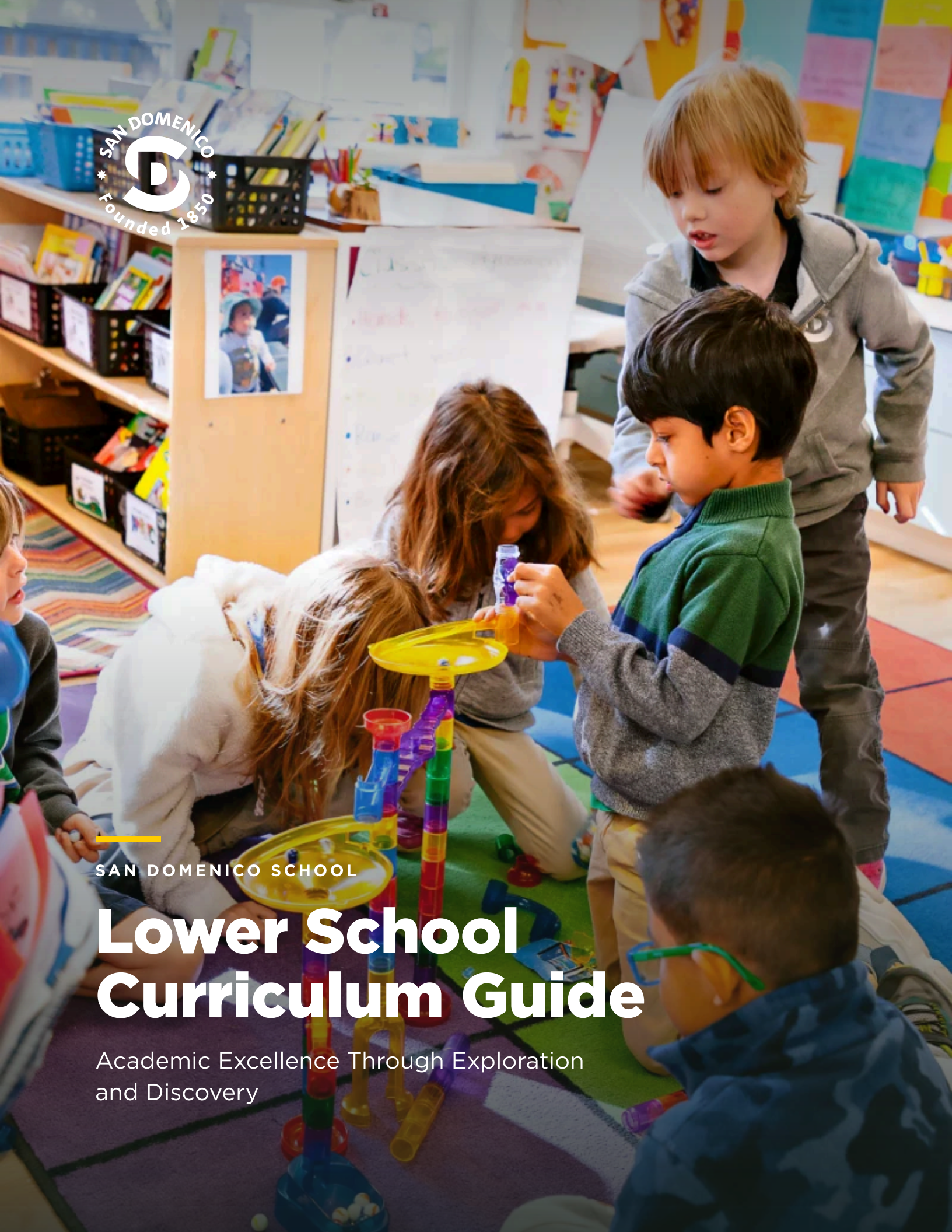


SAN DOMENICO SCHOOL

Lower School Curriculum Guide

Academic Excellence Through Exploration and Discovery

LOWER SCHOOL AT SAN DOMENICO

At San Domenico School, learning goes beyond the classroom. From Kindergarten through Middle School, students build strong academic foundations while developing curiosity, creativity, critical thinking, and confidence. Through hands-on exploration, interdisciplinary projects, and individualized support, students connect ideas across subjects and apply their learning to real-world challenges.



