



Pathways for Parents



A Differentiation Publication

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Hello!

Welcome to the first differentiation newsletter for families of students in School District 123!

The teachers of the district have received a newsletter for the last three years, and this year the district decided that with the newly expanded and improved website, it would also like to include a differentiation publication for parents.

The purpose of the newsletter is to provide you some information about differentiation and how it is used as an instructional approach within our elementary classrooms. Hopefully, the information shared here will be useful in supporting you with your children's education.

Like this newsletter, the teachers' publication is entitled, Pathways. The name, Pathways, was chosen because differentiation is like a road trip. Some people like a straight shot to their destination. Some never get lost. Some like the scenic view. Some need to stop regularly for directions. Differentiation supports the many ways in which our students learn. The paths for students might be different, but they are all heading toward a destination. The district's goal is to make sure that our students reach their destinations through whatever pathways they are able to do so.

What Is Differentiation?

Students come to school with a variety of strengths and needs. Teachers understand that students learn in different ways. Put simply, differentiation is an approach to instruction that allows for those differences in the students in our classrooms with the goals of learning in mind. There are many ways teachers differentiate throughout the day in order to enable students to grow as learners.

This newsletter will discuss one aspect of what can be differentiated, one way in which teachers can differentiate instruction, and one strategy used to facilitate this process.

What Can We Differentiate?

One classroom element that teachers often differentiate is the environment. The classroom environment includes one that provides a balance between student-directed and teacher-directed activities, independence and dependence, whole and small group, and open-ended and specific activities. By providing variety within the classroom environment, teachers can foster greater student engagement and learning.

How Can We Differentiate?

A factor that is frequently used as a basis for differentiated instruction is student readiness. This simply means that the teacher teaches where the child is at in relationship to what he or she must learn. For example, students who demonstrate mastery of a concept might work with more complex and open-ended activities, whereas, students who need extra reinforcement might work with the teacher reviewing a given skill or strategy. The idea is to meet the students where they are at and do what is needed to help them progress along their learning continuum.

Flexible Grouping

One particular strategy that is used on a daily basis in District 123 classrooms is flexible grouping for reading. Teachers work with small reading groups called guided reading groups, according to students' levels of readiness for reading. Skills and strategies are reinforced or extended through flexible groups that can change based on student need.

