

First Grade Curricular Summary and Academic Expectations

First Quarter (September - End of October)

Dear Parents,

As we begin our year together, I thought it would be helpful for you to have a description of the curricular and academic expectations I have for your child coming into and ending the first term of first grade. This document is designed to give you an idea of where the average student will be starting and hopefully finishing this first term. As you read this, please keep in mind that all students start at different places and progress at different rates. If your child is working below these expectations, I will be working to help them accelerate their progress. If your child is working far above these expectations, I will be working to keep moving them on to the next level. We will have a chance to discuss any concerns you may have about these issues at our parent-teacher conferences.

Reading

First grade reading is traditionally organized into three levels: pre-primer, primer, and first grade. Pre-primer is the level that children are expected to master by December, primer by March, and first grade by May. First grade reading also has three basic parts that we will be addressing this year: sight words, decoding skills, and comprehension. Putting these three areas, sight words, phonics, and comprehension together develop a balanced approach to reading.

Sight words are words that we expect children to learn to read on sight. They are chosen because they are the most frequently used words in books and because many of them have spellings that do not match their sounds or follow regular spelling patterns.

- At the beginning of first grade, the average student will know some words on the pre-primer list. Some may know many; some may even know words up to the third grade list.
- By the end of the first term, we expect the average child to have learned around 70% of the pre-primer sight words.

Decoding means being able to figure out a new word that you have not read before. In first grade, we spend a lot of time learning to use letter-sound relationships and spelling patterns to decode words. We also learn how to use the sense of the story and the order of the words in a sentence to help us.

- At the beginning of first grade, your child should know most basic letter / sound relationships for single letters in the alphabet.
- By the end of the first quarter, your child should know all of the letter / sound relationships for each letter and should be able to apply them to "sound out" short, 3-4 letter words with regular spelling, such as "cat" or "must." Your child should

sound these words out smoothly, not leaving out any sounds, and saying the sounds all the way to the end.

Finally, it is essential for all readers to value the meaning of the text they are reading and seek to understand or **comprehend** it. In Kindergarten, first grade, and at home, we support and develop these skills by reading, telling, and talking about stories and books.

- Your children should already understand many things about how stories work.
- By the end of first quarter, when sounding out simple words, I expect your child to be able to match those words to a word they know that makes sense with the story. Your child may do this based on only the first one or two sounds of a word.
- I also expect your child to begin to predict words and content as they read, be able to use the sense of the story to help them figure out words, begin to notice and correct their mistakes when they don't make sense, and be able to retell the story after reading it. I will be working on these comprehension skills all year long.

Writing

At the beginning of first grade, the average child can write words to label a picture and perhaps a sentence or two. Student's writing will involve a lot of drawing, many non-standard spellings, and will usually need some talking to complete the message. We will write regularly in class, and it is exciting to see the kids develop as time goes on. By the end of first quarter, I will assess the students writing in two main areas: composition/mechanics and ideas.

- In the area of **composition**, I expect your child to be writing 3 to 5 sentences during each writing session which stay on topic, make sense, and use natural vocabulary.
- In the area of **mechanics**, your child should have begun experimenting with the use of capitals and periods to start and finish their sentences, but I will not expect consistently correct usage at this stage. I expect them to be writing their words and stories in the correct direction and leaving spaces between their words.
- On their reports, I may also comment on your child's attitude towards writing and their productivity during our writing periods, as over time these factors directly impact their success in this important area of communication.
- In the area of **ideas**, your child should be able to usually think of their own ideas for writing rather than asking me to generate one.

Spelling

In the first quarter of first grade, I use spelling as a method for children to practice, use, and become secure in letter sound relationships. I also look for them to begin to develop sight vocabularies in spelling. This process will take longer than developing sight vocabulary in reading, and I do not expect children to correctly spell words that they may be able to read on sight.

First graders are encouraged to use "developmental spelling" to write before they have learned standard spelling. Most first graders' spelling develops through the following stages.

- At the beginning of first grade, your child may be a *semi-phonetic* speller. For example, a *semi-phonetic* speller may write the word "united" as "ud."
- By the end of first term, I expect your children to be a *phonetic* speller who would write the above word as "untd" or "unitd."
- In the next stage, *transitional*, children begin to experiment with and apply spelling patterns that they recall from reading. A *transitional* speller may spell the above word "youknighted."
- It is at this stage that they are ready to learn the *conventional* spelling of the word since they are developing a visual understanding of it.

At the beginning of first grade, your child may be *semi-phonetic* or *phonetic* spellers. By the end of the first quarter, all children should be spelling words at a *phonetic* level. Your children should move into the *transitional* phase with some words around January. For now, however, I will work on getting your child to use at least one letter for each sound in a word. If they are functioning above this, that's great!

Handwriting

In the first quarter, we will learn how to correctly form all the letters of the English alphabet. We will also discuss proportions of letters, making the tall ones tall and the short ones short as well as correct pencil grip.

- At the beginning of first grade, children hold their pencil and form their letters in a variety of ways. Children often use capitals at inappropriate times and often form their letters backwards.
- By the first report card, I expect your child to be writing increasingly with lower case letters with correct formation, correct pencil grip, and roughly in the lines at this time of the year. As handwriting skills develop, your child's handwriting will become smaller and more consistent. Reversals should begin to decrease, although some will persist through the end of the year.

Math

Our Math program focuses on developing fluent student skills and conceptual understanding in the areas of counting (especially from 0 to 130 and above), number understanding (especially to 50) and counting small change (pennies, nickels, dimes). It evaluates children as beginning, developing, or secure at these concepts and skills.

- At the beginning of first grade, most children should be able to count above 30 and perhaps skip count by 10's or 5's in a group. They have probably been exposed to the concepts of addition and subtraction and may even be developing efficient strategies for working those problems.

- By the end of first term, I expect your child to have a *secure* grasp of counting to 100, skip counting by 5's, and 10's to 50, writing 2 digit numbers to 30, identifying numbers that come before or after to 30, and filling in missing numbers in a sequence. Your children should be *secure* in all the above skills and concepts to be meeting expectations in mathematics.
- We will also begin looking at basic addition and subtraction skills through the number 10, although these skills will continue to *develop* into the second term.

Special Topics

The first grade covers several special topics throughout the first quarter. In the area of science, our units include "Living and Non-Living," and "Solids, Liquids, and Gases." Our Social Studies Units are "Mesopotamia," "Ancient Egypt," and "Veterans Day."

I hope this gives you an idea of where we probably are and where we are headed until the next report card. I look forward to our discussion at the first conferences.