

Specials and Elective Offerings in K-8

Planning Commission Study - January 2026

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Objective:

The Madeira Planning Commission Specials and Electives Offerings Committee was asked to look at the current offerings of specials and electives in grades K-8 at Madeira Elementary School and Madeira Middle School and compare them to offerings at other area schools. We are looking to answer the question: are there ways we can improve our structure and staffing utilization to make the most of our elective offerings in grades K-8?

Research behind the importance of specials and electives:

1. Educating the Whole Child

- Specials classes support cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development.
- Research consistently shows that students learn best when their education is balanced, not limited to tested subjects alone.
- Art, music, and physical education complement core academics by strengthening skills that transfer directly to classroom learning.

2. Academic & Cognitive Benefits

- **Music education** improves memory, language development, and mathematical reasoning.
- **Art education** strengthens creativity, problem-solving, and critical thinking—skills essential for 21st-century learning.
- **Physical activity** improves focus, attention, and on-task behavior, leading to better academic outcomes across subjects.

3. Physical Health & Wellness

- Physical education builds foundational motor skills and promotes lifelong healthy habits.
- Regular movement reduces stress, improves mental health, and supports student well-being.
- Healthy students are more engaged and better prepared to learn

4. Social-Emotional Learning & School Climate

- Specials classes teach teamwork, collaboration, perseverance, and self-discipline.
- They provide positive outlets for self-expression and emotional regulation.
- Students who may struggle in traditional academic settings often experience success and confidence in specials, improving overall school engagement.

5. Equity & Access

- For many students, school is the only place they have access to art supplies, instruments, and structured physical activity.
- Specials ensure equitable access to enrichment opportunities regardless of family income or background.
- These programs help identify talents and interests that can shape future academic and career pathways.

6. Engagement, Behavior, and Attendance

- A well-rounded schedule reduces burnout and behavior issues.
- Students are more motivated and connected to school when learning includes creativity and movement.
- Schools with strong specials programs often report higher student engagement and improved school culture.

7. Long-Term Impact

- Skills developed in art, music, and PE—discipline, practice, collaboration, resilience—prepare students for success beyond school.
- Employers and higher education institutions consistently value creativity, teamwork, and problem-solving.
- Investing in specials is an investment in well-rounded, capable, and healthy citizens.

Process:

- Website research
- Connecting with administrators/educators within Madeira
- Connecting with administrators/educators and at neighboring schools
- Develop and administer student surveys

Current Madeira Offerings:

Madeira Elementary: 852 Students & 7 full-time Specials Teachers plus 2 band & 1 choir teacher in 5th grade for one 50-minute period a day.

Madeira Middle School: 405 Students & 4 full Specials Teachers & shared: 1 gym, 2 band and 1 choir.

Grade(s)	Specials	Class Duration	Frequency	How Long?
K All Day Only	Unified Arts teacher devotes one day each to Technology, Art, Music and PE. She is allotted 5 minutes in the Library for each class.	35 min.	1 day/wk	All year
1-4	PE, Art, Music, STEAM, Media/Makerspace, Computer	50 min.	Every 6th Day	All year
5	Books & Bytes, Art, PE, STEAM	50 min.	2 days/wk	1 quarter
	Band, Choir	50 min.	3 days/wk	All year
6	Band, Choir, Digital Art, Magic of Electrons, Team Sports	45 min.	2-3 days/wk	All year
	Art, Tech Skills, Design & Modeling, Wellness	45 min.	5 days/wk	1 quarter
7	Band, Choir, Flight & Space, Music Media, Communication, Team Sports 2, Digital Art 2	45 min.	2-3 days/wk	All year
	Art Tech Application Fitness Medical Detectives	45 min.	5 days/wk	1 quarter
8	Health, Choir, Band	45 min.	3 days/wk	All year
	PE, Team Sports II, Digital Art 8, Flight & Space, Coding 8, Study Hall	45 min.	2 days/wk	1 or 2 semesters
	World Language (Spanish, Latin, or French)	45 min.	5 days/wk	All year

Results from Grade Level Surveys at MES and MMS:

Student Survey Questions:

1. Which specials/encore classes are you taking?
2. Do you wish you had more choice in your specials or electives?
3. What is your favorite special? Why?
4. What special/elective do you wish you could have?
5. If a foreign language was offered during school, would you be interested?

Student Choice in Specials

- Each grade level voted that they would like to have more choice in the special that they go to.
- 3-5: Across the survey's (370 total responses) approximately 83% of students said they wish they had more of a say in which specials class they attend, while 17% said they did not.
- 6-8: Across the survey's (291 total responses) 76.6% of students said they wish they had more of a say in which specials class they attend, while 23.4% said they did not.