CONTENTS

01	**Mathematics**	Building Confident Problem Solvers
02	**Science**	Inquiry, Innovation, and Discovery
03	**Ecoliteracy**	Understanding Our Connection to the Natural World
04	**Reading, Writing, and Literacy**	Developing Confident Readers and Writers
05	**World Languages**	Language and Cultural Understanding
06	**Interdisciplinary Learning**	Connecting Ideas
07	**Social-Emotional Learning**	Supporting the Whole Child
08	**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**	A Community of Belonging

01 MATHEMATICS

Building Confident Problem Solvers

Our math program develops conceptual understanding, strategic thinking, and a growth mindset. Using the Singapore Math approach, students progress from hands-on manipulatives to visual models and abstract reasoning. A spiraling curriculum, cross-grade faculty collaboration, specialist support, and enrichment opportunities help every student build skills, embrace challenges, and discover multiple ways to solve problems.



Enrichment Opportunities & Middle School Math

San Domenico offers opportunities for students to deepen their mathematical understanding, explore challenging problems, and receive additional support as needed.

- **Lower School Math Specialist** works twice each week with students across Grades K–5, providing both support and enrichment.
- **Math Olympiads (Grades 4–5):** Students tackle advanced problems while developing creative problem-solving skills and collaborating with peers.
- **Middle School Math Extensions:** Big Ideas Math, Thinking Schools, and Mathletes provide additional challenges and opportunities to extend mathematical thinking.
- **Advanced Math Track:** Middle School students can progress through Pre-Algebra, Algebra, and Geometry.
- **Middle School Math Lab:** Offered after school, Math Lab provides additional support with math concepts and homework.

02 SCIENCE

Inquiry, Innovation, and Discovery

At San Domenico, students learn science by doing science. Through hands-on experiments, engineering and coding projects, and outdoor exploration, they develop scientific thinking, curiosity, and confidence in asking questions and investigating the world around them.

515
acre campus for real-world investigations

20+
planned science-focused field trips, Grades K–5

3
dedicated K–8 science labs, plus a 3-D Maker Lab

Resources & Learning Spaces

Our three dedicated science labs for Grades K–8 provide spaces for exploration and experimentation, supported by specialized science teachers. Students also learn in our 3-D Maker Lab, one-acre Garden of Hope, and expansive 515-acre campus, where nature hikes, creek restoration projects, and other real-world investigations bring science to life. Across Grades K–5, students participate in more than 20 planned science-focused field trips.

Curriculum & Approach

Aligned with the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and incorporating curriculum resources from UC Berkeley's Lawrence Hall of Science, science instruction at San Domenico explores physical science, Earth science, life science, engineering, and computer science.

Through inquiry-based, hands-on learning, students ask questions, experiment, embrace the unknown, and develop solutions using design thinking and engineering. Age-appropriate activities help students develop logical reasoning, computational thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills, preparing them to engage thoughtfully with an increasingly technology-driven world.

Science Instruction by Grade Level

Students in Grades K–5 participate in science class twice a week, while students in Grades 6–8 have science five days a week, providing frequent opportunities for investigation, experimentation, and deeper scientific exploration.





03 ECOLITERACY

Understanding Our Connection to the Natural World

At San Domenico, ecoliteracy goes beyond understanding the environment; it helps students recognize the intricate web of life on Earth and our responsibility to protect it. Nestled along a quiet creek on our 515-acre campus, the one-acre Garden of Hope serves as a living classroom where students explore ecological systems, discover the interconnectedness of living and nonliving things, and develop a lasting commitment to environmental stewardship.



Hands-On, Interdisciplinary Learning

Our cross-curricular approach connects ecoliteracy with science, math, comparative religions, history, and art, helping students understand how natural systems connect with one another and with human communities. Through observation, exploration, and inquiry, students discover how each part of an ecosystem contributes to a larger whole.

Seed-to-Table Curriculum

Through our seed-to-table curriculum, students gain hands-on experience with plant life cycles, sustainable gardening, and food cultivation and preservation. They participate in planting, composting, and nature exploration, developing practical skills while learning about sustainability, ecological balance, and responsible resource use.

By observing the natural world and exploring the relationships within it, students strengthen their critical thinking, deepen their understanding of ecological systems, and learn how everyday choices can support a healthier planet.

Learning Begins in Kindergarten

Kindergarten students participate in weekly garden classes, building foundational ecoliteracy through direct engagement with nature. These early experiences nurture curiosity, a sense of wonder, and a lifelong appreciation for the environment.



> “...learn how everyday choices can support a healthier planet.”

