Dear Parents,

Through the years we have found that many parents have similar questions about their child’s learning and progress in Kindergarten. Many of these questions are about reading and writing. As we approach the October conferences we thought it might be helpful to share with you some of the most frequently asked questions and answers regarding these academic areas. We hope you find this helpful. Please let us know anytime you have questions of concerns about your child’s learning.

**1. My child is not reading yet and I know other kindergartners who are already reading?**

Learning to read is like learning to speak. Every child does it differently and at their own pace. Just as your child learned to speak successfully they will also learn to read. Your role is to encourage this process by providing positive experiences with reading and various opportunities for your child to interact with print and stories. However we do need to take care not to rush the natural process of your child. Pushing children beyond what they are developmentally ready for can lead to frustration and negative feelings about this wonderful skill and it rarely leads to earlier success. We tell our children they are reading from the moment they can tell about the pictures in a book. This as well as memorizing is an important stage of reading so build your child’s confidence at the level where they are today. This will lead to greater success in “true” reading later on.

**2. My child knows the sounds but cannot sound out words?**

Sounding out unknown words is one of the hardest of the decoding strategies and many kindergarten children are not ready for this yet. There are other strategies that you can encourage your child to use while they develop the phonemic awareness skills necessary for sounding out words. Using the picture should always be encouraged as well as following the pattern of the language or content. Ask your child to use the first letter as a clue and make a guess based on the picture or context. You can also have them skip the unknown word and come back to it after reading the rest of the sentence. Model saying “blank” for the unknown word. For example, “ On the blank there was a cow.” After the child guesses have them reread the sentence to see if it makes sense. Sounding out a word is very complicated and involves the multiple steps of making each sound, remembering each sound and blending them into something that makes sense. It includes making the correct vowel sound which our early readers have not yet mastered. They get lost in the process and can become frustrated. Model sounding out words for your child and they will eventually get the hang of it. For now avoid the frustration and help your child with challenging words.

**3. The books my child brings home to read are too easy?**

Reading at home should be at a child’s fluency level. This means they should read 90-100% of the words correctly. We want your child to practice reading fluently with confidence and expression. We want them to enjoy the story and comprehend what they are reading as they read. We will work with your child at school on the more challenging instructional level. This is where they will learn new skills and strategies to increase their fluency.

**4. My child doesn’t form the letters accurately?**

Kindergarten children are just developing the muscles which make handwriting possible. They need many different kinds of practice with large and small motor activities in order to be able to form the lines and shapes that make letters. In school we are working on all of these skills such as coloring, cutting, molding with clay or playdough, building and connecting toys. As they ”play” with these materials they are developing muscle tone and strength. You will see the handwriting and letter formation make huge improvements through the year but most children will still be developing these skills well into first grade.

**5. My child reverses letters in writing or confuses some of the letters?**

Letter reversals and confusions of similar letters (b,d,p,q,f,t,I,l,m.n.)is normal and in fact expected during this stage in your child’s literacy development. In writing we will not usually correct these reversals as the goal in kindergarten writing is to allow the child to represent their thoughts unhindered. In reading it is often necessary to correct the child as the confusion will make it hard to decode the words. Reversals and confusion continue into first grade where they will naturally begin to fade as the child has greater experience with reading printed text

**6. My child writes only with uppercase letters?**

Kindergarten children are most comfortable with the uppercase letters since they have had more experience with them and have practiced writing them more. We will be learning some of the rules for using capital letters properly (beginning of sentences and proper names) but when they are not being prompted most children will revert to what is most comfortable. Be assured that we will reinforce the rules for using capitals in writing but as our goal it quality of thought not precision of product we will not overcorrect for capitals.

**7. Since kindergarten writing emphasizes using sounds the children hear to write, will my child learn to spell words incorrectly?**

The first goal of the kindergarten teacher is to convince your child they already know how to write. As soon as they can “draw and tell” we consider them writers. As they learn to form the letters and learn the sounds the letters make they can begin to write using letters to represent the sounds that they hear in the words as they tell about their pictures. This approximation of writing builds confidence in children as writers and gives them a way to share their thoughts on paper before they are able to spell. If we limit children’s writing to what they can spell we get very little creativity. However if we teach children that they can write anything they can say they will write about anything and everything. They can write about volcanoes exploding and aliens invading and not just about cats and dogs. We talk to kindergartners about kindergarten spelling and book spelling. As children become readers they will begin to spell words the way they remember seeing them in print. They will also work on spelling a lot in first grade and beyond so we do not need to worry about their future spelling abilities at this early stage.

**8. Why don’t I see any math papers in my child’s classwork?**

RecentlyCMS adopted a terrific new math program called Investigations. This program emphasizes student exploration and discovery of mathematical concepts. In most lessons student investigate a particular math objective through working hands-on with materials or by playing a “game” with classmates. In each daily math lesson the teacher will introduce a problem, concept or game and then children will be allowed to work together to discover mathematical strategies. The whole class then gets back together to share what they experienced or ways they found to solve a problem. This type of instruction leads to greater understanding of concepts and internalization of reasoning beyond what we would get just solving computational facts on paper.

We hope that this has answered some of the question you might have about your child’s learning. If you need further clarification don’t hesitate to ask your child’s teacher any question you might have.

Every child is unique so enjoy supporting your child as they develop through these exciting new learning stages and try not to compare them to siblings or classmates. Remember that “Childhood is a journey not a race.”