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Course Descriptions Academic Year 2026-2027

Pacem’s primary courses are intended for students ages 10 – 18. Classes for older students cover material at a more sophisticated level and require more homework to be completed outside of class. Classes are intended for students of the age range indicated. Students outside the given age range may take a class with instructor permission. Please contact us if you have questions about which classes are most appropriate for your child. Please refer to the weekly class schedule for class times.

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Language Arts, Literature, and Writing

Teachers will be in touch throughout the year about acquiring books for literature class. Because we want to give families as many purchase options as possible to keep costs down (used books, libraries, e-books, etc.) we have chosen not to charge a book fee and buy books as a school. We can help if the cost of books poses an economic hardship.

Discoveries: Literature and Us

(level 1/ages 10-13) (1 credit)

TBA

Students in this class will explore a variety of literary genres including fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, often drawing on lists of award-winning middle-grades books. Students will read some stories together and discuss literature components like character traits and motivations, plot elements, setting, theme, and style. They'll also make independent reading selections, create responses to these, and share thoughts on them with the larger group. While responses to reading can have creative components, students also will practice academic writing skills like note taking, summarizing, and evaluating, and they'll begin to build analytical writing skills. In addition to academic writing, students will have ample opportunity to explore creative fiction and non-fiction. This may include stories, poetry, or even a class newspaper. Students will design, write, revise, and polish all substantial projects. They'll select 2 polished pieces to include on their Pacem website.

Each year, content and projects differ, depending on students' needs, so students may take this class multiple years. Please be advised that this class will sometimes have reading homework.

Explorations

(level 2/ages 12-14) (1 credit)

Jenni Belotserkovsky

Literature: In this class, students will read about the explorations of both characters and people, as well as the ways such explorations may differ in diverse American and world cultures. Students will collaboratively select literature to read and discuss, as well as make genre selections.

Discussion and Writing: Students will work on close reading analysis, as well as presentation and discussion skills. Depending on student interest, they may self-design creative writing projects. Students will keep a journal consisting of short informal pieces, and, in addition, they will complete an academic literature response essay, a short story, a poem, and an expository piece. With guidance, they will use the drafting process to develop and complete all major projects.

Each year, content and projects differ, depending on students' needs, so students may take this class multiple years. Please be advised that this class will have reading and writing homework.

The Essay and Our Favorite Genres

(level 3/ ages 14-16) (1 credit)

Aaron Starmer

Literature: During the first semester, students will explore a variety of essays and other nonfiction pieces from books, magazines, blogs, and other historical and modern sources. They will also look more in depth at graphic memoirs, podcasts, documentary films, and video essays. During the second semester, the class (or each individual student) will pick fiction genres to focus on. Students may select any genre—fantasy, science fiction, classics, humor, or whatever else inspires them.

Discussion and Writing: Students will write shorter reflective and analytical responses to a number of different kinds of essays. They also will craft at least 4 complete essays: analytical, narrative, opinion/argument, and reflective. If students choose, they could create essays in diverse formats, such as audio, video, or comics formats. They may also develop other creative projects, particularly in response to their genre studies. With guidance, they will use the drafting process to develop and complete all major projects.

Each year, content and projects differ, depending on students' needs, so students may take this class multiple years. Please be advised that this course will have reading and writing homework.

Advanced Global Literature

(level 4/ ages 15-18) (1 credit)

Aaron Starmer

Literature: Students will explore literature from three to four regions outside the United States, though because of the challenges with finding work in translation, they may instead read literature by authors with roots in those regions yet currently living in English-speaking regions. We'll take a multi-genre approach, studying nonfiction, fiction, and poetry, and students will look at authors' techniques for creating literature. In addition, students will consider the ways literature depicts and explores current social issues, such as the effects of transformative technology or political upheaval. Students will have the opportunity to choose some of the texts for this class.

Discussion and Writing: Discussions will focus on the forms and structures of texts, as well as figurative and symbolic aspects. Students will also draw connections between chosen texts and other literature, their own lives, and world events. Writing responses and projects will be tailored to students' interests and long-term goals, though students will be required to write at least two academic literary analysis essays. With guidance, they will use the drafting process to develop and complete all major projects. Please be advised that this class will have reading and writing homework.

