



Frequently Asked Questions: Middle School

Park Day's Middle School deepens and expands on the Park Day mission to prepare students to be informed, courageous, and compassionate people who shape a more equitable and sustainable world. Critical thinking and moral reasoning, along with academic problem-solving strategies and skills, are key aspects of our progressive Middle School program.

How do student/teacher partnerships evolve in Middle School?

In Middle School, students take greater responsibility for their coursework. We encourage them to leverage their own positive relationships with teachers to push when they want to go deeper or need academic support. In Middle School, the parent/teacher partnership evolves to support this initiative as students develop the ability to take ownership of their learning as they prepare for High School.

How is the Middle School classroom structure different from a K-5 Lower School experience?

Students attend regular classes in a cohort of 18-20 students. There are two classes per grade. Academic disciplines are taught by educators who specialize in a particular subject. In 6th grade, Math and Science is taught by one teacher, and Language Arts and Social Studies are taught by a Humanities teacher. In 7th and 8th grades, students take all their classes in the Magnolia building, and academic specialties narrow further. Students have one science teacher, one math teacher, and one humanities teacher. Spanish is offered three times a week in 7th grade, and four times a week in 8th grade.

What is the advisory program?

Students in grades 6, 7, and 8 are divided into small 12-13 person advisory groups. Advisories meet daily with one teacher and focus on social emotional learning, executive functioning, and personal growth. The student's advisor will be a primary contact point for each student and their family throughout the year.

What does homework look like in Middle School?

Homework ramps up in Middle School, especially in 7th and 8th grades when students are preparing for high school. In general, students can expect no more than 30 minutes of homework per subject, per night. Teachers coordinate so that as often as possible, 6th graders don't have more than 60 minutes of homework per night, 7th graders typically won't have more than 70 minutes of homework per night, and 8th graders typically won't have more than 80 minutes of homework per night. Our guiding philosophy is that homework should be relevant to a student's classroom experience, reinforce concepts and skills first learned in class, and assist students in developing the academic and time management skills necessary for success in high school and future schooling.

A place where students 
think creatively, learn deeply, act compassionately and live fully

How does Park Day support families and students in the high school search process?

The high school exploration and application process is integrated into the 8th grade year at Park Day. We offer a weekly class in the fall to help support students in the search process. Many of these classes include visits from various Bay Area high schools, as well as application and interview support for students applying to independent schools. Our Middle School director and other educators meet with families, depending on the needs of each family. Our educators write thoughtful, detailed recommendation letters, and help coach students who are writing essays and applying to independent schools. Park Day School hosts a presentation for parents to demystify the admissions process and learn about financial aid. We also organize a high school panel featuring Park Day alumni from schools throughout the area.

How do Park Day School students do in high school, and where do they go?

Annually, we poll our graduating class of 8th grade families after their student's first quarter or semester in high school. In recent years, the GPA of our students at this time has hovered between an average of 3.7 and 3.75. Park Day students go to schools all over the Bay Area. Over the past six years, 52% of graduates attended public high schools and 48% attended independent schools. In recent years, students have attended Albany High, Bentley, Berkeley High School, Bishop O'Dowd, College Prep, Drew, Head-Royce, Holy Names, Jewish Community High School, Lick-Wilmerding, Maybeck, Oakland School for the Arts, Oakland Technical High School, Orinda Academy, Piedmont High School, St. Joseph's, St. Mary's, and Urban High School.

What are the arts like in Middle School?

Music and Art are offered twice a week in 6th and 7th grade, with students taking art for half the year and music in the other half. Middle School has a Drama program that is closely integrated with Humanities, and meets three times a week in 6th and 7th grade. In 8th grade, students select an arts concentration and spend three class periods a week in their self-selected Art, Music, or Drama concentration. Concentrations shift halfway through the year.

What opportunities are there for students to play competitive sports?

The Middle School athletics program builds confidence, leadership skills, and teamwork. Our competitive team mascot is The Mighty Apple, and we compete with other local independent and parochial schools in a variety of after school sports. Every student gets an opportunity to play and develop their skills and sportsmanship. Fall sports include Cross Country and Flag Football. Winter is dedicated to Basketball, and Spring is an opportunity for Ultimate Frisbee, Track, and Volleyball.

Aside from the regular arts, PE, and sports program, what other opportunities are there to engage in arts, athletics, and other specialized areas of study?

Weekly electives are a regular part of the schedule and are offered in mixed grade groups. Topics change three times a year. The current rotation includes Innovation Workshop, Sound Design & Music Production, Podcasting 101, Yearbook, Mural Painting, volunteering at a local preschool, Dodgeball, Basketball, and more. 7th grade also has a week-long mini course, and 8th graders travel together on a week-long Spanish immersion trip.

How does Social Justice and civic engagement weave into the curriculum?

Promoting social justice, equity and inclusion is part of Park Day's progressive program. Projects in Middle School, particularly large projects in the humanities, often revolve around issues in history and current events viewed through a social justice lens and with an eye to civic engagement. In 6th grade particularly, themes include issues of identity and voice as students deepen their understanding of their own role as changemakers in the world. Within Park Day's Service Learning & Community Outreach program, students form connections with a Bay Area organization or project, and volunteer on site several times a year while studying a related topic in advisory. The organizations we partner with are connected to the school's annual theme.

