

LIFE AFTER 3RD GRADE



Marguerite Montgomery Elementary School 1411 Danbury Street, Davis, CA 95618 Principal: Shelly Wickwire
Website: <http://www.djUSD.k12.ca.us/Montgomery> e-mail: montgomery@djUSD.k12.ca.us Phone: (530) 759-2100

What to expect in the 4th grade

By Julie Williams

Remember back when your child was a toddler, and fourth graders looked so big? Well, as they move through school, only a year away from middle school, they're starting to *feel* that way too. Early big leaps, like reading first books or mastering addition, are giving way to steady strides.

Or so it seems. In fact, fourth grade also contains another leap: toward independent work. Homework has started by now, but fourth grade is usually the first year in which it will take on big weight and include long, home-based projects. While some kids move right along, expect some stumbles. Don't be surprised, for example, when you get a panicky look at the end of the day because a project you didn't know about is due tomorrow and every glue stick in the house has vanished.

As you prepare for these surprises, it's always good to have an idea of what's coming up. Here are the main areas covered in fourth grade across the country:

Reading. In a crucial shift that began as early as late second grade, your child is moving past early "learning to read" into a stage teachers call "reading to learn." Fourth graders still work on mechanics like vocabulary, but look, as well, for strategies that boost understanding. Want to help? Now is a great time to talk about what your child is reading, to encourage reading time at home, and to model good reading habits yourself.

Writing. By now, expect your child to be writing often in cursive (but don't be surprised if it loops and jiggles like mad). More importantly, expect more complex ideas: by the end of fourth grade, students should be able to write essays which use several kinds of sentence structures, express a relatively coherent thought, and use major punctuation correctly. This is one area in which computers can be very helpful. You can augment writing at school, for example, by having your child send regular email to a cousin, friend, or techno-savvy grandma.

Math. Building on previous concepts—such as place value, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, measurement and so on—fourth grade is a time of

INSIDE THIS PARENT INFORMATION NEWSLETTER

What to expect in the 4 th grade	1
4 th Grade Reading: What Happens	2
4 th Grade Writing: What Happens	2
4 th Grade Math: What Happens	3
School Projects: A Survival Guide	4
According to the School Psychologist: 4 th Grade	5
If you want to know more...	5
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)	6

consolidation. Expect your child to make even better friends with fractions, decimals, long division, measurement and basic geometry like lines and angles. Are you building responsible home-chore patterns at home? This is a great time to invite your child to help tabulate allowances or calculate the percentage you'd save by buying by bulk at the grocery store.

Science/Social Studies. While specific topics of inquiry differ by state and even by district, fourth grade science and social studies curriculum typically provide ways for teachers not only to teach these subjects, but to embed growing skills in reading and math as well. Don't be surprised, for example, if within a unit on electrical circuits, your child also learns to calculate and average data on charges; or, in a unit on state history (a common feature in many fourth grades), your child creates quite intricate reports.

For most kids, this is an exhilarating year. Once in a while, though, a child faced with challenges like doing research or writing several pages of linked ideas, may seem to curl up and wilt. Tempting as it may be for parents to sit back and relax a bit after the intense early grades, it's as important as ever to stay involved. Consider it a compliment, then, when your child sits down at the after-dinner table demanding your help with what looks like an endless poster project on worm development. It means you are trusted, and that's a priceless gift. You *can* help, and you should.

"In fact, fourth grade also contains another leap: toward independent work."

4th Grade Reading: What happens

By Amy James

Fourth grade reading is about getting faster and better at reading. Your child already has his basic reading skills in hand. Now he'll focus on using them with greater ease. Children in the fourth grade continue to work on the mechanics of reading, especially vocabulary skills, and expanding the number of words that they comfortably use. They'll also work quite a bit on reading comprehension, learning and using strategies to understand, interpret, and evaluate text.

Curriculum varies from state-to-state, but students working at the standard level at the beginning of fourth grade generally:

- Read with understanding and fluency
- Understand the meaning of synonyms, antonyms, and homonyms
- Identify the meaning of most compound words
- Use punctuation cues to add meaning to the text
- Use graphic organizers to aid comprehension
- Make reasonable predictions about something they are reading
- Identify the main idea of a passage
- Identify traits of characters in passages they are reading
- Summarize what has been read
- Know a large number of words by sight (don't have to sound them out)

Students working at the standard level at the end of fourth grade:

- Read with understanding and fluency
- Use graphic organizers to aid comprehension
- Visualize descriptions and details
- Can follow and give sequential directions
- Can summarize a story
- Can use past experiences to identify with characters
- Compare and contrast various things
- Understand cause-and-effect relationships
- Can use basic rules with quotation marks in dialog



4th Grade Writing: What Happens

By Amy James

In fourth grade, your child will probably be asked to write in cursive all or at least much of the time. Writing becomes even more important in all of the subjects, even math. Your child will be expressing his or her thoughts and ideas, as well as what has been learned, in book reports, research papers, essays, and poetry. Fourth graders continue to review and practice the parts of speech as well as learn how to make them plural and possessive. Your child will be writing to inform others, persuade others, and to express himself or herself in many ways.

