

MIDDLE SCHOOL OVERVIEW

The middle school at DCD encompasses grades 6 through 8 and presents students with new approaches and opportunities that are appropriate to their growth and development while building on the foundation provided during the lower-school years. In middle school, students transition from the homeroom-based lower-school class experience to a model in which they move from classroom to classroom, exploring an expanded menu of course offerings and activities. Challenging, interdisciplinary academics emphasize writing, critical thinking, risk-taking, and problem-solving, while a structured advisory program works in conjunction with a continued emphasis on community service to nurture essential values of respect, responsibility, honesty, and kindness. DCD's commitment to the arts is affirmed in middle school, as students select nine elective courses to take throughout each year, with 50 minutes allotted each day for direct arts instruction; each student competes on three interscholastic athletic teams throughout the school year, ensuring the programmatic balance between academics, arts, and athletics that is central to DCD's mission.

When students enter middle school, they receive a MacBook Air laptop which they will use for the entirety of their time until departing DCD, both in the classroom and at home. The one-to-one laptop program is designed to support academic work, to build comfort and familiarity with essential technological skills in classrooms and art studios, to engender a sense of responsibility, and to present students with opportunities to explore the demands, opportunities, and pitfalls of online identity and digital citizenship. The middle school academic, arts, and advisory programs all contain essential components designed to support these goals.

THE ARTS

DCD fosters the belief that the arts are an essential part of educating the whole child. The school has a long and rich tradition in the arts and believes that effective self-expression comes from commitment, hard work, and exploration. The solid foundation, established in early grades, gives children an opportunity to develop the confidence, creativity, and appreciation of the artistic process that flowers in the middle school program. To ensure a balanced experience in the arts, students are engaged throughout the year in four disciplines: music, drama, woodworking, and visual arts.

In middle school, students are required to take three arts courses per term (for a total of nine courses per year), including at least one course from each discipline (music, visual art, woodworking, drama/technology) during the course of the year. In addition, sixth graders are required to take World Music; seventh-graders are required to take Art History, and eighth-graders are required to take Smooth Talk. Smooth Talk is a course dedicated to public speaking, introspective thinking and writing, and interview skill building to ready students for the

secondary school application process and transition to high school. For their remaining electives, students select from the courses detailed below.

All arts courses meet two days out of six per term (unless otherwise specified). With the exception of the grade-specific requirements named above and each grade's class play, arts classes are cross-grade offerings, resulting in classroom environments of mixed ages and developmental levels. Class enrollments are kept small to allow teachers to provide meaningful, individualized attention and instruction.

View a full list of this year's art electives [here](#).

ATHLETICS

Rather than attending a traditional physical-education class, each middle-school student participates on an interscholastic athletic team each season. The goal of the athletics program is to foster healthy physical growth and the development of positive attitudes toward sport and fitness. Team sports provide a forum for students to build self-discipline and learn the value of concentrated effort, teamwork, and good sportsmanship. Coaches work to foster the capacity for positive leadership in all athletes. While talent and skill are appreciated and celebrated, DCD's coaches emphasize the importance of participation and hard work.

Coaches design and implement drills and activities to teach their players sport-specific skills and strategies, which are then used in competitions with other local independent and public middle schools. Winning is one goal of all teams and motivation for team improvement. However, each season, coaches work to create a unique program with specific goals based on the level of experience and ability of the players on the team. Each player is encouraged and coached to reach his or her individual potential, and coaches work to find meaningful roles for all players.

Students are presented with opportunities to interact and build relationships with their peers and their teachers in a different environment than the academic classroom. Additionally, athletics at DCD build school spirit and bring the community together in a positive way. The athletics program is designed to be meaningful, rewarding, and fun for students.

DCD participates in 175-200 competitive interscholastic games each year. All students participate in the sport of their choice each term and are involved in athletics every day of the school year for at least 75 minutes, with the exception of Fridays. The school provides students with multiple options every season. Fall offerings include soccer, field hockey, flag football, and cross-country; winter offerings include basketball, ice hockey, and squash; and spring offerings include baseball, softball, lacrosse, and tennis.

SERVICE LEARNING

As an integral part of DCD's mission, service learning helps students "to become caring and responsible members of the larger world." Service reflects our core beliefs in character education, community values, and respect for differences. Fostering a sense of "helping behavior" and "social responsibility," our program at DCD aims to instill greater empathy in students and ultimately, a lifelong commitment of service to others.

Over the years, the emphasis on *learning* has grown, and the new language of "service learning" is designed to emphasize that, though improving our community is one goal, a much more significant objective of the program is for DCD's students to take away important skills and meaningful lessons through their experiences working to serve others.

Middle school service learning looks first and foremost at guiding students to become active participants and upstanders in their communities. Students are encouraged to identify causes that are meaningful to them and are encouraged to consider what interests and skills they have that can be leveraged to help others or improve the world. Hands-on service experiences are valued over cash donations and fund drives because DCD wants the students to understand the value of their personal efforts and engagement.

