



LOWER SCHOOL  
COURSE DESCRIPTIONS  
2020-21



marin  
country  
day  
school



# **Lower School Course Descriptions 2020-21**

## **PROGRAM**

Learning is most meaningful when individual skills are presented in the context of larger problems or challenges. Therefore, at MCDS we strive for an integrated curriculum, one in which children learn important and necessary skills through the investigation of challenging and intriguing topics and problems, while also keeping social-emotional learning at the center. At times during the school day students will focus on specific skill development; however, subject areas overlap, allowing the children a more holistic experience. For example, students may practice handwriting and phonics skills at the same time; they develop spelling and grammar skills during writing times or apply math skills during science or social studies. Below you will find a brief synopsis of our curriculum in each subject area.

## **SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING**

At MCDS, we strongly believe that social emotional learning is as important as academic learning, and we address this area of our curriculum both formally and informally. Our teachers use a Responsive Classroom approach to build community; promote prosocial behavior; and foster children's empathy for one another in the classroom. We also integrate social thinking curriculums through which children learn specific strategies for taking perspective and regulating their own emotions and behaviors. In addition, we teach children a "Talk it Out" method for conflict resolution to help them understand others' perspectives and work through conflicts. The No Bully System program is also a focus of our curriculum in Lower School. Informally, we use class meetings, assemblies, literature and small group meetings to support children's growing skill in these areas.

## **ENERGY TIME (ET) and MINDFULNESS**

All children learn practices that lead to an awareness of self, of others and of one's surroundings. Kindergarteners engage in Energy Time, which combines a particular approach and techniques that are extracted from the non-competitive martial art of aikido and is the cornerstone of the Mindfulness program at MCDS. The techniques incorporate intellectual, physical and spiritual concepts that are experienced directly in the body. Energy Time teaches the children the wisdom of making oneself secure without making others insecure. It teaches personal power without the need to dominate and encourages an atmosphere of cooperation. ET is a time for collaboration among teachers and is led by the three grade level. Kindergarten children attend ET three mornings each week. First grade children continue to build on their ET practice by learning new mindfulness techniques and strategies that are integrated throughout the day including breathing, movement and self-reflection influenced by the MindUP curriculum. Second graders continue the practice of self-discipline and mindfulness during a time called Gathering of the Minds. In third and fourth grade, students take part in mindfulness in the classroom, following the Mindful Schools curriculum.

## **LITERACY**

The primary goal of the MCDS Literacy program is to inspire engaged and interested readers and writers. Our program is literature based, and teachers provide students with authentic contexts for reading and writing activities. The Literacy program consists of four interrelated balanced literacy components at each grade level: Response to Literature, Readers' Workshop, Writing Workshop and Word Study (the study of language patterns).

*Response to Literature* is designed to utilize quality children's literature in a variety of ways to deepen comprehension and develop critical thinking and analysis skills. A book, story or poem

may serve as a central theme for a unit of study or it may provide a context for teaching skills. Teachers design response activities to engage and involve children in both the interpretation and evaluation of literature. Responses are developed to maximize student participation and enthusiasm and may include art projects, songs, story-mapping, discussion, dramatic presentations, puppetry and letter writing. Literature is read aloud to students, as well as read independently by students.

*Readers Workshop* involves children in reading and responding to books on their own individual reading levels. Care is given in teaching children to make appropriate book choices. During Readers Workshop children may be reading silently or aloud, in small groups, with a buddy, conferencing with a teacher or working independently. Teachers work with students individually or in small groups to monitor skill development and comprehension and to plan strategies for continued individual growth. Students read selections from the classroom library or the school library.

*Writing Workshop* supports students to create stories, poetry and compositions using self-selected topics, while learning how to write in specific genres. Teacher and peer conferencing help to guide the writer through a process that includes topic selection, drafting, revision, editing, illustration and publication. In addition, children keep notebooks and write poetry, letters, notes and responses to literature.

