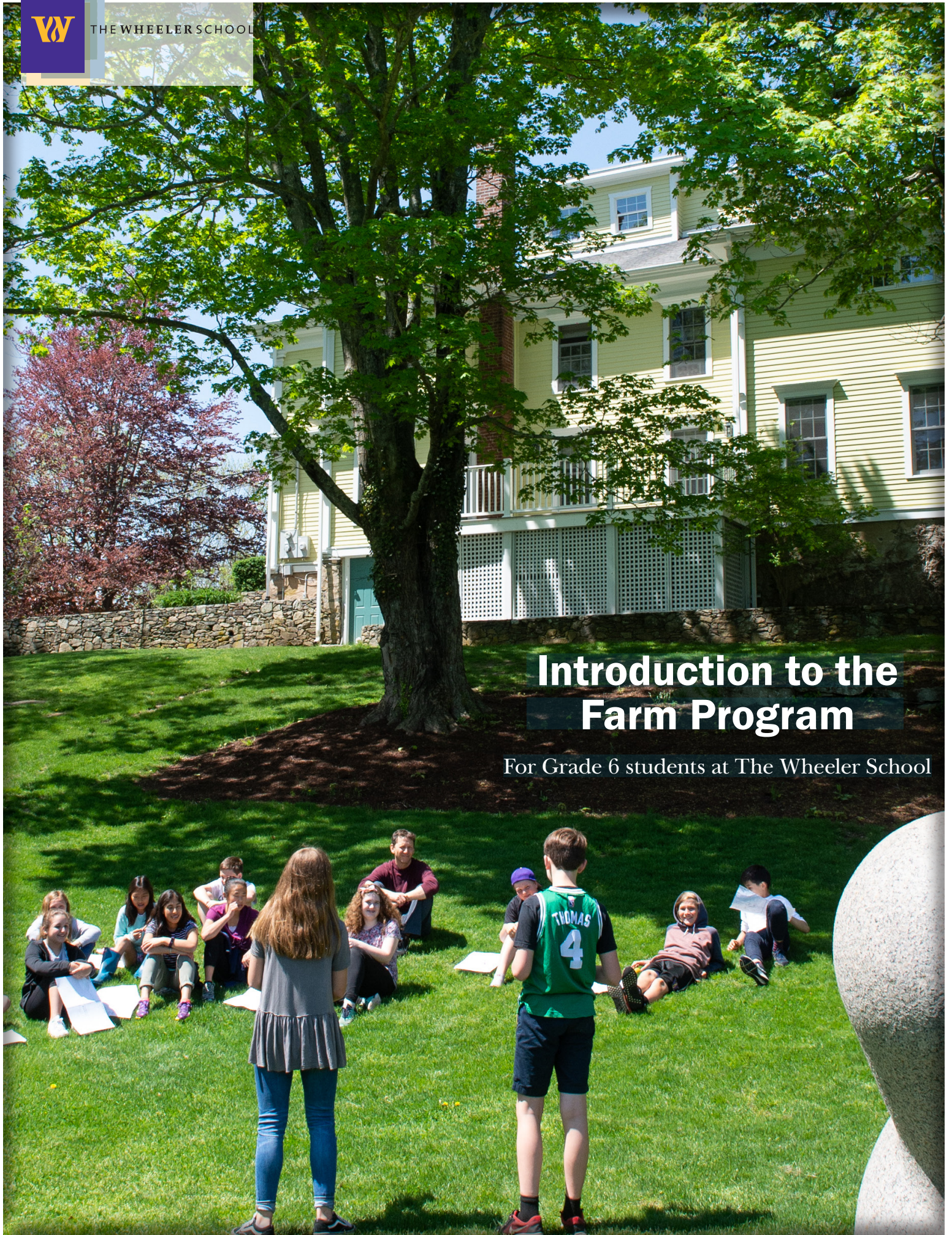




THE WHEELER SCHOOL

# Introduction to the Farm Program

For Grade 6 students at The Wheeler School





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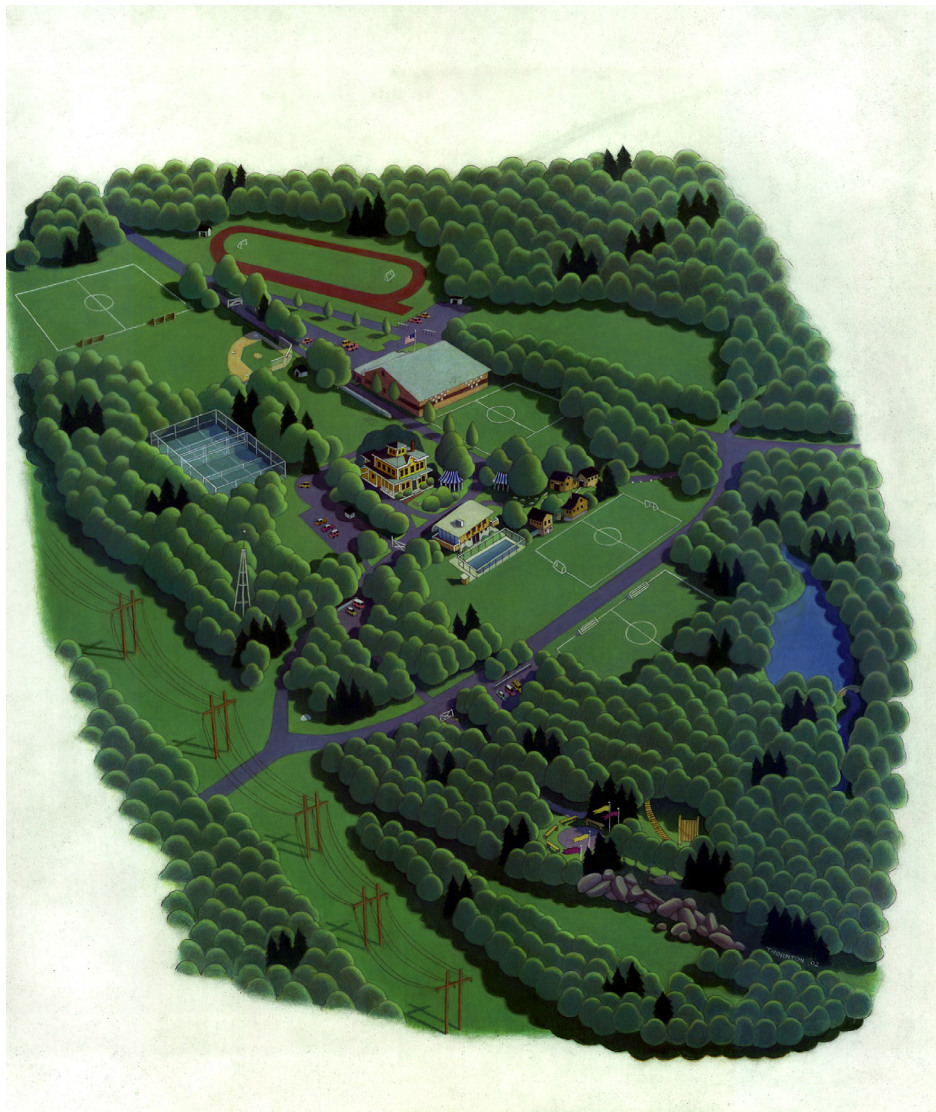
Using both innovative 21st century teaching and time honored learn-by-doing hands on curriculum, the Farm Program captures the kind of learning for which The Wheeler School constantly strives. That is, a place where students are supported and challenged in an environment which honors the individual and also nurtures the community.



**OVER 100 YEARS AGO**, Mary C. Wheeler envisioned a town and country school. Today the Farm Program helps provide the country side of the equation with a slower pace, more hands-on lessons, and socially enriching experience. Access to nature and all it affords nurtures our students who, too often, are overly connected to technology and media.

The Farm curriculum supports the wisdom and learning that occurs through problem and project based endeavors in a completely different environment. For example, students read a coming-of-age novel about survival in the woods, reading and analyzing the book as they would on the Providence campus, but then take full advantage of their setting at the Farm to fish, sew, and cook with few resources beyond their own creativity and persistence. Students at the Farm learn science from a different angle: they design, construct, and launch water rockets; learn the science of cooking, and explore basic physics as they work with tools and wood harvested from the Farm. These experiences emphasize student self-direction in learning, the iterative process of creating and problem solving, and the adolescent preference to explore their world first hand. When seniors in the Upper School reflect on what they have loved most about Wheeler, they frequently bring up the Farm Program. As much as the academic opportunities are a critical part of the program, we know that students remember and benefit even more powerfully from the social-emotional learning at the Farm, as well as from the counterpoint to their city campus experience.

