

August 16, 1999

Dear Parents,

This week begins a brand new school year for all of us! I would like to welcome back my students from last year, and I'd also like to extend a warm welcome to my new students. As always, the start of a school year holds the promise of new discovery and learning, as well as the prospect of personal growth in all areas.

I have put together a handbook of information to help you and your child become familiar with my expectations for the school year. Please take a day or two to read through this information, then sign your name on the line below. On Thursday I will check each student's handbook for a signature. In this way I can be sure that all parents have seen our class handbook. Then you may want to keep the handbook in a special place so that you may refer to it throughout the year. If you need to contact me, I prefer email if possible. My email address is [candlers@att.net](mailto:candlers@att.net). I check my email several times a day and I will respond promptly. If you do not have email, you may call the school and leave a message (868-2800).

I'm looking forward to an exciting year with my class. Thank you for your cooperation in getting this year off to a great start!

Sincerely,



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Parent Signature(s)

## **Cooperative Learning**

I wholeheartedly believe in cooperative learning in the classroom. I have placed my students in mixed ability groups so that they may help each other during the learning process. Research has shown that all students do better when they are allowed to discuss and defend their ideas as they learn. Working in small groups also helps students learn valuable social skills they will need throughout life.

Parents are often concerned about grades in the cooperative learning classroom. I want to assure parents that all grades come from individual assignments and tests. No student's grade will be raised or lowered based on the performance of others in the group.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss cooperative learning with anyone who has questions or concerns. I've had great success with this technique in recent years, and I'd love the chance to convince anyone of the benefits of cooperative learning!

## **Weekly Progress Reports**

I want to inform you of my way of communicating with you each week. I send home a weekly progress report each Friday, and I ask that you sign it and return it on Monday. I will attach all the graded papers for that week to the form, and on the top of the report I will write how many papers are attached. Please remove the papers, read over the comments on the progress report, sign it, and return it to school with your child on the due date.

I will always send home a weekly progress report (or notify you that one will not be sent), so don't accept any excuses for your child not having a progress report on Friday. If I do not receive the form with your signature, I will call you to be sure you have seen your child's progress report for the previous week.

The items listed on the form are stated in a positive manner. (See the example on the next page). If there are no checkmarks beside any behaviors, reward your child for a super week in school. If there are checks, please discuss with your child ways of improving those behaviors in the future. When we work together, this weekly progress report system is extremely effective.





## Materials Needed

Please send the following materials for your child:

- ◆ Loose-leaf notebook (such as a trapper keeper) with pocket folders
- ◆ Loose-leaf notebook paper
- ◆ Single subject composition books (6)
- ◆ Pencils with erasers
- ◆ Box of colored pencils
- ◆ Pocket folders with 3 prongs (4)



Please send at least 2 of the following items for the class:

- ◆ Rectangular box of baby wipes for clean-up
- ◆ Box of Kleenex
- ◆ Pump-style hand soap



## Learning Choice Time

One unusual aspect of my program is that I have learning centers in my classroom. I call this program "Learning Choice Time" because students are allowed to choose activities that interest them. Some of the activities are required, but many are optional. Students may watch a filmstrip, do a science experiment, play a math skill game, or choose from a menu of other activities. Students record the results of their activities in a "Learning Log" which is a spiral bound notebook. I grade this notebook each week. I plan to start using centers by the end of September.

## Classroom Library

I maintain a small classroom library. I allow several students to serve as "librarians" to help me monitor the collection. Students may only check out one book at a time. To do this, they sign their name next to the name of the book in our Book Log. To return the book, students place the book on the rack in the book box so that the class librarian can mark off the book as returned.



Several times a month I allow students to order books from Carnival, Trumpet or Arrow book club. By sending in a book order, I receive free books for my classroom library. When ordering books, please make a check out to the book club directly. I am not permitted to accept cash.

## Homework/Classwork

I believe that homework is necessary for practicing skills that have been learned or for enriching the classroom experience. In many cases, homework is simply classwork that was not finished. I try to give ample time in class for the completion of most assignments, but some students work more slowly than others and must finish at home.



In order to help students get their homework assignments done, students will take home a homework folder each night. They will write their assignments on a chart in the folder. After they complete an assignment, they should place it in the Completed Assignments pocket. I encourage parents to check your child's homework folder each night.

I expect all homework and classwork to be turned in on time. As a general rule, late assignments will not be accepted or graded. However, students will have the opportunity to earn "homework passes" throughout the year. A homework pass can be used in the place of some assignments, or may be used to extend an assignment's due date (one day per homework pass.) I encourage students to save their homework passes in case they forget an assignment or have a legitimate situation which prevents them from completing their work. Students will not be allowed to call home if they forget their work. Organization is the key to success!

