

High Frequency Words and Sight Words

Children in Grades K-1 learn new high frequency words with the goal of them becoming sight words, or words that can be effortlessly recalled from memory. These words will align with the Foundations instruction in the classroom. High frequency words make up most of the words your child encounters in primary text (50-80%). Our county expectation is that by the end of first grade, all students have mastery of all 135 high frequency words. In order to help your child achieve this goal, here is how you can help at home. Many 2nd-5th graders may need continued help to master these words, along with the increasingly more complex word study they are learning.

Many high frequency words follow typical phonics patterns, meaning they can be sounded out correctly. For example, in the word “with” all the letter sounds and letter sound combinations follow the phonics rules we teach, so it can be sounded out. As long as your child can sound out and then blend the word within three seconds or less, it will be considered correct.

However, there are some high frequency words that do not follow the phonics rules we teach, and therefore cannot be decoded easily by sounding it out. (Or maybe your child has not learned that phonics rule yet.) For these words, we will be utilizing a strategy called “orthographic mapping” or the “heart word strategy.” You may see words that have hearts over certain letters or groups of letters. This is to let you know we have taught this word as a heart word. For example, in the word “from” the fr- and -m make their typical sounds, but the -o- does not! We teach your child that the -o- in this word makes the /ŭ/ sound. Since it makes a surprising sound, we will mark that part of the word with a heart, because we need to know this part by heart when sounding out the word. Through this instruction, your child is able to make connections, and hopefully learn these high frequency words more effectively than rote memorization. The connection between the pronunciation and the spelling that goes with the sounds is how the brain maps a word into memory. It does not come from memorizing a word as a whole. In actuality, we want all words to become sight words, and it only happens through this mapping of sounds to spelling. Some students may need more opportunities and repetition for this to happen.

Please refer to the Heart Words Directions for more specific help using the Heart Word strategy.

We are excited to see your child’s high frequency word knowledge grow! If you have any questions, please contact your child’s teacher.