



CONNAUGHT HEIGHTS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Mrs. J. Richter, Principal

Dear Connaught Families,

We often have a number of questions regarding how the placement of students into classrooms is done. The placement of students is determined through school-based professional decisions involving all of the relevant staff. Staff involved with child placement may include classroom and non-enrolling teachers (i.e. resource/ELL teacher, counsellor, etc), classroom support personnel, school principal and district staff. The process of organization begins with school enrollment projections in the spring; determination of number of classes, spring staffing and temporary organizational plan and class formation follows.

Classes include a wide range of students who learn in a variety of ways. As much as possible, attempts are made to maintain balanced class sizes. There is often the misconception that all students with strong academic skills are placed as the younger students in a combined class (please see the document below with more information on combined classes). This is not the case. Each child is considered individually and students are given the most appropriate placement possible based on the information available. Any numbers of factors are thoughtfully considered when placing a student including:

- student intellectual, social and emotional development
- positive social groups considering:
 - placements where a child can work positively and productively with other children in the class
 - peer support or conflicts
 - dynamics between children
 - presence of positive leaders in each class
- workable instructional groups considering:
 - the child's academic needs and strengths
 - teaching and student learning styles and strengths
 - the child's work habits
 - effort, achievement and independence
- school-based resource team recommendations
- inclusion of students with special needs, English language learners, medical accommodations
- groupings appropriate for the best learning environment for all
- adhering to ministry class size limits and class composition requirements

Parents are able to provide the school with important information that can assist in the placement of students. Concerns about possible personality conflicts, instructional methods, teaching strategies, etc... must be based on first hand experiences (not rumours or speculations) and must involve a significant educational concern about the student, focusing on educational needs. **If you have information that you would like us to consider, please inform Mrs. Richter in writing before the end of May for the following school year.** We ask that you refrain from making specific teacher or friend requests but rather let us know the type of learning environment that will best meet your child's needs. Parental input will be considered but it is not a guarantee for child placement.

Parents may find that some children have a hard time transitioning to or understanding their new placement. Generally, given the passage of time and with the help of their parents to facilitate this

change, most children easily adjust to their new settings within the first few weeks of the school year. We find that encouraging, positive parent talk is very powerful.

Placements are subject to the realities of the number of students that appear or who do not appear in September. Even then, numbers can change during the first few weeks, necessitating reorganization. It is for this reason that all student placements are temporary during the first part of September. Final placement is not known until registration is complete and students have arrived during the first few days of school in September. We do not speculate on who a child's teacher might be in advance as we do not want to create anticipation and expectations of having a specific teacher only to have students disappointed if there is a change.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any further questions.

Thank you for your cooperation and understanding.

Yours truly,

Jen Richter
Principal

COMBINED GRADE CLASSROOMS

An Information Bulletin for Parents/Guardians

When their child is placed in a combined grade classroom, parents/guardians often have questions about this classroom organization. Parents/guardians want to ensure their child is receiving an excellent education. Staff in our district are committed to providing an excellent education in a warm and caring learning environment for all children. We hope you find the following information helpful and we look forward to working with you and your child this school year.

1. What are the benefits of a combined grade class for my child?

Recent research indicates a number of positive learning outcomes in combined grade classrooms:

- in general, children in combined grade classrooms perform as well as, or better than, counterparts in single grade classrooms
- combined grade classes promote the development of independent work habits and develop many aspects of social responsibility
- children in combined grades develop strong social skills as they get many opportunities to interact with children of different ages and learn from each other
- teachers in combined grade classrooms employ a variety of teaching strategies

2. How teachers address some of the challenges associated with combined grade classrooms?

New instructional strategies in the curricula encourage teachers to teach individuals, small groups, and large groups within all classrooms and assist teachers to differentiate learning. Teaching strategies that have been necessary in combined grades for a long time are excellent strategies for all children. The range of student abilities in combined grade classrooms is not necessarily larger than single grade ones. Combined grade classrooms encourage teachers to focus on each child's particular strengths and needs.

3. Why do we have combined grade classrooms at our school?

The organization of classrooms is based upon the number of students in each grade. Sometimes combined grades are required to balance pupil-teacher ratios in a school and adhere to guidelines. Combined grades are also recognized in research as being excellent learning environments for children. For that reason, some school staffs make the decision to organize student groupings into combined grades even where not needed for guidelines. Our Montessori program, in particular, subscribes to the Montessori philosophy that supports two-three grade combined classes that provide opportunities for social and emotional growth.

4. Do all schools have combined grades?

Most schools within our district have combined grades.

5. How are students chosen for combined grade classrooms?

Staff spend a great deal of time in late June and August/September of each year discussing the placement of each child. Factors such as academic needs, work habits, social growth and student personalities are considered. Teachers' and principals' professional training assists them in making the best decision for

each child. Individual student needs are a priority, but the total class makeup must also be considered and balanced.

6. Will two classrooms in the same school teach exactly the same things?

All teachers follow the British Columbia curriculum. This curriculum allows teachers and students choices in how they will achieve learning outcomes. Therefore, any two classrooms at the same grade may choose different ways to achieve the same outcome. While there will be many similarities, there will also be differences on individual assignments or the use of particular resources.

7. What should I tell my child who is placed in a combined grade classroom?

Say the same thing you would for any placement situation—that you believe it is going to be a good year and that you will be happy if they try to do their best. The teacher will discuss the class structure with the students. Be positive about school when talking with your child. Student attitude and performance can easily be affected by the comments overheard in adult conversations. If you have questions please call the classroom teacher to discuss them.

8. Do parents/guardians have input regarding student placement?

The principal has the final responsibility for the placement of students in classes. Parents/guardians are encouraged to take an active interest in the education of their children and this includes where they are placed. However, we ask that you consider all factors with an open mind so that your child may experience a wide variety of learning in life.

Parents/guardians are invited to contact the classroom teacher or call the school, if they have questions or concerns about placement. When we know your concerns, we can address them and work together to provide a solution within the classroom. A change in classrooms affects not only your child, but also the children in the class your child leaves and enters. As with all decisions at the school level, there may be factors in organizing classrooms which you are not aware of, and which, for reasons of confidentiality, cannot be communicated to you. Your interest and involvement in your child's education is always welcomed and appreciated.