

# Questions and Answers for Parents on Fountas & Pinnell Assessments and Reading Levels

## **What do teachers use to assess the reading levels of students?**

We use an assessment called the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System. This one-on-one assessment involves the teacher listening to a student read followed by a discussion of the text.

## **What information does this assessment provide?**

This test provides information on the reader's accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. This allows teachers to determine a student's independent and instructional reading level. Fountas & Pinnell levels (also known as guided reading levels) are rated on an A to Z gradient. Each grade level has a range of levels that you would expect a reader to proceed through during the year, with A as the starting kindergarten level and Z being a middle school level.

## **What's the difference between independent and instructional reading levels?**

An *independent* reading level is when the reader knows most of the words and can comprehend the text without too much difficulty. A book at the independent level is often referred to as a "just right" book. These books help students become better readers through ample practice. An independent level book should sound smooth and feel comfortable to read.

A book at an *instructional* reading level is more challenging for the reader, but is not too hard. A book at this level is right on the edge of the child's learning. Teachers use sets of guided reading books from the book room to support small groups of students in reading at their instructional level.

## **Why was this assessment selected?**

The Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System was selected because the best way to find out what a reader's strengths and weaknesses are is to listen to the student read. The Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System was adopted district-wide in 2011 after a careful review of the best reading assessments available.

## Is it important for parents to check the reading level of each book a child reads?

No. The A to Z guided reading level is a useful tool that teachers use to assess, instruct, and evaluate students. It is not essential that parents verify the level of a book when supporting readers at home. The “I-PICK” method for choosing a just right book is introduced in class and is a good approach for helping a student select books.

A “Just Right” book is one you are interested in and that you can read accurately, fluently, and with good comprehension.

### **I-PICK**

**P**urpose – I have a reason to read this book.

**I**nterest – I am really interested in this topic, story, or author!

**C**omprehension – I understand the text and can retell it (story elements, big ideas, and supporting details).

**K**now – I know almost every word and I can read it smoothly and with expression.

Sometimes a student might be very interested in reading a book but it is too difficult. That book might be a good one to read aloud to the child or provide an alternative way to access the book, such as through an audio recording. With continued progress, a book that was too hard at one time will eventually become one that the student can read independently!