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) 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. 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.

**DRAMA**

**Class Play**
In middle school, participation as a performer in the class play is optional; those who choose not to perform may opt to participate in the Set Design class. For those students who choose to act, there are two rehearsals every six days within the arts block. For fifteen days before they perform, students have an extra rehearsal every day, scheduled in place of an academic class.

For each grade, the drama teacher writes a developmentally appropriate play that is tailored to the number of students who have elected to take acting. The aim of middle-school plays is to showcase acting skills that students have learned in previous plays. Students are given complex roles where they can use critical thinking skills in rehearsals to develop their own character. By later grades, students are given freedom to add their own stage directions and blocking and are able to select their own props. Rehearsals focus on class discussions where students are asked, “How can we help younger students understand a complex play?”; “What is the goal of each scene?”; What are the key plot details and how can the actor emphasize them?; “How can the actor show his or her character’s back-stories through interaction with other actors during each scene?”

The seventh-grade class play is performed twice at the end of the fall term; eighth grade performs twice at the end of the winter term, and sixth grade performs twice at the end of the spring term.

**Smooth Talk**
The Smooth Talk course, required in the fall term of eighth grade, offers students the opportunity to take an advanced public-speaking course that is specifically geared towards the leaders of our school. Students write and deliver a speech on a topic of personal importance to them; learn and practice interview skills; develop confidence speaking in public in both prepared and extemporaneous contexts, and learn how to vocalize personal thoughts and opinions in a safe setting.

**Director’s Cut**
This course provides students with an understanding of the skills needed to become a film director. Students have the opportunity to direct scenes from plays and to create their own movie scripts. Students view five or six films from a variety of genres including animation, comedy, action, drama, and fantasy. While watching the films, students develop critical thinking skills through discussion of camera angles, special effects, character development, and music.
Middle School Program

Students are introduced to the range of practices and techniques that go into creating a film, and ultimately learn to analyze what makes a successful film.

**Let’s Dance/Let’s Act**
Let’s Dance/Let’s Act is a dance and acting course that allows students to develop their dancing, acting, and playwriting skills. Students participate in drama games and role-playing exercises as they develop improvisation skills. In addition, students create their own sketches, skits, and mini-plays. They write their own scripts and perform their plays in class. Students learn two dances taught by the teacher and subsequently put their experience into play choreographing their own dances. Students work in small groups to choreograph a short dance using modern and jazz dance techniques. Over the course of the term, students refine their choreography and ultimately perform their dances at the school’s end-of-year Performing Arts Assembly.

**WOODWORKING**

**Rustic Bench**
In this course (at times offered as Rustic Chair), students learn aspects of crafting a bench using branches for the bench frame and “live-edge” planks of different species of wood for the top. Wood is harvested from both the DCD campus and other local forests.

**Woodworking of the DCD Willow Trees**
DCD’s majestic willow trees have served as an important symbol of the school for years. Students in this course participate in the milling of the willow wood from log form into planks and blocks. The work will then turn to designing a project within a wide range of possibilities. Small boxes, sculpture, and hand-carved bowls are just a few projects that students may investigate and consider.

**Robert Frost Maple**
The poet Robert Frost penned the poem “Tree at my Window” in the year 1928 while living in his Derry, New Hampshire, farmhouse. Wood from the very same sugar maple that was once the inspiration for this poem (salvaged by DCD at the tree’s felling in 2007) serves as the material for middle-school woodworkers in the Robert Frost Maple course. While working in this more than century-old maple wood, students draw on their own imaginations to create projects ranging from small boxes to carved spoons and more. Periodically, woodworkers have the opportunity to read aloud to classmates other Frost poems that draw a keen picture of rural New England life from another time.

**Shaker Box**
Students in Shaker Box learn to build a beautiful and useful Shaker oval box. Students learn how to saw strips of cherry and maple veneer of different thicknesses to be used for the bands or sides. Later, students learn how to steam-bend these around a wooden oval bottom.
Shaker Furniture
Sound construction and simple design are qualities characteristic of Shaker furniture. While building these enduring pieces, students learn basic Shaker joinery techniques. For their individual projects, students may choose from a number of different styles and sizes of authentic Shaker bench designs.

Shaker Low-Back Chair
This class focuses on the basic elements of fine chair construction. While handcrafting a Windsor-style piece, students learn how to incorporate the mortise-and-tenon joint into the framework. Other areas explored include how to hand-plane swell-tapered legs, how to fashion a curved back, how to create a shovel-shaped seat, and finally, through extended bench work, come to an understanding of the many subtle design elements that go into a well-made chair.

