

News from Burr

Principal's Newsletter

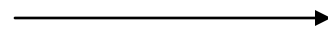
November 2013

Dear Burr Community,

In this season of giving thanks, I wanted to take a moment to thank the different members of Burr's school community. First, of course, are Burr's students. Our students are thoughtful, committed learners who demonstrate curiosity, insight, and a passion for learning every day. Working side by side with students is Burr's staff. They are dedicated professionals who work extremely hard to teach academic skills and build positive character in our students. They know, inherently, that we are helping to build a foundation that will support students as they travel through school and the rest of their lives. Burr's parents are tremendous supporters of education who give their time, energy, and resources to support our work. This partnership between school and home is critical to our success.

One academic area of our work that I wanted to highlight this month is writing. Traditionally, Burr's students have done very well on standardized tests of writing. They have been able to generate a topic and develop it into an organized, well-elaborated first draft. Students have also completed process writing pieces that involved revising, editing, and publishing multiple drafts. While continuing our commitment to teaching both process and on-demand writing skills, we have also made a number of changes to the way we teach writing.

- First, as a way to align our curriculum with the Common Core Standards, students are writing in a variety of different genres connected to narrative, opinion, and informational writing.
- Second, students are doing much more writing. The volume of how much they are expected to produce – whether over time or during an on-demand assessment has increased dramatically.
- Third, there is much more direct instruction about writing craft. Craft is the strategies that writers use to write effectively. Students have always been taught strategies but during the past year, we have increased the variety and complexity of the strategies that we are modeling and teaching students.
- Fourth, students are engaged in much more revision than they have been in the past. Revision is a part of the writing process concerned with reimagining and revisiting your words. Revision is an opportunity for writers to say something exactly the way they intend to say it. Anyone who has ever sat down to write something knows that revision is at the heart of writing well.





- Last, we are doing more work as a school with conferring. Conferring is about getting feedback – both from the teacher and from peers.

As a parent, you might experience this work in a variety of different ways. You might see your child with writing homework. This could mean writing in a writer's notebook, completing a draft of a writing piece, or possibly even conferring with your child about their work. Later in the year, you may be invited to Burr for a publishing party where you get to hear your child read their writing piece aloud. If you love writing, you may even have the opportunity to volunteer and help students during a writer's workshop at school.

I get a lot of questions about spelling and grammar instruction. While this is an area that we are looking to refine in the coming years, please rest assured that spelling, grammar, and editing skills are taught. Some ways that we do this include through the use of whole class instruction, small group review and practice, quizzes and tests, editing checklists and rubrics, word sorts, and conferring. Writers tend to internalize language-based skills by applying them successfully in their own writing. Thus we spend a lot of time helping students learn spelling, grammar, and editing skills through their writing.

Finally, if you want to help your child improve as a writer, here are some things you might consider:

- Have them read a lot. The best spellers, editors, and writers tend to be voracious readers who are consistently exposed to the craft and structure of language.
- Just like we encourage students to read, encourage them to write. This could mean bringing their writer's notebook on vacation, writing a special friend or relative, or writing a politician or company CEO in order to affect change.
- Practice parts of Speech through games like *Mad Libs*.
- Play games such as *Scrabble* or *Words with Friends*.
- Practice spelling, grammar, and story writing using technology apps.
- Write alongside your child. Show them how you write and what you write.
- Let your child read you their writing. Instead of trying to correct or fix their work, listen, enjoy, and offer positive feedback. If you have a small suggestion or question, offer it.
- Expose your child to different genres of text. Order child friendly magazines. Read the newspaper with them.

Our goal is to offer a parent workshop on writing later in the year, so stay tuned. I wish you and your family a Happy Thanksgiving!

Warmly,

Jason Bluestein

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