

## **CURRICULUM OVERVIEW**

### **2025-2026**

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## INTRODUCTION

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At North Park Elementary School (NPES), our mission and core educational beliefs guide our approach to curriculum. All that we do is rooted in a deep curiosity that leads to questioning and exploration, a love for our warm and inclusive community, and a spirit of creative pursuits in all parts of life. This curriculum overview outlines the key features and highlights important focuses at each grade level.

Our students grow in the context of a positive, authentic, and committed independent school community of educators who know and appreciate them, peers who care for and support them, and parents and caregivers who engage meaningfully in our community.

### **The NPES Mission**

North Park Elementary School is a small school with a big impact. We educate students in our inclusive and engaging school culture; affirming, challenging, and supporting each child as they achieve their full potential as reflective learners and involved, empathetic members of their communities.

### **Core Educational Beliefs**

We believe that:

1. Students flourish when they are engaged and energized by their school and teachers
2. All children deserve to feel safe bringing their authentic selves to their teachers and peers, knowing they belong
3. Students learn in impactful and enduring ways when their academic studies are inquiry-based, collaborative, innovative, challenging, and fun
4. Human beings develop a richer understanding across fields of study when they seek out and learn from multiple and diverse perspectives
5. Students achieve success in high school and beyond when they develop flexible and creative problem-solving, critical thinking, and communication skills
6. Children develop cognitive, social-emotional, and life-skills—with an appreciation for the power of the human imagination—through the study of the arts, world languages and cultures, innovation, and physical education
7. Students are positioned to fulfill their potential when educators and parents work together to prioritize the social-emotional strength of the child, including a positive self-concept, processing and expressing their feelings in healthy ways, flexible thinking, resilience for struggle, self-care, and social conflict resolution skills.
8. All learners benefit from neurodiverse classrooms, since considering unique points of view and interacting with a variety of thinking styles are expansive for everyone
9. Students grow curiosity, cultural literacy, empathy, and agency in new ways through purposeful off-campus educational experiences that engender new perspectives
10. Children thrive in their quest to develop their best selves when they seek to help their communities become more inclusive and just

Our core educational beliefs, rooted in our mission, allow us to make intentional curricular decisions that align with who we are as an educational institution. In the end we aspire for our graduates to fulfill our Portrait of a Graduate qualities, habits, and stances through their years of growth and learning at NPES.

### **Portrait of a Graduate**

#### **I am a lifelong learner**

I think critically, ask compelling questions, and innovate to solve problems. I listen to and learn from others. I am engaged and resourceful. I find value in both collaboration and independence. I seek new challenges and see them as exciting opportunities to grow. I advocate for myself as a learner. I speak with intention and confidence. I enjoy sharing my ideas with others.

#### **I am a curious individual**

I continue to discover who I am and who I want to be. I am shaped by my experiences and welcome new ones. I have passions and interests and I pursue them with energy. I am creative, optimistic, and open-minded. I appreciate others for who they are, and I treat them and myself with respect. I am grateful for the opportunities I have to grow, and recognize that not everyone has them.

#### **I am part of a whole**

I am an engaged member of many communities, within and beyond my school. I demonstrate compassion and empathy. I seek to understand those who are different from me. In my relationships I feel seen and valued. I make responsible decisions with the greater good in mind. I contribute to positive change.

#### **I am ready**

I am a curious and confident learner. I know how to build relationships with my teachers and peers. I am motivated and resilient. I am mindful, can be fully present, and set priorities. I have the social-emotional skills to seek a healthy balance in my life. I look for solutions, and I advocate for myself and for others. I am ready to meet the challenges of high school, and I feel prepared to excel and lead.

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## ACADEMIC PROGRAM OVERVIEW

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### LANGUAGE ARTS

North Park Elementary School teachers use research-based practices to foster an appreciation and passion for language arts in order to build joy and competency in reading, writing, oral communication, word study (grammar, vocabulary, and spelling), and handwriting. The language arts curriculum is aligned with Common Core State Standards and the Science of Reading. Providing a strong foundation using daily reading and writing to support all subject areas, the program cultivates social-emotional skills in conjunction with ELA concepts.

Our Early Childhood Program is focused on creating a print rich immersive environment in which reading and writing are authentically embedded. Through play and intentional “studies” Preschool and Junior Kindergarten students begin to develop vocabulary, background, and literacy knowledge. While direct reading instruction does not begin until kindergarten, NPES students leave the Junior Kindergarten year with strong literacy foundational skills that are precursors to the beginning steps of reading. These pre-literacy skills are fostered through rich and diverse studies of compelling topics rooted in playful explorations. Teachers regularly read aloud, provide a writing center that students visit at their own pace, model writing and the “sounding out” of words, create art and sensory experiences using the students’ names, scribe dictations so students can explain their thinking and see it formed into the written word, and use many other strategies and techniques to integrate literacy in all aspects of the day.

Beginning in kindergarten teachers implement a variety of intentional systems aligned with the Science of Reading for explicit reading instruction. These science based approaches provide direct, explicit, multisensory instruction around reading and writing creating a balanced and structured literacy program. In grades K-8 a community-based writing workshop approach is foundational to developing literacy skills while also building student proficiency and stamina. In grades K-5 the [Collaborative Literacy Programs Being a Reader and Being a Writer](#) are the foundational curriculum with EL Education acting as the framework for Middle School.

### Reading

As students transition from early childhood to the primary years of K-2 they begin their learning to read journey. Reading is complex (as highlighted through [Scarborough’s Rope](#)) so teachers must tackle the process in a systematic and structured way. Word recognition, including phonological awareness, decoding, and sight recognition are explicitly taught through whole class lessons and small group reading centers with groupings based on assessment data. Language comprehension occurs simultaneously through the building of background knowledge, vocabulary studies, the examination of language structures and verbal reasoning. Teachers integrate intentional and targeted foundational skills instruction while regularly assessing student progress to meet individual needs. The strands of the curriculum work together to develop comprehension, fluency, decoding strategies, word analysis, spelling, vocabulary, and independent reading. As students become readers they learn the life-long skill of choosing appropriate reading materials for their age, interest level, and skill and find joy in the written word.

The application of critical thinking skills to analyze and identify literature and reading passages for elements including but not limited to genre, plot, characterization, setting, point of view, and theme are the focus in the intermediate through middle school years. As students begin to read to learn and become fluent, confident readers, they work on applying prior knowledge in anticipatory activities in order to confidently discuss literary elements, reading content, and themes and work collaboratively in book clubs, developing a robust and meaningful reading community.

Progress monitoring and other assessment tools at all grade levels help teachers make informed, targeted instructional decisions to ensure reading success for every child. Reading progress and growth is also assessed in K-5 through the aimswebPlus benchmarking and progress monitoring program. These assessments allow teachers to track growth and differentiate for individual students. Additionally, based on the benchmarking information provided from universal screeners like aimswebPlus, select students are monitored for progress in specific reading goal areas throughout the year. For detailed grade level scope and sequences click [here](#).

## **Writing**

A successful writing program must provide time to write daily and build stamina, teach the writing process and ask students to apply it for a variety of purposes and genres, help students develop fluency with handwriting, spelling, sentence construction, typing and word-processing, and create an engaged community of writers.

Teachers emphasize the writing process in all grades; students practice brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Students learn the strategies, skills, and tools to write varied genres, including information, narrative, opinion/argument, fiction, and poetry and repeatedly revisit these genres over their years at NPES. Explicit opportunities for students to hear, discuss, and analyze diverse and rich mentor texts are provided, and young writers learn to incorporate elements of author's craft, genre, and organization into their own writing.

Instruction is provided responsively in small groups and 1:1 conferences and students learn to work with peers collaboratively throughout the writing process. Creating a writing environment that is encouraging and enjoyable is critical to writing development. In NPES writing classes students generate ideas together, learn how to ask for, give, and receive helpful feedback through peer and teacher conferring, and share their work publicly while learning to express appreciation for their classmates' writing. In addition, a variety of tools are used for assessment, including skill-based rubrics, checklists, on-demand writing prompts, publishing, and projects.

When technology is integrated into the writing process at an age appropriate stage, the overall quantity and quality of students' writing improves. In grades 3–8, students develop word processing skills and conduct online research, while learning how to examine the validity of sources and navigate the internet responsibly, in conjunction with our media literacy program.

Grammar and writing conventions are made accessible through explicit, integrated instruction with clear and comprehensive progressions so students grow in these areas from year to year. A variety of teaching methods are used to instruct students in the areas of grammar, spelling, vocabulary, and word usage. Word study begins in kindergarten with study of phonics and word patterns culminating with direct academic vocabulary instruction to develop the critical link between vocabulary and reading comprehension through the *Wordly Wise i3000* program in the middle school years.

Additionally, students are provided the tools to become effective speakers and communicators. They are given opportunities to verbally express themselves in all subject areas and frequently present their discoveries in small groups and individually in formal presentations to the whole class in order to strengthen oral communication skills.

Teachers recognize that language is a fundamental element in all areas of study and strive to promote cross-curricular and cross-grade level collaboration in order to create a rich and consistent learning experience. Content areas, including social studies, math, science, and the arts, are integrated into the language arts curriculum through nonfiction texts and content-specific writing activities; we know the building of content background knowledge is critical to literacy development.

For detailed grade level scope and sequences click [here](#).

The NPES LA student:

- reads fluently and confidently both for the joyful act of reading and to learn
- understands the structure of language and can apply this understanding to increasingly complex texts
- poses essential questions based on wonderings
- applies grammar usage rules and literary techniques to their own pieces
- writes in a wide variety of genres and for many audiences
- develops reading skills to navigate both fiction and nonfiction texts
- utilizes public speaking skills when working in small groups, having whole class discussions, and presenting in front of the class
- collaborates with peers during learning activities
- creates a variety of projects to show learning

The NPES LA teacher:

- designs and executes learning activities to promote student growth and understanding in balanced and structured literacy classrooms
- regularly assesses students to support and extend at their growth edge
- provides whole class, small group, and 1:1 instruction consistently
- creates an environment for students to express themselves creatively
- guides student understanding through engaging literacy activities
- uses current best practices in literacy education and draws from the ongoing work in the Science of Reading to adapt and adjust curriculum
- guides students' understanding of writing skills during lessons and workshops
- differentiates instruction based on the needs and interests of individual learners
- encourages students to make connections between themselves, their community, and the texts they read

## MATH

The NPES mathematics curriculum aligns with the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics and Common Core State Standards and combines computation, reasoning, and problem-solving skills in a format that ties math to students' lives and builds conceptual understanding.

At NPES we feel that math is a common language that is living all around us. At all grade levels, math is about exploration and discovery. Within this approach, we allow students to examine multiple methods to finding a solution and emphasize a true conceptual understanding prior to utilizing algorithms. While students form their own meaning, teachers shape learning environments, guide the development of reasoning, share strategies, and help students learn to analyze their understanding together through communication. Laying the foundation of authentic number sense and meaning making allows for deeper examination of mathematical problems. With that said, at NPES we also value and develop the skill of automatic recall of number facts and procedures at an appropriate age. We believe it is fundamental that traditional methods of learning quantitative skills are blended with engaging projects to help students enjoy being lifelong learners of mathematics, and continue the focus on “playing” in math as the student progresses through the grades. A balanced approach creates well rounded math students.

Math education hones many of a student's general cognitive and life skills: critical thinking, problem-solving, reasoning, finding patterns, and examining the logical. Mathematicians must exhibit patience, flexibility, perseverance, creativity, and ingenuity. Communication is a key skill for all math students and NPES math students are expected to explain their thinking verbally and in writing, and engage in dialogue around mathematics problems. Within this context of collaboration and community, teachers differentiate in the math classroom to meet the needs of all learners.

In our Early Childhood Program, NPES students develop a love of math through exposure to numbers in their everyday play and their surrounding environment. Using Erikson Institute Early Math Collaborative and the Illinois Early Learning and Development Standards as a framework for our early childhood curriculum and assessment tools, the teachers curate the environment to encourage exploration of mathematical concepts through hands-on activities and projects, whole group *Number Talk* discussions, and small group teacher directed activities focusing on a specific mathematical concept. The main goal in the early years is to introduce meaningful mathematical concepts, provide opportunities within the context of play for children to explore, discover, investigate, make connections, and to continue their enthusiasm for mathematics into kindergarten and beyond.

In kindergarten through fifth grade, NPES implements the University of Chicago *Everyday Math* Program. *Everyday Math*, a common core aligned curriculum, encourages students to discover and investigate math through hands-on activities, explorations, and open-ended short answer questions. Additionally, the spiraling nature of the program supports our belief that math skills build upon one another and students are never done understanding or applying a math concept, but continually go deeper. Interactive activities and conversations with peers are common approaches in the program. Math skills are not isolated problem practice but are linked to situations and contexts that relate to everyday life. The curriculum also has a strong focus on communication as students are frequently asked to grapple with and discuss math problems in



partners and small groups. While solving a problem is the outcome, the process of explaining one's thinking and the steps involved in solving the problem are emphasized. Students are encouraged to use correct mathematical terminology while speaking and writing like mathematicians. Furthermore, differentiation is embedded into the *Everyday Math* curriculum. Readiness activities, enrichment, extra practice, and games are designed to help reach all abilities, support individual needs, and engage all students. In addition, teachers embed the language of Common Core's Eight Mathematical Practice standards in order to help students develop a mathematical mindset and see how math is applied in their everyday lives.