Carving
Carving invites students to learn which woods carve particularly well and to explore elements of design and finish. Chisel profiles are examined to advance students' facility with and understanding of this tool. Once work begins, students learn several basic carving techniques as they work on a chip carving, relief, or incise-letter carving. Whittling will also be offered. Projects can include a small figure or animal, a name, or a simple geometric pattern.

Spoon Carving
Hand-carved spoons are works of sculpture as much as they are utilitarian objects. Students rive sections of cherry wood from logs and learn to work with the natural contours that come from rived stock. Specialized hand tools are used as each student goes about the work of capturing unique and graceful lines in their spoon. Finished pieces are intended to emphasize the harmony of art and design.

VISUAL ART

Animation
Students use their laptops to develop a set of characters and a world for those characters to inhabit. They then take their newly developed ideas and use Macromedia Flash to create original animated movies.

Printmaking
Students use a variety of printing techniques to produce work on paper, cloth, and clay. Experimentation with composition and color is encouraged. Periodic critiques help refine composition and technique.

Art History
Art History is a required course for seventh grade. Time is spent discussing works that include the caves of Lascaux, Da Vinci, O'Keeffe, Warhol, and other major artists. The class discusses their significance and the impact of their work on western culture. Students then turn their focus
to an artist of their choosing. After collecting images and biographical information, they produce an accordion book on the life and work of their chosen artist. The goal for each student is not just to create a book that outlines an artist's career, but to have their own book serve as a work of art as well.

**Ceramics**
Students use hand-building techniques to construct ceramic pieces of varying sizes. Students start small to become adept with the skills necessary to produce a successful piece and then progress to larger forms. Students also have the opportunity to work on the potter’s wheel to create simple, functional pottery. A variety of methods are used to finish the fired pots, including low-fire glazes, high-fire glazes, and Raku.

**Watercolors**
In Watercolors, students learn to layer washes of color in order to create interesting textures and a variety of tonal ranges. Students learn how to mix colors and different water-based media to express a range of feelings.

**Painted Floor Cloths**
Students work with acrylic paint on canvas to make finished floor cloths. Students provide photos to inspire the design process. Following the design process, students prime canvases and create paintings using such techniques as sponging, combing, and transparent layering. The final step is to paint several layers of water-based polyurethane on each floor cloth.

**Mosaics**
Each student creates a small mosaic panel based on an individual design. A survey of mosaic artwork throughout history is followed by the design stage, in which students take inspiration from objects in daily life. Students subsequently cut glass tiles, glue them in place on wood panels, and grout the finished pieces.

**Drawing**
The emphasis in Drawing is on improving observation skills. Students refine drawings by working on them for several weeks. Various exercises teach such concepts as contour, value, composition, positive and negative space, and color mixing. Media include graphite, colored pencil, pen and ink, charcoal, and gouache paint.

**Tile Design**
Students in Tile Design paint on bisque tiles and learn to make repeating interlocking patterns. The class examines historical tiles from various sources and experiments with making tiles using a slab roller. Students explore a variety of techniques for creating images on tiles, including carving leather, hard clay, and the use of plaster molds.

**Set Design**
In this counterpart to the Class Play course, students paint, build, draw, and create needed props and objects to transform the school stage into a complete theatrical setting for a class play.

**White-Line Woodcut**
Students in White-Line Woodcut carve designs into pine wood blocks and color them with watercolors. This process results in colorful prints that express qualities similar to watercolor paintings. Students examine the work of Blanche Lazell, an artist from Cape Cod and an inventor of this technique.

**Beginning Metalsmithing**
Since the Bronze Age, artisans have used their imagination to create functional and decorative works from metal. Through hands-on exercises and projects, students acquire basic metalsmithing skills in piercing (sawing), filing, forming, stamping, and cold-fastening. Utilizing their newly acquired skills, students create original pieces from copper, bronze, or silver.

**Graphic Design**
Students learn how to create electronic and paper publications with the use of GIMP (GNU Image Manipulation Program). During the course, students adhere to various electronic and print production standards. By the end of the term, students will produce simulated DCD promotional material in electronic and print form.