Math

Teachers will be in touch throughout the year about acquiring texts for math tutorials. Because we want to give families as many purchase options as possible to keep costs down we have chosen not to charge a book fee and buy books as a school. We can help if the cost of books poses an economic hardship.

Real World Math and Beyond

(level 1-2/ages 10-14) (1 credit)

Rebecca Yahm

This class addresses all topics typically taught in the middle school math curriculum in the context of real-world and hands-on activities designed to build and practice fundamental math concepts and skills in a relevant, interesting, and cohesive way. Students will learn decimals, fractions, percents and the beginnings of geometry. Activities are planned so that all students can learn at their current levels while working towards mastery of fundamental skills and concepts. Students explore, practice, and apply concepts and procedures through investigations, games, problem solving tasks, and group projects. Students develop and apply skills in problem solving, reasoning, and mathematical communication. Themes and projects vary from year to year so that students can continue to take this class until they are ready for beginning algebra. Themes may include the following: architecture and geometry, statistics, mapmaking, games of strategy and chance, and banking and finance. In addition to group projects, students will work on basic math skills at their own pace using either a written or computer-based curriculum. Our expectation is that students entering this class have a solid foundation in basic computation and are familiar with multi-digit addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. The content of this course is very flexible and will be tailored to the needs of individual students.

Math Tutorial

(level 2-4/ages 12-18) (1 credit)

Nick Zandstra /Paul Wallich/ TBA

Pacem believes it is essential for students to have the time to work at their own pace in order to reach their full creative and intellectual potential. This belief is emphasized in Pacem's Math Tutorial, which caters to the individualized study of mathematics. In this class, students set and work toward individual goals. In such a small classroom, our one-on-one math discussions and active use of the whiteboard to work through challenging problems often engages other students and exposes all the students to a wide variety of math levels, from fractions to calculus. In addition, students who are at similar levels will occasionally work together on longer term projects and group challenges that focus on creative problem-solving and mathematical reasoning.

The instructors will be in touch with parents (and will meet with students) at the beginning of the year to outline expectations and discuss curriculum. Depending on student interest and skill level we have several curricula that we have worked with. These include Big Ideas Math, Art of Problem Solving, Singapore Math, and others. Students will be expected to complete homework in addition to working during class time. In addition to having a textbook, students may use online math practice sites such as IXL or Khan Academy. Please note that in order to make good progress in their math skills, students are expected to complete regular homework.

In general, we recommend Math Tutorial for students who are ready for pre-algebra and beyond. There are several sections of this class. The choice of which section to enroll in will be at the discretion of the teachers and finalized at the beginning of the year.

Culture, History, and Peace Studies (CHPS)

CHPS classes weave social science content and a variety of academic skills together while examining key questions about how human beings live together, locally and globally, today and in history.

The Ancients

(level 1-2/ages 10-14) (1 credit)

Rebecca Yahm

Take a journey thousands of years into the past to explore the mysteries of ancient history. We will begin by learning about early humans and how historians and archaeologists learn about the ancient past. We'll then look at the impact of major developments such as agriculture and written language. We will take an in-depth look at several ancient cultures from around the world, which will be chosen in part based on student interest. Through a range of different experiences, we'll explore aspects of these cultures including daily life, mythology, customs, religion and spirituality, science and mathematics, and the arts, and attempt to bring these cultures to life. In the process we'll ask some larger questions about cultural universals, the beliefs of ancient people, and major historical changes. This class will include hands-on activities as well as literature, discussion, oral presentations, and writing.

Big History

(level 2-3/ages 12-15) (1 credit)

Rebecca Yahm

Journey through the entire span of human history. Beginning with the earliest humans, we will explore different scales of time and space to tell the story of how humans have behaved, thought, and interacted across the ages. We'll look at major turning points in history when big changes led to increasing complexity and examine the web of interconnected events that led to where we are today. What makes humans unique? What do we know about our past? What don't we know? What issues and problems have recurred over time? What big themes can help us wrap our brains around the big sweep of time? And how can all of this help shape our ideas of what the future may hold? We will learn about the work of historians as we investigate historical mysteries and look for specific evidence to back up historical claims. Throughout, we'll make connections and comparisons as we discuss big questions and look for patterns to help us understand how human societies have changed over time. Reading, discussion, writing, and oral presentations will all be included. This class is intended for students at the late middle school and early high school level.