Curriculum varies from state-to-state, but students who are working at the standard level at the beginning of fourth grade typically can:

- Communicate in writing
- Use writing to inform others
- Use writing to persuade others

- Identify nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs in a sentence
- Use adjectives to describe things and enhance their writing
- Use conjunctions
- Use common spelling rules
- Identify sentence types
- Write compound sentences

By the end of fourth grade, students working at the standard level:

- Use the writing process to compose
- Use various sentence types appropriately
- Use both simple and compound sentence structures
- Understand the parts of a sentence
- Use a broader vocabulary to express themselves
- Write in cursive neatly and consistently
- Recognize and use proper punctuation

4th Grade Math: What Happens

By Amy James

Fourth grade math is characterized by skill building and growth. Your child has learned many new mathematic concepts during the elementary years. This year your child will be refining his or her abilities. Fourth graders will build on those concepts learned in third grade and focus on four broad categories:

- Operations and computation
- Number sense and patterns
- Geometry and measurement
- Data analysis and probability

Curriculum varies from state-to-state, but there are some constants. Students working at the standard level at the beginning of fourth grade:

- Comfortably add and subtract large numbers
- Know the basic multiplication and division facts
- Understand how place value works in our number system
- Can round numbers in order to make a reasonable estimate
- Use tools, such as rulers and thermometers, to measure
- Can differentiate solids from shapes
- Can find factions of a whole and fractions of a set
- Understand basic probability and statistics
- Understand how bar graphs, line graphs, and tables communicate information



By the end of fourth grade, students working at the standard level:

- Discover, describe, and extend geometric and number patterns
- Solve simple math sentences that contain a variable
- Read, write and rename whole numbers through the millions
- Read, write and rename decimals to the hundreds
- Compare and order whole numbers and decimals
- Explore equivalent and nonequivalent fractions and begin to compare, add, and subtract them
- Multiply larger numbers
- Are comfortable with long division
- Begin developing mental math ability and estimation skills
- Know the basic characteristics of lines and angles
- Have established measurement benchmarks
- Can collect, record, and analyze data to investigate probability

School Projects: A Survival Guide

By Julie Williams

Heads up, parents. Just when you thought you'd finally gotten the household calendar straight, juggling kids' lessons, sports, homework...your fourth or fifth grader will come home with the news: time for an "independent project"!

You know, the kind that takes weeks of research. The kind with directions that say, "be creative." The kind that sent the neighbor kid's dad peeling out to the store last year for last minute supplies at 9:45 at night.

With all that bother, what's the point? Teachers assign projects as a powerful way to bring learning out of the classroom, and new ideas in. Projects typically start in the late elementary years and continue through high school. As kids grow, they need to learn to manage time, stuff, and ideas—and sure enough, a project hits all three.

So, does that mean chaos is unavoidable? Not at all, says Tiffani Chin, PhD., author of "School Sense," a manual for parents, and Executive Director of EdBoost, a nonprofit educational organization. Here's what she recommends:

1. **Start Early, and Make a Plan.** If you do nothing else, do this: Ask your child to show you *all* materials for the assignment. Then sit down with a calendar and help break down the assignment into specific parts. Mark deadlines for each chunk on a calendar together, showing what will be done, as well as when your child might go to the library for materials, or to the store for supplies. Young kids can almost never do this alone, and it's one of the most valuable long-term skills you can teach.

"Painful as it may be to watch, it's still crucial that you let your child be the person doing the report."



2. **Set reasonable expectations.** Painful as it may be to watch, it's still crucial that you let your child be the person doing the report. "It doesn't have to look like a high school report. If it's an 8 year-old's report, it should only look as good as an eight year-old wants to make it look good."
3. **Do help; but don't do it for your kid.** Chin says:
 - Research reading may be difficult. Help by reading aloud, and talking it over.
 - Parents can help transcribe bullet points, help with big picture sequence, or edit spelling, but the child's hand should be on keyboard or pen.
 - Do make sure your child doesn't cheat. "It's better not to finish," says Chin, "than to resort to plagiarism."
 - Insist that the hard stuff get done first: one of Chin's rules for poster projects is, No scissors or glue until the writing is done!
 - Never, never stay up late to finish a project while your child sleeps!

Count on it: despite your best efforts, there will be a time when your child hands in something shoddy, especially if he or she has waited until the last minute. Painful as this may be for parents, Chin says, "Your child needs to face the consequences." Eventually, she says, the gains in responsibility are steady and well worth the effort. With patience and practice, Chin promises, projects can be a "learning experience for the whole family."

