

Multi-Grade Classrooms Information for Parents



Combined Classes: A Primer for Parents

Perhaps you have arrived at school this year to find your child assigned to a combined classroom. This document will help answer some of the questions you may have about combined classrooms at Edmonton Catholic Schools. The last several decades have seen dramatic changes in the Alberta Program of Studies, instructional methods used by teachers, and in our understanding of learners and learning. Today teachers recognize and respond to the fact that individual educational development is unique to each individual and not tied to their chronological age or grade placement. Teachers develop programs according to the needs of their individual students who achieve prescribed outcomes at different times and in different ways.

FAQ

What is a combined or multi-grade classroom?

A combined or multi-grade class is one that includes students from two or more consecutive grades who work in one classroom setting. In the past the term 'split class' was sometimes used which implied a division of instruction between two groups in class which is no longer the normal approach. A combined class, like most modern classrooms, includes a variety of instructional groupings and combinations depending on the students, the learning objectives, and the resources utilized. Most school systems around the world employ combined classes and one-fifth of Canadian students are enrolled in classes with students from more than one grade.

Why do we have combined classes at my child's school?

Combined classes may be the result of school choice or school demographics. Some schools employ multi-age grouping because of the benefits associated with such classes. At other schools, combined classes are the result of an imbalance in the number of students enrolled in each grade. They are a way for schools to utilize their staff more effectively to meet student needs.

Why is my child in a combined classroom?

The selection of students for classes is a serious task involving multiple staff members who consider a wide variety of factors. Beginning with the number of students and the physical layout of the school itself, staff must consider individual students' needs, interests, social skills, learning styles, work habits, emotional development, and independence as well as the teaching styles of their staff when creating classes.

Will my child get enough attention?

Parents are sometimes concerned that their child will not get adequate attention in a combined class. Many factors affect the amount of time paid to individual students and these factors are considered when classes are created. Schools allocate human resources with the goal of providing every student with the attention that they require.

How can the teacher teach more than one grade at a time?

Teachers are professionals who understand that their primary job is not to teach a grade or a subject but to teach individual students. Teachers who instruct more than one curriculum always look for overlap between them. Because of the increased importance of skill outcomes today, there is often a great deal of overlap between grades and between subjects. Teachers develop lessons that allow students to meet outcomes through various learning activities. There are many resources specifically created to assist teachers with combined classes.

Are there any benefits to a combined class?

There have been many studies done over the last several decades on the effects of combined classes. The majority of them have found that students in these classes perform as well as students in single grade classes academically with many of these studies concluding that there are other benefits for students in multi-grade classes.

One of the greatest benefits of combined classes is the expanded opportunities they provide for peer interaction. Younger students can observe older peers and imitate social behaviors while older students have the opportunity to show leadership and reinforce their own understanding through teaching their classmates. This ability to work outside their grade cohort expands students' understanding of their learning and the learning environment. Many older students develop leadership skills while developing a more sophisticated understanding of responsibility. Younger students too, have opportunities for peer interactions that are not available in the regular classroom setting.

This expanded peer interaction leads to younger children actively seeking out older students to help them attain knowledge and skills. These interactions lead to greater development of social skills as students develop a sense of comfort and security and gain a more positive self-concept. In these more diversified classes, students become more resourceful and develop skills of independent learning. Teachers find creative ways to combine outcomes, which provide students with a richer academic experience.

Age mixing also provides students with a more diverse range of peers in their class that can lead to opportunities to find others with similar interests, aptitudes and abilities. The range of social relationships that students build in a combined classroom more closely reflects the reality they will encounter in communities, families and the workplace.

How will being in a combined classroom affect my child?

At Edmonton Catholic Schools, we understand that you want the best for your child. We strive to provide exceptional educational opportunities for all of our students. Every child is a unique learner and our teachers are equipped with the skills and resources needed to provide each one with a program suited to their place on the learning continuum. The use of combined classes is supported by educational research and we have found that for most students these classes have been a positive part of their educational journey. We encourage parents to stay in close communication with their child's teacher and discuss any concerns you may have as soon as possible.

What is the curriculum?

The curriculum for Alberta students is outlined in legal documents from Alberta Education called programs of study. Each curriculum document outlines the basic principles of how students are to achieve the required knowledge, skills and attitudes. School authorities use the programs of study to ensure that students meet provincial standards; however, they have the flexibility to decide how to provide students with the best possible learning opportunities. The curriculum is not a collection of information to be memorized but rather a set of learning experiences aimed at accommodating diverse learners in meeting specific outcomes. Many schools have condensed copies of each grade's programs of study available for parents, or you may look on the Alberta Education website at <http://education.alberta.ca/parents/resources.aspx> for Curriculum Express, Curriculum Handbooks or Curriculum Summaries.

Conclusion

Education is changing and there are new challenges and opportunities facing students, parents, teachers, and districts. The focus of education today is on the development of skills, processes, attitudes and concepts needed to be an engaged educated citizen in Alberta and the world. Because of the rapid pace of change, it is most important for our students to learn how to access, evaluate, transfer and apply knowledge. Students need to 'learn how to learn' because the knowledge that may be most important to them in the future has not even been discovered yet.

Teachers today focus on providing opportunities for students that help them set personal goals, assess their own learning and provide feedback to their peers. Students are asked to reflect on their learning and to show personal initiative in their inquiries. This emphasis on students' individual needs and place on the learning continuum is characteristic of 21st century teaching practices and is as easily attained in a combined class as a single-grade classroom. The latest research and best practices promoted and supported in the educational community completely support the use of combined classes.

Additional Information Links

<http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/multilevel/chap1.pdf>

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/17808164/Combined-Class-Kelas-Bercantum>

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/combined.pdf>

<http://bctf.ca/publications/ResearchReports.aspx?id=5560>

http://www.crossofglory.org/home/140001642/140005475/Advantages_Multigrade_brochure.pdf

<http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/multilevel/chap1.pdf>

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/17808164/Combined-Class-Kelas-Bercantum>

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/combined.pdf>

http://www.education.alberta.ca/media/824183/curric_dev.pdf

<http://www.teachers.ab.ca/Teaching%20in%20Alberta/ATA%20Vision%20for%20Public%20Education/Pages/default.aspx#a-vision-for-public-education->

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