

Information for Lower School

The early years—what a magical time in a child’s life! This stage is filled with wonder, curiosity, and joy. It’s when we build lifelong foundational learning skills.

With wonder, curiosity, and joy, our young learners build the foundational skills they will use for the rest of their lives. Supported by talented and compassionate teachers within a community of belonging, our children begin to develop an understanding of who they are as learners, leaders, and human beings.

During these integral early years, we strive to instill a love of learning in every child. We immerse our students in play to unleash imagination and develop fundamental skills. Our teachers believe in each child’s unlimited potential and offer personalized support to students as they grow. Through each new stage of development, our educators inspire students to explore questions, engage in deep conversations, spark creativity, work collaboratively, and become independent thinkers.

At Breck Lower School, students thrive both academically and personally. We invite you into this place we call home to bear witness to our extraordinary community of learners.

KATIE MAHONEY
LOWER SCHOOL DIRECTOR

Welcome to Lower School. This is where we foster a love of learning, cultivate independent thinkers, and guide children to reach their full potential. Because children are unique, we consider the broad range of their knowledge, interests, strengths, challenges, and experiences to support their growth and development. Integrated curriculum and innovative teaching strategies are critical to engaging whole-child learning and growth.

BE Curriculum Overview **CURIOUS.**

LITERACY

We believe literacy begins before children enter the classroom. We help them develop the skills to be effective communicators, proficient readers, and powerful writers. Throughout language-rich classrooms, quality literature, and personalized instruction, teachers instill a love of language from a young age.

Preschool:

- Storytelling and writing through pictures and words
- Vocabulary development
- Nurturing confidence in communication skills

Kindergarten-4th grade:

- Explore genres
- Form readers as thinkers
- Build solid reading skills and habits using models created by Lucy Calkins at Columbia University’s Teachers College
- Develop narrative and expository writing
- Establish a writing voice and style
- Focus on grammatical precision
- Develop manuscript and cursive writing skills
- Engage with informational text for research writing
- Develop public speaking and listening skills
- Use technology as a literary tool

Curriculum Overview (continued)

VISUAL ARTS

Artistic engagement allows students to explore art and design principles, appreciate artistic process, and understand the role of art in society. Students develop fine motor skills, spatial thinking, and self-expression. Imagination and creativity flourish. Through visual arts, Breck students study concepts, vocabulary, and technique.

Course examples:

- Drawing
- Painting
- Sculpture
- Fibers
- Jewelry
- Museum studies

WORLD LANGUAGES

Research shows that foreign language acquisition helps students perform better in their native language, read earlier, and gain a deeper appreciation and respect for other cultures. At Breck, students begin in our World Languages program, studying Spanish and Chinese in preschool, then continuing their language study through Lower School.

Program highlights:

- Build vocabulary through singing, dancing, and conversation
- Develop confidence in speaking, reading, writing, and listening
- Apply skills in conversation, performance, and written form
- Learn about the cultures of Chinese- and Spanish-speaking countries

PERFORMING ARTS

Students' lives and creativity are enriched through the study of music, singing, listening, and movement. In Lower School, children explore music through the methodologies of Orff Schulwerk, Kodaly, and Dalcroze. We introduce music's universal quality as a common bond in our diverse culture.

Program highlights:

- Learn about melody, rhythm, and harmony
- Explore form, dynamics, and texture
- Understand timbre, tempo, and movement
- Participate in a band/orchestra rotation (Grade 4)
- Take on-campus private string, piano, percussion, or guitar lessons

MATHEMATICS

In Lower School, our early learners explore mathematical ideas through hands-on materials and best practices in early learning. We use the Singapore Math In Focus program from first through fourth grade. We develop problem-solving strategies, basic computational skills, the understanding of metrics and measurement, the introduction to algebraic thinking, and numerical exploration in data, patterns, and graphs.

Preschool-Kindergarten:

- Use number patterns and objects to learn number conservation
- Focus on counting, sorting, and classifying
- Develop problem-solving skills
- Develop number sense using concrete objects
- Explore basic operations and computational strategies

1st grade-4th grade:

- Develop conceptual and analytical thinking
- Use drawing, writing, and conversation to solve complex problems
- Build mental math skills and flexible thinking
- Use concrete, pictorial, and abstract problem-solving strategies
- Build number sense and computational skills

SCIENCE

Our 52-acre campus of wetlands, ponds, native prairie grasses, and wildlife is a living laboratory that we explore through year-long immersion in a broad topic. Through field study and research, students see themselves as scientists and develop an affinity for the discipline.