Grade	Responses	Favorite Specials (top 3)	What They Would Like to See Added (bolded answers were the most repeated)
3-4	241	P.E. 62.5% Library 15.4% Music 8.3%	Dance , Robotics, Foreign Language , Theater, Cooking/Baking , Swim, Paleontology, Sports, Running, Sign Language , Nature, Pottery/Arts/Crafts, 3D Printing, Coding , Building, Yoga, Bowling, Creative Writing, Acting
5th	129	P.E. 62% Choir 10.9% Band 8.5%	Cooking/Baking , Sports, Book Club, Foreign Language , Gaming, Wellness, Knitting/Weaving/Sewing, Swim, Gymnastics. Yoga/Stretching, Nature, Puzzles, 3D Printing, Theater, Dance , Lego Robotics, Parkour, Fitness, Stained Glass, Spanish , Gardening/Farming
6th	89	Team Sports 43.8% Design & Modeling 36% Magic Electrons 22.5%	Gymnastics, Cooking/Baking , Gaming Design, Coding, Nature, Study Hall, Photography, Culture, Kindness, Pottery, Woodworking, Dance , Library/Free Reading, Engineering, Fishing, Marine Biology, Inventions, Gaming, Life Skills , Cosmetology, Swim, Finance, Gardening
7th	133	Team Sports 39.8% Flight & Space 28.6% Art 12.8%	Animation, Cooking/Baking , Woodworking, Foreign Language, Engineering, Pottery, Sewing, Animal Study, Entrepreneurship , Debate, Theater, Cosmetology, Film, Study Hall, Life Skills, Dance, Government, Architecture, Finance , Fitness, Free Reading, Pottery, Sewing, Origami, Building, Yoga/Stretching, Painting, Nature , 3D Art

8th	69	Team Sports 2 25.8% Art 24.2% Flight & Space 21%	Cooking/Baking , Nature, Automotive, Computer, Science, Photography , STEM , Sign Language, Orchestra, Bowling, Structures/Engineering, Painting, Book Club, Study Hall , Geography Running, Sewing, CPR, Creative Writing, Public Speaking
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Gathering Information from Neighboring Schools:

Questions for Other Schools:

1. What specials do you offer K-8? What is the frequency?
2. Does each specials/elective teacher have a degree in that special area?
3. Does each special teacher have their own space?
4. When does foreign language start?
5. What does your technology curriculum look like? Is there a separate course/special?
6. Do students travel in homerooms or mixed groups for electives?

Mariemont Schools

Mariemont Elementary School K-6: 520 Students

10 Specials Teachers, some shared

2 - Art (1 of them shared with Junior High)

1 - Gym

1 - Library

1 - STEM (shared with Terrace Park)

1 - Spanish (shared with Terrace Park, Junior High)

2 - Chorus/General Music (1 of them shared with Terrace Park)

1 - Band (shared with Terrace Park, Junior High, High School)

1 - Orchestra (shared with Terrace Park, Junior High, High School)

Grade(s)	Specials	Duration/Frequency
K-2	Music, Art, Library, PE	Kindergarten PE - 2x/week 1st Grade Music - 2x/week 2nd Grade Art - 2x/ week
3-5	Music, Art, Library, PE, STEM, Spanish	Music, Art, Library, PE - All year STEM, Spanish - one semester
6	Music, Art, PE, STEM, Spanish	Music - 2x/week 1 semester each of the other 4 specials Each class gets a 3rd quarter of the 4 specials on a rotating basis.
5-6	Explorations	3-4x/week, 4 weeks/year

Notes: Specials teachers have specialized degrees. Each special currently has a designated space. Spanish is offered beginning in 3rd grade. Technology is taught as a part of the STEM curriculum. Grades K-5 travel in homerooms. Sixth grade travels with homerooms, with the exception of Music on those days. 7th and 8th graders choose their electives.

Mariemont Middle School

7	<u>Students Select 1</u> : Chorus, Band, Orchestra AND Latin, Spanish <u>Elective Courses (selects 2)</u> : Studio Art, Digital Art, STEM, Lifetime Fitness, Modern Communications, Cultural Intelligence	50-55 minutes daily
8	Year Long Optional (selects 1): Chorus, Orchestra, Band, Latin, Spanish, Digital Art 1 & 2, Coding, STEM, Draw Paint and Print, 3D Sculptures, Fiber Arts, Creative Productions, MJHS News Weekly, Design and Animation, Yearbook, Medical Detectives, Flight and Space, Design and Modeling, Warriors Give Back	50-55 minutes daily

Notes: Specials teachers are certified to teach their content areas. Great Oaks Project Lead is also utilized. Teachers at the elementary school have their own spaces. MJHS shared spaces. Spanish begins in 3rd grade. Technology is taught specifically when iPads are sent home in 5th grade in STEM and Modern Communication. 2-3 weeks are spent on digital citizenship. A course is currently being designed around the topics of AI basics, ethics, tools and strategies.