Students will be given a homework grade based on whether or not homework is completed. Students who complete all homework will receive a "100" to average in with their other grades for that subject. Those who do not complete all assignments will be graded accordingly. Homework grades will count toward the final nine week's grade.

## Absences

Regular school attendance is critical to the learning process. When your child is absent, he or she misses valuable instructional time. Please send a written note of explanation whenever your child is absent. State law requires us to code each absence as lawful or unlawful. **Lawful** absences include illness and doctor's appointments. **Unlawful** absences include out-of-town trips, missing the bus, and family vacations. Students are permitted to make up work missed during lawful absences. However, some activities will be difficult or impossible for students to make up (such as science experiments and hands-on math activities). Therefore, your child may be given an alternate assignment.

## Physical Education Program

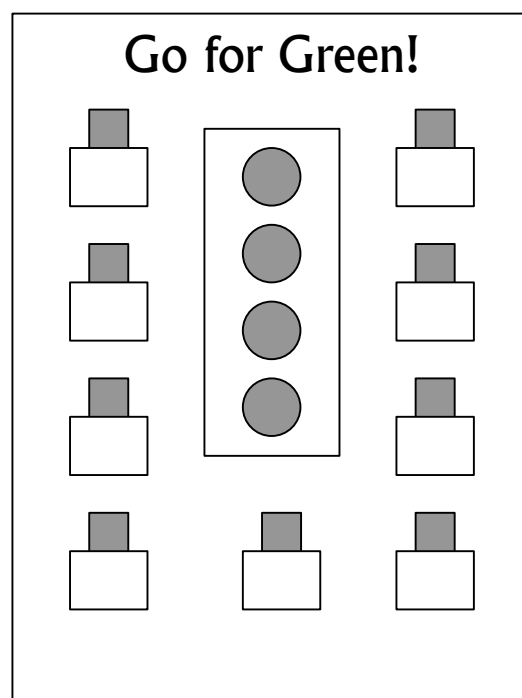
Our class participates in physical education everyday. We do exercises, run laps, practice P.E. skills, and play games. Therefore, your child needs to wear appropriate clothing and footwear each day. Students who wear dress clothes or shoes should be prepared to change into appropriate clothing before our P.E. period. Slick shoes or restrictive clothing can be a hazard during physical education activities. If you feel your child should not participate in P.E. on a particular day, please write a note stating the reason. All children will be expected to participate unless they have a note excusing them. Any child who brings an excuse note will be sent to Mrs. Graziano, our P.E. teacher, for approval.



## Stoplight Behavior Management System

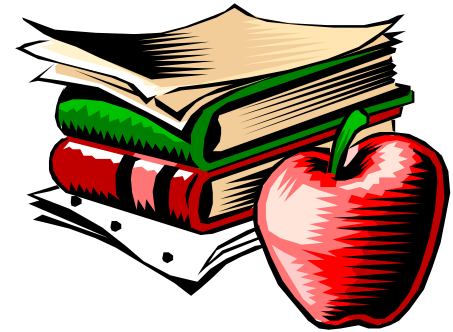
I want to explain a very effective behavior management system that I use in my classroom. The bulletin board at the front of the room shows a stoplight with four colors: green, yellow, orange, and red. Numbered pockets surround the stoplight. Each student has a number, and each person's pocket contains a strip of colored paper. Everyone begins each day with "green for go" showing. If a class rule is broken, the color changes to yellow, which is the first caution. If another behavior problem occurs that day, the color will change to orange, the second caution. Furthermore, the student will have to complete a Time Out worksheet explaining their inappropriate behavior and how they plan to correct the problem. These Time Out forms will be sent home to parents to be signed and returned. The color red is reserved for very severe discipline problems. Such behavior will usually result in a phone call home or a trip to the office. I also use the stoplight system to reward students who behave appropriately.

If this system sounds confusing, you may want to visit our class and observe the stoplight system in action. It's actually quite simple and allows me to devote more time to teaching and less time to handling discipline problems.



## Literature Circles

Research has shown that the way to become a good reader is to simply READ! With this in mind, I have developed a reading program which requires students to read novels in addition to their regular reading textbook. I call this program "Literature Circles" because we have small groups of students reading different novels and each group has a weekly "circle meeting" with me to discuss their book. This is an exciting approach to reading, and one that fourth graders enjoy.