*Word Study* focuses on the structure of our language: phonetic elements, spelling patterns, grammatical structures and vocabulary development. In kindergarten through second grade, students engage in Phonics Workshop. In Phonics Workshop, students first learn phonics skills in isolation, and then apply these new skills to their reading and writing. There is also a focus on building students' knowledge of high-frequency sight words. In third and fourth grades, students move from learning these skills and building their phonics foundation to focusing on more complex spelling patterns, using these patterns with more automaticity, as well as exploring vocabulary. Throughout all of the grades, grammatical structures are taught and reinforced in both reading and writing.

**Kindergarten:** Through a literacy program rich in literature and print, children develop a solid foundation for reading and writing. Emphasis is placed on children's growing phonemic awareness, or their awareness of the sounds of the language, through rhyming, sound matching, and sound manipulation activities. They begin (or continue) to recognize and write the alphabet, develop an understanding of the relationship between letters and the sounds they represent, and experience themselves as readers and writers. Kindergartners learn to spell and read high-frequency words, while practicing writing using "best guess" or "invented" spelling as they explore the relationships between sounds and the letters or letter combinations that represent them. In addition, children listen to and discuss stories read aloud to them to develop their comprehension and vocabulary.

**First Grade:** During first grade, emphasis is placed on building children's word identification skills. Children learn or solidify their knowledge of the system of sounds and corresponding symbols, learn to recognize a large number of words by sight, and practice using those skills to read texts at their own instructional level. First graders develop their comprehension and vocabulary skills both through class read-alouds and by reading themselves.

First graders write every day about a range of topics and publish books for their annual First Grade Library. They explore several genres in their writing, including personal narrative, nonfiction, poetry, and realistic fiction. Mini-lessons on craft, mechanics and text features help students develop their writing. Children apply their study of high-frequency words and phonetic patterns to their written work, although most children continue to use "best guess" or "invented" spelling in first grade.

**Second Grade:** During the second grade year, students continue to develop their word identification skills and read increasingly difficult texts with greater ease and fluency. They continue to develop their comprehension of texts they read as well as those that are read aloud to them, with an emphasis on making inferences and reading “between the lines.” Their study of Change Makers in the spring allows them to study the genre of biography in depth.

Second graders also write every day, and writing is integrated into all aspects of the curriculum. Using a workshop approach, they write autobiographical “Small Moment” stories and continue to explore various genres and styles of writing. In the spring, second graders write a nonfiction piece about the Change Maker of their choice. Mini-lessons on craft, mechanics and text features are provided to help children develop basic skills. Children continue to learn to spell by studying high-frequency words and phonetic patterns and, slowly but surely, most second graders make the transition to conventional spelling by the end of the second grade year.

**Third Grade:** The third grade reading program continues to foster students’ love of reading and strengthens their comprehension and oral reading fluency. In addition to independent reading and read-aloud time, students participate in small group instruction to learn and practice comprehension skills such as asking questions while reading, summarizing and visualizing.

Students write in all content areas; however, during Writers Workshop, third graders study a variety of writing genres and receive direct instruction in various aspects of the writing process, craft and mechanics. Using a writer’s notebook, students learn to develop their own ideas in writing. They practice a variety of strategies for collecting story ideas, drafting, revising and editing. Students also select pieces to publish a few times throughout the year. The third grade word study program also explores a variety of spelling patterns, writing mechanics, and vocabulary.

**Fourth Grade:** The fourth grade reading program helps students develop into effective, lifelong readers. Students read from a wide range of genres. To enhance reading fluency and comprehension of texts, the program provides direct instruction in the following reading strategies: decoding, use of contextual clues, visualization and writing about reading to note important ideas or discrepancies in understanding. Students share their personal reading choices through book reviews and reader’s response journals. Class novels may include *Island of the Blue Dolphins* by Scott O’Dell and *By the Great Horn Spoon* by Sid Fleischman. Students also participate in genre-based book clubs.

The writing program emphasizes a balance of process and product with a focus on creative revision as a means of developing the craft of writing. Direct instruction is given to improve specific skills such as developing paragraphs, improving leads, adding details, using dialogue, varying sentence structure and stretching small moments. Students draw from literature analysis to apply the methods of good writers. The writing conventions of spelling, punctuation and grammar are also emphasized in instruction. Spelling activities are used to increase students’ knowledge of letter sound patterns, high-frequency words, homophones and basic spelling rules. Children develop their writing voice through experimentation with varied genres and in both assigned topics and free writing. In addition to a unit involving realistic fiction writing in the fall, students learn the concepts and skills of writing five-paragraph essays, including thesis statements, supporting details, paragraph formation, and summative concluding statements.

