



FRIENDS ACADEMY

# Lower School

COURSE OF STUDY

2023-24



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## Mission Statement

Guided by Quaker principles, Friends Academy educates our students to discover and develop the best of who they are and who they can become.

## Belief Statement

At Friends Academy, we achieve educational excellence by committing to the highest standards of learning and living.

Our diverse and welcoming community is strengthened by our Quaker values, which empower our students to inquire, reflect, and engage in their classrooms, their neighborhoods, and in the world.

Because when we inspire students to learn and live with purpose, they can achieve greatness without sacrificing goodness.

## Introduction

Welcome to the Lower School at Friends Academy! The years your child spends in the Lower School are filled with discovery, wonder, scholarship, and achievement. These are the foundational years for children to develop, and it is our goal to ensure that each child leaves the Lower School with a solid sense of self, a love of learning, and a curiosity for life that enables them to approach new opportunities and challenges with confidence, competence, and joy.

Our Lower School builds an exceptional foundation of academic excellence. This, combined with real-world skill building, is enhanced by our Quaker values, empowering our children to learn and live with purpose. We engage each child in student-centered, hands-on learning, and teach real-world skills to our youngest learners, including communication, inquiry, interpretation, analysis, and problem-solving. This strong foundation provides our students the tools they need to fuel natural curiosity and develop creativity while maintaining wonder and awe for the world around them.

In the Lower School, we believe that every child has incredible potential and, in partnership with families, we are committed to supporting every child so that they can achieve their fullest potential as they journey through each developmental stage. The results are children who are confident, embrace and persevere through challenges, develop a healthy sense of self, and appreciate and celebrate the unique and diverse perspectives of others in their community, as well as globally.

As you continue to read, you will see that the Lower School at Friends Academy puts every child, Playgroup to Fourth Grade, at an unparalleled advantage for that first transition to Middle School, then Upper School, and finally in finding success beyond. From the moment your child enters Lower School, they are enveloped in an academically rigorous setting led by educators who believe each child is capable of great things and who are committed to helping each child find success. We live up to this promise by making sure each child feels seen, heard, and known. Character education is essential to help children rise to high academic expectations. Research shows that character and a values-based education are invaluable in helping children successfully navigate our complex and fast-paced world.

## **Social and Emotional Learning strengthens all competencies**

### Responsive Classroom

Responsive Classroom is an approach to building a classroom community that supports students' well-being and helps them take ownership of their learning. Responsive Classroom gives equal time and space to students' social, emotional, and academic journeys by addressing social, emotional, and academic competencies. Creating a trusting partnership between home and school is essential, as well as utilizing best teaching practices, promoting opportunities for collaboration, and honoring multiple intelligences.

# Our Approach to Academics

## Early Childhood

### **Reggio-Emilia Inspired**

Early Childhood at Friends Academy is driven by children's curiosity and enthusiasm about the world around them. Our Reggio-Emilia inspired program draws upon meaningful play experiences that foster wonder, exploration, and investigation.

In addition to our Reggio-inspired approach, our unique Reggio-Emilia *Atelier* provides children with an incredible studio to gather and explore a variety of materials and tools to nurture their imagination, creative problem-solving, and the artist within themselves. When children are encouraged to experiment and exchange ideas they learn how to collaborate with one another and more about their authentic selves as individuals and within a community.

### **Forest School Program vital to creative problem-solving**

Outdoor learning opportunities are vital to a child's growth – academically, socially, and emotionally. The launch of our groundbreaking Forest School Program in the fall of 2021 gives children the opportunity to use the natural world as their "classroom." Located on 65 acres of our vibrant and lush campus, children are guided by our educators to engage with nature, thus building on their spiritual connection as stewards of the earth. Forest Programs encourage a type of creative problem-solving, play, and exploration unique to the natural world; children build confidence, as well as the ability to persevere and strengthen resiliency. Healthy bodies support strong minds, and children further develop their gross and fine motor skills in a way that is appropriately paced for each one of them as an individual.

