

September 1, 2009

Dear Sandburg Parents,

RE: Words Their Way: Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling

As a Professional Learning Community, we are constantly examining our instructional practices in our quest for those that will be most effective with our learners. One such practice is spelling. Traditionally spelling has involved assigning students a list of words to practice and testing for memorization. I'm sure this sounds familiar from your own elementary years (mine, too). However, research has shown, and we can attest, that the transfer of words from the weekly spelling list into students' writing is quite low. We often hear parents lament how their child can spell these words at home, but not at school.

As a result, individual teachers have looked for ways to enhance students' understanding of how words are spelled through other activities involving spelling patterns, word roots, suffixes, prefixes, meanings, and origins. While these efforts supported some learners' success with spelling, we continued to search for a school-wide system that would support sustained growth for every student from grade level to grade level.

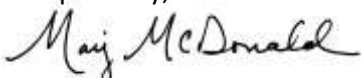
Littleton Public Schools adoption of Words Their Way (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, and Johnston) this year presented an opportunity to realize this goal. We now ask for your patience as we familiarize ourselves with the routines and richness of this program. We are currently in the process of using the Words Their Way diagnostic tools to establish where each learner is developmentally and to plan specific steps for instruction. Thank you for your understanding as we work together to create a plan of action that will result in success for every learner in this area of study.

Words Their Way is a word study approach that "evolves from three decades of research exploring developmental aspects of word knowledge with children and adults." This program addresses spelling within the larger context of literacy and more specifically word study. It allows us to identify where each learner is developmentally (measured in stages of development) in his/her "general knowledge of spelling and their specific knowledge of words—the spelling and meaning of individual words." Words Their Way takes learners beyond spelling memorization, allowing them to "examine words in order to reveal consistencies within our written language system and to help (them) master the recognition, spelling and meaning of specific words."

Mastery is achieved through daily hands-on, cooperative, games and activities, including pattern sorts, sounds sorts, word hunts, writing sorts, and meaning sorts. Unlike the routines of the previous spelling program, **learners will not take a weekly "spelling test."** Instead learners will engage in sorting activities at school and will most likely bring them home as well, giving your child an opportunity to share his/her new learning with you. Teachers will monitor their developmental progress through end-of-unit assessments and, more formally, end-of-trimester assessments. You child's teacher will be sharing his/her progress with you throughout the year.

We anticipate that you will have questions along the way. In return we will be sharing with your child's learning progress with you. Please do not hesitate to contact your child's teacher or me at any point.

Respectfully,



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