Dear Family Member,

Welcome to our first unit of study, "Plants and Animals Have Needs."

This year, our kindergarten students will build literacy and language skills by participating in ten cross-disciplinary units of study in our Benchmark Advance Program. Each three-week unit features a topic, ranging from economics to earth science, history and culture to themes in literature, and more. As students read poems, stories, plays, and informational articles, they will strengthen their reading and writings skills and strategies, participate in meaningful constructive conversations, and make connections to their other content area studies. We look forward to sharing your child's progress with you!

As we start each unit, I will send home a letter like this one, introducing the unit focus and skills your child is learning. I will also suggest activities you and your child can do together at home to build on the work we're doing in class.

In this unit, "Plants and Animals Have Needs," your child will learn how living things have certain needs in order to survive. For example, most plants need water and sun to grow, and animals need food, as well as shelter from predators or the environment. Your child will also discover how needs differ among plants and animals. The selections in this unit feature a variety of genres, including informational texts, poetry, and animal fantasy. This unit is sure to inspire deeper interest in a fascinating topic that you can explore further at home.

As always, should you have any questions about our reading program or about your child's progress, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Plants and Animals Have Needs

In this unit, we'll read about the needs of plants and animals and think in depth about the question "Why do living things have different needs?" Here are some activities designed to continue the conversation about the needs of living things and to build on the skills and concepts your child is learning in school. Who knows? Maybe you'll learn a thing or two alongside your child!

Needs in the Neighborhood

Take a walk around the neighborhood with your child. As you do, jot down all the living things you see, from the tallest tree to the tiniest bug. Don't forget—people are living things, too! When you return home, challenge your child to categorize each living thing you saw as a plant or an animal. Together with your child, brainstorm what each plant and animal needs to stay alive. You can start by suggesting, for example, that grass needs water to grow and a chipmunk needs shelter from the weather or predators.

Use It in a Sentence

Your child is learning new words associated with living things and their needs, such as **air, plants, sprout, sunlight, water, food, shelter, grow, hunt, survive**. Review the meaning of each word with your child. Then write each word on a small piece of paper and fold it up. Put the folded words in a bag or other container. Have your child pick one of the words from the container and use it in a sentence. Then you use that same word in a different sentence. Continue until you've made sentences for every word.

I'm an Expert

Several of the selections we'll be reading describe a sequence, or order of events. Recognizing sequence in a text is an important reading skill that your child will develop over the years. Support this skill by inviting your child to think of something she knows how to do well, such as playing a sport or making a braid. Have her describe to you step by step how to do it. It may help for her to draw pictures of each step. Encourage your child to use sequence signal words, such as *first, next,* and *finally.*

Letter of the Day

Letter recognition is the first step in learning to read, and an important part of this unit's phonics instruction. Over the next three weeks, have your child pick a letter of the day. She might start with the first letter of her name, for example. Everywhere you go—store, bank, restaurant, movies—encourage your child to find that letter.