

Combination Classes/ Split Classes/ Multi-age classes

Schools have adopted a variety of different class structures to reflect financial constraints, teaching philosophy, and community preferences. There is no one way to create a class, and depending on the nature of the community, there are multiple factors to consider before determining the class structures.

A summary of our research

Research indicates both pros and cons to enrolling students in multi-grades. The Department of Education has a document entitled:

Independent Together: Supporting the Multilevel Learning Community which may be downloaded from <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/multilevel/index.html> .

Generally, the success of a multi-grade is dependent on the quality of teacher, the strengths of the student, and the support of the family. We recognize that this type of class will not work for everyone, just as small classes of 14 or 15 students do not work for everyone. As our mission states, we strive to provide successful learning opportunities for everyone.

Many studies we reviewed were interested in knowing how the students fared after being in a multi-age classroom experience. Individual students were observed and tested to determine if there was a difference in their academic or social development depending on the classroom composition.

- a. There was no significant difference in student Standardized tests scores, except in cases where the students were in multi-grade classes for 3 or more years. In those cases, students' scores tended to be higher than the students who learned in the uni-grades only.
- b. The research indicates that there **are** significant differences in personal skills and social skills development - students have more developed social and personal skills as a result of learning in a multi-grade classroom.
- c. After reviewing schools in which multi-age classrooms worked and comparing them with situations in which it did not work, the research indicates that there are three main factors for success:
 - i. the quality and experience of the teacher
 - ii. the needs of the student
 - iii. and the support of the family
- d. The research also indicated that there are some things to be cautious about when planning on adding a multi-age classroom:

- i. Who will be the teacher – Is she effective at teaching, well-organized, and knowledgeable of both curriculums. If she does not have these qualities the combination class will fail.
- ii. There is a concern regarding potential social isolation – the multi-grade room is different than the rest of the school. If the school and community are not supportive, the class can be viewed negatively and the students will feel isolated. (This sense of isolation increases if the multi-age occurs at the older grade levels i.e. grade 6 and above)

Our process:

So, knowing the research, what do we do at SCCS to ensure that the multi-age classroom is a good fit for our school? We:

- i. Hand-select the teachers. They are carefully chosen based on their proven abilities to nurture students successfully in such an environment.
- j. Carefully select the students. The process includes:
 - a. Having all of the staff involved meet to review each child's needs and strengths. We will look at their academics, social skills, learning styles, grade level and gender. We will also factor in whether or not the child was in the combination class last year.
 - b. Secondly, we will consider parents preferences. As you heard, family support is crucial.

Students will then be grouped accordingly. Our hope is to have a class composition that is typical for our school.

- c. Courses offered:
 - i. Grade level Math is taught in all classes i.e. Grade 4 math is taught to students regardless of their placement in a 3-4 combination class or a 4 uni-class.
 - ii. Similarly, Grade level ELA concepts are taught in all classes. While the novel studies, or the poetry used may be different, the concepts are the same for Grade 4 students in a 3-4 or a 4 class.
 - iii. The Combination classes alternate Social Studies and Science curriculum, and offer it on a two year cycle. For example, the 3-4 combination class is studying the Grade 4 Science and Social Studies in 2016-2017. In the previous year, they studied the Grade 3 curriculum in these subjects. Should a child be moved in or out of the class at any time, parents can rest assured both of these subjects are on what is called a "spiral curriculum" meaning the concepts will be

revisited/re-taught at an upper grade level. Social studies/Science concepts that may be missed in the early years will be covered at some point in every child's K-12 learning experience. Parents in these rare situations, can also provide at-home studies under the direction of the classroom teacher.

- d. Field trips, Bible Celebration and Music Class - what we learned from our experiences is the following:
 1. Each class has a distinct character, and thrives best when treated as a family unit. Sometimes they will join another class family, and at other times they will do "their own thing".
 2. Students can socialise with their peers in the other classroom at lunch and at recess.

Our results:

SCCS first adopted combination classes in 2010. Since that time, we have received considerable feedback from both staff and parents. Anecdotal evidence from other schools who have used this approach over a longer period of time supports our experiences:

- a. Students always have someone else who can work at their level
- b. Behaviour is automatically set to a higher standard in combination classes due to the added maturity levels.
- c. Exposure to varying levels of learning raises overall performance
- d. Students learn socialization skills that are otherwise absent
- e. Anxiety is reduced and confidence increased in students. Older students are respected as mentors who adopt the teacher's behaviours with the younger students.
- f. Students gain greater tolerance for each other – greater acceptance of different rates of learning
- g. Students assume greater ownership of their learning process

In conclusion:

- a. Almost every adult has had or knows someone who has had a personal experience with multi-age classrooms. In each case, the experience was either positive or negative. We recognize that everyone here today is coming from a personal perspective and we respect that.

It is for this reason that we are inviting families to be a part of the decision process as to which students would most benefit from being a part of this class. Let us be thankful that families have the luxury of opting out of the multi-grade classrooms if they so wish.

We will notify you of your child's placement on June 30th.

So the process is as follows:

1. Please let us know if you do NOT want your child in a combination class. Otherwise, your child will be considered.
2. Staff will meet to review each child and a class list will be prepared. This is a lengthy process, which will most likely take us through June.
3. Your child's placement will be indicated on a letter with your child's report card.