

PACKER

Preschool & Lower School Curriculum Guide

Pre-K Threes through Fourth Grade



Table of Contents

Welcome to Packer.....	3
Mission.....	3
Vision for Educational Excellence.....	3
Values.....	3
Preschool & Lower School Educational Philosophy.....	4
Social-Emotional Learning & Responsive Classroom.....	4
Approach to Learning: Play, Inquiry, and Reflection.....	4
Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging.....	5
Division Logistics & Daily Life.....	6
Core Subject Overviews & Progression.....	7
Language Arts & Literacy.....	8
Mathematics.....	10
Science.....	13
Social Studies & Community.....	15
Specials Curricula.....	17
Grade-Level Learning Snapshots.....	21
Preschool 3 (PK3).....	21
Preschool 4 (PK4).....	21
Kindergarten.....	22
Grade 1.....	22
Grade 2.....	22
Grade 3.....	23
Grade 4.....	23
Learn More & Connect With Us.....	24

Welcome to Packer

Our mission, vision, and values guide everything we do.

Mission

Packer educates students to:

Think Deeply

Listen Actively

Speak Courageously

Act with Purpose and Heart

Vision for Educational Excellence

Packer is a diverse community of learners in which each person is valued and challenged. We strive to be knowledgeable, empathetic, and engaged members of an interconnected and dynamic world. We inspire joy and purpose through transformative learning experiences that foster both intellectual development and social-emotional growth, prioritizing collaboration, reflection, and continuous improvement in service of student learning.

Values

- **Scholarship:** *Promoting rigorous inquiry leading to deep understanding.*
- **Creativity:** *Fostering discovery, imagination, and innovation.*
- **Equity:** *Embracing diversity, expanding access, and nurturing belonging.*
- **Integrity:** *Cultivating decency, honesty, grace, and personal responsibility.*
- **Joy:** *Creating a community of positive energy and lively engagement.*
- **Respect:** *Caring for oneself, for one another, and for the world around us.*

Preschool & Lower School Educational Philosophy

Packer's Preschool and Lower School programs partner with families to nurture the whole child—balancing academic challenge with social-emotional growth, joyful discovery, and a deep sense of community from PK3 through Grade 4.

Social-Emotional Learning & Responsive Classroom

Academic growth rests on a solid foundation of positive social and emotional development. Guided by the evidence-based **Responsive Classroom** framework in Kindergarten through 4th Grade and integrated daily SEL lens in Preschool, the division prioritizes:

- **Morning Meetings:** Daily gathering circles for greetings, sharing, group activities, and community reflection.
- **Shared Agreements:** Collaborative rule-making and goal-setting that foster self-regulation, mutual respect, and personal responsibility.
- **Mindful Transitions:** Purposeful energizers and relaxed quiet times that support stamina and focus throughout the day.
- **Interpersonal Growth:** Direct instruction and coaching in empathy, active listening, perspective-taking, self-advocacy, and peaceful conflict resolution.

Approach to Learning: Play, Inquiry, and Reflection

Emergent Learning in Preschool: Inspired by the Reggio-Emilia philosophy, PK3 and PK4 learning is driven by children's natural curiosity, interests, and questions. Classrooms offer sensory-rich materials and provocations that encourage open-ended exploration, symbolic play, and co-constructed long-term projects.

Inquiry-Based Lower School: As students progress from Kindergarten through 4th Grade, structured academic instruction is paired with hands-on, project-based learning grounded in real-world explorations. Students test ideas, make and defend conjectures, collaborate across disciplines, and reflect on how practice leads to growth. We encourage them to find their voices and discover the impact they can have on the world around them. The program provides a framework for identifying issues of interest, then developing and executing plans to address them.

Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging

Packer is a diverse community where equity, inclusion, and belonging are central to teaching and learning. We cultivate caring classroom cultures where every child's identity, background, and voice are validated and nurtured. Through curated literature, multi-perspective social studies units, and reflective dialogue, students learn to appreciate differences, notice unfairness, and build the skills needed to be active, compassionate changemakers in their communities.

