

Early Learning Academy: Frequently Asked Questions



Q. What is the difference between a daycare and an Early Development Program?

A. The Early Learning Academy is not a day care, but an Early Development Program. Like a daycare, our utmost responsibility is the high quality care and safety of our children. Unlike a daycare, the Early Learning Academy follows a rigorous curriculum that is committed to achieving school readiness. Our teachers write detailed, objective driven lesson plans, make individualized observations of each student's progress, assess them on an ongoing basis and meet with their parents about their developmental progress and growth. EastSide is committed to Early Childhood Education and the knowledge that the first five years are the most developmentally important in a child's life. In addition, we are acutely aware that our population faces not only a preparation gap for attending Kindergarten, but is on pace to experience the massive achievement gap between socioeconomic groups. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan recognizes that closing the gap between minority students and white students could be realized by enrolling children in preschool, saying, *"We can keep trying to play catch-up or we can have an effect on the front end, by leveling the playing field from the beginning."* We seek to do the latter.

Q. What is Expeditionary Learning?

A. Expeditionary Learning is a national design framework in which children participate in in-depth learning expeditions – interactive, hands-on projects that spark curiosity, promote active learning, encourage teamwork, build character, and capitalize on children's innate spirit of adventure. This framework values how children learn, as much as what they learn, challenging them to think critically and take leadership roles in their classrooms and communities.

Students attending Expeditionary Learning programs have shown significant gains in reading and math and consistently outperform students in neighboring programs. Furthermore, the model's focus on character highlights the importance of developing traits such as grit, persistence, responsibility, empathy and care and concern for their world.

Q. What is play based learning?

A. It is through play that we practice creative problem-solving, try on new identities, learn what our strengths and limitations are, and practice love and war. (Brown, 2009) Young children are masters of play. They are at an age where learning capacity and brain development are at their peak, and nature has given them the drive to maximize that power with its best learning tool – play. Every major early childhood research organization endorses play as a foundational activity in every good early primary classroom. It is no accident that children prefer acting and interacting to listening passively. It's how they were designed. Play is the context within which children can practice the skills they are not otherwise allowed access to – complex decision-making, leadership, and higher-level thinking thrive in a play environment. Play also builds the foundation for abstract representational thinking – a rag on a stick becomes a flag, just as a set of squiggles on a page stands for a word. Open-ended play creates specific learning opportunities, allowing children to create their own worlds, grapple with the challenges most urgent to them, and gain experience negotiating alliances, roles, and strategies with their peers. Structured play allows teachers to harness the intrinsic drive to play for specific learning purposes and activities.

Quick Facts

- We serve 66 children.
- The Early Learning Academy is a Star 5 program and participates in the Delaware Stars for Early Success program.
- We share our school year calendar with the rest of EastSide Charter School.
- We are committed to the Expeditionary Learning framework; a national model that seeks to promote good work and good citizens through hands-on, student centered learning and assessment.

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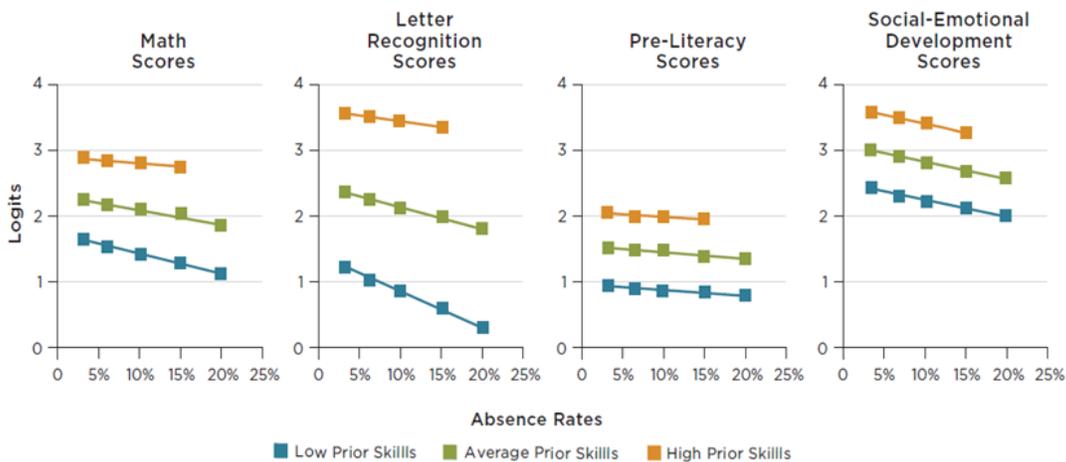
Q. What is Delaware Stars?

A. Delaware Stars for Early Success is a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), which is a method used to assess, improve and communicate the level of quality in early care and education. It establishes quality standards for programs and provides technical assistance and financial support to programs involved in Stars as they engage in quality improvement efforts. Delaware Stars is designed as a voluntary system that expects programs to work on improving quality by moving up the Star Levels. During the 2013-2014 school year, the Early Learning Academy was assessed as a Star Level 5 Quality Early Childhood program.

Q. Why is attendance so critical in Early Education Programs?

A. Significant attention is currently focused on a national level on ensuring that children are enrolled in preschool. However, regular attendance is also critically important. Children with better preschool attendance have higher kindergarten readiness scores.

The more preschool students miss school, the lower their math, letter recognition, and social-emotional development scores are at the end of the year. This is particularly the case for students entering preschool with low skills.



Q. What curriculum is used?

A. Curriculum provides the framework around which teachers organize the learning environment, experiences and interactions. There is general agreement among leaders in the field of early education that curriculum should be based on research evidence and evaluated for its effectiveness with populations similar to those with whom the curriculum will be used (NAEYC, 2003). In high quality early education programs the curriculum is thoughtfully planned to focus children's attention on important concepts, skills, and behaviors in critical areas of development and learning. When curriculum is developmentally appropriate, it is challenging, engaging, culturally and linguistically responsive, and it promotes positive outcomes for all children. EastSide Early Learning Academy has adopted the *Creative Curriculum for Preschool*, a comprehensive curriculum based on child development and early education research and theory. It is widely used in programs across the United States. Curriculum materials detail how to (a) create learning environments, (b) individualize for diverse learners, (c) teach content areas, and (d) integrate in-depth investigations of topics of interest to children, which aligns with the Expeditionary Learning framework that our entire learning community is committed to. Embedded within the curriculum resources are links to the *Teaching Strategies GOLD* assessment system that provide opportunities for daily, guided observation of children's progress toward learning objectives.