

Dear Mount Sinai Parents,

I want to start this letter by thanking you for an amazing first year. This community has been so welcoming and accepting of me. This first year has been so much better than I had any right to expect. As I wrap up my first year, I'm excited about the places we are going as a school.

At the beginning of the year, I gave a survey to parents about our school. I'm also giving a survey this month to reflect on 2017/2018 and look towards 2018/2019. I take these responses seriously and use them to plan next steps as a school. Please look at our school's website for a link to the survey and take a few minutes to fill it out.

The biggest change for our school is that we are starting a new reading program! The program is Teachers' College's Reading Workshop. We have set up a section of our website with videos and resources to help understand the program. In addition, I'll be talking about the program again at Back to School Night in September. In this letter, I'll give a quick overview and talk about the changes you can expect to see as a parent.

In the past, Mount Sinai has used a textbook, or "basal reader", approach to reading. In that setup, the children are reading from the same text and are tested at the end of the text to gauge their understanding of that text. In a "workshop" approach, the children are all reading different books while the teacher talks about skills and strategies they can use in their own individual books. These books are differentiated by "level" as well as interest.

**In the beginning of the year, we'll assess the students to set their "just right" level on a scale from A-to-Z.** We want students spending most of their time reading books that are not too hard as well as not too easy. Students may also be reading some books that may be a bit hard, or a bit easy, but interest them. For example, if a student loves baseball we would still want them to read a baseball book that is a few "levels above" where they have been assessed if it interests them. The goal of the program is to increase students' independence and cultivate a lifelong love of reading.

As the year goes on, we will see their levels rise and change (more rapidly in the lower grades) and they will get new books weekly by "shopping" in their classroom libraries. Sometimes students will be reading with partners and in book clubs, while other times they will be reading independently. Very young readers will read multiple books during a single workshop. Older readers will read one book over several days or a week. While the children read, the teacher works with small groups or meets with individual readers.

The reading curriculum is divided into units of study. A unit of study focuses on a set of reading skills and often a specific genre of text. For instance, in a mystery book club unit, children not only read mysteries, they learn to read more closely, thinking hard about small details that authors lay out as clues.

**As a parent, you'll notice a few big changes. The succinct way to state it would be: Less testing, less homework, more books and reading.** Our goal is "eyes on texts" as much as possible. We are teaching our students the skills needed to pick up a book and not only read the words, but comprehend the text on a deeper level. This is not a skill that is assessed through a weekly or monthly test. The students will be assessed on the level of text they are able to read fluently and talk about on a deep level. That is what will be reflected on report cards and in conversations with teachers throughout the year.

Having seen this approach in multiple schools that I've worked in over the years, I know the power of the work and the potential it brings to Mount Sinai. I cannot wait to walk into classrooms next year that will be filled with books where students are reading independently and talking about their books.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out and email me over the summer. I can't wait for you to see this program in action. If we don't speak, have a great summer and remember to keep reading with your children to get them ready for the fall!

Sincerely,

Rob Catlin  
Principal  
Mount Sinai Elementary