

Combined-grade classes: Learning together

Combined-grade classes consist of students in two consecutive grades grouped together in one class. They are common both locally and internationally, with “one out of every five Canadian students enrolled in a multi-grade classroom” according to at least one study. There is a good chance that Surrey children will have the experience of being in a combined-grade class during their elementary school years.

Organizing classes to best meet the needs of all students is a complex process. While practical factors such as shifting enrolment, class size and composition influence the formation of classes, the Surrey School District is committed to creating balanced classes that focus on students’ learning strengths and the needs of the whole child.

There are academic as well as social benefits to combined-grade classes. Studies indicate that children in combined classes do as well academically as children in single grades.

Research has shown that combined classes:

- allow students to learn from one another,
- provide models for younger students,
- help older students see what they’ve already learned,
- provide opportunities for a greater range of learning,
- encourage students to work together,
- promote social responsibility,
- help students to become independent and
- foster a positive attitude toward school.

Students in combined classes are not held back to the level of younger students, nor are they expected to handle work beyond their ability. In every classroom, there is a wide range of skills and abilities. Children mature at different rates in various aspects of development. Teachers are aware of these individual differences and structure learning activities according to the needs of each learner.

Children learn continually; their intellectual, social and personal development does not occur in discrete steps according to grade level. Studies have found that on average, a single-grade class includes students whose development spans five years. The developmental range in a combined class is not significantly different.

Within the combined class there will be children of both grade levels with similar levels of performance. Whether a child is gifted or needs considerable assistance, each will be challenged to excel as much in a combined class as he or she would be in a single-grade class.

Researchers have reported successful learning is less dependent on how students are grouped into classes, than on the quality of instructional practices.

For more information on the research into combined-grade classes, please visit the Surrey School District website: Department Directory, Research and Evaluation Department, Research Currents and click on [Learning Together: Research into Combined and Multiage Classes](#).

