



COMBINED GRADE CLASSROOMS



Current Numbers for TDSB

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- Combined Grades is not new to TDSB as the chart below indicates
- Reasons: Primary class size; Increase in number of small schools; Increase in number of dual track schools

	31 October 2006	31 October 2007	31 October 2008	31 October 2009	30 September 2010
	% Combined	% Combined	% Combined	% Combined	% Combined
JK and SK	78.0%	86.7%	96.5%	96.1%	96.5%
Grade 1-3	23.3%	27.7%	29.6%	35.4%	37.1%
Grade 3 /4-8	21.6%	24.6%	24.5%	27.3%	25.3%
Totals:	35.4%	40.1%	43.3%	46.9%	47.4%

**The information provided above includes Regular, French Immersion, and Extended French program classes. Special Education, ESL and LEAP classes are excluded.*

What does the Research Show?

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While there are some parents who perceive combined grade classes as detrimental to their child's academic success, research shows

- ❑ Students in combined grade classrooms achieve as well academically as those in single grade classrooms.
- ❑ Students appear to benefit from the spirit of co-operation and mutual help that exists in these settings.
- ❑ Strategies such as explicit instruction, co-operative learning and subject integration support improved learning in combined grade programs.

Are there Benefits to Combined Grades?

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Students have been shown to:

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- ❑ do better in the area of socio-emotional development
- ❑ develop more positive peer interactions
- ❑ have greater development of social skills
- ❑ do more collaborative and independent learning

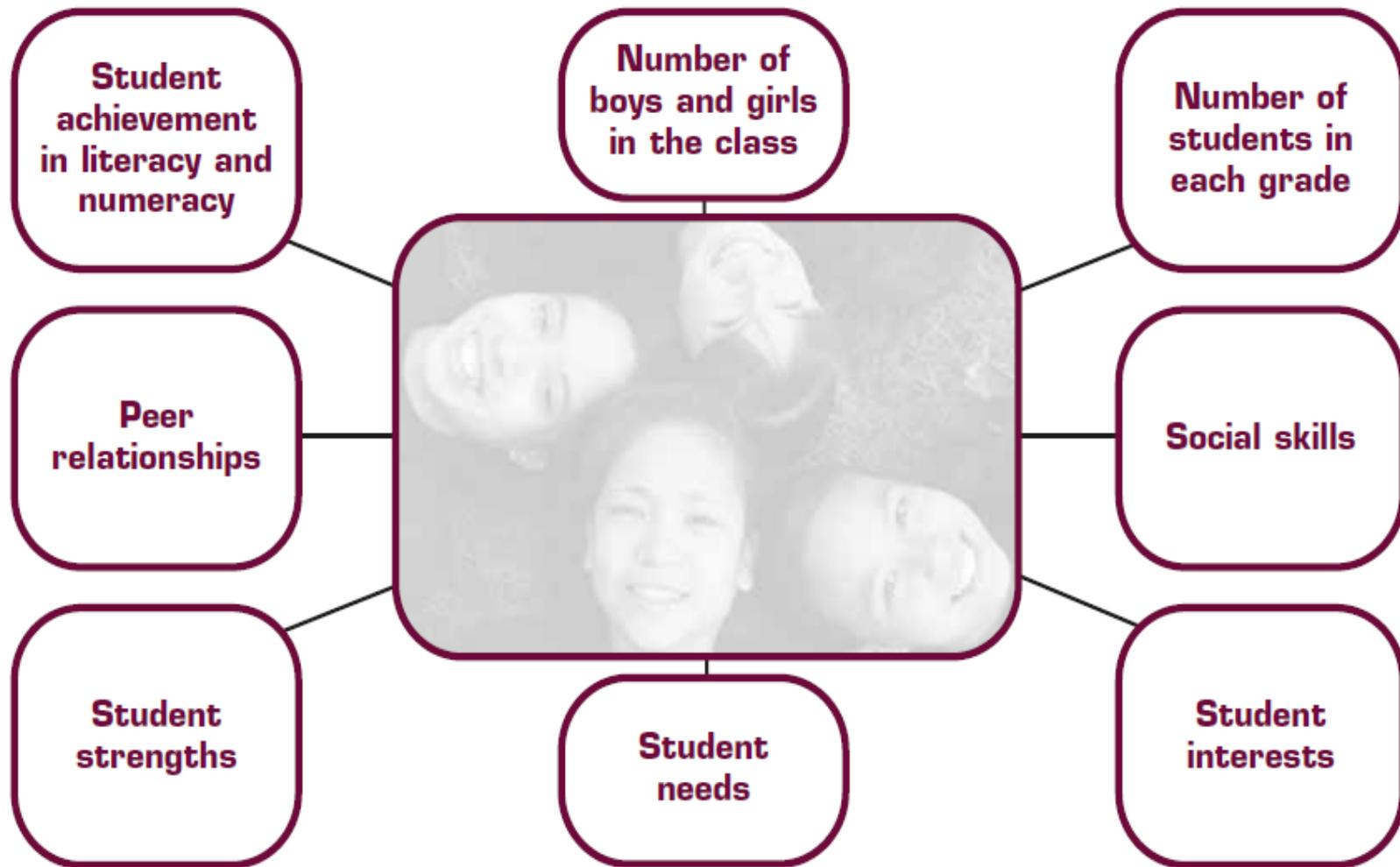
Studies indicate that students:

