

Dear Parent,

I am writing to update you on the important and challenging work your child is doing within our yearlong study of writing. As you may have realized, we've segmented the yearlong curriculum into a sequence of units of study, each lasting approximately one month. We are now embarking on our third unit, and this one is especially challenging for children. The unit is called Writing for Readers, and the goal of the unit is to inspire children to believe that with a little extra work, they can write in such a way that others can read their writing. Of course, the goal is also to give children the skills they need to create readable writing.

Please notice that the goal is not for children to spell perfectly. If you and I were to set out today to learn anything—say, to play the violin or to program the computer—there is no way that we could suddenly and magically be perfect at doing it. Learners must go through stages of approximating, of doing the best they can and learners make the fastest progress if they actually throw themselves into doing something, knowing their first efforts will be less than perfect, but that they will get feedback and improve.

In this unit, I will work hard to teach children to stretch words out, saying them slowly and recording whatever sounds they hear. I will encourage children who are novice spellers to reread their own work often and to do so with a finger under the word, making small changes so their print matches what they say. I hope you will see your child rereading often, giving his or her own writing the test of "Can I read this?" I hope your son or daughter also brings his or her writing to you and asks, "Can you read this?" When this happens, let the child see you working really hard to decipher the print. And if, in the end, you can't read it, ask the child, "What did you want it to say?" and help the child to try again, recording one word at a time, spelling as best he or she can.

If your child is a proficient writer, you will see more subtle changes during this unit. Perhaps the child will begin to write more consistently in lowercase letters, or to use punctuation more appropriately, or to rely more on the high-frequency words he or she knows even when tackling unknown words.

In school, we will put quite a spotlight on the importance of conventions. The most important thing you can do right now is to balance that by devoting extra time to storytelling. Encourage your child to tell you the stories of his or her day, help your child tell those stories in a blow-by-blow fashion and tell him or her often, "You should write about that!"

Our author celebration for this unit will be an in-house event, but the celebration at the end of our upcoming unit will definitely be one you'll want to attend. I will send you more information as the time draws near.

Sincerely,