In middle school, *CPM, College Preparatory Math*, is our foundational curriculum. It is designed using the three main ideas of cooperative learning, problem-based learning, and mixed space practice (the constant review of previously learned material). A focus on cooperative learning is a key component of *CPM* and all students work in teams on a daily basis. These teams are responsible for learning and making sense of mathematical concepts together. Instead of providing direct instruction, the teacher acts as a facilitator in the class while the students create and build their own understanding through the collaborative process of problem-solving, oftentimes while standing at vertical writing services around the room. Concepts are then reinforced by the teacher through daily summary sessions. *CPM* uses real-world situations to bring math to life. The idea of mixed space practice, or constantly reviewing previous material, runs throughout. The homework for every lesson is focused on the review of old material and every test is created on a 60%-40% model, where 60% of the questions cover material from previous units and 40% of the test is on new material from the recent unit.

### **Kindergarten-5th Grade Math**

Kindergarten-5<sup>th</sup> grade utilize the *Everyday Math* curriculum. The *Everyday Math* program is rooted in six main principles:

- **Real-life problem solving:**
  - *Everyday Math* emphasizes the application of mathematics to real world situations. Numbers, skills, and concepts are not presented in isolation, but are linked to situations and contexts that are relevant to everyday lives.
  - The curriculum also provides numerous suggestions for incorporating mathematics into daily classroom routines and other subject areas.
- **Balanced instruction:**
  - Each *Everyday Math* lesson includes time for whole-group instruction as well as small group, partner, or individual activities. These activities balance teacher-directed instruction with opportunities for open-ended, hands-on explorations, long-term projects and ongoing practice, which allows for authentic and meaningful differentiation.
- **Multiple methods for basic skills practice:**
  - *Everyday Math* provides numerous methods for basic skills practice and review. These include written and choral fact drills, mental math routines, practice with fact triangles (flash cards of fact families), daily sets of review problems called Math Boxes, homework, timed tests, and a wide variety of math games.
- **Emphasis on communication:**
  - Throughout the *Everyday Math* curriculum students are encouraged to explain and discuss their mathematical thinking, in their own words. Opportunities to verbalize their thoughts and strategies give children the chance to clarify thinking and gain insights from others.
- **Enhanced home/school communication:**
  - Daily Home Links (grades K to 3) and Study Links (grades 4-5) provide

opportunities for family members to participate in the students' mathematical learning.

- Study Links are provided for most lessons in grades 4-6, and all grades include periodic letters to help keep parents informed about their children's experience with *Everyday Math*.
- **Appropriate use of technology:**
  - Teachers utilize Promethean slides for each Everyday Math lesson. This fosters a more interactive environment.
  - *Everyday Math* teaches students how to use technology appropriately. The curriculum includes many activities in which learning is extended and enhanced through the use of calculators.

## **Middle School**

Our personalized acceleration approach to math at the middle school seeks to differentiate by supporting and challenging all students at their individual growth edge:

Sixth Grade is the final year of whole-group, heterogeneous, survey mathematics at NPES.

- *Sixth Grade Math* is an important year of transition to middle school, with reinforcement and consolidation of many prior mathematical concepts and skills; exploration of a variety of math fields (beyond algebra); and key foundational work for pre-algebra taking place.
- General Units of Study:
  - Unit 1 Representations and Patterns
  - Unit 2 Graphing data, area of rectangles, multiplication, and the distributive property
  - Unit 3 Fraction/Decimal/Percent equivalency, the number line and adding negative numbers
  - Unit 4 Variables, equivalent expressions, enlargements/reductions, ratios
  - Unit 5 Multiplying fractions and area of parallelogram, triangle, and trapezoid
  - Unit 6 Dividing fractions, order of operations, and area/perimeter using algebra tiles
  - Unit 7 Rates, more dividing fractions, more distributive property, and writing equations
  - Unit 8 Measures of central tendency and writing equations
  - Unit 9 Volume and nets of prisms and percents
  - Unit 10 Probability and adding positive and negative number

Seventh Grade is when Personalized Acceleration begins, with two different algebra-based classes available taught at different paces:

- *Seventh Grade Algebra* includes a thorough review of relevant math concepts and skills from *Sixth Grade Math*; support for any remaining gaps in math learning that are needed for the study of algebra; a significant investment in pre-algebra; and the beginning of high-school level algebra studies in the second semester. This course is taught at a more measured, deliberate pace of instruction, with more review, practice, and scaffolding for students. It also seeks to help students build a growth mindset in mathematics, tolerance for productive struggle, and a more solid foundation of confidence in the field for future studies.

- *Seventh Grade Algebra-E* (algebra with extensions into even deeper challenges and potentially other fields in the subject by 8th Grade) devotes little time to review of key concepts and skills from Sixth Grade Math, assuming mastery in most or all key areas (or the facility to address a deficit quickly if one arises). The course begins with Pre-Algebra at an accelerated pace before moving on to the study of algebra one at the same accelerated pace, not only covering essential concepts and skills but doing so with a greater focus on depth and more complex, independent application of learning.
- General Units of Study:
  - Unit 1 Addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division of integers, similar figures, and proportional relationships
  - Unit 2 Probability
  - Unit 3 Solving algebra equations
  - Unit 4 Linear equations
  - Unit 5 Systems of Equations
  - Unit 6 Proportional relationships and percents
  - Unit 7 Angle measures and angle relationships
  - Unit 8 Area, Perimeter, and Volume
  - Unit 9 Transformations and dilations
  - Unit 10 More linear Equations
  - Unit 11 Exponents and scientific notation
  - Unit 12 Triangles and the pythagorean theorem

In Eighth Grade, Personalized Acceleration continues, with two different algebra classes taught at different paces and different levels of depth and application.

- *8th Grade Algebra* includes a thorough review of algebra concepts and skills from *7th Grade Algebra-A* before continuing the study of algebra for the remainder of the school year at a more measured, deliberate pace of instruction, with more review, practice, and scaffolding for students. Like *7th Grade Algebra-A*, this class also strives to help students build a growth mindset in mathematics, tolerance for productive struggle, and a more solid foundation of confidence in the field.
- *Eighth Grade Algebra-E* (algebra with extensions into even deeper challenges and potentially other mathematical fields) devotes little time to review of key concepts and skills from *Seventh Grade Algebra-E*, assuming mastery in most or all key areas (or the facility to address a deficit quickly if one arises). The course resumes the study of high-school level algebra at an accelerated pace with deeper and more complex applications, and when the accelerated pacing and greater depth allow for it, this cohort may engage in studies in geometry or trigonometry before the year concludes.

NPES eighth graders study **algebra** including algebraic terms and operations, binomials, polynomials, exponents, order of operations, absolute value radicals, solving algebraic equations of the first degree, inequalities, factoring and solving quadratic equations, solving simultaneous equations and inequalities, algebraically and geometrically.

- Eighth graders participate in one culminating project:
  - Students build trebuchets in order to learn about quadratic equations and launch them in front of an audience of community members. .
- General Units of Study:
  - Unit 1 Functions

- Unit 2 Linear Relationships
- Unit 3 Simplifying and Solving equations
- Unit 4 Systems of Equations
- Unit 5 Sequences
- Unit 6 Modeling two variable data
- Unit 7 Exponential Functions
- Unit 8 Quadratic functions
- Unit 9 Solving quadratics and inequalities
- Unit 10 Solving complex equations

For more information about this program visit [here](#).

The NPES math student:

- takes risk and approaches problems from multiple angles.
- perseveres in the face of difficult tasks.
- supports ideas with evidence.
- uses appropriate tools (technological and other) strategically to support learning.
- accesses the understanding of peers and critiques the reasoning of others.
- identifies new discoveries and finds patterns.
- examines the logic of discoveries.
- builds on pre-existing information.
- demonstrates knowledge and understanding in writing and discussions.
- shows metacognition about mathematical thinking and sets goals when age appropriate.
- utilizes appropriate vocabulary and communicates precisely.

The NPES math teacher:

- creates a safe, interactive, and stimulating learning environment.
- assesses students frequently and authentically in order to determine areas of strength and areas for growth.
- modifies lessons to meet the needs of each individual student.
- applies the appropriate technologies to enhance math learning.
- models lifelong learning through participation in ongoing professional development and research around math best practices.
- follows the chosen curriculum while continually evaluating the needs of the particular group of students and adapting appropriately.
- explicitly models good mathematical practices such as persistence, curiosity, risk-taking, and collaboration.
- communicates math learning goals with parents and educates parents about the approaches to math education.
- designs an environment that allows students to engage in the Common Core 8 Mathematical Practices.
- provides problem-based, open-ended learning opportunities that foster experimentation.

## SCIENCE

### **Kindergarten-5th Grade Science:**

Children are inherently curious and naturally approach the world with the mind of a scientist as they wonder why and how things work. The NPES science philosophy rests on the backbone of constructivism with the belief that new knowledge is acquired when exploration and discovery are at the heart of learning.

For science students to authentically experience the naturally problem-based nature of science, students engage with a challenging essential question built from practicality, curiosity, discovery, and invention. This question drives exploration and further questions, leading to the making of observations, sharing of data and initial ideas, and examination of literature. The scientific and engineering processes are non-linear and students are encouraged to retest, develop new approaches, and revise assumptions or hypotheses. Taking risks is applauded and young scientists must respond flexibly to outcomes and draw their own conclusions based on experiences. Critical thinking, reflection, and collaboration are critical elements of this approach. Written and oral communication is fundamental to the scientific community and students must explain their findings and thinking as documented through scientific notebooking and Claim Evidence Reasoning assessments. The explanation process involves a new focus on a particular aspect of the exploration and the introduction of formal concepts, processes, and skills by the teacher. This helps to define discoveries with scientific language to show conceptual understanding. Through formal publication of findings, students learn to communicate about investigations with peers, much like in the real scientific community. Sharing sparks further elaboration and the development of new questions and theories based on previous findings, which leads to deeper explorations and inquiries. The real-life process and benefits of doing science are emphasized as students build knowledge, satisfy curiosity, and solve everyday problems. While they might not yet be able to develop technology, address societal issues, and inform policy on a grand scale, NPES scientists begin to see that science has value and does all of the above in the real-world.

The scope and sequence of the science curriculum at NPES is guided by the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). *STEMscopes* (grade K-5) and *SEPUP* and *Open SciEd* (6th-8th) curricula provide a framework for the science program. Driven by overarching Cross Cutting Concepts (themes such as cause/effect, structure/function), at all grade levels the NGSS identify Disciplinary Core Ideas (or topics) grouped in the four domains of science: physical, earth and space, life, and engineering that students must learn. The final emphasis of the NGSS is the Scientific and Engineering Practices (such as asking questions and defining problems, developing models). The practices describe behaviors that scientists engage in as they investigate and construct visuals and theories about the natural world, and the key set of engineering practices that engineers use as they design and build models and systems. These three elements work together to define cohesive, authentic, and age-appropriate standards to drive our inquiry-based curriculum. The NGSS, and therefore the NPES curriculum, focuses on a select number of core ideas in science and engineering both within and across the disciplines in order to avoid the shallow coverage of a large number of topics, and to allow more time for teachers and students to explore each idea in greater depth. Reduction of the sheer sum of details to be mastered is intended to give time for students to engage in scientific investigations and argumentation and to achieve depth of understanding of the core ideas presented.

## Early Childhood

In preschool and JK, topics of study change from year to year due to the emergent nature of the Reggio Emilia philosophy but are often rooted in science concepts and the natural world. At its foundation, this approach maintains a connection to the natural curiosity and interests of young learners. Past studies have ranged from dinosaurs, ice cream, and natural disasters, to the human body, soup, and space. Teachers have the autonomy to create and implement science lessons as the study unfolds and often include cooking to examine chemical reactions, nature walks in the surrounding neighborhood, and examinations of the life cycle of local insects. The children have grown vegetables and plants and explored various types of seeds through dissection of flowers.

## Kindergarten-5th Grade

The NGSS aligned *STEMscopes* curriculum is utilized in [grades k-5](#), along with teacher created materials. In kindergarten through 3rd grade, the generalist classroom teacher facilitates the science course. Each grade studies elements of the three branches of science throughout the year, with some years focusing more heavily on one branch. Students participate in hands-on, inquiry-based explorations of materials and engage in many engineering projects. Through various "scopes" students follow the well researched instructional model of the 5Es. The framework of the 5E model is **Engage** (hook to get students excited, access prior knowledge, and identify misconceptions), **Explore** (scientific investigation, engineering solutions and/or project based learning depending on the unit), **Explain** (students articulate their understanding at this point and teacher guides to content knowledge), **Elaborate** (math and literacy connection at different levels and providing the opportunity for application) and **Evaluate** (open ended response, claim evidence reasoning, and/or multiple choice assessments depending on the unit). Some highlights of the science program include the hatching of chicks in kindergarten, a sustainable housing design challenge in 2nd grade, and the environmental and sustainability work that frames the 4th and 5th grade years. At the 4th and 5th grade level, there is a dedicated STEM teacher which allows for greater integration of technology and cohesion between math and science.

## Middle School

With one dedicated science teacher for grades 6th-8th, there is strong consistency across the curriculum. The SEPUP and OpenSciEd curricula, aligned with the NGSS, frame the middle school years. Both are issue-oriented curriculum that ask students to use inquiry to grapple with big essential questions. Collaborative investigation is at the heart of the curricula. Middle schoolers experience the 5E model and mimic the approach of real scientists and engineers much like in the younger years. Middle school science courses take place in a dedicated science lab with hands-on materials to support lessons, inquiries, and engineering projects.

