



Columbus Academy Lower School  
Information Guide  
2022-2023



## COLUMBUS ACADEMY MISSION STATEMENT

Columbus Academy – an independent, coeducational, college preparatory school – enriches its academic tradition of excellence by valuing a broad diversity of students, as it seeks to develop the complete person – mind, body and character. The School rewards rigorous effort and accomplishment; fosters compassion, respect and moral courage; and insists on integrity, fair play and community service. The Academy strives to develop and sustain a community of thoughtful, responsible, capable and confident citizens eager to engage in a pluralistic and ever-changing world.

## STATEMENT OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Columbus Academy believes that diversity, inclusion, equity and justice are essential to the excellence of our community, culture and curriculum. We recognize that the pursuit of this excellence requires thoughtful, deliberate and sustained action and that this effort is critical to our educational mission.

**Community:** We value diversity in all of its dimensions including but not limited to gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, physical abilities, family composition, and socio-economic status. We seek to reflect multiple perspectives, backgrounds and interests in all facets of our community. We recognize that students who are exposed to and embrace diversity are better prepared to engage in a pluralistic world.

**Culture and Climate:** We strive to be an inclusive community in which each individual feels safe, respected and valued. In building a community that values similarities and differences among its constituents, we seek to embody in our relations with one another the principles of equity and justice as well as Columbus Academy's core values of honesty, respect, compassion, responsibility, and fairness.

**Curriculum:** We believe that exposure to multiple – and sometimes even competing – points of view best equips students to explore, understand and apply complex concepts, building the basis for a rigorous education. By weaving diversity into the fabric of our curriculum, we equip our students with the interpersonal and critical thinking skills that are essential to success in the complex, multicultural world in which we live.

*Columbus Academy adheres to the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) Principles of Good Practice for Equity and Justice.*

## LOWER SCHOOL OVERVIEW

Dear Prospective Family,

This information guide has been designed to give you a general overview of the Lower School at Columbus Academy. If we want the children of today to continue to be leaders of tomorrow, we need to help them develop a sense of themselves as competent learners who can function in diverse settings. In order to accomplish this goal, the Lower School curriculum exposes children to different approaches in learning, enhances their awareness of their own individual learning styles, and aids them in discovering that there are many resources for information and knowledge, both within and outside of school.

The Lower School is committed to building conceptual understanding, and thus places great emphasis on hands-on experiences as children in these early years think concretely. The goal is two-fold: to help the students establish an indispensable foundation of self-confidence and sense of competence to learn, and to foster a genuine understanding of what has been learned so that their knowledge becomes transferable. Our program is committed to the development of imaginative and conceptual learning as well as skill acquisition. It provides opportunities for students to transfer the strategies of critical thinking, decision-making and problem solving from one situation to another. The curriculum addresses the whole child, including personal, social and emotional development. We recognize that children benefit from an environment in which social and emotional growth is intentionally developed and nurtured. Because of this belief, the Lower School uses a wide variety of resources and instructional methods to help provide our students with an environment that empowers them to feel safe, comfortable, and confident within a wide variety of situations. It is our belief that our students will greatly benefit from and stand upon this foundation as they grow and navigate the larger world.

We appreciate your interest in Columbus Academy. Please feel free to contact us with your questions.

Sincerely,

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## CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

Below you will find a general overview of our content curriculum. More specific information about curriculum at each grade level is available on the Columbus Academy website. Letter grades are not given in our Lower School. Students are assessed using grade level standards, and parents have the opportunity to meet with the classroom teacher for conferences several times per year. Standards-based progress reports are distributed three times per academic year.

During their time in the Lower School, students at Columbus Academy create an online portfolio of their work through an application called Seesaw that is shared with only their teachers and caretakers. Through this app, homeroom teachers and co-curricular teachers are able to share updates and photos, while students can share and reflect on their own work and projects.

## LANGUAGE ARTS OVERVIEW

Reading instruction involves a variety of methods that include Reader's Workshop, Guided Reading and Literacy Groups. Students work within leveled and homogeneous groups, which are determined by the results of the Benchmark Assessment System (BAS). Individual reading conferences provide teachers the opportunity to pinpoint specific skills and reading goals for each child. Classroom libraries include a variety of relevant literature that is organized by author, genre, and /or independent reading levels. Throughout the year, teachers read aloud to students from different texts such as picture books or chapter books, while discussing different story elements. Students are also exposed to biographies, poetry, modern classics and non-fiction selections.