### **Emergent Curriculum leads to highly engaged learning**

Exploration, investigation, and inquiry are the basis for all learning that takes place in our program. We believe children learn best when they are passionate and motivated about what they are doing. Observing the children and listening carefully to their interactions helps us learn what interests them, so we can build the curriculum upon

their ideas. In this way, the curriculum *emerges*, and children become actively invested in their learning.

As the children investigate and explore collaboratively through engaging in hands-on experiences, our educators guide them in developing critical thinking skills – such as problem-solving, perseverance, and the ability to express themselves – and to value the voices and ideas of others. Age-appropriate numeracy skills and a relationship with environmental print and love of stories are cultivated. Foundations, a multi-sensory based approach to phonics, is introduced.

Our youngest learners enter their school experience at varying points in the learning journey. We are committed to personalizing the experience of each of our learners so that every child thrives at their own developmental pace. Differentiation and enrichment are key at any age and stage to help children reach their potential and see themselves as life-long learners.

### **Block Curriculum essential to early Mathematical understanding**

Block Play is incorporated throughout the day. Blocks represent numerical values in relation to one another, which help to build early mathematical understanding. Block Play fosters shape recognition, the conceptual understanding of cause and effect, spatial awareness, socialization, collaboration, and imaginative play scenarios – essential to children’s ability to construct meaning about the world around them. From the moment children begin building, they engage in the processes of making predictions and comparisons. Block Play helps children expand their vocabulary as they communicate with each other to achieve their goals. In addition to heightening a variety of skills, Block Play provides invaluable opportunities for children to create, explore, imagine, and invent with new materials.

### **Wilson Foundations launch crucial pre-literacy skills**

Even the youngest of learners are ready to develop pre-literacy skills. The formation of upper and lower case letters, letter representation and letter-sound recognition are critical skills to introduce in the early years so as to encourage and support children in building a positive and enthusiastic relationship with reading and written communication. Beginning targeted instruction in the early years, personalized for

each child, sets our youngest learners up for an unparalleled advantage to leading a literate life.

### **Pre-K to Kindergarten transition ensures academic success**

Our master Pre-K teachers truly understand and know Kindergarteners and have a deep knowledge of Kindergarten curriculum. This, coupled with their ongoing partnership with our Kindergarten teaching team, ensures a seamless transition for children graduating our Pre-K program and entering the next part of their Lower School journey at Friends Academy's Kindergarten – Fourth Grade.

Pre-Kindergarten at Friends Academy lays the foundation for academic success by instilling joy, curiosity, the basis for critical and analytical thinking, and the introduction to academic and real-world concepts, all of which are necessary for the youngest learner to blossom in Kindergarten. For example, the mathematical concepts explored in our Pre-K Block program and Forest program, are developed and built upon from the moment children enter Kindergarten through our formal program, *Developing Roots*. (*Developing Roots* is the precursor to *think!Mathematics*, which is the Concrete, Pictorial, Abstract approach to mathematics that starts in First Grade.) The pre-literacy skills, thirst for story telling and making meaning from read-alouds, in addition to the print-rich environment children are accustomed to in Pre-K, sets the stage for each child to begin learning how to develop into an increasingly independent reader and writer in Kindergarten.

Kindergarten begins a formalized schedule that is followed from First grade through Twelfth grade. (Please see the end of the Course of Study for more information as to the Typical Day of a Lower School student.)

## **Kindergarten through Grade 4**

### **Wilson Foundations uses strategic multi-sensory approach**

Pre-Kindergarten through Third Grade uses the Wilson Foundations program. Foundations is a multisensory phonics-based approach to language that provides children with a solid foundation for reading, writing and spelling. Phonics and word study are taught explicitly and cumulatively. Children have extensive and authentic

opportunities across the curriculum to practice and apply taught skills and strategies.

### **Balanced Literacy develops critical and analytical readers**

The Friends Academy Balanced Literacy approach engages students in four core elements of reading instruction: read-alouds, independent reading, shared reading, and guided reading. Children learn in whole-class, small group, and partnership settings, in addition to working with teachers one-on-one.

Balanced Literacy instruction reinforces particular literacy skills, such as strategies to figure out unknown words and how to decipher difficult sentence structures. Children also work on strengthening their comprehension skills and strategies to become stronger critical and analytical readers.