Science Olympiad, an after school competition-based program, draws participation from a large percentage of NPES middle school students. This nationally run organization, devoted to improving the quality of science education and increasing interest in science, allows students to compete in a series of 23 events spanning five disciplines: life, personal & social science, earth & space science, physical science & chemistry, technology & engineering, and inquiry & the nature of science. Events fall into three categories (core knowledge, lab, or build events) each requiring a unique combination of conceptual knowledge, scientific process skills, engineering, and application. The NPES team has placed in the top three in the region numerous times and has advanced to the State Tournament for the past 18 years.

It is our hope and belief that the NPES science student:

- asks thoughtful and investigable (through science and engineering) questions and defines problems built on pre-existing information.
- develops and uses models.
- plans and carries out well-designed, original investigations.
- observes and collects data in a systematic and scientific way through science notebooking.
- analyzes and interprets data to draw conclusions and develop theories.
- takes risks while seeing failures as progress toward learning.
- applies mathematical concepts and computational thinking to scientific investigations.
- constructs explanations (for science) and designs solutions (for engineering).
- engages in well-developed and thoughtful arguments based on evidence (CER) and critiques the reasoning of others.
- obtains and evaluates informational text.
- communicates information in writing, orally, and through creative presentation tools.
- uses appropriate tools (technological and other) strategically to support learning.
- shows metacognition about scientific thinking and sets goals when age appropriate.
- utilizes appropriate vocabulary and communicates precisely.

The NPES science teacher:

- creates a safe, interactive, and stimulating learning environment.
- holds a strong grasp of science practices, concepts and ideas and has direct experience with the sciences and/or engineering world.
- differentiates lessons to meet the needs of each individual student.
- applies the appropriate technologies to enhance science learning.
- models life-long learning through participation in on-going professional development and research around science best practices.
- follows the chosen curriculum while continually evaluating the needs of the particular group of students and adapting appropriately.
- explicitly models good scientific and engineering practices.
- communicates science expectations to parents and educates parents about the approaches to science education.
- designs an exploratory, inquiry-based environment that allows students to engage in the Science and Technology Practices.
- provides learning opportunities that allow students to truly engage in how science works in the real world.
- assess students using formative and summative methodologies that examine scientific content and process skills, as well as critical thinking and design skills.

## **SOCIAL STUDIES**

The school's philosophy of social studies education states that "NPES strives to create a meaningful social studies curriculum that helps prepare students for lives as members of the global community." The school strives to create an inclusive, inquiry-based, and engaging social studies curriculum. Through a sense of curiosity and wonder in the world, as well as respect, empathy, and interest in a diversity of cultures, opinions, and perspectives we hope students develop civic responsibility and an understanding of their place in our community and world becoming thoughtful, well-informed, and active citizens in the NPES community and beyond.

Social Studies provides endless opportunities for inquiry. Students are able to dig deeply into the themes of **history, geography, culture, economics, and government**. In addition, the curriculum is integrated with **current events, community service and social-emotional learning** enabling students to learn more than history; they learn what it means and how to be thoughtful and participatory citizens. The K-5 [scope and sequence](#) is based on the *Inquiry Journeys* curriculum which is a culturally responsive, inquiry-based approach rooted in national standards. There is a specific focus on telling a variety of stories throughout history to ensure windows and mirrors are present for all children to feel affirmed in the classroom.

Sixth grade social studies explores world history with a thematic approach. Students work in groups to ask inquiry questions and create projects about River Valley Civilizations and Classical Civilizations. They also complete a unit about the Middle Ages from the perspective of six different regions throughout the world. The year closes with a focus on European History in a unit that covers topics such as the Renaissance, Age of Exploration, and Age of Revolution. For each unit, students use inquiry methods to create research questions and then practice research and writing skills and ultimately create a choice project to share their knowledge with others. The seventh and 8th grade curricula cover American history. Seventh grade begins with the colonial era and finishes with the Civil War and all 7th graders take their state-mandated Constitution Test midyear. Eighth graders study Reconstruction to the Civil Rights movement. Students learn about American wars in expert groups with the themes of context and causes, battlefield, homefront, leadership, and outcomes. Other thematic units include economics and equality. Both 7th and 8th grade have a focus on creating and defending historical arguments through essays, debates, and Socratic seminars. Students also learn how to think critically as historians as they analyze primary and secondary source documents.

The school strives to foster a sense of curiosity and wonder in the world, as well as respect, empathy, and interest in a diversity of cultures, opinions, and perspectives and these stances are often built through learning in the social studies classroom. We acknowledge and discuss with students the fact that various chapters in American History have a complicated legacy. NPES students are pushed to challenge, question, and debate these legacies as we strive to develop a sense of civic responsibility in our students, and guide them to an understanding of their place in the community and world while committing to becoming an anti-racist, anti-bias institution that builds the cultural literacy of all constituents.

With a commitment to creating a culturally responsive curriculum, through ongoing professional development and reflection, teachers regularly examine the curriculum with a critical eye toward diversity, equity, and inclusion. All social studies texts are carefully assessed for multiple perspectives and accurate representation that honors and affirms diverse and often marginalized communities, ensuring that all voices are elevated and seen.

Throughout the elementary years students are exposed to a complex and rich tapestry of stories and histories that reflect the diversity of the world around them including a study of important holidays, celebration, accomplishments, and contributions of people from all cultures and backgrounds. We also take great care to not treat communities as a monolith and recognize that one experience in a particular race, nationality, or religion is not representative of all people in that community and know that not all members of a group are only heroes, but complex and full humans. In middle school, multiple perspectives are intentionally woven into the history that students learn. In sixth grade world history, students discover world history beyond Western Civilization. In their Middle Ages Unit, students move beyond the western perspective that only focuses on Europe and learn about the era in Japan, China, the Middle East, and the Americas.



In seventh and eighth grade American History, students use primary sources to learn about how major events impacted women and minority or marginalized groups. Students discuss and compare these perspectives through activities such as Socratic seminars.

Social studies at NPES extends beyond the classroom. Through student-led projects, learners share their discoveries with the broader NPES community. Students gain an understanding of their place in the community and their ability to impact the world around them through civic engagement and service learning. Students learn more than history; they recognize what it means and how to be a thoughtful and participating citizen and how to effect change in the hopes of creating a more equitable world.

**The NPES social studies student:**

- demonstrates inquiry
- analyzes primary sources
- identifies cause and effect connections
- articulates evidence based arguments
- recognizes and respects diverse perspectives
- constructs a wide variety of projects that reflect content
- collaborates and compromises with peers
- engages in deep reflection about our country's past and recognize the need for progress now and in the future

**The NPES social studies teacher:**

- creates a safe learning environment
- plans and executes project-based, authentic lessons that inspire student engagement
- facilitates productive discourse
- encourages intellectual curiosity
- uses a variety of formative and summative assessments to monitor student growth
- differentiates curriculum based on the needs and interests of individual learners
- guides students to make connections between social studies content and how it relates to their role as a global citizen
- reflects and adjusts curriculum to align with best practices

## **LIBRARY SERVICES**

At North Park Elementary School (NPES), we value literacy in its many forms. We are dedicated to maintaining a physical space with a diverse and expansive collection of physical books while building our digital collection. Further, the school library is a place where students work to develop media literacy, information literacy, and digital literacy skills. We employ one full-time school librarian to facilitate all library services, including author visits, the annual Book Fair, coordination of volunteers, collection development and maintenance, collaborating with classroom teachers, and guiding the development of varied types of literacy.

The physical library space acts as a central hub for the community and is frequently used for programming. Our library is warm, welcoming, and bathed in natural light. We believe that everyone should have their story represented on our shelves and all are welcome in the library. The library catalog and circulation system is fully automated through a web-based program called Follett Destiny and students are able to browse and check out books on their own.

All students, preschool through 8th grade, participate in one 30-40 minute visit per week to the library. During these visits, students may hear a read aloud, work on developing library skills, learn about digital literacy, practice information literacy skills, or explore different types of media. Students may check out books during their scheduled library time or as needed depending on their schedules.

Digital, information, and media literacies are integrated throughout the year, based on the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) Standards for Learners and the Edvolve Digital Citizenship Curricular Framework. Resources for lessons include Common Sense Media, Google, The News Literacy Project, Civic Online Reasoning from Stanford University, and others.

## TECHNOLOGY SERVICES

### **Philosophy & Overview:**

At NPES, technology is used as a tool for creation and to share knowledge. When technology is used in a meaningful way, students can reach beyond the classroom to a larger audience.

As John Dewey once wrote, “If we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow.” According to our “Portrait of a Teacher” an excellent NPES teacher “utilizes best practices and research-informed methodologies, including current educational technologies” in the classroom. Through thoughtful project-based classwork and the integration of technology, students are asked to share their voices and add to the global conversation on topics of study. We encourage our learners to create content to be shared and make connections in a safe and supported environment.

Even at the earliest ages, the focus shifts from consumption to creation as students learn how to use the iPad or computer to create, record, draft, collaborate, and communicate. Students develop projects that show their unique perspective as well as have a viable “product” of their learning through the building of a digital portfolio of student work. This allows them to see growth and document progress over time, as well as develop a comprehensive body of work as a result of their education at NPES.

Starting in preschool, teachers document student progress using Seesaw Learning Journal. This begins the development of a personal body of work for a larger audience than the classroom teacher. In preschool, technology is a useful tool reserved for the hands of the teacher predominantly used for the documentation of student experiences and information gathering based on the current study.

Students in K-2 have a classroom set of iPads.

In grades 3-8, students have 1-1 iPads.

- 3rd graders are introduced to the iPad and begin using G Suite, Everyday Math, Stemscopes, and Google Classroom LMS. The iPads stay at school.
- 4th & 5th graders begin to take their iPads home as utilization of programs above occurs daily. Library time is used to augment in class digital literacy lessons, including those from Common Sense Media
- In 6th-8th grade, students fine tune their iPad skills and become expert users of their iPads. Digital Citizenship demands increase and students create a portfolio of their work at NPES

## **Technology Curriculum**

The school stays away from warning middle school students about online risks or attempting to curtail their activities, and instead employs a more age appropriate approach of helping them leverage the power of digital media to create and contribute to social justice and equity via the creation of content to be shared. Our approach to digital citizenship is about being in community with others and showing students possibilities over problems, opportunities over risks, and community successes over personal gain.

The Director of Instructional and Operational Technology pulls resources from Future Ready Schools and ISTE Standards for Teachers and Students to develop a philosophy that all NPES stakeholders can work with and implement. It starts with looking at Citizenship in the Digital Age and encompasses ways to incorporate technology with class activities that make memorable learning experiences that can be traced to potential “real-world” impact and job path.

## **Innovation Lab**

Expanded in 2024-25, the redesigned Innovation Lab focusing on being the unschool and disrupting more traditional methods of education. It uses the Design Thinking process as a way for students to identify problems and solve them through empathy, ideation, and iteration. The Innovation Lab includes 3d printers, 3d scanner, embroidery machines, Cricut machines, a laser cutter(Glowforge), a heat press, a sublimation printer, robotics( Sphero, Lego Inventors, and Bluebrain/ Microbit) along with vintage crafting materials such as construction paper, scissors, cardboard, glue, straws, tooth picks, etc. Students through grades K-8 are taught to understand what a tool does and respect it for safety while being comfortable with it to create a solution via Prototyping. The Lab serves as a place to build resilience and learn from failure. Each class comes to the lab a few times a year for a sustained project.

## **SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING**

Our work around social emotional learning (SEL) is rooted in the belief that when children feel safe and recognized in the classroom, they can excel academically. Social and emotional learning is the process of acquiring the skills to recognize and manage emotions, develop caring and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle challenging situations effectively. Our curriculum is deeply embedded in research and an understanding of the developmental needs of our students at various age levels. The framework and general structure for social-emotional learning at NPES is based on the research at the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and both the Positive Discipline and Responsive Classroom programs. Additionally, we partner with The Potocsnak Family Division of Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine at Lurie Children’s Hospital to provide our students with lessons related to gender identity and sexual orientation, consent and healthy relationships, puberty and reproductive systems, sexual health and healthy decision making, and drug and alcohol education. We also employ one full time School Counselor who coordinates, collaborates, co-teaches, and leads lessons in all grade levels aligned with the 5 CASEL competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

**The School Counseling Curriculum** is based on the aforementioned SEL beliefs and philosophy. The 5 CASEL domains of self awareness, self management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making guide the material presented throughout

class lessons and/or small group sessions. The School Counselor delivers this curriculum in a variety of ways. In PreK and Junior Kindergarten, SEL curriculum is delivered through song, stories and lunch discussions 3 times per week. Some topics might include *what to do when we miss home*, *how to calm our body before rest time*, etc. Grades K-2 receive class visits periodically with special topics delivered by the School Counselor in partnership with the teaching team. K-2 topics might include *tattling vs. reporting*, *whole body listening*, or *becoming feelings experts*. Grades 3-5 have a weekly class meeting with the School Counselor to review community norms, and have a mini lesson on a SEL skill to practice or reflect on throughout the week. Those meetings are co-facilitated with the Drama teacher and incorporate games or role playing to practice skills such as *self advocacy*, *conflict resolution*, and *how to tell a joke so no one gets hurt*. Grades 6-8 have SEL themed advisory time with the School Counselor and cover topics related to stress management, coping skills, and mental health. A sample of the School Counseling Curriculum Map can be found [here](#).

