



# Curriculum Guide

## Curriculum Framework

Our curriculum is designed to inform, provoke, challenge, and inspire our students so that ultimately, they have a deeper knowledge both of themselves and of the world they enter as adults. There are four critical elements of our framework which guide the curricular and instructional decisions of our school leaders and teachers.



*Common Core Standards* – Common Core Standards are the standards recognized by schools in the District of Columbia. They are also taught within the curricula of Washington Latin classes and assessed by the annual PARCC exam.

*Moral Issues* – Teachers identify the major moral questions that arise within their curricula, and students respond to these moral questions through class activities including Socratic Seminars.

*Academic Indices* – These indices are those facts and ideas that are critical for Washington Latin students to know and understand before they graduate.

*Teacher Choice* – Teachers identify their own areas of strength and interest, and they teach facts and skills to students in the content of their curricula.

Please read on to learn more about what we teach in each subject area and at each level.

## *English*

The English curriculum throughout the school emphasizes active reading and engaged writing. Students read both classic works of literature and more modern works chosen for their examination of moral issues. An independent reading program at each level allows students to read books of their own choice. Instruction in literacy includes work on grammar and sentence structure. The writing curriculum introduces writing as a process and asks students to write frequently and in several genres. In fifth grade, students take a separate public speaking course; instruction and practice in the art of public discourse is thereafter part of each course in the school.

## *Mathematics*

The mathematics curriculum aims to provide students with a solid foundation in all the basic numeric operations. Students are expected to be able to perform these basic operations before they can move on to the more abstract ideas of algebra and geometry. In grades 5 and 6, students are grouped according to their previous expertise and facility with basic operations; in grades 7- 10, depending on their comfort with numeric operations, students either continue their work on basic math or begin their high-school work on Algebra I, II, and Geometry. For some advanced 10th grade students, Pre-Calculus is an option in the high school. High-school students can also elect to take Statistics, AP Calculus or AP Statistics in order to fulfill their four-year high-school math requirement.

Throughout the curriculum, students repeat concepts until they understand them deeply; they also learn how to apply their knowledge to unknown problems. Throughout the school, the mathematics curriculum emphasizes automaticity with basic functions, application of prior knowledge to problems, and an appreciation for the beautiful mystery of mathematics.

## *History*

The history curriculum begins in the fifth grade with a world geography course. Students are expected to know the names of countries and capitals throughout the world, and to be familiar with the world map. In the 6th grade, students study a year of civics, with a particular emphasis on the founding documents that shaped the governance of the United States of America. In 7th grade, the curriculum explicitly introduces students to the history of Greece and Rome, and to the major figures of the classical tradition. The 8th grade curriculum leads students through their first comprehensive study of American history.

In the 9th and 10th grades, students study two years of World History, beginning with the shaping of civilization in the Fertile Crescent and moving to the present. These courses emphasize depth over breadth, focusing particularly on those moments in history when moral decisions came into play. Juniors study American history in depth and seniors take a semester of DC History and a semester of Government. Throughout the curriculum, students learn to ask essential questions that raise fundamental issues about scarcity of resources, governance of peoples, and causes for conflict.

## *Science*

The science curriculum at Latin aims to introduce students to both the method and wonder of science. In grades 5 and 6, students work labs and units designed by the inquiry-based FOSS science curriculum. They investigate questions from the four main areas of science: earth, chemical, physical and life. After this introduction, students receive more specialized instruction in each of these areas: in 7th grade, they study life science in more depth, focusing particularly on those aspects of life science that are crucial to understanding some of the issues of biology now in the news. In 8th grade, the emphasis is on earth science, again with an emphasis on a moral issue like the harvesting of diamonds or the search for oil.

The 9th grade begins the three-year high-school sequence with an introduction to physics. This course makes understandable some complicated but fundamental physical concepts such as electricity, motion, light, and sound. In the tenth grade, building on their understanding of physics, students take a general chemistry class, with a particular emphasis on the skills and content foundational to their future study of biology. Juniors take Biology and seniors may elect to take AP Biology, AP Environmental Science, Marine Biology, or Astronomy. Throughout the curriculum, students are asked to practice the habits of the scientist: to be painfully precise and endlessly curious.

## *Latin/World Languages*

As the cornerstone of its curriculum, Latin asks all students to study Latin through at least the third level of the language. Beginning in 5th and 6th grade, students study the basic grammatical principles of Latin, laying the groundwork for their more formal instruction in grade 7. The curriculum stresses Latin's legacy to the English language, both in grammar and in vocabulary. Students also learn the major characters and tales of Greek and Roman mythology, and the phrases the ancient tradition has bequeathed to our everyday speech. In grades 7, 8, 9, and 10, depending on when they enter school, students take either Latin I, II, or III. The first two years cover the essential features of grammar and introduce students to some passages of real Latin. By the third year, students are ready to translate some of the world's most well-known and loved classical texts.

In addition to Latin, we also provide a strong foundation for our students' development as global citizens through study of modern world languages. All upper school students must complete at least two years of study in either French, Arabic, or Mandarin. We strongly encourage students to continue their language studies beyond the two-year requirement, as they will reap more benefits from higher language proficiency. Proficiency in a new language is a portal to literature, cultures, historical perspectives, and human experiences. In addition to these intrinsic benefits, students gain many practical benefits from long-term language study, as multilingualism is a highly valued, marketable skill that enables students to competently navigate our increasingly connected world. Many Washington Latin students do enroll in higher level language courses, and some of our young language enthusiasts have even enrolled in more than one language course, studying two of our three languages at once.

## *Arts*

Instruction in the arts is also an important component of the curriculum at WLPCS. Students in grades 5 and 6 take a drama class that is coordinated with the English curriculum. Using the literature of the English classroom as an anchor, students learn how to “get inside” a character and how to write about characters imaginatively. In grades 7 – 8, students receive formal instruction in visual art and music, a semester of each in each year. In the high school, all students are required to take a semester each of art and music. Poetry contests, visual art shows, a dance course, music concerts, and dramatic presentations complement the required instruction in the arts.

## *Physical Education/Health*

In grades 5 and 6, students receive instruction in physical education with an emphasis on learning the habit of daily activity and exercise. In both grades one day of the week is devoted to health education, including such topics as nutrition, fitness, substance abuse prevention, and emotional wellbeing. Students in grades 7 and 8 are required to participate in a sport at least two seasons of each academic year. In the high school, all students are required to participate in five “seasons” of physical activity, one of which is a physical education class. Before they graduate, all Upper School students must also take a semester of health.