### **Reading Workshop emphasizes deep understanding of literature**

A highly successful reading workshop model develops the skills and deep understanding of literature in every student, which cultivates and fosters a love of reading in every child. We want children to joyfully engage with texts that span a variety of genres, topics, experiences, and perspectives. Reading Workshop provides opportunities for children to practice reading strategies independently, in small groups, and with teacher guidance on a daily basis. Skills critical to analytical and critical thinking include, but are not limited to: summarizing a text, identifying story elements (beginning, middle, end, conflict, resolution, plot, and climax), making predictions and inferences based on textual evidence, understanding how characters and character traits influence the arc of a story, and pulling salient information from trustworthy resources from nonfiction materials. Teachers are able to differentiate and enrich curricular goals for children to support their various needs and help them develop into life-long passionate readers who have the skills, strategies, and abilities to think deeply and engage with texts.

### **Writing Workshop teaches the craft and techniques of authors**

In Writing Workshop, we want every child to see themselves as a writer; one who develops their writer's voice and builds a strong command over spelling, grammar and craft techniques. Students explore various genres that span personal narratives, research-based projects, persuasive writing, and poetry – to name a few. Children



study the crafts and techniques of authors and learn how to thoughtfully apply voice and technique to their own work. Children also learn about the writing process (planning, drafting, revising, editing, publishing) while they internalize their own process. All writers learn how to write for a range of purposes and audiences. The mechanics of writing such as capitalization, punctuation, standard spelling, as well as grammar conventions are taught, thereby strengthening students' abilities to effectively communicate using the written word.

### **Mathematics – A language that teaches multiple pathways to solutions**

At Friends Academy, the study of mathematics is much more than arithmetic. By instituting a Problem-Solving Approach to Mathematics, referred to as the CPA Approach (Concrete, Pictorial, Abstract), children learn to construct their own meaning and develop personalized strategies in order to solve challenging problems. Building strong number sense within the main operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division as well as successfully interpreting and solving word problems is essential for our young mathematicians. For any problem, even in math, there are multiple pathways that lead to solutions. Math is viewed as a language – one that is investigative, descriptive, evaluative, and creative. Students work individually and collaboratively to learn that multiple strategies will often lead to a solution. The role of the teacher is to assist students in reaching a conclusion; it is not to offer a singular strategy but to guide and support students as they develop their own strategies. The *thinkMathematics!* Program is used in Grades 1 - 4 in Lower School. Our Kindergarteners use Developing Roots, a program that is part of the *thinkMathematics!* approach, to launch our 5-year-olds into their journey as mathematicians.

### **Social Studies elevates skills of research, inquiry, and multiple perspectives**

Friends Academy draws upon the Understanding by Design framework of teaching, which emphasizes the use of Essential Questions to guide student inquiry and learning. Social Studies also takes on an interdisciplinary approach, incorporating literacy, mathematics, and science. Our Social Studies curriculum builds upon itself as children progress, and is focused on helping children develop a healthy sense of self and belonging as an individual in their family, school, local community, and in the global community. Students grow in their ability to conduct research, analyze and evaluate primary and secondary sources, and develop an understanding of multiple

perspectives in both modern and historical contexts. The celebration of diversity and commitment to inclusion supports children in seeing how their own unique gifts contribute to the greater good of their community and the world.

## Special-Area Subjects enhance academics

### Science

Lower School science at Friends Academy is a time to engage in scientific inquiry. Using a phenomena-based approach to learning, students are encouraged to ask questions, make discoveries and develop connections about the natural world. They utilize engineering practices to design solutions that address the phenomena of study. Through a process of sense-making and evidence-based reasoning, students learn to engage in scientific arguments. In addition to hands-on exploration, students must read texts, analyze and evaluate their findings, reason and hypothesize in order to explain and defend their theories both orally and in writing. Our pedagogical approach and curriculum are fully adapted to align with the NGSS (Next Generation Science Standards). Units of study in science include, but are not limited to:

