

# Teaching Combined Grades

**Challenges and Opportunities**



# Presentation Outline

- ✿ “Switch on” schema\*
- ✿ Ministry document
- ✿ Personal Insight & Strategies
- ✿ Final Q & A



*“The Cognitive Backpack”*

\*The collection of ideas and knowledge I have about the world based on my prior experiences and learning.

# Combined Grades

<b>K</b> (What I already <b>know</b> )	<b>W</b> (What I <b>want</b> to find out)	<b>L</b> (What I have <b>learned</b> )

According to the Ministry of Education, 45 percent of classes in Ontario's elementary schools were combined grades in 2012 - 13, up from 36 percent just four years prior.

@OECTA , December 2013

# Consider the possibilities...

**Scenario 1:** Practicum placement

**Scenario 2:** Occasional Teaching (Daily)

**Scenario 3:** Occasional Teaching (Long term)



**Scenario 4: Full-time Position  
(first job)**

**Scenario 5: Full-time Position  
(new school)**

**Scenario 6: Full-time Position,  
(familiar school,  
experienced)**

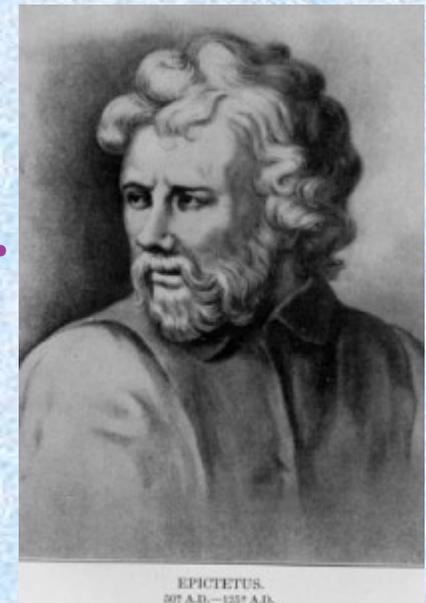


## Additional Challenges with a Combined Grade:

- Dual Curriculum Expectations
- Perceptions and Attitudes

*People are not troubled by things,  
but by the opinion they have of things.*

**Epictetus**  
55 – 135 CE





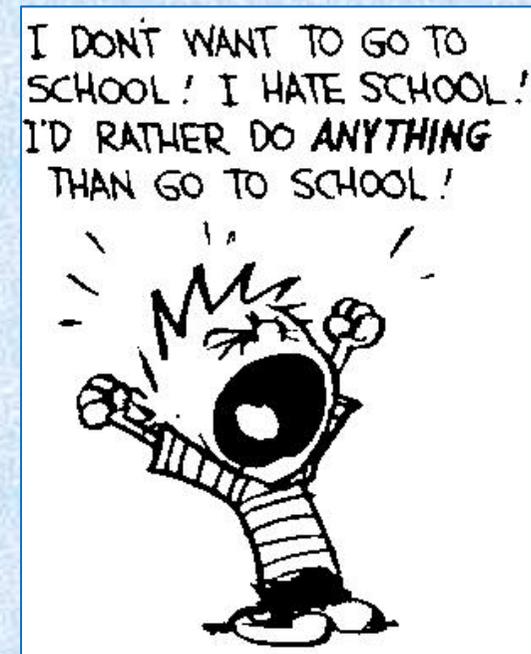
What  
questions  
will parents  
have?

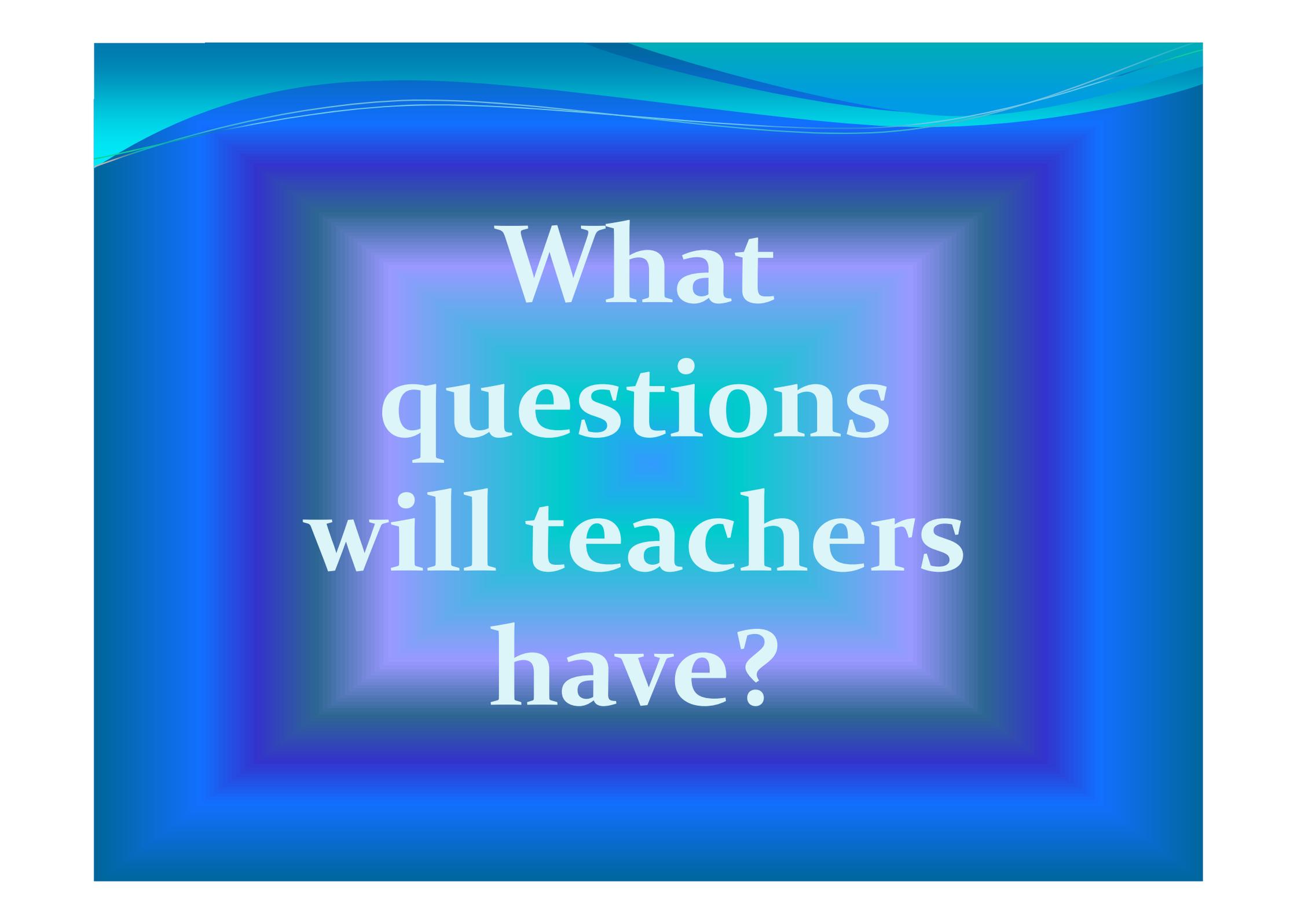
- **Why do you have “split” grades?**
- **How will this benefit/hurt my child?**
- **Why was my child chosen to be in a “split ” grade?**
- **Can I move my child to a straight grade?**
- **Will the teacher have as much time for each child?**
- **How do teachers prepare for teaching a combined grade?**
- **Will my child in the higher grade be sufficiently challenged?**
- **Will my child in the lower grade be overwhelmed?**
- **How will they prepare for/ How will this affect EQAO?**



