



**Strength-Building Learning Cohort**  
**Approach to Routines, Rigor, and Standards**  
**2019-2020**

## **Welcome!**

**Thank you so much for joining us on our learning journey! We are so excited to provide a glimpse into what we do with your children every day. Below you will find how we approach curriculum in our classrooms, both in general and within each subject.**

## **Beliefs**

**We cultivate a growth mindset in our learning community. We model and teach that as learners, we are dynamic, not fixed – we have the capacity to grow in any and every area. With effort and hard work, we can increase our potential and our intelligence! With this in mind, the students have authentic opportunity to develop essential life skills such as grit, resilience, optimism, and connection.**

**We will encourage and provide opportunities for students (and teachers -- we're learners alongside them!) to be daring in their academic endeavors. We uplift one another through the discomforts in the learning process and collaborate. We encourage authenticity and vulnerability -- to have the courage to find support by saying, "I don't know yet -- this is what I have tried," and then to try again is truly what grows us and makes us strong.**

**We employ the tool of reflection as much as possible to examine our processes, look for alternative approaches, and to celebrate our growth.**

**We strongly urge you to read through the Kiker Parent/Student Handbook with your child. Know that we follow those guidelines. As members of Bernice Kiker Elementary, we embrace the theme of "Limitless."**

## **Curriculum**

**As we plan for each child's academic program, we use a variety of instructional strategies and resources to support their learning style and take them to the next level.**

**We place emphasis on depth over speed. Every routine and strategy we teach is precisely planned so that all the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) are covered thoroughly, all students are challenged, and classroom endeavors have varying levels of complexity. The TEKS are available for viewing on the [Texas Education Agency website](#).**

**We also make sure the students can explain not only WHAT they are doing, but WHY. Students will be able to reflect on the process and verbalize not just what they know, but their thoughts/methods of getting to that point.**

## English Language Arts (ELA)

Students experience literacy as a whole; writing and reading go hand in hand. We learn what strong readers and writers do, and we do it ourselves. We vacillate between whole class, small group, and individual lessons. **Notebooks**, which serve as their **portfolios** of work, contain our thoughts and learnings.

### Reading Workshop

Throughout the year, students will find favorite authors and genres, and they will develop their own identities as readers. Louise Rosenblatt (1938); "A text is merely ink on a page until a reader breathes life into it." Students will bring to life what they read. We build a community who loves to read.

We meet in the "living room" where we experience a piece of literature together. This **Read Aloud with Accountable Talk** uses mini-lessons to model skills and strategies that strong readers do, sometimes using material that has more sophisticated themes or vocabulary. Short, precise lessons pack a big punch. We use either a portion of or an entire text. Each mini-lesson goes through distinct steps that focus on specific skills and strategies they need to know to be strong readers. During Read Aloud, students are able to engage in comprehension freely, without feeling encumbered by decoding or speed. They are active in thinking critically, preparing to discuss what we have read. Discussion is a conversation where we are looking at each other, listening, and deepening ideas. Rather than a few students raising their hands to answer questions the teachers pose, in Book Talk we are all interacting. They find that their thoughts and ideas matter.

Students daily move into their "reading spots" for **independent reading** and **conferences**. This is the most important part. Readers select books that are their "just right" level that they read for an extended time. Teachers meet with individuals about their ongoing goals and reading or pull small groups to give more specific instruction. Each conference and small group ends with a "next step" – another goal that will deepen his or her expertise as a reader.

### Word Work Workshop

This block of time contains routines that will help us use and think about words and how they work. We have opportunities that are specifically designed for students to write, practice, and think about words and how they work. We alternate 7 day cycles between **Language Study**, which is practice on the essential grammar skills they need, and **Word Studies** that incorporate spelling, meaning, patterns and application to writing. We know that one "size," or list, does not fit all. Therefore, we have multiple groups with different lists. In order to group them and know which patterns they need to learn, we give a diagnostic assessment periodically throughout the year. The assessment has specific developmental patterns so that we see exactly where they are working and where they need to grow. They are grouped by like needs, and are flexible. These lists are short, focused, and research-based. Once they master one pattern, we move on to the next. **We do not have traditional spelling tests.** Spelling is assessed through the activities in word studies and in their final drafts.

### Writer's Workshop

This is your child's opportunity to shine as an author. Once the process is up and running, they write with choice, freedom, and purpose. We share as fellow writers, students and teachers alike.

Workshop begins with a **mini-lesson** that follows the same format as Reading Workshop. Students develop an understanding of what writers do, and what best fits their writing identities. Students leave our community knowing that writing is not an assignment they do, but an expression of themselves. We will read and discuss various well-written texts,

often times using the same piece from Reading Workshop. We look at it with a "writer's eye," finding things we can "try out" in our own writing. Units of Writing and Reading have been planned together to compliment each other and make the learning more powerful and connected.

