

Dear Parents:

SEPTEMBER 2017 CLASS BUILDING

As this school year commences, you may be interested in how students are placed into classes each year. Here is some information to help you understand the process.

In June, the complex process of organizing classes begins. Many variables are considered when creating classes for the following year. Some of these considerations are: academic achievement, special needs, leadership skills and social and emotional needs.

Consideration is also given to class size and the number of ministry-designated students in a class. The school district has to approve our organization and the number of classes based on the enrolment we have in the school. This number usually changes between June and September as families move in and out of the area. It is necessary for us to use strategies such as combined classes to ensure we have a few spaces at each grade level for new student enrolment throughout the year. Numbers dictate how we structure the class combinations. All learning opportunities that are created will meet the academic needs of your child.

Teachers who have spent the previous September to May with your child, have the knowledge and experience to evaluate your child's strengths and challenges. These teachers have a strong voice and they exercise their professional judgment carefully when suggesting placements.

If there is any additional information that we require from you to help us with this process, we will contact you directly.

For those of you that have already contacted the school, please know that all the information you have provided will be considered. The staff spend a number of hours collaborating and then re-visiting the classes before the final decisions are made for this school year.

As it stands, we anticipate some changes to the French organization by way of changing the 4/5 to a 5/6. We are working in consultation with the staff and the School District to arrive at the best organization for the students and what we think will be the best learning situations for everyone.

We are hoping to have our organizations approved for both French and English so that we may move into our new classes on Friday afternoon. We look forward to working with you and your children this school year.

We thank you for your trust and understanding in our thoughtful decisions.

Mary-Ann Brown, Principal

Combined-Grade Classes

Learning Together

Each child is guided to succeed within their grade appropriate learning outcomes

Burnaby School District is committed to creating balanced classes that focus on a student's individual learning strengths and the needs of the whole child. Additional factors that influence the formation of classes include shifting enrolment, class size/composition, and school staffing. Often, particularly at the elementary level, schools will form combined-grade classes.

In a combined-grade class, students from different grades are grouped together in a classroom with one teacher (eg. Grade 2 and Grade 3). Combined-grade classes are common in Canada. In fact, a Canadian study on classroom organization found that one out of every five Canadian students is enrolled in a combined-grade classroom. This means, it is very likely that your child will be in a combined-grade class during their elementary years.

Do children "learn" differently in combined-grade classrooms?

Children learn and mature at different rates. Intellectual, social, physical and personal development is not grade level dependent. In every classroom, combined-grade or single-grade, there is a wide range of children with varying skills and abilities. Teachers are aware of these individual differences and structure learning activities within the curriculum, according to the needs of each learner.

Students in combined-grade classes are not held back to the level of younger students nor are they expected to handle work beyond their ability. Whether a child is an advanced learner, or requires additional learning support, each is guided to succeed within the grade appropriate learning outcomes.

There are also social benefits to combined-grade classes. Research shows that combined-grade classes:

- allow students to learn from one another
- encourage students to work together
- provide models for younger students
- help older students see what they have already learned
- promote social responsibility
- help students to become independent
- foster a positive attitude towards school

There are many social benefits to combined-grade classes

How do teachers "teach" in combined-grade classes?

The combined-grade structure does not make a difference in how a teacher teaches students. Teachers of combined-grade classrooms are familiar and knowledgeable about the curricula for the grades and subjects they are teaching.

Learning has shifted away from memorizing facts to a more holistic approach that focuses on engaging the learner through a lens of inquiry-based learning, critical and creative thinking. This approach lends itself well to combined-grade classes where the emphasis is on teaching students how to evaluate ideas, make judgements, transfer and apply knowledge, understand processes and access information.

How can I support my child's learning?

Children in all class formations thrive when parents are involved in the learning process. Here are some ways to become involved and help your child learn:

- Take an interest in your child's school work and activities
- Monitor their homework
- Communicate with the teacher
- Offer to volunteer in the school

Parent involvement supports student success