What  
questions  
will students  
have?

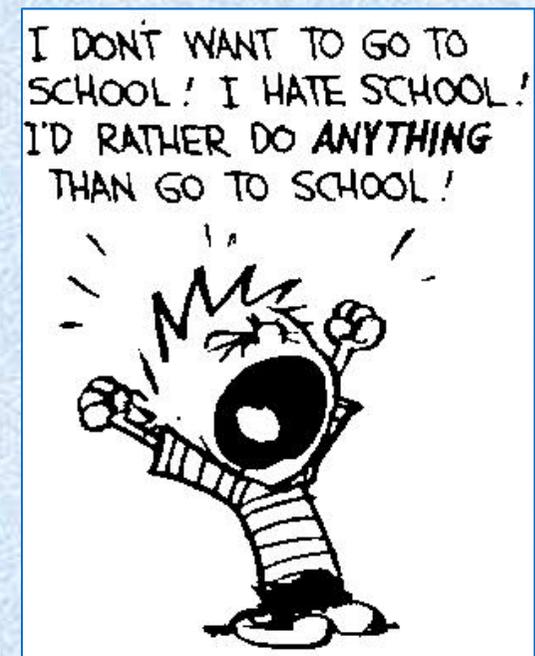
- Why do I have to be in a “split” grade?... again?
- Will I have any friends in this class?
- Will I always have to work quietly on my own?
- Will it be boring?
- Will the teacher be mean?
- Will there be a lot of homework?
- Will it be harder?
- What about our field trips?





What  
questions  
will teachers  
have?

- Why do I have to teach a “split” grade?... again?
- Can I get out of this?
- How will I ever get everything done?
- How can I keep the parents calm and out of my hair?
- How will I convince the students to buy in to this?
- How will I manage the extra work?
- How will I have a life?
- Where’s the combined textbook?
- When can I retire?



# Resources from the Ministry of Education



# Research Tells Us:

- Students in combined grade classrooms achieve as well academically as those in single grade classrooms.
- Students appear to benefit from the spirit of co-operation and mutual help that exists in these settings.
- Whole-class strategies such as explicit instruction, cooperative learning and subject integration support improved learning in combined grade classrooms.

-from *What Works? Research into Practice*

*A research-into-practice series produced by a partnership between The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat and the Ontario Association of Deans of Education, 2007*

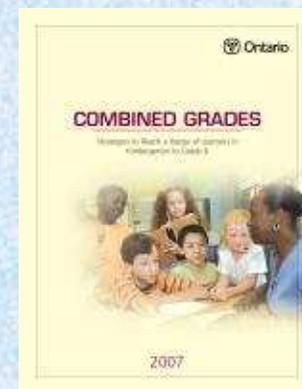


# Advantages of Split Grades

**Social and academic advantages to combined or split grades include:**

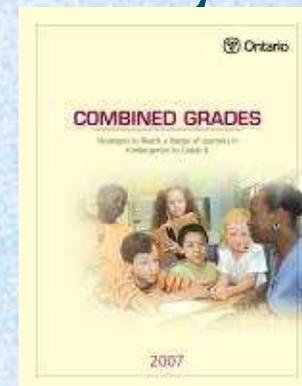
- ✓ Students do better in the area of socio-emotional development
- ✓ Students develop more positive peer interactions
- ✓ Students social skills develop better
- ✓ Students do more collaborative and independent learning
- ✓ Students display greater feelings of comfort and security, and show a more positive self-concept
- ✓ Students show higher satisfaction with achievements
- ✓ Students have more opportunity for leadership