Indian Hill Schools

- **Indian Hill Primary: K-2 and Indian Hill Elementary: 3-5**
 - **IHPS 504 Students (6 specials teachers)**
 - **IHES 547 Students (6 specials teachers)**

Grade(s)	Specials	Duration/Frequency
K-2	Play Studio, PE, Spanish, Art, Library, Music	K= 30 min 1= 40 min. 1 day, 80 min next (avg 60 min/day) 2= 40 min 1 day, 80 min next (avg 60 min/day) 4-day rotation (some days classes have two specials)
3-4	PE, Spanish, Music, Library, Art, iLab (STEM)	50 minutes 2-week rotation. Students go to the same special every day for 2 weeks. Students travel with their homeroom.
5	PE, Spanish, Band/Orchestra, Library, Art, iLab (STEM)	50 minutes 2-week rotation. Students go to the same special every day for 2 weeks. Students are mixed and travel with instrument groups.

Notes: Each elective teacher is a certified teacher with a degree in their content area, with the exception of Play Studio. All specials have their own space with the exception of Spanish at the Primary School. Spanish begins in Kindergarten. Students have additional options of Latin and

French in 6th grade. The technology curriculum is covered in class, except for digital citizenship and Code.org, which are covered in the library or iLab.

Indian Hill Middle School

Grade	Specials/Duration	Duration/Frequency
6	Semester: Art, PE, Learning Lab All Year: Band, Choir, Orchestra, AND French, Latin, Spanish	45 min three times a day
7	Semester: Health (required) Art 2D 3D Design, Studio Art, Intro to Digital Media, Design & Modeling, Intro to Python, All year: Band, Choir, Treble Choir, Orchestra, French, Latin, Spanish	45 min three times a day
8	Semester: Cartooning & Design, Painting & Drawing, Ceramics & Mixed Media, Digital Art & Photography, Launch, Media Production II, Comp Science Discoveries, Medical Detectives, Automation & Robotics, PE, Intro to Python, Learning Lab All year: Band, Choir, Treble Choir, Orchestra, Required: French, Latin, Spanish	45 min three times a day

Notes: Students are required to participate in one semester of PE during their 6-8 grade years. Discovery is an elective offered in 6-8 for students who score in the 98th percentile and above. Students focus on critical thinking, creative thinking, problem solving, and independent learning. Learning Lab is offered by the semester to grades 6-8 based on teacher recommendations.

Wyoming Schools

- **Wyoming Elementary Schools: (8 full time specials teachers, 3 full-time library aides)**
 - **Elm: 194 Students**
 - **Hilltop: 274 Students**
 - **Vermont: 209 Students**
- **Wyoming Middle School 5-8: 623 Students**

Grade	Specials	Duration/Frequency
K-4	Art, Music, PE, Library, Spanish (1-4)	55 minutes per day
5	Art, Music, PE, Spanish	40 minutes 2x a day
6	Required for all students: Spanish, PE Required for all students (selects one): Band, Strings, Choir Electives: Art, Cowboy Bell (Science STEM)	40 minutes 2x a day
7	Elective Courses: Art, Advanced Art, Band, Strings, Choir, General Music, PE, French, Latin, Spanish, Health & Foundations	40 minutes 2x a day
8	Required for all students: Health Electives: Art, Advanced Art, Band, Strings, Choir, General Music, PE, French, Latin, Spanish, World Cultures, Health & Foundations	40 minutes 2x a day

Notes: Specials teachers are certified in their area, with the exception of the Library at the Primary School. All specials have their own space at the MS, but some Primary School teachers are on a cart while new buildings are being built. They also provide what we call SST or Student Support Time during which they provide direct instruction in reading and math to students with Tier 2+ needs. Spanish begins in 1st grade. French and Latin are introduced as an option in 7th-8th grade, with an option for HS credit. 1-5 students travel in their homerooms. Older grades are according to choice.

Sycamore Schools

4 Elementary Schools K-4: Each school has 5 specials teachers

- **Blue Ash: 640 Students**
- **Maple Dale: 573 Students**
- **Montgomery: 539 Students**
- **Symmes: 653 Students**

Grade	Specials	Duration/Frequency
K-4	Gym, Music, Media (Library), Art, or STEAM	5-day rotation, 50 minutes/day
5-6	Band/Choir/Orchestra - 3x/week General music - 1x/week PE - every other day Art/Multimedia Multimedia - 3D printing, CANVA, web design 6 th grade - Advanced Art STEAM FLIGHT (Study skills, Organizational skills, Social/emotional learning, Character/leadership building)	2 specials every other day for the year for 48 minutes. Ex. Gym, Art on Monday, STEAM, Music on Tuesday, then repeat on Wednesday and Thursday
7-8	Choir/Band/Orchestra	All year
	Foreign Language (Spanish, French, Latin), Music, PE, Art	One semester

Notes: Specials teachers are certified in their area, with the exception of STEAM and FLIGHT. All specials have their own space. Foreign language begins, as an option, in 7th grade. Technology is taught in Art/Multimedia. Students travel in their homerooms.

