



SCHOOL YEAR 2022-23 · APRIL 2023

lowercase

The Newsletter of Potomac's Lower School

Building Everywhere and Any Time

BY DR. DONNETTE ECHOLS, LOWER SCHOOL HEAD

Many words come to mind when describing the youngest in the family. Almost always, these descriptions include the words "baby," "cute," or some synonym of either word. In the Lower School, we embrace our position within the Potomac community. Our students are the babies of the Potomac community, and yes, they are incredibly cute. When you examine them more closely, you will see that they are "not just cute."

Lower School students can acquire and construct knowledge independently and collectively, inside and outside school. They can think deeply about a variety of topics and share their thoughts publicly and succinctly. They are problem solvers, critical thinkers, writers, musical composers, artists, and so much more. They are kind. They are developing empathy and independence. They have made significant academic strides and demonstrate incredible resilience and flexibility. They are thriving. Lower School students have the potential to build knowledge and skills everywhere and at any time.

This *lowercase* edition will share some tricks of the trade so you can capitalize on teachable moments during the summer using wisdom from our special subject teachers who help shape our students' well-rounded educational experience. In the coming weeks, our homeroom teachers and specialists will also share some academic summer family fun.

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SCHEDULE

Next Year's Lower School Schedule Preview

BY DR. DONNETTE ECHOLS, LOWER SCHOOL HEAD

We are pleased to share that all four divisions will implement new and improved schedules for the 2023-24 school year. The start at 8:15 and end at 3:15 will remain the same, but what happens between these hours will elevate the student experience. We seized the opportunity to work with Independent School Management (ISM) and a 30+ year veteran in schedule design, Roxanne Higgins, to help us shape divisional schedules to ensure a student-centered approach.

Our priorities were:

- To balance academic excellence with health and wellness
- To create a steadier and more predictable pace throughout the days
- To provide opportunities for cross-divisional programming
- To ensure equitable access to the educational experience
- To provide time for faculty collaboration

One of the significant benefits of our new schedules is something called a "six-day rotation." Six days does not mean that students will attend school on Saturdays. A six-day rotation means that if Monday is day 1, the following Monday is day 6, then Tuesday is day 1. Every day will be predetermined before the school year starts, consistent across all four divisions, and remain unchanged regardless of canceled days, which brings predictability. This change will also prevent students from missing several days of an academic or special subject class because it is on Mondays or Fridays, which are the most frequently missed days. For example, this year, parent-teacher conferences were on Monday, April 24, so students who had science on Monday missed science. Next year, instead of missing class, science will be on Tuesday. These new schedules will support our institutional efforts to provide a more balanced, healthy, and equitable educational experience. Don't worry if this sounds complex now. You only need to get your students to school, and we will take care of the rest. Please look at a generic sample [Lower School Schedule](#) for 2023-24.

Summer Family Fun: Read, Read, Read

BY MICHELLE O'HARA, LOWER SCHOOL DEAN AND LIBRARIAN

There are so many things you can do over the summer to enhance children's development. Creating art, making music, tinkering with building materials, and unstructured play are all wonderful. Reading is another readily-available, free way to continue your child's academic and personal growth.

Here are our top five tips for connecting your child to books and stories this summer:

Tip #1 - Read to your kid(s). They are never too old for a read-aloud. Reading aloud to children increases their vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency skills. It also builds connections between children and caregivers while creating positive associations with reading. Share the joy of a story with them.



Tip #2 - Model being a reader. From birth, children are master mimics. They notice what you spend your downtime doing and they copy that. The more you read books, the more they will read books. Setting up a family read-in time can be a nice way to emphasize the practice for everyone. Whenever possible, we encourage students and parents to read from physical, paper-based books. We suggest you use your local public library to keep the reading options fresh.

Tip #3 - Discuss reading in a fun, relaxed way. In addition to summaries, ask open-ended questions that have no wrong

answers. For example, ask which scene is their favorite, which character they'd want to have a playdate with and why, what they would do differently from a given character, etc.