In the area of writing, teachers continue to focus on the writing process by conferencing one-on-one with children and creating writing assignments that show each child's individuality. A variety of methods are used to teach students writing and grammar throughout the grade levels. Teachers often incorporate grammar instruction, peer editing and direct instruction into writing time. Students have opportunities to present their work in and out of the classroom to both large and small groups. This collaborative format encourages young writers' confidence and initiative.

## MATHEMATICS OVERVIEW

The Columbus Academy Lower School math program will provide a quality mathematical experience for every child Pre-K through Grade 5. The students will be immersed in a differentiated, enriched math environment where they are engaged and successful at learning math. Connecting to the Math Vision of Columbus Academy, all students in the Lower School will develop problem solving skills, reasoning skills, and a growth mindset. The math curriculum promotes mathematical thinking, reasoning and sense-making through a variety of methods such as; math journaling, number talks, making connections among concepts, the use of concrete representations that lead to deeper understanding, and the application of real-life word problems. Strategies for math fluency are taught along with multiple ways to solve math problems. A mathematical mindset is developed as students value mistakes and alternative strategies as they progress in the program. Unleashing students' math potential and curiosity through innovative teaching is a key to the success of the lower school math program.

## SOCIAL STUDIES OVERVIEW

Lower school social studies education at Columbus Academy is geared towards helping young students better understand the community and world around them in developmentally appropriate ways. We strive to foster a sense of belonging in a variety of social groups, from families to the global community, and an appreciation for both our common humanity and the diversity of the human experience. In the Lower School each grade level has specific units of study, or themes, which are integrated into the curriculum in a variety of ways to establish deeper connections and broader understanding. The classroom teachers work with the specialist teachers to connect social studies with literature, math, science, technology, music, Spanish, physical education and art.

Additionally, our goal for the social studies curriculum is to intentionally complement Columbus Academy's mission and the Lower School C.A.R.E.S. philosophy by encouraging:

- Cooperation with each other toward a common goal
- Assertion to interrupt injustice wherever we see it
- Responsibility for our actions and how we treat others
- Empathy to walk in the shoes of someone different than we are
- Self-control when solving problems with respectful words

## SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL LEARNING OVERVIEW

Our social/emotional curriculum addresses the whole child, including personal, social and emotional development. The Lower School utilizes the Responsive Classroom (RC) approach as a framework from which all aspects of interaction take place. We are an RC school; therefore, much of what we do – the language we use, the way we teach and interact with students and our school culture positively influences the students' educational experience. RC recognizes that all aspects of a child's needs – academic, social, emotional, and physical – are important. Faculty and staff work together to create an environment that recognizes and appropriately responds to all areas of need so that children can be their best selves while learning.

In addition to RC, we have begun a new curriculum developed by the Center for Responsive Schools. It is a standards-aligned social and emotional learning curriculum designed on the belief that, in order for students to be academically and socially successful, they need to learn a set of social emotional competencies. Each grade level has five units with four themes based on these competencies: cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, empathy, self control (C.A.R.E.S). Another way we build community in our classrooms is to set time in the schedule for every homeroom to participate in a morning meeting as a positive way to begin the day, and a closing circle which allows students to reflect and leave on a positive note.

## CO-CURRICULAR CLASSES

Throughout their time in the Lower School, students will participate in several co-curricular classes, which are explained in more detail below. At Columbus Academy, our schedule operates on a six-day cycle, which is named by letter days A-F. A calendar with the letter days will be shared out at the beginning of the year. The length and frequency of the co-curricular classes is dependent on the grade level.

### ART

Students in the Explorer Program through fifth grade attend art classes. The art program is multifaceted in that a variety of approaches are used to introduce young children to art. The historical approach features an "Artist of the Month". By featuring different artists throughout the year, the children become familiar with artists as people who express their ideas in different ways, dependent on the period of time they worked or the tools and materials they used. The conceptual approach emphasizes a particular concept such as contrast, symmetry, mood, tone, emphasis, or rhythm. By comparing different works of art, the elements and principles of design become the focus of the lesson. The thematic approach is interdisciplinary in nature. This usually involves an area of study that is occurring in the classroom and extended to the art room. The aesthetic approach

introduces the children to new tools, materials or media that motivate self-expression.