## **HANDWRITING**

MCDS uses a handwriting program called “Handwriting without Tears.” It provides a multisensory, systematic approach that serves all kinds of children very well. The program begins in kindergarten by teaching children proper pencil grip and manuscript letter formation. Children become more fluent in letter formation in first and second grades. Children often use special plastic pencil grips to assist them in developing a proper grip throughout the early years. In third grade, children learn cursive writing and also

practice keyboarding as homework throughout the year. In fourth grade, students continue to develop keyboarding skills in the classroom.

## MATH

MCDS uses *Investigations in Number, Space, and Data (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition)* or “TERC” for mathematics in Lower School. Research-based and developed by the research collaborative TERC under a grant from the National Science Foundation, this program is a hands-on, activity-based program that supports the development of mathematical thinking, problem-solving, computational fluency, application of math skills to real life problems, and effective communication of mathematical thinking. Students consistently are expected to think and reason in their mathematical work, both independently and in small collaborative groups, and to explore multiple strategies for solving problems. Communicating mathematical thinking is an integral part of the program as students communicate their findings, share approaches, conjectures, difficulties and results.

**Kindergarten:** In kindergarten children develop strategies for accurately counting quantities and connect counting skills to the operations of addition and subtraction. Kindergartners practice “joining” and “taking apart” numbers. They also explore measurement (length and using nonstandard units to measure and compare objects), patterns and functions (sorting objects by attributes and comparing patterns) and 2D and 3D geometry. To support their understanding of data analysis, they use basic surveys to collect data, record and represent data, pose questions about the data, and make sense of the results.

**First Grade:** In first grade children focus on developing a deeper understanding of the operations of addition and subtraction and become fluent in adding and subtracting the two-addend combinations of 10. They apply these skills to solving story problems as well. They continue work in 2D and 3D geometry, with a focus on identifying and describing triangles, continue their work in measurement by focusing on accurate linear measurement using a variety of units, and make predictions about and analyze patterns. In the area of data analysis, students learn and compare standard forms of representation including picture graphs, tallies, charts and bar graphs. They carry out their own data investigation by developing a question and collecting, representing, describing and interpreting the data.

**Second Grade:** During the second grade year, children explore number relationships to 100 and become accurate in adding and subtracting two-digit numbers. They are encouraged to work with numbers in flexible ways; they learn to add using place value as well as adding in parts. Second graders develop strong mental math abilities. They practice these skills in the context of story problems, including ones with missing parts. They begin to see the relationship between addition and subtraction. In geometry, students focus on the properties of rectangles and rectangular prisms and explore the concept of symmetry. Work with patterns and functions continues, and children deepen the strategies they use to represent data and analyze data. At the end of the year students begin to work on three-digit addition and subtraction. Throughout the year students develop a foundation for learning multiplication in third grade.

**Third Grade:** In third grade, students build their understanding of the number system to 1,000, building fluency with addition and subtraction and developing strategies for solving multiplication and division problems. By the end of the year, students solve three-digit addition and subtraction problems using a variety of strategies and are fluent in multiplication combinations up to  $10 \times 10$ . Students also work with fractions (halves, fourths, eighths, thirds and sixths) and mixed numbers, and are introduced to decimal fractions (0.25 and 0.50) within the context of money. Third grade’s study of geometry and measurement focuses on angles of triangles, square and other polygons, volume, and length and perimeter using U.S. standard and metric units. Third graders deepen their understanding of patterns and functions by analyzing change using tables and line graphs. Numerical and categorical data investigations are integrated in other areas of the curriculum as well.

