

News from Burr

Principal's Newsletter

October 2014

Dear Burr Community,

Parent / teacher conferences are an important opportunity to learn about how your child is doing in school. Our goal is for each conference to be a collaborative discussion where you have the opportunity to give input and ask questions about your child's progress. Student work samples and pertinent data should be part of the discussion and serve to give you specific insight about your child's strengths and challenges. What follows are some insights about how to get the most out of your time with your child's teacher.

What are some questions to ask my child's teacher?

- What are my child's strengths in reading, writing, and math?
- What goals do you have for my child academically, behaviorally, and socially? How can I help support these goals at home?
- Who are my child's friends in school? How is my child doing socially?
- Do you have any concerns about my child's progress?

During the first two months of the school year, how do we track your child's progress?

We use a variety of district and school based assessments to measure how students are doing. In reading, students in first through fifth grades have already been given a district Spelling Knowledge Assessment. The purpose of this assessment is to give teachers information about the spelling patterns that students understand. This in turn will give teachers insight into students' ability to decode text. Students in kindergarten have been given assessments that measure their knowledge of letter identification and sounds as well as concepts about print. Concepts about print include whether a student can read a book front to back and left to right. Teachers also monitor the progress of students as readers through 1-1 conferences and small group work. During these conferences students read to their teacher and answer comprehension questions (either orally or through writing) related to a specific piece of text.

In writing, students have taken their first on-demand writing prompt. These prompts are timed—lasting approximately 45 minutes. They are also connected to our writing curriculum. Areas of writing that are assessed in these prompts include leads, transitions, editing, organization, craft, spelling, and punctuation. Additionally, students write everyday using a process approach. This involves composing





in a variety of genres including narrative, informational, and opinion. Students learn how to develop an idea, draft, revise, edit, and ultimately publish their work. Teachers also confer with individual and small groups of students during writer's workshop. They learn important information about your child's writing skills and writing process through these conferences.

In math, teachers in grades 1-5 have already given a new district assessment called i-Ready. (Kindergarten students will take it for the first time in January.) i-Ready replaces AIMSweb and Blue Ribbon as the data system for capturing student growth in mathematics. In addition to providing a single district system to monitor math growth over the course of a student's elementary and middle school years, it also provides teachers with the following advantages:

- It takes students less time to complete the assessment.
- It is more closely aligned to our curriculum than previous assessments.
- It will provide teachers with instructional feedback on student performance.
- It is adaptive and will adjust questions to find students strengths.

i-Ready assesses students across four domains: Algebra and Algebraic Thinking, Measurement and Data, Number and Operations, and Geometry. (Kindergarten focuses on foundational skills.) It provides data on what individual students know, what they did not demonstrate, and what they are ready to learn. In addition to i-Ready, math teachers use unit assessments, performance assessments (extended word problems), classwork, and homework to assess your child's progress in math.

What information can my child provide me that will inform my conference?

Discussion about school is a terrific way for you to gain insight into your child's performance at school. This can occur at the dinner table, driving to a sports practice, or just before bed. Questions you could ask your child that would prompt a thoughtful response could include:

- Tell me something that made you laugh today in school?
- What is the best thing that happened at school today? What is the worst thing that happened?
- What was the highlight of your school day? Why?
- What was something you learned today in school?
- When in school today were you excited about something you learned? Why?
- What was something you learned as a writer, reader, mathematician, historian, scientist, etc. today?
- What was something that was challenging/hard at school today?
- What was one time that you were creative today at school?

I hope this information helps you have a productive, positive conference with your child's teacher. Ultimately this is a collaborative meeting that has two goals. First it gives you an opportunity to learn about your child's work in school. Second it gives you the chance to offer insights to the teacher about who your child is and how they learn best. Have a terrific conference, and thank you for your continued support for our work at Burr.

Warmly,

Jason Bluestein