



## I am concerned that my child will not do well in a combined class and will not be ready to move onto the next grade.

Detailed studies like John Goodlad's in 1987 (The non-graded Elementary school) have shown that on average a five year span of development is typically found in a single grade group and six years in a combined class. Additionally, the results of a study published in 1999 by Dr. Joel Gajadharsingh (University of Saskatchewan) found that using standardized tests, students did as well or better in combined classrooms in Math, Language, Science and Social Studies. He also found that students in combined classes performed better than students in single grade classrooms in the following areas: independence, responsibility, study habits and attitude towards school. This is one of the compelling reasons that some schools such as Charles Dickens Elementary have gone to multi-age groupings.



## How can I support my child in a combined class?

Parents can support their children in the same ways they would if they were in a single grade class. Staying interested and concerned about school work and activities, monitoring a child's homework and keeping in touch with the teacher and attending the school whenever possible are ways the parents can support the child's learning. If you have concerns about your child's learning, you should speak to the classroom teacher.

A survey of literature on combined classes, published in 2001 and available on the internet (ERIC Identifier ED 448935) states:

"Advantages for multi-age students have been shown to increase the longer students remain in multi-age classrooms. Students in multi-age classrooms demonstrate more positive attitudes toward school, greater leadership skills, greater self-esteem, and increased pro-social and fewer aggressive behaviours, compared to peers in traditional graded classrooms. Statistical analysis demonstrated that students from multi-age classrooms achieved greater academic outcomes in relation to their abilities and demonstrated greater increases in academic achievement than students of the same and higher abilities from single age classrooms when all classrooms employed developmentally appropriate teaching practices."



## COMBINED CLASSES (often referred to as Split Classes)



## What is a combined class?

A combined or split class refers to a class that is made up of students from two or more grades. Combined classes occur most frequently in elementary schools and are the combination of students in two different grades with one teacher teaching both curricula. For example, a school might have a grade 2/grade 3 class combination or a grade 6/grade 7 class combination. At the secondary schools, combined classes may occur, for example a Spanish 9/10 combination or a Ceramics 10/11/12 combination.

It is important to know that students in combined classes are not held back to the level of the younger children nor are the children in the lower grade expected to do work beyond their abilities. The prescribed learning outcomes are grade appropriate for all students, whether or not they are in a combined class.

## Why do schools create combined classes?

There are several reasons why schools create these classes. When school staff look to organize their students, that is to place the students in their classes with teachers, they have to balance the educational needs of their students with the staffing they receive from Human Resources as well as with legislated contractual considerations.

A school calculates enrolment. This is then verified by the Human Resources division of the Vancouver Board of Education. Based on this figure, teaching staff (both enrolling and nonenrolling) is allocated. The Principal, working with the Staff Committee of the school, then constructs classes based on these factors and the educational interests of each student. In many instances, combined classes result.



## How do schools decide which students to place in combined classes?

In an effort to ensure all students are placed in appropriately balanced classrooms, school staff (teachers, Principals and Vice Principals) use such criteria as age, range of ability, special learning needs, gender, social groupings, and support staff recommendation.

Just as they do when allocating students to non-combined classes, the Principal and Vice-Principal work together with the classroom teachers to best match the learning styles and needs of the student. In many schools parents are given the opportunity in June to submit their preference for a learning situation for their child.

## Will the teacher teach the entire curriculum to both grades?

The School Act, which governs British Columbia schools, stipulates that all teachers, including teachers of split classes, must teach the prescribed curriculum. Therefore the teacher is obligated to teach the entire curriculum to both grades. Teaching strategies that address diversity, meet individual needs, and satisfy Ministry requirements with respect to content and processes of learning work well in both combined and single grade classrooms.

## What are the challenges for teachers?

Teachers need to be familiar with the curriculum for both grades and the variety of resources available in the school and in the district. Teachers of students in combined classes, like those in single-grade classes, employ their skills and strategies so that each student is challenged at the level at which he/she can succeed. For example, a teacher might use a thematic approach to teach a unit. This approach enables the teacher to address processes and skills requiring continuous development. This requires a sophisticated approach to integrating knowledge and skills but it can be done in ways that do not repeat or “miss out” prescribed curriculum.