*-from Combined Grades: Strategies to Reach a Range of Learners in Kindergarten to Grade 6, 2007*



# Factors that are generally considered in organizing classes:

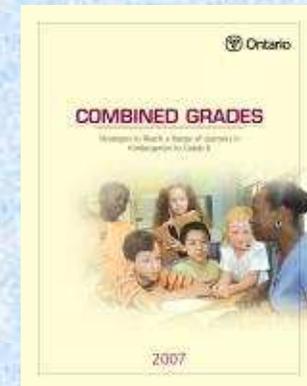
- Number of students in each grade
- Special considerations re: cohort
- Students' strengths, needs and interests
- Students' level of independence
- Social skills
- Number of boys and girls in each class
- Student achievement in literacy and numeracy
- Peer relationships
- Matching student to teacher



# Teaching Units of Study in Combined Grades

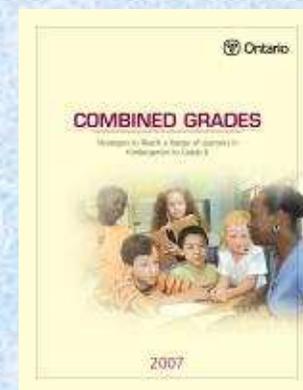
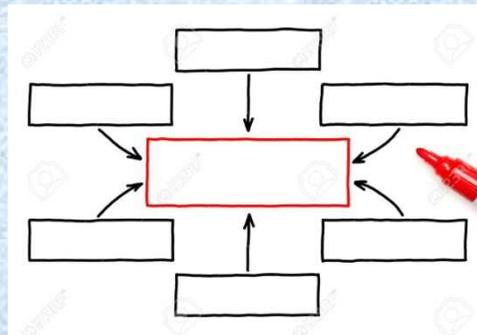
Two distinct approaches are possible:

- The teacher addresses new learning to two different groups at different times.
- **Common** units are built around “**big ideas**” or themes, while different specific content is addressed by each group.



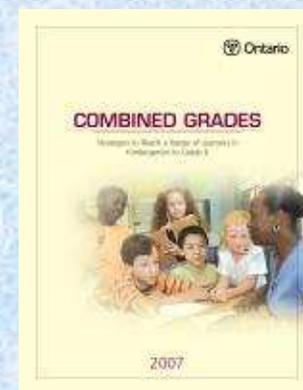
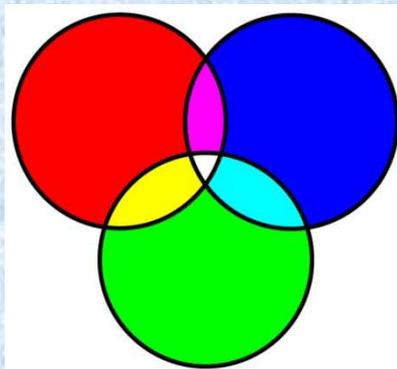
# Planning Considerations for Combined Grade Units

- **Align** related topics and strands for the year.  
(Begin with your strengths & interests!)
- Focus on related **“big ideas”** and **common concepts and skills**.
- Consider **commonalities** that may be possible in culminating tasks.



# Planning Considerations for Combined Grade Units

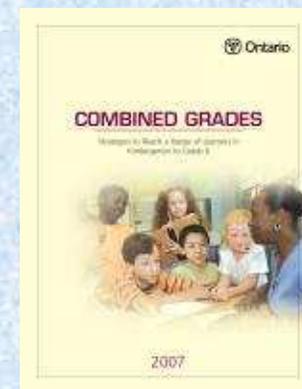
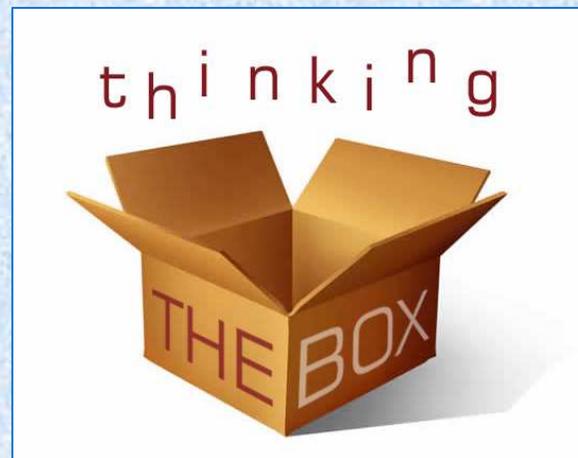
- Consider grade and student-appropriate **variations** of content, process, and product.
- Select **common** or related reading materials.
- Make **connections** among different subjects where the two grades can be **aligned**.



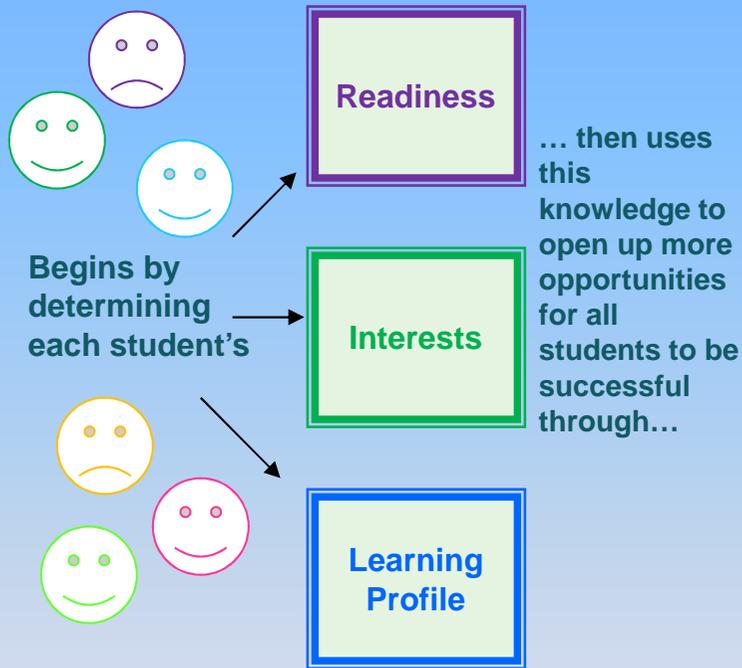
# Designing Unit Plans

✿ Focus instruction on the “**big ideas**” or fundamental concepts and/or skills **common** to the two grades. Look for **common**:

- themes
- big ideas/guiding questions
- skills
- processes
- strategies
- products



# Differentiated Instruction



*Concept Map by Deanna Cullion and Beth Warren*

WINDOWS OF OPPORTUNITY

Student Engagement	
Movement	Interaction with others
Interaction with the content	Appeal to each student's interests

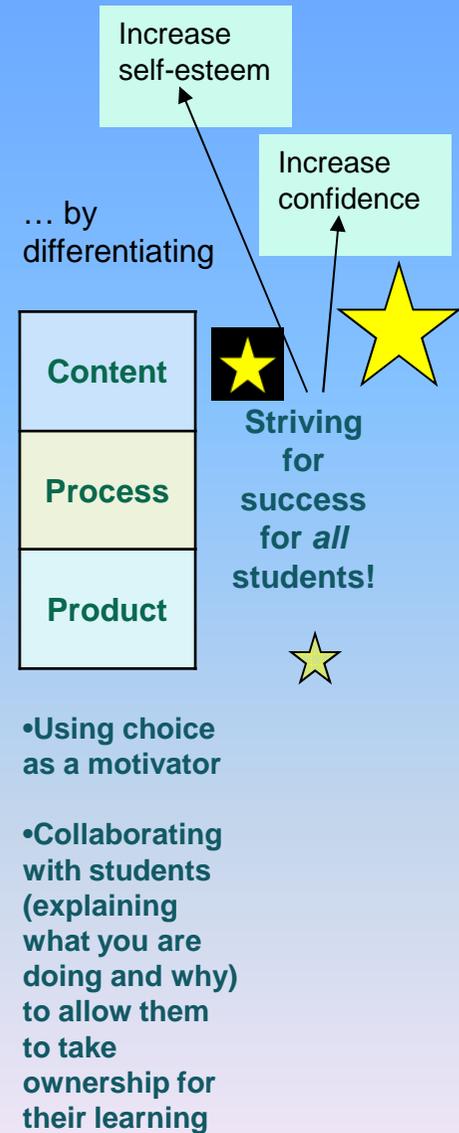
Questioning	
Student centered	Constructs meaning
Develops higher-level thinking	Questions are more important than answers

Flexible Grouping	
According to student needs	According to particular goals of the lesson
Vary the grouping patterns	Incorporate individual & group accountability

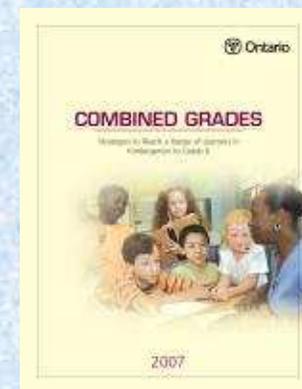
Ongoing Assessment	
Assess before, during, and after instruction	Helps to see how best to group students
How students feel about their own progress	Helps students set goals



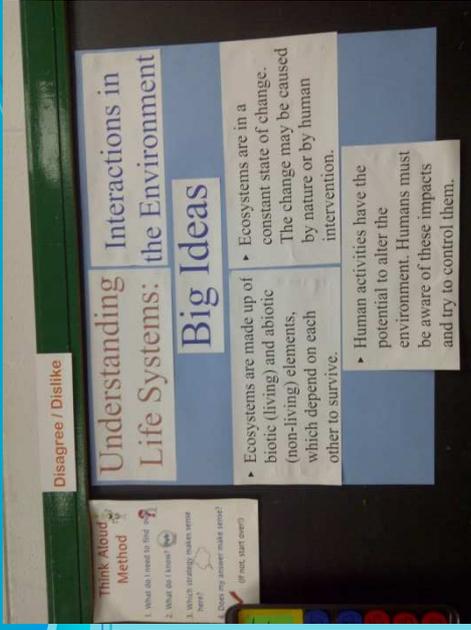
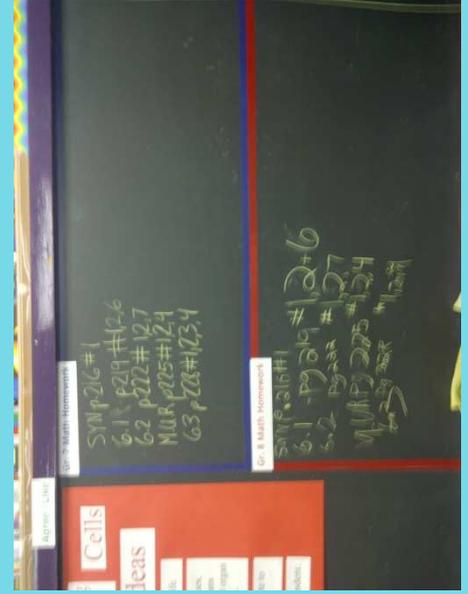
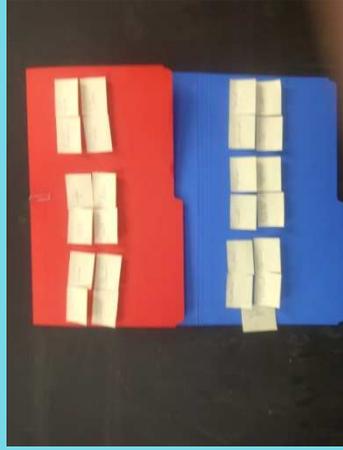
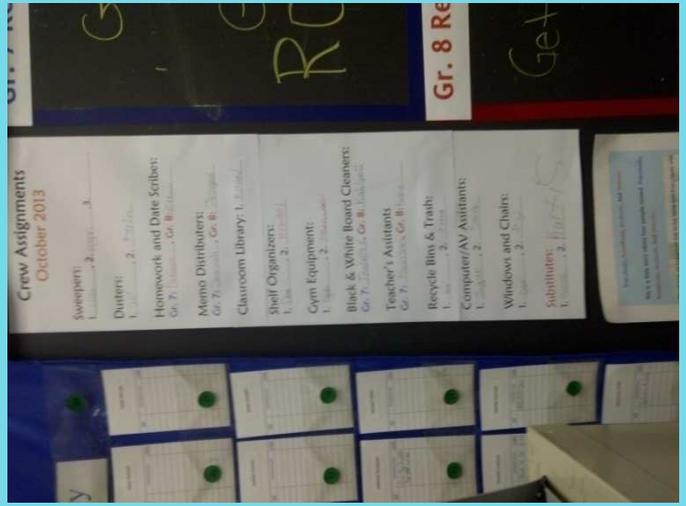
# Structure is essential!

