

# Questions and Answers for Parents About the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment and Reading Levels

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

At Aurora Charter School we use a literacy 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 about the text. After the discussion, students are asked to write about the text.

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

This test provides information on the reader's accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. Furthermore, writing about the text not only allows teachers insight into a student's ability to use correct writing structures and clearly express their thoughts on paper, but also to gather additional information about a student's ability to use phonics skills and comprehend text. As a whole, this information allows teachers to determine both 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 move through during the year starting with A in kindergarten and ending with Z in middle school.

## **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 when read aloud and feel comfortable to read. Students should be able to have an in-depth discussion about these texts with little to no difficulty.

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 to support small groups of students in reading at their instructional level. This approach pushes students without overwhelming them resulting in high levels of reading motivation and learning.

### **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 and talk with the student about what they are reading. The Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System was adopted districtwide in 2015 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 can be used to help support children and parents in choosing a just right book.

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

**I-PICK Purpose** – 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 a parent/teacher can provide an alternative way to access the book, such as through an audio recording or interactive read aloud online. With continued progress, a book that was too hard at one time will eventually become one that the student can read independently!