

District approves new ELA programs

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By Thomas Franz 



(File photo by Thomas Franz)

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CLINTON TOWNSHIP — Chippewa Valley Schools will soon be implementing new English language arts programs for elementary and middle school students.

After piloting programs this past fall, the district's board of education voted March 20 to approve the purchase of two programs to update its ELA curriculum.

The K-5 program, Journeys, is a Houghton Mifflin Harcourt product that integrates all of the state standards for reading, writing, listening and speaking, said Pam Jones, the district's director of curriculum and assessments.

"Our teachers overwhelmingly preferred Journeys over the other program. The reason they liked the program is it is a very comprehensive language arts program," Jones said. "It engages students in a variety of activities, from whole groups to small groups to individual activities."

Jones said teachers will begin implementing the new program at the start of next school year, and will have it fully implemented by mid-year.

"We feel that Journeys will adequately provide rigor and comprehensive ELA in both writing and reading skills so they can be very successful when they enter the middle school," Jones said. "It's also in response to the new third-grade reading bill, and we wanted to ensure that every one of our students is reading at or above grade level by third grade."

Karen Langlands, a curriculum leader in the district, said Journeys will also feature numerous technology enhancements.

"Students will have a hardcover textbook, but they will also have an e-book, and they can respond to questions and take notes online," Langlands said. "They'll also have access to apps for phones and tablets to have access to the program that way."

For middle school students, the StudySync program from McGraw-Hill was also chosen for its course offerings and its focus on group work.

"It is a really amazing program to develop critical thinking skills in the students. We feel it will help them with college and careers, in high school and anything else they choose to do, because it's very rigorous," Jones said.

Curriculum leader Kathy Clor said that there are numerous opportunities for cooperative group learning with StudySync, and similar to Journeys, a phone app will be available for homework lessons.

Clor also said the class sessions with StudySync could begin with a question from a short text, and student responses would be shared so that they could critique each other's responses.

"They start each lesson with a digital activity to engage students at the start of class," Clor said. "It's kind of like a blog. There's a great deal of collaboration."

Jones said the integration of technology with traditional coursework will create a blended educational model.

“It’s highly engaging for the students because they’re integrating technology constantly in the program. They’ll read, then they’ll respond through technology to their reading and can read digitally and respond in a cooperative group. They are not on computers constantly, but they use technology consistently throughout the program,” Jones said.

Jones said there were 1,700 middle school students and 30 teachers surveyed to determine which ELA program the district would choose moving forward. There were 46 elementary classrooms involved in piloting the Journeys program.

The cost of the Journeys program is \$1,013,329, while StudySync was purchased for \$522,045.

As it relates to the technology enhancement bond proposal this May, Jones said these programs can be used with the district’s current technological capabilities.

“We are purchasing this program based on the current technology we have. We know that this program will be successful with our current technology, but in our bond proposal, we have allocated specifically laptop carts for the middle schools to enhance this instruction,” Jones said. “The more technology we can put into those classrooms, the program just gets better and better.”