

# Information for Parents About Nongraded (Multi-Age) Elementary School

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## Précis

Elementary and secondary students have traditionally been placed in graded classrooms corresponding roughly to their ages. This method of grouping students has been a useful administrative tool; however, it has also been a grouping method which efficiently establishes targets for student achievement and which is readily understood by parents. Enhancements within the traditional graded classroom allow attention to be given to children who are progressing at differing rates in their cognitive achievement (reading, mathematics, language, etc.). Nongraded (or multi-age) grouping refers to a practice in which students who would be placed in different grades are combined in the same classroom setting for perceived educational benefits. There are many different approaches to nongraded grouping. At one end of the spectrum of nongraded programs, one finds those such as the Joplin Plan, where students are placed in traditional grades for most of each school day, but nongraded grouping occurs for one subject, usually reading or mathematics. At the other end of the spectrum, one finds comprehensive nongraded programs or Individually Guided Education (IGE). These programs feature learning plans tailored to each student (individual learning plans), one-on-one teaching by the teacher or peers (other students), and intensive use of small group activities.

The variety of nongraded programs has made it difficult to gauge the effect they have on student achievement. Research studies comparing the nongraded and graded approach have used small numbers of students and reached varying conclusions. The quality of the research reported has varied greatly. Several educationists have reviewed reports in which achievement of students in nongraded and graded programs are compared. These reviews give us some insight into how consistently nongraded programs may benefit student achievement. Most studies of the nongraded approach have dealt with the primary grades (K-3). Thus we have only limited information to use in judging claims for the benefits of nongraded schooling for older students. The reviews of studies comparing nongraded and graded programs indicate that the nongraded approach may offer some benefit with respect to noncognitive student achievement (e.g., attitude towards school, social adjustment, and personal adjustment). One clearly cannot conclude that all nongraded approaches benefit cognitive achievement. In fact, when the magnitude of the effects (effect sizes) of nongraded schooling are determined for a large number of program evaluations without paying attention to the kinds of nongraded programs used, one cannot show with any confidence that nongraded programs have a beneficial effect on cognitive student achievement. However, when one examines the effect sizes for different kinds of nongraded programs, one finds that Joplin-like programs are likely to improve student achievement whereas more

comprehensive, individualized programs are not as likely to do so. Thus, when grouping is done to enhance teacher-directed instruction, it benefits student achievement. However, when it is done solely to provide a framework for individualized instruction, one cannot be certain it will benefit student achievement compared to a traditional graded approach.

The published reviews of research on nongraded elementary school programs have analyzed data from studies done between about 1960 and 1985. Therefore, one can only speculate about the impact which innovations popular among some educationists today would have when incorporated into a nongraded educational program. However, the conclusions reached from reviews of past research on the nongraded classroom indicate that adding such innovations to a comprehensive nongraded program is likely to be deleterious to cognitive student achievement. For example, use of abstract outcomes, poorly defined competencies, or ill-defined standards and formal portfolios to demonstrate student alignment with outcomes in a nongraded classroom setting are likely to decrease emphasis upon the teacher-directed instructional methods that have been shown to work. Such innovations are also likely to overburden teachers undertaking nongraded teaching assignments. Both of these factors would lead to decreased student achievement in key subjects such as reading and mathematics.

### **What Do Educationists Mean When They Talk about Multigrade, Multi-age, or Nongraded Classrooms for Elementary Students?**

Parents often express concerns about their children being in classrooms that include students who would traditionally be placed in separate grades. They have many questions. Is this an experimental program? Will my child's achievement be accelerated or inhibited? How will I know my child is performing at "grade level"? Is this part of outcome-based education or some other educational fad? Is it appropriate to use this approach throughout the elementary school? Educationists implementing the programs will naturally reassure the parents. They may cite research supporting the usefulness of this type of program. On the other hand, they may portray the program as "innovative" based upon more "modern philosophies" of education. Parents must be careful not to indict a nongraded program as harmful just because it appears to be new or different from what they encountered as students. On the other hand, educationists are known to promote use of programs which mix what is proven with unproven innovations or to promote what is truly experimental as proven. I think some information about the nongraded classroom would be useful for parents.

I will first provide some definitions and historical background. Then I'll describe the findings of several published review papers which have examined research studies of nongraded student grouping. Finally I will use the conclusions of these research reviews to provide parents with some guidelines to use in evaluating programs in which their children may be asked to participate.