Tip #4 - Listen to audiobooks together during long car rides, dinner prep, or lazy afternoons. These can be checked out from your local libraries too.

And... perhaps most importantly,

Tip #5 - Do NOT judge children's reading choices. Research tells us that all reading counts - magazines, newspapers, cookbooks, graphic novels, comics, video game manuals, etc. If they want to read it, then you should support it. As a parent, your main focus should be cultivating a LOVE of reading. Sometimes this means

having to force yourself to smile past gritted teeth while your child reads *The Complete Pokemon Players Guide* for the billionth time. It also means letting them abandon a story that they are not connecting with and try something else. Remind yourself, "If they love reading, they will read more. If they read more, they will choose another book - eventually." If it helps, trust that teachers will make sure they read the "important" works of literature someday. Parents get the fun job of encouraging reading for joy. So, especially during summer, enjoy it!

Summer Family Fun: Making, Tinkering, and Building

BY DIANA MACKENZIE, LOWER SCHOOL ART TEACHER

Reggio Emilia educator Carlina Rinaldi wrote, “*All children are intelligent, different from each other, and unpredictable. If we know how to listen to them, children can give back to us the pleasure of amazement, of marvel, of doubt...the pleasure of “why.”*” Independent artmaking at home is a great daily activity for children to discover “the why” and can go a long way in expanding your child’s creative thinking skills and growth mindset this summer.

If your child only sometimes gravitates towards artmaking on their own, try including them in creating their own new space or tidying up an existing one, where they will engage in open-ended creative work: making, building, and tinkering. It could be the kitchen table, a desk in their bedroom, or a picnic table in the backyard. Have your child help to organize the materials and tools already in your home for artmaking, so they can access them independently and put them away easily.



Below, I recommend some materials to include in your artmaking space for maximum independent work. Find the materials that fit your family the best, or create your own must-have list!

A variety of drawing tools and papers, in addition to the beloved magic markers and white printer paper, will create more buy-in and exploration from your child: graphite pencils, chalk, charcoal, oil pastels, tempera paint sticks, ballpoint pens, cardstock, paper on a roll, watercolor paper, and textured or handmade papers. Recyclables are a great free option for sculpture and collage, like empty cereal boxes, cracker boxes, egg crates, shoe boxes, paper towel tubes, newspapers, old magazines, brown paper bags, and aluminum foil. Don’t forget the sticky things to help connect everything: glue sticks, liquid glue, masking tape, and Scotch tapes are great independent options. Super glue and staplers are better heavy-duty options that could be used with adult supervision.

Summer Family Fun: Making, Tinkering, and Building (Cont'd)

BY DIANA MACKENZIE, LOWER SCHOOL ART TEACHER



In addition to independent artmaking, creating as a family is an excellent way for children to practice teamwork and low-stakes risk-taking. Search YouTube for free tutorials for activities or look for the outstanding series of children's craft books published by Quarry Books, like papier-mâché sculptures, handmade papermaking, making your own sketchbooks, printmaking and stamping, ceramics, and fiber arts like sewing, knitting, and weaving.

Consider the occasional day trip to one of the area's many artistic sites to inspire your family's creative buzz at home. The museums and sculpture garden on the National Mall are excellent and free spaces to view world-renown works of art. Additionally, I have compiled a list of several more places that will spark your family's creativity this summer.

