

Split Grade Classes in Elementary Schools

Prepared May 19, 2009

Split Grade Classes in Genesee County:

A survey taken in the spring of 2009 of the 21 school districts in Genesee County regarding their use of split grade classes produced the following information:

Districts that have implemented split grade classrooms in recent past due to enrollment numbers:	Districts that have split grade classrooms in the 2008-2009 school year:	Districts that tentatively plan to institute split grade classrooms in 2009-2010 school year:	Districts that did not respond to survey:
Atherton Carman Flushing Genesee Grand Blanc Fenton Lakeville Montrose Mt. Morris Westwood Heights	Carman Grand Blanc Flushing	Grand Blanc Swartz Creek Flushing Mt. Morris Carman Linden Fenton	Bendle Clio Davison Goodrich Kearsley Lake Fenton

Research on Split Grades:

Adapted from Principal's Partner (2006) by David Payne and Ron Robbins

Dr. Joel Gajadharsingh, of the University of Saskatchewan, is the leading North American investigator of combined classes. In 1991, the Canadian Education Association summarized his extensive findings and concluded the following:

- 1) Children in combined classes get an education that is just as good or better as in single grade classes.
- 2) Children in classes where there is more than one level learn to become more independent, responsible learners and develop a greater degree of social responsibility. They also develop better study habits and a more positive attitude towards school.
- 3) 85% of teachers considered the achievements of students in multi-grades to be equal or superior to the achievement of students in single grades in language arts, mathematics, sciences and social studies.

Achievement:

B. A. Miller reviewed 13 experimental studies assessing academic achievement in single-grade and multi-grade classrooms. He concluded that there were no significant differences between them (ERIC Digest, No. ED 335 178).

The Non-Graded Elementary:

John Goodland completed a very detailed study in 1987 called ‘the Non-graded Elementary School.’ The study revealed that on average there was a five-year span of development typically found in a single grade group. In combined classes, representing two or three grade levels, the span was about six years of difference in the various aspects of student development.

Multi-Grade Classes:

S. Veenman completed a research paper on multi-grade classes in 1995. He reviewed fifty-six studies from twelve countries, including four from Canada. Forty-eight multi-grade classes were studied. Thirty-eight of the fifty studies looked at overall achievement in math, reading and language. Of the thirty-eight studies, twenty-eight found no overall effects on achievement. In four other studies, significant and positive effects were found favoring multi-age classes and six favored single-grade classes. Eleven other studies found no significant difference in cognitive achievement, whereas in the non-cognitive area, multi-age classes generally scored higher.

Factors for Multi-Grades:

A review of Veenman’s results by Mason and Burns (1996) concluded that multi-grade classes are appropriate for many students. They do not dispute Veenman’s findings, but they do suggest there were factors in place that contributed to the outcome of his study. These include careful selection of students, class size, the skill of the teachers and the school supports in place to effectively manage a combined class.

Resources on Split Grade Classrooms:

Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario, “Spit Decisions: The Reality of Combined Grades in Ontario in 2001,”

Ontario Ministry of Education, Information Management Branch, “Summary Statistical Report on Combined Grades,” *Elementary School September Reports, 1996-1999*. October 2000.

W. C. Kasten and B. K. Clarke. *The Multi-age Classroom: A Family of Learners*. Katonah, New York: Richard C. Owen Publishers, 1993.

K. Gutloff, *Multi-age Classrooms*, National Education Association of the United States: NEA Teacher-to-Teacher Books, 1995.

A. M. Hallion “Strategies for Developing Multi-age Classrooms”, paper presented at the Annual Convention of National Association of Elementary School Principals’ Association, Orlando, Florida, March 4-9, 1994.

S. Veenman, “Cognitive and Noncognitive Effects of Multi-grade and Multi-age Classes: A Best-Evidence Synthesis, : *Review of Educational Research* 65 (4), 1995.