

## **ORGANIZING OUR SCHOOL**

### **Policies, Practices and Parental Input**

Placing students in the most appropriate class for an academic year is a complex process for the school and is handled carefully and thoughtfully. Many factors are considered during this process and parental input is given careful consideration. However, other factors at the district, school and staff level must also be considered. The central goal is always that each student receives a classroom placement that will meet his/her academic needs and that his/her social - emotional needs are addressed. Fortunately, experience proves that the vast majority of students quickly accept their new teacher, become involved in classroom routines and relationships, and work towards creating a successful school year.

#### **1. How is staff assigned to our school?**

Planning for the school year begins in March when Ministry, district and school enrollment projections are studied. Based on anticipated registration, the Superintendent's Office allocates a specific number of teachers to each school. This allocation is calculated by dividing the projected number of students by the class size. In B.C., the class size is determined by the Ministry of Education.

#### **2. How does the school develop an organizational plan for September?**

Based on the number of teachers (and fractions of instructional units) assigned to the school, the educational teaching staff begin planning during the Spring term for September. Often, several proposals are presented and the staff agrees on the most sensible organizational plan, which will utilize teaching staff most effectively. In this process, teacher assignments may be changed, teachers may transfer, and new teachers may join the school.

#### **3. How are classes formed?**

Once an organizational plan has been adopted by the school and the number of classes has been determined, the principal assigns teachers to each class and begins the process of forming classes. **The following factors are considered: class size limit, special needs of students, student leadership, grade balance, male / female ratio, instructional grouping, behaviour, work habit strengths and weaknesses, social relationships, and teacher strengths.**

#### **4. Why are there "combined grade" classrooms?**

The number of classes and teachers available in our school is determined by the number of students who are enrolled in the school. All classes established in a school must conform to the provincial guidelines. These factors, plus financial constraints, make it impossible to offer single grade classes for the whole school.

## 5. Are “single-grade” classes superior to “combined grade” classes?

Although “combined grade” classes may be more work for some teachers, there should be no difference in quality of education between “single grade” and “multi-grade” classes. Each year teachers must develop a year plan including units or themes for the students in their class. In “combined grade” classes, teachers must decide whether to plan for two separate curricula (as in a Grade 2 and separate Grade 3 math program) or a combined curriculum (as in a geometry unit with different criteria for Grades 2 and 3’s). Many subjects contain the same strands each year and teachers create different units to meet the course objectives. In these subjects teachers plan units which will meet the objectives of both grades.

In many ways, every classroom is a “multi-grade” class. Every teacher, in meeting the needs of the students in the class, must plan to accommodate a wide range of learning styles, interests, abilities and achievement levels. For example, in a Grade 6 class it is possible to have students reading between a primary level and a secondary level. Added to this, there will likely be students who have special needs, both in enrichment and remediation; possibly students with social, emotional or behavioral needs; and maybe students where English is a second language or who have a physical disability. Every class experiences this diversity and the teacher designs programs to meet the needs of students in the room.

## 6. Are “higher” combined grades better than “lower” combined grades?

With older curriculum models, where teachers organized classes by subjects and grades, there was the perception that the upper grade of a “combined grade” was for lower ability students and the lower grade was for higher ability students. This was based on the belief that “smarter” students could indirectly learn what was happening in the grade above and “slower” students could review materials in the grade below. In fact, classes were not usually organized with this philosophy; and in practice, students seldom benefited from such “indirect” instruction.

Newer curriculum models prescribe the learning outcomes that students are to meet at each grade but do not outline the units or themes to be taught. The teacher is responsible for designing an educational program that will meet the prescribed learning outcomes and the diversity of student needs within the classroom. Within this context, the teacher often adds or varies the objectives and or criteria for students of different ages, and is required to adapt, modify or develop an individual educational plan for students with unique learning needs.

## 7. How are students placed in classes?

The school holds placement meetings in June to tentatively assign students to classes. Ultimately, all the students registered in the school must be placed in the available classrooms. The school uses an “arena placement” model to make decisions about classroom placements. The principal, learning assistance teacher, and the receiving and sending classroom teachers are present at these meetings. During the placement meeting, ***each child is considered individually***. Information on each pupil is discussed and parental input is carefully considered in this process. All available information about each student is presented to all the professional staff involved as a decision is being made. The teachers consider the academic, social,

emotional and physical needs of the child in reaching a placement decision. The student is given the most appropriate placement possible based on the information before the teachers.