Division Logistics & Daily Life

School Hours & Extended Care

- **PK3:** 8:30 am – 1:30 pm | *Puppies+ Extended Day:* 1:30 pm – 3:00 pm
- **PK4:** 8:30 am – 3:00 pm (*Early drop-off available from 8:00 am*)
- **Kindergarten:** 8:30 am – 3:00 pm (*Early drop-off available from 8:00 am*)
- **Grades 1 & 2:** 8:30 am – 3:10 pm (*Early drop-off available from 8:00 am*)
- **Grades 3 & 4:** 8:20 am – 3:15 pm (*Early drop-off available from 8:00 am*)

[After-school options](#) through at least 6:00 pm daily begin in Kindergarten. Additional fees apply; financial aid is available.

Specialist Class Cadence (Per 7-Day Cycle)

Specialist Subject	Preschool (PK3–PK4)	Lower School (K–Gr 4)
Science	1x (half-class)	2x (K–Gr 2) / 3x (Gr 3–4)
Visual Art	2x + open studio time	2x
Music & Performing Arts	2x	3x (K–Gr 3) / 3x General + 2x Instrumental/Chorus (Gr 4)

Physical Education	2x	3x
Dance & Movement	1x	1x (Dance K–Gr 3 / Dance & Theatre Gr 4)
Library	1x	1x
Computing & Design		1x (Gr 1–4)
Health & Wellness	Integrated SEL	1x (K–Gr 4)

Core Subject Overviews & Progression

Discover how your child's learning journey unfolds across core disciplines from PK3 through Grade 4. This section outlines the overarching philosophies, research-based frameworks, and sequential skill development within each subject area.

Language Arts & Literacy

Overarching Pedagogical Approach

Literacy at Packer is built on the belief that language is an essential tool for communication, connection, and deep thinking. From early childhood through 4th Grade, our program balances explicit, research-based foundational skills with authentic reading and writing opportunities. Instruction is highly differentiated, utilizing structured frameworks including **UFLI Foundations** for explicit phonics, **Morpheme Magic** for morphology, **The Writing Revolution** for sentence and paragraph structure, and **Reading and Writing Workshop** approaches to foster authorial identity and literary appreciation.

Preschool: Early Print, Oral Language, & Exploration

- **PK3**

- **Oral Language & Listening:** Expands vocabulary through interactive read-alouds, morning meetings, and collaborative play; practices expressing emotions and setting goals.
- **Early Reading & Print Awareness:** Connects spoken language to print through environmental text, songs, and shared storytelling; explores fictional and non-fictional texts.
- **Emergent Writing:** Begins mark-making and drawing in Writers' Notebooks to share thoughts and record ideas.

- **PK4**

- **Phonemic Awareness & Phonics:** Integrates phonics and phonemic awareness with letter identification and formation.
- **Print Concepts:** Identifies beginning, middle, and ending sounds; recognizes and writes first names; begins connecting sounds to letters using invented spelling.
- **Author Identity:** Authors and illustrates individual and class books across various emergent genres.

Lower School: Decoding, Comprehension, & Expressive Writing

- **Kindergarten**

- **Foundational Skills:** Explicit phonics via UFLI Foundations; masters letter-sound correspondences, CVC word blending/segmenting, vowel sounds, and high-frequency words.
- **Reading Comprehension:** Retells familiar stories, asks/answers questions about key details, and compares character experiences across texts.
- **Writing & Mechanics:** Combines drawing, dictating, and phonetically spelled writing to compose opinion, informative, and narrative pieces; practices capitalization and end punctuation.

- **Grade 1**

- **Foundational Skills:** Decodes digraphs, long-vowel patterns, suffixes, and multi-syllable words; builds reading fluency and accuracy.
- **Reading Comprehension:** Identifies main ideas, text features (glossaries, headings), character traits, and central lessons across fiction and informational texts.
- **Writing & Mechanics:** Uses Units of Study and sentence-building strategies to compose personal narratives, topic books, and persuasive pieces using temporal words and structured conventions.

