

Multi-Age Classroom FAQs

Is this a new concept in education? Why don't we see more multi-age classes?

Multi-age education is not a new concept, but rather one with a lot of educational history, having originated with one-room schoolhouses. Multi-age education is based on the belief that learning should be age-appropriate, individually appropriate, and include meaningful learning experiences. Priscilla Pardini (2005) researched why we don't see multi-age classroom as commonly. Some reasons include:

1. The implementation of No Child Left Behind legislation
2. Emphasis on standardized, grade-level testing
3. The expectation of teachers to deliver individualized instruction

Even in our current graded model at GA, these factors have little influence on our practice as an independent school.

What will the class size be?

As in all 1st and 2nd grade classes at GA, the class size will typically be about 18 students and is taught by two teachers. Each class is comprised of a mixture of 1st and 2nd graders.

What curriculum is followed?

Our current curriculum at Germantown Academy is well positioned to support the multi-age model. In a multi-age classroom, children are not grouped by their grade level, but rather by their level of skill and knowledge in particular areas of study. Our balanced literacy program naturally supports differentiation as children build foundational literacy skills. The enVision math program is taught to students in their grade level sequence and students are instructed in skills-based math groups. Social studies and the special subject areas implement a two-year rotating curriculum sequence.

How will students be assigned to the multi-age classroom?

A diverse group of students at varied ability levels will be selected to participate in the multi-age classrooms. As with all placements, children will be placed in classes with thoughtful consideration as to where they can best experience academic and personal success.

Will the high performing older student receive enough challenge in a multi-age class?

Yes. As in all classes, there is a range of abilities and skills, which vary from student to student and from subject to subject. Our teachers are skilled at providing differentiated instruction including support and enrichment to ensure the success and growth of each child.

How might my child benefit from having the same teacher for 2 years?

Current Kindergarten students who will enter as 1st graders will have the benefit of a two-year time span with the same teachers. This model allows children to build deep, meaningful relationships with teachers. In the second year of the sequence, teachers and students do not require the same beginning of the year transition time that is required in traditional classes.

If my 1st grader is in the multi-age class, can he/she skip to 3rd grade the following year?

No. Although students are able to work at different levels across subject areas, they will be considered first and second graders and move forward with their grade level class.

How will my younger child fit socially into a multi-age peer group?

When students work alongside one another on a daily basis, they begin to form a classroom community. Older children can serve as mentors in this setting and friendships develop just as they naturally would in families, after school, extracurricular activities, and other multi-age environments.

How is a multi-age class at GA different than a traditional 1st or 2nd grade class?

Many aspects of a multi-age class will be the same as a traditional 1st or 2nd grade class. Some key differences of multi-age classes include: a more diverse learning community, a two-year relationship with a teacher, and the use of a specialist curriculum that alternates on a two-year cycle.

How will children be prepared for 3rd grade and beyond in a multi-age classroom?

The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) names essential capacities for learners in the 21st century. Multi-age classrooms prepare students to build these skills as students interact with a more diverse group of learners, in a flexible model that allows them to learn collaboratively from one another and assume leadership roles in the classroom. The NAIS 21st century capacities are:

1. Analytical and creative thinking and problem solving
2. Complex communication
3. Leadership and teamwork
4. Digital and quantitative literacy
5. Global perspective
6. Adaptability, initiative, and risk-taking
7. Integrity and ethical decision making