

## **Multi-age Learning @AGC**

### ***What does “multi-age” mean at AGC?***

Multi-age grouping refers to a system where groups of students grow and learn together across more than one grade level. This can include permanent grouping with one teacher (Example: second and third grade students in the same group) or mixed small groups that are shared across teachers. At AGC, students in PreK - 5 have permanent multi-age grouping and in grades 6 and above students are sometimes grouped for multi-age learning opportunities.

### ***Why does AGC support multi-age classes?***

AGC believes in a developmental, child-centered approach to learning. Multi-age classes honor the whole child and provide a safe, nurturing space for children to develop academic skills as well as socio-emotional skills.

We all develop and learn at different paces. In a multi-age setting, all students take on the role of mentee and mentor throughout their time in the two year cycle. The focus is on collaboration and leadership development. Younger students benefit from older children who model more sophisticated practices in authentic learning experiences. Students who are advanced learn and solidify their skills by teaching others. Mixed age play is more creative and more imaginative, as well as more cooperative and less competitive.

Grades and the traditional classroom model are a result of the 19th century industrial revolution. They do not necessarily reflect the more organic ways of learning and interacting as a community. Many of our AGC current practices, such as peace circles and the focus on community, are based on indigenous practices. Multi age grouping brings us closer to these practices.

### ***Will the students remain with their teacher for two years?***

In AGC's Village Model, students spend two years in the same village and we aim for them to stay with the same teacher, which is a best practice called looping. Looping is about developing relationships and consistency for students. Spending two years with the same teachers provides the opportunity to deeply understand each child and spend less time in the “getting to know you” phase in year two. Teachers can hit the ground running with year two students, maximizing the instruction they receive.

### ***How do we determine who is going to be in each class?***

AGC makes groups taking into account a balance of ages, linguistic backgrounds (in dual language) and gender. We also aim to place siblings and other family (ex: cousins) apart.

***How are the standards and curriculum met for both grade levels in a multi-age classroom?*** The focus is on the whole-child and children's learning does not necessarily follow a linear path. Each child has their own learning continuum or journey. In every group,

whether it is from one grade or two grades, there are different academic, socio-emotional and executive functioning levels. All students participate in assessments at the beginning of the school year, to determine what his/her entry level is. Teachers are facilitators of learning and plan for differentiation according to their academic levels. IB is a student-centered, differentiated curriculum in nature, and when it comes to common core and other standards teachers make sure to address them at different levels. Multi-age villages follow a 2-year IB unit curriculum cycle so all students will have exposure to Next Generation Science Standards and Illinois Social Standards assigned to both grade levels during that time.

In terms of grading, each set of students will be graded at their Common Core standard levels based on their age. For example, the expectations for a five year old's reading level will be different from the expectations of a six or seven year old.

***Will the older and academically strong students be challenged in a multi-age classroom?*** Yes! IB curriculum is student-centered and differentiated by nature, and all students can engage at their level. Language Arts and Math lessons are differentiated based on the students' current level.

***How will interventions be addressed in a multiage classroom?***

Through authentic assessments teachers will know where students are and what the goals are. Just like in our current model, every student will be assessed for the grade/age level expectations. If the child is behind and needs additional support, he/she will receive a multi-tiered support based grade level expectations.

***Do other schools do multi-age teaching?***

Yes! There are thousands of schools around the world (and some in Chicago) that have multi-age settings. The Montessori Model, for instance, is based on multi-age groupings based on each child's stage of development. To clarify, AGC is not a Montessori school.

***What does the research show about multi-age classrooms?***

"The broadening of the learning community enriches the learning experiences for all children in mixed-aged settings" (Doherty, 2012; Gray, 2011, 2013)

"Children in multi-age classrooms learn to become more autonomous, self-directed learners"(Gray, 2014, 2017; Stone 2004)

"Younger children or novices benefit from collaborative learning from older children, or experts, who model more sophisticated approaches to learning within authentic contexts such as projects (Kallery & Laupidou, 2016) and older children solidify mastery as they explain their approaches to younger children." (Dowling, 2023; Roopnarine & Johnson, 1984)

“Student attitudes toward learning, school, self-concept, and personal and social adjustment were higher in the students who had participated in combination and multi-age classes” (Veenman, 1996)

“Parents of students in multi-age classrooms have noted that it provides a rich resource for children of diverse abilities, cultural backgrounds, and socioeconomic conditions, where they are able to appreciate and learn from one another.” (Leggett & Newman, 2017; Nieto, 2017)

“Mixed-age play is more creative and more imaginative, as well as more cooperative and less competitive.” (Gray, 2011)

“Multi-age learning is not just limited to academic schools, but broadly engages each child’s intellect, intelligences, interests and understanding of morality.” (DEVries & Zan, 2012; Katz 2015; Noddings, 2010)

“Multi-age offers children the “extraordinary opportunity to cultivate imagination, curiosity, creativity, and innovation.” (Stone, 2019)

