It is with that in mind, that HHA fosters an appreciation for physical activity which in turn will promote a positive and healthy lifestyle.

## **World Languages**

### **Spanish**

The goal of the Spanish program is to guide the students to communicate in meaningful and appropriate ways in the target language following the Standards for Foreign Language Education based upon the 5 Cs of the National Standards for Foreign Language Education (communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, communities) by ACTFL (American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Language). Students will increase proficiency in Spanish through multiple modalities, including reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The course content focuses on daily life situations that allow the students to experience the language with an emphasis on communication skills. Various meaningful learning strategies are used throughout the course including songs, poems, technology integration, and cultural activities in order to make the learning age appropriate and hands-on. Students are exposed to global themes which are integrated throughout the year and expanded upon in subsequent courses.

### **Mandarin**

The Mandarin program aims to enable students to attain basic language skills for communication in the interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational modes, as specified in the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning (communication, cultures, connections,



comparisons, communities) by ACTFL (American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Language). Through class experiences, students will have increased their awareness and understanding of the Chinese language. Students will also explore various aspects of Chinese culture that are related to Mandarin, compare languages and cultures, and make connections within communities and other subjects. Students have numerous opportunities to engage in learning tasks for interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational communication. The course content focuses on daily life situations that allow the students to experience the language through a variety of hands-on, age-appropriate activities. Meaningful learning strategies are used throughout the course including songs, poems, movies, cultural activities, conversations, and presentations. Instructional strategies will also guide the students to build a good foundation for how to read and write in Chinese characters. The Pinyin system will be introduced at a rudimentary level with the focus on building awareness of tonal differences and accurate pronunciation of basic Chinese sound.

## **Art**

Our art program combines hands-on learning with projects and self-discovery. Students in Kindergarten through 8th grade build a strong foundation in art concepts such as balance, space, proportion, form, texture, color, lines, and patterns. They explore projects like painting, drawing, and working with clay in our fire kiln, while also learning about influential artists like Kehinde Wiley, Pablo Picasso, Yayoi Kusama, Jen Stark, Van Gogh, Hokusai, and Leonardo da Vinci. This dynamic program nurtures creativity, artistic confidence, and a deep appreciation for the arts and their history.