**Digital Photography**
Digital Photography students learn photographic techniques and work to develop their own creative voices and points of view. Students learn the main functions of Nikon digital cameras, explore elements of composition, and experiment with various creative techniques. They digitally archive their work using a private online database and enter discussions and critique sessions with classmates about the images they have created.

**MUSIC**

**DCD Band — students participate in all three terms**
The DCD Concert Band offers dedicated and experienced instrumentalists an ensemble experience that allows them to expand and hone their musical skills. Drawing on repertoire from blues, jazz, and pop/rock literature, this course allows students to learn and perform music in a range of styles while developing reading, listening, and ensemble and performance skills. The repertoire is accessible yet challenging; composers represented in recent years have included Herbie Hancock, Horace Silver, Eddie Harris, and more. Students are expected to devote regular outside-of-class practice time to prepare for rehearsals and performances. The band performs in various holiday and performing arts programs throughout the year.

**DCD Chorus — students participate in all three terms**
The DCD Chorus is a performing ensemble that meets for three consecutive terms per year with three major assemblies required for all singers. Students in the chorus learn to sing independently while maintaining accurate intonation, steady tempo, appropriately-produced sound (timbre), clear diction, and correct vocal posture. Singers are expected to sing expressively with appropriate dynamics, phrasing, and interpretation. Students are exposed to a repertoire of vocal literature that includes singing ostinatos, partner songs, rounds, and simple two- and three-part songs with or without accompaniment. Students are expected to sing all repertoire from memory while following and responding to the cues of a conductor and accompanist.

The overall objective beyond skill acquisition is for choral students to learn a variety of songs representing genres and styles from diverse cultures, larger conceptual themes, song selections from musicals, and music from multiple historical periods. Spring term incorporates show-choir stylings where movements and dancing are added to the music selections. One tradition specific to DCD includes the annual Thanksgiving Assembly where alumni are invited to join the chorus to sing "Cross the Wide Missouri/Shenandoah."

**Sound Sculpture**

Using primarily acoustic instruments and sound sources (from both within and outside of the traditional compositional palette), students create and record composed and improvised works. Emphasis is placed on using mood and texture to create expressive and evocative pieces. Students listen and respond to a variety of contemporary musical strategies including 20th-century minimalism, noise, musique concrète, free jazz, and cinematic Foley recording. Using GarageBand recording software on their laptops, students record and edit their work, culminating in a final composition that is expected to incorporate a variety of strategies and sound sources.

**Music, Keyboards, and Computers**

Using MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) instruments and sequencing/notation software, this course brings technology and music together. Working with MIDI keyboards, students create original compositions using the computer. They learn to create a melody, produce effective accompaniment, and refine and edit their compositions.

**World Music**

Required of all sixth graders, World Music emphasizes that music comes in all shapes, sizes, colors, and textures. Students listen to music from a variety of styles and cultures, learn how music functions in different cultures, societies, and settings, and determine how music from other cultures has influenced the music we listen to today.

**Soundtracks**

A good soundtrack can add an enormous impact to the effectiveness of a film, radio broadcast, or even a static image. A well-crafted soundtrack has the capacity to deepen the effect of a scene and bring certain aspects of a story into sharper focus. Students study various types of
soundtracks where original music is particularly effective. They examine the role of the storyline, musical characterization, and the qualities that enable music to enhance a particular scene. Using sequencing, sound-editing, and video software, students create original soundtracks to accompany film and animation clips and storylines.

**Introduction to Acoustic Guitar**
Students are introduced to basic chord progressions, note reading, and the music theory behind learning to play guitar. Each student is given a variety of songs to practice, sing, and play. School-owned acoustic guitars are loaned to each student for the term. Practicing at home is a requirement of the course.

**Introduction to Ukulele**
Students are introduced to basic chord progressions, note reading, and the music theory behind learning to play the ukulele. Each student is given a variety of songs to practice, sing, and play. A school-owned ukulele is loaned to each student for the term. Practicing at home is a requirement of the course.

**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, community service, or service learning, as it is now known, 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 activity choices from which they select their choice of activity. 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 (one boy and one girl), two seventh graders (one boy and one girl), and four eighth graders (two boys and two girls). 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 three dances and three middle-school social events during each school year, assuming all responsibilities (with the guidance of the faculty representative) 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, Knitting for Service, and Spanish Culture and Cuisine. 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 AM 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 Student 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.

**Middle-School Social Justice Club**

The Social Justice Club is a forum for students to discuss issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. 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.