#### **Some Useful Definitions**

One problem parents often face in listening to educationists is determining what the terms they are using truly mean. The terms may mean different things to different

educationists and may not mean what parents think they mean. Therefore, I need to provide you with some definitions before we proceed further with this discussion. Everyone can agree that **graded classroom** grouping refers to the traditional practice of grouping students by age and assigning a grade level to each grouping created. For example, all 8-year-olds are placed in the 3rd grade, all 9-year-olds in the 4th grade, and so forth. Such classrooms are usually heterogeneous in terms of the ability of students except perhaps for the most low-ability students. I will define **multigrade classes** as those in which students from two or more traditional grades are taught by one teacher in one room at the same time. Students in multigrade classes retain their respective grade-level assignments and their respective grade-specific curricula. Such classes are generally formed for administrative and economic reasons. The one-room rural school house might be considered an example of multigrade education. **Multi-age grouping** or **nongraded (ungraded) grouping** refers to a practice where both age and grade levels are deliberately mixed for educational purposes. The student is kept with the same teacher in the same class for a number of years, usually three. It is important to keep straight that multigrade classes are formed out of necessity, but multi-age (nongraded) are formed intentionally for their perceived educational benefits. *I will use the term nongraded grouping to refer to the latter for the remainder of this presentation.*

Nongraded elementary school can refer to a wide range of school and classroom organizational configurations. The main idea of the grouping scheme is the elimination of traditional grade levels in setting instructional goals. Students are allowed to proceed through some or all of a curriculum at their own rates. Sometimes nongraded grouping is done within traditionally graded classrooms for one or two subjects (usually reading or reading and mathematics). For example, the Joplin Plan is a program where students remain in separate graded classrooms for most of the day. The students are regrouped for a part of the day on the basis of a single ability irrespective of the grade level or age of the student. Thus the Joplin Plan is basically a graded school with an enhancement requiring limited nongrouping. In more comprehensive nongraded programs students are placed in a nongraded environment for multiple subjects. Yet another program could have students placed in self-contained multi-age classrooms according to their reading performance or general ability (this might be called nongraded tracking). It is remarkable that the term nongraded grouping can apply to all of the grouping configurations I have just described.

#### **A Historical Overview: the Rationale for a Nongraded Elementary School**

In rural areas of the United States and other countries the multigrade classroom was used as a necessity. The number of students available and economics dictated this approach. The consolidation of rural schools has continued unabated for the past 60 years in the United States so the "one room school house" is now largely a sentimental memory. The dominant organizational pattern for the vast majority of elementary schools during this century has been the grouping of children by age in classes of 25-30 students taught by one teacher, who in general teaches the class the same curriculum.

On one level, this arrangement has served merely an administrative function. But it is also an efficient method which is readily understood by parents. It also tends to establish grade specific goals to be reached for reading, mathematics, language, and other subjects. Parents have some means for judging if their children's achievement is at "grade level." Within each classroom of a graded school, especially in the primary grades (K-3), it has become common for the teacher to divide students into small groups for brief periods of time during a school day and to differentiate instruction to the perceived (low, medium, or high) ability of the students. The idea here is to look at the skills the students need to achieve and to help students attain those skills. In addition to the basic classroom pattern, the graded school may provide classes for remedial and, occasionally, for advanced students. These classes range from all-day affairs to pull-out approaches. Thus, the graded school has undergone evolution over the past several decades. This is important to keep in mind because critics often assail it as a system which has been completely static in its organization since 1930. While its durability says something about its usefulness, the graded classroom has been the object of continued attack over the years by a significant number of educationists. Its critics have claimed there are no demonstrated principles of learning and/or growth and development undergirding age related grouping. Advocates for the nongraded approach present the arguments summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Arguments for Nongraded Primary Education  
Voiced by Advocates of These Programs  
[Modified from Ellis and Fouts (1)]

- Chronological age and mental age do not always correspond.
- Children are able to work at different developmental levels without obvious remediation, thus avoiding the social or emotional damage typically caused by retention.
- Students stay with their teacher for more than 1 year providing for continuity of learning.
- Age and achievement differences are accepted as normal by children.
- Nongraded arrangements lend themselves to integrated curriculum.
- The increasing diversity of contemporary society is more easily accommodated by nongraded programs.
- Nongraded grouping leads to more positive student attitudes and behavior, with no loss of academic achievement.
- Nongraded programs are more in keeping with the way children in naturalistic settings spontaneously group themselves for play and projects.
- Nongraded programs avoid many of the drawbacks of traditional practices, such as retention and acceleration issues.

