



Champlain Elementary School

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What Makes the Spelling Bee So Special? An Interview with Champlain's Spelling Bee Coaches and Students

By Dr. Dorinne Dorfman, Principal

On May 18, selected Champlain fourth and fifth graders will compete in the Burlington School District's elementary spelling bee. Teacher Sarah Legault and parent Kate Kenny have organized and coached our students to perform their best! Here they share their perspectives on the big event with all six participating fourth-grade students chiming in.

DD: How do students get involved in the spelling bee?

SL: I told all fourth and fifth graders about this year's spelling bee. Of course students were very excited and remembered clearly who was on the spelling team last year since Champlain took home the trophy!

KK: All fourth and fifth grade students who were interested in taking part in the SB could get a list of the regular spelling words from Sarah. We then invited any interested future SB participants to take a spelling quiz at the beginning of March. We gave them thirty random words from the list and the six students who spelled the most correct words were selected for the team.

Claire Chutter-Cressy: Ms. Legault got me really excited, and I knew I had to try out.

DD: How do they prepare?

SL: Our spellers spend a lot of time practicing at home and of course at school. We examine word parts, prefixes, suffixes, word meanings and patterns, and the tricky words. Kate and I meet with our spellers 2-3 times a week before school and during lunch.

KK: Rather than try to memorize the words by rote, we work on the rules of spelling and then, with it being the English language, lament how many times these rules are broken and spend some time looking at the anomalies. We also fill out a worksheet which I use when teaching foreign languages, whereby students write down the word which they may find tricky twice, then cover it up, write it again, check it, and write it again. Research has shown that if we write a word several times, we have a better chance of retaining its spelling.

Annie Harte: Ms. Legault and Ms. Kenny are great teachers! They have taught us so much, and they put in so much hard work and effort! This experience has been a lot of fun and we have worked incredibly hard as one team.

DD: Do students forget the spellings after it's over, like cramming for an exam?

SL: I don't think so! Our students are taking a deeper approach by analyzing spelling patterns and learning prefixes, suffixes, and Latin and Greek origins.

KK: They don't seem to. I think, because we work on rules, patterns and identifying anomalies, the students are developing a good understanding of spelling.

Miles Kenny: No, I think I'll remember the words forever.

DD: Why is the spelling bee such a big event in the Burlington School District?

SL: It's a great way for our district to come together as a whole community. We are making spelling exciting!

KK: I really don't know! I came to it fresh, last year!

August Bauer: Tons of schools come and the winner gets a trophy!

DD: Did you participate in the spelling bee or a similar competition when you were a child?

SL: Although I was never in an official spelling bee, I always had a passion for spelling, reading, vocabulary work, and handwriting when I was in elementary school.

KK: No – we only moved to Vermont from England nine years ago, and spelling bees do not take place in the UK. This is, for me, quintessentially American.

DD: What is usually students' favorite part of the spelling bee? What is your favorite part?

SL: My favorite part is the preparation for the actual bee! I'm so proud of these motivated, devoted, and passionate spellers. They put forth a high-level of commitment. They embraced the growth mindset and weren't afraid to make mistakes, knowing that mistakes are valuable! In the end, it's not about winning, it's about working together as a team and enjoying the journey.

KK: Last year was the first time that Sarah and I coached the spelling bee team, so I only have that experience to draw on, but I would say that the students' favorite part is the competition. I remember turning up with our six participants (who were wearing regular clothes) at the Miller Center and seeing the other five Burlington Elementary School participants proudly wearing their schools' t-shirt, and Sarah and I looked at each other and said, "Oh, boy! This is a big deal!" And it was a big deal. I was so pleased with how seriously all of the participants took the competition. Three to four hours is a long time to sit quietly on show in a room full of parents, teachers and adjudicators, but all thirty-six participants did this so well. It's also rather nerve-wracking to stand up in front of a crowd and to loudly spell a difficult word. Again, they all did this so well last year. Of course there were, and will be, mistakes, but I was so impressed with the maturity which the participants displayed in the face of making a mistake and how they got right back up in the next round and had another go. I think the students, too, enjoyed having the opportunity to show-off how hard they had worked and how many words they had learned. They definitely enjoyed working as a Champlain team and were very supportive of each other. The fact that we won last year was, of course, a huge bonus!

Jack Tomlinson: Winning!

DD: What else would you like to share with the Champlain community about this topic?

SL: The Champlain PTO generously donated team t-shirts and a fun treat for our hardworking spelling team! Thank you for your continued support!

KK: The students and I have had so much fun preparing for this SB. They are always raring to go on Tuesday and Thursday mornings and this reflects, I think, how hungry students are to learn and how they relish a challenge. The actual competition is such a wonderful chance for them to work as a team, to experience what it feels like to speak in public, to succeed in spelling a difficult word, but, also, to experience disappointment when they make a mistake and to learn how to bounce back from this disappointment in order for them to do their best in the next round. These are great lessons for life.

Morgan Davis: Don't be scared of new things!

Library Summer Learning Challenge Begins

The Fletcher Free Library (FFL) offers an awesome summer program planned for Burlington kids, tweens and teens! ***Libraries Rock!*** is FFL's (and the national) theme with lots of books, music and STEAM-related activities. Librarian Rebecca Goldberg comes to our 5/21 assembly about the summer fun at the Fletcher Free Library.



Health Room Update: Sunscreen Protection

Please apply sunscreen to your child between 10AM and 4PM. Apply approximately one ounce of sunscreen (minimum 15 SPF) 30 minutes before going outside. This should protect from UVA and UVB rays. Reapply every 90 minutes or after swimming or sweating. Protect your child from harmful rays and painful sunburns that can cause lifelong skin damage!

Important Dates

Monday, May 21	All-school assembly - Parents welcome @ 8:20 AM
Monday, May 28	Memorial Day - School closed
Wed.-Fri. May 30-June 1	Champlain plant sale after school
Sunday, June 3	Champlain Fun Run - 1-3 mile run/walk - Oakledge Park lower pavilion @ 8:30 AM
Wednesday, June 6	Champlain's jazz chorus performance at Jazz Fest at City Hall Stage @ 12:45 PM
Tuesday, June 12	Champlain Fifth-grade Step Up ceremony in the gym @ 6:00 PM
Thursday, June 14	Last day of school - 11:30 AM Dismissal