World History and Perspectives

(level 3-4/ages 14-18) (1 credit)

Rebecca Yahm

This class encompasses world history, culture, religion, politics, perspectives, and ideas. We begin by learning about ancient cultures and societies worldwide and then explore the transformations which created our modern world. Students will research, analyze, discuss, and reflect on global historical themes and questions from early humans to the beginning of the 20th century. Topics will include the agricultural revolution, the development of cities, written language, changing economic and political organization, revolutions, industrialization, and imperialism and colonialism. We will practice skills for weighing evidence about historical claims, making comparisons, and interpreting primary and secondary sources. Discussions will include cultural universals, issues and problems that have recurred over time, the consequences of big changes that led to increasing complexity, the growth and collapse of civilizations, the connections between historical events and current issues, and other connections and patterns. Reading, discussion, writing, and oral presentations will all be included.

Science

Science courses at Pacem are lab and activity based courses focusing on inquiry, investigation, and research. All of our science courses cover, in an age-appropriate manner, the scientific method, observation, data analysis, scientific writing, and research. Environmental sustainability is a thread woven in throughout the curriculum, as is knowledge and understanding of the local environment.

How the Universe Works

(level 1/ages 10-13) (1 credit)

Nick Zandstra

Together we will explore the mechanics of our universe. Through hands-on experimentation, research projects, and class discussion we will build a foundation of understanding of the universe around us and its many complicated parts and pieces. We will test the laws of physics with hands on projects with emphasis on observation and record keeping. As we build on our understanding of the physical, we also will incorporate electronics and magnetism into our picture of how the universe behaves. Once we have built a solid foundation of physics, we can then expand out to investigate how the Earth and the solar system was formed and now behaves, and then out farther to understand stars, other galaxies, and black holes. Topics covered may include:

- Motion, forces, and Newton's laws as applied to everyday objects
- Kinetic and potential energy and friction
- Electricity, circuits, and magnetism
- Motion of planets and moons
- History of the solar system and universe
- Understanding of the scale of the solar system

Science of Food and Water

(level 2/ages 12-14) (1 credit)

Nick Zandstra

Food and water form a basis for animal survival (including our own!) In this class we will introduce the concepts of nutrition, food chemistry, and water quality. There will be a mix of field work, lab work, research, writing, presentations and other projects as well as possible field trips to local farms, rivers, and municipal water plants. The scientific process will be an underlying foundation for our studies. Topics may include food energy conversion, fermentation and preservation, nutrition, and agriculture. Our water study will involve examining and testing local water sources for organic and biological components, and our study of food will include an introduction to the study of matter. Field trips will be incorporated as often as possible.

Physics

(level 3/ages 14-16) (1 credit)

Paul Wallich

How can we describe motion? Why are ice skates slippery? What is a rainbow? How does a motor work? Physics holds the answers to these and other questions, both mundane and profound. In this course, we will start by discussing measurement and how measurement helps us to understand what things are made of. In this course, we will investigate the nature of motion, energy, electricity, sound, and light. These are the fundamental laws that explain our universe and determine the behavior of everything we see in the world around us. Increasingly science educators are promoting the study of physics as the first foray into upper level science. From this, the more abstract sciences of chemistry and biology follow naturally. This will be a project-based conceptual physics course. We will ask questions and work together to devise both qualitative and quantitative experiments to answer them. From these explorations, we will develop a concrete understanding of physical laws, which we will apply to current problems in the world around us. Students who are ready for it will analyze their data using the tools of algebra, but no particular level of math is expected.

Chemistry

(level 4/ages 15-18) (1 credit)

Paul Wallich

What are things made of? Why do we use so much plastic in our world? How much pollution is in our air and water? Why do we use the materials that we do? How do things stick together? Why does petroleum have so much energy in it? The answers lie in chemistry. We will answer these questions, and many others as we discover what matter, the stuff of the universe, is made of, how it is put together, and how it changes.

This will be a rigorous study of both quantitative and qualitative chemistry. We will cover topics typically included in an honors high school chemistry curriculum including atomic structure, bonding, behavior of solids, liquids, and gasses, mole concept, stoichiometry, and

chemical reactivity. Throughout the course, we will examine issues of local and global environmental importance, as well as topics of particular interest to the current students, as a means to understanding the structure and behavior of matter. Our studies will include group discussions, lab experiments, gathering and analyzing data, computer simulations, reading, and research.

