



## **Multi-Age Classrooms: Congratulations! Your Child Is About to Have an Incredible Learning Experience!**

When people are new to the multi-age approach to teaching, they usually have a lot of questions. Some wonder if it means their fourth grade student will be slowed down by the pace of third graders. Others think that being in a mixed class means their younger student is advanced or their older student is struggling. Some wonder if their child will repeat curriculum they already studied in order to accommodate a younger grade level.

Multi-age teaching is becoming more and more popular, even in traditional public schools, because it works! We have seen for ourselves that everyone from the most advanced student to the student who is struggling can have a fantastic learning experience when grouped with children in another grade level.

Teachers who choose to teach multi-age classes believe that children learn better in a mixed group because there are more opportunities for the children to learn from each other, there is an increased sense of community and sharing of ideas, and it is a more accurate reflection of the experiences that children will have as adults.

Fortunately, you have chosen SCS, where our charter includes multi-age teaching and our curriculum plans are designed to accommodate this model. Our big units of study in social studies and science are designed to rotate every two years so children are not getting repeated information when they spend a second year with the same teacher. For example, this past year, second and third graders learned about world history. This year, third and fourth graders will focus on American history, so they will not be repeating units they have already studied.

The teachers at SCS believe in the multi-age model and philosophy and are experienced and passionate about creating successful communities full of engaged students that meet and go beyond the typical grade level standards and expectations.

Here are a few of the most common advantages to having your student in a multi-age class:

- **Children are viewed as unique individuals.** The teacher focuses on teaching each child according to his or her own strengths, unlike in same-grade classrooms that often expect all children to be at the same place at the same time with regard to ability.
- **Children are not labeled according to their ability,** and children learn at their own rate.

- **Children develop a sense of family with their classmates.** They become a “family of learners” who support and care for each other.
- **Older children have the opportunity to serve as mentors and to take leadership roles.**
- **Children learning together tend to naturally develop small groups that teachers can work with** to make sure that learning standards for each grade level are being met. The peer groups that children work with are fluid and can change based on academic level, social interactions, and interest.
- **Children learn to be tolerant and recognize individual strengths in others** when learning in an environment with a wide range of abilities and experiences.
- **Not only can older children be mentors, but any student who has strength in one area can help another who is struggling regardless of grade level.** This type of interaction has been much more prevalent in multi-age classes I have worked with than straight grades.
- **Children are more likely to cooperate than compete.** The spirit of cooperation and caring makes it possible for children to help each other as individuals, not see each other as competitors.
- **Older children model more sophisticated approaches to problem solving,** and younger children are able to accomplish tasks they could not do without the assistance of older children. This dynamic increases the older child’s level of independence and competence.
- **Children are invited to take charge of their learning,** by making choices at centers and with project work. This sense of “ownership” and self-direction is the foundation for lifelong learning.
- **Children are exposed to positive models for behavior and social skills.**
- **Older children, working at their own pace, are free to extend their learning beyond their grade level.** Supporting peers along the way allows advanced students to solidify their knowledge and work on open-ended projects that they can take to new levels to enhance their skills.

When students stay with the same teacher for two years, there are additional benefits:

- **Children receive almost an extra month of teaching time,** because the teacher does not have to spend the early weeks in the school year getting to know each child.
- **Students who are beginning their second year with a teacher help new students** adjust to routines and expectations of the classroom with more ease and expedience.
- **Children are able to spend longer periods of time with the same teacher.** This allows the teacher to develop a deeper understanding of a child’s strengths and needs, and is therefore in a better position to support the child’s learning.

If you need more information, these are some quotes from a current second/third grade class that spent past years in straight grades and are finishing up their year in a combined classroom.

- *“It’s pretty fun to be with a person that’s one more grade up. You sometimes get to learn more stuff because there’s an older grade in the classroom.”*  
— Second grade student
- *“I got to teach multiplication to a second grader who was ready to learn. It felt cool to be a teacher and it helped me to memorize my facts.”*  
— Third grade student
- *“I like being in a multi-age class because I can get help from the third graders and my teacher.”*  
— Second grade student
- *“In a multi-age class you have more friends, you have more projects and challenges, you have more people to help, and you can work together to fill a jewel jar!”* (The Jewel Jar is a positive reinforcement system for staying on task and meeting goals in this class.)  
— Third grade student
- *“I like being in a multi-age class because my teacher can work with me on fourth-grade work while the rest of the class is doing Math Workshop, and then I can teach my friends.”*  
— Third grade student
- *“I like this class because we are not separated by grade. We can learn what we need to and help each other.”*
- *“I like this class because both grades get tough challenges. The lower grades can try the older grade’s challenges and the older grades get the next grade’s challenges. You can learn more than before if you already know some stuff about the subject. We also have lots of friends and lots of happy faces and we are never bored.”*  
— Second grade student
- *“I like that we have different math groups so you can work at your own pace.”* — Third grade student

As you can see, there are many benefits to being in a multi-age class. Our best advice is to trust yourself and trust the teachers. You have decided that SCS is right for your child and you are sharing him or her with a staff that is here because they believe in doing what is best for your child’s learning style. We can’t think of better hands to put them in!