

Dear Families,

During the 2009-2010 school year, Minneapolis Public Schools adopted a new word study program, Words Their Way. This K-6 Word study program includes phonics (knowing that sounds and letters have a relationship), spelling, language and vocabulary development. This program looks a little different from traditional spelling programs.

Current research shows that learning about language and words by discovering the relationships between letters and sounds, by learning how these relationships impact spelling, and by directly tying this instruction to students' daily reading and writing helps students become more effective readers and writers. The Word Study program in K-6 grades will include the study of the relationships between letters and sounds, learning about spelling patterns, generalizing spelling patterns and language, vocabulary lessons and dictionary and thesaurus lessons. The curriculum will involve hands-on learning activities as students actively engage in a variety of tasks to learn about the English language. Use of the word study program will ultimately allow children to transfer what they learn about words into their daily reading and writing.

The following are specific goals for Words Their Way program:

- **Learn spelling strategies.**
Your child will learn spelling strategies that will assist him/her when he/she is trying to spell unfamiliar words. Sounding out a word is only one of several strategies. Other strategies that will be taught are making connections to other words by patterns or by meaning, using a known word to spell an unknown word, and using a word part to spell an unknown word.
- **Learn common patterns.**
Your child will learn common patterns used in spelling. These patterns will include consonant blends (**street**), vowel patterns (**rain, bake**), words with silent letters (**light**), and how the meaning of base words change when a prefix (**rewind, unknown**), or suffix (**teacher, running**) is added.
- **Develop a spelling consciousness.**
Your child will develop an awareness of words. The goal is for your child to become a word expert, recognize when a word doesn't look right, and choose a strategy to spell and write it correctly. Your child will become more aware of words and word patterns in his/her environment.
- **Develop word awareness and interest.**
As we explore words through spelling and meaning, your child will begin to develop a curiosity and interest in words that will transfer into reading and other content areas. We will explore word relationships, study synonyms (words with similar meanings), antonyms (words with opposite meanings), homophones (words that sound the same, but have different meaning and spelling), and

homographs (words that are spelled the same and might be pronounced the same but have different meanings).

- **Develop the ability to use reference materials with ease.**

During Word Study lessons, your child will learn how to use grade-appropriate reference materials including dictionaries, thesauruses, and encyclopedias.

Differentiated Lists

An assessment was given in September and will be given again in winter and spring to form groups. These groups are based on what the student is “using but confusing.” Most classrooms have 3-4 different groups to meet the student at their instructional level in word study. Although we assess 3 times a year, our groups are fluid throughout the year to meet student’s needs. If you feel your students word study list is too hard or easy, please talk to your child’s teacher about your concerns.

Spelling Tests

Student spelling tests will look different from traditional spelling tests where students memorize and then forget how to spell words. Words Their Way focuses on students learning and APPLYING their word pattern knowledge. So in order to assess this, student’s spelling tests will comprise of some words that they did NOT study but have the same word pattern as the words they studied. This will assess their ability to apply the word pattern when spelling unknown words.

Word Study Homework

Throughout the year, your child MAY bring home a variety of Word Study activities that reinforce what your child is working on in the classroom. These activities may include:

- ❖ word sorting activities
- ❖ word hunts
- ❖ studying word lists
- ❖ playing word games

If there is homework, a letter, materials needed, and suggestions about how to help complete the assignment will accompany your child’s list. These activities will help your child use these words effectively in daily reading and writing.

If you have any questions about how to help your child further, please feel free to contact your child’s teacher. If you have any specific questions pertaining to word study, please feel free to contact me at Kilee.christnagel@mpls.k12.mn.us or 612-668-1020 Ext. 32614.

Sincerely,

Kilee Christnagel – Literacy Coach at Marcy Open School

