February 20, 2015

Dear Families,

Thank you for attending Technology Night! The panel discussion was wonderful and I want to thank Nate Blackford, Lesley Martin, and Shae Zion for participating. Thanks to Carol Sprading, Scott Bell, Michael Rogers, and Diana Linville for facilitating the learning of Scribblers, Scratch, and Scratch Jr. Thanks to the Computer Science students for helping all of us work through the programs. I know this collaboration is here to stay and we will explore more opportunities for future endeavors.

The first week of March brings a fantastical week of fun with Dr. Seuss’ birthday and Read Across America. Stay tuned for more information next week.

I want to provide some updates on what is going on in Horace Mann classrooms and this week the update is on reading. In the coming weeks I will talk about Summer School and possible child care (a survey was emailed on Thursday), Project Lead the Way, and University Partnerships/Collaborations.

Reading:
Horace Mann is implementing a Readers Workshop model of reading instruction. In Readers Workshop, students are given an opportunity to read at their own level and choose their own books. Research has shown that motivation predicts reading volume, which improves achievement (Allington). Students are invited to become actively involved in their learning, and in the process learn more about how to read various kinds of texts (Atwell). Teachers use mini-lessons to provide instruction and guidance to students. Independent reading is reading a student does on their own in a book that fits their needs. Shared Reading is when the teacher is reading aloud and the students are also reading the same book with the teacher. Teachers also meet with small groups to address specific skills that students have. The small groups are fluid, change often, and meet the needs of individual students. Some things you are probably hearing from your child:
Choosing a Just Right Book—students turn to a page in a book and read. They use the five finger rule to determine if the book is a right fit for them or not. In choosing a just-right book, the students also follow the I - PICK expectations. These include:

I - I Choose the book.
P - Purpose → Why am I reading this book?
I - Interesting → Do I like this book, and is it interesting?
C - Comprehend → Do I comprehend what I am reading?
K - Know → Do I know most of the words?

Metacognition—Thinking about your thinking. Using the metaphor, "driving their brains" we can guide students toward thinking about how they can best learn. Teaching students about metacognition is an effective teaching/learning practice that has been proven to impact student learning. The strategy of Metacognition is the umbrella over all of the other strategies, and these include Schema, Visualization or Mental Images, Questioning, Determining Importance, Inferring and Synthesizing. The teachers introduce these strategies using concrete lessons that tie the metacognitive thinking to the importance of the strategies in the texts that they choose to read. Then, the teachers gradually release the strategic thinking to their students, and the students facilitate the conferences and their thinking based on the strategy(s) being used.

Conferring—Conferring involves students becoming involved in their own reading. This is where the students use codes (post-it notes), based on the 7 strategies of reading comprehension. They spend time independently reading self-chosen books, and confer with their teachers about what they are reading, and how those comprehension strategies help them understand the book that they are reading with deeper comprehension.

Have a nice weekend and I hope you stay warm.
Thanks for sharing your children with us!

Sincerely,
Sandy Seipel