*Responsive Classroom* consists of teaching strategies for bringing together academics and social-emotional learning. It is based on the three domains of **engaging academics**, **effective management**, and **positive community**. The guiding principles that define *Responsive Classroom* are:

- The social and emotional curriculum is as important as academics.
- How children learn is as important as what they learn.
- Great cognitive growth occurs through social interaction.
- To be successful academically and socially, children need to learn a set of social and emotional skills that include cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, empathy, and self-control, all of which fit into CASEL's 5 competencies.
- Knowing the children we teach - individually, culturally, and developmentally - is as important as knowing the content we teach.
- Knowing the families of the children we teach is as important as knowing the children.
- How we, the adults at school, work together is as important as our individual competence.

With this being said, *Responsive Classroom* outlines specific practices that foster this approach in the classroom. There are three domains that are the backbone of the work, and underneath each domain are practices that teachers utilize at NPES to reach the goals of *Responsive Classroom*:

- **Engaging Academics** - Teachers provide learning activities that are active, interactive, and fun. Students need to take a personal interest, have a choice, and see relevance in their work to be truly invested.
- **Effective Management** - Teachers create environments that facilitate ownership and success. Teachers explicitly teach positive social and emotional skills needed for success and handle misbehavior respectfully.
- **Positive Community** - Teachers nurture a sense of belonging, significance, and emotional safety in the classroom. Student "voice" is appreciated and validated, and in turn, risk taking is applauded.

*Positive Discipline* is a program designed to teach young people to become responsible, respectful and resourceful members of their communities. Research shows that children are "hardwired" from birth to connect with others and seek belonging, and that children who feel a sense of connection to their community, family, and school are less likely to misbehave. Effective discipline seeks to connect and uncover the source of the disconnection, rather than only attempting to change behavior. Jane Nelsen, the founder of Positive Discipline, gives the

following criteria for “effective discipline that teaches”:

#### FIVE CRITERIA FOR POSITIVE DISCIPLINE

1. Is **kind and firm** at the same time. *Positive Discipline* teaches adults to employ kindness and firmness at the same time, and is neither punitive nor permissive.
2. Helps children feel a sense of **belonging and significance**. Children feel a mutual respect with adults.
3. Is **effective long-term**.
4. Teaches valuable **social and life skills** for good character.
5. Invites children to discover how **capable** they are and to use their personal power in constructive ways.

#### The tools and concepts of Positive Discipline include:

- Identifying the belief behind the behavior. Effective discipline recognizes the reasons kids do what they do and works to change those beliefs, rather than merely attempting to change behavior. This is deeply rooted in brain science.
- Effective communication and problem solving skills.
- Discipline that teaches (and is neither permissive nor punitive).
- Focusing on solutions instead of punishment.
- Encouragement (instead of praise). Encouragement notices effort and improvement, not just success, and builds long-term self-esteem and empowerment.

In NPES classrooms you will see students socializing and collaborating around academic choice, morning messages, and class meetings that encourage connections, a “calm corner” where students can gather their minds and bodies, teachers speaking in a positive and respectful way, the use of logical consequences, rules that were developed as a community around student hopes and dreams, energizers and self-regulation practices, students reflecting on their learning and thinking about their thinking, and teachers who are modeling expectations and setting clear paths to success.

#### SEED

Our sixth grade SEED course meets once per week for a semester in a half size group. This course embodies both social-emotional and identity-based work. SEED (*Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity*) is a nationally-recognized program that trains educators to facilitate meaningful and respectful conversations about identity, power, equity, and systems of bias and privilege. SEED seminars take place in small groups of learners who share stories, explore readings and videos, and listen, reflect, and engage in structured conversation together. The content is adapted to the age group of the students and our SEED stands for Sparking Empathy, Embracing our Diversity. Participants reflect on how their identities and stories connect them to one another and how their identities show up in society. The National SEED Project for Inclusive Curriculum was founded in 1987 by Peggy McIntosh, a scholar, speaker, justice activist, and senior research scientist of the Wellesley Centers for Women, originally with adults in mind (in fact, NPES continues to require all new staff to complete a SEED program in their first or second year at the school). But since its founding SEED can be adapted for middle and high school students who now engage in similar meaningful conversations at an age-appropriate level with a trained facilitator who understands their unique stage of development.

SEED positions students to develop deeper understandings of identity, ask probing underlying questions, and better understand themselves and the world. SEED can positively impact classroom discourse in all subjects while preparing students for NPES’ signature curricular

extensions like Service Learning, Neighborhood Explorations, and educational travel (Outdoor Education, Springfield, IL, Washington, D.C., the Civil Rights Tour of Georgia and Alabama, and the optional journey to a Spanish-speaking country in the Americas). The SEED process creates conversations that lead to deeper cultural literacy and curiosity, and awareness of identity-based injustices. SEED work acknowledges each participant's intersecting identities and is grounded in recognizing the time it takes to self-reflect, to be in authentic conversation, and to take action towards justice, always centering dignity, wholeness, and wellness for all. This course supports the development of NPES students on their journey to achieving the qualities of our [Portrait of a Graduate](#) as SEED asks students to engage in lifelong learning, be curious, and think of their place as part of a whole as they prepare to be ready for the next stage of their lives.

Other values in SEED include:

- We are each the authorities on our own experience and can learn to engage in effective conversation among our peers about issues of equity and diversity.
- A systemic approach to looking at oppression and privilege, rather than seeing them only in terms of individuals making individual choices.
- Acknowledgment that inclusion, equity, and belonging work is an ongoing process for all, not a one-time course of study.
- Experiential, interactive learning over lecturing. Facilitators lead students in interactive exercises and conversations stimulated by videos and readings; they don't lecture.
- Time-tested methods of intentionally-structured conversation to create an effective learning environment and include all voices.
- SEED work is not about blame, shame, or guilt; It is about deepening awareness and understanding of self, others, and the world, especially as it relates to inclusion, justice, and well-being.

### **Middle School Advisory and MSM Programs**

NPES strives to teach the “whole” child. Graduates will leave with many of the qualities outlined in our [Portrait of a Graduate](#) largely because of our intentional focus on social-emotional learning over the years. Through a focused and deliberate Advisory and SRT (Student Resource Time) program based on CASEL's 5 core competencies and through the *Positive Discipline* approach, students will develop a strong social and emotional identity that will lead to greater academic and personal success.

As students enter middle school and their needs evolve, they transition into two special programs specific to this age band. The *Advisory* group consists of a small group (about 8) of same grade level students and meets once per week. The curriculum is authentic and responsive to the nuances of each advisor and advisory group and focuses on topics such as executive functioning issues, stress, and wellness. Students experience team and trust building activities, meet independently with the advisor, and set individual goals. During SRT, students are given time to study, catch up on homework, and get support from their teachers. This time is also used for academic one on one conferences between advisors and students.

### **SERVICE LEARNING**

Service-learning is a teaching method where guided or classroom learning is deepened through service to others in a process that provides structured time for reflection on the service experience and demonstration of the skills and knowledge acquired. Students learn and use academic skills to become leaders, perform needed service and increase civic participation, reflect on and learn from their experiences as they define who they are, and provide tangible benefits that serve the community while also learning from those they serve. Students, guided

by teachers, are encouraged to take the lead in responding to genuine needs in their school or community. Service-learning brings together the five competencies of self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills and responsible decision-making. Service-learning differs from other forms of community service or volunteer work because the education of students is always at its core.

Students have choice - when students have a voice in choosing and designing a service project, they are intrinsically more invested emotionally and intellectually. Projects utilize student strengths and talents that aren't always apparent in other facets of the school day. Students identify topics that they are passionate about and organizations they would like to work with. In grades K-5 while the service topic is chosen for the grade level, students brainstorm and discuss ways in which they can help the organizations they are working with throughout the year.

We involve the community in an authentic way. Community can be defined in a variety of ways from relationships within the school to the broader neighborhood and city. Our students are working locally within NPES, in the surrounding and nearby neighborhood and across the city.

Students gain a deep knowledge of a topic - the learning piece is what sets service-learning apart from volunteering and what makes for meaningful work. We make intentional curricular connections in our work and have content resources in place at each grade level so that teachers are implementing specific lessons around their topic.

In grades K-5 service learning happens as an interdisciplinary part of the curriculum with students making connections across subject areas and themes rooted in guiding questions (outlined below). In middle school 7th and 8th graders participate in a service learning course during which they are guided through the process of identifying a need in the community and developing an action plan. Details of the course are outlined [here](#).

There are clear service or action components at least twice a year. Our students are frequently out in the community working with partners. We are doing a variety of all of the following:

- Direct Service (face-to-face interaction with individuals in need): Meeting with children with Down Syndrome, serving at the food pantry
- Indirect Service (benefit the community as a whole): Stocking a food pantry, planting at a park
- Advocacy (create awareness or promote action) : Letter writing, creating PSAs, teaching others about the topic
- Research (create surveys, conduct interviews) : Testing water or soil quality, interviewing community partners about their work

### NPES Service Learning Projects

Grade Level	Service Project Title	General Purpose(s)	Possible Partnerships
K	Animal Welfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn about the needs of shelter animals</li> <li>• Build empathy for all living things</li> <li>• Find ways to help and support a local shelter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chicago Canine Rescue</li> </ul>
1	Building Friendships with Community Members with Down Syndrome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn what is true and what is not true about people with Down Syndrome</li> <li>• Interact with and learn from people with Down Syndrome</li> <li>• Learn about the work of Gigi's Playhouse and why it's an important resource for families and the community.</li> <li>• Build a relationship with Gigi's to further support their work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gigi's Playhouse</li> </ul>
2	Food Insecurity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn about the sources of hunger: accessibility, availability and knowledge</li> <li>• Identify and understand myths of hunger</li> <li>• Explain how hunger impacts one's life and the different types of hunger (chronic vs. short term)</li> <li>• Learn about hunger in the immediate community</li> <li>• Connect with a local food pantry and identify ways to help (permanent installation of NPES Food Pantry, meal delivery, decorations, garden food delivery...)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common Pantry</li> </ul>
3	Immigration Insights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connect historical immigration to modern day topics of immigration and refugees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• World Relief and Refugee One</li> <li>• Facets Movie</li> </ul>



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and compare and contrast different instances of immigration/refugee movement based on pushes and pulls</li> <li>• Begin to understand the complex issues that refugees and immigrants face upon arrival in the United States</li> <li>• Hear and connect with the stories of refugee/immigrant children and adults</li> <li>• Take actions (backpacks, kid to kid guide, donations) to support newly arrived families and individuals, especially children.</li> </ul>	House <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refugee family support (HIAS)</li> <li>• Global Garden Refugee Training Farm</li> </ul>
4/5	Environmental Stewardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify wasteful practices at NPES and work to improve through composting and recycling</li> <li>• Educate the broader school community about composting and recycling</li> <li>• Present projects about sustainability to the entire school community as part of Earth Day celebrations</li> <li>• Explore and learn about the impact, importance, and health of the Chicago River.</li> <li>• Engage in civic action and advocacy related to the Chicago River</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WasteNot Composting</li> <li>• Friends of the Chicago River</li> <li>• Urban Rivers</li> </ul>
6	SEED Identity Course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students participate in SEED in order to deepen their understanding of their positionality and privilege in the context of social justice.</li> </ul>	
7-8	Dedicated Course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify a local issue</li> <li>• Learn about the issue and organizations that are making a difference</li> <li>• Determine how to best take action</li> <li>• Assess the quality of nonprofits and determine the</li> </ul>	Various organizations

		<p>best one to work with to carry out the action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with the organization to determine the type of support needed and then take action.</li> </ul>	
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## DESIGN THINKING

Students participate in a design thinking course for one semester in grades 7 and 8 led by the Director of Instructional Technology, the MS Art teacher, and the School Librarian. Design Thinking is “A process for creative problem-solving drawing on the humanities for empathy and ethnography, the arts and engineering for idea generation and invention, and the sciences for hypothesis creation, prototyping, testing, and reflection. Students develop the mindset to identify situations where they can better the world, and design thinking gives them the tools and resolve to take action.” Empathy-centered design “asks students to put themselves into someone else’s shoes in order to understand their needs and create meaningful solutions. This gives students tools and mindsets to embrace new challenges, unleash creativity, and develop a strong sense of self-efficacy, all starting from a place of empathy.” The Nueva program NPES is striving to integrate emerged from a collaboration between [IDEO](#) and [Stanford's d.School](#), as Nueva developed the first design thinking program and Innovation Lab specifically for PreK–12 students in America.

Design Thinking education is purposeful and collaborative project-based learning guided by a [clear, intentional, and skills-rich process](#) in which the end of the process serves as a new starting point for getting closer to solving a complex problem students care about. The problems could be as localized as designing a better backpack to carry the same number of items while fitting into an NPES-sized locker, or as global as designing a process to bring American political leaders of opposing ideologies together—and everything in between. More information about design thinking can be found [here](#).

## LEARNING SERVICES

The Learning Services Department is a cornerstone of the school’s commitment to inclusive education, ensuring that every student has access to the resources and support necessary to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. The department is a specialized team dedicated to providing targeted academic and behavioral support to students across various grade levels, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to succeed. The department is structured to address the unique needs of students from early childhood through middle school, with a focus on delivering Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions, managing individualized education plans (IEPs) and 504 plans, and ensuring that each student’s educational needs are met.

The Department consists of a Director of Learning Services who oversees the department, ensuring that all support services and interventions are aligned with school-wide goals and manages internal documentation of necessary accommodations and individualized education plans (IEPs) and 504 plans. There are also three Learning Services Teachers in the

Department, one for each division of Primary, Intermediate, and Middle School. These teachers specialize in providing targeted support to students with Learning Services Plans through small group pull out and push-in approaches. They deliver Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions and work closely with classroom teachers to support instruction that meets the developmental needs of all students. The last member of the Department is the School Counselor who plays a vital role in addressing the social-emotional needs of students across all grade levels. The Counselor works in collaboration with the Learning Services teachers to provide behavioral support, develop social skills programs, facilitate small groups, and offer individualized counseling sessions as needed. The counselor also assists in monitoring student progress, supporting mental health, and helping students manage personal and academic challenges. The Learning Services Department Handbook can be found [here](#).