**Fourth Grade:** During fourth grade, students extend their knowledge of the number system to 10,000. They focus on understanding the operations of multiplication and division and on using multiple strategies to solve problems. By the end of the year, students know their multiplication combinations to

12 x 12, along with the related division facts, and solve 2 x 2-digit multiplication problems and division problems with 1-2 digit divisors. Fourth graders also build their understanding of the equivalent of fractions and decimals. In geometry, students compare attributes of 2D shapes, while measurement work includes linear measurement in U.S. standard and metric units, area, and angles. Fourth graders deepen their understanding of finding and analyzing patterns using tables and formulas. Numerical and categorical data investigations are integrated in other areas of the curriculum.

## **SOCIAL STUDIES**

The goal of the Lower School social studies curriculum is to help students understand their own identities, to appreciate human differences, and understand the basic challenges people have always faced in coping with their environment and with changing technology. As in all other areas of the curriculum, social studies topics are presented with activities designed to give students the necessary thinking and analytical skills, an appreciation of a broad context and a deep understanding of the complexity and interrelated nature of the many concepts.

**Kindergarten:** Each day children gain practical hands-on experiences that contribute to their understanding of social studies concepts. Through morning meeting, sharing, cooperating, engaging in dramatic play, constructing their farm communities and simulating life on a farm, the children are encouraged to build a peaceful and healthy community. Through science activities, children discover the world around them, observing, questioning and recording their thought processes. They learn about the life cycles of trout, butterflies, chicks, fava beans and other garden crops. Through their farm studies, they also gain insight into weather patterns, water conservation, pests and predators. We hope to nurture excellent stewardship skills in all of our students. Children also learn about the process of composting. Fruit and vegetable scraps for composting are collected each day by our kindergarten truck drivers, as they pedal the K Trucks all around campus. Once the compost decomposes into soil, it is used in our Lower School garden. In this way, children discover the magical cycle of food production.

**First Grade:** The first grade social studies curriculum focuses on an in-depth study of the individual and their role in a community. In this study, children build an understanding of the self and one's relationship to the community. The study begins with a focused look at our individual characteristics, concentrating on embracing similarities and differences, and continues to examine the concepts of friendship and, ultimately, how groups share responsibilities and work together. First graders take a close look at skin color, explore qualities of strong friendships, and immerse themselves in the concept of what makes a healthy commons. They examine a variety of commons, participate in keeping them healthy and even create their own during the annual First Grade Library. The overall goal of the first grade social studies curriculum is for students to gain a deeper understanding of themselves as individuals who live within and contribute to a variety of communities and commons.

**Second Grade:** In second grade, students learn how communities change over time and how individuals influence their communities. Students begin by exploring communities in general and our own community of Corte Madera more specifically. Second graders begin by defining their own unique classroom communities as they begin the year together and then learn about the fascinating history of Corte Madera in the context of the Bay Area and the wider world. To synthesize this information, each class creates its own simulation of this evolving community in the classroom. Students explore how life in the community has changed over the past century. They become inventors as they identify a problem people faced at the turn of the 20th Century. Using the Design Process they work with a partner to design and create a prototype solution to the problem. As they explore different time periods, second graders look at the changes taking place closer to home and how they link to larger social movements and leaders. By reading the literature and biographies of Change Makers (influential people or heroes) in history, children explore the ways in which some people have exerted great and positive influence on their communities. Students then demonstrate their learning through projects, reports, representations or performances.

**Third Grade:** Third graders explore the city of San Francisco in depth, with an emphasis on considering why and how people preserve things that are significant over time. They explore the notion of common spaces and the responsibilities we all have to create and preserve healthy commons. Their study takes them to natural spaces, historical landmarks and the varied neighborhoods of San Francisco. Reading, writing, research and design skills are woven into the unit, while guest speakers and field trips make the study come alive for students. A culminating urban planning project synthesizes content and skills by using design thinking protocols and a collaborative tinkering challenge.

**Fourth Grade:** During fourth grade, students explore California history with a focus on the diverse cultural groups that define and continue to shape its identity. Specific units address the Coast Miwok culture, the establishment of the California Missions and the effect of Missions on indigenous peoples, and immigration to California during and after the Gold Rush. Throughout the study, students reflect on current culture, relate their learning to essential questions “What does it mean to live well in a place over time?” and “When does change threaten and when does change contribute to our ability to live well in our place over time?” and use the lessons gleaned from history to envision a better world. Guest speakers, local field trips and an overnight to California Gold Country enrich the year’s study.

