

Appendix XV: Early Learning Curriculum Overview



Early Education: PreK-1st Grade

Based on our expectations for rigor and the needs of our students, the Early Education program at EastSide Charter School focuses on four distinct domains that align to the Common Core State Standards and cognitive and social development of our young learners:

*Approaches to Learning
Social and Emotional Development
Communication, Language, and Literacy
Cognition and Knowledge of the World*

Guiding Principles for PreK-1st Grade:

- Children develop at different rates and each child is unique in his/her own development, growth, and acquisition of skills. Appropriate and reasonable supports and accommodation must be provided to enable all children to succeed.
- Children are active learners. A primary approach to learning is through purposeful play and collaboration. Intentional planning promotes rich learning experiences that invite participation, involve multiple contexts, and engage the senses that help children explore their environment.
- Early learning and development are multi-dimensional. Children's learning is integrated and occurs simultaneously across all domains, which are interrelated and interactive with one another.
- The content of curriculum and instruction is guided by research and effective practice to strengthen educational experiences across all settings. Our Early Education program is systematically aligned with Common Core State standards, the Delaware Early Learning Foundations, Head Start outcomes, and the National Association for the Education of Young Children guidelines.

Approaches to Learning: Teachers must intentionally design learning environments that foster children's natural curiosity, initiative, engagement, persistence, and creativity. The environments must be safe for students to ask questions, to embark on and embrace new tasks, to persevere, and to suggest original solutions. It is absolutely essential that environments are not contrived, but rather, engaging and relevant to the child and reflective of the child's interests. Learning what motivates each child will help teachers support individual differences and help children discover their own learning style.

Social and Emotional Development: Interpersonal intelligence (the capacity to understand intentions, motivations, and desires of other people) and intrapersonal intelligence (the capacity to understand oneself, to appreciate one's feelings, fears and motivations) are proven to be as important as the cognitive types of intelligence traditionally measured by IQ scores.

Communication, Language, and Literacy: The National Reading Council's recommendations for promoting literacy development in young children include instruction designed to "stimulate

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verbal interaction, to enrich children’s vocabularies, to encourage talk about books, and to provide practice with the sound structure of words.” Why the heavy emphasis on oral language skills? Research shows language development is crucial in preparing children for literacy and that word knowledge is closely linked to reading accomplishments. Access to oral and written language is influenced by a number of factors, not the least of which is the socio-economic status of the family. Expressive literacy is perhaps easiest to observe through the distinct stages of writing development. Scribbling soon takes the direction of left to right; first letters appear; strings of letters suddenly turn into expressing their ideas into conventional writing. As the building blocks of literacy—vocabulary, background knowledge, expressive and receptive language, phonological and phonemic awareness, oral expression come together children learn to view and represent, to listen and speak, to read and write. They become increasingly sophisticated in expressing themselves in ways that are readily and clearly understood.

Cognition and Knowledge of the World: By facilitating conversation and purposefully asking questions, adults not only provide rich experiences that encourage children to delve deeper into a topic of interest, but also challenge them to reach the next level of thinking. Open-ended questions, in particular, prompt children to not only use more language, but also require them to recall, and put into sequence, past events. It is during these early years that cognitive development and brain development are integrally linked. Young children are able to make sense of their world by acquiring, adapting, practicing, applying, and transferring knowledge in order to construct new or expanded concepts. It is through play, active engagement, both linguistically and experientially, experimenting, observing, exploring, manipulating, creating, listening, reflecting, problem solving, and using logic and reasoning that children become capable of more complex thinking.

What this looks like and sounds like now (2014-2015 school year):

- Students using handmade “binoculars” to demonstrate their learning targets starting with, “I can recognize...” This allows students to connect with rigorous vocabulary and teachers to check for understanding in an authentic way.
- Turn and talk debriefs amongst students discussing if they have or have not mastered their learning target for the lesson...and *why or why not*.
- Students using the learning targets to describe their thinking in the classroom.
- Students presenting math problems to the class to describe their thinking behind solving the problem and taking questions from classmates who are still unclear.
- Students engaging in free choice and/or open-ended activities that promote exploration and discovery. Teachers ask questions and provide materials to deepen students thinking without altering their path of discovery.
- Students learning across content areas. A student building a block tower draws and labels a blueprint first. His partner makes a prediction of how many blocks high the tower will be. They count together as they build, skipping every other block.
- Students who make mistakes in the classroom are asked what they can do differently next time to ensure the mistake doesn’t happen again. They are also asked what the appropriate and logical consequence should be so that the teacher knows that the student has made the connection between action and consequence.
- Students work collaboratively during the majority of the day. In PreK, there is no more than 20 minutes of whole group time *per day*. In Kindergarten and First grade there is no whole group time in the afternoon. This not only allows teachers to meet with each student individually, but it also allows students to work collaboratively to learn concepts.

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