At the Farm students become closer to their classmates through the rare commodity of unstructured play away from screens and hovering adults and the close connection to the natural beauty and resources of the Farm. This sixth grade experience forms a critical foundation for their work together as a class in academic, social, athletic, and artistic pursuits in their remaining seven years together at Wheeler.



Wheeler Farm illustration by  
Peter Thornton





## Program Highlights

In addition to the innovative academic curriculum, students participate in some learning opportunities unique to the Farm Program.

**Cooking:** Cooking at the Farm is a consistent student favorite. Each Friday, students cook a hot lunch for the day. Working with a partner, students measure, mix, prepare and cook their meals using whole foods and fresh ingredients. Cooking is a part of the science curriculum which includes lessons on nutrition and food safety. Our menu is adaptable to any dietary restrictions.

**Recess:** Recess is an important component of the Farm Program. Students have use of 20 acres, which includes; grassy fields, a 40-foot forested rocky hill and several shallow, but fun, woodland pools. Students must follow strict safety rules during their recess time or lose their privileges to this amazing “playground.” During the winter quarter, students are allowed to go ice skating and sledding under direct teacher supervision.







## Student Letters to Fifth Graders

"In my opinion the Farm is so much fun. One thing that's different about the Farm Program is that there is only one classroom and two teachers. So things are much more quiet and peaceful. Unlike the campus where you have the upper, lower and middle schools altogether making tons of noise. Another thing that is different is that there are so many more choices for recess. Maybe even too many! One of my personal favorites would have to be sledding. It's so fun when everyone does a class train, and at the end everyone crashes into each other."

*"So many things to list and so little time, well I guess I'll get started. My number one favorite is when we do STEAM activities at the Farm. These activities are so much fun. We have made all sorts of rockets and we do a really weird egg drop. In STEAM class, it's really relaxed. Many times our teacher shows us a bunch of cool tricks and you think it doesn't have to do with science or technology, but it does."*

"Having school at the Farm is great, and there are many things I like about it ... One thing I like about having school at the Farm is the way we can incorporate our lessons with the outdoors. Like when we start to learn about trees, we can go into the woods and learn from nature, not just from a book. Another thing we can do is have our classes outside. For me, it can get hard to pay attention at school with the rush of the students and the noise of the halls. Something about sitting in the sun just makes me feel calm and concentrated. Even though we have only been out there for a couple of weeks, I already know that I will enjoy my time there and I will be sad when we have to go back to the rush and crowds of the city."



*"I have had many fond memories from the Farm but one definitely stands out from the rest. The memory that stands out the most, is sitting on top of "June Bug" all alone reading one of my favorite books. It was so quiet and peaceful up there. The birds were chirping and I could hear the squirrels chattering way high up in the trees. I laid back and gazed at the sky and pushed all the stressful thoughts from my mind. I think that everyone should take a break from their busy lives and do that. The world would be a better place if everyone took time to relax."*



## Parents' Perspective

"I have had the privilege of having two children participate in the Farm Program at Wheeler. The Farm Program is truly a unique experience in which middle schoolers can take a 'sabbatical,' so to speak from the fast-paced schedule of a typical school day. The Farm Program affords students the opportunity to learn from their hands-on experiences in nature's laboratory. What an awesome classroom! I believe that my children became aware that valuable learning experiences can occur in non-traditional settings, and that it is ok to come home and say, "SCHOOL WAS FUN TODAY!" My younger daughter is very shy and although very excited about coming back to Wheeler, I am sure a bit nervous about re-entry. The Farm Program afforded my daughter a friendly, relaxed environment in which she could acclimate to new faces, teachers and curriculum. She has now completed the Farm Program and has successfully transitioned back to the regular school program. I give much credit for this wonderful transition back to Wheeler School to the Farm Program. I fully support this program and am grateful that my children were able to participate. I believe that our children are exposed to much more stress than our generation and I applaud any attempt at letting, "KIDS BE KIDS."