## SCIENCE

The Lower School science program fosters students’ awareness and curiosity about the world around them. Students use different techniques and methods to observe, question, investigate and make sense of that world. Children practice scientific inquiry (observing phenomena, formulating and investigating meaningful questions, devising scientific tests, collecting and interpreting data, and constructing knowledge) through a meaningful, hands-on approach. All Lower School students have a science journal in which they record observations, questions, data, conclusions, diagrams and drawings. Emphasis is placed on discourse and communicating scientific discoveries.

**Kindergarten:** In kindergarten, science and social studies are interrelated as components of the farm study. During this year, children learn about the life cycle and begin to develop observation, questioning and analytical skills important for subsequent science study.

**First Grade:** First graders explore the adaptations, life cycles and predator-prey relationships of both birds and snails. In addition, they investigate the physical science of force and motion through a hands-on study of balls and ramps.

**Second Grade:** Second grade science units include geology and the Bay study. Through scientific inquiry and hands-on investigation, students discover the diverse ecosystem of the Bay Area. They observe local plant and animal life and the geological formations. Through a variety of investigations (collecting, comparing, experimenting, recording and classifying), children develop an understanding of earth materials. They also gain an understanding about the relationships between the natural communities of the Bay and the local human communities.

**Third Grade:** Third graders study energy for the full year. Students begin with a miniature study of nutrition, using the plants in the school garden as the basis of their exploration. Next they learn about electricity and simple circuits. They transition from the study of electricity to learning about renewable and nonrenewable energy sources with a focus on solar electricity and solar heat. Through an inquiry-based approach, children get an opportunity to observe phenomena, formulate and investigate questions, devise and conduct tests, and collect and interpret data. Students record observations, data, questions, conclusions and drawings in their science notebooks.

**Fourth Grade:** The inquiry process is the foundation for exploring learning in science. Children explore phenomena, such as light, through an ongoing process of investigation structured around observing, developing questions, and formulating and conducting fair tests. Children record discoveries in science notebooks and communicate understanding in various modes of presentation. In addition, as a link to the

California study, fourth graders explore native and non-native plants of Ring Mountain. This unit includes a service learning field trip to a local site, like the Golden Gate Recreation Area, as well as collaboration with the Marin County Open Space District. To culminate the learning experience, students design and implement a service learning project of their own that aims to protect the native plants of Ring Mountain.

## WORLD LANGUAGES

World languages are offered to students beginning in third grade. During the third grade year, all students take half a year of Spanish and half a year of Mandarin; in fourth grade, students choose one language that they will study through eighth grade. World languages are taught through a variety of approaches that stress listening comprehension and verbal performance. When students have an understanding of the workings of the language, reading and writing are gradually introduced through phonetics. The skills that students obtain allow them to communicate with confidence and enthusiasm in real life situations. Many props and other realistic visual materials are utilized to complement the curriculum. Students learn about culture through songs, games and movies.

### SPANISH

**Third Grade:** The objective of third grade Spanish is to awaken an excitement and curiosity about the language and to introduce to the students the elements of pronunciation, structure and vocabulary through emphasis on listening and speaking activities. When students begin to understand, reading and writing are gradually introduced. Songs, puppets, drawings, games and audiovisual aids assist in the learning of the alphabet, numbers, colors, days, months, fruits, family, animals and expressing likes and dislikes. They will also learn the usage of gender and number in words.

**Fourth Grade:** The fourth grade curriculum builds on the skills and vocabulary introduced in third grade. Speaking, reading and writing skills increase through phonetics, drills, songs, dialogues and audiovisual aids. Vocabulary study focuses on classroom objects, more numbers, prices, food, more animals, time, capital, countries, idiomatic expressions with *tener* and most question words. The use of irregular verbs in context is expanded and several infinitives of regular verbs are introduced. Culture is experienced through videos, art projects and the observance of holidays.

### MANDARIN

**Third Grade:** For half of the school year, students explore Mandarin language and Chinese culture. In addition, students learn how to write some of the words they learn. Similar to Spanish, students will explore this language through songs, games and activities. Through this exposure, students will appreciate this rich language and culture.

