

An Introduction to Combined Classes



What is a 'combined class'?

Grades are used to group children according to their chronological age. Such organization stems from the belief that patterns of development are tightly bound to a child's age. However, in reality all classrooms – whether single-grade or combined – include students with a range of developmental levels.

Why do we use the term 'Combined'?

Combined grade classrooms have many names including split grades, multi-age, family grouping, etc. The term 'split grade' sometimes conjures-up negative images of a classroom where the teacher 'splits' his or her time and attention between two distinct groups. The term 'combined class' reflects a more holistic approach to learning that emphasizes whole group instruction, as well as opportunities for flexible groupings to meet students' learning styles and needs.



How are students selected for a 'combined class' placement?

Many factors are considered when selecting students for a combined class, including: social and emotional skills, work habits, friendships, leadership skills, self-motivation, learning styles, and academics. These characteristics are considered so as to create balanced classes throughout the school.

Are there benefits to a 'combined class'?

Studies (1) have shown that there are many socio-emotional benefits for students in combined classes, including greater leadership skills, increased self-esteem, and more positive peer interactions. Studies assessing students' academic achievement indicate that there are no significant differences between single grade and combined grade classrooms.

(1) Naylor, C. (2000, January). Split-Grade and Multi-Age Classes: A Review of the Research and a Consideration of the B.C. Context. BCTF Research Report

Will a student miss or repeat curriculum material?

In today's classrooms, the emphasis has shifted from learning and memorizing facts to the development of skills, concepts, processes and attitudes. With the rapid changes in science and technology in our society, it is essential that students learn how to evaluate ideas and make judgments, transfer and apply knowledge, understand processes, and access information. Teachers of combined classes challenge all students, often incorporating learning outcomes from both grades into holistic, theme-based units of study.

How can parents support their children in a combined class?

Regardless of their child's class placement, parents are encouraged to stay positive and interested in their child's schoolwork and activities, monitoring homework and staying in close communication with the teacher.