Early in the school year, establish routines for:

- ✓ entry and dismissal
- ✓ submission and storage of notes from home and daily agendas
- ✓ transitions and movement
- ✓ crew assignments/job chart
- ✓ problem solving for common occurrences ( e.g., bathroom routines)
- ✓ materials management
- ✓ individual and buddy reading
- ✓ book selection
- ✓ procedures for handing work that is finished or not finished
- ✓ options when work is completed
- ✓ clean-up procedures
- ✓ guided reading schedules
- ✓ ....and so on







# Newsletters

**Quick Reference Guide for Assessments**

## TACK

Most assessments will be described as levels of achievement.

Level 4: with a high degree of effectiveness

Level 3: with considerable effectiveness

Level 2: with some effectiveness

Level 1: with limited effectiveness

NEI: Not enough evidence for Level 1 (incomplete)

**R: Remediation required**

**Application:** The use of knowledge and skills to make connections within and between various contexts.

**Thinking:** The use of skills and creative thinking skills in problem solving.

**Communication:** The conveying of meaning through various forms.

**Knowledge and Understanding:** Subject-specific content acquired in each grade (knowledge), and the comprehension of its meaning and significance (understanding).

**Please note:** Each area of achievement will contribute to the student's final assessment. However, individual assessments will not necessarily be evaluating all four categories.

**Marks Guide:** All leveled marks will be translated to letter grades for Gr. 6 and numerical grades for Gr. 7 on the report card.

4+ (A+)	92	4 (A)	82	4- (A-)	72
3+ (B+)	78	3 (B)	72	3- (B-)	62
2+ (C+)	68	2 (C)	62	2- (C-)	52
1+ (D+)	58	1 (D)	52	1- (D-)	42

\*\*\*NEI cannot be used for assessment purposes. If necessary, alternate measures will be taken.\*\*\*

## Welcome to Grade 6/7W!



A guide to help you get off to a great start

Sacred Heart School  
200 Kenwood Blvd.,  
LaSalle ON N9J 2M1  
519-734-1255



Please keep this newsletter at home for reference throughout the year.

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### Classroom Expectations

In addition to the curriculum expectations outlined by the Ministry of Education, there are behaviours which I expect to see so that our classroom can be a place of effective learning and communication.

**Respect:**

Issue simplified it for us: treat others the way that you want to be treated. Love one another. I expect that you will also show respect for yourself by putting your best effort forward in all areas.

**Problem Solving:**

Ask yourself the following before approaching your teacher for help:

- Can I do this on my own?
- Have I tried everything I can think of?
- Are there resources in the room that I can consult?
- Are there other students I can ask for help? ("Ask 3 before me")
- Is this an appropriate time to interrupt the teacher?

Please, keep me free to help with the BIG problems by handling the smaller ones yourself.

### Work Habits:

Good time management is essential to keep up with your responsibilities. So:

- Use your Agenda to keep up with school obligations, as well as personal events and responsibilities.
- Use class time well to complete tasks on time.
- Contribute to a calm and quiet work environment.
- Do assignments neatly and correctly the first time.
- Ask for help before little problems snowball into bigger ones.

### Recommended Tools and Supplies:

The following is a list of items which would be helpful, but are not mandatory:

- White glue &/or glue stick
- Coloured pencils, markers and highlighters
- lined/blank three-hole paper
- calculator!!!
- compass & protractor
- ruler
- scissors & eraser, red pen
- personal pencil sharpener
- 2+ boxes of Kleenex
- sissors
- pencil cases
- non-marking indoor gym shoes
- 8-10 duo-tangs

**Please note:** Desk space is very limited. You will be expected to keep your work space tidy.

Organization is the key!

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### Health & Physical Education

Daily Quality Physical Education, where active participation and healthy living are the primary goals, will focus on cooperative games, good sportsmanship, personal growth and safety. Because we only have access to the gym every other day, we will walk or run the block (weather permitting) on alternate days. **Proper footwear is important for your comfort and safety.**



This coupon is worth **100 House League Points** ...when the back is promptly completed, cut out and returned to your homeroom teacher.