**Fourth Grade:** The fourth grade curriculum builds on that of third grade. The class will continue on developing a solid foundation for communication in Mandarin. Listening and speaking will be addressed as well as reading and writing. Students will learn the Mandarin phonetic system of pinyin, basic knowledge about strokes and stroke orders, and common radicals for writing Chinese characters. Students will learn basic vocabulary, including numbers, colors, zodiac animals and basic dialogues through traditional Chinese folk tales and story books. They will also learn to read and write the basic characters that are seen in the stories. Culturally, they will participate in calligraphy, Jian Zi (Chinese hacky sack) and learn the background story, significance and celebration of Spring Festival and Mid-Autumn Festival.

## TECHNOLOGY

There is a balanced approach to technology, as technology is used as one of many learning modalities in the Lower School. Thoughtful tech integration involves continuous assessment of whether the tools enhance student learning. We integrate technology with specific learning goals in mind, as opposed to



putting it to use simply because it's available. 1:1 iPads are provided in kindergarten, first, and second grade, and 1:1 Chromebooks with cart-based access to iPads are provided in third and fourth grades. In addition to teaching students how to use tech tools that support classroom learning, they also learn coding, computer science, digital citizenship, media literacy, effective search, robotics, and physical computing. Students practice keyboarding independently via online accounts set up by the school. Our goal is to prepare students to engage capably and meaningfully in a rapidly-changing, tech-centered world. Students are equipped with tech skills *and* mindfulness practices to help ensure the development of healthy personal relationships with technology. For more information, visit [www.mcdstech.org](http://www.mcdstech.org).

## **ART**

The art program fosters the creative spirit of each child, providing a safe environment where problem solving, imagination and self-esteem can flourish. In keeping with the curriculum of each grade level, the art program is devoted to exploration and discovery in drawing, painting, sculpture, printmaking, bookmaking and mixed media. Respect is given to the children's natural stages of development and their innate ability to draw and use the art elements instinctually, and emphasis placed on assisting them in learning to see and developing their perceptive abilities. Art projects frequently complement classroom studies. All Lower School students enjoy two periods of art each week, with classes scheduled back-to-back in first through fourth grades to provide one double period.

## **MUSIC**

The Lower School music program is inspired by the educational ideas of Carl Orff, an Austrian composer who believed that children should be guided to work creatively with the elements of music and movement. In this approach, songs, chants, rhymes, stories, games and dances from many cultures and times become doorways through which children enter the conceptual world of form, pitch, phrase, tempo, rhythm, dynamics, melody, harmony, tone color, orchestration and movement quality. Children learn to make music in ensemble with their voices (through speech, chant, and song) and their bodies (through clapping, patting, stamping, snapping, etc.). In addition, they use unpitched percussion instruments (wooden blocks, bells, rattles, drums, etc.) and melodic percussion instruments (xylophones, metallophones, glockenspiels). Through playing in ensembles, children develop their rhythmic, melodic and listening skills. Children learn to play many different repeating patterns and melodies that become progressively more complicated through the grades. The children accompany some of the songs they sing on these instruments as well as improvise.

The Kodaly methods of solfege syllables and the corresponding hand signals are used to train the student's inner ear and intonation. Students are made aware of correct singing posture and controlled breathing and various ways of correct singing production. They learn an assortment of international songs from a diversity of countries and cultures. Many of these songs are two- and three-part rounds. Some of the songs have accompanying games that involve movement and dance. Students continue to learn rhythmic and melodic notation. They learn staff notation through a variety of written activities and movement-oriented games.

All students in Lower School have music twice weekly. At times, the material of the music class is related to current themes in the classroom or in other specialist classes (art, library and physical education). In addition to music class, chorus is offered for students in third and fourth grade, and division assemblies and school-wide assemblies offer students opportunities to sing together.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

Through our physical education program, students become competent in the management of the body and the mind, acquire and maintain a suitable level of physical fitness, and develop a positive self-concept. The program contributes to developing desirable social standards and ethical concepts. In the early

grades, most activities are individual in nature, centering on movement experiences and rhythmic motions. Emphasis is placed on simple stunts and low-organized games. While an accent on cooperation with others is necessary, little emphasis is placed on large group or team play. Children perform various activities such as ball handling drills, stunts, tumbling and apparatus work. The focus is placed on the gradual development of gross and fine motor skills, body image and balance. Physical fitness is achieved through a program consisting of maximum participation for each student during class time, with each child progressing at his/her own rate and gradually increasing his/her energy output within the limits of his/her physical condition. Pedometers are introduced in first grade to provide quantitative feedback to students.