Many feel that perhaps the strongest motivation for use of the nongraded approach has been to provide an alternative to both retention (holding a child in the same grade for the following year) and social promotion (that is, promoting students regardless of performance). On the one hand, there is the sincere belief that retention is harmful to students, is applied inconsistently, and fails to account for variable development ("late bloomers"). A retained child will repeat the whole year of content he or she failed to learn the first time. Spending the second year going over the same curriculum seems to be a poor practice for low achievers. Advocates of nongrading argue it

is better to allow such students to move more slowly through material and never have to repeat unlearned material. Of course the issue of adverse effects on student self-esteem with retention also arises.

It is interesting to note that the major implementations of nongraded schools have occurred during periods of time when there was intense interest by the public in improving standards and accountability in schools. It is logical to assume that as demands for performance to higher standards occur, social promotion becomes more difficult. The nongraded classroom offers educationists an escape from this troublesome problem. It is not surprising that major implementation of the nongraded classroom occurred in the early 1960s when the United States was reacting to the scientific advances made by the Soviet Union--the "Sputnik reaction." The demand for higher standards and accountability may be one of the stimuli for the greater popularity of nongraded classrooms in the 1990s as well.

The nongrouping programs used in the 1960s involved changes in grouping patterns but not fundamental changes in instructional methods. Teachers still taught overwhelmingly groups of students using traditional instructional methods. The curricular structure often incorporated a *continuous progress* approach. Here skills to be learned in subjects such as reading and mathematics are organized into a hierarchical series of levels covering all the grades involved in the plan. For example, the reading curriculum ordinarily taught in grades 1-3 might be organized in four levels per grade, for a total of 12 levels for the entire nongraded period leading to grade four. In a continuous progress model students pick up each year where they leave off. The hierarchical curricular organization could be used for reading and mathematics. However less special grouping would occur for subjects such as social studies or science.

Starting in the late 1960s the nongraded approach began to fuse with another innovation, *individualized instruction*. Increasingly, descriptions of nongraded schools began to include extensive use of learning stations, learning activity packets, and other individualized, student directed activities. Another typical attribute was *team teaching*. For example, two-six teachers might occupy a section of the school and take joint responsibility for a large group of students, flexibly grouping and regrouping students throughout the day. As time went on programs such as these were implemented in schools without classroom walls and tended to be called *open schools* rather than nongraded elementary schools.

The final phase in the evolution of nongraded programs was Individually Guided Education (IGE), which was developed by Klausmeier and others at the University of Wisconsin in the late 1970s (2). IGE affects all aspects of school organization and includes not just grouping. *Individualized learning plans* are prepared for each student, and students are constantly assessed to determine their continuing placements. Instruction can be delivered one-on-one by a teacher or peer tutor (classmate) to small groups, or (rarely) to large groups. Extensive use is made of learning stations at which students can perform experiments, work on individualized

units, or do other individual or small group activities independent of the teacher. A typical program could involved 100-150 students, a unit leader, 3-5 staff teachers, an aide, and a teacher intern.

More complex programs are difficult to sustain and explain to parents, particularly if student achievement turns out not to align with the parents' expectations. Thus, although most schools now have some attributes similar to the nongraded school, the traditional graded school is again quite common in the 1990s. Of course we are now in a period where there is once again heightened concern about student achievement, particularly for basic reading and mathematics skills in the primary grades. As mentioned previously, one can expect this to be a stimulus for use of the nongraded approach. Moreover, the "institutional memory" of the educational establishment seems to be about 20 years. Thus the nongraded school can now presented as a "new innovation" to be pursued by "forward looking schools." This time around however the implementation of the nongraded school may gather to itself new fads. Unfortunately, in some cases the true agenda behind use of the nongraded approach may be to get the fads into place. Some of these fads have been derived from the outcome-based education (OBE) movement. OBE is characterized by use of abstract outcomes to drive the entire educational process. Thus, primary students may be asked to demonstrate multiple strategies in reading. This may amount to little more than code words for "we're going to use whole language." They may be expected to "demonstrate environmental awareness," etc. Intensive use of performance assessments so that they become essentially the mode of instruction is another feature. And the school may require use of formal portfolios to catalog each student's performances. Teachers have traditionally used packets of class work at parent-teacher conferences to show parents what their children have been doing in school. These formal portfolios are a step well beyond this. Teachers must spend large amounts of time planning performance assessments and group projects keyed to the outcomes and putting their students' assessment products into portfolios. The research on nongraded classrooms I will describe in the next section will show that the various forms of the nongraded classroom differ in the likelihood that they will improve student achievement. We don't have research to show what happens when the OBE approach is introduced into a comprehensive or IGE nongraded program. My opinion is that analysis of the available research on nongraded schooling indicates that incorporating OBE-style practices into the nongraded classroom is likely to be neutral at best and could prove destructive.

