

Spring 2012 First Grade Parent Meeting
April 27, 2012

Dr. Allan Gold, District Psychologist, Nora Ho, Principal,
Wendy Jawor, First Grade Teacher

Principal Ho introduced the meeting and spoke briefly about the coming Common Core Standards, which have been adopted by California and most of the states in the country. They will guide curriculum and instruction with an increase in critical thinking.

By the end of the school year teachers and staff will have new web sites using “Weebly.” When we switch over, teachers’ sites will have common features, making it easier for parents to navigate and find information. Dr. Gold’s web site can be accessed through the Reed School website.

Dr. Gold’s Open Forum / Questions, Issues, and Concerns in Parenting our First Graders (soon to be Second Graders)

Over the course of the first grade year, tremendous growth is evident, academically, behaviorally and socially.

Q: A youngest child in the family wants to play outside with neighborhood teenagers. Should he be with kids his own age because he always seems to have to be with older people in the family and in the neighborhood? Is there a chance that he will put too much pressure on himself to be as competent as the older children (in sports, for example)?

A: It’s important for kids to have play dates with kids their own age, but some kids are precocious or deep-thinkers, and may be quite comfortable with older kids. However, an important issue or question when younger kids associate with older ones is: how do you keep kids “young?” When they hang out with older kids, they will be exposed to video games, language and older kids’ understanding of current events. They will hear or perhaps, see things that they are not able to

understand yet. In general, parents need to ask: How much should they see? Should they be reading the newspaper, watching the news?

The fact is that kids are exposed to a tremendous amount of information these days, and it is impossible to prevent that. What is required from parents is a lot more monitoring now, certainly more than when we were growing up.

Keep your ears open. If the older kids are generally respectful and sensitive kids, then they will recognize that there are younger kids around and modulate their language, topics of discussion, and behavior. But that doesn't always happen. Parents must be good listeners. When kids are exposed to "older" concepts, be prepared to ask them what they heard, what they think and be ready to correct misconceptions. For example, seven year olds are NOT disinterested sexual beings. They might be interested and curious. When they say something that suggests that they've heard something you weren't prepared to deal with yet, don't hesitate to ask: "What do you understand?" "What do you think that means?" then correct or confirm what they heard. In order to keep your communication open with your child, don't overreact, but explain calmly what something means and why it may be inappropriate (e.g. language).

If they have heard about a scary or confusing event, then you may need to reassure them that Tiburon is a very safe place, the event took place very far away, or is very unusual.

The issue of exposure to video games and movies is a complex one. Regarding video games, think about your values. Little kids should not be watching or playing violent games, but if their peers have older brothers and sisters, then they may be exposed to that kind of "entertainment." Don't be afraid to have conversations with the parents of your children's peers or of the older students to make sure that when your child is at someone else's house, the gaming is being monitored. It's ok to express your values to another parent and request that when your child is at another home, that certain games are not allowed.

Summary: If the child (and you) can handle it with older kids and feels confident, then it is okay. If the child comes home and feels insecure, or is continually exposed to language, behavior, and information that is too difficult to explain or manage, then those associations may need to be limited.

It's always VERY important to have play dates and play time with peers.

Q: How can parents find a balance between being a “tiger mom” with very high expectations, and not always having to nag/remind/ask kids to do chores/bed making/piano practice/homework, etc.? Does everything have to be rewarded with computer, TV, etc. How do we get them to listen?

A: Kids' have two main jobs: school and home responsibilities. Dr. Gold believes kids should have home responsibilities. Children are part of a family and are old enough to contribute to the working of the family. Kids this age that WANT to be helpful and then they can see benefits. “Mommy has more time now that you helped out!” They shouldn't be paid for these tasks. However, they ARE getting old enough to be given small allowances, so that they can learn about money. Dr. Gold believes that an allowance should be divided into three parts: how much are you willing to let them spend a week on their own choices (like toys or candy, for example)? Multiply that amount by three, so one third can be for their own spending, one third for savings in the bank, and one third for charity. They can either spend their money weekly or learn to save up for a more expensive toy or game.

This allowance is NOT tied to chores. Chores are done as a family member's responsibility. We should expect them to help out. We must set up standards and expectations and hold them to this. We, as parents do not have to be their servant. You don't have to do everything for them or give them everything they want, particularly if they are not contributing or are disrespectful to you. “If you contribute to the house, it will give us more time to spend together to do fun things. If you don't contribute, then I won't be able to help you as much.”

What is reasonable for your child to be responsible for?

Tell them once, maybe twice but STOP TALKING. Kids get parent-deaf. They don't want to listen anymore. Let the kids know ahead of time what the consequences are.

We can make a chart for them listing daily responsibilities, but we also need to respect their time. "These are the four things that need to be done today," and then give them some choice as to when they want to accomplish their duties. Of course, some may have time constraints, such as "the table needs to be set for dinner by 6:00." The parents set parameters and kids need to respond.

The book 1,2,3 Magic has good suggestions for these types of nagging problems.