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## GRADE LEVEL OVERVIEWS

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### EARLY CHILDHOOD

Inspired by the *Reggio Emilia* approach, the early childhood program focuses on inquiry-based learning that sees the child as strong and capable, filled with wonder and knowledge, and driven by innate curiosity. Preschoolers are valued for their ideas and creativity, and the curriculum reflects their interests and experiences. To support this emergent curriculum approach, teachers create a rich learning environment and provide the tools children need to explore, experiment, and express themselves as they work to make sense of the world. There are close interactions between teachers, parents, and children, and learning evolves out of these trusting, nurturing relationships.

#### **The Child**

Each child is a unique and competent member of our community who comes to school with an abundance of experiences, natural curiosity, and an unlimited potential to learn. They are driven to form relationships, make connections, and seek new experiences to understand their world and their role in the community. Inspired by their own interest to figure things out, children construct knowledge, side by side with their teachers and classmates, as they explore and discover together.

#### **The Parent**

Parents and families are an integral part of the preschool experience and the teachers recognize and respect parents as their child's first and primary teacher. Through strong relationships built with families and the emphasis on the home and school connection, children feel a sense of safety and security in their life at school. Parents help us celebrate birthdays, host holiday parties, organize family gatherings, share their hobbies and expertise in the classroom, and volunteer. Frequent communication between the students' "school family" and "home family" ensures a strong partnership to support each child.

#### **The Teacher**

In the early childhood classrooms, the teacher's role is varied and complex. Depending on the child, the group, the lesson, or the opportunity for a "teachable moment," the teacher may be acting as the curator, guide, resource, facilitator, researcher, advocate, or scribe. The teachers implement strategies to ignite learning and support the children as they navigate the space and materials, and learn in a collaborative setting. Educators partner with the children to build a

caring, supportive community where each individual is treated with respect and valued as an important contributor to the group. All of the teachers are experienced and highly qualified with a bachelor's or master's degree, in addition to specialized training in Reggio philosophy.

### **Documentation**

A critical component of the Reggio approach is communication through documentation. Through the use of photos, videos, dictation, note taking, journals, blogging and the display of children's artwork, teachers document the many ways children communicate their thoughts and ideas. Learning is captured as it happens and the visual record allows children to reflect upon their thinking, revisit their ideas, and build on them. Children can see that their work and ideas are valued. Documentation inspires conversations and connections with parents and other visitors. Teachers use the documentation to evaluate their work and exchange ideas with others, while parents can see and understand what their children are doing at school.

### **The Environment as the Third Teacher**

In the Reggio approach, the environment is considered to be so important that it is referred to as the third teacher, after the parent and classroom teacher. The classrooms are thoughtfully and intentionally designed to spark interest and engagement. In these warm and welcoming spaces, natural elements and light are used to create dynamic environments with the flexibility to respond to the needs and interests of the children.

### **The Hundred Languages of Children**

In early childhood, children are developing their ability to express and understand themselves and the world by using many symbolic languages—whether art, movement, drawing, painting, music, sculpture, science, dramatic play, yoga, dance, math, building, or writing. As they communicate through these “hundred languages,” children are invited to collaborate, ask questions, explore emotions, and examine their own thinking. They learn to realize new perspectives and deepen their relationships with others. With a dedicated atelierista, or art teacher on staff, children have multiple opportunities to explore materials and techniques on a daily basis.

### **Community Building**

A sense of community begins at home for families with young children. Preschoolers then build relationships with their peers and teachers. As they become more confident, they are ready to broaden their connections to involve other people in the school community, including their older buddies and adults throughout the building. Through these trusting relationships, children learn to incorporate and understand the broader community. They are supported and encouraged to do this by taking frequent walks around the neighborhood, and getting to know our neighbors and local business people. Early childhood students also participate in emergent service projects that connect them to the outside world, while also teaching empathy.

A driving philosophy at NPES is that students learn from each other as much as they do from the adults in the room. Our youngest students benefit from cross-grade learning with buddies throughout the elementary grades and middle school students. The students enjoy an enriching buddy program with the 4th grade students where they learn about Science, Technology, Engineering and Math or “STEM” together. They are proud to have older friends at school and thrilled to have their attention, while older students enjoy becoming role models and mentors for their younger counterparts. These connections help children develop their sense of self in the larger world and promote positive behavior in all participants.

## KINDERGARTEN

Much of the goal of kindergarten is to teach students to become more independent learners while continuously building social emotional skills and fine tuning gross and fine motor skills. Exploration and imaginative play continues to be an important part of the learning process and literacy skills grow and expand during this phase of life.

- In **language arts**, there is a strong emphasis on letter and letter sound identification. As emergent readers and writers students learn to connect with literacy and build stamina in both reading and writing. Students also receive handwriting, explicit science-based phonics instruction, spelling and word study instruction in language arts.
- **Math** study focuses predominantly on the milestone of number sense and students begin to identify numbers and count by 1s, 5s and 10s. The importance of a conceptual understanding between the number and its value is emphasized. Students learn to “play with numbers” through beginning addition and subtraction. Along with the content goals, students continue to grow and expand their understanding of the 8 Mathematical Practices outlined in the CCSS, and exhibit habits as outlined in the NPES math philosophy. These habits include traits such as perseverance, resilience, curiosity, and collaboration.
- Physical, Life, and Earth **science** are each touched upon in Kindergarten. Kindergarteners plan investigations to answer burning scientific questions and design new solutions to problems related to elements of motion. Students use scientific tools and materials in meaningful and appropriate ways when studying plant and animal needs. Kindergarteners must make accurate scientific observations, ask questions as a result of observations, and then construct a strongly supported argument with findings when looking at weather patterns and habitat impacts.
- **Social studies** focuses on what it means to be a member of a family, a classroom, and a larger community. Students engage in inquiry studies of three guiding questions for the year:
  - How can we make school a great place for everyone?
  - How can we unite to build a powerful class community?
  - How can we bring families together to build a stronger community?
- **Social emotional learning** is the backbone of everything kindergarteners do during the day. The environment, approach, and teacher language uses the *Responsive Classroom and Positive Discipline* programs. Students are taught to be positive members of the community. Kindergarteners thrive with clear expectations and an empathetic setting in which to make mistakes and grow in the ability to self-regulate, engage in the complex nuances of growing friendships, and increase their level of self care.
- For their **service learning** project, students will engage in activities designed to raise awareness about animal care, the role of shelters, and how animals find loving homes. Through collaboration, storytelling, and creative projects, they will learn about the daily needs of animals, including food, shelter, and affection. Students will grow to understand the concept of adoption and how shelters work to rescue, protect, and place animals in safe homes.

## FIRST GRADE

First graders are full of eagerness, curiosity, and imagination. They are energetic, relish new ideas, and love to ask questions. First graders learn well through games, poems, riddles, songs, and any type of hands-on projects. At this age, students are also better able to understand past and present, and how and why things happen. Classroom communities deepen as students grasp the reasons for rules and are increasingly able to see the viewpoints of others. Literacy skills grow by leaps and bounds at this age and in many ways a new world opens up to first graders.

- First graders develop reading fluency, word recognition and decoding skills through reading and writing workshops and direct phonics instruction during **literacy** time. The emphasis is on building reading strategies as first graders begin to conquer more challenging texts. Students are also able to write a variety of genres with more detail, while working through the entire writing process. Students receive handwriting, phonics, spelling, word study and vocabulary instruction while working in differentiated small groups.
- **Math** class focuses on more advanced addition and subtraction. Students begin basic geometry, measurement, problem solving as well as data and chance; learning the foundation for building strong math skills. Along with the content goals, a growing and expanding understanding of the 8 Mathematical Practices outlined in the CCSS emerges. The 8 Mathematical Practices habits are further practiced and include traits such as perseverance, resilience, curiosity, and collaboration.
- First graders experience Physical, Life, Earth/Space **science**. Students sharpen their observation skills as they discover how communication with light and sound works. They plan and conduct investigations and incorporate accurate tools and materials to examine the parts and traits/inheritance of plants and animals. They end the year with a study of seasonal patterns and space.
- **Social studies** focuses on what it means to be an active member of a community where we live. Students engage in inquiry studies of three guiding questions for the year:
  - How can we use wisdom from the past to build a better future?
  - How can we help others appreciate our special location?
  - How can we work together for the good of the community?
- Much of the **social emotional learning** in first grade revolves around friendships as students become increasingly social. The classroom environment, approach, and teacher language is built around the *Responsive Classroom* and *Positive Discipline* programs. The importance of being a part of a community of learners continues to be the focus. First graders take on greater ownership of this idea as they begin to reflect on what type of community member they will work to be.
- During their **service learning** study first graders partner with Gigi's Playhouse, a local Down Syndrome Support Center. The first graders participate in activities led by young adults with Down Syndrome which include yoga, obstacle courses, and other team building activities. The children help support and learn about Gigi's mission to change the way the world views Down Syndrome and to send a global message of inclusion for all.

## SECOND GRADE

Second graders develop a deeper understanding of time, space, and quantity. They can listen well and respond appropriately which allows for more, and better quality, class discussions. At this age, hands-on exploration and frequent repetition is important to maximize learning and their world view is broadening as they begin to think beyond their own worlds.

- Our 2nd-grade **reading program focuses** on developing essential literacy skills through a balanced approach. It combines whole-group lessons with independent learning stations to cover vocabulary, spelling, reading comprehension, word study, and grammar. Students engage in activities like reading independently, working in small groups, and one-on-one conferencing, all designed to meet individual learning needs and foster a love of reading. This comprehensive program is designed to build strong foundational skills while encouraging collaboration and independence.
- Our 2nd-grade **writing program fosters** creativity while developing key writing skills. Students explore various genres, including fiction, non-fiction, poetry, letter writing, and opinion writing. Through a balance of free writing and targeted lessons, the program emphasizes handwriting, punctuation, capitalization, and expanding vocabulary. Students learn to add detail and literary language to make their writing engaging and meaningful, helping them grow as confident and expressive writers. Writing mechanics such as capitals, spaces, punctuation, spelling, and sentence structure will also be a big focus.
- In second grade **math**, students solidify their addition and subtraction fluency and begin adding and subtracting two digit numbers. They also progress in their skills with more advanced measurement, place value, geometry and beginning fractions. Along with the content goals, students continue to grow in and expand their understanding of the 8 Mathematical Practices outlined in the CCSS, and exhibit habits as outlined in the NPES math philosophy. These habits include traits such as perseverance, resilience, curiosity, and collaboration.
- **Science** touches upon topics of Physical, Life, and Earth/Space science. Second graders continue to practice planning and conducting investigations, analyzing data, and making observations to develop evidence-based arguments around the topic of matter and phase change. At this age students are now adding to their repertoire of science skills and practice developing simple models around animal and plant dependence, using information from several sources and comparing multiple solutions to provide evidence when examining earth's landforms, and erosion. By actively participating in the scientific process, students not only build a solid foundation in STEM but also develop a sense of curiosity and confidence in their ability to explore and understand the world around them.
- **Social studies** in 2nd grade emphasizes inquiry-based learning. Students explore big ideas through questions, investigation, and problem-solving, fostering critical thinking and curiosity. Units are designed to help students understand their role in the world, exploring topics such as community, culture, history, and civics. Through hands-on activities, collaborative projects, and discussions, students develop a deeper understanding of social concepts while building essential skills like communication, research, and collaboration.  
focuses on how we can work together with our community to meet its needs and wants. Students engage in inquiry studies of three guiding questions for the year:
  - How can we respond to our changing landscape?
  - How can we help our community work together to achieve its needs and wants?
  - How can we innovate to improve the world around us?
- **Social emotional development** in 2nd grade is rich and complex. At this stage of development, friendships deepen, and social-emotional learning becomes more complex. As students navigate new and evolving peer relationships, they benefit from the guidance of empathetic, responsive adults who support their growth. In our classroom, the environment, approach, and teacher language are rooted in the principles of Responsive Classroom and Positive Discipline, fostering a sense of safety,

trust, and mutual respect. Second graders thrive on the consistency of clear rules, routines, and physical boundaries, which help them feel secure and confident. Throughout the year, we continually reinforce the five core social-emotional competencies: self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and self-management. By nurturing these skills, we create a supportive space where students can build meaningful relationships and make thoughtful, positive choices.

- In 2nd grade, our **service learning program** is designed to help students develop a deeper understanding of poverty and the importance of giving back to their community. Through our partnership with The Common Pantry, students engage in meaningful activities such as donating fresh produce from their visits to the Montrose Metra Garden and walking trips to the local farmers market. These hands-on experiences highlight the issue of food insecurity while fostering empathy, social responsibility, and the understanding that even small actions can make a big difference. Throughout the year, targeted lessons focus on essential human rights, including access to healthcare, food, shelter, safety, and education. These discussions provide students with a broader understanding of the challenges many people face. Additionally, with the help of parent volunteers, we organize food drives using our permanent NPES “Yes We Can” Pantry as well as multiple snack/lunch packing days, emphasizing the importance of access to diverse, fresh, and nutritious food. This program not only supports every aspect of our curriculum but also empowers students to be active participants in addressing real-world issues.