### And now...getting down to business!

We will spend the first several weeks establishing routines and getting to know one another. Hopefully, you'll soon discover that:

- Self-discipline (doing the right thing even when the teacher isn't looking) leads to success and a happy work environment.
- The quicker we make transitions from one activity to another (and the fewer the disruptions) the greater the opportunities for learning.
- In a cooperative classroom, no one gets left behind. When we help each other, everyone benefits.
- People with different personality types and abilities can learn to get along if they respect and appreciate each other's differences.



### Homework:

It is your responsibility to fully complete all assigned work to the best of your ability.

Assigned work must be completed at school, unless told otherwise.

Unfinished assignments have a way of piling up. Start early to avoid last minute panic.

Every attempt will be made to set reasonable due dates on graded assignments.

**Parents:**

As teachers are now being discouraged from assessing work that has been completed outside of the classroom, homework will primarily be done at school. It is important that I observe the child's independent efforts - or know exactly how much support was needed - in order to make accurate assessments.



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Page 3

### The Language Connection:

Our ability to communicate affects every aspect of our life. Your Grade 6 & 7 programs will be based upon certain assumptions about the importance of literacy. **Successful students:**

- develop a lifelong love of reading and intellectual growth;
- develop communication skills;
- learn how to learn, and become strategic readers, writers and communicators;
- reflect on values, both personal and societal, and are able to articulate them clearly and creatively;
- work both collaboratively and independently;
- view assessment as a learning opportunity.

Additional information about our Math program will follow.

### Mathematics

Whether or not you realize it, Math is all around us. Budgeting your time, paying for your Happy Meal, cooking, keeping score in a game... Math is everywhere. To a great extent, our success in this world depends on our mathematical skills.

Using the Math Makes Sense program, we will strive for new understandings in our five Mathematical strands:

- Number Sense & Numeration, Measurement
- Patterns & Algebra,
- Geometry & Spatial Sense,
- Data Management & Probability

**Math Tests**

Unless otherwise stated, all Math tests will be "open book" to encourage students to use these resources more effectively.

**Warning:** OPEN BOOK - EASY (unless you do all homework and corrections, ask when unsure, and pay attention in class.)

### Science, Social Studies (6) History & Geography (7)

These content subjects will be taught in an integrated way throughout the year. I will prioritize the content and skills in each program based on curriculum expectations (as I do every year) in order to achieve the most important goals. I will also look for common "big ideas" between the two programs to minimize the sort of back and forth instruction that has been more typical of combined grades.

In this age of Information and Technology, greater emphasis must be placed on learning how to acquire and manage information, and how to think critically about what has been learned, rather than on merely memorizing facts.

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Page 5

### Project TLC

Over the past two years, Sacred Heart families have been the primary contributors to Project TLC. Janet Jensen, a retired teacher from our system, continues to need our help. She, and other retired teachers, make up gift baskets for people who are in the care of a variety of non-profit organizations in the Winona Lake County area. Would you please search your closets and drawers for any of the following (unused and unexpired) items:

- hotel shampoo, soap, etc.
- cosmetic samples
- toothbrushes
- travel sized care products
- cosmetics, aftershave samples
- lotions

Any personal care items would be appreciated - and will be accepted throughout the year. (Keep us in mind when traveling)



Student's name \_\_\_\_\_  
Parent's signature \_\_\_\_\_

# Know your Curriculum Documents

## GRADE 6 | READING

### OVERALL EXPECTATIONS

By the end of Grade 6, students will:

1. read and demonstrate an understanding of a variety of literary, graphic, and informational texts, using a range of strategies to construct meaning;
2. recognize a variety of text forms, text features, and stylistic elements and demonstrate understanding of how they help communicate meaning;
3. use knowledge of words and cueing systems to read fluently;
4. reflect on and identify their strengths as readers, areas for improvement, and the strategies they found most helpful before, during, and after reading.

### SPECIFIC EXPECTATIONS

#### 1. Reading for Meaning

By the end of Grade 6, students will:

##### Variety of Texts

- 1.1 read a wide variety of texts from diverse cultures, including literary texts (e.g., short stories, poetry, myths, legends, fantasies, novels, plays), graphic texts (e.g., graphic novels, advertisements, atlases, graphic organizers, charts and tables), and informational texts (e.g., biographies, textbooks, and other non-fiction materials; articles and reports; print and online editorials, various electronic texts, webquest texts)

##### Purpose

- 1.2 identify a variety of purposes for reading and choose reading materials appropriate for those purposes (e.g., online and print sources to compare different approaches to the same topic; webquest texts for information on a historical topic; graphic organizers, charts, and tables for specific information; a novel or a non-fiction book on a favourite topic for personal enjoyment)

##### Comprehension Strategies

- 1.3 identify a variety of reading comprehension strategies and use them appropriately before, during, and after reading to understand increasingly complex texts (e.g., activate prior knowledge on a

topic through brainstorming and developing concept maps; use visualization and comparisons with images from other media to clarify details of characters, scenes, or concepts in a text; make predictions about a text based on knowledge of similar texts; reread or read on to confirm or clarify understanding)

##### Demonstrating Understanding

- 1.4 demonstrate understanding of increasingly complex texts by summarizing and explaining important ideas and citing relevant supporting details (e.g., general idea and related facts in chapters, reports, tables and charts, concept maps, online and print magazine articles, editorials, brochures or pamphlets, websites; main theme and important details in short stories, poems, plays, legends)

##### Making Inferences/Interpreting Texts

- 1.5 develop interpretations about texts using stated and implied ideas to support their interpretations

*Teacher prompt:* "What is the story between the lines ... beyond the lines? What clues did the author give that led to your conclusion? Why do you think the author doesn't state these ideas directly?"