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- ❑ show higher satisfaction with achievements
- ❑ have more opportunities for student leadership within a community of learners
- ❑ display greater feelings of comfort and security, and a positive self-concept

What do Principals and Teachers consider when creating Combined Grade Classes?

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How do Principals place students when there are both combined and straight grade options?

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- Achieve a balance of a range of students in both combined and straight grades as in slide #7
- Ensure number of students in each grade in the combined grade class supports students' learning – a minimum of 4 students in one of the grades
- Consider parental input as part of consultation regarding placement and promotion of students with Principal making the final decision in the interest of all students

How do teachers prepare for teaching of combined grades classes?

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- All teachers are able to teach and meet the diversity and a variety of ability levels in any classroom. It is important that all classes, single grade or combined grades, be considered a unified community of learners, where the individual needs and qualities of each student are honoured and nurtured.
- Teachers employ a range of instructional strategies to meet students' learning needs and to engage students to achieve and succeed.
- Teachers work with large groups, small groups, and individual students.
- Each year teacher assignments are based on consultation between Principal and teacher in March. This in turn enables teachers to undertake preparations for their teaching assignments for the following year.

What are some of the teaching strategies used in a combined grade class?

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The teacher may use many teaching strategies that:

- Provide a learning environment with a range of materials and resources to meet the needs of students;
- Use direct instruction with individuals, small groups or the whole class to develop necessary skills and concepts;
- Establish various groupings of students such as cooperative groups, pairs, interest groups or ability groups to promote learning among peers;
- Develop integrated curriculum approaches which allow separate curriculum areas to be integrated in a meaningful way; and
- Develop student choice and ownership through activities that are tailored to each grade.

Strategies for Teaching and Learning

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Class/Grade instruction



Small, flexible group learning

Individual instruction and support



Strategies for Teaching and Learning

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Students learn collaboratively in pairs and flexible groupings to construct and consolidate knowledge



Planning Learning

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Grade Specific Content

Grade Specific Content

Common:

Themes; Big Ideas; Skills; Processes; Strategies; Products

Common Theme:

Characteristics of Civilizations
A Comparison

Example:

Grades 4 Medieval Times

Example:

Grade 5 Early Civilizations: A
Comparison

Strategies - Language

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In a combined grade 3/4 class,

- All of the students would spend time reading to improve their comprehension.
- The grade 3 students would be learning to restate important ideas from a text, while the grade 4 students would be learning to make an outline of a section of reading.
- The same students might then do a writing assignment. The grade 3s would be expected to use joining words to combine simple sentences, while the grade 4s would be required to use sentences of different lengths and complexity.

Strategies - Science

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- In a grade 1/2 combined grade class, when teaching the life systems strand of science, the teacher might start by showing a video about a specific animal.
- The grade 1 students would do a follow-up activity to identify the characteristics and needs of living things, while the grade 2 students would focus on growth and change in animals.