Interdisciplinary Student-Directed Projects

Student-directed project work is at the heart of Pacem's curriculum. It reflects our strong belief in emergent learning—giving students time to focus on a topic of study that develops out of their own interests and passions, while providing teacher guidance and an intellectually inspiring atmosphere. The project process stretches students' ability to use inquiry and research, organize and present information, write, make interdisciplinary connections, channel their creativity, and see an idea through from concept to completion. It encourages students to be invested in their own learning and guides them towards ownership and responsibility for the process. It provides a meaningful context for learning and practicing research skills, writing, and other forms of communication and allows each student to build on existing strengths to learn new skills and information. Students learn about the subject they have chosen to explore, about the process of research and project work, and often about the media they choose to use to present their project.

Student-Directed Project: From Inspiration to Presentation

(level 1-2/ages 10-14) (1 credit)

Rebecca Yahm/ Jenni Belotserkovsky

Imagine the learning potential of studying a topic of great personal interest with the guidance and support to follow your questions and realize your vision! This is a powerful and compelling way to learn and practice new research and communication skills at the middle school level. Students choose a project of personal interest each semester and set their own project goals. At this level, a small group project with more teacher guidance is an option for those who want or need more direction. These projects can span all curricular areas. The teacher helps to guide students in a rich, interdisciplinary, in-depth exploration of their chosen topics, including suggesting related fields of study to explore and helping find and use available resources including experts, field study, and other field trips. Through individual conferences, mini-lessons, and group discussions, students receive support and instruction as needed in organization, research, and writing skills (including goal-setting, brainstorming and refining ideas, evaluating sources, note taking and organization, Internet research, bibliographies, time management, display ideas, and editing).

Each student creates a final display or portfolio of work, which is shown at a culminating Presentation Celebration. Past creations have been as diverse as the following: a song and music video about youth voice, a model of a black hole, a scrapbook of paintings of places in Italy, a treehouse, a recycled fashion exhibit, a stop-motion animation movie about Galileo, a 3-D map of Middle Earth, and an active maple sugaring operation. These displays reflect the individual talents, creativity, self-expression, and learning styles of the students as they share their learning with the community.

Student-Directed Project: From Inspiration to Presentation

(level 3-4/ages 14-18) (1 credit)

Rebecca Yahm/ Jenni Belotserkovsky

Imagine the learning potential of studying a topic of great personal interest with guidance and support to follow your questions and realize your vision! This is a powerful and compelling way to learn and practice the research and communication skills that are essential to lifelong learning, higher education, and many work environments. Students choose a project of personal interest each semester or for the whole school year and set their own project goals. These projects span all curricular areas. The teacher helps to guide students in a rich, interdisciplinary, in-depth exploration of their chosen topics, including suggesting related fields of study to explore and helping find and use available resources including experts, field study, and other field trips. Through individual conferences, mini-lessons, and group discussions, students receive support and instruction as needed in organization, research, and writing skills (including goal setting, brainstorming and refining ideas, evaluating sources, note taking and organization, Internet research, bibliographies and citations, time management, display ideas, and editing). Many projects at the high school level include research as well as nonfiction writing.

Students may also opt for a community-based project which could include service projects, service-learning opportunities, internships, and large-scale community projects.

Each student creates a final display or portfolio of work, which is shown at a culminating Presentation Celebration. Past creations have been as diverse as the following: a Pacem theater group, a fiction story set in Japan, a slideshow about prejudice, hand-sewn costumes, animated and live-action short films, a robot, a model of a sustainable homestead, and a computer built from parts. These displays reflect the individual talents, creativity, self-expression, and learning styles of the students as they share their learning with the community.

Capstone Project

(level 4/ages 16-18) (1 credit)

Rebecca Yahm

Imagine the learning potential of creating a major piece of work with guidance and support to follow your questions and realize your vision! The Capstone Project is an opportunity for our oldest students to bring together many of the skills they have developed over their high school years in the study of something personally inspiring, and to show the Pacem community what they can do. It is required for students in their final year of high school who wish to receive a Pacem diploma and is an option for students the previous year as well. This is a more in-depth and challenging project experience in which students pursue a passionate interest with guidance from a mentor, chosen by the student if possible. They set their own goals and progress towards them very independently, meeting with their mentor once or twice a month as needed.