In third and fourth grades, students begin to focus on group games. Each class period typically starts with an appropriate warm up and skill instruction. The class then proceeds to learn and practice an organized activity. Intramural sports are offered within each grade and focus on a given sport for a period of time. The groups rotate through two sports and a traditional MCDS “Blue-Green” contest is scheduled in one of the sports studied.

Students attend Physical Education classes in the gym and on the playing fields. Kindergarten has three classes per week, while first through fourth grades have four classes per week.

## **LIBRARY**

Beginning in kindergarten, the library provides a variety of group and individual experiences for students as well as for faculty and parents. Students are exposed to a wide variety of stories, books, magazines, and audiovisual appropriate to their age, needs, interests and academic abilities. The librarians help and encourage students to find materials that broaden their appreciation of their own and other cultures. Students begin to develop the critical thinking and research skills needed to locate, select and use library materials responsibly and effectively for curriculum or recreational purposes. Students learn the location of library materials, and the use of the online catalog.

Lower Schoolers visit the library once each week for stories and book selection, although individuals or small groups of students may visit the library before school and at any time during the school day when permitted by classroom teachers. We encourage parents to become library patrons and check out books.

## **CULINARY FARM**

At MCDS, we believe in teaching children how to interact with food in healthy, sustainable ways for nutritional and environmental purposes. Students have hands-on experience planting, caring for and harvesting healthy foods, while learning about the larger system of food production. They experience the Farm to Table initiative firsthand when the food they have grown is then served and eaten in the lunchroom. Beginning in kindergarten, Lower School students are involved in composting food from our campus, which is then used in our three gardens and our greenhouse. There is a strong connection to service learning in this work, as children learn the value of how food benefits our entire community. In the Upper School, students deepen their Culinary Farm experience with different projects, including an Aquaponics curriculum and a Culinary Farm elective.

## **SERVICE LEARNING**

MCDS has a strong Service Learning program. In the earliest grades, we model the importance of showing respect and compassion to those who are close to us. In addition, we look for concrete, hands-on ways for young children to care for others. Awareness of ourselves and our opportunities to care for each other is a cornerstone of our educational goals. As children and adults in our community we seek ways to

help others. “Service Learning” is the satisfaction of doing something for others while learning more about ourselves and our world in the process.

Kindergartners begin service learning by collecting compost buckets for the Lower School and bringing them to the school’s compost area. Beginning in first grade, students participate in the legendary MCDS Lunch Bunch. Lunch Bunch is one important way that children begin to understand that in order for a community to work well all the members must share in the work. Through Lunch Bunch, children learn that they can begin to serve others right at school. On a rotation, each homeroom takes its turn for a week of Lunch Bunch. Children help with the serving, stacking dishes and general lunchroom clean up. Some tasks require that they arrive in the lunchroom a bit early, while others mean they will get to the playground for recess a bit late. All tasks are integral to orchestrating multiple seatings for lunch in quick succession each day.

Other service learning projects are integrated with the class curriculum and have included supporting a school in Colombia, making playing cards with Bay facts for a local community center, reading aloud to seniors at a local assisted living facility, collaborating with Marin Open Space, helping to prepare meals for Homeward Bound, creating a guide for throwing an eco-friendly party, and campus-wide clean-ups.

### **ASSEMBLY**

Lower School assemblies are held on most Friday mornings in the Multi-Purpose Room, while several all-school assemblies are held throughout the year. Themes and topics vary from assembly to assembly but always include informal sharing by one or more classes, singing, story sharing, announcements and discussion of topics vital to us as a Lower School community, such as playground issues, MCDS core values or conflict resolution. Fourth grade students help run assemblies.