

Combination Classes . . . are organized to include students from more than one grade level in a single classroom. In these classrooms, students continue to receive the curriculum designed specifically for their appropriate grade level, although some class activities may be conducted with children of both grades included. The main goal in this type of instructional setting is to capitalize on the diversity of ability and experience in the mixed-age group to create a unique and effective learning environment. Combination classes also serve to maximize personnel and space resources.

It is possible that every student in the district will be enrolled in a combination classroom at some time in his/her academic career. Although this instructional setting has been an educational tradition since the one-room schoolhouse, it is too often the undeserving subject of controversy and concern due to some common misperceptions.



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT COMBINATION CLASSROOMS

How are basic skills taught? The Huntington Beach City School District provides many resources for acquisition, extension, remediation and reinforcement of basic skills. Teachers working with multi-age groups are very selective in choosing appropriate instructional materials and strategies. This selective approach encourages the teacher to individualize part or all of the instructional program based on the child's skill level, interests, or learning style.

My child is a fifth grade student in a fourth/fifth grade combination class. Isn't she "losing out" academically? Absolutely not. HBCSD has established rigorous academic standards that define what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. Students in combination classes are expected to perform at or above their grade level peers in all areas of the curriculum. So, a fifth grade student in a four/five combination class will receive instruction and support designed to meet fifth grade expectancies, just as the fourth graders will be supported in achieving fourth grade competencies. In reality, combination classes often progress at a slightly faster pace when compared to single grade level classrooms. This is largely due to the positive learning habits of many of the students.

How are children selected to participate in a combination classroom? When any classroom is formed, school teams determine criteria that will result in a balanced, positive instructional environment. The typical student in a combination class performs at or above grade level and also possesses the ability to work independently.

How can a teacher teach two grade levels at the same time? Grouping for instructional purposes is the standard in any effective classroom. During many parts of the day, one group of students will work on an independent task while another group receives direct instruction from the teacher. In a single grade level class, these groups may be formed based on ability or interest. In a combination class, these groups are often established by grade level.



Do combination classrooms receive any special support? Grade level teams actively collaborate to improve the instructional program for all students, including those in combination classes. This might include such strategies as having students attend neighboring classes for specific content instruction, or ensuring that combination class students fully participate in field trips, student performances, and culmination activities with their grade level peers.



What are the risks associated with a combination classroom? Teachers must keep in mind the experienced children's need for challenge, while making certain that the younger student is not overwhelmed by older, more competent classmates. This is actually the case in every classroom, even when student age and grade is not a factor.

What are the benefits of a combination classroom?

- A combination classroom setting provides opportunities for students of different ages to interact, cooperate and work together. The general learning environment is often enhanced by the solid performance and work habits of the majority of students selected to participate in the combination class.
- Research demonstrates that children in multi-age settings made equal or greater gains in academic and social development when compared to single-grade classes.

Benefits of a combination class(continued)

- Combination/multi-age classrooms provide more options for placement of students. The school has greater flexibility in matching children and teachers for learning styles.
- It may be possible for a student in a combination classroom to remain with the same teacher for more than one year, a practice known as “looping.” Looping provides students with the advantage of working with a teacher who possesses prior knowledge regarding individual learning styles and abilities.



What if I don't agree with the placement

decision? Student placement procedures include the collection of a wide range of information prior to making a decision. The input of parents or legal guardians is an important component in this process. If a parent wishes to share information regarding a child's unique needs, it is important that this information be brought to the principal's attention. In most cases, a decision can be made that will be supported by all involved. In instances where this is not the case, the Board of Trustees has given the principal the authority to make the final decision regarding student placement.

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