



Lower School...At a Glance

Literacy:

ESD embraces a balanced literacy approach, combining explicit phonics and word study instruction with a reading and writing workshop model to grow decoding, fluency, grammar, and comprehension skills for all readers. ESD's literacy program draws from numerous curricula which allows for differentiation based on students' needs. Reading and writing are taught in tandem using whole group instruction and guided literacy groups. All students are immersed in different genres and exposed to a vast array of authors and illustrators. Students with a diagnosed reading disorder receive reading instruction from two certified language therapists. Therapists push into kindergarten and first grade classrooms, working with small groups and looking early for reading challenges. Students in grades two and three receive the Take Flight curriculum specifically designed for students with dyslexia.

Math:

The goal of ESD's Lower School math curriculum is to motivate and challenge students to see the power and value of numbers. In classrooms, students will have the opportunity to investigate, question, reason, verify, apply, and enjoy mathematics. While an understanding of basic math concepts and an ability to compute accurately in a reasonable amount of time are important, logical thinking and an appreciation for the relationship between practical life experiences and math are stressed. Students will work with numbers in a wide variety of ways, developing a deep understanding of how a number can be composed and decomposed and to use that information to become flexible and efficient problem solvers. Along with memorization of facts and procedural steps, a firm foundation in numeracy contributes significantly to student success in mathematics, numerically and symbolically, and leads to problem solving that is intuitive, creative, flexible, and efficient.

ESD currently uses The Everyday Math Program as its primary resource for teaching and learning. Teachers also refer to and utilize lessons from Singapore Math, Marcy Cook, Jo Boaler, and Greg Tang.

Social Studies:

Social Studies in the Lower School focuses on an awareness of self, family, community, and one's place in the world as a global citizen. Students use historical thinking skills such as examining primary sources, establishing historical significance and thinking about continuity and change. They learn to research and assimilate information by using databases, books, and classroom resources. Each trimester has an intentional focus- either study skills, project based learning or innovation and exploration, with each grade level rotating the order so that the CAST teachers can participate more efficiently. Community service projects are woven into each grade level which helps students make connections to the real world.

CAST Art:

Students in lower school art classes are introduced to the basic elements and principles of art. Their exploration begins with simpler elements like color, line, and form and builds to more complex study and execution of principles like unity, balance, and emphasis. Students are introduced to both classical and contemporary artists from around the world. Recognizing the artist's approach - noticing how the artist uses color, shape, and medium to create their art - leads to brainstorming on the part of the students, helping them understand how they can include these elements in their own works of art.

CAST Music:

In lower school music classes, students are engaged with the elements of music through singing, listening, moving, creating, performing, and evaluating. In music, healthy singing techniques, as well as pitch and rhythmic competencies are developed through a variety of activities that lay the foundation for music literacy, music appreciation, and improvisation. Students perform in ensembles singing and playing Orff instruments. Throughout the lower school experience, music students are engaged in a diverse range of styles of music and have the opportunity to share their learning in grade level performances. Students in 4th grade reinforce music reading skills by playing the recorder and ukulele.

CAST Science:

Students learn to recognize the formal and informal opportunities to experiment and question as they build, take apart, sort, name, observe, compare, and try out new ideas. Students develop the mindset of "taking things apart," observing carefully and keeping accurate records as they do so. Teachers create an environment that draws out a student's natural curiosity about how things work and why things are as they appear. Students are learning to take the hypothetical seriously and to recognize patterns and use abstractions to make them logically consistent. The science program teaches students to frame careful questions based on their observations, postulate hypotheses to explain why and how, and to create verifiable experiments that test their ideas. In classrooms students regularly notice technical opportunities to make the world or classroom a better place and are able to formulate these opportunities into a design challenge with numerous possible solutions.

CAST Spanish:

Lower school students are exposed to the Spanish language using the "Teaching Proficiency Through Reading and Storytelling" (TPRS) approach. Beginning in the early childhood years, students learn basic communication skills to engage in daily conversation, act out stories, provide and obtain information, and express feelings and emotions in Spanish. As students progress through the elementary grades, they participate in spontaneous spoken, written, and signed conversations. Students present on familiar topics, transitioning to more narrative and descriptive uses of language over time. Novel studies and dramatic storytelling provide opportunities to demonstrate fluency and comprehension in written Spanish. Students are exposed to and cultivate a knowledge and appreciation of the Spanish language and Hispanic culture in order to become a global citizen.

Design Lab:

Students are introduced to technologies and basic ethics of the digital world and encouraged to explore creativity and innovation. Students in grades 1-4 are introduced to the design thinking process and participate in a variety of design thinking challenges throughout the year. Basic coding skills are introduced and built upon each year, with a culmination in fourth grade when students complete their first independent coding project.

Library:

The lower school library program focuses on early and emergent print and media literacies. The library is a service - not a place - and is infused throughout the entire lower school building to encourage students to think, create, share, and grow in every part of the school.

PE:

The purpose of lower school PE is to enhance the development of fine and gross motor skills and increase the skills and knowledge necessary for each student to become physically active and create life-long habits of wellness. Emphasis is placed on developing locomotor skills, fine motor skills, gross motor skills, cooperative play development, and personal safety while playing. Students are also taught various health topics such as nutrition, the cardiovascular system, the skeletal and muscular system, and personal hygiene. Lower school curriculum is in alignment with the national standards set by the National Association for Sport and Physical Education.

Religious Studies:

ESD believes that every child is made in the image of a loving God. We believe this identity is lived out in how we live and our interactions with one another. Through our Lower School Religion classes, we learn the stories of our shared Biblical Narrative to understand who we are, who we were created to be, and how we care for one another. In kindergarten, we focus on the story, learning the hero stories - who and what. In second grade, we build on that foundation and begin to ask the why or wonder questions, aiming for students to be able to share the story in their own way. In fourth grade, we begin to apply what we know of the story to what we understand of our own life. What does the Bible have to say to me about my purpose and plan? Through the study of the major biblical heroes of the Old Testament and the birth, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ, we learn a common meta-narrative that allows us to create, maintain and expand upon a shared moral and ethical view of our purpose and future.