GRADE 6

READING

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## GRADE 7 | READING

### OVERALL EXPECTATIONS

By the end of Grade 7, students will:

1. read and demonstrate an understanding of a variety of literary, graphic, and informational texts, using a range of strategies to construct meaning;
2. recognize a variety of text forms, text features, and stylistic elements and demonstrate understanding of how they help communicate meaning;
3. use knowledge of words and cueing systems to read fluently;
4. reflect on and identify their strengths as readers, areas for improvement, and the strategies they found most helpful before, during, and after reading.

### SPECIFIC EXPECTATIONS

#### 1. Reading for Meaning

By the end of Grade 7, students will:

##### Variety of Texts

- 1.1 read a wide variety of increasingly complex or difficult texts from diverse cultures, including literary texts (e.g., short stories, poetry, novels, mysteries, historical fiction, autobiographies, scripts, lyrics), graphic texts (e.g., graphs and graphic organizers, charts and tables, diagrams, surveys, maps), and informational texts (e.g., print and online encyclopedias, manuals, and magazine and newspaper articles; magazines in their first languages, where appropriate; electronic texts, textbooks, and non-fiction materials; a variety of dictionaries, thesauri, and websites)

##### Purpose

- 1.2 identify a variety of purposes for reading and choose reading materials appropriate for those purposes (e.g., an electronic database listing magazines, newspapers, and journals to verify information; a national, local, or community newspaper for coverage of a specific current issue, scripts and lyrics for enjoyment, recreation, and interest; an online or print encyclopedia article for background information)

##### Comprehension Strategies

- 1.3 identify a variety of reading comprehension strategies and use them appropriately before, during, and after

reading to understand increasingly complex texts (e.g., activate prior knowledge on a topic through dialogue and discussion; use visualization and comparisons with images from other media to clarify details of characters, scenes, or concepts; ask questions to monitor understanding; summarize sections of text during reading; synthesize ideas to broaden understanding)

##### Demonstrating Understanding

- 1.4 demonstrate understanding of increasingly complex texts by summarizing important ideas and citing a variety of details that support the main idea (e.g., key information in manuals, surveys, graphs, online and print encyclopedias, websites, tables and charts; theme and related ideas in magazine articles, dramatic monologues, television programs)

##### Making Inferences/Interpreting Texts

- 1.5 develop and explain interpretations of increasingly complex or difficult texts using stated and implied ideas from the texts to support their interpretations

*Teacher prompt:* "How does the information in the graphic influence your interpretation of the text?" "What do you think the author wants you to realize about the character's decision in this scene? How is this information communicated?"

GRADE 7

READING

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Use available **resources** to achieve the curriculum expectations of your **Grade \_\_\_ program** in ways that best meet the needs of your students.

These are your **program guides**



These are **resources**



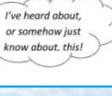
# Anchor Charts

- These provide references for students when you are busy with the other group.
- Where appropriate, create them with students . Always make sure that you have fully worked through the concepts together before expecting them to understand the posted chart.
- Print headings large enough so that each chart is recognizable from across the room. Allow students to get up and view as needed.

**Making Connections**

To better understand the text you are reading:

- ✓ activate prior knowledge
- ✓ visualize
- ✓ connect in 1-3 ways:

- **Text-to-Self (T-S)** 
- **Text-to-Text (T-T)** 
- **Text-to-World (T-W)** 



**QAR ▶**

**Question-Answer Relationships**

**IN THE BOOK** 

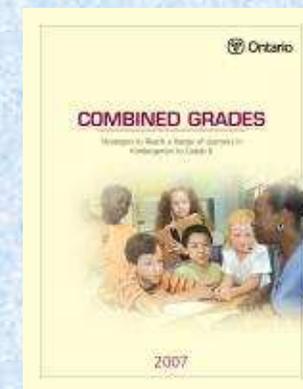
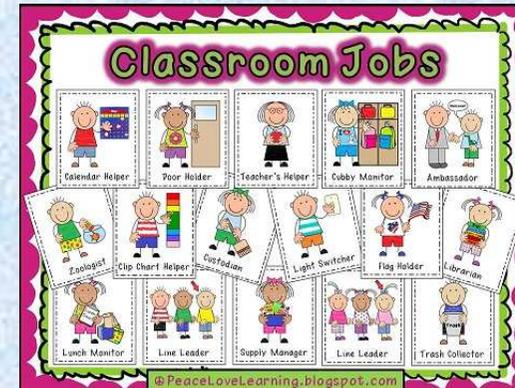
- ▶ **Right There**   
(The answer can be found within one sentence in the text)
- ▶ **Think and Search**  
(The answer is hidden in more than one sentence)

**IN MY HEAD** 

- ▶ **Author and Me**   
(The answer comes from the author and me)
- ▶ **On My Own**   
(The answer is not in the text but I know the answer!)

# Common Anchor Charts

- ✓ Classroom rules and responsibility lists
- ✓ Classroom helper charts
- ✓ Class routine reminders
- ✓ Reading strategy reminders
- ✓ Alphabet lines/number lines
- ✓ Daily schedule
- ✓ Word lists/word wall
- ✓ Illustrations and/or definitions of numeracy terms
- ✓ Writing forms and conventions
- ✓ Writing elements or traits
- ✓ Media techniques
- ✓ Rubrics or criteria for achievement
- ✓ Shape and pattern charts
- ✓ Higher level questioning prompts



# Assessment in a Split Grade is:

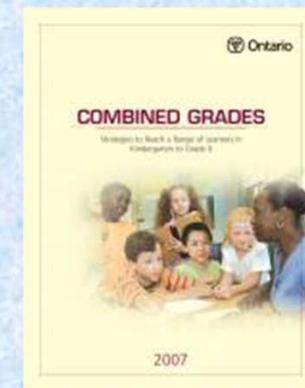
- frequent
- unobtrusive
- authentic
- respectful
- related to individual growth
- recorded carefully!