Admire one of the groundbreaking contemporary artworks at the new [Rubell Museum DC](#) and explore the nine exhibition spaces at the [Museum of Contemporary Art Arlington](#). Tour the

exhibit [At the Beach](#) in the Torpedo Factory in Alexandria, and admire the stellar collection at America's first museum of modern and contemporary art, [The Phillips Collection](#). While the National Museum of Women in the Arts is closed for renovations, check out their many online exhibitions, including [The Book As Art](#) and [DMV Color](#). Reserve a table for in-person artmaking at [The Reach's Moonshot Studio](#) or visit their online collection of [Moonshot@Home](#) digital art activities. If your little ones are six or older, join the DC Public Library's [Fab Lab](#) arts program. Walk the expansive grounds of [the Glenstone Museum](#) in Potomac, MD, and try to spot all of their 200+ outdoor sculptures. Wrap up the summer with a picnic at the Arts Show in [Glen Echo Park](#) on Labor Day weekend.

Wishing you and your family a summer of endless artistic possibilities and discoveries!



Summer Family Fun: A Family That Plays Together

BY CAROL HILDERBRAND, PE DEPARTMENT CHAIR

If you want to feel like a “rock star,” teach physical education (PE) at The Potomac School. Each day our team of PE teachers arrives at Lower School classrooms to pick up our students and escort them to PE. As Lower School students race to line up, the energy in the room is palpable, with children simultaneously rattling off a variety of questions and comments. What are we doing today? Are we outside? Can we play that game we did yesterday? Are we running on the track? Do you like my new sneakers? I love PE! I wish we had it every day. When children come to PE excited and happy to move, learn, and exercise their bodies and minds, we know our program is achieving its curricular goals. Our Lower School PE program aims to provide an environment where students can develop confidence in their physical selves. A primary goal of the program is for students to develop a range of fundamental motor skills through lessons that are age-appropriate in a safe atmosphere of trust and enjoyment. This environment encourages our students to persevere, take risks, and appreciate the importance of practice to develop skills, self-confidence, and fitness.

Physical education has always been about teaching children within the three educational domains: psychomotor, cognitive, and affective. Our lessons in PE address aspects of these three areas. The psychomotor domain pertains to the physical skills we teach in our various units, such as throwing, catching, kicking, or striking. The cognitive or mental skills have to do with the knowledge of how to perform the movement and understand movement concepts, game rules, and strategies. Affective learning involves feelings of self-confidence, relating to others, and exhibiting socially-acceptable behavior that respects oneself and others.

As our lessons focus on the development of age-appropriate gross motor skills in an environment that is safe, nurturing, and inclusive, there is also much more:

- We encourage children to pursue a healthy lifestyle by focusing on fun fitness pursuits and exercises in our lessons throughout the school year.
- Cooperation, teamwork, and sportsmanship are discussed, encouraged, and modeled in our class activities.
- Lessons are designed so students feel safe to take risks, try new skills, and appreciate practice to achieve progress.
- Respect, acceptance, and appreciation of varied skill levels and interests, amongst others, are discussed and encouraged in our lessons.

A great way to instill these values in your children at home is by promoting a healthy attitude toward physical activities and making movement fun!

Here are some suggestions from our PE team:

- Make it a family affair. Pack a healthy snack or lunch and take a nature hike or bicycle ride. There are many beautiful parks and trails in our neighborhoods that would make for a wonderful outing.
- Play a sport or activity together as a family, but instead of competing for the winning score, combine your points. For example, while shooting hoops, how many can the family score together? OR how many catches can you and your child make in a row from various distances apart, or how many steps can you walk together in 20 minutes.
- Schedule family playtime. Perhaps after dinner, play a game of tag, go for a walk/hike/bike ride, try bowling or miniature golf, bocci ball, or pickleball. Have a family talent show and showcase each person’s talent. Parents and children share their unique skills with each other. Talents could include: Jumping rope (how many jumps can you do in 2 minutes) or jump rope tricks, hula hooping, creating dance moves, ball tricks (dribbling basketballs), balancing on one foot, or juggling soccer balls.
- Create your own at home workout circuit. Share ideas for creating exercises or movement challenges that the family can do together, such as jumping jacks, yoga poses, planks, curl ups, short sprints, and squats. You don’t need to buy equipment just be creative with things around your house.



