

News from Burr

Principal's Newsletter

January 2014

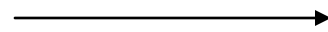
Dear Burr Community,

Dear Parents,

Happy New Year! I hope you and your family had a happy, relaxing holiday and vacation. I wanted to take this month to talk about reading – including how we approach reading at Burr as well as things that you can do to support your children as readers.

Reading instruction at Burr (and throughout Fairfield) is structured around a workshop approach. The main objective of workshop teaching is to build self-reliance, stamina, and independence within students. In a reading classroom this manifests itself in the following ways: Can students choose a book at their independent reading level? With support from the teacher, can students increase decoding, fluency, and comprehension skills? Can students discuss and write about what they are reading? Can students build an identity as a reader and love to read?

Teachers do a number of things everyday to make this happen. They conduct whole class mini lessons (5-15 minutes) that introduce students to standards based, high leverage reading strategies. They confer individually with students about their reading. They conduct small group flexible instruction for students with similar reading needs. They facilitate both oral and written expression through book clubs, whole class discussions, interactive read alouds, paired sharing, and written response tasks. Of course, they also provide students with big chunks of time in school to read. Research studies – both domestically and internationally – point to the importance of everyday reading as a way to build critical thinking skills, strengthen written skills, and help build a robust vocabulary. Teachers at Burr help students build reading proficiency in both fiction and non-fiction texts. Fiction because it helps students understand the complexities and “magic” of life. Non-fiction because it is typically practical reading – the kind of reading that students will encounter as they move through school and their careers.





There are a number of things that parents can do to help support our reading work. They include:

- Read yourself (in front of your children.) You are your child's first and most influential model. Students whose parents read themselves for pleasure achieve higher on international reading measures.
- Read to your child (for as many years as you can.) There are two important reasons to read aloud. First, it allows your child to access more sophisticated texts, character development, and information. Second, it is a great springboard to discussion. Again, research suggests that the power of reading aloud is the conversations that it sparks between adults and children. This ultimately help students build deeper comprehension skills. Even older students love to be read to.
- Find quiet time in your house for everyone to read. Environment is often key to building stamina and engagement in reading. Take 20-30 minutes 4-5 times a week, shut off all distracting electronics, and read.
- Get a library card OR consistently bring your child to a bookstore and remind them how to choose a just right book. A just right book is a book that fulfills two basic requirements. First, a student can read it independently. This means that they can decode more than 95% of the words, read at a fluent rate, and comprehend the text. Second, this is a book where the topic engages and interests the reader.
- Let your child read to you. This will help inform your discussions with their teacher about your child's reading proficiency and give you some insight into whether they are reading a just right book.
- Give your child books as gifts. This sends a powerful message about the value of literacy. As a follow up to this idea, encourage your child to carry a book with them. Whether on vacation, at the dentist's office, or on a long ride, reading is a great way to pass time.
- Buy (or download) high interest, non-fiction magazines for your child. (Ex. *Sports Illustrated for Kids*) Being able to analyze non-fiction text is an important skill that will be relevant for students for the rest of their lives.

Winter is a great time to get comfortable and immerse yourself in a good book. Happy reading!

Warmly,

Jason Bluestein

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