



2103 COMBINATION CLASS GUIDELINES

Policy Type: Administrative
Applies To: All Staff, Students, Visitors
Approved By: LCS Head of Schools
Policy Reviewed: every 2 years
Adopted: 06 1997
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1. RATIONALE

- (a) A combination class is a class made up of at least two different grade levels. It is made up of a heterogeneous (mixed abilities) grouping of students. Combination classes do not negatively impact student learning, and in fact, much of the research conducted on combination classes of mixed grades shows positive advantages for students.
- (b) 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.
- (c) 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 Or. 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.
- (d) 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."
- (e) Parents can support their children in the same ways they would if they were in a single grade class. Staying interested and concerned about schoolwork 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.

2. Features of combination classes at LCS:

(a) In a combination class students will:

- build on what s/he already knows
- make choices
- show what s/he knows in different ways
- work together and by her/himself
- know that what s/he says is valued by teachers and classmates
- find out that s/he can learn from others and that others can learn from him/her
- see teachers as learners
- have fun learning
- be excited about sharing what s/he is doing with others
- talk about what s/he is doing and how s/he is doing it
- develop a positive self-concept that lays the foundation for life

(b) In a combination class teachers will:

- structure learning activities to meet the needs of the individuals, rather than to teach to an imaginary "middle of the class."
- promote a diverse environment, where children do not feel the need to compete, only to do their best.

(c) Advantages for students of the combination class include:

- quality relationships with teachers
- smaller class size
- a positive classroom climate
- better learning and enhanced self-esteem from increased inter-dependence and peer tutoring
- increased independence from teachers
- wider range of roles within the group for students
- peer tutoring - students learn from each other
- enriched academic activities
- better socialization
- improved self esteem
- respect for individual differences
- learning based on the individual, so no class levels are evident

- the focus is on success, the student moves forward, building on prior knowledge
- students think of learning as fun, and therefore become life long learners
- integrated curriculum
- extra resource and support
- flexible grouping to take advantage of each activity

3. Policy

- (a) LCS administration will plan for combination classes if enrolment within a particular grade level cohort drops below 80 students.
- (b) Combination classes will include no less than 8 students from one of the two grades combined to create the class.
- (c) The Independent 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.
- (d) 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.
- (e) To ensure all students are placed in appropriately balanced classrooms, school staff use such criteria as age, range of ability, special learning needs, gender, social groupings, and support staff recommendation.