First graders are just learning about the responsibility of homework. By fourth grade they have homework figured out and we will certainly need to nag less. Girls tend to be better at age 7 at sitting down and doing homework but boys aren't as interested, generally.

What About Screen Time?

When kids go to someone else's house and have "screen time," it makes it hard when they are at your house.

Kids do need to learn to manage screen time. Even Del Mar kids find it challenging to manage laptops at times.

If they learn to manage screen tools at this age, so much the better. An important question to ask is, "Does my child have an addictive personality?" Signs: they argue or don't respond when asked to stop working on the computer (for instance) and it culminates in an argument. This means the child could have an "addiction" to computer time. Maybe have a conversation about addiction with your child. The more difficult it is for kids to detach from the computer, the more it's recommended that you have a "no computers" (at least on week days) rule.

Dr. Gold says that, in general, a little bit of computer time is okay – a half hour a day of video games is okay. But it is very important to consider the *quality* of games they are playing. Are they violent? The more graphic and realistic, the worse it probably is. No violence or people getting shot. Sports games are probably fine. We can't assume there are non-violent video games at other people's houses. Communication with other parents is key for birthday parties, play dates, etc. The kids need a lot of debriefing. Kids might not understand that in real life people get hurt and that video games show this. Kids can have a hard time distinguishing between fact and fantasy. One side of us wants to keep them innocent and the other wants them to learn moderation and self-discipline, because the computer and this kind of entertainment isn't going away. If this is a strong value, (minimum time with video games), it's perfectly all right to let them know.

How do you deal with this in older grades? If you put a strict "no video game" rule, the kids might go somewhere else, so dialogue becomes more important at this time.

TV time can be controlled better because you can see what they are watching.

Approaches:

"Moderation" vs. "Black and White." Kids aren't very good at moderation. It is often easier to make a Black and White statement: "no electronics during the week."

There will always be other kids whose parents don't manage this electronic time. Set up play dates carefully so that if you have a "no screen time" rule, the children can find consistency. Have that child over to your house or choose someone else. It is really important to talk to the parents of the other child to see what their rules are. *Consistency is really important.*

What about consistency?

Don't have arguments with your spouse about consistency in front of child. "Why should he have to do that?" Kids are exquisitely good at figuring out parental wiggle room and can manipulate situations.

Different cultural backgrounds make it difficult sometimes. Trying to find consistency is really important.

Fatigue can be one of the reasons we are not always consistent. But find your “bottom line” issues. For example, for Dr. Gold “respect” in kids is a bottom line. Figure out the “bottom line” issues. Pick your battles. A little inconsistency around responsibilities or bed time may not be a disaster. But for a core value, (like respect), any misbehavior does need to be dealt with every time.

Q: A child has been termed a “deep-thinker,” who loves to research, go to library, etc. But when the child’s teacher asks for work in class, things do not get done in the required time frame. The student also tells stories that go on and on. Is there a risk that classroom performance is not representative of what the child can actually do? How do children learn to set priorities and learn efficiency?

A: Some very bright kids take a long time to explain, write, do things. In Dr. Gold’s social skills group, they work on these skills. “How long do you think you can talk before your audience gets bored?” Pay attention to the non-verbal cues. How can we tell if our audience is bored? Teach children to look for these boredom signs in our audiences. Dr. Gold’s rule of thumb for telling stories is about 30 to 45 seconds; then see if people are engaged – what is their body language saying and are they eager for more information? This is a teachable skill.

Kids at age 7 have a decrease in egocentrism. When they tell stories when they are five or six, in their mind you were there, so they leave out lots of things. But now that they’re seven they need to work on *efficiency*. If kids can get to the main idea, that is really good. They can learn to shrink their statements or written responses to the main idea. IF we need more information, we can ask, and kids can learn that that’s what we will do.

Efficiency in writing is a teacher job. Teachers will work on this for the next many years. Our upper elementary and middle school students actually become VERY good writers. At this point as they’re just

learning writing skills it's much easier for teachers to have kids trim down ideas than it is for them to generate ideas when the kids don't have ideas.

Kids also need to learn what the appropriate level of quality for a specific task. Some are perfectionistic and may be very hard on themselves, even at this young age. This is a reason they don't work at a faster pace. Teachers are the critical people to teach kids what the appropriate level of quality is. Some kids won't write things down unless they are perfect. Sometimes parents are pretty demanding and a dialogue between teacher and parent is critical.

Q: What is the appropriate balance for kids of structured after school activities and unstructured play. What happens to fun time as kids get older?

A. The issue of how to keep balance in our kids' lives is a complex and critical one. Imbalance occurs when we over-schedule. Dr. Gold took a survey of which kids had one, two three or more scheduled activities after school. Many had two or more.

Free play is so important because this is how they learn to interact with each other. Though they get a lot of this at school, they also need practice at home.

Later on, the kids in middle school get REALLY overscheduled and really stressed (juggling social, academic, sports, homework, etc.).

If kids really don't want to do something, they will say no (and probably quite strongly). But many times they will say yes to everything because they are curious and interested. We, as parents need to be able to keep these things to moderation.