- **Grade 2**

- **Foundational Skills:** Decodes complex two-syllable words, prefix/suffix meanings, and multi-syllable roots; strengthens self-correction through context.
- **Reading Comprehension:** Tackles longer chapter books; analyzes character responses to major events, central ideas, and visual text elements; compares multiple texts.
- **Writing & Mechanics:** Introduces *The Writing Revolution*; constructs expanded simple and compound sentences, multi-paragraph nonfiction, narratives, and opinion pieces.

- **Grade 3**

- **Word Study & Mechanics:** Shifts from basic phonics to morphology via *Morpheme Magic* (prefixes, suffixes, base words); introduces cursive handwriting; masters paragraph structure and dialogue formatting.
- **Reading Comprehension:** Conducts character studies and mystery book clubs; identifies theme, stanza/scene structures, and literal vs. figurative language.
- **Writing & Research:** Drafts persuasive essays, expository reports, poetry, and research-based compositions using gathered notes from print and digital resources.

- **Grade 4**

- **Word Study & Vocabulary:** Analyzes complex Greek and Latin affixes and roots; interprets idioms, similes, and nuances in word meanings.
- **Reading Comprehension:** Evaluates primary vs. secondary sources; analyzes point of view (1st vs. 3rd person), structural formats (cause/effect, problem/solution), and textual evidence to make logical inferences.
- **Writing & Research:** Writes multi-paragraph argumentative essays, realistic fiction narratives, and multi-source research projects with formal citations and categorized evidence.

Mathematics

Overarching Pedagogical Approach

Mathematics at Packer builds deep conceptual understanding, computational fluency, and creative problem-solving skills. Rather than learning isolated formulas, students explore mathematical concepts through visual models, hands-on manipulatives, real-world inquiry, and collaborative discourse. Our curriculum transitions from Reggio Emilia-inspired play and block-building along with number recognition, counting, and cardinality in Preschool to research-based, inquiry-driven frameworks in Lower School, including **Contexts for Learning Mathematics (CFLM)** and **Bridges in Mathematics** (featuring daily **Number Corner** routines). Students are encouraged to

develop a growth mindset, defend their reasoning, and approach math with confidence and curiosity.

Preschool: Experiential Math, Patterns, & Spatial Reasoning

- **PK3**
 - **Numeracy & Routines:** Explores numbers through daily routines, cooking, and games; practices counting and one-to-one correspondence.
 - **Spatial & Attribute Reasoning:** Sorts and classifies materials by single attributes; identifies basic shapes and spatial relationships; constructs and identifies simple patterns.
 - **Measurement Concepts:** Compares quantities, sizes, and weights through sensory and play-based materials.
- **PK4**
 - **Block Engineering & Geometry:** Utilizes wooden unit blocks to explore symmetry, volume, fractions, and structural balance.
 - **Number Sense:** Connects numeral recognition to sets of physical objects; practices subitizing (recognizing quantities without counting); collects simple class data during group meetings.
 - **Patterning & Games:** Designs complex visual patterns and plays rule-based board and dice games to build flexible mathematical thinking.

Lower School: Base-Ten Structure, Operations, & Applied Reasoning

- **Kindergarten**
 - **Counting & Cardinality:** Counts by 1s, 5s, and 10s; reads, writes, and compares numbers; uses 10-frame visual models to establish 10 as the core building block of our number system.
 - **Operations & Algebra:** Explores addition and subtraction concepts through real-world story contexts (CFLM); discovers patterns and number relationships.
 - **Measurement & Data:** Measures objects using non-standard units (shorter, longer, heavier, lighter); organizes data using tally marks and picture graphs; identifies positional words and geometric shapes.
- **Grade 1**
 - **Place Value & Operations:** Deepens understanding of two-digit place value (tens and ones up to 120); develops fluency with addition and subtraction within 20; applies multi-digit addition strategies.
 - **Measurement & Time:** Measures length using non-standard units (cubes, sticks); tells and writes time to the hour and half-hour on analog and digital clocks.