<b>Kindergarten</b>	Sunlight and Weather	Pushes and Pulls	Needs of Plants and Animals	
<b>1st Grade</b>	Animal and Plant Defenses	Light and Sound	Spinning Earth	
<b>2nd Grade</b>	Properties of Matter	Changing Landforms	Plant and Animal Relationships	
<b>3rd Grade</b>	Environments and Survival	Inheritance and Traits	Balancing Forces	Weather and Climate
<b>4th Grade</b>	Earth's Features	Vision and Light	Properties of Waves	Energy Conversions
<b>5th Grade</b>	Matter and Energy in Organisms and Ecosystems	Modeling Matter	Earth's Systems	Sun's Effect on Climate

### World Languages

All students in the Lower School participate in the World Languages and Cultures program. In an effort to lay the foundation for communication, Early Childhood through fourth grade students study the Spanish language and culture. The instructional goal is to develop listening skills, auditory discrimination, auditory

processing, speaking skills, and linguistic awareness. Exposure and understanding of Spanish culture in a variety of Spanish-speaking countries is also an integral focus. Collaborating with classroom teachers and other special area teachers provides an interdisciplinary approach that heightens learning. These goals are achieved by incorporating rhymes, songs, poems, games, music, movement, storytelling, role-playing, art projects, technology, and simple conversations into daily classroom activities. Learning takes place through concrete experiences such as visuals, manipulatives, and hands-on activities that are integral components of instruction accompanied by aural-oral language use.

### Visual Art

The Visual Art curriculum in Kindergarten through Fourth Grade is intentionally integrated with math, science, and social studies when there is an authentic overlap of skills and learning goals.

The Art Studio in the Lower School is a welcoming, supportive, and inspiring work environment where students are encouraged to explore and express their authentic selves and develop their aesthetic awareness. All students are honored as working artists and, through carefully designed explorative activities, students witness how it is through a mindful engagement in the art process, rather than a focus on the end product, where they will discover their creative potential. Children are encouraged to lead with curiosity by being offered “challenges” whereby they experiment with multiple ideations. Throughout their tenure in the Lower School, artists engage in multiple iterations of a variety of art processes that include, yet are not limited to, observational drawing, color mixing and painting, ceramic hand-building, additive sculpture with wood and recycled materials, relief printmaking, paper collage, and fiber weaving. Through an in-depth exploration of these processes, students discover how tools are an extension of our creative self and can support us in self-expression. Emphasis on written reflections supports each artist in understanding their creative process and valuing their unique style. Engagement in “stewardship” – our tool and studio care – fosters an appreciation for our learning space and materials and supports children in developing their independence. Our Arts program is grounded in helping children understand how their artistic learning is valuable beyond the art studio.

## Music

It is the goal of the Friends Academy Music Department that each student develops a life-long appreciation of making and supporting music. We employ a “spiraling curriculum,” which introduces key concepts that are revisited and built upon throughout a student’s musical education in Lower School. Our program is designed to tap into the innate talents in each child and stimulate them into becoming tuneful, beautiful, and artful musicians. Our approach draws upon research that incorporates movement with vocal and choral experiences, in addition to the use of percussive instruments to heighten the experience of music-making. We use a wide variety of activities, which encourage the creativity of each individual through a supportive environment of mutual exploration and focus our learning through the lens of the Friends Academy Five Strands of Music (Music Making, Music Literacy, Music Connections, Music Legacy, and Character Development).

Each of our Lower School musicians explores numerous pitched and unpitched instruments. They begin to play in a formal ensemble (Band or Orchestra) in 4th grade. Particular care is taken to introduce students to appropriate care and maintenance for musical instruments and the responsibilities of each individual as a musical ensemble member.

We offer many informal opportunities for performance throughout the year as well as at least two formal presentations in concerts or class presentations. Students regularly accompany songs in our performances. All of our young musicians from Pre-Kindergarten to 4th grade students perform in our annual Winter Concert. Third and 4th grade students also perform in the Spring Concert.

## Library

All of the children in the Lower School, from Playgroup through Fourth grade, have scheduled library classes. Literacy and research lessons are part of each visit. Students will participate in a themed read-aloud. The librarian will ask open-ended, challenging questions to assess students’ comprehension and the connection they are making to the text. During book selection time, the children are allowed to choose

freely from a variety of genres in our collection. Students are encouraged to explore various topics and new genres or to continue with a favorite genre or series.

