

Fall Grade Level Meeting for Kindergarten Parents

September 19, 2008

Dr. Allan Gold, District Psychologist, Lexie Sifford, Principal, Marcia Gillespie, Kindergarten Teacher Coordinator

Principal Lexie Safford opened the meeting at 8:30 am. This important event happens at each grade level at Reed School two times each year. This is a great turnout today and a good opportunity to meet other Kindergarten parents.

Dr. Allan Gold: Dr. Gold is the Reed School district psychologist. Dr. Gold facilitated parent introductions. Each parent introduced her or himself, and stated their child's name and teacher.

Dr. Gold: Welcome parents. It is an important part of this job to promote the connection between the school and parents. Most parents here have their first child at Reed School, or it is their first child of a particular gender in Kindergarten this year. There will be lots of "values" talk. We will look at a picture of what a kindergartener looks like. We will create a list of issues, academic, developmental and social, and we will discuss as many of these issues as possible.

It is very important to establish relationships between the school staff and parents. This is a partnership. It is very hard raising kids now, particularly during the last 5 to 10 years. Establishing values at age 5, 6 and 7 sets the stage for the future of our children.

There is a great supplement to the school website under parent education that has many resources and is sponsored by Dr. Gold and David Kover, the district psychologists. It is accessible from the Parent Ed link on the Reed website. Articles of interest and links to resources on many issues of childhood are available.

It is important to know you are not alone in this process. Each child is an individual, but not entirely unique. It is important parents get to know each other and develop a parental network while their children are in the Reed Union School District. The grade level parent meetings are important forums for us to talk about values and issues, especially with other parents. Parents have two basic emotions: love and guilt. We want the best for our kids, but we get defensive. As kids get older, there are many issues that come up. It is important that parents are able to talk to each other. It is also important to find people with similar values as your family, and to establish your family values early. A good book to read is "The Price of Privilege" by Madeleine Levine. Take time to establish what is important. Family time is very important. Kids want to do everything and family life suffers. This generation is constantly multi-tasking. The internet has changed life dramatically. Kids are computer savvy and will grow up knowing the internet. Where does family life fit in? Kids are only kids for a short time. Parents need to be in control in

a world that is trying to take control away. Kids should not be raised by the media or by other kids.

What are kids actually like these days? Taking a slice across an age group, there is a huge range of “normal”.

Dr. Gold: How have your Kindergarten children changed over the past year? (observations by parents):

- More independence
- More social
- More confident physically
- More verbal
- More aware
- More empathetic
- More exhausted
- More negotiating
- More limit pushing
- More argumentative
- More private
- Starting to read
- More aware of what others think
- More talk about God/Death
- Good imagination

Over the past 20 years there has been a shifting down of characteristics in kids. What you used to see in a 14 year old, you now see in a 10 year old.

In thinking about child development there are four areas to consider: Physical, Cognitive, Social and Emotional. Children, all during their school years, and even beyond are looking for mastery in each of these areas.

Physical: Gradual changes until adolescence. At 5 they are more physically capable. They are able to handle household responsibilities, so it is a good time to begin to expect them to do small “chores” to help around the house. They want to be helpful, so capitalize on that desire now.

Cognitive: Traditionally age 5 is the beginning of a very significant transition from being egocentric and lacking understanding of logic to more logical understanding of the concrete world. They begin to be able to understand rules, sort and classify, put things in order. They begin to be able to see others’ points of view and be more aware of others. This is usually

more of a 1st grade characteristic. There is a blossoming of vocabulary at this time. Kindergarten really is 1st grade 10 years ago. The demands are quite significant but kids are rising to the occasion.

Social: Learning social skills, such as initiating interactions, sharing, entering a game or group, dealing with disagreements, etc. is an ongoing process. Developing friendships is happening, they friendships are not overly profound or deep at this time; they tend to be somewhat fluid. Nevertheless, feelings get hurt. However, most of the time, kids are OK 10 minutes later. If you have questions about kids socially, ask their teacher. They are the most aware. Kids don't hide issues at school.

