**Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions**

**ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS AND ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS**

In 2007 district curriculum committee members began a study of *Understanding by Design* (Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins). In 2008 committee members brought this work to the ongoing process of refining the district curriculum by adding enduring understandings and essential questions.

Enduring understandings and essential questions are the thread that links units, lessons, and year to year teaching. They provide powerful tools for focusing daily classroom activity on meaningful goals. They are a way to think about our curriculum that helps us answer the question: Why does it matter? We include these samples of enduring understandings and essential questions as a model for what we strive to incorporate in all curricula throughout the district.

**Enduring Understandings**are important ideas that have lasting value beyond the classroom.

**Essential Questions**are questions that probe for deeper meaning and promote inquiry.

**Vocabulary and Concept Development**

**Enduring Understandings**

Students will understand that…

* Words are composed of parts that help us understand their meanings.
* How a word or phrase is used determines its meaning.
* A dictionary and a thesaurus are resources for finding, understanding, and using words.
* A rich vocabulary enables us to understand and communicate more effectively.
* Words become part of our language in many ways.
* Vocabulary is acquired through reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

**Essential Questions**

* How do word parts help us understand meaning?
* How does context help us understand word meaning?
* Why do we use the dictionary and thesaurus as resources?
* Why is vocabulary development important?
* Where does the vocabulary we use originate from, (Latin, German, etc.) and what is the importance of where it originated from?
* How does the depth of a student’s vocabulary contribute to the student’s ability to read, write, listen, and speak more effectively?

**Beginning Reading**

**Enduring Understandings**

Students will understand that…

* Proficient readers use the relationship between letters and sounds of speech and spelling patterns to problem solve, read fluently, and comprehend.
* Proficient readers use print cues to solve unknown words while still focusing on meaning and structure.
* Proficient readers develop and use a variety of strategies to attend to information from different sources.
* Readers use both text features and the features of written English to comprehend.

**Essential Questions**are questions that probe for deeper meaning and promote inquiry.

* What do readers look for to help them read?
* What do we think about when we read?
* How does what we think about help us comprehend?

**Understanding a Text**

**Enduring Understandings**

Students will understand that…

* Readers interpret text by reading thoroughly and with purpose to determine main ideas and the facts and details used to support them.
* Readers continually monitor and check their interpretations of the author’s intent and meaning.
* Background knowledge supports understanding of text.
* Informational and expository text is written differently than imaginative and literary text and makes different demands on the reader.

**Essential Questions**

* How does what you know help you understand text?
* How does thinking about the author’s purpose and message deepen understanding?
* How do text features and characteristics of informational and literary text influence reader interpretation?

**Making Connections**

**Enduring Understandings**

Students will understand that…

* Our perceptions of those close to us can be altered by large events.
* The world we live in is reflected in literature.
* What we read affects how we make sense of our own world, the world around us, and of others.

**Essential Questions**

* Which connections help most to increase understanding of a text?
* How does literature reflect the time period in which it is written?
* Do literary and non-literary pieces reflect our culture or have helped to shape or make changes to it?

**Genre**

**Enduring Understandings**

Students will understand that…

* Different genres have different structures and conventions.
* Authors choose a particular genre for a specific purpose.
* Characteristics of genre may overlap or cut across lines of genre.

**Essential Questions**

* How does an understanding of the different genres and their characteristics help the reader better comprehend the meaning of text?
* How do you classify a piece of literature as a certain genre?
* How does the selection of genre shape the author’s message?
* How does the form chosen by an author accomplish his/her purpose?

**Theme**

**Enduring Understandings**

Students will understand that…

* Theme represents a view or comment on life.
* Authors may use various writing techniques to power their themes.
* A well written piece of fiction or non-fiction can make any theme seem new again.
* Using analysis to compare and contrast texts to discover similar themes will further understanding of literature.
* Locating themes and providing textual support develops more thoughtful readers.

**Essential Questions**

* Why is theme important?
* Is the theme of a story always interpreted in the same way?
* How does a reader identify the theme in a piece of writing?
* How does comparing and contrasting themes from various pieces of literature increase understanding?

**Fiction and Nonfiction**

**Enduring Understandings**

Students will understand that…

* Although stories of fiction may vary greatly in degree in terms of subject matter, the structure of fiction remains relatively consistent.
* In the same way that a math equation produces an answer, if one follows the structure of fiction, while implementing elements such as irony, symbol and setting, one can compose an original piece of writing that will be considered fiction.
* By providing evidence from the work of fiction to support their understanding, students’ opinions and arguments will be validated by the work, and therefore more sound in judgment.
* Knowledge of the organizational structures in nonfiction deepens reader understanding.
* Understanding the textual and graphic features of nonfiction provides powerful tools when reading and writing.
* Authors use the structures and elements of nonfiction for specific purposes.

**Essential Questions**

* How do readers recognize a nonfiction piece versus a fiction piece?
* Why is it important to differentiate between fiction and nonfiction?
* How do readers approach different types of text?

**Poetry**

**Enduring Understandings**

Students will understand that…

* Poets share feelings, experiences, or thoughts through well-chosen words, formats, techniques, and poetic elements.
* Poetry can achieve a great deal in terms of feeling, emotion, and description in a concise way.

**Essential Questions**

* What is poetry?
* How is poetry different from prose?
* What are the elements and structures of poetry that deepen the understanding of poetry?
* How does a reader identify, respond to, analyze, and compare the elements of poetry?

**Writing**

**Enduring Understandings**

Students will understand that…

* Writing is a powerful tool for communicating.
* Effective writing is coherent, logical, and effective.

**Essential Questions**

* Why is writing important?
* What makes writing coherent, logical, and expressive?

**Consideration of Audience and Purpose**

**Enduring Understandings**

Students will understand that…

* The key to quality writing is to know audience and purpose.
* Audience and purpose impact a writer’s style.
* Word choice conveys a level of formality, sense of style, and tone.

**Essential Questions**

* How do writers know their audience?
* How does knowing your audience and purpose contribute to effective writing?
* How do writers tailor their writing for a specific purpose and audience?

**Revising**

**Enduring Understandings**

Students will understand that…

* Writers know that although their initial ideas may be good, their work will be vastly improved by careful revision.
* Revising is an ongoing process that involves thinking about (rethinking) language, organization, audience, and purpose.
* The smallest changes to elements of writing can change the meaning of the work.

**Essential Questions**

* Why revise?
* How is revising a piece of writing as essential as the initial effort?
* How does a writer know when and how to revise?

**Standard English Conventions**

**Enduring Understandings**

Students will understand that…

* Conventions are rules that have been established to standardize written communication.
* A writer needs to use Standard English conventions to get his/her message across effectively in terms of intended meaning.

**Essential Questions**

* What are the Standard English conventions?
* Why is it important to use correct spelling and grammar?
* How important are Standard English conventions?

**Organizing Ideas in Writing**

**Enduring Understandings**

Students will understand that…

* Ideas in writing can be organized in many different ways depending on the author’s purpose.
* There is a direct correlation between organization and effectiveness of writing.
* Working on organizing ideas in writing develops more logical ways of reasoning.

**Essential Questions**

* How can organization influence meaning and clarity in a piece of writing?
* What does it mean to be organized in writing?