Developing Confident Readers and Writers

At San Domenico, our Lower School literacy program builds strong foundational skills while nurturing a lifelong love of reading, writing, and language. Through differentiated instruction, engaging texts, and meaningful opportunities for expression, students develop the skills and confidence to become thoughtful readers, creative writers, and effective communicators.

Grades K–3: Building Strong Foundations

Students practice foundational reading and writing skills daily using the Fundations curriculum for systematic phonics instruction. Through focused practice in phonemic awareness, decoding, and fluency, they develop the essential skills needed to become confident, independent readers and writers.

Grades 4–5: Deepening Comprehension and Expression

Students expand their vocabulary, strengthen strategic reading comprehension, and explore diverse texts across fiction and nonfiction genres. Differentiated instruction empowers students to work independently, articulate their ideas clearly and creatively, and approach the writing process with confidence and purpose.

Grades K–5: Daily Instruction & Interdisciplinary Connections

Each day includes focused mini-lessons, independent reading and writing, teacher-student and peer conferences, and opportunities for students to share their work. Reading and writing units often integrate with social studies, helping students make meaningful connections across subjects while strengthening their research, critical thinking, and communication skills.



Celebrating Literacy

Joy and a growth mindset are woven throughout literacy instruction, encouraging students to take an active role in learning and grow in confidence as readers and writers. A favorite tradition is the Kindergarten Readers Parade, where students wear “super reader” capes and carry their favorite books as the entire school community cheers them on. Moments like these reflect San Domenico’s vibrant community spirit and celebrate the joy of learning.



05 WORLD LANGUAGES

Language and Cultural Understanding

At San Domenico, world language learning begins in Kindergarten, introducing students to new ways of communicating while fostering curiosity about other cultures and perspectives. Students explore Spanish and Mandarin for one semester each, building foundational language skills through immersive, interactive, and culturally meaningful experiences.

Spanish: Learning Through Stories and Creative Expression

Spanish instruction uses storytelling and Comprehensible Input, incorporating Teaching Proficiency through Storytelling (TPRS) techniques to help students acquire language naturally. Through short stories, songs, rhymes, verses, and poems rich in cognates, students build vocabulary, develop pronunciation, and strengthen listening comprehension. Teachers use questioning and repetition to reinforce understanding and encourage participation.

Through project-based learning, students put their language skills into practice in creative ways, designing Carnaval masks, preparing recipes, drawing favorite characters, and engaging in other activities that connect language with cultural traditions.

Mandarin: Building Confidence Through Listening and Speaking

Mandarin instruction emphasizes listening comprehension, oral communication, and growing confidence with a new language. Students learn vocabulary through stories and by identifying corresponding objects, gradually progressing toward character recognition and presentations in front of their peers.

Semester topics include Lunar New Year, the Moon Festival, numbers one through ten, body parts, animals, and community helpers. These age-appropriate themes introduce students to Mandarin language and cultural traditions while encouraging active participation and authentic communication.



Through both languages, students develop communication skills, cultural literacy, and an appreciation for diverse perspectives. These early experiences lay the foundation for continued language learning and meaningful engagement with the wider world.

06 INTERDISCIPLINARY LEARNING

Connecting Ideas

At San Domenico, we believe learning is most meaningful when students make connections across subjects and apply their knowledge in new ways. Our Integrated Learning approach brings together science, mathematics, language arts, social studies, and the arts, encouraging students to explore topics deeply, ask questions, and see how different disciplines inform one another.





Learning Across Subjects

Through engaging, hands-on projects, students investigate real-world topics from multiple perspectives. In first grade, for example, students study bees and explore pollination, ecosystems, and life cycles while incorporating scientific observation, writing, and art. In Kindergarten, the Animal Showcase combines research, storytelling, and creative expression as students investigate animal characteristics, behaviors, and habitats.

These experiences allow students to develop subject-specific knowledge while strengthening critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and creativity.

Sharing Learning and Building Community

Interdisciplinary projects often culminate in presentations and celebrations where families are invited to experience students' work. Buddy classes also come together to share discoveries, giving older and younger students opportunities to collaborate, exchange ideas, and learn from one another.

By connecting academic concepts with hands-on exploration and meaningful expression, Integrated Learning helps students develop a deeper understanding of what they study while building confidence, collaboration skills, and a lasting enthusiasm for discovery.

