

Combined-Grade Classes

Learning Together

Each child is guided to succeed within their grade appropriate learning outcomes

Burnaby School District is committed to creating balanced classes that focus on a student's individual learning strengths and the needs of the whole child. Additional factors that influence the formation of classes include shifting enrolment, class size/composition, and school staffing. Often, particularly at the elementary level, schools will form combined-grade classes.

In a combined-grade class, students from different grades are grouped together in a classroom with one teacher (eg. Grade 2 and Grade 3). Combined-grade classes are common in Canada. In fact, a Canadian study on classroom organization found that one out of every five Canadian students is enrolled in a combined-grade classroom. This means, it is very likely that your child will be in a combined-grade class during their elementary years.

Do children “learn” differently in combined-grade classrooms?

Children learn and mature at different rates. Intellectual, social, physical and personal development is not grade level dependent. In every classroom, combined-grade or single-grade, there is a wide range of children with varying skills and abilities. Teachers are aware of these individual differences and structure learning activities within the curriculum, according to the needs of each learner.

Students in combined-grade classes are not held back to the level of younger students nor are they expected to handle work beyond their ability. Whether a child is an advanced learner, or requires additional learning support, each is guided to succeed within the grade appropriate learning outcomes.

There are also social benefits to combined-grade classes. Research shows that combined-grade classes:

- allow students to learn from one another
- encourage students to work together
- provide models for younger students
- help older students see what they have already learned
- promote social responsibility
- help students to become independent
- foster a positive attitude towards school

There are many social benefits to combined-grade classes

How do teachers “teach” in combined-grade classes?

The combined-grade structure does not make a difference in how a teacher teaches students. Teachers of combined-grade classrooms are familiar and knowledgeable about the curricula for the grades and subjects they are teaching.

Learning has shifted away from memorizing facts to a more holistic approach that focuses on engaging the learner through a lens of inquiry-based learning, critical and creative thinking. This approach lends itself well to combined-grade classes where the emphasis is on teaching students how to evaluate ideas, make judgements, transfer and apply knowledge, understand processes and access information.

How can I support my child's learning?

Children in all class formations thrive when parents are involved in the learning process. Here are some ways to become involved and help your child learn:

- Take an interest in your child's school work and activities
- Monitor their homework
- Communicate with the teacher
- Offer to volunteer in the school

Parent involvement supports student success