

Dear Families,

As students become increasingly proficient at decoding words and reading with fluency, it is common for parents to ask why we are not encouraging their child to read more challenging texts. We have put this handout together to help you understand the challenges your young readers will work through as they go through more and more complex texts across their years with us at Lake Mills Elementary School.

You may have noticed that your child zipped through levels A-J in no time and now you are wondering why they have been reading at level K or slightly above for a while. The short answer is, the work a reader does at the higher levels is different. It is less about decoding, and more about comprehension. While it is true that many of our first grade readers can decode books that are much more challenging than those we are encouraging them to read in the classroom, the truth is that they often cannot comprehend those texts beyond a basic level of understanding. For example, they can comprehend a level K text with one main character and a simple problem across 30-40 pages, but they cannot follow several main characters and a complex plotline at level N. They are not developmentally mature enough to do the critical thinking work required to read more challenging books with deep comprehension. We DO encourage parents to read books to their children that might be at a slightly higher level of complexity than those he/she is reading in class. The conversations that parents can have about new vocabulary, confusing passages, and character traits help scaffold comprehension. This is precisely what teachers model through read alouds and small group instruction as they help students make the shift from decodable texts to comprehension across entire chapter books.

Texts at levels A-J present new phonics challenges level by level. At level K, students must make a large leap in terms of the comprehension work required of them. At this point, texts share similar traits by bands of levels rather than level by level. In addition, content also becomes increasingly more mature as students move through bands. The bands are KLM, NOPQ, RST, UVW, and XYZ. Please see the attached document to learn more about how texts increase in complexity. We want our students to read widely in levels while we provide explicit comprehension instruction that helps readers “see” more in their books. When

we move kids through levels too quickly, we bypass so many wonderful titles that are age-appropriate and present just the right amount of cognitive demand. Additionally, we create readers who only notice the main story elements in highly complex texts. In essence, they continue to read like a level K reader in level R, S, T texts, only pulling out the main plotline and following one character even though there are many important characters to consider.

The slowdown in movement across levels is expected at level K. A crucial shift in instruction occurs at this point as we move away from phonics instruction and focus on comprehension. We teach our students to develop theories about characters, make sense of challenging vocabulary and phrases, follow multiple characters and plotlines, and interpret themes. This requires readers to slow down and be very intentional as they read so that they notice everything the author *wants* them to notice. We want them to “sight see” in their books rather than race car read to the end.

If you have further questions, please let us know! You can contact our Reading Specialist. Her contact information is below.

Sincerely,

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