

# Breck



## OE - Outdoor Education

The **Breck Middle School Outdoor Education Program** is a place-based, uniquely Minnesotan experience aligned with the Breck mission and core values. Students learn by practicing physical wellness, recreating outdoors, and serving as stewards of the environment. Throughout Middle School, students engage in a variety of outdoor activities—such as archery, orienteering, canoeing, and Nordic skiing—to face challenges both independently and as part of a team.



## A UNIQUE WELLNESS BLOCK

Our unique Wellness Block offers four Outdoor Education rotations a year—one for each Minnesota season. Lasting about five classes each, these rotations allow students to regularly revisit skills throughout Middle School. This intentional repetition gives them the space to experiment, reflect, and grow in confidence, excellence, and self-knowledge. The Middle School competencies are deeply intertwined throughout each rotation, empowering students to become active meaning-makers who can seamlessly transfer their outdoor experiences into lifelong growth. This approach makes wellness a natural, everyday part of how they live and learn.

## MS COMPETENCIES IN ACTION



# FIELD NOTES



## SUMMER

Students explore our campus natural resources, steward our school forest, fish our pond, and consider archery as both a sport and traditional means of harvesting food.

## FALL

Students use creativity and critical thinking to develop foundational outdoor skills in a collaborative environment.

## WINTER

Students develop the confidence to not just survive but thrive outdoors in MN's toughest season through a variety of winter sports and activities.

## SPRING

Canoeing provides a culminating experience of learning technical skills, effective communication, collaboration, and reflecting on personal leadership.

## A CASE STUDY OF STEWARDSHIP

In 6th grade, environmental stewardship comes to life. Students restore Breck's School Forest by removing invasive buckthorn, then whittle that same wood into fishing rods to use at the Breck Pond. This hands-on experience anchors our focus competency of citizenship, teaching students how their personal actions actively serve the greater good.



Identifying and *busting* buckthorn



Fishing in Breck Pond with buckthorn poles

## WHAT IS OE?



Outdoor education can be many things. It is therapy and medicine to the anxious mind. It is observation and critical thinking to the scientist. It is physical well-being to the athlete. It is adventure to the explorer. It is retreat and reflection to the team. It is meaning and purpose to the steward.

- Forrest Theisen - Outdoor Education Teacher

# Breck



# Breck

## Lower School Without Walls

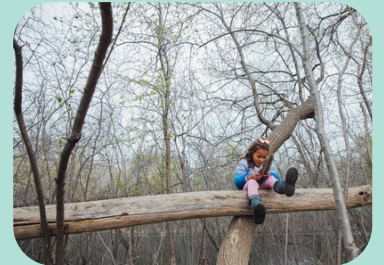
By removing the physical walls, we allow our students to develop a sense of wonder, resilience, and a lifelong connection to the environment. "Lower School Without Walls" is the next evolution of the Breck Lower School experience.

## Early Childhood - Our Foundation

Our gold-standard Preschool model immerses students outdoors for 40% of the day, utilizing an emergent curriculum fueled by their natural curiosity. **Lower School Without Walls** is a mission-grounded blueprint for a rigorous integration of Science, Social Studies, and Wellness that uses nature as a living laboratory for growth.

### ***FIELD NOTES***

When the snow melted this spring, preschoolers were bothered by the amount of trash that became uncovered. They spent days collecting trash from the ponds and woods, which led to a month-long inquiry into art and artists that incorporate trash/recyclables.



## Strategic Alignment & Curriculum

### THE COMPETENT CHILD:

By shifting the teacher's role from "instructor" to "co-researcher," we trust children to navigate challenges and assess risks. This intentional approach fosters deep self-knowledge and the confidence to lead.

### EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING:

By teaching Science and Humanities through direct interaction with the environment, we make abstract concepts tangible - sparking a deep, lifelong intellectual curiosity.

### EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE AND JOY:

We harness nature to build grit and calm focus, fostering well-being. Through shared outdoor experiences, we spark engagement and social responsibility, preparing students to lead with resilience and purpose.

# FIELD NOTES

By grounding literacy and science in the physical world, we ensure that every outdoor experience serves a clear developmental purpose. This work is the direct result of a curriculum that carefully balances exploration with academic intent.

## Pre-K and Kindergarten

Moving beyond the typical clay pinch pot, **Pre-K** took their 3D sculpture inquiry into the wild—hunting for natural clay and studying the intricate patterns of the forest floor. This partnership between art and science transformed the outdoors into a laboratory, bridging the classroom to the world. The unit culminated at the Walker Art Center Sculpture Garden, where students and families connected their outdoor experiences to world-renowned works, bringing our "Lower School Without Walls" vision to life through shared discovery and excellence.



Monthly, our **Kindergarteners** return to a lone apple tree that serves as a living anchor for their writing. This intentional "sense of place" transforms the tree into a seasonal laboratory for literacy; as students document the tree's changes through the seasons, their writing and observational skills grow in tandem.

**"Looking back in the student's science notebooks, we can see their growth in writing, science documentation and descriptive writing."**  
-Tyrone Thayer - Kindergarten Teacher



## Faculty Spotlight:

**"Our program uses a play-based foundation, layering in structured literacy, math, science, and social studies. The activities and invitations that teachers design for student play are both purposeful and academic."**

- Heidi Matheson - Early Childhood Art and Nature Teacher