Non-verbal communication is 80% of all communication. Most kids learn to pick up on non-verbal cues. Many don't need help learning these skills, but some do.

Boys are very physical at this age. Schools are very female-centric. Schools are not very tolerant of physicality. Kids have to follow school rules. They are not allowed to play "tag," and no kissing is allowed, either.

Kids operate on the "recency" effect. They remember the last thing that happened, so that when they tell you they had a bad day or that no one likes them, it may be because one unpleasant interaction happened at the end of the day and the rest was fine. Don't worry about every negative comment they make.

Mrs. Gillespie: A lot of time is spent on social issues and friendship skills in kindergarten. It helps to be very specific about the action and model the behavior you want to see. Recognize and praise the behavior you want to see.

Emotional: This is the most important area. Without emotional control and stability, kids can't learn. They need to sit in a circle and manage frustration. The "disappointment muscle" has to be exercised. Praise kids for effort, not product. Kids need to learn to take risks. How do you think you did? Did you have fun? There is pleasure in activities. Every activity is not a performance. Kids need to accept reasonable limits. Power struggles don't help anybody. Take 10 deep breaths and enter situations with a calm demeanor.

Mrs. Gillsepie: Program "Second Steps" helps identify emotions and positive ways to handle them.

Lexie: Hardest part of parenting is getting control of face-emotions.

Character Pillars: Our character pillars provide the basis for character education at school. There is a different word from a character pillar presented and discussed each week. Reinforce

the pillars and words of the week at home by giving examples of behaviors and words that demonstrate the word, and what it is not. These help kids develop values.

For example, It is OK to be upset, but respect is the underlying value. Kids need to be taught to disagree in a respectful way.

Some important issues:

Discipline:

Lexie: When discussing consequences it can be helpful to distinguish between Start and Stop behavior – trying to get kids to do what they're supposed to do or to stop doing things they're not supposed to do. Consequences may be different for each of these. Try to make the consequences fit the misbehavior, if possible.

The ability to give an "I" statement can be helpful. I am feeling "x" right now because..... For example, I'm worried that we'll be late and you'll miss what your teacher has to say. Kids need to know their words and actions affect others.

Adults and kids don't respond well to anger. Anger is usually the surface emotion. The underlying emotion, which might be concern, worry, or hurt, is very important to identify and communicate to children, who don't hear anger very well. The same is true of children. By reflective listening we can try to identify children's underlying feelings in order to help them problem solve. Sherry Patterson, a consulting psychologist, goes to each class three times each year to talk about anger management.

Consequences should be thought out at a family meeting first. Talk about what you need to work on as a family.

Two helpful books for discipline ideas are 1, 2, 3 Magic and Siblings without Rivalry, both in the Reed library.

Protecting Kids from the World:

Now that kids are beginning to read, they will be more and more capable of absorbing information. How much do we protect them from the world? They hear and see a lot. Now is the time to consider what you want them exposed to. There are two schools of thought: Expose them to things and explain what they see and hear to them at an age appropriate level, or try to protect them from everything as long as possible. They will see and hear things at home and at school, that you will have less and less control over. Even if you're trying to protect them, it is important that you are the interpreter for the information that they see and experience.

Parental Anxiety:

There has been a major increase in parental anxiety. It is in the nature of parents is to worry, but many parents are micro-managing their kids. The term “helicopter parent” refers to this. We need to make sure kids are safe, but kids need to be free of worry that their parents are overly concerned about every aspect of kids’ lives. Worry about if your child is going to be a good human being. Anxiety saps the joy away from parenthood. It is OK for them (and you) to make mistakes. Try to keep yourself grounded. If you have concerns check with your child’s teacher and/or one of the school psychologists. We can help you put your concerns into perspective.

Lexie: There are fabulous years. Your children are wonderful and we love them.