

From the Principals' desks

How does my child's reading level affect the instruction they receive?

The Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Reading Assessment provides more than just a reading level for your child from A to Z. It provides the teacher detailed information about your child's reading behaviors and understandings to notice, teach and support. Teachers are looking at student learning on a continuum for progress and growth, at each stage of the continuum are specific skills and strategies that your child needs to master to become a highly effective user of oral and written language. Teachers work to plan specific goal oriented lessons across many instructional contexts. The teachers must make sure that all grade level skills and strategies are secure across multiple genres that focus on:

- Within text understanding (literal understanding achieved through solving words, monitoring and correcting, searching for and using information, summarizing, maintaining fluency, and adjusting for purposes and genre of text)
- Beyond the text understanding (making predications, making connections with personal experience, content knowledge and other texts; inferring what is implied but not stated; synthesizing new information)
- About text understanding (analyzing and critiquing the author's craft)
- Solving Words (using a range of strategies to take words apart and understand what words mean through word study related to the text being read)

As we think about the individual child this process is clear and straightforward as we plan for students who enter the grade performing below, near or at grade level. The students test at a specific level and instruction is planned accordingly to move them along the continuum of learning beginning at their performance level. The process shifts for students that test above grade level.

For high performing students, core instruction begins at the 'end of year' level. For example, the end of year level for third grade is level P. If a student tests above level P they are doing so based on one test, one book and one genre. The teacher must make sure they are secure at all grade level skills and strategies. In short, this means that instruction for high performing students begins at the 'end of year' level with a strong focus on the specific skills and strategies that need security so those students can move along the developmental continuum with no gaps or deficits in reading behaviors and how they process text. The teacher will use a variety of texts across genres and levels for instruction to meet their needs, not always at their tested level. The teacher must work to match the skills and strategies to a text for the child, and this does not always occur at their tested level. If this sounds like a lot of work, it is! This is why we can not just place a high level child at the level in which they test, or keep moving them up in level, we need to make sure they are secure across the continuum of learning to ensure they are highly effective users of oral and written language.

The larger implication here is that for students performing beyond grade level we have more to secure given everything in between the level at which they test and the end of year expectation. Think about that for a third grader who tests at level U. They need to first be secure at every grade level skill and strategy beginning at level P, then move into the skills and strategies for levels Q, then R, S, T and finally U. That is a lot to cover and it most likely will not happen in one year! So hopefully this helps to better understand the big and vast planning process for thoroughly meeting your child's needs in reading.

If you have questions about this please contact the school's literacy coach, Karen Ruhs at

Ways parents can support the development of reading skills

Share the love of reading with your child

Make time to read aloud with your child every day. Model that reading is important by making sure your child sees you reading newspapers, magazines, and books. In Kindergarten children should be reading a variety of books with a few words on each page, supported by pictures and illustrations. Listen to your child read, encourage them to sound out words and use pictures to make meaning. Enjoy reading together.

Help your child learn the alphabet

Play alphabet games and songs to help your child learn letters as you play with alphabet books, blocks, and magnetic letters. Recite letters as you climb stairs or jump rope. Utilize games, puzzles, books on CD that teach letter names.

Help your child notice printed language

Read aloud, letting your child open the book and turn the pages. Point to the words as you read. Invite your child to join in reading repeated phrases. Bring attention to letters and words you see around you. Make an effort to read aloud traffic signs, billboards, and labels on packages, maps and phone numbers.

Help your child build their vocabulary and narrative skills

Sing songs, clap and read rhyming books. Sing the alphabet with your child and teach songs that emphasize rhyme and alliteration, such as "Baa Baa Black Sheep" and "Hey Diddle Diddle". Make up your own bedtime stories and share stories around the dinner table.

Play word games by asking your child to think of words that rhyme with "cat" or begin with the b sound.

Give them sounds in words and ask your child to put them together. Ask: "Do dog and dad begin with the same sound?" or "Which word begins with a different sound "sit" "cat" "sand"? Play "I Spy" using beginning sounds.

Support your child's understanding of what they read

When you read aloud to your child, ask questions about what you read. As your child reads, ask questions about what is happening, what might happen next, and why things happen. In any discussions, keep the tone playful and positive.

Reading and writing go hand in hand

Provide writing materials for your child and encourage their use. Help your child learn to write letters, their name, and other important words and phrases. Help your child put together words and pictures to tell stories, and write about what they are reading. Play spelling games with your child by saying the sounds in a word and writing the letter that goes with the sound. Encourage your child to write letters as you say the sounds.

Home, school and community connections

Talk with your child's teacher about what students are learning in class so you can support that skill development at home. Ask your child's teacher and utilize your public library for books and recommendations.

Winter Wishes,

Merry Tilleson, A.P. LHCS

Congratulations to the Lake Harriet Chess Club

The 4th-grade team of the Lake Harriet Chess Club recently placed 3rd at the St. Paul Open Grade Level Tournament. The fourth-grade team consisted of Noah H., Evan L., Noah S., and Isadora W.. Also competing, but without enough members for a team showing, were Luke L. (1st grade), Isaac R.D. (3rd grade), and Anders L. (7th grade). Congratulations to the LHCS Chess Club!

Seventh Grade History Day Club

Seventh Grade History Day Club If you are a Seventh Grader doing History Day for the very "first" time and would like more help, please come to the History Day Club in Ms. Krawetz's room, #205, on Tuesdays from 4:10-5:30 pm. We will meet on Jan. 4, 11, 18, and 25, and on Feb. 1, 8, 15 and 22. We will begin with an after school snack, and then we will delve into our History Day research topics working on our new middle school laptop computers. Skills we will work on include planning final projects, finding primary source documents, composing thesis statements, writing process papers and compiling annotated bibliographies. Please join us on Tuesdays if you'd like help and coaching on your History Day project in a smaller setting. If you have questions please contact Debra Krawetz at debra.krawetz@mac.com.

Join the LHCS Green Team

Join the LHCS Green Team and support organics recycling in the LHCS lower campus cafeteria. Volunteers help the kids separate organics (food scraps, paper, and cardboard) from the rest of their lunch trash. The time commitment is two lunch periods per month (11:25 – 1:40). If you can help, please contact Keren Price (kprice@pro-ns.net). This is a fun and easy program that has a real impact -- on our kids and on our planet!

2010 - 2011 Connection Contacts:

Anna Mraz: anna1028@gmail.com

Gwen Spurgat: gwen.spurgat@objectpartners.com

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Submissions: email to anna1028@gmail.com or use the online submission form at <http://lakeharriet.mpls.k12.mn.us/connection1.html>. Please try to limit each submission to approximately 150 words in length.