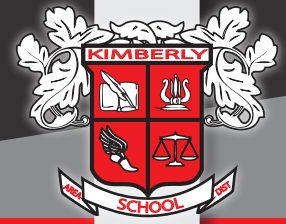


School Matters



Special Insert
April 2017

School News for Residents of the Kimberly Area School District



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Superintendent

Literacy is a fundamental skill that sets the foundation for all future learning. When a child starts to fall behind in reading, as more time passes, it becomes exponentially more difficult for them to catch up to their peers. We want to give our students the best start possible and that means ensuring that they receive an education tailored to their capabilities. That's why our 4K Center for Literacy believes that learning should take place through play. Keep reading to learn how this type of learning works for our 4K students.

-- **Bob Mayfield**

Learning Through Play in 4K

When four-year-old kindergarten students arrive for their half-day of school, it functions much like the arrival of other schools across the Kimberly Area School District (KASD). Some arrive by bus, and others are dropped off by their parents. They start their day socializing with their classmates before heading to class. 4K students even recite the Pledge of Allegiance, just like all the other students in our District. But from there, their classroom experience is different - it is tailored to meet the needs of four-year-olds. They jump right into an activity that seems like play to the students, but has been carefully crafted by their teacher to infuse their play with learning.

How has Kindergarten Changed?

The primary focus of both of our kindergarten programs, 4K and 5K, is to build a strong and developmentally appropriate foundation in literacy. In the Kimberly Area School District, much research and staff development has been done to structure our kindergarten programs to give students what they need, when they need it. For students at the 4K Center for Literacy, what they need is literacy-based learning suited to their age.

"We are about infusing play into every learning experience," said Holly Prast, Assistant Superintendent. "When students come to school, their whole day should feel like play and for our educators, that takes a lot of work."

Even snack time at the 4K Center incorporates play to become a learning opportunity. "An example would be if they are having pretzel sticks, we'd ask all the students to make a letter with their pretzels before they eat them," said Prast. "The students think it is fun to play with their food and in the meantime they're learning how to make letters."

Guiding Framework: Kids Can Do Remarkable Things

The guiding framework of Kimberly's kindergarten literacy curriculum is the concept of identity, agency and craft. According to Kathy Champeau, a well-known expert in literacy who helps the District to structure early literacy programs, "The most critical component for learning to occur is when we see ourselves as learners and know that we can and will learn." Identifying as a learner helps students have agency over their life. "Agency is the knowledge that if we act and act strategically, we can accomplish our goals," said Champeau. "To be successful in any endeavor we need to be able to act



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strategically to make things happen.”

Lastly, craft is how students use their identity and agency to practice literacy. “Craft means that students understand the kinds of decisions writers make with intentions to entice readers to want to read their books,” said Champeau.



Jenny Matney, a teacher at the 4K Center for Literacy, sees the value identity, agency and craft brings to our youngest students. “Our 4K teachers have worked hard this year to establish a classroom community where each one of our students sees themselves as writers,” said Matney. “We have set up our rooms to provide endless opportunities for students to be exposed to different mentor authors and their unique styles of writing.”

Students participate in activities based on author mentors, such as Mo Willems, Jan Thomas, Donald Crews and Eric Carle. “Our students have become great ‘noticers’ of different writing styles of various authors,” added Matney. “They then take what they have learned through discussion and observation and put it to use in their own writing.”

“By inviting kids to notice all kinds of things about books, we have a meaningful way for them to learn about some of the basic concepts and details of print and message and how that works together,” said Champeau. “Young children are inquisitive about their world. They want to know why and how so many things in their world work, and we try to give them as many experiences as we can as parents and teachers. This is the spirit with which we immerse four year olds in literacy.”

Ultimately, our District’s guiding philosophy as Holly Prast so aptly describes, is “Kids can do remarkable things, if you give them remarkable things to do.”

Literacy Begins by Telling Your Story

Educators in Kimberly’s kindergarten classrooms embrace having dialogic classrooms, meaning they are based on dialogue or talking. The concept is that if you can build upon what students are already capable of doing, in this case talking, then you can help them build on those skills. In a dialogic classroom, students are encouraged to talk about everything – to talk about their ideas, talk about their drawings, talk about their books and talk about themselves.

“If a student draws a book that has no words in it, one that is all pictures, but they can tell others what their pictures mean and that you read their book left to right on the page and front to back in a book, then they understand some of the major building blocks in literacy,” said Prast. “It’s about capitalizing on those very developmentally appropriate capabilities that we are working on in 4K and 5K.”

Our approach and challenge is to find developmental readiness on the individual level, something that works for each child, each and every day. “During writing, students are encouraged to share with others, problem solve, and work together, all of which deeply enhances their learning,” said Matney. “Students then become teachers as they share their writing and thinking with their classmates, igniting a contagious energy within the group.”

A great example of where students have agency is in center time, a time when they can choose what play-based learning activity they want to participate in. When asked what the students’ favorite center activity is, Matney was quick to point out that it is writing. “Our 4K students view writing as play. Writing time is very social and a choice during center time,” said Matney. “They laugh and work with one another. They truly enjoy making books.”

Reading is a fundamental building block skill to academic success. By helping students build a strong foundation in literacy, it sets the groundwork for future learning. “Our teachers are working really hard to connect what it is students need to learn in kindergarten with play,” added Prast. “This prepares students for the next school level and their future.”



Students in Jenny Matney’s afternoon class learning about syllables.