### LIBRARY

Students in the Explorer Program through fifth grade visit the school library. Building information literacy skills and fostering a love of reading are two primary goals of the lower school library. Information literacy skills are taught within the context of the classroom curriculum whenever possible. To that end, the librarians work closely with other teachers to plan library sessions that support and extend work being done in the classroom. In addition to sharing stories and giving book talks to promote reading, the library sponsors visits from children's authors and illustrators. Finally, the library orchestrates a summer reading challenge to extend the excitement of reading through the summer.

### MUSIC/DRAMA

Students in the Explorer Program through fifth grade attend music classes. The lower school music program strives to cultivate and broaden students' learning experiences by extending the general education curriculum through collaborations within our vast cultural community. Music, in study and practice, is an interdisciplinary application of the liberal arts, which seeks to integrate the information of a broad academic education into a creative art form. With an emphasis on both State and National Music Standards, students are given a multitude of diverse musical experiences. Through performing, listening, creating and analyzing music of their own cultures and cultures around the world, students will develop both an understanding and appreciation of this valuable art form. All students, Grades PK-5, prepare and present songs for two Closing Programs: one in December and one at the end of the school year and participate in a grade level performance at some point during the school year.

### PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Students in the Explorer Program through fifth grade attend physical education classes. The primary goal of our physical education program is to engage students of all ability levels in physical activity. Classes are designed to include components of physical fitness and skill-building exercises. Emphasis in all classes will be placed on individual improvement and the practice of good sportsmanship. It is our belief that with proper instruction students can increase their skill development, participate with a healthy blend of competition and cooperation, and develop an intrinsic motivation to stay fit and active throughout their lives.

### SCIENCE OVERVIEW

Students in Kindergarten through fifth grade attend science classes. Students learn to explore the world through hands-on experimentation, observation, and analysis. Collaboration is front and center in the Academy science classroom, as students are always working with each other and talking through the scientific process. The ultimate goal of the program is to foster interest, enthusiasm and confidence in the field of science, which supports lifelong learning.

### SPANISH OVERVIEW

Students in Pre-kindergarten through Grade 5 attend Spanish classes. The program introduces the Spanish language along with the cultures of Spain and North, Central, and South America. The curriculum is a spiral one that introduces new material at each level while also reviewing and extending material introduced in previous years. In the six-day rotation PK receives 60 minutes of Spanish instruction and grades K-5 receive 90 minutes of language instruction. The study of Spanish in the Lower School provides students with the knowledge and skills at the Novice level to continue in Spanish or to begin another language of study in the Middle School.

### SWIMMING

Students in Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 5 attend swimming classes. The Columbus Academy Lower School swimming program utilizes components of the American Red Cross, Swim America, Lifetime Fitness and YMCA programs to formulate the Columbus Academy swimming program. The primary purpose of the program is to help children learn to be safe and have fun when they are in, on, or around water. The program covers skills and knowledge in a logical progression for aquatic skill development based on the child's readiness.

### TECHNOLOGY

Students in Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 12 are issued a school-owned I-pad for classroom use. Columbus Academy views technology as an essential tool in the education of students in the Lower School. In first, second and third grades, our primary goal in the technology classes is to help the students become technologically literate. We reach this goal by exposing students to a wide variety of hands-on computer experiences, including technology literacy, computer programming, information and research gathering, keyboarding, digital citizenship, and working with various software applications, including those within Google's educational applications. By providing an extensive range of computer activities, we expose students to the idea that computers can assist in all stages of learning.



In fourth and fifth grades, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration skills are developed in the Lower School Makerspace (computer lab). Students use their creativity to design and create projects to solve problems through hands-on exploration using low-tech or high-tech tools and applications. The Makerspace is equipped with a vast array of tools and raw materials that support invention and creation.

## SERVICE

Columbus Academy's mission statement points to the importance of community service in developing responsible citizens. Service activities at Academy are so much more than just a requirement, as our entire community comes together several times a year to help meet the needs of others both locally and globally. Students in the lower school participate in both classroom and school-wide community service projects.

