

OFFICE FOR CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

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Dear Parents and Guardians,

The Ridgefield Park School District is excited to bring back Words Their Way to our literacy program in grades K-6. This is a developmental spelling, phonics, and vocabulary program. WTW is an approach to spelling and word knowledge that is based on extensive research and includes stages of development and instructional levels that are critical to the way students learn to read. A word study program allows effective instruction in phonics, spelling, and vocabulary, allowing each child to work at his or her appropriate instructional level.

Why “Word Study” instead of a “traditional” spelling program? Research clearly indicates that the memorization of lists of spelling words does not promote the development of spelling skills. In the traditional approach of “everyone gets the same weekly list and test on Friday,” many students who passed the spelling test were not able to transfer the knowledge into their writing. Memorizing a list of words and getting 100% on weekly tests does not necessarily mean that your child is a good speller. It may just mean that they are good at memorizing words for a test.

Why Word Study? In word study, teachers encourage students to compare and contrast features in words. One common method for doing so is by having students “sort” words. When sorting, students use their word knowledge to separate examples that go together from those that don’t. This allows students to make generalizations about words and transfer this knowledge to new words. Teachers then assess students’ pattern knowledge rather than the ability to memorize single words.

What can YOU do to help?

- Remind your child to *sort the words* into categories like the ones in school. Your child should read each word aloud during this activity. Ask your child to explain to you why the words are sorted in a particular way - what does the sort tell about spelling in general?
- Do a “*blind sort*” with your child. Lay down a word from each category as a header and then read the rest of the words aloud -one at a time. Your child must indicate where each word goes without seeing it. Lay it down and let your child move it if he or she is wrong. Repeat if your child makes more than one error.
- Assist your child in doing a “*word hunt*”, looking in a book he or she has already read for words that have the same sound, same pattern, or both. Try to find two or three words for each category.
- Do a “*writing sort*”. As you call out the words in random order, your child should write them in categories. As soon as each word is written, have your child show it to you to check for accuracy. Call out any words your child misspells a second or even third time.
- If your child is older, encourage him or her to write complete sentences that incorporate the words from each category and their meaning.
- Talk about the meaning of each word.

Our teachers are very excited about beginning this new program. Thank you for your support in your child’s education. Happy sorting!

Sincerely,



Ms. Katie Herbst
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