At each grade level, these opportunities are followed by activities that require children to think critically and analytically about texts and transfer their understanding of both fiction and nonfiction works across the curriculum. Hearing texts reading aloud is an essential activity that benefits the listener by encouraging vocabulary development, strengthening auditory skills and broadens the imagination to encourage a love and appreciation of reading. Students learn age-appropriate research skills. At all grade levels, the librarian works closely with the classroom teachers to provide materials needed for planned units of study. The Lower School Library is also a place where children are welcome to come and research answers to individual questions that they may have. Special collections available for circulation include World Language materials and audiobooks.

### Health

The objective of the Lower School health education program is to begin equipping students with the knowledge and skills necessary to make healthy choices throughout their lives. In the Lower School, we use the “Great Body Shop” as the foundation for our curriculum. The “Great Body Shop” is a comprehensive health program that uses multiple strategies that promote a positive impact on children’s health attitudes, knowledge, and behavior. The program includes topics that cover all aspects of physical, mental, social, emotional health, and safety. Additionally, each unit of study incorporates the skills of interpersonal communication, advocacy for person, family and community health, self-management, decision-making, and goal-setting.

### Physical Education

In the elementary grades, the Physical Education program emphasizes the development of fundamental locomotor, non-locomotor, and manipulative skills through the main content areas of educational games and dance. The movement framework, (i.e., body, space, effort, and relationship) is also a part of the core content and is the basis for developing, expanding, and refining children’s range of motor skills and awareness. The motor skill foundations established during the elementary grades

enhance children's social, cognitive, and physical development and increase the likelihood of continued interest and participation in physical activity.

Health-fitness concepts at elementary grades are supported by a rich experience in many basic movement forms and are folded into the curriculum. The health-fitness components of flexibility, cardiovascular endurance, muscle fitness and body composition are supported through the Fitnessgram which assesses each individual's health-fitness levels beginning in 3rd grade and serves as an educational tool to address these concepts within our curriculum. Students also enjoy a dance/movement and aerial program inherent in their curriculum, once a week for half of the year.

## **How does a Quaker education elevate our student's academic experience?**

A rich, robust, and rewarding education is rooted in values, and who better than Friends Academy to set the standard with a history and reputation of academic excellence that dates back to 1876.

Our values (also referred to as our Quaker Testimonies) include simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality and equity, stewardship, and service. Do values elevate and deepen the academic experience? Yes. They create a foundation for academic challenge for children at every stage of their development.

In a Friends School we require even our youngest students to *consider multiple perspectives* when analyzing the real world problems presented in our curriculum. All voices in a classroom must be *included* before a singular answer from a lone participant is accepted by the group. In this manner students are challenged to slow down, discern, and question the information in order to get to the answer or solution.

The belief that a spark or light exists in every child, each one capable of great things, sets the foundation for our learner-centered approach to education. We view children as capable and encourage and empower them to take initiative as they become increasingly confident and independent learners. When expectations are high and teachers share responsibility and expectations for learning, the children rise to the challenge.

The evidence exists in our learners' experiences. Our Pre-Kindergarten students gather in small groups to collaborate and plan structures as part of our Block Curriculum. They recognize they must listen to one another, divide the building tasks equitably, and incorporate one another's ideas in order to engineer a base for their "bakery" that is "more steady" so that their building will not "collapse."

Then we have our third grade writers who choose something they feel passionate about to develop a persuasive essay. They master the art of writing a thesis statement. To have integrity it must be backed up with facts and compelling evidence. Ideas range from persuading their teacher to reduce homework, persuading the Lower School Principal to spruce up the faculty lounge for their hard-working teachers, or convincing their parents that they are ready for the responsibility of caring for a pet.

Friends Academy fourth graders take their learning beyond the classroom in their Entrepreneurial Studies course. In one particular challenge, they applied design thinking and engineering to solve a real-world problem – designing an innovative cup holder for a unique vehicle and space.

Research has shown that beginnings matter and that children are never too young to develop the very same skills they will need not only in their academic career, but in life. Academic rigor built on a rock-solid foundation of timeless and time-tested values that are in critical demand now more than ever ensures our students will be prepared to respond to the challenges of an ever-changing and growing world.