Parents need to be informed about the various nongraded programs which can be used and alert to detect exactly what is being presented as a nongraded program for their children.

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## Research on the Nongraded School

Looking at reviews is essential. In describing the research on nongraded elementary schools, the first thing I need to say is that the vast majority of the research has centered upon the primary grades (K-3). Thus, there is much less research to use in judging the effect of such programs for grades 4-6. Also, we are fortunate that several educationists have reviewed the research on nongraded schools. Reviews are helpful here because the quality of the research in this area is quite variable and it is published in diverse locations (manuscripts of meeting presentations, theses, magazines and journals). The research studies may involve use of small numbers of students so that the statistical certainty of conclusions drawn from a single study is low. Therefore, by looking at trends of results of multiple research studies, which have been selected for their good quality, one can try to answer the question, "How likely will it be that a nongraded program will produce a positive, negative, or neutral effect upon student achievement?"

The reviews give conflicting conclusions. Even the reviews of research studies of the nongraded classroom have reached varying conclusions about the usefulness of this approach. After presenting an overview of the various reviews of research studies, Ellis and Fouts (1) stated that the majority of the reviews could not find conclusive evidence that the nongraded approach changed student achievement while a few concluded that children may do slightly better in nongraded classrooms. Ellis and Fouts pointed out that a number of reviews have supported the idea that "multi-age grouping appears to offer some advantages in affective growth, particularly self-esteem, aspirations, feelings of success, and perceptions of parental approval." I will go on record as saying that this may indeed be true, although some of the data used to support this premise are vague. However, I don't think a particular nongraded program should be used unless one can expect it to benefit student achievement in reading, math, and other "cognitive" subjects.

Since 1990, three reviews of good quality have appeared which look at research reports of studies contrasting student achievement in nongraded classes with achievement of students in traditional graded classes. These reviews screened research reports from approximately 1960 through about 1985. The authors of each review used slightly different techniques for choosing reports viewed as being of good quality. They also used different methods to analyze the research reports they chose to review. For example, Anderson and Pavan (3,4), using a score card kind of analysis, concluded that studies showing a positive effect of nongraded school on student achievement far outnumbered significant negative ones. Thus, Pavan, who is a known advocate of the nongraded approach, concluded that nongraded programs are likely to benefit most schools.

By contrast, the other two major reviews of nongraded schooling, which used a method to analyze the research different from Anderson and Pavan, reached different conclusions. The authors of both of these reviews calculated effect sizes for the mean (average) achievement test scores of students enrolled in each research project. To calculate an *effect size* they calculated the difference between the mean test scores for the students in nongraded and graded programs for each study and divided this by the graded program's standard deviation from the mean. The idea is to get some idea about how much the nongraded program influenced achievement, taking into account the fact that there would be a significant variation in how well students would do on an achievement test whether they were in a nongraded or graded program. A positive effect size would indicate achievement appeared to be higher for students placed in nongraded classrooms, and the larger the positive effect size observed, the more likely the positive effect would occur if a nongraded program were used in multiple schools for many students. On the other hand a negative effect size would indicate placement in a nongraded classroom tended to decrease student achievement. An effect size of zero would mean there was no discernible difference between achievement of students in the nongraded and graded classrooms.