The Capstone Project is expected to include at least one major substantial, well-developed, in-depth piece of work, which can take a variety of forms. The length and scope are determined by student and advisor based on the student's interests, needs, and goals (students doing a Capstone Project before their final year of high school may choose to do two shorter main pieces

instead). Students complete other components in addition to the major work. In total, the Capstone Project must include nonfiction writing, research, learning from an expert in the field (if possible), at least two means of communication in addition to writing, a teaching component, and presentations to the Pacem community or other appropriate audience, including at least one oral presentation. For example, one student studied urban sustainability and sustainable design, and his project included the following: designing and building a bioshelter and using it to raise food, writing a research paper to accompany the structure, taking a course on permaculture at Yestermorrow, teaching workshops at Pacem about computer assisted design, and presentations to the Pacem community.

Note that although this is on the schedule for a particular block of time, meetings with the advisor may be arranged outside of this time block as needed. It is expected significant amounts of work will be done outside the scheduled class time.

The Arts

Studio art classes at Pacem give students a solid foundation of technique and design principles while still allowing for personal self-expression. Students also are exposed to both historic and contemporary artists as inspiration for their own work, and connections are made to topics of study in literature and CHPS classes where possible. Performing arts are taught in the context of Thursday Workshops. In addition to a variety of topics based on student interest, we will produce a full-length play in the spring semester.

Studio Art

(level 1-4/ages 10-18) (1 credit)

Bonnie Hooper

All our art studio classes use the elements and principles of design as the foundation for creating and discussing art. Elements include line, texture, value, color, and shape. Principles of design include contrast, rhythm, balance, scale, and emphasis. Students are exposed to a wide variety of artists both historical and contemporary. With this inspiration, they create their own vision that illustrates their understanding of the concepts presented.

Topics in art will be determined by the interests and past experiences of the students. Painting, drawing, sculpture, and world art, are all possible areas of exploration. All assignments will be modified so that advanced students will be challenged, and beginners will be given instruction in basic art skills. A wide range of artists will be used for inspiration.

Please note that the choice of section for this class will be determined by the other courses a student is taking.

Foreign Language

At Pacem, we believe that speaking a foreign language is an important part of understanding other cultures, peoples, and parts of the world, as well as a skill that students may need in their future life and work. This understanding, in turn is critical for fostering global peace and understanding which is central to our mission. French and Spanish are the languages students most often wish to learn, however, tutorials in other languages, including Latin or Japanese, may be possible as well.

Beginner/Intermediate Spanish

(level 1-3/ages 10-15) (.5 credit)

TBA

Spanish is the third most commonly spoken language in the world today. Learn this important language through an immersion process. Class time will include games, dialogs, music, creative writing, cultural studies, and performances as well as grammatical skills to create a solid foundation and reinforce what is learned. There will be some homework in order to continue practicing between classes. There will be two sections of this class. One is for beginning students, and the other for students with some prior Spanish knowledge.

Foreign Language Independent Study

(level 3-4/ages 14-18) (.5-1 credit)

Staff

Students may choose to study a language other than Spanish independently. If possible, we will find a tutor (who is likely to be online) to work with the student in their chosen language, however students choosing this option will be expected to work and make progress independently and document their work.

Study Skills

Study Skills

(levels 1-3/ages 10-15) (.5 credit)

Jenni Belotserkovsky

At Pacem ask all our students to take a leading role in shaping their academic experience. This course is intended to help middle school and younger high school students organize their studies and learn to navigate and succeed in the shifting academic and social climate of middle and high school. The class will address academic executive function and organization skills, literacy skills, and basic math skills. There may also be discussions of social-emotional learning and how that ties into academic achievement. In addition, students may get help with specific classes that they are taking. There will be required journaling.

Independent Study

(level 1-4/ages 10-18) (.5 -1 credit)

Pacem Faculty

In any subject area, students may work with a faculty advisor to design an independent study to substitute for a regular Pacem class. The purpose of an independent study is to allow students the flexibility to design their own curricula with faculty mentors. Pacem faculty may also assist the student in finding outside expert mentors when appropriate. Independent studies must include similar concepts and skills and be of the same quality and complexity as the classes they are replacing. Independent studies are not available if a similar course is currently being taught. At the beginning of the year, students will define goals for their studies. Throughout the year the student and their mentor will meet weekly, to plan their work for the week and assess the student's progress.

