Word Study:
Learning About Letters and Words

Through word study and learning about letters and words, students examine, manipulate, and categorize letters and words. When teachers use a practical, hands-on way to study words with students, they create tasks that focus students' attention on critical features of words - sound, pattern and meaning. A word study program that explicitly teaches students necessary skills and engages their interest and motivation to learn about how words work is a vital aspect of any literacy program. The study of letter and word features must match the level of letter and word knowledge of the learner. Word study is not a one-size fits all program of instruction that begins at the same place for all students within a grade level. It must lie in the critical role of differentiating instruction for different levels of letter and word knowledge.

Rock Hill School District Three believes that the most effective instruction in phonics, spelling and vocabulary **links** word study to the texts being read, and provides multiple opportunities for hands-on practice and application. Letter-sound correspondences, phonics, spelling patterns, high frequency word recognition, decoding, word meaning, and other attributes are the basis of word knowledge. The challenge for teachers is to help children develop a repertoire of flexible strategies for solving words while reading for meaning. In fact, to read means to use graphic symbols embedded in continuous text.

Marie Clay's phrase "reading for meaning with divided attention" is a useful way to think about the process. The story or message is the focus of the reader's attention.

Good readers use many strategies to solve a word while reading for meaning.
 - recognize it as a familiar word and check whether it makes sense and sounds right
 - derive the new word by analogy to a word or words they already know
 - search for meaning in pictures and text
 - predict based on meaning or syntax and check against visual information
 - think about what would make sense and sound right given some aspect of the word.
 - partially sound letters of the word and fit this partial information with meaning and
        language structure
 - sound out parts of the word and link them to known words or parts of words
 - analyze the word letter by letter, using larger clusters as much as possible

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Revised 05-13-16