- **Data & Geometry:** Constructs and interprets graphs; compares numbers using symbols ($\$>\$$, $\$=\$$, $\$<\$$) ; reasons with 2D and 3D shapes and their attributes.
- **Grade 2**
 - **Place Value & Fluency:** Masters three-digit place value (hundreds, tens, ones) using numerals, words, and expanded notation; solves two-step addition and subtraction story problems within 100.
 - **Measurement & Money:** Measures length using standard units (inches, feet, centimeters, meters); solves real-world word problems involving dollars and coins.
 - **Fractions & Foundations of Multiplication:** Partitions shapes into equal halves, thirds, and fourths; constructs rectangular arrays as an introduction to multiplication.
- **Grade 3**
 - **Multiplication & Division:** Develops fluency with multiplication and division facts within 100; applies array and ratio table strategies to solve word problems.
 - **Fractions:** Understands unit fractions; locates, compares, and generates equivalent fractions on a number line.
 - **Measurement & Geometry:** Solves area and perimeter problems; tells time to the exact minute; estimates metric mass and liquid volume; classifies quadrilaterals based on side and angle properties.
- **Grade 4**
 - **Multi-Digit Operations:** Masters multi-digit multiplication and division strategies; explores factors, multiples, prime numbers, and composite numbers.
 - **Fractions & Decimals:** Adds and subtracts fractions/mixed numbers with like denominators; multiplies fractions by whole numbers; converts fractions with denominators of 10 or 100 to decimal notation (tenths and hundredths).
 - **Geometric Measurement:** Measures and sketches angles using protractors; applies perimeter and area formulas for rectangles; analyzes lines of symmetry, parallel lines, and perpendicular lines.

Science

Overarching Pedagogical Approach

Science at Packer cultivates natural curiosity, critical inquiry, and environmental stewardship. Through active investigation, students transition from multi-sensory exploration in early childhood to systematic application of the scientific method and engineering design process in Lower School. Guided by hands-on experimentation, live-animal care, field research, and design challenges, students learn to ask testable questions, gather and analyze data, construct physical models, and see themselves as innovative problem-solvers.

Preschool: Sensory Exploration, Observation, & Living Things

- **PK3**
 - **Sensory Tools & Exploration:** Uses five senses alongside foundational tools (hand lenses, magnets, droppers, tweezers) to investigate natural materials.
 - **Empathy for Nature:** Fosters gentleness, patience, and observation through interactions with live classroom animals (fish, snails, worms, stick insects).
 - **Scientist Identity:** Introduces diverse scientist role models to inspire curiosity and self-identification as young scientists.
- **PK4**
 - **Expanded Instrumentation:** Incorporates balance scales and simple microscopes to extend sensory observation.
 - **Natural Cycles & Earth Systems:** Investigates seasonal changes, trees, and environmental stewardship.
 - **Inquiry & Engineering:** Engages in teacher-guided engineering challenges responsive to emerging student questions and interests.

Lower School: The Scientific Method, Engineering Design, & Physical Systems

- **Kindergarten**
 - **The Scientific Method:** Practice questioning, predicting, testing, and collecting data; records findings on "Wonder Walls."