### THIRD GRADE

Third graders are an enthusiastic group. They approach academic challenges with excitement and are full of new ideas. At this age, students engage in deeper conversations and discussions, and can explain ideas confidently. Students read to learn and can broaden their studies in science and social studies as they now have a stronger foundational skill set.

- In **language arts**, third graders work on applying skills and strategies to a variety of genres. Reading instruction focuses on developing both foundational reading skills and comprehension. Students read texts with diverse perspectives, rich language, and engaging characters and plot. One highlight is student led book clubs, which also connect to our social studies learning later in the year. During writing instruction, students learn to express their ideas and communicate effectively through writing. The students hear and discuss examples of good writing and write original pieces in a variety of genres, including personal narrative, fiction, expository nonfiction, opinion writing, and poetry. There are multiple opportunities for students to create published works using the writing process. There are also lessons that focus specifically on grammar and conventions.
- In **math**, third graders focus on operations and algebraic thinking, numbers and operations in base tens and fractions, data and chance, measurement and data, geometry, patterns, functions, and algebra. Along with the content goals, students continue to grow in and expand their understanding of the 8 Mathematical Practices outlined in the CCSS, and exhibit habits as outlined in the NPES math philosophy. These habits include traits such as perseverance, resilience, curiosity, and collaboration. By the end of third grade, students are expected to be confident with math facts and have mastered automaticity.
- While continuing to explore the branches of physical and life **science**, students move beyond the basic skills of observation and analyzing data learned in K-2 and begin to delve deeper into scientific skills. Third graders develop models of life cycles and



construct arguments with evidence around animal behavior, inheritance and variation of traits, and extinction. When examining fossils, adaptations, and survival of the fittest, students analyze and interpret data to provide evidence and then use evidence to support explanations. Within the physical science topics of motion and magnetic forces, students define a simple design problem that can be solved by applying scientific ideas.

- **Social emotional learning** focuses on the importance of working collaboratively in an effective way. Students continue to expand friendships and particularly excel at group activities. Third graders are particularly focused on rules, logic, and fairness. The teacher acts as a guide to help students define what makes a classroom community productive and positive. The classroom environment, approach, and teacher language is built around the *Responsive Classroom* program. The five core competencies of self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and self-management are continually reinforced throughout the year. Third grade also uses the *Positive Discipline* approach to build skills of problem solving by asking students to learn and practice self regulation, communication, and mutual respect, and focuses on solutions instead of blaming.
- **Social studies** focuses on how we can honor and respect our heritage and histories and act as global citizens by speaking out for equity and justice. Students engage in inquiry studies of three guiding questions for the year:
  - How can we act as global citizens?
  - How can we honor and respect our many cultures?
  - How can we take steps toward equity and justice?
- **Service learning** builds on the immigration learning in social studies. Children engage in authentic conversations and learning opportunities with immigrants and refugees in our community, in partnership with a variety of local organizations. Families participate through sharing their own immigration stories and contributing time and donations. This project varies from year to year depending on the experiences of the families in the class and the needs of the community.

#### FOURTH/FIFTH GRADE

Fourth and fifth grade at NPES is an exciting time as students experience more independence through a collaborative specialization model. A specialist teacher provides instruction in the humanities (social studies, reading and writing) and another specialist teaches the STEM (math, technology, and science) content. This means that students experience a higher level of expertise in teaching while allowing them to practice moving from classroom to classroom and interacting with various teachers prior to Middle School.

Fourth graders are deeper thinkers. They begin to look at the world with a critical eye and strive for fairness around them. For many children, this is an age of budding intellectual curiosity, and many seek out the answers to how things work and why things happen. As part of this developmental leap, fourth grade transitions students completely to intermediate elementary school. Coursework and expectations increase, and the focus becomes more global.

- The **language arts** curriculum for fourth grade offers a comprehensive approach to literacy instruction. There is a process-oriented approach to writing instruction, emphasizing craft, grammar, and conventions while nurturing students' intrinsic motivation to write. The curriculum uses diverse trade books as mentor texts and integrates social skills development throughout. This integrated approach ensures that fourth grade students develop foundational skills in reading and writing while fostering a collaborative and supportive classroom community.
- **Math** advances as students continue to progress with more complex multiplication and

division. They learn estimation and place value with decimals, build upon the knowledge they developed around fractions in 3rd grade, and begin operating with fractions. Fourth graders also learn about lines, rays, and angles in their study of geometry. Along with the content goals, students continue to grow in and expand their understanding of the 8 Mathematical Practices outlined in the CCSS, and exhibit habits as outlined in the NPES math philosophy. These habits include traits such as perseverance, resilience, curiosity, and collaboration.

- Fourth grade **science** asks students to take on the true engineering and design processes as an authentic **STEM** course. Students further practice the previously learned skill of argumentation while discussing plant and animal structures, and continue to work on obtaining and combining information around the idea of energy and human activity. There also continues to be a strong emphasis on developing and using models during a deeper study of waves and light. In addition to model creation, students seamlessly incorporate math concepts by measuring and graphing quantities while looking for evidence of Earth's systems.
- **Social studies** focuses on how we can be stewards of our natural environment in our city and state while honoring the history of where we live. Students engage in inquiry studies of three guiding questions for the year:
  - How should we use the natural resources of the United States?
  - How can we better honor the cultural heritage of this land?
  - How can we help tell the story of our state?
- **Social emotional learning** really focuses on the importance of working collaboratively in an effective way. Students continue to expand friendships and particularly excel at group activities. The teacher acts as a guide to help students define what makes a classroom community productive and positive using the *Positive Discipline* framework. The five core competencies of self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and self-management are continually reinforced throughout the year. Essential skills developed through positive discipline include agreements and guidelines, routines, meaningful work, self-regulation, communication skills, mutual respect, building cooperation, mistakes and how to fix them, encouragement, respecting differences, and participation in class meetings.
- **Service learning** in fourth and fifth grade focuses on "environmental stewardship." The fourth and fifth grade students study the Chicago River including its history, environmental impact, importance to the people, flora, and fauna of the region.

Fifth grade is a structured academic year that focuses on preparing for yet another transition, the transition to middle school, and the increased independence and accountability that comes with it. Expectations are high, but the high-interest content ensures there is plenty of motivation for success. This is truly a year of growth in collaborative skills. Fifth graders love to share their knowledge and are more naturally cooperative than previous years. This age is proud of accomplishments and enjoys teaching others as part of the learning process.

- The **language arts** curriculum for 5th grade offers a comprehensive approach to literacy instruction. There is a process-oriented approach to writing instruction, emphasizing craft, grammar, and conventions in a variety of genres while nurturing students' intrinsic motivation to write. The curriculum uses diverse trade books as mentor texts and integrates social skills development throughout. This integrated approach ensures that students develop foundational skills in reading and writing while fostering a collaborative and supportive classroom community.
- **Math** stresses volume, fractions, decimals, geometry, and multiplication and division. Along with the content goals, students continue to grow and expand their understanding

of the 8 Mathematical Practices outlined in the CCSS, and exhibit habits as outlined in the NPES math philosophy. These habits include traits such as perseverance, resilience, curiosity, and collaboration.

- Fifth grade **science** asks students to take on the true engineering and design processes as an authentic **STEM** course. Students further practice the previously learned skill of argumentation while discussing gravity, and continue to work on obtaining and combining information around the idea of human footprint. There also continues to be a strong emphasis on developing and using models during a deeper study of matter. In addition to model creation, students seamlessly incorporate math concepts by measuring and graphing quantities while looking for evidence around food webs and ecosystems. Representing data in graphical displays also allows students to reveal patterns when studying the earth's rotation, objects in the sky, and earth's water sources.
- **Social studies** focuses on how we can create and continue to be a part of a healthy democracy. Students engage in inquiry studies of three guiding questions for the year:
  - How can facing the complexities of America's past help us to meet the challenges of the present?
  - How can we promote life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all?
  - How can we contribute to a healthy democracy?
- **Social emotional learning** builds on the collaborative foundations made in fourth grade rooted in the *Positive Discipline* framework. Students work in groups throughout the year and across content areas to further hone their skills. In fifth grade, the main focus is on independence and accountability and students learn to take risks and fail in a safe environment as they prepare for the increased freedom of middle school. The topic of health and human body is discussed as this is a relevant and timely concern for fifth graders. The five core competencies of self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and self-management are continually reinforced throughout the year.
- **Service learning** consists of partnering with local business, WasteNot Compost. Students distribute compost bins to school classrooms and collect the waste weekly. The waste is then sent to WasteNot Compost and turned into rich soil. Students' goal is to eliminate hundreds of pounds of school waste from entering the landfill. The 5th graders also study the Chicago River including its history, environmental impact, importance to the people, flora, and fauna of the region.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL

Middle school is an exciting, as well as challenging time. Adolescents undergo an enormous amount of physical, social, and cognitive changes during this time. Beginning in sixth grade, students develop an increasing desire to apply their higher order thinking skills to meaningful work. Students are more able to think abstractly and begin to challenge adult explanations. They frequently want to find answers independently and do so through researching and experiencing. In seventh grade frequent questions about identity and self-perception emerge. Students become more adept at metacognition and begin to recognize individual passions and strengths, and pursue those. As seventh grade is a notoriously difficult and high pressure year for students, much support, both emotional and academic, is put into place. The curriculum is designed to support students as they prepare for the high school entrance exams. By eighth grade, NPES students are experts at engaging in debate and dialogue. Students at this age level enjoy taking sides of an issue and can write passionately about their opinions. The highlight of this year is the graduation ceremony. Students design, write and practice their graduation speeches and the entire NPES community is invited to their commencement ceremony.

As a result of these myriad of changes, expectations and work-loads increase significantly as students prepare academically for the high school application process, and for the rigors of high school itself. The structure of middle school also more closely mirrors a high school setting.

- The Middle School is departmentalized by subject area and classes are taught by experts in each area.
- One day a week middle school students choose from among a variety of elective options which might include Band, STEM, Drama/Glee Club, Classroom Aides, Genius Hour, Fantasy Football, Debate, Studio Art...etc.
- All Middle School students participate in our Advisory and MSM programs to learn about and practice social-emotional competencies.

## Advisory and SRT

NPES strives to teach the “whole”child. Graduates will leave with a strong sense of self, the knowledge of how to set and reach goals, a deeply rooted ability to empathize and connect with diverse people, the capacity for successful and rewarding relationships, and as thoughtful and reflective problem solvers in a global world. Through focused and deliberate advisory and SRT programs, students will develop a strong social and emotional identity that will lead to greater academic and personal success.

The *Advisory* group consists of a small group (about 8) of same grade level students and meets once per week. The curriculum is authentic and responsive to the nuances of each advisor and advisory group and focuses on topics such as executive functioning issues, stress, and wellness. Students experience team and trust building activities, meet independently with the advisor, and set individual goals.

Student Resource Time (SRT) is a period in which students have quiet time in small groups, which is meant to support a student’s academic success. It can be used to work on homework, study for tests, retake or correct tests, or catch up on missing work. Students check-in with teachers if they need a little extra help in an academic subject. Advisors have a weekly check-in with their advisees about their academic progress.

### SIXTH GRADE

- Sixth grade **social studies** focuses on the river valley civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, and China as well as the Classical Civilizations of Greece and Rome. Students also study the Middle Ages from the perspective of six different regions: the Middle East, China, Japan, Europe, Africa, and the Americas. The curriculum then moves through European history, focusing on events such as the Renaissance, Age of Exploration, and the Industrial Revolution. The sixth grade social studies curriculum is thematic and inquiry based where students research essential questions of their choosing and demonstrate knowledge through creative and varied projects.
- **Language arts** utilizes the reading and writing workshop approach. Students develop their reading and writing skills using the *EL Education* module units focusing on Greek Mythology and Critical Problems and Design Solutions. Students also do varied literary circles covering topics such as mystery and characterization.
- Students begin their first experience with College Preparatory **Math** (CPM) in 6th grade. CPM focuses on reasoning, critical analysis, mathematical modeling, and justifying. Students are active participants in their learning through the problem-based nature of each lesson. The curriculum provides guided and purposeful investigations that support deep conceptual understanding of the mathematical objective. Students make sense of

mathematics through frequent work in study teams; they benefit by sharing information, insights, and expertise while building on and productively critiquing the ideas of others. Topics covered include algebra and variables, data and chance, geometry and spatial sense as well as other age appropriate topics. The sixth grade year includes a portion of what is traditionally taught in seventh grade through the CPM curriculum. This integration allows students to move at a rigorous pace and cover content that will readily prepare them for Algebra by 8th grade.

- **Science** class moves to the science lab where we use a student-led and inquiry based approach to build new understandings. Students study units chemistry of materials, chemical reactions, cells to organisms, body systems, and ecology. Scientific reading, writing, and lab skills are woven throughout.
- The sixth grade **SEED (Sparking Empathy, Embracing Diversity)** course focuses on anti-racist education and social identity exploration. Students examine the many intersectional aspects of their own identity and learn about the experiences of others through storytelling in order to deepen their empathy and understanding of the multitude of lived experiences. This is a one semester long course.

