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Great First Week!

Wow! I couldn't have dreamed up a nicer class than the one that showed up last Tuesday! They were so excited, a little shy, and totally willing to try new things! We worked on setting up rules and procedures, as you saw from the homework. It takes a couple weeks for everyone to get comfortable with new expectations, but I think this class is picking things up extra quickly, and we're moving right along. We also spent time building a community and working together. It's going to be a phenomenal year!

I love reading, so I'm happy to announce that we've been learning procedures for checking out books and practicing thinking while reading. I have an electronic library system, similar to the one in the school's library. Each student received a library card to check out any book in my collection. I only print and laminate one nice card per year for each student, so we've talked about where to put them to keep them safe. It's a great way to practice responsibility! We talked about how to choose books and practiced finding books that were just right for us. Books from my library can be read at school or at home, and must be returned in two weeks. I've also started reading with the students, going through leveled assessments so that I can target my instruction and help them soar as readers. I hope your kids are as excited as I am about reading this year!

We also spent time reviewing the parts of the brain, which most students remember from second grade. In third grade, we go deeper into the subject, and focus extensively on how each child learns their best. This is a great unit for third graders, who are eager to establish themselves as individuals. As I discover how they learn best and how they can best show their understanding, I am able to provide more opportunities for success! During our goal-setting conferences next month, we'll be able to talk more about your child's unique learning style and how that will be honored in the classroom.

Students also learned about the elements of line and shape as they created alphabet art, modeled after the cubism artist Stuart Davis! This project connects students to our theme this year: Relationships. All of the letters connect to each other, forming interesting shapes, and students discussed the relationship between language and art. They're really neat! Keep your eyes out for them on curriculum night!

Now that most of the procedural learning has been presented, there's more time to delve into content areas. We'll continue setting practices for guided reading in class while I assess students. We're also starting our new math curriculum this week. Because students were introduced to this curriculum last year, they are moving much more quickly than my third graders last year, who were brand-new to it! I administered a pre-test and learned that my students are well-versed in number sense! We'll start word study in the next few weeks, which is another one of my favorites! Students will get a practice set of words, and I'll introduce the routines. In a couple of weeks, once everyone knows what to do, I'll be placing students in groups according to their developmental stage of spelling. I'll send more information when we begin!

You already saw one of my weekly communication tools: "Friday Updates," which inform you of your child's work completion, effort, and behavior. I hope you find these helpful.

Thank you all so much for your kind emails this week! It sounds as though your kiddos are just as excited about this class and this year as I am! You can look forward to a newsletter like this nearly every week this year. I send them first thing Monday morning. I have such a great feeling about this year because your kids are amazing. Please keep in touch as questions arise. I look forward to getting to know each of you a little better this year, as well!

Dates to Remember

Curriculum Night 6pm	Sept 15
PTSA Walkathon	Sept 19-23
School Photos	Sept 27
Early Dismissal-Conferences	Oct 3, 4, 6
No school-LEAP	Oct 7

Parent News

Thank you so much for completing and returning that (very long) survey. It's an excellent way for me to get to know your children better. It also helps me to understand how you view school work, which is an essential understanding for us in working together as a team. Some of you had questions that will be answered at Curriculum Night on Thursday, September 15th. We'll meet at 6:00 pm in my classroom. If you have not yet completed the survey, please do so before Wednesday this week so that I can tailor my Curriculum Night presentation to meet your needs!

Thanks also to those of you who have turned in the check for supply money. If you haven't been able to get to it this week, don't worry! I know how busy this time of year is for everyone. Please send in one check made out to Rosa Parks Elementary School for \$35.00. This money will be used for classroom supplies and project materials.

I am so eager to sit down with all of you and your children to set goals. Luckily, the district has moved to goal-setting conferences with everyone in October! In the next few weeks, you'll see lots of homework assignments related to goal-setting in the content areas (reading, writing, math) and lifeskills. This will help prepare both you and your child for our conference next month (October 3-6). In the mean time, if you have questions, please feel free to ask! If you haven't already signed up for a conference time, please bring your calendar to Curriculum Night, where I will have a sign-up sheet available.

Homework Plan

Homework is one area that I always find the most challenging as a teacher! From your surveys, it's clear that everyone has a different expectation and a different outlook on homework. Some families feel it interferes with other activities and would rather have no homework, while others feel that homework is extremely important and something to be done every day for an extended period. You can probably guess that it's hard for me to make everyone happy in this department!

In addition to family expectations, I also consider the research I've read about homework. There is no correlation between academic achievement and homework in elementary or middle school students. That always makes me wonder, "Why am I doing this?" It is usually because I'm trying to please everyone!

The best situation would be that I accommodate for everyone and make individual homework plans. This is something I would like to speak with you about individually, preferably at our October conference. If we work as a team, I believe we can create a plan that will work for everyone. And, as I said in my last letter to you, I am a fan of risk-taking! We can try this together and evaluate its success as we go!

For the time being, I'm going to continue giving homework on a nightly, as-needed basis. Last week you signed a few forms as homework, which does help establish routines both here and at school. This week, I'll introduce the reading log to help motivate readers at home. And in the next few weeks, you'll see occasional math homework and goal-setting forms.

Thanks for your support on this matter! I'm very excited to work with you to try and find a plan that works for you and your family. Feel free to share any ideas you have now, though we may not set a final plan until conference time.

How Can You Help?

If you are one of my eager volunteers, please read! I have a project for you. Students are finishing up their Passion Posters this week. These are the covers to their writer's notebooks. I will need volunteers to cut each poster, paste it onto a composition notebook, and cover it with contact paper, making sure to secure all edges. I have all the supplies ready to go. Just pop in and check the "Volunteer Opportunities" box in the classroom, right next to the door. There's a sample on top to help you.

My students are very excited about the prospect of sitting on exercise balls during class. Over the years, I have found these to be extremely helpful tools, as they allow for constant movement. They actually improve the focus of students! I have 14 balls available for "rent". You may choose to purchase a ball for your child. If so, please look for a 55cm Stayball, or something that keeps the ball in place (I've seen some with "udders"). If you do purchase a ball, please pump it up before sending it to school with your child! You may also choose to send in the pump as mine are all broken! Thanks for the help!

**"Fear paralyzes.
Curiosity empowers.
Be more curious
than afraid."
- Patricia Alexander**