

Top Ten Questions Parents Ask About Combined Grades

1. What is a combined-grade classroom?

A combined-grade classroom has children in two or more grades. Most of the day students work together as one learning group on similar and sometimes common topics and activities.

2. How can a teacher teach two grades at the same time?

The key is planning. The teacher will coordinate units so that students of both grades will work together for the majority of the day. Assignments expectations are modified for each grade level and different children focus on different learner expectations. All classrooms, whether single or multi-grade, have a wide range of student needs. The combined-grade classroom offers a little more flexibility for accommodating these diverse needs.

3. Isn't this difficult for the teacher?

There's no question – it takes a skilled and dedicated teacher to effectively manage a combined classroom. The teacher has to really know the curriculum, has to be flexible and has to be an excellent planner. But there are rewards for the teacher. Enhanced curriculum knowledge and more comprehensive planning ultimately make the teacher's job easier.

4. Won't my child get bored doing some of the same topics as last year?

No, it's not unusual for major concepts and topics to be revisited at different grade levels throughout a child's school career. Combined-grade classrooms offer children the opportunity to get a preview of what's coming and revisit what they have already learned. Increasing children's background knowledge only enhances their learning—there are always concepts to explore in greater depth or from other perspectives.

The combined-grade classroom teacher does adapt individual assignments to meet specific grade outcomes and uses a range of strategies to ensure all children in the classroom are mastering the skills and concepts of their grade level curriculum.

5. Will my child fall behind?

The research is consistent on this issue – there are no negative effects on the academic achievement of students of combined-grade classrooms. Studies show that social development is actually enhanced in combined-grade settings.

6. How can I be sure my child is keeping up?

We use many strategies for monitoring student growth throughout the school year. Progress notes and parent-teacher conferences will keep you up-to-date on your child's current level of achievement. Samples of student work, our Data Notebook, project assessments and learning logs are all useful indicators of who children are learning.

7. How is the school deciding which child goes into which grade combination?

These decisions will be made on a year-by-year basis. There are many considerations: number of students in each grade level, how many boys and girls there are, and the range of learners in each age group. We strive for a diverse group at each grade level.

8. Why are combined grades more common now than they were ten years ago?

There are a number of complex influences at work. There are proportionally more special needs students now, and because the general school population is more transient, it is more challenging for schools to organize for instruction. Financial issues also play a part in the decision. However, combined-grade classrooms have always existed and will likely exist well into the future.

9. Are there any disadvantages to combined-grade classrooms?

A factor that does work against the success of combined-grade classrooms **is the negative percept that many parents initially have**. We're hoping that information such as this will help parents see the combined-grade classroom as a positive learning environment for their child.

Current research shows that children in combined-grade classrooms are not at an academic disadvantage. In fact, there are several documented advantages for children.

10. Are there advantages to combined-grade classrooms?

Yes! Children will become more independent workers and will have more opportunities to work cooperatively with others. Children in the younger grade will be challenged and children in the older grades will have some of last year's learning reinforced and enriched. And children will have more opportunities to teach and learn from each other – a win-win situation for both grades. In every situation, children are ready for the next level of learning after being in a combined classroom.