Using effect sizes, Veenman (5) reviewed what he thought were the best studies available and concluded that cognitive achievement for reading, mathematics, and language was not different for students in nongraded compared to graded classrooms. The median (most frequently observed) overall effect size he observed was -0.03, which was very close to zero (no effect). The effect size for noncognitive parameters (self-esteem, personal adjustment, social adjustment, and motivation) also did not show that the nongraded approach was clearly beneficial compared to the traditional graded approach (median effect size +0.15). Veenman was a "lumper" rather than a "splitter" in looking at studies comparing nongraded and graded schooling. He did not look at the effect of particular types of nongraded programs on student achievement. Obviously, if he reviewed studies that represented a mixture of program types, the beneficial effect of a particular program type might be lost in the "background noise" of the remaining studies reviewed. Ignoring this possible criticism of his work, it is still useful to list the factors which he believed could contribute to his inability to see differences in student achievement between the nongraded and graded programs. Some of these give insight into some of the potential pitfalls which could occur when a school decides to undertake a nongraded approach. The factors that he speculated could have led to an inability to demonstrate improved achievement using a nongraded approach were:

- The grouping strategy chosen for schooling may not be important. Successful learning might be much less dependent upon organizational strategies than upon the quality of instructional practices used. This is an interesting proposition. Please keep it in mind as you read about the conclusions reached by Gutiérrez and Slaven, which I will discuss a little later.

- There might have been bias in the selection of students placed in the nongraded and graded classrooms. The differing characteristics of the students then canceled any effects produced by the grouping strategies used.
- Teachers in a nongraded classroom may have been ill-prepared to teach two or more grades at the same time and may not have had teaching materials that were adequately suited to the nongraded classroom.
- There may be a teacher "burn out" factor. He notes that teachers in nongraded classes who were surveyed indicated that nongraded classes involved a greater workload, required more preparation time, and demanded better classroom management skills.

Gutiérrez and Slavin (6) reached a different conclusion than Veenman. It appears this occurred because their criteria for selecting studies for review cast a wider net and they grouped studies according to how expansive the nongraded program was. In their review, they established categories for nongraded programs and looked at the impact of each category upon student achievement. The five categories for nongraded programs they used were:

1. Joplin-like plans (9 studies)--nongrading occurred for only one subject (8 in reading and 1 in math); otherwise children remained in graded classrooms.
2. Comprehensive (14 studies)--nongraded programs emphasized continuous progress and flexible, multi-age grouping, but did not emphasize individualized instruction.
3. Individualized (12 studies)--these programs emphasized individualized instruction, learning stations, learning packages, programmed instruction, and/or tutoring.
4. IGE (10 studies)--the characteristics of these programs were described in detail earlier.
5. Unspecified (12 studies)--these studies failed to state what was actually implemented in the nongraded programs.

The results of the analysis developed by their approach are shown in Table 2.

Table 2  
Summary of Effects by Type of Nongraded Plan  
[from Gutiérrez and Slavin (6)]

Type of Program	Total Studies	Signif. Positive	Nonsig. Positive	No Diff.	Nonsig. Negative	Signif. Negative	Median Effect Size
<b>Joplin-like</b>	9	4	2	1	1	1	+.46(7)
<b>Comprehensive</b>	14	8	2	1	3	0	+.34(9)
<b>Individualized</b>	12	2	6	2	2	0	+.02(9)
<b>IGE</b>	10	4	3	2	1	0	+.11(6)
<b>Unspecified</b>	12	2	3	1	4	2	+.01(6)

Their main conclusions were as follows:

[The] positive effects of nongraded organization are most consistent and strongest when the program focuses on the vertical organization of the school and when nongrading is used as a grouping strategy but not as a framework for individualized instruction. Four categories of nongraded programs were examined, in addition to one group of studies in which the nature of the nongraded program could not be determined. Studies in two of these categories clearly supported the nongraded plans. These are the Joplin-like programs, in

