Understanding Class Placements and Class Configurations

One of the important pieces of our work at Huband Park Elementary School is determining class configurations and placing students into classes. We recognize that families may have questions about how these decisions are made and what factors are considered.

Our goal is to create balanced, supportive, and inclusive learning environments in which all students can learn, grow, and be appropriately challenged. Class placement is a thoughtful, collaborative, albeit complex, process that involves consideration of both the overall composition of classes and the individual needs of students.

Determining Class Configurations

The school first determines class configurations based on several factors, including:

- Overall student enrolment and the number of students at each grade level
- Ministry and district requirements related to class composition
- Student designations and identified learning needs
- The level and type of learning support required across the school
- The number and nature of students requiring additional adult support or specialized programming
- The goal of creating learning environments that are balanced and responsive to student needs

These factors help determine the number and type of classes that can be offered, including whether a grade may be organized as a single-grade class or a split-grade class.

How Students Are Placed

Once class configurations have been established, teachers work collaboratively with school administration to place students into classes.

This is a professional and thoughtful process. Teachers know their students well and bring valuable insight into students' strengths, learning needs, relationships, and classroom experiences. Placement decisions consider the composition of the class rather than simply grouping students according to academic level or friendships.

When creating balanced and heterogeneous classes, teachers consider factors such as:

- Academic strengths and areas for growth
- Learning styles and instructional needs
- Behavioural and social-emotional needs
- The level of teacher time and support individual students may require
- Learning support needs and student designations
- Peer relationships and social dynamics
- Leadership and independence
- The overall balance and diversity of each classroom
- The ways in which individual students may contribute positively to the learning environment

The goal is not to create classes that are identical. Rather, the goal is to create well-balanced learning communities that reflect a range of strengths, needs, personalities, and learning styles.

It is important to recognize that there is a wide range of learning needs in any classroom. Heterogeneous grouping is not unique to split-grade classes; it is a fundamental part of today's classrooms. Students within a single-grade class, just as within a split-grade class, will have different academic, social-emotional, behavioural, and learning needs.

Why Are Split Grades Used?

Split-grade classes are a normal part of organizing elementary classrooms and can be formed for a variety of reasons. In some situations, a split is necessary based on student numbers and available class configurations. In other situations, the needs and composition of the students may be a significant consideration.

It is also important to recognize that some traditional perceptions of split-grade classes do not reflect how contemporary classrooms are organized or how teaching and learning take place today. A split class is not a "lower" or "higher" class, nor does the grade configuration determine the level of learning that will take place.

The primary goal is to create a positive and heterogeneous learning environment, not to create a "higher" or "lower" class.

There can be both advantages and challenges associated with either type of split. Students in the younger grade may benefit from opportunities to observe and learn from older peers, while older students may benefit from opportunities to develop leadership, independence, and responsibility. At the same time, being placed in the younger or older grade of a split does not necessarily mean that a student will have fewer opportunities to learn at a higher level, be less challenged, or be too challenged. Every classroom brings together students with a range of strengths, needs, interests, and areas for growth.

As professionals, teachers assess students on an ongoing basis and use that information to plan instruction that meets students where they are in their learning. Students may work with different levels of complexity, receive different forms of support, participate in different groupings, or be provided with opportunities to extend their learning.

The Role of the Teacher

Every teacher brings their own strengths, experience, professional knowledge, and gifts to the classroom. Teachers also have professional autonomy in determining how they enact the curriculum and design learning experiences for their students.

This means that two classrooms may approach the same curriculum in somewhat different ways while still providing rich and appropriate learning opportunities.

Teachers continually assess student learning and use that information to make instructional decisions. Their responsibility is to know their students, understand where they are in their learning, and provide appropriate support, challenge, and opportunities for growth.

Regardless of whether a classroom is a single-grade or split-grade configuration, teachers are responsible for responding to the individual learners in front of them.

The Importance of Partnership

Parents and caregivers know their children in ways that are incredibly valuable to the school. Teachers bring professional knowledge and daily insight into students as learners. The strongest support for a child comes when these perspectives are brought together through a positive partnership. Open and ongoing communication between home and school is an important part of this partnership.

If you have questions or concerns about your child's learning, we encourage you to communicate with your child's teacher. Conversations about learning, progress, strengths, areas for growth, and ways to support your child are most productive when they are grounded in collaboration and a shared commitment to the child's success.

A Shared Goal

Ultimately, class placement is about more than determining which classroom a student will enter in September. It is about creating learning environments where students can feel a sense of belonging, develop relationships, experience success, and be appropriately supported and challenged.

There is no single classroom configuration that is perfect for every student. Our responsibility is to use the information available to us, apply professional judgment, and create balanced classes that give all students the opportunity to learn and thrive.

We appreciate the trust families place in our staff and recognize that questions about class placement can sometimes bring uncertainty. Our shared goal remains the same: to create positive learning environments in which every student is known, supported, challenged, and given opportunities to grow.