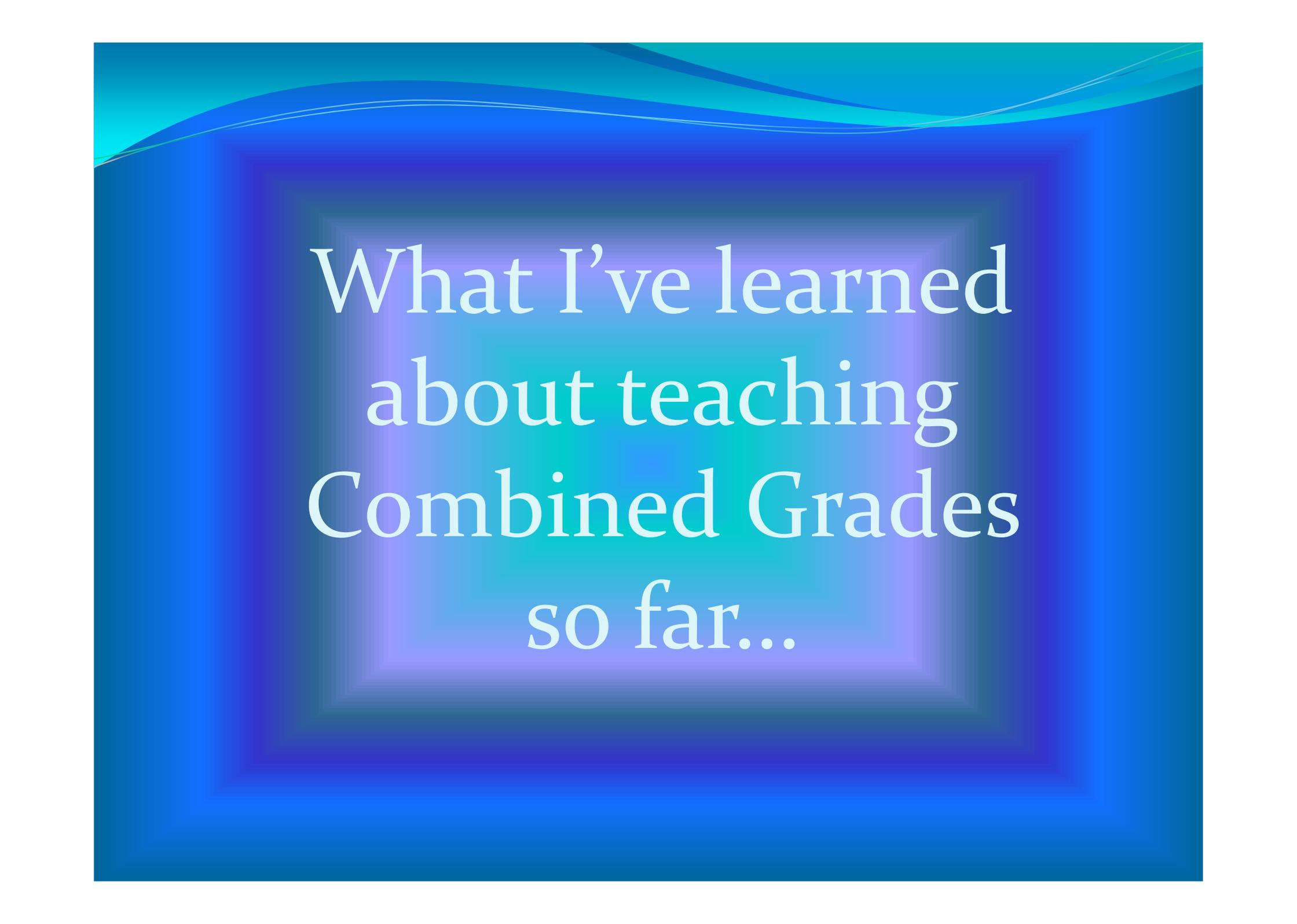
## Focus of Assessment:

- ✓ for learning
- ✓ as learning
- ✓ of learning

^ of learning

^ as learning





What I've learned  
about teaching  
Combined Grades  
so far...

# #1 Establish Priorities



- ❖ You need to take care of yourself in order to be of service to others.
- ❖ Identify and manage those things that are beyond your control as best you can. Recognize opportunities in those things over which you do have some control and innovate!
- ❖ Be a lifelong learner. Do the best you can with what you know now, understanding that you'll "do better" when you "know better".
- ❖ You will develop professional judgment with experience that will make it easier to prioritize; learn to trust your instincts.
- ❖ Priorities can change without notice. Be prepared to be flexible.

## #2 Build Community

- ❖ Students who feel safe, valued, and understood will experience greater success.
- ❖ Cooperation and collaboration are the key ingredients in any productive classroom, but are even more essential in a Combined Grade. Teach your students the skills they need to work together.
- ❖ Communicate your goals and expectations to students as well as their families – and be an effective listener.



## #3 Consult Experts

- Mentors, colleagues, and school administration
- School Board teams
- Affiliate representatives
- Workshop and course presenters/teachers
- Professional literature & Ministry documents
- and, of course...



# Remember to:

- ✓ Familiarize
- ✓ Visualize
- ✓ Prioritize
- ✓ Devise
- ✓ Revise



**And above all...focus on the positive!**

