

# Middle School

Curriculum Overview

2016



## **ISB's Middle School develops independent thinking and curiosity about the world around us.**

All Middle School academic classes are taught in French or English, so students don't merely learn two languages – they learn *in* those two languages. This enables students to experience different ways of thinking and reasoning on a daily basis, enhancing their intellectual flexibility. It is a lifelong benefit that not many other middle schools can match. Middle School students can select a schedule that emphasizes either the French or English language, depending on their academic interests and future plans.

Middle School follows a curriculum that aligns with the official program of the French Ministry of Education.

## **Languages**

Multilingualism is highly valued at ISB. Languages are the core of the ISB curriculum and are a through-school, cross-curricular focus. Language instruction develops written and spoken communication skills and nurtures an appreciation of world cultures through the study of literature. In addition to English and French, Middle School students choose to study either Spanish or German as a third language, and which further develops their understanding of the structural connections among languages and cultures. They can take Latin as an elective starting in eighth grade. This strong linguistic foundation prepares students for the demands and challenges of high school and beyond. English or French as a Second Language is offered to non-proficient students in small groups. The goal is to integrate them, when they are ready, into their grade level classes while providing support to ensure their success.

## **Mathematics**

The Middle School math program follows the mathematics guidelines from the French Ministry of Education as well as many of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Throughout the middle school years, the French education system puts an equal emphasis on geometric and algebraic topics (as compared to the American education system, which focuses more heavily on algebraic topics and much less on geometric topics).

All students follow the same program throughout Middle School. Students may choose to study mathematics either in French or English and can alternate language of instruction from one year to another. During 6th grade, classes meet 4.5 times per week, and in 7th and 8th grade, they meet 5 times per week.

Students will be encouraged to make sense of problems, reason abstractly and quantitatively, construct viable arguments and proofs both orally and in writing. Attending to precision and rigor, using appropriate tools strategically, and using technology to explore and deepen their understanding of concepts are skills that are also developed. A strong emphasis is placed on

perseverance, consistency, and autonomy. At the same time, students are encouraged to seek further clarification when necessary.

Starting in sixth grade, we offer an optional math enrichment program, which primarily focuses on an investigative approach to problem solving and advanced algebraic topics.

## Science

ISB students engage in inquiry-based science and develop their understanding of the scientific method in the Middle School. Classes follow the French Ministry of Education's Physics-Chemistry and Earth & Life Science disciplines for the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades.

Sixth and seventh graders meet 4 hours a week in science courses that combine the Physics-Chemistry and Earth & Life Sciences disciplines. Sixth graders concentrate on scientific inquiry as they learn how to design and carry out experiments, record data and write about their findings. Seventh graders hone their analytical skills by evaluating more complex experimental data, generating thoughtful conclusions based on their experimental results.

In preparation for high school, 8th graders take separate courses in the two science disciplines. Students spend 2 hours a week respectively on Physics-Chemistry and Earth & Life Sciences, each with a specialized instructor. Eighth grade students build upon their knowledge of scientific concepts and practices in the two classes, with a concentration on research, oral and written communication, and argumentation.

All Middle School science classes include regular time in the school's science labs where students experience hands-on activities, use their critical thinking skills and apply the concepts they are learning.

## Humanities

ISB students have a unique opportunity to take humanities courses in both languages (History-Geography in French, and Social Sciences in English), which allows them to enhance their language skills and also learn to view their world from multiple perspectives. Whether the course is taught in French or English, the aims of the humanities program are to help students appreciate human and environmental connections, to understand the interactions and interdependence of individuals and societies, to act as responsible citizens of local and global communities and to develop inquiry skills that can lead to a deeper understanding of their world. The objectives are for students to learn factual and conceptual knowledge about individuals and societies, to develop research skills for investigating independently, to strengthen communication skills by expressing themselves in a variety of formats, and to use critical thinking skills to apply their learning to help better understand their world.

## Arts

A multicultural arts education at ISB provides for descriptive, expressive, intellectual and aesthetic processes, enabling students of all abilities to express ideas and make sense of them through the use of visual art, drama, music and movement. In addition to enhancing creativity, arts education helps to create many other lifelong skills, including confidence, focus, perseverance, collaboration and accountability, which lead to a rich, meaningful and successful life. We encourage group interaction, active learning, and self-reflection. ISB promotes the investigation of cultural values and historical contexts through the arts in order to prepare students to respond to a changing world. Furthermore, through the arts, students contribute to the general positive ethos of the school through shared events such as concerts, plays and other presentations of their work.

## Physical Education

The ISB Physical Education (PE) program has several goals, which include: developing a sense of teamwork, developing leadership, and increasing an understanding of health and well-being. Additionally, the PE program seeks to increase students' understanding of physical activities and sports. Finally, the PE program aims to have students develop a greater understanding of the body's abilities and limits, so they can improve their general physical capabilities.

## Student Exploration Program

The Student Exploration Program (SEP) is a program unique to ISB and one that gives Middle School students the chance to explore topics not typical in a Middle School curriculum. Faculty engages with students on a broad variety of topics, stemming from their own personal interests and expertise – topics ranging from Japanese culture to architecture, and from stop motion animation to robotics.

Not only are the topics unique, but the way in which students learn is different from a traditional classroom. Working in a hands-on and collaborative way, students develop important 21st century skills like creativity, curiosity, collaboration, ethics, resilience and time management. Sixth, seventh and eighth graders work together on SEP projects and this creates a strong sense of community and collaboration in the Middle School. Having a chance to work in groups helps students develop social skills and learn from each other as well as from their teachers. At the end of each semester, Middle School students design, create and present their final projects to each other.

## Student Support Services and Programs

As part of the Middle School curriculum, students have various opportunities for support and enrichment. In order to foster developmental needs and academic skills and expertise, Student Support Services and Programs cover the following areas: study skills and IT workshops, teacher's office hours, learning support services, wellness and advisory. See the Student Support section of website for more details.