At the beginning of each session, students choose the novel they want to read from the 3 that I present to the class. We take several weeks or a month to read a novel. Students have weekly deadlines to meet which include specific pages and assignments. Students who miss the deadlines do not participate in the discussion groups and earn a 0 for that week's reading grade. Parents can help by posting deadlines on a calendar at home and providing time at home for reading the novel. We will start Literature Circles later this fall.

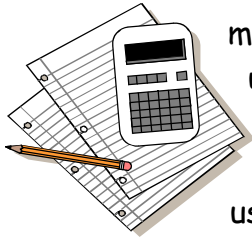
## Accelerated Reader

The Accelerated Reader program is a reading incentive program. Students read novels from a selected list and then take short computer quizzes to test comprehension. Students earn points based on the difficulty of the book and their performance on the quiz. Incentives are offered to students and classes according to the number of points accumulated.



Although students may participate in the AR program at any time, during some months I will require students to meet a point goal, such as 5 or 8 points every two weeks. The points will convert to a letter grade and be recorded. This year we are going to focus on choosing challenging, high-quality books. Students will be tested at the beginning of the year to find out their approximate reading level. This will allow me to recommend books in a particular reading range for each student. Students will record their books and test results in their AR Logs.

## Calculator Use



My students will be learning to solve increasingly complex mathematical word problems this year. It's important that they learn to use a calculator as a problem-solving tool. Students may use calculators to complete math homework problems that involve geometry, fractions, word problems, etc. However, students may not use calculators for skill drills and basic computation.

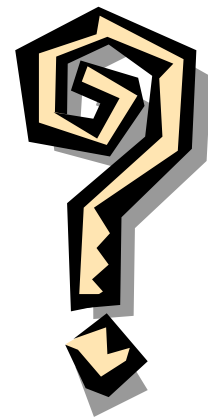
## Daily Math Drills

In my experience, students cannot move on to higher level reasoning in mathematics until they master their basic math facts. Our math class will be performing daily drills beginning with basic addition facts. To demonstrate mastery, students must correctly perform all 50 addition problems in 4 minutes or less. We will also drill on subtraction, multiplication, and division facts. You can help your child prepare by studying with flashcards or using a homemade drill worksheet. You can even call out math facts to your child while driving in the car or waiting in the doctor's office!

After students master a set of math facts, they are excused from repeating that particular drill. Instead, they may use this time to complete other assignments. Students who do not attain mastery after several weeks will be given math drills to perform at home with parent supervision.

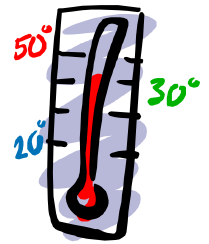
## Weekly Math Challenge

Each week I will send home a challenging math word problem for homework. Students must try to solve the problem on their own, but they may get help if needed. They are encouraged to use a calculator and any other tools necessary to solve the problem. After they solve the problem, they will write the answer and a paragraph explaining how they solved the problem. Students are also encouraged to illustrate their solution with a picture or chart. I will announce the solution to the Weekly Math Challenge on the School Biz line each Friday.



## Science Buddy Program

We will again be participating in the Science Buddies program. This program involves students taking home one science activity a month to complete at home with an adult Science Buddy. The experiments use simple household materials and generally take no more than 15 minutes to complete. Each activity comes with several questions to talk over. You will receive more information about this program at the end of the month. Your first activity will be sent home on September 1<sup>st</sup> and will be due later that month. Both parents and students have loved this program in the past, and I'm sure you will look forward to each month's investigation.



## Lunch Money

As you know, students who do not receive free lunch must either pay for one or bring their own from home. Each year I have a major problem with students who forget their money or lose it before lunch. Lending money to students is very inconvenient and expensive, since students frequently forget to pay me back.

Having students pay by the week or the month can eliminate most lunch money problems. Our school has a computerized system which effectively keeps track of all money paid in to each child's account. When a student is absent or chooses not to eat lunch, the money remains in his or her account for the next week.



The cost of school lunch is \$1.40 (40 cents for reduced) so a weekly ticket will cost \$7.00 (full price) or \$2.00 (reduced price). Please help me avoid lunchtime problems by purchasing a weekly ticket if you normally pay on a daily basis. (Checks should be made out to E.E. Miller School).

## Candler Kids on the Web

Our class has a home on the Internet! We have a class web page on which we display student work and list our honor roll and other awards. Parents can visit the web page to view a monthly activity calendar and keep up-to-date on classroom events. Our web site is located at <http://home.att.net/~candlers>. If you would like to contact Mrs. Candler by email, you can use the email link on the web page or write to her at [candlers@att.net](mailto:candlers@att.net).