- Focus on observational and data collection skills
- Develop journal writing and experimentation
- Explore the Minnesota Zoo, the Science Museum, and Fort Snelling
- Collect and send data to professional institutions such as Cornell Lab of Ornithology
- Learn to investigate, question, and wonder
- Conduct inquiry and research
- Make predictions, develop hypotheses, and draw conclusions
- Use the environment as a natural science lab for discovery

TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION

Technology in Lower School includes our digital citizenship curriculum, keyboarding, robotics, and STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics). Students use technology to practice, create, innovate, and problem solve. Lower School faculty utilize an online application to document and share student work with families.

Preschool-1st grade:

- iPads are used for coding, skill reinforcement, and product creation

2nd-3rd grade:

- Content applications and presentation programs are explored
- Keyboard instruction begins
- Online research skills are developed

4th grade:

- 1:1 laptop program begins
- Students are assigned a Breck email address for classroom communication and work
- Computers are used daily for composition, research, blogging, and computational thinking

SOCIAL STUDIES

Our social studies curriculum develops an understanding of self and one's relationship to others and to the environment. Students study history, culture, geography, economics, government, and citizenship.

Students engage in classroom discussions, research, and project-based learning to deepen their knowledge of our community, state, country, and the world. Woven throughout course topics is identity development.

We use culturally responsive teaching to include all voices and give our students a deeper understanding of the world. Guest speakers and field trips are used as resources to expand our lessons and ideas beyond the school walls.

LIBRARY/MEDIA

Often described by students as one of their favorite places on campus, the Lower School library boasts more than 20,000 titles to foster a lifelong joy of reading. Whether students are searching for a secondary source online, listening to a great story, or finding their next read, their time is filled with new discoveries.

Students' experiences examples:

- Browse our collections
- Participate in book discussion and author studies
- Practice independent reading
- Research topics of interest
- Learn digital citizenship

BE BRECK.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Students develop cooperation, respect, personal confidence, and a healthy sense of well-being. The program focuses on individual skill development and lifelong fitness utilizing our three gyms, field house, pool, ice arena, track, and outdoor fields.

Activities:

- Aerobic fitness
- Ball handling
- Gymnastics
- Health and nutrition
- Ice skating
- Physiology
- Rhythms
- Soccer Skills
- Swimming
- Track

RELIGION

We study and celebrate many faiths and cultures to deepen our own concepts of spirituality and expand our understanding of others.

Religion exploration examples:

- Life stories and experiences
- Literature
- Religious traditions
- Social responsibility
- World religion

SOCIAL CURRICULUM/ CHARACTER EDUCATION

We teach, practice, and reinforce dimensions of character and belonging with our C.A.R.E. (Character Always, Respect Everyday) curriculum. We work to promote a respectful community and support children as they demonstrate responsibility, respect, friendship, kindness, and honesty.

Program highlights:

- Understanding self and others
- Friendship skills
- Mindfulness practice
- Bullying and conflict resolution
- Self-advocacy skills
- Use of Responsive Classroom to build community

Curriculum Overview (continued)

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

We believe it's important for children to see the impact they can have on the world—with one act of kindness, a generous heart, and a helping hand. Reflecting our mission of social responsibility, Lower School students learn to be civically engaged both on and off the Breck campus.

Activities and opportunities:

- Lunch Buddies: Where our older students serve and befriend younger students at lunch
- Local nursing home visits
- Feed My Starving Children
- Numerous community food, clothing, and book donation drives
- Student-led initiatives
- Philanthropy grants

STUDENT LEADERSHIP

In class, children have weekly responsibilities to practice leadership in various roles. Students have opportunities to demonstrate leadership beyond the classroom.

Leadership examples:

- Student Council
- Chapel Committee
- Sustainability Team
- Service Committee
- Admissions Ambassadors

CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Lower School students have the opportunity to participate in these year-long activities, which happen outside the daily curriculum.

Co-curricular examples:

- Mustang Club
- Chess Club
- Robotics
- B.A.S.E. (Breck After-School Experience)

PRESCHOOL

Imagination, collaboration, innovation. We offer a developmental play-focused program that enhances each child's academic, social, emotional, and cognitive skills.

We believe:

- Play-based learning builds focus, self-reliance and self-regulation
- Supportive family and classroom relationships foster healthy risk-taking and confidence

- Integrated learning that connects to students' unique passions can stretch and boost learning in class and beyond
- Collaboration, creativity, and a culture of respect empowers lasting learning and authentic connections
- Intentional teaching based on current developmental research engages the whole child
- Using nature as a second classroom helps reduce anxiety and builds confident and engaged learners



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