- **Life Cycles & Biology:** Studies life cycles and oviparous animals firsthand through classroom chick-hatching and live-animal observation.
- **Engineering & Environmental Health:** Designs structural solutions (bird beaks, nests) and explores forces, hygiene, and planet protection.
- **Grade 1**
 - **Physical & Earth Sciences:** Investigates Light and Sound waves and Space Systems (patterns and cycles of the sun, moon, and stars).
 - **Habitats & Adaptations:** Explores how animal structures support survival in diverse environments.
 - **Data Representation:** Organizes scientific findings into T-charts, Venn diagrams, and short observational logs during engineering challenges.
- **Grade 2**
 - **Structural Engineering:** Applies the full Engineering Design Process (plan, build, test, improve) to construct strong, stable towers and bridges.
 - **Geology & Earth Forces:** Examines how dynamic earth forces shape the planet over time through rock and mineral studies.
 - **Ecosystem Interdependence:** Studies botany, insect adaptations, and the symbiotic relationships that keep ecosystems healthy.
- **Grade 3**
 - **Metric Measurement & Chemistry:** Masters metric tools (length, mass, volume, temperature); conducts series of tests on household solids to determine chemical and physical properties.
 - **Geology & Space:** Compares rock and mineral properties systematically; explores planetary relationships within our solar system.
 - **Ecosystem Stewardship:** Deepens understanding of indigenous species, habitats, and environmental balance (interdisciplinary with Social Studies).
- **Grade 4**
 - **Forces, Motion, & Simple Machines:** Applies Newton's Laws of Motion and simple machines to design and build complex Rube Goldberg machines.
 - **Electrical Engineering:** Conducts semester-long investigations into electric current, conductivity, open/closed circuits, and series/parallel configurations.
 - **Microscopic Inquiry:** Learns formal compound microscope techniques, including slide preparation, to observe cellular structures and micro-organisms.

Social Studies & Community

Overarching Pedagogical Approach

Social Studies at Packer empowers students to understand their own identities, cultivate empathy for diverse perspectives, and develop the critical thinking skills required of active, global citizens. The curriculum follows an expanding horizon model: starting with self and family in Early Childhood, moving to local neighborhood systems and urban geography in early Lower School, and expanding to regional indigenous histories, civil rights movements, and constitutional principles by Grade 4. Through primary source analysis, field research, map work, and historical inquiry, students learn to ask whose stories are told, examine cause and effect over time, and see themselves as empowered changemakers.

Preschool: Identity, Family, & Belonging

- **PK3**
 - **Self & Belonging:** Develops self-awareness and personal voice within a supportive classroom community; explores personal stories and emotions.
 - **Family & Traditions:** Shares and honors diverse family structures, cultures, and traditions through literature, artwork, and storytelling.
- **PK4**
 - **Affirming Identity:** Builds vocabulary to describe individual identity traits while appreciating similarities and differences among peers.
 - **Empathy & Inclusive Community:** Practices respectful dialogue, active listening, and collaborative rule-making during daily shared routines.

Lower School: Community, Geography, & Historical Inquiry

- **Kindergarten**
 - **Identity & Changemakers:** Explores unique personal gifts; identifies fairness and unfairness in daily contexts; introduces young changemakers who have impacted the world positively.
 - **School Community Connections:** Investigates roles, relationships, and shared responsibilities within the broader Packer school environment.
- **Grade 1**

- **The Anatomy of Community:** Conducts a year-long study of community dynamics, progressing from family structures to Packer's school history and the surrounding neighborhood.
- **Neighborhood Systems & Geography:** Conducts field walks to map local structures, services, and workers; analyzes essential vs. non-essential community elements based on needs vs. wants.
- **Grade 2**
 - **Comparative Community Dynamics:** Compares urban, suburban, and rural communities; explores how geography influences culture, resources, and daily life.
 - **Map Literacy & Change Over Time:** Utilizes maps, artifacts, oral histories, and photographs to investigate geographic relationships and analyze historical cause and effect.
- **Grade 3**
 - **Indigenous Histories & Native Nations:** Conducts an in-depth study of the Lenape Nation and tribal nations across North America, examining culture, sovereignty, and historical perspectives.
 - **Land Stewardship & Critical Thinking:** Investigates native species and local ecosystems to understand indigenous land stewardship; critically evaluates historical narratives and whose voices are represented in recorded history.
- **Grade 4**
 - **Rights, Freedom, & Injustice in American History:** Examines American history through founding ideals (freedom, equality, pursuit of happiness) versus lived experiences across different communities.
 - **Social Movements & Primary Source Research:** Investigates historic movements for change—including abolition, women's suffrage, workers' rights, LGBTQIA+ rights, disability rights, and environmental justice—using primary sources, timelines, and research projects.

