

School district introduces new ELA curriculum to K-8 students

By Joshua Gordon

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Chippewa Valley Schools introduced new elementary and middle school ELA curriculums for this school year, which will affect nearly 10,500 students. (Photo by Joshua Gordon)

CLINTON TOWNSHIP/MACOMB TOWNSHIP — Chippewa Valley Schools has introduced a new English language arts program for all students in kindergarten through eighth grade this school year.

The district purchased two new curriculums — the Journeys program for elementary students and the StudySync program for middle school students. Both curriculums are more comprehensive than the programs they are replacing, according to Director of Curriculum and Assessment Pamela Jones.

Both curriculums combine reading and writing as opposed to them being taught separate of one another.

“Students are going to notice their reading and writing are very connected with each other as opposed to ending reading class and going to writing class and being very segregated,” Jones said. “I think the kids will become stronger writers because of having those rich experiences throughout their day.”

Jones said the state changed the standards for testing in ELA in 2010, and the current materials at both the elementary and middle school level were over 10 years old.

The district piloted both curriculums with about 46 elementary teachers and 24 middle school teachers from September 2016 through March of this year. The Board of Education approved the purchase in the spring and the teachers had their first training before the last school year ended and throughout the summer.

The new curriculum will affect nearly 10,500 students across the district, which includes 12 elementary schools and four middle schools.

The Journeys program for the elementary students is more of an evidence-based literacy program, Jones said. It will combine elements from both reading and writing to help the students really understand what they are learning.

“This program engages students with reading high-level texts and then writing about what they read,” Jones said. “So the phonics and grammar and word study are all integrated with each other, and the kids can see the connections and remember what they have been taught.

“It will help facilitate our kids to develop a passion for both reading and writing.”

The middle school curriculum is similar in that it combines reading and writing, Jones said, but it goes even further in being a hybrid model. About half the students will be learning on the computer, and the students will have access to materials on the computer from home.

The middle school program is more in line with what students will need to know in preparing for the SAT, applying to college and being career-ready, Jones said.

Getting updated curriculums that aren't more than a decade old is important so kids can study passages that they can relate to.

"The kids will enjoy these more because these lessons are much more in tune with where the kids are now," Jones said. "For an 8-year-old student, if the materials are 10 years old, it was before their time. This is much more relevant and real-world to the kids."

Donald Brosky, executive director of elementary education with the district, said the schools made sure to incorporate the principals and other administrators in the training on the new curriculums to make sure everyone is aware of what the new programs consist of.

"In order for an administrator to be effective, they need to be in the classroom and know what the curriculum is all about," he said. "We have to make sure everybody is on the same page."

This fall, several high school teachers will be piloting a few new ELA curriculums so they are prepared for the current elementary and middle school students coming from their new programs.

Jones said they will look at a few programs, the materials, and talk with teachers before putting forth a recommendation to the board next spring.