Dear Families and Caregivers,

Welcome to the new school year! This year, your child will be using Pioneer Valley Books Stepping Together lessons to develop and strengthen their skills in all aspects of literacy (phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, and writing). Stepping Together is an explicit and systematic literacy program created by literacy experts at Pioneer Valley Books. The program follows a carefully developed scope and sequence designed to ensure that students systematically learn the foundational skills necessary for proficient reading and writing while developing automaticity and confidence.

Daily lessons begin with a brief warm-up activity in which students listen to and chime in with a nursery rhyme, song, poem, or chant. This is a print-free experience designed to support phonological awareness and oral language. Practice with rhyming can enhance students' awareness of the sound patterns of speech.

The next step of the lesson is engaging in a phonological awareness activity. Rhyming as well as blending, segmenting, and manipulating word parts and phonemes (individual sounds) all help to increase students' phonological awareness.

Students then participate in hands-on phonics activities. Phonics instruction builds on phonemic awareness and is where students learn to connect sounds (phonemes) to letters or letter clusters (graphemes) that represent those sounds. Each lesson connects the skill students learn during the phonological awareness activity to the skill taught during the phonics component in order to help students make these letter-sound connections. The phonics activities include the use of hands-on materials to support the learning of all students and make the learning both fun and engaging.

Each week, a new story will be introduced to the class. Students will share in reading and rereading and then interactively writing about the story. In the shared reading portion of the lesson, students read a book with the teacher's support to develop fluency. Engaging fiction and nonfiction books have been carefully selected to provide opportunities for learning new literacy skills. As students read the story, they have discussions and engage in new learning to support comprehension. Interactive writing allows students to put their phonics skills into practice as they write about what they read.

Students will also learn how to read and spell high-frequency words. These are words that show up often in books. We want students to read and write these words quickly and automatically to build fluency. Some examples of the first words we will learn are *look*, *here*, and *said*.

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The chart below describes the phonics skills your child will be learning across the year.

MODULE 1	Short vowels	Students are learning about short vowels and how to put them together to read and spell CVC words (consonant, vowel, consonant): for example, *hug* and *ten*.
MODULE 2	Digraphs (*sh*, *th*, and *ch*)	Students are learning how to read and spell common digraphs (two letters together that make one sound): for example, wi**sh**, **th**in, and mu**ch**.
MODULE 3	Initial Blends	Students are learning how to read and spell common initial blends: for example, **tr**ip, **sn**ug, and **cl**ap.
MODULE 4	Final Blends	Students are learning how to read and spell words with common final blends: for example, tru**nk**, pla**nt**, and re**st**.
MODULE 5	Long Vowels with Silent *e* and Three-Letter Blends	Students are learning how to read and spell words with long vowel patterns that end with a silent e: for example, d**im****e** and pl**an****e**.
MODULE 6	Vowel Teams (*ay*, *ow*, and *ee*), Diphthong Vowel Team (*ow*), and Vowel-*r* Combinations (*ar* and *or*)	Students are learning how to read and spell words using: • Vowel teams (two or three letters that together spell one sound): for example, gr**ay**, tr**ee**, and sn**ow**. • Diphthongs (two letters that glide together to form two sounds): for example, c**ow** and ch**ow**der. • Vowel-*r* combinations (words with a vowel sound that is changed due to the letter *r*): for example, ch**ar**t and sh**or**t.
MODULE 7	Vowel Teams (*igh*, *oo*, *ea*, *ai*) and Diphthong Vowel Team (*ou*)	Students are learning how to read and spell words using: • Vowel teams (two or three letters that together spell one sound): for example, l**igh**t, z**oo**, m**ea**l, and r**ai**n. • Diphthongs (two letters that glide together to form two sounds): for example, f**ou**nd and m**ou**th.

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Included in the Stepping Together lessons are decodable passages called Super Stories. After reading these stories in school, your child will be given copies to reread.

One of the most important ways for students to build their reading skills is through *reading* and *rereading*. It is important for your child to develop a habit of reading. Finding a time and place for your child to read daily will provide invaluable support for your child's reading progress!

Here are some suggestions to create a reading routine for your child and to build successful readers:

Read every night: Carving out time to read each night teaches children that reading is important and is a priority in their lives.

Find a quiet spot: Find a spot that is comfortable and that is not too distracting to help your child concentrate.

Talk about the story: After your child reads, have a conversation. Lead with open-ended questions like *"What did you read about?" "Why do you think …?"* or *"Did you like the book? … Why or Why not?"*

Reread, reread, reread: Each time your child reads a book, their reading improves. Have your child read each story to you. Listen for them to read the words accurately, smoothly, and with expression. Rereading will support them in refining skills and building fluency.

Scavenger Hunt: Using the decodable Super Story, magazines, or newspapers, have your child search to find any words that have the phonic elements or sight words that have been taught and circle or highlight them. In magazines and newspapers, they can also search for images that have the target phonic element sound.