

# KINDERGARTEN CURRICULUM

## EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING CENTER Principles of Teaching and Learning

The Early Childhood Learning Center at Heathwood Hall Episcopal School offers a developmentally-appropriate program that provides children with the strong foundation needed to ensure future academic success and good learning habits. Experiential learning and play are the vehicles through which basic skills are taught and reinforced for our students. This type of play does not happen by chance; rather, it is thoughtfully designed and orchestrated by teachers with years of experience and expertise in early childhood education. In the spring of 2009, the ECLC teachers developed a statement about our early childhood environment.

We strive to create an early childhood environment that focuses on:

### **1) Creating a caring community of learners**

In this community each child is

- known *one-on-one time between teachers and students, low teacher/student ratios, staff consistency and conversation between grades, know the age/stage of current students*
- valued *communicate with families and the child in written and verbal forms, learn about interests and strengths and build upon them, asking for questions and feedback*
- recognized for his or her unique character strengths and opportunities for growth *getting to know students and families through the school experience, inquiry-based learning*
- learning how to value and care for others *classroom-created expectations, cooperative work, chapel, offerings, prayers, caring language, and “good works”*

### **2) Teaching and learning between and among teachers and students that**

- actively engages their bodies, minds, and hearts *physical activity and on-campus trips, related arts, real-life experiences, relationships across the community, caring language and a reasoned approach*
- is experiential and connects “old” learning to “new” learning *creating products through careful process, KWL, showing/telling about learning, PLCs, Schools Attuned*
- has purpose and meaning *alphabet learning with a purpose, reading for meaning, experiential math, student-interest topics, child ages/stages learning through the Gesell materials*

**3) Planning developmentally appropriate and responsive curriculum to stimulate intellectual curiosity by encouraging each child to develop the life of the mind through foundational**

- problem-solving *hands-on with access to needed tools and materials, modeling and guiding to answers*
- literacy *sequential reading and writing skills, enthusiasm for the use of books and students' written work, what does a good reader do?, celebrating with Book Buddies, using a variety of media sources*
- mathematical thinking skills *NCTM curriculum focal points, real math purposes, games, manipulatives*
- habits for being a lifelong learner *establish expectations together, habits of independence and responsibility, follow interests, expand learning through discussion and projects*

This statement guides how we establish our classroom procedures and expectations and how we plan for future learning. Our engagement with the children is a key to how we teach skills in a way that they will learn.

**Fundamental Programs for Literacy and Mathematics**

Kindergartners develop a strong reading foundation through the use of *Houghton Mifflin: A Legacy of Reading* program. Used in grades K-3, it is a comprehensive language arts plan that provides explicit, systematic instruction in reading, writing, and language. Students develop letter/sound association as they are introduced to Alpha Friends—pictures that resemble the shapes of the letters they represent. They explore common word families and learn to recognize basic sight words. The secure decoding and comprehension skills develop through learning strategies taught during the shared whole-group and small-group reading of texts. Through exposure to a variety of genres and well-known children's authors, students develop a life-long excitement for reading. We also use the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Literacy System. Especially during the second semester, this allows the teachers to know and plan for reading instruction that is targeted to where each child is as a reader.

Writing becomes a natural part of the kindergarten curriculum as students share in the writing of class stories, lists, and descriptions. Independent journal entries using inventive spelling help students organize thoughts and apply phonetic knowledge and reading vocabulary. D'Nealian handwriting is introduced during the kindergarten year.

The *enVision* math program provides a balance between conceptual understanding and computational fluency (*Children need a deep understanding of the concept and sufficient time for practice.*); its visual, problem-based approach (*Real-life situations are used and procedures are laid out in a step-by-step approach that builds a sequence.*); on-going assessment that provides teachers with an understanding of where each student is and instruction based on the learner's needs; its technology integration and support (*Digital resources are integrated with instruction and allow us to use the SMARTBoard for student engagement.*); and its curriculum construction around the National Council of the

Teachers of Mathematics Curriculum Focal Points. This puts Heathwood Hall in-line with the most current national mathematics standards.

Throughout the year, students engage in units of study to apply their emergent learning to real world, broader themes that allow them to deeply explore a topic. Some of these in the past have been

**Birds, Elephants, or Otters:** This is a study of our class mascot as we work together to develop a community of learners with the routines and habits we will need for the school year.

**Tree Homes:** Students will become familiar with trees and their importance to the survival of many animals. Through observation, comparison, and role-play, the children integrate language arts experiences and math skills to investigate the role of a tree and how animals survive in their tree-hole homes.

**Wampanoag Indians:** Children will travel back in time to develop an appreciation for how a group of people lived long ago. Through classroom experiences and the PEAK outdoor education program, students begin to understand how all people and cultures have basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter.

**Christmas:** The kindergarten children present “The Christmas Story” to their families and the early childhood and lower school classes. They memorize traditional carols and don costumes of the Nativity to remind everyone of the true spirit of the season.

**Frog Math:** In this unit, the story “The Lost Button” from the Frog and Toad series serves as the “jumping off” point for math activities designed to build thinking skills such as estimating, counting, predicting, describing, classifying, recording data, and using logic and probability. Additionally, teachers may introduce science concepts relating to frogs and toads, or literacy concepts such as story mapping.

**Habitats of Heathwood:** The kindergarten studies life in the fields. While on walks in the fields that border our campus, the children hunt for animal tracks and collect treasures of nature. They study owls and examine owl pellets, learning about predators and prey. They learn all about ladybugs and worms and watch the wonders of spring bloom before their eyes!

**Units of Inquiry:** Throughout the year teachers will work with their students and delve into a topic area that is of high interest to the group. The advantage of this type of study is that students develop critical thinking skills and problem solving, and explore various methods of investigating a topic. Students also demonstrate different ways to represent what they learn. The inquiry experience empowers young learners to take charge of their learning!