



# CURRICULUM

## ACADEMIC PROGRAMS—GENERAL

A frequent topic of debate among educators has been the issue of “back to basics” versus “integrated learning.” Ashbrook recognizes that integration of facts and ideas cannot take place until the facts and ideas themselves have been learned. For this reason, the school includes factual knowledge in the lower grades as a necessary precursor to more complete integration of knowledge in the upper grades.

Lower School students master material before proceeding to the next grade level. This clear expectation motivates students to excel and also ensures that a firm academic foundation is laid for further studies.

Time in class is structured by a variety of methods. Depending on the subject and the judgment of the teacher, this structure may include direct instruction, class discussions, video documentaries, collaborative projects such as debates or theater productions, and individualized study. Field trips and enrichment programs enhance class work.

## ACADEMIC PROGRAMS—LOWER SCHOOL

The Ashbrook pre-school and pre-kindergarten programs provide children with a loving, creative, joyful, and stimulating learning experience. A further goal is to help children develop good social skills as well as foundational learning and listening skills.

Kindergarten students follow a flexible full-day schedule which includes daily instruction in reading, math, science, and social learning by their homeroom teacher plus foreign language, music, and physical education by specialists. Art activities are integrated into other subjects, and a visual arts specialist teaches art technique one period each week.

Teachers in grades one through four are specialists in the education of young children. Homeroom teachers provide daily instruction in the “core” subjects of English, math, social studies, and science. Students are also taught by specialists in music, physical education, and foreign languages. The art specialist meets with them for increasing amounts of time as they progress through the Lower School.

English instruction includes reading, spelling, handwriting, composition, and oral work participating in drama. Early reading is taught primarily by phonic methods.

Social studies in the Lower School includes both geography and history. Geography serves as a context for historical studies. Before studying history, students learn the names and locations of the continents, oceans, and major countries of the world. History is taught from an international and developmental perspective. For example, Native American cultures are not taught in isolation but instead as an example of the nomadic stage of cultural development through which people of many nationalities have passed.

Science instruction emphasizes exploration and observation via hands-on experimentation. For example, in learning to identify insects, students learn how those same identification methods are used to classify other living beings. There is a continual interplay between students discovering on their own and learning what others have discovered. Students learn generally accepted facts and how to use the scientific method to evaluate new information.

Lower School mathematics includes estimation, computation, and application skills. Arithmetic classes incorporate both homework and learning games. Students are advanced according to the number of skills they have mastered. Calculators are introduced only after students have mastered basic computational skills.

Three foreign languages are taught at Ashbrook: French, Spanish, and Chinese. On entering kindergarten, each student begins one of these languages. Verbal fluency is emphasized, especially in the Lower School. Foreign languages at this level are taught primarily through role playing, songs, and games. An additional goal of foreign language instruction is to teach students about another culture, another way of looking at the world. Foreign language teachers emphasize those aspects of the foreign culture which distinguish it from our own.

Art activities taught in the Lower School include various forms of drawing, painting, and sculpture. In addition to art taught as visual arts by the specialist, artistic expression is incorporated into other subjects.

In the Lower School, students in music classes learn vocal and instrumental (recorder, chime, and Orff instruments) skills. Music concerts are performed before other students and parents.

Beginning in kindergarten and continuing through grade eight, physical education instruction at Ashbrook emphasizes locomotor movement to develop body control and spatial awareness, rhythm, and skills such as throwing, catching, striking, etc. Developmentally appropriate activities promote an appreciation of physical activity while emphasizing health related fitness, fair play, and sportsmanship.

## ACADEMIC PROGRAMS—MIDDLE SCHOOL

The Ashbrook Middle School (grades five through eight) program includes daily study in English, history, science, and mathematics. Other subjects (art, music, physical education, foreign languages, keyboarding and computer skills, and a wide variety of electives) are taught on an every-other-day block rotation.

The English curriculum includes literature, writing, grammar, vocabulary, and oral work such as speech and drama. Students read and analyze classic and contemporary literature. They also develop higher levels of editing skills to fine-tune their writing. Students at this level produce about 500 words each week.

Students gain valuable experience on stage. Theater is intended as a vehicle to teach not only public speaking but also appreciation for literature and fine arts, the importance of teamwork and careful planning, and self-esteem enhancement. Producing plays often involves incorporating various academic emphases such as art, music, English, and science. Older students are encouraged to take responsibility for helping to coordinate productions. Each spring Ashbrook produces an all-school play that is open to kindergarten students through eighth grade. This production is rehearsed and performed outside school hours.

The emphasis on geography in the Lower School lays a sound foundation for Middle School students to study history in a largely chronological sequence. In this core subject, topics such as economics, philosophy, technology, art, military strategy, epidemiology, religion, and civics, are introduced into the curriculum to deepen understanding.

Science teaching in the Middle School concentrates on one scientific discipline at a time resulting in more in-depth study. Subject areas covered include biology, geology, astronomy, meteorology, zoology, botany, and microbiology/health. Enough physics and chemistry are taught to serve as a foundation for further study in high school.

Middle School students are placed in math classes according to their skill level. Core math classes include two levels each of pre-algebra and algebra plus geometry. A math lab elective is offered for students needing special assistance.

Foreign language study at Ashbrook emphasizes verbal communication as well as grammar and writing. In the Middle School classes, each of the three languages is taught at two or three levels. The more competent students read literature and put on plays in the language.