If there is no Pacem faculty member available with the expertise to advise an independent study, a student may find an independent outside tutor. Pacem is only able to pay for one hour a week at a rate comparable to the Pacem faculty hourly rate. Any fees above that rate will be the responsibility of the family. This option is intended primarily for full-time students.

Thursday Programming

Thursday mornings at Pacem are devoted to Student Directed Projects. For students not interested in that, this is a good time to explore internship opportunities, community service projects, or other compatible full-day programs. Faculty guide students in making the best use of their time. The possibilities are endless!

Thursday afternoons

On Thursday afternoons, Pacem hosts a series of 1 – 8 week long workshops. In these workshops, we will take advantage of local organizations and experts. Students may register for the entire series of workshops, or for individual offerings. Interested students are invited to play a significant role in choosing workshop topics, organizing them, and even leading them. Past workshop topics have included mountain biking, archery, model rocketry, fencing, American Sign Language, improvisational acting, Shakespeare reading and performance, digital photography, board game design, and more. In the winter or spring, Thursday workshops will focus on the production of a full-length play.

College Advising

Pacem Faculty

Depending on demand, a variety of offerings to assist in the college admissions process will be available to our high-school aged students. These may include workshops such as choosing an appropriate college, applying for financial aid, essay writing, homeschool transcript and portfolio documentation, and interviewing skills. In the past we have also employed a college consultant.

Extracurricular Activities and Clubs

Pacem offers a variety of extracurricular activities which vary by season. Offerings are determined by student interest and are generally student-led. In the past, these have included the following: game club, dungeons and dragons, live action role-playing, a cappella singing, cross country skiing, ultimate Frisbee, running, theater, and more.

Fall Outdoor Adventure Days

All students are invited to join us for several days before the start of school (dates TBA). We will spend some time in the woods and fields of Vermont getting to know each other and building the foundation of our community for the coming year. Our days will be filled with team building activities, hikes, and companionship. We will have time alone to contemplate our goals for the coming year, and time as a group learning to work cooperatively and appreciating what each of us has to offer the group. The details of these days will be available in August. All students who are taking more than one class at Pacem are strongly encouraged to attend.

Homeschool Advising Package

With our homeschool advising package, Pacem's homeschool expert, Rebecca Yahm, will provide you with support for your homeschool curriculum, planning, and teaching throughout the year. The first advising meeting will take place in the summer to get help developing educational goals for the year, planning curriculum, finding resources, and/or completing state paperwork. In the middle of the year, you will have an opportunity to check in and address any concerns or issues you might be facing, since mid-year questions and new directions are common. At the end of the year, you will meet for a homeschool assessment, which fulfills the state of Vermont Home Study year-end assessment requirement and is also an opportunity to review and appreciate your child's progress and accomplishments during the year. Meetings in addition to the ones described here can be scheduled for additional cost.

Health Seminar and Trip Days

For one to two days in April, we will devote ourselves to understanding, appreciating, and promoting healthy lifestyles. During this time, Pacem will host a series of workshops led by students, faculty, parents, and local experts. Specific topics will be developed by students and faculty. More information will be available in April. If there is student and faculty interest, we may use this time for school trips, as well.

Mountain and Service Retreat

Just as we began the year outside, so we will end it. After classes end in June, we will physically challenge ourselves on two mountain hikes and enjoy the beauty of early summer in Vermont. On one other day we will serve one or two organizations in our community. If students are up for the challenge our mountain hikes might include an overnight camping trip. Any camping trip will incur a nominal cost to cover food and camp-site fees. Parents are asked to either volunteer to chaperone or pay to cover staff costs for these days.

The emphasis of these days will be to reflect on the past year and appreciate the ways in which we have all grown. We will contemplate how we can help each other and the world around us, learn about and appreciate our natural world, and find our peaceful center.

Bring your field guides and your knowledge of the natural world with you and share!

Please note: Classes with insufficient enrollment are subject to cancellation. Families will be notified as soon as possible about class cancellations. Deposits for canceled classes will be returned.