LETTERLAND

We teach phonics through a program called Letterland, which you are probably familiar with from kindergarten. Wake County uses this program in grades K-2. It is very effective for teaching children letters and sounds. Even if children know the 26 letters of the alphabet by name and can identify associated sounds, there are still many combinations of letters that make new sounds (ch, ph, ck, etc) and spelling patterns that are essential to know in order to be a strong reader and writer. In first grade, we will move beyond the 26 letters to some of those more advanced spelling patterns.

In order to keep you informed of what your child is working on in our Letterland units, I will send home a list of words each week. You may choose to work on these or not, depending upon your child’s ability to read and spell the words. When the list comes home on Monday, have your child read the words from LIST A. Then, here are my suggestions:

* For kids who can already read these words fluently (automatically), have them spell the words. Many times, kids recognize the words but can’t spell them yet. If they can’t spell them, work on that. You can do rainbow words (write the word in one color, trace with a second color, trace with a third color – a clever way to practice writing it 3 times without it being boring). You can take dried beans or cereal and have your child spell the words out. There are many ways to practice – if you need ideas, ask me or Google!
* For kids who can read some of the words but not all of them, focus on them learning the pattern. For example, in this week’s list, if your child can read “back” correctly but then stumbles on or has to sound out “sack”, that means he or she may recognize the word “back” but isn’t seeing the pattern and transferring it to another word with the same spelling pattern. In this case, use a highlighter or crayon to mark the part of the word that is the same (the –ack part.) Write those words down and try to add words to the list.
* For kids who are struggling with all or most of the words, look for the patterns and focus on one pattern at a time. In this week’s list, for example, we have “can”, “ran”, and “van” that all end with –an, then we have “ am”, “jam”, “Sam”, and “Pam” that end with the –am chunk, and finally we have “back”, “sack”, and “pack” that end with the –ack chunk. You could focus on –an words one night – read them, find them in books, write them, add own –an words to the list. The next night, review the –an words but also do the –am words. The following night, work on the –ack words.

Additionally, students should recognize and be able to spell the “Tricky Words” on the Word List. These are just sight words. Last week we worked on “the”, “my”, and “is”. This week’s words are “I”, “like”, and “and.” Again, many students will know those words already. The next step for them is to make sure they can spell them as well as recognize them. The best way is for them to write sentences or stories so that they build the habit of spelling the words correctly in context. Likewise, the best way for children who don’t know those words to learn them is to see them in print. In other words, it is better to find the words in text and practice reading them in context than to practice them in isolation. Kids may learn to read and write individual words in isolation, to practice for a test for example, but may not transfer that to actual reading and writing – unless they get opportunities to see the words in text and use the words when they actually write something.

Finally, I want to explain the Word List a bit more. The top two sections are sight words, the next section is a review from the previous week, the 4th section is List A – our new words for this week, the 5th and 6th sections are additional words for practicing the same spelling patterns, and the 7th section is for reading and writing the words in sentences. You can ignore the last 2 sections, as we are not following the program’s homework procedure, and the story words are something we use in class. The parts you will use the most are sections 2 (Tricky Words) and 4 (List A).

I apologize for the length of this letter, but I wanted to make sure you understand what Letterland is for, how to look at and use the Word List that will go home each week, and how to help your child at home if necessary. If you have questions, please email me. I’ll be happy to talk with you about it. I will also be setting up conferences throughout September and October, and we can talk about at our conference if you need clarification.

Sincerely,

Crystal Blum