Loveland

Grade(s)	Specials
K-5	PE, Art, Music
6	Band, Orchestra, Chorus
7	Applied Digital Skills, Tiger 101 (life skills, Google Suite and Gmail, Leadership, communication, time management, executive functioning, organization, study skills & problem-solving, college and career readiness, financial literacy), Band, Choir, Orchestra, Art, Computer Science for Innovators and Makers, Design and Modeling (CAD, 3D printing, engineering, wood shop, architecture), Hope Squad, Innovation Lab (hands-on study of technology integration), Intro to World Languages, Loveland Middle School News Network, Puzzle Masters, Project-Based Myths and Legends, Science: Fact or Fiction
8	Spanish, German, French, Health, Band, Choir, Orchestra, Art, Automation and Robotics, Computer Science Foundations, Exercise Science and Nutrition, PE, Hope Squad, Innovation Lab, Loveland Middle School News Network, Medical Detectives, Project-Based Science

Notes: Art, Music, PE, and Technology are certified in their subject area. Specials have their own areas. Intro to World Languages is offered in 7th grade. Spanish, German, and French start in 8th grade for high school credit. Technology is integrated into K-4 classrooms. 7th graders take Applied Digital Skills, Computer Science for Innovators and Makers, Design and Modeling, and Innovation Lab. 8th graders can take Computer Science Foundations, Automation and Robotics, and Innovation Lab

Seven Hills Primary School K-5 and Middle School 6-8

Grade(s)	Specials
K	Spanish, PE, Visual Arts, Drama, Music
1-5	Spanish, PE, Visual Arts, Drama, Music
6	Spanish, Latin, French, Music, Chorus, Instrumental Ensemble (winds, brass), Theater, Art, Physical Ed/Health
7	Chinese, Latin, Spanish, French, General Music, Chorus, Instrumental Ensemble, Theater, Art, Physical Ed/Health
8	Chinese, Latin, Spanish, French, General music, Chorus, Instrumental Ensemble, Theater, Art, Tech Art, Physical Ed/Health

Note: In 6th and 7th grades, students participate in all three disciplines: music, theater, & visual art. In grade eight, students choose one or two of these disciplines to study further.

Summary from neighboring schools:

Many of the schools we interviewed introduced foreign languages before 8th grade. Five out of the seven schools we interviewed have Spanish in elementary grades. None of the schools interviewed has a Computer special in the younger grades. They have integrated it into other specials or the classroom curriculum. All Kindergarten students attend music as a special class. Many schools have some specials 2 or 3 times a week. Specials teachers to student ratio is lower at neighboring schools.

Madeira's Strengths

Madeira City Schools has placed great significance on specials. Based on the 2024-25 MCS Parent survey, parents were satisfied with the specials and clubs that MES and MMS provide. Additionally, Madeira Specials teachers are highly qualified, engaging, and dedicated. 7th and 8th-grade specials have evolved, and new electives were recently adopted by MMS. There are 8 specials teachers for 405 students. The specials teacher-student ratio improved when the fifth grade was moved to MES. MES continues to adapt to growing class sizes and the addition of fifth grade.

Madeira's Challenges

Half-day kindergarteners do not currently have any specials. All-Day Kindergarteners have a block of time each day, but it is up to the discretion of the Unified Arts teacher. This schedule prevents Kindergarten teachers from having a common planning time. In addition, a Kindergarten Musical has been eliminated from the district calendar. Grades 1-5 Specials teachers only see 1st to 4th grade students once every 6 days and see approximately 700 students in a 6-day rotation. The teacher-to-student ratio is high, making it harder to form strong teacher-to-student bonds. Madeira students are being introduced to Spanish much later than neighboring schools, with it not being a required course until 9th grade. There has been a decrease in interest in middle school coding.

Recommendations

- Form a team of administrators and teachers to review this study and its implications for each building. This committee could recommend changes and decide the best ways to phase them in.
- Gather input from specials staff and look at the scheduling challenges as a team.
- Provide more certified staff to help the K-5 specials teachers who are over capacity.
- Rework Kindergarten specials
 - Allow them to have specials with certified specialists
 - Create a common planning period for Kindergarten teachers.
- Add Spanish beginning in grades 7-8th, possibly earlier
 - Evaluate the importance of technology vs. Spanish in grades K-5.
- Group specials models (K-2, 3-5, 6-8)
- MMS - Create an alternative technology specials elective to replace coding.
- Create an opportunity for students in 1-5 to go to Art and Music twice weekly