*"The Farm Program is certainly a wonderful idea that is reminiscent of a now forgotten ancient teaching system in India (1000-1200 B.C.) with an emphasis on our relationship with nature and learning. Last Friday evening we had a wonderful time with you at the Wheeler Farm and were enlightened about the purpose and scope of your Farm Program. The setting is excellent-a quiet place surrounded by nature, as if, a place far from the madding crowd! Your well thought-out curriculum is providing the students with a perfect occasion to learn about working together, conducting their own experiments, like rocket launching, cooking, etc., and learning science, technology, engineering, art, math and nature, all from books and from nature itself. I am certainly positive about the long lasting impact on every student's experience from this hiatus at the Wheeler Farm when they return to the main campus for the rest of the academic year. As for my son, I am sure that the eight weeks that he spent at the Wheeler Farm Program, will remain indelible in his memory for the rest of his life."*

"Special is certainly the word that comes to mind when we think about the experience that our son has had this past term at the Farm Program. I think, at times he feels like he has been playing hooky, going off to the farm, and yet the learning has been deep and lasting! He has looked forward to going to the Farm every day and never once was disappointed. He loves nature and science, so of course, the place would be a natural for him. But I think it's really the people that have made the difference for our son. He has learned there, as never before, lessons about the benefits of cooperation and the pleasure of teamwork that we believe will last him a lifetime."





## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What will my child be doing in the Farm Program?**

Students will study the same subjects as their peers in Providence using experiential education methodologies. For example, students in Providence may learn about the manufacture of paper while learning about plants. Farm Program students may make greeting cards from homemade paper while they also learn about commercial paper production and the cellular difference between plants and animals.

### **Why offer the Farm Program?**

Middle School children learn best by doing and experiencing. They like to have time and space as they learn. Typical 6th graders like to get comfortable and take their time exploring. In addition, more children have less opportunity to experience the outdoors even in a park or backyard. Obesity and related health problems are on the rise among middle schoolers. Emotional stress among middle schoolers is also of increasing concerns. The Farm Program offers active learning in a healthy environment and the gift of time.

### **What quarter will my child go?**

This depends on your child's homeroom placement.

### **Don't the Fall and Spring students like the Farm Program more than those in the Winter quarters?**

Each quarter has its own advantages and disadvantages. While the spring can be a beautiful time in New England, especially in the outdoors, it can also be difficult for those suffering from allergies or unaccustomed to the emergence of insects. In the winter quarter it may be cold, but students won't have to cope with bugs, pollen, poison ivy. The winter also offers unique opportunities such as studying the laws of physics while skating and sledding. Each season has its gifts and challenges. As each quarter unfolds, students unanimously assert that "their" particular quarter is "the best time" to come to the Farm.

### **Why not offer more time at the Farm?**

The Farm Program is truly unique. To the best of our knowledge, there is no program like it in the nation. To make it work requires the coordination of many resources and program flexibility. The seventh and eighth grade programs do not offer the kind of flexibility that could extend the Farm Program beyond the sixth grade.

### **How is the Hamilton School involved in the Farm Program?**

Hamilton faculty and the school's director have been involved in the planning and implementation of the program since its beginning. Hamilton 6th grade students participate in the Farm Program in two week sessions, once each quarter of the academic year.

### **How long does it take to get to the Wheeler School Farm from Providence campus?**

The two campuses are approximately 5 miles apart. Travel time is 12-15 minutes.



## The Farm Program Logistics

**Basic Daily Schedule:** Students start each day in Providence with math class.

**Student Absence:** If your child is sick or cannot attend school, please call the Middle School Administrative Assistant, Mrs. Mello at 401-421-8100 x 2126 by 8:30 am.

**Planned early departure from school:** If your child is at the Farm, you must pick up your child in Seekonk. Early departure due to illness: If your child becomes ill while at the Farm, a member of Wheeler Health Services will drive your child back to the Health Center on the Providence campus if necessary.

**Late arrival to school:** If your child is late and missed the bus to the Farm, you must drive him/her to the Farm.

**End of day dismissal:** Your child may be picked up from the Farm between 2:40-3:00, if preferred. Please notify Paul Pieri 24 hours in advance when possible, ( 401 )573-4205 or [paulpieri@wheelerschool.org](mailto:paulpieri@wheelerschool.org)

**Lunch and Snack:** Lunch is Monday-Thursday with Snack time every day. Students are responsible for providing their own lunch Monday-Thursday and they must bring a snack every day. Students may purchase food from Wheeler Food Services in Providence prior to departure to the Farm each morning. On Fridays, the class will cook hot lunch together at the Farm.







Farm Program  
Values

**Responsibility**

**Consideration**

**Stewardship**

**Gratitude**

**Joy**











**Farm Program Administration**

**Director:** Paul Pieri

**Middle School Director:** Vanessa O'Driscoll

**Head of Strategic Innovation & N-8 Divisions:** Young Un