

# The Dalton Plan

## Mission Statement



The Dalton School is committed to providing an education of excellence that meets each student's interests, abilities and needs within a common curricular framework and reflects and promotes an understanding of, and appreciation for, diversity in our community as an integral part of school life. Dalton challenges each student to develop intellectual independence, creativity and curiosity and a sense of responsibility toward others both within the School and in the community at large. Guided by the Dalton Plan, the School prepares students to "go forth unafraid."

As a progressive school guided by the Dalton Plan, a Dalton school is an intentionally diverse community committed to a tradition of life-long learning and educational innovation. The following are major principles that inform the daily learning environment at Dalton:

1. Valuing all dimensions of each child – intellectual, social, emotional, aesthetic, physical and spiritual.
2. Cultivating values of respect, integrity, compassion and justice to encourage community responsibility, combat prejudice and engage students as participants in a democratic society and global community.
3. Developing intellectual independence and risk-taking through inquiry, direct experience and collaboration.
4. Valuing all disciplines – the arts, sciences, humanities and physical development in an interdisciplinary curriculum, mindful of our historical emphasis on music, dance, theater and visual arts.

## Overview

Inspired by the intellectual ferment at the turn of the century, educational thinkers, such as John Dewey, began to cast a bold vision of a new, progressive, American approach to education. **Helen Parkhurst** caught the spirit of change and created the Dalton Plan. Aiming to achieve a balance between each child's talents and the needs of the growing American

community, Helen Parkhurst created an educational model that captured the progressive spirit of the age. Specifically, she had these objectives: to tailor each student's program to his or her needs, interests, and abilities; to promote both independence and dependability; and to enhance the student's social skills and sense of responsibility toward others. Parkhurst developed a three-part plan that continues to be the structural foundation of a Dalton education: **House, Assignment, and Lab.**

Students at Dalton begin using the Dalton Plan from a very young age. At the First Program, children are presented with opportunities to make educational choices about their learning and in the process discover how to identify their interests and take responsibility for pursuing them. Over the years, Dalton students learn how to take responsibility for their own education. Dalton graduates frequently comment on how well prepared they were for college because the Dalton Plan taught them how to budget their time, seek out faculty, and take control of their own educational destinies.

Today, as in the early years, Dalton is committed to educating students in accordance with the Dalton Plan developed by Helen Parkhurst. This unique philosophy of education, along with fine facilities and a dedicated faculty, continues to enhance Dalton's reputation as one of the nation's most innovative and successful educational institutions.

## House



Helen Parkhurst believed it was crucial that each student belong to a smaller community within the larger school, a group where each child would learn, under the watchful eye of a caring teacher, the human skills needed to be a successful part of the group. This small group was so important to Parkhurst that she did not call it 'homeroom' or 'advisory,' but 'House,' and made it one of the three pillars of her Dalton Plan.

The House is home base in school for each Dalton student, and the House Advisor is the parents' key contact with the school. In the First Program and Middle School, House is comprised of students in the same grade. In the High School, House includes students from each of the four grade levels, creating a microcosm of the larger High School community. In all divisions, the House Advisor guides and assists each student in the learning process. The relationship that develops is a close one that supports students throughout their Dalton years.

For the children in the First Program, the House Advisor is also the classroom teacher. In the Middle School, the House Advisor sees the student through the transition into more departmentalized classes. In the High School, the House Advisor serves as a coach and counselor, helping to guide and advise students as they negotiate the rich and multi-faceted curriculum.

### Assignment

The Assignment represents a contract between student and teacher. In addition to defining common obligations for daily class work, long-term projects, and homework, Dalton Assignments are uniquely structured to promote the internalization and refinement of time-management and organizational skills, while offering students opportunities to develop their individual strengths and address their specific needs. The Assignment is introduced in the First Program and increases in scope and complexity through Middle and High School.



## Curriculum

Within a defined but flexible curriculum, the First Program faculty individualizes learning for children at different levels of development. Teachers vary the pace of instruction in the basic skills, enabling each child to achieve both personal and academic success. Learning takes place on a one-to-one basis, in small groups, or as part of whole class activities. Opportunities are provided at all levels to encourage children to become active and independent learners.

Unique learning experiences enrich the curriculum, such as the Archaeology Program for third grade students, a hands-on archaeological unit of study developed by Dalton's own Archaeologist-in-Residence. Investigative digs, designed in conjunction with the Social Studies cultural themes, lead young children into new areas of discovery. This interdisciplinary study is coordinated by the Archeologist in Residence, the Technology coordinators (who provide additional resources), and the House Advisors.

The First Program curriculum is also enhanced by the study of Chess. Dalton's Chess Program provides instruction to all kindergarten, first, and second grade students. In addition

to being fun, chess is a useful tool for developing young students' problem-solving skills, focus, and logical thinking.

The curriculum at the First Program is extended through numerous field trips that utilize the many resources of the city, as well as through Dalton's liaisons with The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Museum of Natural History, and other institutions. These trips are an integral part of the children's educational experience. An overnight nature study trip for third graders is a highlight of the program.

## Homework

Regular, formal homework assignments begin in the second grade and are an integral part of the Dalton Plan. They represent the child's commitment to completing the material to be covered. Homework is planned to help the child begin to learn time management, establish a routine for home study, and develop responsibility toward schoolwork. It is designed so that the student can complete it with as much independence as possible. Parents are encouraged to help their children find an appropriate study time and place. On occasion, home assignments may be given in kindergarten and first grade. The goal of homework in First Program is to provide opportunities for children to realize that schoolwork often requires thought, attention, and discipline.