### SEVENTH GRADE

- **Language arts** utilizes the reading and writing workshop approach. Students develop their reading and writing skills using the *EL Education* module units focusing on *The Lost Children of Sudan* and *Epidemics*. Students also participate in science fiction literature circles and study Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.
- **Math** continues to be rooted in the CPM curriculum philosophy where students work collaboratively and engage in reflective mathematical discourse on a daily basis. Our personalized acceleration model means we offer two courses that teach the same content but provide smaller class sizes and different pacing options. All students follow an accelerated pathway, learning algebraic notation and problem solving, order of operations, linear equations, and properties of the arithmetic operations.
- **Science** uses a student-led and inquiry based approach in which students build new understanding through dialogue, modeling, and experimentation. Class offers students a chance to hone their scientific reading, writing, and lab skills through units such as force and motion, chemical reactions, cells to organisms, body systems, and ecology.
- **Social Studies** explores United States history through the lens of the Constitution and government structures. The course is structured thematically rather than chronologically. Students look at each branch of government and how they have affected the history of the United States and our country today. Through units about each branch of government, students become experts on different acts of congress, presidential administrations, and landmark Supreme Court cases. The last two units of the year cover the Bill of Rights and the idea of Federalism. These units culminate in a final Constitution test. Students focus on skills such as finding the cause and effect connection between events and analyzing primary sources. Current events and elections are also followed closely throughout the year.
- Seventh graders participate in a **Service Learning** course during which they are guided through the process of identifying a need in the community and developing an action plan. Students develop the mindset and tools to engage in meaningful and impactful civic engagement.
- Empathy-centered design “asks students to put themselves into someone else’s shoes in order to understand their needs and create meaningful solutions through our **Design Thinking** course. This gives students tools and mindsets to embrace new challenges,

unleash creativity, and develop a strong sense of self-efficacy, all starting from a place of empathy.”

### EIGHTH GRADE

- **Language arts** utilizes the reading and writing workshop approach. Students develop their reading and writing skills using the *EL Education* module units focusing on Folklore of Latin America and Food Choices. Students also do varied literary circles covering genres such as dystopian and graphic novels.
- Based on the foundation and group learning developed in 6th and 7th grade **Algebra** concepts using manipulatives and real-world problem solving are the focus of 8th grade math. In two differentiated classes that address the pacing needs of students, students study algebraic terms and operations, binomials, polynomials, exponents, order of operations, absolute value, radicals, solving algebraic equations of the first degree, inequalities, factoring and solving quadratic equations, solving simultaneous equations and inequalities, algebraically and geometrically.
- **Science** in 8th grade focuses on using scientific communication and experimentation to build and strengthen understandings. Students practice communicating their questions and knowledge, both orally and in writing, throughout units such as evolution, reproduction, the solar system and beyond, weather and climate, fields and interactions, and waves.
- **Social studies** focuses on American History from Reconstruction to the Civil Rights movement. Thematic units include Equality, Movement, America at War, Innovation, and Crisis. Students practice the skill of analyzing primary sources to answer historical questions and make historical arguments through essays, debates, and Socratic seminars.
- Eighth graders participate in a **Service Learning** course during which they are guided through the process of identifying a need in the community and developing an action plan. Students develop the mindset and tools to engage in meaningful and impactful civic engagement.
- Empathy-centered design “asks students to put themselves into someone else’s shoes in order to understand their needs and create meaningful solutions through our **Design Thinking** course. This gives students tools and mindsets to embrace new challenges, unleash creativity, and develop a strong sense of self-efficacy, all starting from a place of empathy.”
- The graduation ceremony is the culminating event of the eighth graders North Park career. It is truly a celebration of all that has been accomplished and the relationships that have been forged. The community is invited to the ceremony to hear students reflect on their experiences at NPES and define their hopes and dreams for the future.

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### CO-CURRICULARS

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The arts are an integral part of the student experience at North Park Elementary School. As stated on our website, “NPES believes that creative expression is a basic human need and we are dedicated to unleashing each child’s potential for invention and innovation.” The fine arts program at NPES encompasses three distinct disciplines that help develop and encourage the skills and tools necessary for creative expression. These include visual art, music, and creative drama. All students from preschool through 8th grade engage in an immersive creative program

in the three disciplines with regularly scheduled weekly classes and presentation opportunities throughout their tenure at NPES.

The mission of the NPES arts department is to enable students to be engaged fully in the artistic process and to instill a love and knowledge of the arts while gaining skill and confidence by learning to work in a variety of mediums and modalities. The arts program is integrated with the core academic curriculum in order to establish historic relevance and offer students the opportunity to create and do well in all subject areas. Often the art projects enhance and add a visual component to what students learned in other courses. For example, 3rd graders make funny and witty comics about the Day of the Death to accompany their project in Spanish, and 7th graders make their own tessellation art after their Math unit about angles. Our program nurtures inventiveness as it engages students in a process that aids in the development of self-esteem, self-discipline, cooperation, and self-motivation. The goals of the arts program at NPES are to provide students with the tools to understand human experience; to learn to adapt to and respect others' way of thinking; to learn creative methods of problem solving; understand the historical and cultural influences of the arts; to make decisions in situations where there are no standard answers; to analyze non-verbal communication; and to communicate thoughts and feelings using a practiced and highly developed visual, auditory, and emotional vocabulary.

### **VISUAL ARTS**

When approaching the building, a student-created mosaic greets visitors and immediately sets a tone of appreciation for the visual arts. Once inside the school, the stairwell walls and ceilings in some classroom spaces are covered with student murals based on an area of interest or passion which continues to exemplify the NPES spirit of self-expression and exploration. Art students learn how to engage fully in the artistic process and thereby gain skills and confidence by working in the following two and three-dimensional mediums: drawing, painting, sculpture, ceramics, printmaking, collage, fiber, digital arts, and mixed media. Students are exposed to and encouraged to experiment and explore different art-making techniques and mediums in order to express their ideas. Visual literacy is stressed, especially in such an increasingly visual world. Two full-time certified teachers with professional experience in art facilitate the art program, one focusing on preschool through second grade art as the atelierista, while the other focuses on third through eighth grade.

All students from preschool through eighth grade participate in a school-wide "Faith Nielsen Fine Arts Show" where a variety of drawing, painting, sculpture, and mixed media artwork are on display for the community. In addition to the art show, student artwork is on display throughout the school on a rotating basis and is a part of the everyday student and community experience. The online gallery Artsonia has been instrumental in helping teachers and students to archive a digital portfolio for students made up of images of their work from preschool through 8th grade.

### **Early Childhood Visual Arts**

The preschool and junior kindergarten art program is influenced by the Reggio Emilia philosophy, which values art as a key component of self-expression and sees the atelierista, or art teacher, as a guide on the journey. Students have opportunities to engage in visual art on a daily basis within their classroom environment. They are exposed to a variety of media, art concepts, and techniques to encourage their visual expression, development, and visual vocabulary. Early childhood artists are encouraged to take artistic risks and experiment with their own creative capabilities. The art curriculum reflects the interests and studies that emerge in the classroom environment and are closely tied to literacy, math, science, and social-emotional curricula. Students are encouraged to express their learning about the world through their artistic expression. The study of nature is an important component of the early

childhood art program and inspiration is drawn from the natural environment through nature walks, scientific observations, and creative experiments.

Each year, the PK/JK students take a family field trip to either the Art Institute of Chicago or the Museum of Contemporary Art to view art in person and take advantage of the wealth of visual resources available in the city of Chicago. Preschoolers learn how to look at artwork and use a rich and varied vocabulary to talk about what they see. Additionally, they are taught to appreciate art and behave respectfully in a museum environment.

### **Kindergarten through Second Grade Visual Arts**

Early elementary students attend art class once per week for 40 minutes in half class groups. They are exposed to a wide variety of art media to create with and given direct instruction on the use and care of art materials. They use drawing media, paint, collage materials, printmaking techniques, sculpture materials, and technology to explore creative expression and visual representation. The students practice looking at and discussing artwork by famous artists from a diverse range of cultures, abilities, and backgrounds. They are given opportunities to share their artwork with their peers to practice speaking about their own work and reflecting on their process. Art students in the early elementary years are empowered to make creative choices to experiment and explore to learn about how to engage in the creative process, make mistakes, and rebound from the unexpected.

### **Third through Eighth Grade Visual Arts**

3rd through 5th grade have one 60 minute art period per week, and 6th, 7th, and 8th grade each attend one 100 minute class per week. The art program is a studio-based, child centered model. The student is an artist and the art room is their studio. The art studio is organized by media, and students will be creating and exploring in drawing, collage, painting, printmaking, clay, sculpture, digital arts and fiber arts. The focus is on the Studio Habits of Mind: Develop Craft, Express, Observe, Engage and Persist, and Reflect. Through teacher led skills builders, demonstrations, and explorations, students will gather skills and experiences with all types of media and the creative process. The student then creates art that is personal and meaningful that incorporates these skills. Contemporary artists are highlighted and investigated for inspiration. Students are expected to generate original ideas, maintain focus on art making, demonstrate care and effort in artwork, be an active participant in critiques, and care for tools and materials. They will be setting personal goals for their growth as an artist, use technology to create a digital portfolio of their work, and write thoughtful artist statements. Our curriculum also encourages collaboration between upper grade students and lower grade students to foster a more supportive and connected school community. Field trips to the Art Institute of Chicago, the MCA and other sites beyond art museums are planned throughout the year. The field trips are designed to enhance and support place-based learning. The art program creates a structured approach to teach art that progresses with the students' developmental stages while fostering a love for creativity and artistic exploration.

### **The NPES fine arts teacher:**

- exposes students to creative methods of problem solving
- develops a curriculum that fosters an understanding of the historical, contemporary and cultural influences of art
- provides students with the tools to express an understanding of human experience
- assesses and critiques student work to provide opportunities for artistic growth



- models and demonstrates the correct usage of new materials and techniques, stressing a high standard of craft
- curates and displays student work throughout the building

**The NPES fine art student:**

- explores and experiments with tools and materials made available to gain an understanding of the unique properties and limitations of each
- makes decisions in situations where there are no standard answers
- understands the relevance of learning about historical and contemporary artists to understand the context for their own work
- learns to adapt to and respect others way of thinking
- analyzes non-verbal communication; and to communicate thoughts and feelings using a practiced and highly developed visual vocabulary
- discusses, analyzes and appreciates works of art by others as well as explain the decisions made in their own work
- strives to achieve a well executed finished product that demonstrates a knowledge of craftsmanship and good technique
- Takes artistic risks and pushes outside of his/her comfort zone

## CREATIVE DRAMA

The Creative Drama program at NPES fully involves the participant: intellectually, emotionally, physically, and socially. It provides our students with the opportunity to expand self-awareness, develop imagination, think independently, work cooperatively, improve communication skills, express a healthy release of emotions, and build social awareness. Creative drama encompasses a wide range of activities in which the main focus is experiential. This can include dramatic play and movement, story enactment, theater games, character development, improvisation, and creation and interpretation of scripted material. We partner with grade-specific teachers to enhance the core curriculum and support the many presentation opportunities our students experience. At NPES, we liken drama to a team sport: we support, inspire, appreciate, and enjoy each other. Our goal is to empower our students to believe in themselves and to encourage them to discover their individual voices and express them with confidence.

In addition to regular classroom instruction in preschool through fifth grades, 6th - 8th grades may choose to participate in electives such as improvisation and scene study. There are several extra-curricular drama opportunities. These include a multi-grade musical play in early spring. Traditionally participation in this production includes approximately half of our student body. In the fall we create a theater showcase during which students perform one acts, vignettes and original material. In late spring, we typically offer a "Build Your Own Play." workshop. The theater program continues to thrive and grow. Parent volunteers are integral to the success of the program.

It is our hope and belief that the NPES Creative Drama student:

- Actively participates in the classroom
- Creates, invents and explores the imaginary and real worlds
- Supports his/her classmates
- Finds and develops individual and group voices
- is curious
- remains open to new experiences
- Develops a love for the arts

The NPES Creative Drama teacher:

- Creates a safe environment where students feel comfortable taking risks
- Encourages the students to collaboratively solve problems
- Provides clear goals for the games and activities and projects
- Encourages creative and non-linear strategies
- Utilizes movement and multi-sensory exploration
- Encourages exploration and appreciation of the arts
- Provides extra-curricular opportunities to further dramatic arts involvement

## MUSIC

Music is a force within our daily lives; it is a part of everyone's heritage; it provides us with a means of aesthetic expression; it provides us with a unique way of knowing. We not only learn music to appreciate what others have created, but to encourage students to shape their own unique identity, through study and performance opportunities. Responding to music is intuitive to all students, regardless of ability. For that reason, all NPES students are offered the opportunity to discover and explore their innate potential as musicians, and to increase these natural capacities through music instruction.

### General Music

The NPES music program in grades PK-5 focuses on singing, playing instruments, moving/dancing, and creating; all through the Orff Schulwerk method, which starts with playing and allows for imitation, experimentation and personal expression. Middle school music is completely cross-curricular focusing on music history paralleling the Social Studies curriculum. All grades are exposed to world music throughout the year and experience a square dancing unit.

Students learn to describe music using appropriate terminology, practice reading rhythm, and recognizing and matching pitch. Technology is utilized in various ways, using iPads to heighten the musical experience through composing in GarageBand and creating presentations in iMovie and on Google platforms. Online resources like Kahoot, Quizlet, GimKit are all frequented for assessment and eliminate the need for paper in the classroom.

### Band and other extracurricular musical offerings

Starting in 5th grade, students have the opportunity to join the school band and continue through 8th grade. There are two levels of band: Beginner (5th grade) and Advanced (6th-8th grades). Ensembles meet before school and perform at least 3 major concerts each year. Additional instrumental ensembles include a middle school rock band and elective options. Chorus is a year long program that meets 2 times a week before school for grades 3-8. Chorus will perform along with the band at any performance.

