***WORD STUDY***

Dear Parents,

In our classroom this year, students will participate in reading and writing activities for a variety of purposes. Within these experiences, teaching and learning about phonics and spelling is an important goal. One component of this process is called “Word Study,” which differs quite a bit from traditional spelling lessons. It’s a highly structured and systematic way of learning to spell, which is practiced daily. This is a more individualized and differentiated approach to learning about words.

**What is Word Study?**

It is a student-centered approach to phonics, spelling and vocabulary instruction that actively engages the learner in constructing concepts about the way words work. Each week, students will have the opportunity to construct their own word knowledge that they can then apply to their reading and writing.

**Why is word study important?**

Becoming fully literate is absolutely dependent on fast, accurate recognition of words in texts and fast, accurate production of words in writing so that the readers and writers can focus their attention on making meaning.

**What is the purpose of word study?**

The purpose of word study is to have students examine words in order to discover patterns or spelling principles, within the written language system and to help students master the recognition, spelling and meaning of specific words. The program is based on extensive research on how words work within the written language system.

**The research behind the program:**

1. We do not learn all of our spoken vocabulary through word memorization, it would be impossible to memorize that many words.

2. We learn words by applying patterns seen in known words to unknown words.

3. Orthographic (spelling) and phonetic (letters and sounds) patterns help us to tackle new, unknown words.

4. Students need to understand the principles of spelling so they can apply their knowledge in reading and writing.

In class, the students will be sorting words that compare spelling features/patterns of words that they know well, with features/patterns of words that they are “using but confusing.” Students sort the words based on the pattern, sound and meaning of the words. Students are asked to explain their reasoning by making a generalization of the spelling principle. Through this active process, students take ownership of spelling principles by constructing their own learning.

Students will receive guided practice and coaching throughout the week. In addition, students will be presented with exceptions to patterns so they can discover the inconsistencies within the English language (we call them “oddballs” in class). Your child will be assessed weekly on the learned patterns; being asked to spell words from the weekly practice (knowledge of words studied). Students will also be required to apply learned patterns to their writing.

**How will you differentiate word study?**

Through individual spelling inventories, writing samples and observations of student reading, we will gather diagnostic information about the spelling features that each student has mastered and ones they still need to study. These individual spelling inventories take the place of traditional pretests.

**Will there be homework?**

Yes! Word Meaning activity will be the required weekly homework. In addition, a weekly spelling sort will come home along with a list of daily activities completed in class that you may choose to do at home to practice word study. See the attached letter for more information.

**Will there be tests?**

Yes! On a designated day students will have a Word Study Test in the form of a sort. Students will not be tested on every word they studied throughout the week. Instead, we will choose up to 10 words from the original list. This will help us to see if students are able to generalize the letter-sound principles. In this way, the discriminating spelling feature is emphasized, with the ultimate goal being application during reading and writing.

Sincerely,

Fourth Grade Teachers