Middle-school students have the option to participate in five community service afternoons during the year. Students are given a sign-up sheet offering a range of activities from which to choose. Students also have the opportunity to initiate their own service experiences and may choose to work those during service afternoons. Participation is not required, as these service activities take place after the end of the school day on Fridays. Examples of past service options include sorting clothes at Cradles To Crayons' Giving Factory; clearing trails at Hale Reservation; visiting with senior citizens and memory-care patients at The Linden at Dedham; cleaning up at the Franklin Park Zoo; preparing birthday supplies at Birthday Wishes; and doing chores and socializing kittens at Stray Pets in Need. Recent student-initiated and student-led projects include the organization of a Green Club; the painting of a banner to spruce up DCD's walls; and the creation of a band to perform at The Linden at Dedham.

DCD holds a special school-wide community service day in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in which middle-school students participate in planning and executing an array of additional service projects, recently including a walk-a-thon to raise money for the Boston Children's Hospital League; a blanket and towel drive for the Dedham Animal Rescue League; the creation of nameplates for a vocational program for adults with developmental disabilities; and making Valentines for the residents of a local nursing home. By participating in community service activities on this day, DCD emphasizes to students that it is through actively working to make their community a better place that we best honor Dr. King's legacy and the principles for which he stood.

CO-CURRICULAR OFFERINGS

Student Council

DCD middle-school students elect an eight-member Student Council each year, consisting of two sixth graders, two seventh graders, and four eighth graders. Representatives are elected by their peers and meet once a week during lunch with the faculty representative to the council. The council plans student events and addresses plans, ideas, and concerns voiced by their classmates. Council members plan dances and events during each school year, assuming all responsibilities (with the guidance of the faculty representatives) for organizing, funding, and staffing these events. Student concerns are addressed by the Council in formal and informal communication with the faculty and administration. The Student Council offers an opportunity to develop leadership and collaboration skills at all grade levels in the middle school; students work together as a group to plan effectively and to develop solutions to issues of concern to the student community.

Middle-School Clubs

During the winter term, middle-school students have the opportunity to participate in club activities for one 55-minute period per week. These clubs are open to all students in the middle school and are optional, with nonparticipants being offered time in study hall to complete homework or to meet with classmates or teachers as needed. Clubs are run by interested faculty members and have recently included Ceramic Wheel Work, 3D Printing, Debate, Robotics, and Knitting for Service. Club offerings can shift from year to year based on student interest and faculty availability.

Middle-school math club meets once per week throughout the year at 7:30 a.m. on Wednesdays. In the fall and spring terms, the club meets to work on problems and topics in a casual, informal setting. During the winter term the math club becomes a competitive team focused on competing at the annual MathCounts competition in February.

Middle-School Conference

The purpose of the Middle School Conference is to allow students to engage in workshops related to identity for an entire day; these workshops are facilitated by adult members of the DCD Community, including parents and faculty. Styled as “DCD Inside and Out”, this conference is but one of the ways our students and adults embody the motto of *Learning is a Way of Life*. This conference is organized by affinity space and dialogue group facilitators and student participants in these spaces.

Middle-School Affinity Spaces and Dialogue Groups

Each year, Middle School students will be surveyed about existing affinity spaces; the purpose of this yearly check-in is to gauge whether current spaces are meeting the needs of students and to incorporate additional spaces as needed. Below are DCD's current offerings in terms of Middle School Affinity Spaces, subject to change based on student need and interest. Students in these affinity spaces will assist in programming for heritage months and holidays. In addition, students in these affinity spaces will lead the planning and execution of our Middle School Conference each spring.

Students of Color Affinity Group

The Student of Color (SOC) Affinity Group provides a majority experience for our students of color, much like the one they experienced as part of the lower school Culture Club. Our goal is to create a safe and supportive space for students to discuss and understand their experience as persons of color in our school and in their broader communities.

Our goal is to help children better understand their identity and develop skills that help them to become culturally competent. It is important that all of our students have opportunities to discuss issues of race, culture, power, and identity, and our program allows for these rich opportunities across the school. The middle-school affinity group is one more addition to our program to help us meet our goals in the context of an affinity group, and we are confident it will be an important addition to our work building an inclusive and diverse community.

Boys Talk

This is a space for students who identify as boys to discuss issues related to being a boy at DCD. What does "being a boy" mean? What expectations are placed on boys? How do boys move through the world around them?

Girls' Voices

This is a space for students who identify as girls to discuss issues related to being a girl at DCD. Topics for discussion have included dress code, body image, advocacy and gendered expectations.

LGBTQIA+ Students and Allies

This is a dialogue for students who identify as LGBTQIA+, and for students who identify as allies to this group to come together and learn more about LGBTQIA+ history and experience; students also discuss how DCD might better serve students who identify as LGBTQIA+.

Middle-School Social Justice Club

The Social Justice Club is a dialogue group where students discuss issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion from the perspective of "how can I positively impact change?" The club's agenda is set by its members, and discussion topics may include local, national, and global issues. This club is open to all middle-school students.

Breakfast Buddies

Breakfast Buddies meets on Thursday mornings at 7:30 - 8:00 a.m. for students who identify as Black. One meeting each trimester is open to 5th grade students who identify as Black in preparation for their transition into middle school.

Neurodiversity

This space offers students the chance to consider themselves as learners. How do we advocate for our learning needs? How might we “think differently” about ourselves in the classroom? And, what does it mean to be a school that embraces many different learners?