**8. How important is it that my child be placed with his/her friends?**

Social and emotional needs are important to the success of a child in school. However, that does not mean having all a child's friends in a class is the answer. School is a place for social development and making new friends and working cooperatively with others is an essential life skill. Being adaptable and flexible are skills that we need to foster. We build class groupings that take into account the skills and qualities that students can bring to a group. Leadership builds confidence and strengthens learning.

**9. Do parents have a choice of classrooms?**

A free and universal choice system with restrictions on the number of teachers and classrooms is not possible. To give approximately 300 choices in a fair system would be unwieldy, if not impossible; and to give choice to some parents and not others would be unfair. Therefore, the short answer to the question is "No." The school and principal are given the responsibility under the School Act to make final placement decisions. However, parents do have the opportunity for input and their opinions are given serious consideration during the placement meetings.

**10. What type of parent information is helpful for teachers in determining student placement?**

Parent input on the needs of their children is appreciated throughout the year and cooperative relationship between the home and the school is encouraged. Before the placement meetings, teachers appreciate being informed of detailed information regarding unique educational, personal, medical or social needs of a child who may require a special placement. These concerns will be shared at the placement meeting and be seriously considered during placement decisions. It should be noted that parental preference is not a request for specific placement. Concerns about possible "personality conflicts", instructional methods, teaching strategies, etc. must be based on first hand experiences (not rumors) and must also involve a significant educational concern about the student.

**11. Why do classes change sometimes in September?**

Despite the planning and preparation that occurs in the spring, the enrollment in the school might change in the first week of the new school year. Over the summer, students may move away and new students may move into the neighborhood. If the number of students transferring in and out of the school does not balance, total school enrollment projections will be inaccurate and require teachers to be removed from the school or classes added to the school. These major changes affect the school's organizational plan and a totally new plan and placement process may have to be completed in the first few weeks of September. Typically, however, the students moving in and out of the school do not effect total enrollment but may change the balance of pupils in each class by age, grade, sex, instructional program, or class size. This requires some movement of students between classes but not necessarily a change in the proposed organizational plan.

**12. Why are students not placed in the permanent classes immediately in September?**

There are various models for welcoming students back to school in September and beginning a new school year. Some schools have students return to their old classrooms for the first week, some attempt to immediately implement the school's organizational plan for the year, others introduce school-wide activities and themes, and still others establish multi-grade temporary classes. There are pros and cons for each of these systems. The teachers at our school have chosen to have the students start with a school wide activities and themes. This allows time for new registration and classes to be finalized based on new staff and information.

**14. When can parents give input about their child's placement?**

It is important that any input presented for consideration be given prior to the student placement meetings that occur in early June. Therefore, this information **must be received by the last Friday in May**. As the placement process is a complex one, **input made after this date will not be accepted**.

**15. If I fill out the "Parent Input" form, am I guaranteed anything?**

Requests for specific placement are not made. However, the input you provide us will be given careful consideration along with the other needs listed for class make-up.

**16. Can I find out ahead of time who my child's teacher will be?**

The final placement of students is not definitely known until registration is complete and students have arrived during the first days of school in September. And rather than create anticipation and expectation of having a specific teacher, we do not make public tentative class lists.

**17. How will placement be affected if my child is on an I.E.P.?**

If your child has an I.E.P. (Individual Education Plan), a review of the I.E.P. will take place in late May or early June. During this time, appropriate placement will be discussed to meet the needs of your child.

**18. How can I help to prepare my child for placement in September?**

The power of **"positive parent talk"** cannot be over emphasized! Be encouraging and supportive in front of your child. Children "take on" your energy, whether it be positive or negative. If you have concerns, express them to your child's teacher and allow the teacher to address the issues in a positive and professional manner.

**Conclusion:**

Again, parental input into the placement of students is important and will be seriously considered during the placement meetings. Although all input will be considered, there is no "guarantee". For those parents who would like to provide more details on the education,

personal, medical or social needs of their child, the attached form is provided for your convenience. **All parental input must be into the school office by the last Friday in May.**

Once permanent classes are established, experience demonstrates that the vast majority of the placements work out well. Worries that may seem enormous during the first few days of school usually disappear once classroom programs and relationships are established. Typically, by the end of the first week, students are talking confidently about “my class” and “my teacher.” However, if placement concerns persist beyond the first few weeks of school, parents should clarify their concerns with the teacher and discuss them with the principal.