

April 6, 2020

Hello GFB Families,

Hopefully by now you have acclimated to our “new normal” and have found an approach to surviving being distant from those things and people that contribute to our daily happiness. It has occurred to me many times that we have never had more in common.

Although our GFB staff are “distant”, our students and their families remain on our minds and in our hearts. We hope you had a chance to view our YouTube Kindness Counts video in celebration of National Autism Awareness Day. Because this video was assembled in a short time frame, not all staff were able to participate but I have a feeling other surprises are coming. Special thanks to Ms. Hurley and Ms. Donovan for helping to organize and put this together. The feedback from GFB families and so many in the community was overwhelming; we definitely “lit it up blue”!

A lot has changed for both parents and their students in one week. Last week’s Fort Report introduced you to the enhanced and more specific learning activities/resources we have assembled for students. The approach to accessing the link changed a bit to make it more comparable to other schools but it’s still super simple: go to our school’s web page, click “home learning” at the top and select from the 3 drop down areas listed. As previously noted general resources will be added to the “online resources/opportunities” tab as they are found. The “student daily activities” tab however is detailed, grade level specific and broken down by content. These activities will be posted weekly and all weeks will remain up and available should you need to go back to reference. Please be sure to visit the webpage regularly as information from the Superintendent, Commission of Education and Winthrop Public Schools announcements are coming in and being posted almost daily.

A few families have experienced challenges with the Lexia and iReady websites. One logical reason for this would be too many people using the platform at that particular time. But it may also be due to other issues (for instance if your date/time is not correct on your device) or perhaps you are using a device that is too old to be compatible with the resource. Second grade students who are having trouble accessing iReady through clever will need to contact their teacher for their username and password. Here’s a document for using Lexia at home that may help with some of your questions. <https://www.lexialearning.com/customer-resources/core5-support-for-families>

While last week’s Fort Report focused on the importance of establishing a schedule and routine for students, casual and impromptu learning opportunities can make a powerful contribution to engagement and positive outcomes, too. As teachers it is instinctive to be mindful of the impact our interactions and dialogue with students can have. We also have the training to deviate from typical instructional approaches and take advantage of incidental opportunities in learning. I recognize that parents/caregivers are feeling anxious about their ability to support their student. With that in mind here are some helpful approaches and techniques that I can share to help you further support your student while keeping him/her engaged in learning.

ELA/writing:

- Use language in conversation that allows you to **expand vocabulary**. The trick here is to be sure new words are embedded in a context that helps students understand the meaning. For example, if you are out on a walk and your child notices a *bush* with buds getting ready to bloom, you may substitute bush with a less commonly used word like *shrub*. (“Look at all the little buds on that bush!” can turn into “Wow, that shrub is going to be beautiful when those buds bloom!”) An important consideration: the new vocabulary term must be used regularly and frequently to embed learning.
- **Book readings should include** attention to genre (fiction, nonfiction, folk tale, etc.), author’s purpose (persuade, inform, entertain) and elements within that purpose. Depending on the genre and/or author’s purpose questions about characters, setting, plot, sequence of events, problem and solution can all be used to engage student’s critical thinking skills.
- **Open ended questions** are not yes/no questions but instead invite extended responses. When framed correctly they encourage children to reason, reflect, and think about how their experiences may apply to the question. Here’s some that work for me: What do you think about the part when...? Why do you think that happened? What do you think would have happened if...? Tell me more about that. I wonder why...?
- **Maintaining a journal** that has students write two sentences (one sentence for kindergarten) about why they liked or didn’t like a recently read book will give students a quick dose of writing. Because the task is short, attention to proper use of uppercase/lowercase letters, spacing, punctuation is a must and expected for all grade levels. Including some element of detail within the sentence is a reasonable expectation for many of our grade 1 and most of grade 2 students. Frequently used words, spelling words and sight words should be spelled correctly. And the journal will help students reflect on previous reading accomplishments and therefore may be helpful in motivating students to read more.

Math:

- **Vocabulary use matters** and particularly because many words already familiar to students can support their math comprehension. Words like pairs, larger, fewer, more, same, compare, greater, less, add, plus, subtract, minus, pattern have an everyday context that can make math more digestible. Comparing whether the number of objects is greater than, less than or equal can move us right into adding and subtracting to make numbers equal. Look at all those math words!
- The concept of numbers is easiest explained with **materials that can be manipulated** (also known as representational objects). Whether you are working on rote counting, counting by 2s, comparing odd/even numbers, or addition/subtraction, concrete materials help. Pasta, toothpicks, Q-tips are great tools to enhance your ability to explain and your child’s ability to conceptualize mathematics. No supplies on hand? Use pictures to solve addition and subtraction problems just like our K-2 students do in school. Educators like to call this “representational thinking” and it is a powerful way for students to demonstrate their understanding. Once your child sees what putting

together and taking apart looks like, you can take the next step of associating the relevant symbols (+/-) to create number sentences.

- **Open ended questions** are important in math, too. The following questions can help you establish how secure your child's understanding is as well as identify potential areas of confusion or frustration: What is the question asking us to solve/do? What did you need to know to figure this out? Is there another way to solve this problem? Do you see a pattern?
- **Model your thinking** and approach to problem solving. This is especially powerful if you can concentrate on referencing 10 frames and isolating the helpful nature of doubles facts. For example, "Okay I need to add $8+2+6$. Well I know 8 plus 2 equals 10 so that's easy. Now I just add 6 to that 10 and I've got it." Or "Well I know 2 plus 6 is 8 and my 8 doubles fact is 16. That was simple and fast." These examples also lend themselves to the important concept that the placement of numbers being added can be switched and still equal the same sum.

I am incredibly grateful to our teachers for the work they have done and continue to do to support our students and families. In addition to having huge hearts and tremendous concern for our students and their families, they are truly gifted and resourceful teachers. The thought and detail they are including in the home learning documents is expertly aligned to the standards and learning outcomes within those standards. I want to support you in following through with their efforts. I am receiving lots of emails from families looking for tips and guidance in working with students and frankly, it's tough to provide that with few words. I hope that despite the length of this Fort Report, it will be helpful to you in working productively with your child.

Your partner in education,
Ms. Pearson, Principal