



# ORGANIZING OUR SCHOOL

## Guidelines, Questions & Answers

Juniper Ridge Elementary School

### Procedures, Practice 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.

***NOTE: Research also shows that children feed off of and mimic the emotions of the adults in their lives. Negative opinions and emotions displayed around children often have an adverse affect on how those children view their school experience. The opposite is also true. Part of the success of children and their school experience is related to the messages they get from the adults in their life.***

#### 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 divided the projected number of students by the class size. In B.C., the class size is determined by the Collective Agreement between the School District and the BC Teacher's Federation.

#### 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. In some cases, due to unexpected enrollment changes usually over the summer or early September, this process may be delayed at the start of the school year. At this time all efforts are made to get students

into their academic placements/classrooms as soon as possible. This often means waiting until the second week of school. The following factors are considered when forming classes:

- class size limits
- special needs of students
- student leadership
- grade balance
- gender ratio
- instructional grouping
- behaviour
- work habits
- social relationships
- teacher strengths

#### 4. How are students placed in classes?

The school holds placement meetings starting in June. 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, vice-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 the teachers have.

#### 5. 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.

#### 6. Do parents have a choice of classrooms?

A free and universal choice system within the restrictions on schools on the number of teachers and classrooms is not possible. To give approximately 450 plus 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, requests for specific teachers (or not to have specific teachers) are generally not considered.** Also, requests for single grade or combination grade classes are not considered. Research does not support any difference in achievement for students in combination grades vs. single grade classes. For more detailed information on combination classes vs single grade classes, please refer to our website under General Information and Multi-Age Classrooms (<http://juniper-ridge.sd73.bc.ca/mod/folder/view.php?id=795>) "Tips and Information for Parents."

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.

#### 7. 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 home and 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 are considered at the placement meetings 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 rumours or speculations) and must also involve a significant educational concern about the student.**

## 8. 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 neighbourhood. 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, gender, instructional program, or class size. This requires some movement of students between classes but not necessarily a change in the proposed organizational plan.

## 9. 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. We have decided to start the year with students returning to their old classrooms. This allows time for new registration and classes to be finalized based on new staff and information.

## 10. 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 begin in June. Therefore, this information **must be received in writing using the form available from the office by the last Friday in May.** As the placement process is a complex one, **input made after this date may not be accepted.**

## 11. If I communicate to the school a placement request, am I guaranteed anything?

Requests for specific placements are generally not considered. However, the input you provide us on your child will be given careful consideration along with the other needs listed for class make-up.

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

The final placement of students is not known until registration is complete and students have arrived during the first few days of school in September. Rather than create anticipation and expectations of having a specific teacher, we do not make public or post *tentative* class lists. When our classes are finalized for the year we will have students down for an assembly and then they will return to their last year's class to be dispersed from there to their new placements.

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

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

## 14. How can I help to prepare my child for placement in September?

The power of “**POSITIVE PARENT TALK**” can not 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 issue 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.”

Once permanent classes are established, experience demonstrates that the vast majority of the placements work out well. Worries or concerns that may seem enormous during the first few days of school usually disappear once classroom programs and relationships are established, especially if it is coupled with “positive parent talk.” 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 first with the teacher and if needed, discuss them with the principal.

In general, changing placements after the school year has begun is extremely difficult and rarely happens. Changing even one student can impact several students and classes, and the make up of class dynamics that parents may not be aware of or privy to.