Strategies - Mathematics

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- In a grade 5/6 combined grade math class the teacher might review the concept of place value with the whole class. Then the students would work on the grade-specific expectations.
- Grade 5 students would be practicing math problems with place values up to 100,000 and decimals to hundredths, while grade 6 students would work on problems with place values up to 1,000,000 and decimals to thousandths.
- Or if working on measurement, the whole class might work on an activity requiring them to estimate, measure and record perimeter and area of various items. The grade 6s would have more complex items than the grade 5s.

Ongoing Professional Learning for Teachers of Combined Grade Classrooms

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- Subject-specific and cross-curricular professional learning through the Teaching and Learning Department:
 - differentiated instruction
 - high yield strategies for learning
 - assessment and evaluation

Example from Science and Technology - TDSBweb

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Support for Combined Grades

Teachers of combined grades often face challenges when programming for content areas such as science and technology or social studies. The lack of apparent connections between content in two grades makes lesson preparation and classroom management difficult.

The format and structure of the 2007 Revised Science and Technology Curriculum offers some solutions to the combined grades problem.

1. First and foremost, the revised curriculum is **skills driven**--skills of inquiry, problem solving, research, and higher order thinking that are common between grades and throughout the curriculum.
2. The revised curriculum identifies **six fundamental concepts** that are common throughout every topic from grades 1-8. In each topic of study, the fundamental concepts that are addressed are clearly identified, and are linked to **"big ideas"** or enduring understandings--important, fundamental concepts that students should understand and remember. Within a grade, there are between 12-15 big ideas for the entire year, and these are the key ideas that teachers should focus their instruction and evaluation on.
3. The big ideas are clearly linked to the three **overall expectations** in a topic, and the three overall expectations are what assessment and evaluation should focus on.
4. The revised curriculum has a vast reduction in the number of specific expectations within a grade. This will allow teachers to focus on skills development and the attainment of a few key concepts.

To support combined grades, the Ministry of Education has developed sample unit and lesson plans for various grades and topics for grade 1-8 science and technology. These resources are found below.

Grade 1/2	Grade 2/3	Grade 3/4	Grade 4/5	Grade 5/6	Grade 6/7	Grade 7/8
Sample Long Range Plans						
Sample Unit Overview						
Sample Unit Plan						
Sample Lesson						

CULMINATING TASK SAMPLE: TEDDY BEAR'S PICNIC

The ["Teddy Bear's Picnic"](#) (2506K 4/19/2010) is a culminating task for grade 1/2, combining grade 1 "Materials, Objects, and Everyday Structures" with grade 2 "Motion". The song/poem "Teddy Bear's Picnic" sets the context for students to explore their local community, examine structures and mechanisms in a context that is meaningful to them, and then design structures and mechanisms for a Teddy Bear's Picnic. For combined grades, This combined grades task differentiates the students by content, but students follow a similar process (technological problem solving) and similar product.

How are students assessed in a combined grade class?

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- Assessment and evaluation in a combined grade class focuses on the achievement of grade related expectations.
- Teachers tailor assessments, cluster expectations and create a continuum of learning of skills to meet the needs of both grades. Teachers may use assessment tools such as: rubrics, exemplars, checklists, and anecdotal comments.

Some ways parents can support their child:

In a combined grade, the same as a same-grade class, the more you know about your child's education, the more you will be able to help your child learn and succeed.

- Attend Curriculum Night to become familiar with the curriculum for your child's grade. You can find the complete Ontario Curriculum on the Ministry of Education website at www.edu.gov.on.ca or in your school library.
- Read information from your child's teacher and school. Ask your child to tell you about schoolwork that is brought home. Talk with your child about her school experience.
- Communicate with your child's teacher about his individual learning needs. If you have questions, talk to the teacher about the strategies that are being used to teach the combined grade curriculum.
- Connect with the school in other ways such as: Attend parent information nights and other school events. Attend a school council meeting. Volunteer at the school if you have the time.

Questions & Answers

..... and Thank You