Two scheduled activities a week is good and the rest should be unstructured (*not* computer time) so kids figure out how to entertain themselves. The trickle-down from over-scheduling is a stressed parent. Ask yourself how *you're* feeling. Having free (*not* computer) time is so crucial. "Necessity is the mother of invention." Kids need to figure out

how to creatively entertain themselves. It's hard to do that when all the imagination is provided by someone or something else.

By over-scheduling, we rob kids of that opportunity. Reading, of course, is good. Imagination, new worlds and experiences open up through books. But play is really important, too. Play will help the kids learn social skills. Kids must practice social skills at home the same way they need to practice reading and math.

Question from parent regarding balance – Is bedtime 7:30 p.m. good for a first grader? An earlier bedtime gives the kids less downtime in the evening. Dr. Gold says 7:30 p.m. or 8:00 p.m. is okay. But watch to see what happens when you experiment. Kids need about 10-11 hours of sleep at this age. Moms need their downtime, too!

Q: Getting prepared for second grade - what can we expect?:

I. Socially

The complexity of social interactions will escalate in 2nd grade. If you have a daughter – be prepared for lots of drama around friendships and particularly, triangles. Sometimes it's better for dads to handle these because it triggers memories in moms. Usually these problems stem from jealousy and intensity of relationships.

Are parents supposed to provide advice? Most importantly, they should listen to the stories. (Yes, they can be long – a good teaching opportunity for efficiency.) As problem-solvers we always want to solve problems. Sometimes the kids just want to talk and vent. The kids are just trying to figure out their socialization. Ask the kids “what would you like me to do?” or “how do you think we can solve this?” We want to put the responsibility *back* on to the kids. As parents, we have to judge the situation. If your child is being targeted or scapegoated, don't necessarily jump to get on the phone. If you notice a real change in your child's demeanor or if they don't want to go to school, then you can start investigating (teacher, yard duty). Then you can take things a step further. Kids get very sensitive and are usually less articulate than we need them to be to fully explain what's going on. But they can

surprise us. If there's an ongoing animosity that doesn't seem to go away, let school/teacher/Dr. Gold know.

We can help kids resolve battles that they cannot solve themselves.

A parent asked if social skills are more complex now than they were 20-30 years ago. People are much more involved nowadays. Moderation is the key to having parent involvement in their kids' social issues. It's all about balance. We are all very fear-driven as adults. We want to take care of everything. We *need* to give kids more control. You have to know your kids well enough to do this. It is a delicate balance. Maybe try to be more hands-off to sensitive and reactive kids. Maybe get more involved when a generally stoic or less reactive kid reacts with a very strong emotion .

What about boys?

Boys tend to deal with problems right then and there and then move on. Girls tend to hold onto things.

Boys will likely get more interested in sports and athletics. There will be a heightened awareness of the division into the sports and non-sports boys. Boys tend to hang out in "packs," though, as with girls, there can be more intense bonding, grouping, and finding a best friend or good buddies.

It is important for both boys and girls to begin to think about what makes a good friend. You can have conversations at home about this. "What are you looking for in a friend?" "How do you feel when you're with X?" Help them list characteristics of what a good friend does or doesn't do. The issue of trust doesn't come up yet, but inconsistency does. For example, what about the kid who is nice on a play date or not at school, or nice one day and not the next? Kids are increasingly aware of put-downs and the importance of not saying mean things or being teased.

While many kids are natural at making friends, the complexity of social skills means that some students may actually have to be taught specific skills. For example, if your child says, "nobody likes me," check it out

with the teacher and/or yard duty. If that appears to be true, start thinking of your child's habits. What are they doing that might not attract friends? Do they have off-putting habits (not acting their age, bossiness, being in others' space, etc.) Have conversations which include problem-solving skills, compromising, sharing, reading non-verbal cues.

Don't impose your standards of popularity on your child. Some kids are just fine with one or two good friends. Second grade is all about figuring out "who am I good with?" As parents you probably won't be able to influence friendships quite as much as now, and that will be increasingly true. Your child might even want to be friends with someone you don't like. You can certainly have conversations about why you think this isn't a good combination, but be sure to ask your child first what s/he likes about the other child. Then you can make your observations about how his/her behavior changes (negatively) after a play date with that person. A compromise position for you is to have that child over to your house, so you can better monitor what goes on between the children and set your own behavioral standards.

II. Academically:

Teachers are now preparing the kids for next year. The second half of first grade is now like the old second grade. Dr. Gold says the transition into second grade will be more gradual. Responsibility will increase. If your child is wiggly and cannot pay attention, address this before the end of the first grade year. If they can sit quietly and work for a while, the transition shouldn't be that difficult.

The new standards will be much more critical thinking-based, though our curriculum has focused on critical thinking for a long time. Testing will likely be scheduled for several times a year in second (and all) grades with the new Common Core Standards, instead of the May testing only, as it is now. Fortunately, our school doesn't obsess about preparing for testing

There was a question about there being a parent information meeting about the Common Core? Not that we know of yet.