Summer Family Fun: Sing, Say, Dance, Create, and Play!

BY TARA CLAYBURN, LOWER SCHOOL MUSIC/CHORUS TEACHER

Music is an integral part of life and education - for the connection to the spirit, intellectual challenge, and sheer enjoyment. As you might already know, the Lower School Music Program is built upon the Orff-Schulwerk approach, where the students' play is the foundation for combining speech, song, drama, movement, and instrumental play to engage them with the elements of music.

Learning and participating in music and music activities enhances:

Reading Skills

Research suggests that reading song lyrics and musical speech (poetry, rhymes, etc.) improves a child's ability to read fluently.

Brain Development

Neurologists believe that early rhythmic experiences support brain development. According to research, participation in music causes the cerebral cortex in the brain to increase in size. (Magsamen and Ross, *Your Brain on Art: How the Arts Transform Us*)

Music education and participation in music also build skills in creativity, communication, critical thinking, collaboration, confidence, courage, cultural awareness, community, and becoming capable and caring citizens.



Here are some things you can do at home this summer to increase your child's musical skills:

- Sing along together as a family with your favorite songs!
- Sing songs to help build routines at bedtimes, bath-time, and for cleaning up.
- Move or dance to music together!
- Play instruments together or make your own out of found items.
- Attend outdoor concerts in our area!

Websites to Explore:

- [Dallas Symphony Orchestra - Kids](#)
- [San Francisco Symphony Orchestra - Kids](#)
- [Chrome Music Lab](#)



Summer Family Fun: Tech and Innovation

BY BETH BRUNDAGE, K-4 ACADEMIC TECHNOLOGIST

The goal of the Lower School Technology and Innovation program is to equip students with a solid foundation in proficient and responsible technology usage; however, the real essence of the program lies in the process of achieving this goal. Students share and explore novel ideas through a project-based curriculum, enhancing their creative thinking and problem-solving skills. Collaborative projects help to reinforce the importance of being a good teammate and allow students to sharpen their communication skills.

Whether the students' project work requires using a device or taking them off-screen, the technology and innovation program emphasizes the importance of active usage, encouraging students to be proactive learners and creators rather than passive participants. Summer is quickly approaching, and many of our Potomac families may be looking for fun tech projects to keep the active engagement rolling. Here are a few ideas inspired by some of the student's favorite activities this school year.

Engineering Explorations:

- Check out the [Instructables](#) website for some project ideas to satisfy the builders and crafters in your household.
- The official [Rube Goldberg](#) website is another excellent resource for your young engineers. Be sure to check out some of [these videos](#) for inspiration.

Content Creation:

- Any simple voice recording app can turn your student into a professional podcaster. Encourage your young journalists to create a list of guests, from stuffed animals to family members, to interview on their podcasts. They can also prepare for each episode by making a list of questions to ask their guests.
- Students can use iMovie, or any other video editing tool, to create their own movies, instructional videos, or music videos. Many of our third graders also had a great time creating stop motion films this year, and there are many apps, such as [Stop Motion Studio](#) (free) or [iStopMotion](#) (paid), that can help students create some amazing animations.

"Play is one of the keys to giving our children the skills and habits of mind they need to succeed--skills like creativity, innovation, teamwork, focus, resilience, expressiveness, empathy, concentration, and executive function, to name a just a few."

PASI SAHLBERG AND WILLIAM DOYLE



Announcements, Events, and Updates

BY JOANNA HUANG, ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT TO THE HEAD OF LOWER SCHOOL

May 2023

Kindergarteners' Chicks

Kindergartners kicked off a special unit on the life cycle of chicks. This multi-subject unit will focus on the life cycle of chicks and their basic needs, as well as how we can learn to be stewards of our environment and good partners within our community. At the end of March, farmer Sharon Rabie visited our kindergarten classes. She spoke to students and brought a set of soon-to-hatch eggs that fit perfectly in our classroom incubators. Many eggs hatched this past week, allowing students to see first-hand how a newborn animal acts and develops through the first few days of its life. The students will be responsible for assisting with naming, feeding, and caring for our chicks over the next two weeks and writing about their observations and experiences with the chicks. The unit will culminate with a May 1 field trip to Hard Bargain Farm, during which our kindergarteners will return the chicks to the farm.