Specials Curricula

Packer's specialist ("Specials") program provides a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary approach to visual arts, performing arts, physical development, technology, research, and health. Specialist faculty collaborate closely with homeroom teachers to integrate academic themes into specialized environments.

Visual Art Studio

Overarching Approach

Inspired by Reggio Emilia principles and studio-based artistic inquiry, the Visual Art program fosters creative problem-solving, material fluency, and artistic confidence. Students view themselves as capable artists, engaging in process-oriented experimentation with diverse media while cultivating sustainability through upcycling and repurposed materials.

- **PK3 – PK4:** Explores sensory materials (clay, paint, wire, collage) and loose parts; develops foundational motor control with tools (scissors, brushes, hammers, nails); practices sustainability by repurposing found materials.
- **Kindergarten – Grade 2:** Builds a toolkit of techniques; manipulates cardboard, fiber arts, clay, and sunprints; explores line, shape, color mixing, and self-portraiture; learns to give and receive constructive peer feedback.
- **Grade 3 – Grade 4:** Applies design principles (repetition, variety, unity); executes collaborative murals and printmaking; examines historical and contemporary artists; investigates the relationship between color, emotion, and identity.

Music & Performing Arts

Overarching Approach

Music at Packer emphasizes experiential, embodied learning through Dalcroze Eurhythmics, Orff Schulwerk techniques, vocal development, and active listening. Students build music literacy, rhythmic precision, and vocal expression through a diverse repertoire of world music and collaborative ensemble performances (such as K-4th May Day Celebration, Winter Sings, etc.)

- **PK3 – PK4:** Investigates sound vibration and instrument mechanics; internalizes musical opposites (loud/soft, fast/slow); practices rhythmic movement and pitch matching; prepares for community Sings.

- **Kindergarten – Grade 2:** Develops vocal range and pitch accuracy; introduces solfège (*do-re-mi*), 4/4 meter conducting, and staff notation; plays pitched percussion (xylophones) and small strings.
- **Grade 3 – Grade 4:** Masters soprano recorder technique; connects rhythmic notation to mathematical fractions; performs 2- and 3-part vocal harmonies; selects dedicated instrumental or choral ensembles in Grade 4 (Brass, Woodwinds, Strings, or Chorus).

Physical Education & Movement

Overarching Approach

The Physical Education program instills a lifelong appreciation for physical movement, health, and athletic cooperation. Through progressive skill-building, students develop body control, spatial awareness, cardiovascular fitness, and exemplary sportsmanship in a supportive environment.

- **PK3 – PK4:** Focuses on gross motor control, balance, and spatial awareness through obstacle courses, low-organization games, tumbling, and introductory bouldering.
- **Kindergarten – Grade 2:** Refines locomotor skills (galloping, skipping, jumping) and visual-motor coordination using varied equipment; introduces fitness components (agility, flexibility, endurance) and modified team activities (soccer, basketball).
- **Grade 3 – Grade 4:** Applies strategic thinking and official rules in modified sports; details warm-up and cool-down routines; practices tactical teamwork and advanced climbing wall skills.

Dance & Theatre

Overarching Approach

The movement curriculum utilizes the **BrainDance** framework to integrate physical movement patterns with mental focus and creative expression. Students explore the physical body as a storytelling medium, integrating multicultural dance traditions and dramatic performance techniques.

- **PK3 – PK4:** Practices eight developmental movement patterns; explores weekly themes (shapes, directions, emotions); participates in global dance explorations (*World Travel, Carnival of the Animals*).