which students are grouped across age lines in just one subject (usually reading), and the comprehensive programs, which involve cross-age grouping in many subjects but still rely on teacher-directed instruction. The median effect sizes for studies in these categories were clearly positive (+.46 for Joplin-like programs, +.34 for comprehensive), and the best designed evaluations were the ones most likely to show the positive effects. In contrast, nongraded programs that incorporated a great deal of individualized instruction (and correspondingly less teacher-directed instruction), including Individually Guided Education (IGE), were less consistently associated with achievement gain. This is not to say that these approaches reduce student achievement; their effects are very inconsistent, generally neither helping nor hurting student achievement, with more studies finding positive than negative effects (especially in the case of IGE). Poorly described nongraded programs also had median effect sizes near zero, perhaps because experimental and control groups may not have differed in anything essential except label. What accounts for the relatively consistent positive effects of the Joplin-like and comprehensive nongraded plans and the less consistent effects of programs incorporating individualization? At this remove of time from the flowering of the nongraded ideal, one can only speculate, but there are many more recent developments in educational research that suggest some possibilities. The most obvious reason that incorporating a great deal of individualization might have reduced the effectiveness of the nongraded elementary school is suggested by research on individualized instruction itself, which has generally failed to support this innovation [4 references cited]. Correlational evidence from process-product studies of more and less effective teachers has consistently found that student learning is enhanced by direct instruction from teachers, as contrasted with extensive reliance on individualization, seatwork, and written materials [reference]. Further, to the degree that the nongraded elementary school came to resemble the open school, the research finding few achievement benefits to this approach [reference] takes on increased relevance.... *If the effectiveness of nongraded organization is due to increased direct instruction delivered at students' precise instructional level, then it is easy to see how a move to greater individualization would undermine these effects.* Individualized instruction, learning stations, learning activities, and other individualized or small group activities reduce direct instruction time with little corresponding increase in appropriateness of instruction to individual needs (in comparison to the simpler cross-age plans)(6)[emphasis added].

I have depicted what I believe to be the main theme of Gutiérrez and Slavin's analysis in the figure accompanying Table 2. Clearly it is important to take into consideration the type of nongraded program to be used in trying to gauge how likely it is that a nongraded program will be beneficial for children who will be immersed in it. It appears that grouping to help primary grade students acquire well defined skills is helpful. Beyond this there is no compelling evidence that the nongrading strategy consistently produces benefits.

Figure illustrating the main findings of the review of research studies on nongraded schooling presented by Gutiérrez and Slavin (6).

**Relevance of Past Experience with Nongraded Schooling to Nongraded Schooling being Used Today**

Most of the studies reviewed above took place before 1985. What relevance do they have when parents must judge whether or not a nongraded elementary school program is a good idea for their child? First of all, if the nongraded approach being offered for their child is a simple one, similar to the Joplin plan, the parents can have confidence that the program may very well enhance their child's achievement. However, if a school is using a comprehensive nongraded program or an IGE program, parents should be more cautious. If the school's personnel start talking about every child having an individualized learning plan to fit his or her learning style, parents ought to be concerned about whether that program is going to improve the child's achievement.

Today parents also need to look at any proposed nongraded program to determine if it differs from those that were used between 1965 and 1985. If the nongraded program is bringing in other "innovations," parents have a right to be quite concerned.

For example what would happen if one took an individualized or IGE nongraded program and simultaneously began to use an OBE approach featuring use of vague outcomes to drive the curriculum and formal, detailed portfolios to demonstrate students' knowledge, skills, or behaviors are aligned with the outcomes? Obviously, the answer to this question will be a speculation. In my opinion, a program that goes this route is likely to have adverse effects on student achievement. The curriculum will inevitably de-emphasize teacher-directed instructional methods which have been shown to work. The curriculum will lack a clear focus on teaching basic skills in reading and mathematics. The use of formal portfolios would burden teachers who are already burdened with the extra work involved in managing a multi-age classroom. All of these factors will adversely effect student learning. Fortunately, at this point in time, it appears that the OBE movement's influence may have peaked and it is in decline. Thus, it is less likely that the more extreme practices associated with this approach to schooling will be incorporated into nongraded classrooms.

Perhaps the most important lessons to be learned from past implementations of the nongraded classroom are these:

1. Most of the experience with the nongraded approach to schooling has been with primary grade children (grades K-3). Thus, we don't know as much about how well they work beyond this point in elementary school.
2. "Keep it simple." The more subject areas which are treated in a nongraded manner and the more innovations which are introduced into a nongraded program, the more difficult it becomes to predict the resultant product will be successful in raising student achievement.
3. When nongraded grouping is done for a single subject such as reading with the expressed intention of enhancing teacher-directed instruction, the likelihood of improved student achievement in the school is increased. On the other hand, if a nongraded program is established mainly to provide a framework for individualized instruction, one cannot have as much certainty that the school will be successful in improving student achievement.

Hopefully these rather simple guidelines will be useful to parents when they must assess whether or not their children should participate in a nongraded elementary school program being offered in their school district.

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