Students **independently Write** in their personal ELA Notebooks, mirroring and extending the strategies presented in the lesson. During this time, teachers conference with individuals and small groups to address writing goals that are tailored to their needs. Each session concludes with **sharing**. This is very important, as it empowers each writer and validates his or her pieces. We savor every smile they wear as they are applauded and thanked for what they shared.

## **Math**

Students learn to think like a mathematician and to use a range of mathematical strategies to solve problems. They learn to flexibly use a variety of tools and symbols to represent their mathematical ideas. Most of all they'll see that math applications have value, that math is everywhere, that it can be open and creative, and that it's amazing!

Your student's math block will typically include a **math meeting**, often at the beginning of class. This is a short discussion to introduce new concepts, review and connect prior learning, or to model mathematical thinking and strategies. Students will learn new concepts and vocabulary both from the teacher and from each other. This meeting and other collaborative learning experiences develop a math community.

Students will spend much of their time developing strong understandings of mathematical ideas through **problem solving**. This means they'll use a variety of strategies (creating a visual representation, making a table, writing an equation, etc.) to solve problems. In many cases, an answer will not be readily apparent and will require persistence, effort, and a willingness to learn from informative mistakes. Students also learn that many real-world problems have multiple strategies and perhaps multiple accurate answers. While problem-solving experiences will happen independently, much of our work happens with partners or in small groups. This maximizes the active participation of each student and provides more immediate feedback. Teamwork opportunities also promote emphasis on mathematical reasoning, so math moves beyond memorization of procedures.

Part of each week will also be spent building **number sense** and developing numerical fluency. This practice will include small group meetings with the teacher, partner games or puzzles, and use of our classroom technology to differentiate instruction.

Students will keep a math **notebook** full of artifacts to show their thinking. The notebook will include problems they've solved each week, reference pages about key math concepts/vocabulary, and reflections about mathematical ideas.

While classroom instruction is differentiated in many ways, **assessments** are not. Students are graded based on their grade-level TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills). All assessments will reflect concepts that have been introduced, practiced, and reinforced as needed. You can monitor your child's recorded grades on the AISD cloud. We will contact you if your child continues to struggle in any specific skill and/or if your child's grades are significantly falling in any subject area.

**SBLC mathematicians know:**

- **Everyone is expected to put forth effort and to value mistakes as learning moments. This growth mindset is an integral part of our classroom culture.**
- **We intentionally cultivate a climate where pondering ideas, making connections, and thinking flexibly about numbers are valued.**
- **We are constantly sharing our ideas. Our classroom is a place where we seek different perspectives and develop strong teamwork skills.**

**We have woven financial literacy into our daily routines and implement our classroom economy at the beginning of the school year. As contributors and citizens of the SBLC, we each have a job with a salary. Students become familiar with the concepts of deposits, withdrawals, and planned/unplanned spending.**

## **Research Workshop Social Studies/Science**

**Our goal in this workshop is to make information come alive by providing ways for students to connect with each concept and each other. We design these opportunities with intention through primary resources, personal accounts, investigations, lab experiences, and meaningful projects.**

### ***Inquiry-Based Learning***

**Our curriculum is presented in an inquiry-based format, which allows for student-constructed learning as opposed to teacher-transmitted lessons. In this approach, our classroom is a learning community wherein students are active participants and problem solvers. Presenting our standards in this manner increases student ownership, critical thinking, and curiosity.**

**We utilize stages of inquiry and students investigate questions as a class, team, and independently. In the novice stages, students are directed through the investigation by their teacher. As students gain proficiency, teachers give the question to students, and they plan the investigation with teacher guidance. Through gradual release, students gain the confidence to initiate and conduct their own investigations independently.**

**Our workshop approach uses routines which foster critical and creative thinking. We model and share practices that encourage students to adopt a skeptical stance, to look beneath and beyond the information to analyze, interpret, and gain insight. Students use diverse sources to gain understanding from multiple perspectives. We engage in open-ended conversations that builds on others' thoughts and ideas to encourage global awareness and empathy.**

### ***Problem Based Learning***

**As students develop a greater awareness of the wider world, a natural outgrowth is action! Working together to investigate solutions to an authentic problem brings us together and energizes us in a powerful way. Students design, garner needed support, and create innovative solutions and awareness to problems of all kinds. These truly bring all learning together and inspire our students to look past themselves and to make the world a better place.**

**Contact Information**

**So that we can devote our full attention to you and your child, please e-mail (or call) to discuss any needs or to arrange a meeting. We will do our best to respond within 24 hours.**

**We look forward to working with you to create a memorable and enriching learning experience for your child!**

[www.kikersblc.blogspot.com](http://www.kikersblc.blogspot.com)

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