LS New Parent Orientation

If you have a child who will be new to Lower School in the fall, please join us for a new parent orientation on Tuesday, May 2, at 9:00 am, in Ramsey. An invitation has been sent. Please remember that although you might have a long acquaintance with Potomac, we would love to help your incoming child transition to the Lower School. Please meet other parents, faculty, and staff, and learn about special plans for the fall. At a later date in May, we hope you and your family will join us for the New Family Ice Cream Social. We look forward to seeing you!

LS Math Event

LS Family Math Event is a program designed for parents to nurture their children's love of math through engaging activities. Families will have the opportunity to do math problems together, learn to spot mathematics in various literature, and have some friendly competition on Tuesday, May 2, from 3:30 to 5:00 pm, in Ramsey Assembly.

Sharing Assembly

Friday, May 5, our Sharing Assembly will feature Mr. Gustavson's and Ms. McIntire's first-grade class, Mrs. Hoffmann's second-grade class, and Ms. Passano's third-grade class.

Grills and Games

Join the fun on campus at our Grills and Games celebration on Friday, May 5, from 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm. This is an excellent opportunity for Potomac families to cheer for our Panther athletes and come together as a community. There will be delicious food hot off the grills, yummy frozen treats, face painting, and plenty of fun and friendship. From 3:30 pm to 4:00 pm, families can either enjoy time together or go for a pre-game cheer and chat with our teams in Ramsey Assembly.

Announcements, Events, and Updates (cont'd)

BY JOANNA HUANG, ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT TO THE HEAD OF LOWER SCHOOL

May 2023 - cont'd

Sandwich Day - Wednesday, May 10, JHK

Our beloved tradition is a part of our Service Learning community partner - Martha's Table and Cornerstones as our students learn how they can support our community members dealing with food insecurity.

Grandparents and Special Friends Day

We welcome Grandparents & Special Friends to campus on Friday, May 12! Our special guests will be invited to gather in the Preston Gym for coffee and remarks and then will have the opportunity to conduct classroom visits. Please [click here](#) to register. We are excited to see you soon! Please join us on Friday, May 12, from 11:00 to 11:30 am, in Ramsey for our LS Grandparents Day Assembly.

Kindergarten Circus is Coming to Town!

Please join us on Thursday, May 25, for our Kindergarten Circus at 11:00 am, in Preston Gym! Clowns, bodybuilders, wild animals, and acrobats are just a few of the performers scheduled to entertain Lower Schoolers. The Circus will be followed by a cast party for kindergartners and their guests. In the spirit of community, we ask that families refrain from saving seats for guests who will arrive later. This event will be livestreamed for those who are unable to attend in-person.

June 2023

Grade 3 Fifty Nifty Assembly

Our Sharing Assembly on Friday, June 2, will serve as the Lower School send-off for our third graders. As part of their 50-states research, students are selecting their states and gathering research. They will also present their famous "Fifty Nifty" song, wearing the hats they created to represent America's 50 states.

Field Day

This year's Lower School Field Day will be held on the morning of Tuesday, June 6, students will be participating in popular activities such as wacky relays and an obstacle course. This favorite end-of-the-year event will have activities on the Turf Field and in the Chester Gym. If it should rain, we will take all the fun inside to our gyms. One or two parent volunteers from each homeroom class will be needed to help. Volunteers will be coordinated by homeroom representatives. Please make sure your child has a water bottle with his/her name on it. Sunscreen should be applied before coming to school. A hat or visor is optional. Parents are invited to watch the fun!