## LOWER SCHOOL EVENTS and TRADITIONS

- **Lower School Ice Cream Social:** This event traditionally takes place the afternoon/evening prior to the first day of Lower School. Students and their parents are invited to meet their child's new teacher and tour their new classroom. Families then enjoy greeting one another on the playground while enjoying an ice cream treat!
- **Back to School/Parent Night:** During the second week of school, parents come to school in the evening to learn more about what to expect from the school year.
- **Get-To-Know-You Parent/Teacher Conference:** This conference takes place during the second week of school and is an opportunity for parents to share about their child with the child's teachers. This conference lays the foundation for the teacher-parent-student partnership.
- **Parent/Teacher Conferences:** These are scheduled in late Fall and again in late Winter.
- **Celebration of Accomplishments:** This is a student-led conference in May where a child shares with his/her parents work samples and reflections that highlight the growth and progress made throughout the school year.
- **Musical Programs:** held in December and May for all lower school students. Additionally, each grade level has its own music performance during the school year.
- **Assembly:** Each week, lower school students in grades Kindergarten through 5th grade gather in the theater for an Assembly. Classes are given opportunities to share what is happening in their classrooms. "Flag of the Week" and "Culture Corner" are two of the activities that happen during each Assembly.

- **Halloween Parade:** Lower school students, dressed in costume finery, parade through each building to celebrate this American tradition.
- **Lower School Carnival:** A fun-filled event planned by lower school parents for families and their children in grades Explorer through 5.
- **Buddy Events:** All lower school children have a buddy in another grade level. Regular events are scheduled for buddies to meet, learn and have fun together.
- **Fourth and Fifth Grade Overnight Camping Experiences:** Fourth and Fifth grade students go on a one or two day overnight trip for a team building outdoor education experience. Each experience complements the academic and social emotional curriculum.
- **Lower School Campout:** In September, lower school families can enjoy a camp-out on school grounds, complete with a pizza dinner, s'mores, campfire and a night hike!
- **Field Trips:** Students in Kindergarten through fifth grade participate in opportunities to travel off-campus for learning. Field trips are specific to each grade level and are planned to enhance what is being taught in the classroom.
- **Kindergarten/Senior Buddies:** At the start of the school year, kindergarten students are paired with 1-2 senior students. These buddy pairings get together once a month for special activities.
- **Forest Fridays:** Every Friday, students in Pre-K, Kindergarten and First Grade spend the majority of their school day exploring and learning outdoors in nature.
- **Outdoor Weeks:** Students in second through fifth grades schedule an "Outdoor Week" 2-3 times during the school year for nature learning.
- **Commemorative Months:** The Lower School Community participates in the education of various groups' histories and their contributions to American History.
- **Seesaw:** A digital app-based platform that provides teachers and students with the opportunity to communicate with parents the learning occurring in their child's classroom.

## AFTER-SCHOOL OFFERINGS

- **C.A.S.E. (Children's After School Experience):** C.A.S.E. is an after school program for all Lower School children, Explorer Program through Grade 5. Children may be enrolled for a regular full time schedule or as a drop-in basis. C. A. S. E. is available from the end of the school day until 6:00 p.m. This program is provided at an additional cost.
- **Homework Club:** A supervised hour of study for students in grades 2-5. A Columbus Academy teacher is present for an hour to offer basic support for those students who may be in need of some homework support throughout the year.
- **Strings:** This program is offered to students in grades 3-5 after school throughout the school year. There is a materials charge. Instruction is part of the LS curriculum and covered by tuition. The lower school orchestra program has three levels and continues through Upper School.
- **ASA's (After-School Activities):** ASA's are offered during C.A.S.E. with several different programs available—Chess, Athletics, Cooking, Art, Dance, etc. Each activity runs from 3:30-4:30 p.m., unless otherwise noted, with a new schedule of programs made available each season (fall, winter, spring).
- **Youth Sports Opportunities:** The purpose of our Junior Vikings youth sports programs at Columbus Academy is to positively develop our students ranging from grades 1 through 6 (depending on the sport). Participation, character development, skill and fun are all key factors in our youth sports offerings. Providing opportunities for growth through sport and a welcoming environment where children feel they are learning how to be involved in their community is important in creating an exceptional experience for our students.
- **Girls On The Run:** (Girls in Grades 3, 4 and 5)  
The Girls on the Run research-based curriculum is structured around understanding ourselves, valuing relationships and teamwork, and recognizing how we can shape the world at large. Participants gain critical life skills that strengthen their potential at a time when societal pressures and conflicting messages about how to feel and act can cause doubt and uncertainty.



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