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## Curriculum



Eastern Washtenaw Multicultural Academy desire is to make a difference in the education of its students. The faculty, administration, and parents believe providing choice is a powerful tool for creating strong learning environments and for influencing education in general.

One of the exclusive features of Eastern Washtenaw Multicultural is that our curriculum is center theme based. Also, all of our classrooms are multi-age, with elementary classrooms containing elementary K-5 and middle school containing 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade levels. Our high school 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> is considered to be a pioneer for whom we incorporate technology (Virtual High School classes) along with teacher mentors, who focus on small classes in a family environment. With all the proven and successfulness our school offers EWMA has the opportunity to give your child academic and personal enrichment skills to help them be more successful inside and outside the classroom.

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### **Center based classrooms:**

At EWMA our Centers based learning provides children with opportunities for making choices, working with others, being involved in hands-on activities, and becoming fully engaged in learning. In contrast, traditional classroom formats, in which children must remain quiet and at their individual desks for most of the school day, may discourage children's active engagement in learning, prevent them from taking responsibility for their behavior, and make going to school a generally unpleasant experience. Children are grouped according to their academic abilities instead of their age.

### **Multiage Classrooms:**

The multi-age classroom is not a combination class where a teacher instructs two grade levels in their designated curricula. Ages and grades do not divide this community of learners within the classroom. Rather, in the multi-age classroom, every child can become a successful learner on his or her own continuum of growth. The multi-age classrooms supports this individual growth through a process approach to learning that is child-centered. The multi-age environment requires teachers to facilitate the learning of each child rather than to instruct the class as a whole based on predetermined grade-level skills and content. As a result, the multi-age classroom can turn the process of education into a wonderful and successful adventure in learning for both teacher and children.

### ***Questions about how our Multi-Age Grouping works:***

#### **What is Multi-Age Grouping?**

Multi-age refers to the physical grouping of students as well as a philosophy about the best way to achieve outcomes for them. Students are grouped so that the age span of the class is greater than one year. Programs are planned which are developmentally appropriate for each student regardless of their age or grade level. The multi-age philosophy recognizes that students learn better when they have role models they can turn to for assistance, and when they are able to practice their skills by demonstrating to others. This cannot happen in a single grade class. The multi-age class is based on a more family-oriented structure where difference is accepted, and nurturing is valued and encouraged.

#### **How are students taught in a multi-age class?**

In a multi-age class, students are taught in groupings that maximize the potential of their learning. Teachers take advantage of the range of experiences, knowledge and skills of the group to develop programs where the outcomes for students are open-ended. This means that students learn from the teacher and each other, and the teacher plans for, and expects different outcomes for each child dependent upon these stages of development.

#### **Won't my child get bored learning the alphabet two years in a row?**

Basic skills, such as learning letter names and sounds, and learning to count are taught in groups of students according to their needs. Once your child reaches their learning goal they move onto the next stage. This gives all students a

chance to work at their own level regardless of the pace of their peers.

### **Will my older child be expected to "teach" the younger children?**

As in any class, the responsibility for the teaching rests with the teacher. In a multi-age class, older students naturally want to help younger students and frequently do so. Research has shown that when students teach information and skills to their classmates, their academic performance improves. They reinforce their own knowledge and skills, which in turn builds their self-confidence and self-esteem and they come to a better understanding of the subject matters.

### **Won't my younger child be overwhelmed by the older, more competent children?**

Older students often spontaneously comfort and nurture the younger students. Most students are sensitive to the needs of those that are younger and want to help them fit in. They show them where everything is, help them to read and write, play with them and look after them on the playground, and enable them to accomplish tasks far more complex than if they were in a single grade class. In a multi-age class, younger and less able students have their needs met much more quickly and more often.

### **Won't my young child pick up bad behavior from the older children?**

Because the older children fulfill a nurturing role, there are less behavior problems in the multi-age classrooms. The older students tend to self-regulate their behavior in order to provide good examples. Also, the fact that all the older student's practice being leaders in the class helps to alleviate the pressure between older students competing for the role of "boss" in the classroom. The aggressive and domineering behavior that often leads to friction between children is not a problem.

### **How do teachers manage to teach all the different age levels?**

Teachers in a multi-age class are very aware of each student as an individual. They focus on what each student knows, and needs to know, rather than on the body of information that has to be transmitted to the class. Because students remain with their teachers for more than one year, teachers get to know each child very well.

Teachers use strategies such as personal learning plans, team teaching, grouping for skill learning, cooperative learning groups, interest groups, peer tutoring, and one to one instruction.

### **What about my gifted child?**

Students in multi-age classes learn to take responsibility for their learning from the beginning. They are encouraged to set goals and challenges for themselves and the teachers facilitate whatever it is they need to achieve them. Students are often allowed to move to another class for certain subjects if they need more challenges.

### **How is my special needs student be provided for?**

Charter Schools must follow all state guidelines for special needs services. Special needs students will receive the required help, but the labels tend to

disappear within the classroom. All students are judged on their personal development level and differences are accepted by the students. Multi-age classes help blend the age and ability differences that are obvious in one-grade classes, and the kids are very accepting of the differences within their classroom, because they expect them.

Charter schools often work to reduce their special education rolls not by excluding such students, but by working intensively with them within the regular classroom setting. They take all students, but resist the every-growing district practice of labeling all difficult or low-achieving children as "special

### **How is my child placed in a classroom?**

Simply defined, a Multi-Age classroom is a mixed-age group of children that stays with the same teacher for two years. Placement into a multi-age classroom, as in all classroom assignments, is determined by a collaborative effort, which takes into account a child's developmental level, learning style, makeup of a classroom, and parental input. This grouping, deliberately made for the benefit of children, not for reasons of economics, curriculum, or convenience, comprises much more than school classmates, evolving instead into a true family of learners.

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