## **How does a Quaker education foster the spiritual life of a child?**

### **Meeting for Worship and Worship Sharing**

Meeting for Worship is the center of Quaker life and at the heart of a Friends school. We gather together as a community to share in a silence that grows deeper as it progresses. This sharing of silence helps ground children to listen inwardly. Anyone may speak if they feel inspired to share a message with the group, since everyone can be a minister with insights to share. Grades 2 - 4 gather in the Matinecock Meeting House on campus every 8 days. Our Early Childhood, Kindergarten, and First Grade students engage in Worship Sharing in their classroom, which is reflective of our practice in the Meeting House.

## **Worship Sharing**

Worship sharing can be likened to guided meditation. By focusing on a particular question or query, children explore their own experience and share with each other more deeply than we would in usual conversation. It seeks to draw us into sacred space as a class community. Worship sharing is intimate and gives children the opportunity to share what is on their minds and hearts.

## **Gathering**

First to Fourth Grade students gather every 8 days. We hold a Gathering every week in the Lower School Library. Examples of topics and discussions that take place during this time include service-learning opportunities, events that enrich the life of the school, celebrating the diversity within our community, global events, Quaker history, and the open sharing of ideas to strengthen Quaker student life. We learn about special holidays, cultural events, and traditions. We listen to stories, participate in singing, and learn from our fellow community members as they present about special projects and goings-on in their classrooms. Gathering helps us all remain connected throughout our busy weeks, months and the school year.

# **A Day in the Life of a Friends Academy Lower School Student**

## **Daily Schedule incorporates all core academics**

Our K-4 students follow a schedule that includes reading, writing, and math on a daily basis, in addition to lunch & recess, and a morning and afternoon snack. Social studies is integrated throughout the schedule each week.

## **Special-Area Subjects enhance daily schedule**

Children enjoy two to four special area subjects per day and leave the classroom to attend these subjects in teaching spaces around campus that are designed for each program:

- **Science** – Lower School Science Lab
- **Spanish** – Lower School Spanish Classroom
- **Library** – Newly renovated Lower School Library
- **Music** – Music Wing and Theater in the Arts Center



- **Dance & Aerial** – Dance & Movement Studio
- **Visual Art** – Lower School Art Studio
- **Physical Education** – Main Gym and brand-new Turf Athletic field

### **Our 8-Day Schedule provides balance and flexibility**

Friends Academy (K-12) follows a rotating 8-Day schedule, as opposed to a Monday through Friday schedule. This means that each school day is assigned a number from 1-8 and each number day has its own particular schedule. As a result, we are able to ensure that holidays, long vacation breaks, snow days, etc. do not routinely subtract teaching time from certain academic areas or special-area subjects. A rotating 8-Day schedule creates a balanced and equitable schedule for all students in every content area.

### **Longer instructional blocks ensure depth of understanding, application and acquisition of knowledge**

Longer instructional blocks are foundational to the development and success of children. In this way we are able to differentiate and enrich every child's experience. Our **60- to 90-minute** math and literacy blocks are structured to allow every child to have the opportunity to get what they need in order to explore, build upon, deepen and heighten their understanding of concepts and craft. In a typical Reading and Writing Workshop block or Math block, the teacher leads a mini-lesson with the class to introduce or build upon a reading strategy, writing technique, or math concept. The class practices the goal of the mini lesson with the teacher in order to deepen their understanding by "doing." Then children move on to work independently or to collaborate in partnerships or small groups.

### **Differentiated Instruction ensures children reach their full potential**

While students are working, teachers meet with each child one-on-one or alongside children in small groups to personalize instruction for every child:

- **Children who understand and excel** in a given concept are given elevated or more challenging work to deepen their understanding.
- **Children who have a grade-level appropriate** understanding of a concept will be shepherded toward a more complex and challenging application of the

concept to deepen their understanding.

- **If a child is struggling** with grade-level content in a particular area of study, the classroom teacher will scaffold assignments to help them reach grade-level success. And, in some circumstances, our learning specialists will work with students to provide further direct instruction and support.