- **Kindergarten – Grade 2:** Investigates space, pathways, time, and energy; explores historical dance genres (Tap, Ballet, Modern, Hip Hop); collaborates on original choreography for the annual May Day celebration.
- **Grade 3 – Grade 4:** Focuses on choreography, composition, and structured improvisation; in Grade 4, integrates theatre, choral reading, mask work, and world folktales to bring literary characterization to life.

Computing & Design

Overarching Approach

Housed in the Innovation Lab, Computing & Design empowers students to evolve from technology consumers into creative problem-solvers. The curriculum balances computational thinking and hands-on engineering with digital wellness and ethical digital citizenship.

- **Grade 1 – Grade 2:** Explores structural mechanics with LEGO engineering kits; introduces block-based coding (*Scratch Jr.*, *Daisy the Dinosaur*, *LEGO WeDo*) to practice sequencing, debugging, and program control; introduces digital safety basics.
- **Grade 3 – Grade 4:** Develops keyboarding fluency and laptop independence; programs complex logic (loops, variables, conditionals) in *Scratch*; utilizes 3D design and printing tools; explores virtual reality and the ethical, responsible use of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Library & Information Literacy

Overarching Approach

The Hart Library program cultivates a deep love of reading while equipping students with critical media literacy and research skills. Students learn to navigate print and digital environments, evaluate information sources critically, and engage with diverse literature.

- **PK3 – PK4:** Fosters print awareness and storytelling appreciation through classic folklore, nursery rhymes, and picture books; establishes library borrowing routines.
- **Kindergarten – Grade 2:** Masters independent browsing and library layout; evaluates fiction vs. nonfiction; participates in student-voted book awards (*Irma Black Award*); hosts visiting authors and illustrators.

- **Grade 3 – Grade 4:** Conducts independent online catalog research; evaluates source credibility and digital media manipulation; analyzes literary excellence (*Caldecott, Newbery, Cook Prize* awards); practices note-taking and citation ethics.

Health & Wellness

Overarching Approach

The Health curriculum equips students with the knowledge and self-awareness needed to make informed decisions regarding personal wellbeing, physical health, and interpersonal relationships in a safe, age-appropriate setting.

- **Kindergarten – Grade 2:** Introduces basic body systems, hygiene, nutrition, mindfulness, emotional self-regulation, body safety, and positive relationship skills.
- **Grade 3 – Grade 4:** Examines nutrient groups, conflict resolution, consent, and personal boundaries (partnering with specialized *Prepare* instruction); provides age-appropriate human development and puberty education in 4th Grade.

Grade-Level Learning Snapshots

While our values and subject-area continuums span the entire division, each grade level features signature learning experiences and developmental milestones that define the student experience.

Preschool 3 (PK3)

- **Reggio Emilia-Inspired Exploration:** Early inquiries emerge directly from children's curiosity, resulting in collaborative, long-term class investigations across arts and sciences.
- **Writers' Notebooks & Emergent Print:** Young learners begin capturing their thoughts, stories, and emotions through mark-making, drawing, and dictation.
- **Young Scientist Role Models:** Students engage with live classroom animals and diverse scientist role models to foster empathy, observation skills, and scientific self-identity.
- **World Travel Movement Unit:** Children explore global cultures through songs, rhythms, and imaginary dance journeys around the globe.

Preschool 4 (PK4)

- **Classroom Authoring:** Children write, illustrate, and publish their own physical books, creating a growing student-authored library for their peers to read.
- **Wooden Unit Block Engineering:** Daily block building introduces fundamental concepts in fractions, symmetry, balance, spatial reasoning, and collaborative design.
- **The Making Table:** Sensory materials and recycled loose parts encourage independent invention, strengthening fine-motor control and creative problem-solving.
- **Carnival of the Animals:** A signature movement and performing arts unit where students explore animal characterization, memorization, and performance sequencing.

