

*Here is a draft letter that you might use to communicate with your students' caregivers. We plan to share more drafts to help you correspond between school and home and would love for you to forward us copies of any other letters you've written so we can share those across our teaching community, as well.*

Dear Families of <insert class>,

As the school year gets going, I want to write to tell you a bit about my approach--our school's approach--to teaching your child to read. Here are some important things that you should know.

First, we understand that little kids come to school, excited that they'll be learning to read and write, and I do everything I can to communicate that reading and writing are just the greatest gifts on earth. I'll say things like, "A rainy day! I just love rainy days because I get to stay inside and read, read, read!" or "Let's give ourselves a special treat today and have not just one read aloud time but TWO!" I say similar things about writing. "Look at these extra special marker pens I got for the class. These will help us all write lots and lots of stories. And today, we'll have a chance to share our stories with each other."

Next, know that at this school, we absolutely believe kids need to be taught their ABC's. (I actually think most teachers across the whole nation know that--but in any case, I surely do!) We follow the research that tells us which letters are easier for kids to learn before others--so although the alphabet starts with A, B, C... we actually begin by teaching letters such as M and S, alongside a study of the letters and sounds in our names. During conferences, I'll be happy to explain why certain letters may be easier to grasp than others, and I'll also tell you more about the research that informs our yearlong phonics curriculum. But know for certain that we teach phonics every day.

Lastly, you can count on the fact that we don't just teach the content of phonics, we also teach little ones to USE the phonics they have learned to read and to write as best they can. Another time, I'll explain what early reading and writing look like--but for now, just know that it's important for kids to use whatever they know about letters and sounds and about how print in English goes to begin to read and write. That means, if a kindergartener at the very start of the year pretends to read (reciting a familiar book from memory), I'm apt to celebrate that approximation, "You are reading!" and then to say, "Let me show you how a book works..." and I'll then demonstrate and coach the child to read top to bottom, left to right, word by word. Similarly, a child might label the parts of their drawing with the most salient sound they hear in the word; for instance, recording a C or S for the /sssss/ they hear in the word *house*. Over time and with more phonics instruction, their reading and spelling will become increasingly conventional and sophisticated.

I'll be writing to you regularly to tell you more about the teaching that you can expect across this year. Please let me know if you ever have any questions. I am so excited to partner with you and watch your child grow as a reader and writer!

Yours truly,

<insert name>