A No-Nonsense Guide to “Teacher Talk”

Maybe it was a glance at your child’s weekly school schedule, or perhaps she arrived at home repeating an unfamiliar term her teacher used in the classroom. You may have wondered… So, here is a guide to some often-used “school words”.

**Standards-based**
Standards are a list of the skills, concepts, and abilities (what one knows and is able to do) that a typical student has command of by the end of each grade level. All units, lessons, and tests are based on those standards. In Salem (and most other US school districts) our work is based on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). For details go to www.corestandards.org

**Workshop model**
Salem’s reading, writing, and math classes in grades K-8 use the workshop model structure. As the term suggests, these classrooms are humming with activity. Teachers open the class with a focus lesson, or teaching point. This is brief but intense and always connected to the previous days’ work. When all students are ready, they are sent off (with a clear purpose) to work. As kids engage in the challenging, wonderful work of reading, writing, and math - alone, with a partner, or in a small group - the teacher is very busy as well. The teacher is a coach - providing all manner of support and assistance to students (again, individually or in groups). Near the period’s end, students are called back together for a quick conclusion of the session. Questions are answered, work is shared, and accomplishment is celebrated. Lots of reading and writing is happening!

**Word study**
Far more than simply lists of spelling words, this broad term includes a variety of strategies and skills that are essential to effective reading and writing. Word Study can be grouped into Nine Areas of Learning: Early Literacy Concepts, Phonological Awareness, Letter Knowledge, Letter-Sound Relationships, Spelling Patterns, High-Frequency Words, Word Meaning/Vocabulary, Word Structure, and Word-Solving Actions. Each of these is a tool. “Their importance lies in their contribution to reading and writing continuous text.”¹

**Assessment**
Assessment is the use of many tools (both formal and informal) to document or show what a student knows and is able to do. Tests are just one form of assessment. The results of any test or task given to a group fall within a range of success – think of rungs on a ladder. Assessment, used properly, shows the way up the ladder. The goal, always - is progress, or growth. Assessment is a beginning, not an end. Salem’s new report cards reflect this understanding.

- **Pre-assessments & post-assessments**
  New learning is built on the foundation of what is already known. Gaining new knowledge depends on the mastery of earlier fundamental skills. Pre-assessments are given at the beginning of units (particularly literacy and math) to see if students know what they need to in order to conquer new learning. If not, review and more teaching are needed. Post-assessments happen at the end of units to gauge students’ understanding of the topic. Those results too, likely lead to further teaching.

- **i-Ready tests**
  Three times a year, in September, January, and May, students use classroom laptops to take both a reading and a math test. These tests pinpoint individualized, specific areas of strength and need. Also, the autumn tests give a baseline, or starting point, against which mid-year (January) and year-end (May) growth can be measured. Each test can usually be completed in little more than a class period, and the results are valuable.

**NH SAS (New Hampshire Statewide Assessment System)**
These assessments, scheduled for late spring, replace the Smarter Balanced tests from previous years. The NH Department of Education states, “Assessments are used to gauge how well students are mastering the standards – and ultimately how ready students are for college and career education and training. New Hampshire students in grades 3-8 and 11 will take (this) common statewide assessment for English language arts (ELA)/writing and mathematics”.

**Benchmarking**
By paying very close attention and noting errors during a student’s reading & discussion of a very short book (either fiction or nonfiction), teachers gain key information about the child’s ability to read and understand text. The books are leveled (or matched to a particular time within a grade). For example Level R is about where a typical fourth grader would be reading in March. A student’s success (or struggle) reading the text helps identify a level of achievement, as well as skills in need of improvement. Repeating this process two or three times during the year shows one’s progress over time.

**Project Lead the Way**
Project Lead the Way is an exciting STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) curriculum that uses hands-on projects and activities to teach vital 21st-century skills. Problem solving, critical thinking, collaboration are key features. Elements of computer science, engineering, and biomedical science are introduced in all elementary grades. The program’s use of technology, and real-world hands-on problem solving ignites students’ enthusiasm. It is a treat to see how much kids enjoy these classes. Copy this link to see a video introduction to PLTW. [https://youtu.be/al65aeTBKNE](https://youtu.be/al65aeTBKNE)

**ST Math**
ST Math is a math software program based on games and puzzles that start off simply and get more challenging as a student progresses. The goal of ST Math is to develop problem solving skills in an interactive, engaging way. Fourth grade ST Math topics include place value, fraction addition and subtraction, geometry concepts, and more. Another element of the program helps to develop speedy and accurate use of math facts. Kids can practice from home too. Adapted from [www.mindresearch.org](http://www.mindresearch.org)

**Reading Support time**
Fisk School classrooms at have a 30-minute block set aside each day for reading support. During this time, some students may receive assistance from specialists such as resource room or Title One staff who spend me in the classroom to help. Others may move to different locations to get individual or small group help. Students getting help during this block will not be missing any classroom lessons or instruction. This “catch-up” time also gives teachers more opportunity to work closely with individuals or small groups of learners.

**Intervention Block**
This is special classroom time, thirty minutes twice a week, dedicated to targeted instruction in both reading and math. In preparation, a teacher may ask himself, “What skills does this student (or these students) need to work on right now?” It is valuable time, when kids can do the reading or math work that is most helpful to them. This focused work can be done alone, with a partner, or in a small group, but its structure is provided by the teacher.