It is our hope and belief that the NPES music student:

- Actively participates in the musical environment
- Encourages and supports others
- Takes risks and tries new experiences
- Collaborates with peers musically
- Has multiple opportunities to participate in instrumental ensembles

The NPES music teacher:

- Provides a positive musical environment
- Directs all students to discover ways to participate more fully in the musical environment
- Helps students learn to listen to music and convey understanding of music
- Helps students grasp the ties between people and their music
- Provides consistent and clear goals for both behavior and musical learning targets
- Brings all students into a lifelong love of music
- Provides an inclusive and supportive instrumental music experience

## **SPANISH**

The NPES Spanish Language and Cultures program promotes a lasting curiosity for learning the Spanish language by focussing on oral communicative language acquisition and by introducing our students to the diverse cultures of Spanish speaking countries and people in order to develop a global cultural awareness. We have two Spanish teachers on staff.

### **Preschool-3rd grade**

Our classes for younger students use songs, games, stories, movement and everyday authentic conversations to acquire language and build an enthusiasm for learning the Spanish language. Also many cultural aspects and traditions are explored during class in conjunction with language learning. As students increase their reading and writing skills, they will have opportunities to read and write in Spanish class. Preschool students meet weekly for 25 minutes. Kindergarten, 1st and 2nd graders meet weekly for 60 minutes. Third graders meet weekly for 80 minutes.

### **4th - 8th Grade**

The program focuses on oral communicative language acquisition, utilizing and emphasizing three basic senses vital to learning a second language; visual, auditory and kinesthetic. Students begin learning by listening, watching and imitating and as they continue their studies through 8th grade they speak, read, and write in Spanish, while also exploring various cultural traditions. Each week, 4th - 5th grades meet for 80 minutes and 6th - 8th grades meet for 120 minutes.

The rich curriculum follows and builds upon the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) standards and uses Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS), a method of second language teaching that uses highly-interactive stories to provide Comprehensible Input (CI) to create an immersion-like environment. Students are taught to communicate effectively in various situations and grow in cultural competence. Students engage in Spanish class utilizing everyday language and make personal connections from school and home. They celebrate their own and other cultural backgrounds as mirrors to our community at large. Lessons are collaborative and encourage students to take risks and discover creative ways to express themselves in a second language.

The Spanish language experience is authentic, spiraled, and developmentally appropriate at each grade level. Each year, foundational skills build upon previous years and are reinforced, adding new material throughout. The lessons are tailored to meet students' diverse needs: with enrichment for those who may have a strong Spanish language foundation and inclusion for those students who enter without previous experience with the Spanish language. In the program students also develop an appreciation for the rhythm and tone of a new language structure, which deepens their understanding of English syntax and grammar.

The main goals of the Spanish Language and Cultures program are to provide exposure to the target language and to build confidence and enthusiasm for language and cultural studies. Upon completion of the program, students have a solid foundation in Spanish language by listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and are able to utilize such skills in future language classes.

It is our hope and belief that the NPES Spanish student:

- utilizes the target language throughout each class.
- takes risks while seeing challenges as stepping stones toward learning.
- asks thoughtful questions about the language and culture.
- communicates orally with creative presentation tools.
- uses appropriate tools (technological and other) strategically to support learning.
- obtains and evaluates informational text.
- establishes a desire to be a lifelong learner of languages.
- develops a lasting and meaningful connection to Spanish speaking culture.

The NPES Spanish teacher:

- creates a safe, interactive, and stimulating learning environment.
- holds a strong grasp of Spanish language and culture and has direct experience with the Spanish-speaking world.
- utilizes formative and summative assessments frequently in order to determine areas of strength and growth.
- uses interpersonal, interpretive and presentational communicative assessments, as outlined by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL).
- differentiates lessons to meet the needs of each individual student.
- utilizes multi-modal learning opportunities to reach the diverse learning styles (collaborative songs, dances, skits, games, and projects...).
- applies technology to enhance Spanish learning.
- models life-long learning through participation in on-going professional development and research around Spanish best practices.
- follows the curriculum while continually evaluating the needs of the particular group of students and adapting appropriately.
- communicates Spanish expectations to parents and educates parents about the approaches to Spanish education.
- provides authentic learning opportunities that allow students to use Spanish in real-world contexts.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

The North Park Elementary School (NPES) Physical Education (PE) program is designed to teach students how to live and maintain healthy and active lives. When students keep adequate levels of physical fitness and make healthy choices, the conditions and opportunities for quality learning will increase. The program promotes favorable attitudes for active lifestyles, physical fitness, and safety through teaching the fundamentals of lifetime and leisure sports. Instruction focuses on instilling a positive self-image, teaching appropriate social behavior, promoting sportsmanship, and helping students learn how their bodies can perform more efficiently. Students develop skills like teamwork, collaboration, sportsmanship, honesty, and integrity that enable them to lead full and productive lives both in and out of school. PE provides students with multiple opportunities to assess fitness levels and to engage in opportunities that will strengthen the development of gross motor skills. Student assessment is based on participation and effort given in class.

The NPES PE student learns ways to become a life-long physically active person, participates in activities that improve locomotor skill development and promotes physical well being, is exposed to a variety of activities and sports, and learns life skills such as respect, honesty, and sportsmanship while playing sports. The NPES PE teacher provides a positive, safe, and fun PE environment, with a focus on effort and growth rather than achievement. Students are encouraged to participate to the best of their ability and develop skills and abilities that are useful in a variety of sports and activities.

Students in kindergarten to 2nd grade have PE three times per week for 30 minutes. Students in 3rd to 8th grade have PE three times per week for 40 minutes. There is one dedicated PE teacher for grades k-8th and PE classes are taught in the school gymnasium. Classes also utilize a local park and local rented church gymnasium.

### **Kindergarten/1st**

Students in the lower grades have a focus on locomotor movements through play-based activities, as well as specific skill development used later in sports. Each class begins with a warm-up game designed to get the students moving and ready for class. Students are taught how to develop their skills in a safe and encouraging environment and they begin to learn how to play games on a team.

### **2nd/3rd**

Each class begins with a warm-up game designed to get the students moving and ready for class. Students continue to work on skills learned in kindergarten and 1st grade and are further challenged by more complicated and skill-based games. Students begin to understand the rules and regulations with sport based games played in class.

### **4th/5th**

Each class begins with a warm-up game designed to get the students moving and ready for class. Students continue refining their skills in a larger variety of games and sports. New sports are introduced in 4th grade including ultimate frisbee, lacrosse, badminton, and pickleball.

### **6th/7th/8th**

Students continue sports introduced in 4th/5th grade and have more responsibility upon them to understand and play by the rules of sports and games. Students spend less time on raw skill

development, and more time working on teamwork skills during game-like situations. During the volleyball, basketball, badminton units, students spend time traveling to the church gym for class. Additionally, students spend time during the soccer, football, ultimate frisbee, and 16" softball units traveling to Welles Park.

### **Outdoor Education**

As part of the PE experience, fifth and sixth graders have the opportunity to attend a three-day Outdoor Education trip each fall at Covenant Harbor in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. The students participate in outdoor survival activities like orienteering, archery, fire building, and canoeing. These activities connect students to nature while encouraging perseverance and grit. Students also participate in team-building exercises such as low and high ropes courses that build relationships amongst them. Beginning in the 2020-2021 school year (TBD), students will attend outdoor education in the winter on alternating years in order to provide a variety of experiences. It is our hope that every NPES student gains valuable skills that are readily applied to the academic setting upon return to the classroom.

### **Health Education**

NPES contracts with two outside providers The Potocsnak Family Division of Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine at Lurie Children's Hospital and Response for Teens through JFCS of Chicago to provide our students with lessons related to gender identity, consent and healthy relationships, puberty and reproductive systems, sexual health and healthy decision making, and drug and alcohol education. Students have the opportunity to ask questions confidentially, by submitting a notecard following their group session, if they choose. Responses to these anonymous questions are addressed by North Park teachers, Counselor or the Lurie/Response staff. Staff members respond to questions connected to the human body content and defer to parents regarding more sensitive topics.

The NPES Physical Education student will:

- Learn ways to become a life-long physically active person
- Participate in activities that improve locomotor skill development and promote physical well being
- Be exposed to a variety of activities and sports
- Learn life skills such as respect, honesty, and sportsmanship while playing sports

The NPES Physical Education teacher will:

- Provide a positive, safe, and fun Physical Education environment
- Create an environment focused on effort and growth and not on achievement
- Encourage all students to participate to the best of their ability
- Help students develop skills and abilities that are useful in a variety of sports and activities

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## ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

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North Park Elementary School strongly believes in communicating consistent and accurate feedback about student progress. We emphasize a growth mindset and believe that learning happens when students are asked to think critically and push beyond their comfort zone while persevering to mastery.

Teachers conduct daily, weekly and monthly formative and summative assessments in all academic areas. The goal of assessment is to inform instruction and differentiation strategies, as well as to ensure that students are progressing appropriately. Assessment types range from tests and quizzes, to project-based and collaborative assessments.

### STANDARDIZED ASSESSMENTS

The school also administers standardized assessments to aid teachers in data collection as we work to differentiate curriculum to meet all student needs.

- aimsweb®Plus - NPES uses aimsweb®Plus to screen and monitor the reading, writing, and math skills of students in grades K-5. The aimswebPlus benchmarking system, which is formally delivered three times over the course of the year (and as needed for monitoring progress), allows teachers to uncover learning gaps quickly, identify at-risk students, and assess individual and classroom growth.
- ERB CTP - NPES students are given the ERB CTP in the spring of 6th and 7th grade. The [ERB Comprehensive Testing Program \(CTP\)](#) assessment consists of a series of multiple-choice questions given under timed conditions through an online secure application on iPads. The CTP is comprised of subtests in the areas of language arts and mathematics; verbal reasoning, vocabulary, reading comprehension, writing mechanics, writing concepts and skills, quantitative reasoning, and mathematics concepts and applications. Test results are considered in the context of other measures of academic performance and wellness, i.e., grades, homework, projects, and teacher feedback. This provides a true and full understanding of your student's learning. Internally at NPES, we use the data gleaned from all these sources to plan instruction and target resources to support students and challenge everyone to learn at their highest levels. The ERB CTP assessment is also closely aligned to high school admissions testing.



## **Early Childhood**

Teachers share an abbreviated mid-year update (checklist or bullet points) in December and write a comprehensive narrative report with photo documentation in June for every student that focuses on social-emotional, fine and gross motor, number sense, and literacy skills, as well as on each child's growth as a member of the classroom community.

## **Grades K-2**

Seesaw is used on an ongoing basis by posting individual updates that document student progress.

### **Midterms (3 times)**

- Midterms are exception reports in the form of a short Seesaw Note. The timing of fall conferences makes midterm reporting unnecessary, so this is more applicable to the second and third trimesters.

### **Report Cards (2 times) December and June**

- Narratives highlight the key academic areas for growth and strength for each student.
- Narrative reports can be found in Ravenna.
- At the end of the second trimester during March conferences, parents/caregivers receive a graphic organizer, checklist, or bullet-pointed document that summarizes areas for growth and areas of strength during conferences. This is then posted in Ravenna after conferences. No comprehensive narrative is written at this time since conferences occur at the end of the trimester.

## **Grades 3-5**

Google Classroom is utilized in an ongoing way - assignments are inputted in the gradebook and teachers comment on individual student assignments.

### **Midterms (3 times)**

- Exception Reporting for students whose teacher is concerned about and/or for students who are excelling academically or socially-emotionally.

### **Report Cards (2 times) December and June**

- Narratives highlight the key academic areas for growth and strength for each student.
- Narrative reports can be found in Ravenna.
- For 3rd grade, students are ranked on each subject area on the scale E (exceeding), M (Meeting), App (Approaching), NI (Needs Improvement).
- For 4-5 letter grades (transferred from Google Classroom) are given for each subject area. A narrative that highlights the key academic and social-emotional areas for growth and strength is also shared.
- For the end of the second trimester in March parents receive a graphic, checklist, or bullet pointed document that summarizes areas for growth and areas of strength during conferences. This is then posted in Ravenna after conferences. No comprehensive narrative is written at this time since conferences occur at the end of the trimester. Rankings (3rd grade) and grades (4th-5th grades) are given at the end of each trimester.

## **Grade 6-8**

Google Classroom is utilized in an ongoing way - assignments are inputted in the gradebook and teachers comment on individual student assignments (especially focusing on outliers).

### **Midterms (2 times)**

- Exception reporting to parents if a student has shown particular growth or needs to focus on an area of improvement.

### **Report Cards (2 times) January and June**

- A narrative that highlights the key academic and social-emotional areas for growth and strength is shared for each core academic class (Math, Science, Language Arts, Social Studies, and Spanish) and a letter grade is assigned.

## **CO-CURRICULARS**

### **K-5**

Co-curricular teachers feature an image or video and a brief caption for all students in two grades each trimester. All projects/units/assignments are being posted on either Google Classroom or Seesaw in a weekly blog, so parents are kept up to date in between grading periods.

### **Middle School**

Middle schoolers are evaluated using an E (Exceeding), M (Meeting), App (Approaching), NI (Needs Improvement) standard, based on criteria written specifically for each co-curricular class.

## **CONFERENCES**

Twice a year NPES hosts parent/teacher conferences (fall and spring). Parents are invited to discuss their students progress and growth both academically and social-emotionally with teachers. The partnership with home is vital to each child's success and is of great value to our faculty.

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## **CURRICULUM RESOURCES**

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[SCOPE & SEQUENCE K-5](#)

[SCOPE & SEQUENCE MIDDLE SCHOOL](#)

[SCOPE & SEQUENCE K-8 CO-CURRICULAR CLASSES](#)

[K-5 ELA SCOPE AND SEQUENCES - COLLABORATIVE LITERACY](#)