Supporting the Whole Child

At San Domenico, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is at the heart of our commitment to nurturing the whole child. We recognize that academic success, personal growth, and wellbeing are closely connected. Through explicit SEL instruction and daily classroom practices, students develop self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, positive relationships, and the skills to navigate challenges with confidence and care.



Responsive Classroom

Responsive Classroom is a student-centered approach that fosters a positive learning environment, shared responsibility, and intrinsic motivation. Key practices include:

- **Student-created rules:** Students help establish classroom expectations, building ownership, mutual respect, and responsibility for their community.
- **Logical consequences:** Students learn accountability and how to repair harm through meaningful, related actions—for example, "You break it, you fix it."
- **Intrinsic motivation:** Rather than relying on external rewards, teachers encourage students to take pride in their efforts, choices, and personal growth.

Morning meetings in Grades K–5 and student-led Middle School meetings strengthen relationships and build community. Closing circles and advisory groups provide opportunities for reflection, connection, and a positive end to the day.

Second Step

The Second Step curriculum develops emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills, and responsible decision-making through age-appropriate lessons that evolve with students' needs.

- **Kindergarten:** Students learn to recognize and understand emotions, initiate conversations, and build friendships.
- **Grades 1–5:** Students explore growth mindset, goal-setting, empathy, perspective-taking, and making amends, strengthening their ability to navigate relationships and respond thoughtfully to challenges.

Kimochis

Kimochis, meaning "feelings" in Japanese, is a fun and engaging social-emotional learning program that helps our youngest students build emotional awareness, develop healthy relationships, and strengthen communication skills. Through the use of playful character-based tools, students learn to identify and express their feelings, practice empathy, navigate challenging situations, and develop positive strategies for managing emotions. Kimochis empowers young learners with the confidence and skills they need to understand themselves, connect with others, and create a caring classroom community.

Mindful Schools Curriculum

Taught by our Lower School counselor, the Mindful Schools curriculum helps students cultivate mindfulness, self-awareness, and emotional regulation. Through these practices, students learn to recognize their emotions, pause before reacting, and develop greater calm and focus in the classroom and beyond.

The Overall SEL Impact

Consistent SEL instruction helps students navigate challenges, strengthen relationships, and contribute to a caring and respectful school community. By practicing empathy, accountability, mindfulness, and thoughtful communication, students develop the skills to care for themselves and others. Woven into daily school life, these practices help create an environment where students feel supported, connected, and ready to learn.

A Community of Belonging

At San Domenico, our Social Vision affirms that we are “a community of belonging where students, staff, and families are dedicated to inclusion and respect for all.” Our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) program brings this vision to life by helping students understand their identities, appreciate diverse perspectives, recognize bias and injustice, and take action with empathy and integrity.

Learning Through the Social Justice Standards

Our Lower School DEI curriculum integrates the Social Justice Standards developed by Learning for Justice, providing a framework for anti-bias education across four interconnected domains:

Identity

Students develop pride, confidence, and healthy self-esteem while honoring the dignity of others.

Diversity

Students learn to appreciate differences and build respect for people from diverse backgrounds and experiences.

Justice

Students begin to recognize bias and understand how injustice affects individuals and communities, both historically and today.

Action

Students learn to make principled choices, challenge unfairness, and stand up against bias.

Through integrated SEL lessons and connections to social studies, reading, and writing, students learn to understand and express their identities while celebrating the diversity of their classmates and families.

Grades K–4: Building Foundations for Inclusion

In the early grades, students explore personal and family identity, ancestry, race, ethnicity, culture, religion, and stereotypes through developmentally appropriate, scaffolded lessons. As their understanding grows, students build self-confidence, learn to appreciate

differences, and explore the idea that interests, professions, colors, and activities are for everyone.

Grade 5: Deepening Understanding and Awareness

In fifth grade, students build on earlier learning through expanded discussions about identity and inclusion. They also participate in the Human Development program, which introduces puberty, reproductive anatomy, and gender identity. These lessons provide accurate information and language to support students as they develop a deeper understanding of themselves and others.

Fostering a Lasting Sense of Belonging

Grounded in San Domenico's mission and Social Vision, our SEL and DEI curricula nurture empathy, respect, personal growth, and wellbeing. By helping students understand themselves, value others, and respond thoughtfully to the world around them, we foster a community where every student can develop a stronger sense of belonging and learn to contribute with compassion and integrity.



Visit San Domenico

sandomenico.org/visit

admissions@sandomenico.org

1500 Butterfield Road, San Anselmo, CA 94960

Rooted for the Future