Kindergarten

- **Responsive Classroom Launch:** Daily Morning Meetings, Energizers, and Quiet Times establish a strong foundation of social-emotional wellbeing, self-regulation, and community agreements.
- **Live Chick Hatching & Life Cycles:** Hands-on biology unit where students observe, care for, and study oviparous animals firsthand as classroom eggs hatch into chicks.
- **Upcycled Art Studio:** A yearlong visual arts experience where children learn to reimagine single-use and recycled materials into complex 2D and 3D artwork.
- **Picture Book Restaurant:** Interactive library unit where students read, critique, and create literature focused on global food traditions, family, and storytelling.

Grade 1

- **Neighborhood & Community Field Study:** Students expand their lens beyond the classroom, conducting neighborhood walks, interviews, and mapping projects to examine local community systems.
- **Innovation Lab & Block Coding:** Hands-on LEGO engineering design challenges paired with foundational digital block coding using platforms like *Scratch Jr.*
- **May Day Movement Tradition:** First Graders investigate spatial pathways and formations as they prepare for the school's annual May Day dance performance.
- **Nonfiction Research & Topic Books:** Young authors choose individual topics of interest to research, write, and illustrate multi-page informational books.

Grade 2

- **Tower & Bridge Engineering Challenge:** Students apply the full Engineering Design Process—planning, building, testing, and revising—to construct structural bridges and towers.
- **Comparative Community Dynamics:** A social studies exploration comparing urban, suburban, and rural communities, using historical maps, photos, and artifacts to analyze change over time.

- **Irma Black Award Literature Panel:** Students serve as critical book judges, evaluating national children's picture book finalists and casting official votes for the winner.
- **Multi-Style Dance Journey:** A performing arts exploration where students learn the histories and movements of Tap, Ballet, Modern, and Hip Hop.

Grade 3

- **Lenape & Native Nations Inquiry:** An in-depth history and social studies unit exploring Lenape culture, indigenous land stewardship, and Native tribal nations across North America.
- **Soprano Recorder & Music Theory:** Students transition to formal instrumental reading, learning fingerings, breath control, notation, and improvisation on the soprano recorder.
- **Household Chemistry Investigations:** Young chemists test unknown safe household solids using scientific observation to classify physical and chemical properties.
- **Bank Street Cook Prize Selection:** Students analyze and evaluate STEM picture books against award criteria, synthesizing literature appreciation and scientific thinking.

Grade 4

- **Rube Goldberg Machine Engineering:** A culminating physical science project applying Newton's Laws of Motion, simple machines, and circuit building to design complex chain-reaction devices.
- **Rights, Freedom, & Primary Source Research:** Historical inquiry examining American social movements—including abolition, suffrage, labor, and civil rights—through primary sources and research projects.
- **Middle School Music Ensembles:** Fourth Graders select a dedicated instrumental or choral ensemble (Brass, Woodwinds, Strings, or Chorus) taught by Middle and Upper School music specialists.
- **Multicultural Storytelling & Theatre:** An interdisciplinary performing arts unit using mask work, choral reading, and choreography to bring global folktales to life on stage.
- **Debate Program:** Students research topics for debate in their classrooms, practicing oration techniques, persuasive arguments, and active listening.

Learn More & Connect With Us

At Packer, the Preschool and Lower School years are designed to build far more than strong academic foundations—they cultivate a child’s intrinsic joy in learning, confidence in their own voice, and deep empathy for others. By pairing rigorous, research-based instruction with child-centered inquiry, our teachers create an environment where curiosity is celebrated, and every student feels a profound sense of belonging.

We invite you to explore our campus, meet our dedicated faculty, and witness firsthand how our students think deeply, speak courageously, and act with purpose and heart every day.

Questions About Our Curriculum or Program?

Our Admissions team is here to help as you explore educational opportunities for your family. Please reach out to the Admissions Office at admissions@packer.edu or (718) 250-0200, or visit www.packer.edu/admissions to schedule a tour, attend an open house, or learn more about the application process.

Updated: September 2026