According to the School Psychologist: 4th Grade

By Dewi L. Faulkner

Can it really be? That little squirmy, wriggling ball of sweetness and cuddles you held in your arms nine years ago is now standing, brow furrowed, at home plate getting ready to whack a softball to kingdom come? Fourth grade is often when children are “truly coming into themselves and are more engaged in the world around them. They can demonstrate a striking level of competence. Our job is to notice this change and support it,” explains Lori Landau, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and Parenting Coach.

While preoccupation with peers and the need to fit in remains strong at this age, the fourth grade child is often even more concerned with measuring up to her own demands on herself. She is now being graded in school, not to mention being casually assessed by her peers and family members. The fourth grader may begin to exhibit a preoccupation with competition and “being the best,” either academically, in sports, or in some other skill or hobby in which she has an expressed interest. Fourth graders are “more self-reflecting as they’ve encountered enough of the outside world and judgments to know that they don’t always win or get chosen to have their work highlighted,” states Landau.

In addition to increasing self-awareness and budding recognition of her unique place in the world, a fourth grader is developing her sense of morality as well. This age marks the beginning of

true autonomy in children in addition to the ability to see and process points of view other than their own. “They are able to make a decision and accept the consequences for it. They have made the shift to understanding that a correct behavior is based on their own internal values, rather than the threat of punishment that guided their actions only a couple years before,” explains thirty-year veteran school psychologist Dr. Laurie Zelinger, Ph.D.

With increased participation in school and extracurricular activities, in addition to her growing sense of self, and ability to process the world around her, fourth grade can be a heady time. It’s important to help your child learn to budget and manage her time effectively, making sure, especially, that she always gets a good night’s rest. If your fourth grader becomes withdrawn or seems stressed, try helping her pare down some of her activities until she has a schedule that allows for unscheduled play and quiet time.

“Keep in mind however, that no matter how bogged down your child may get, kids are incredibly resilient,” advises Landau. Fourth grade parents are faced with the exciting (and sometimes daunting) task of helping their children nurture and develop the skills that in many ways will contribute to who they ultimately become as adults. “Find their strengths and keep them in the foreground,” Dr. Zelinger advises. “Applaud effort, not outcome.”

If you want to know more...

The articles in this newsletter and many other helpful articles can be found on the following website:

<http://www.education.com/grade/fourth/?cid=50000.00351>

The articles on www.education.com cover subjects ranging from social and emotional issues (bullying, developing self-esteem, your 4th grader's social life), to developmental (gender differences, anger, physical development milestones), to academic (encouraging young writers, ways to encourage reading).

Don't forget the resources that Montgomery offers! Feel free to ask your child's teacher any questions you might have. Shelly Wickwire, our principal, is also always available to discuss your questions or concerns. Montgomery is also very lucky to have a school counselor, Donna Stephens, who is an invaluable resource.

*“Applaud effort,
not outcome.”*

LIFE AFTER 3RD GRADE

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)



January 2008

Q *How long is the school day for 4th – 6th grade students?*

A The school day runs from 8:30 am until 3:05 pm on every day except Wednesdays, when all grade levels are released at 1:30 pm.

Q *What is the class size?*

A We can have a maximum of 31 students in a class in the intermediate grades. We do try to slow down at 29 students, but we can accommodate up to 31.

Q *What can students expect with homework?*

A This can vary depending on the teacher, and teachers should clearly outline their homework policy to parents at Back to School night and to students at the beginning of the school year. As a general rule of thumb, the district policy in Davis estimates that students in grades 4 through 6 may have approximately 40–75 minutes of homework per day, four days a week. The homework might be sent home in a packet once a week or might be assigned on a nightly basis. Also, in the intermediate grades, student planners are purchased and sent home with students in an effort to help students learn time management skills.

Q *Do you try to avoid combination classes in the upper grades?*

A We try to avoid combination classes in the upper grades if they are based solely on logistics because the curriculum and content are very different. However, there are times that combination classes are unavoidable, and they can be done well with careful planning, grade level collaboration, and extra support from paraprofessionals.

Q *Is there a music program for the intermediate grades?*

A 4th graders can participate in the Strings program, where they can choose to learn a stringed instrument. 5th and 6th grade students can choose to learn a wind instrument. Lessons are given as a pull-out rotation as part of a regular school day. The PTA also supports a music program at MME by providing music education at all grade levels (Mindy Manville & Music Matt).

Q *I will have a child in the 3rd grade and one in the 4th grade. Is there somewhere my 3rd grader can go for the half hour until I arrive to pick up my 4th grader?*

A You have several options to choose from. We offer the Read and Relax program after school for a half an hour (from 2:35 until 3:05 pm) in one of the primary grade classrooms. You might also consider either the T.A.L.K. program, where your child can learn Spanish every day after school (except Wednesdays), or you might think about Running Club, which is offered on Tuesdays and Thursdays after school.