

Background of Elementary English Language Arts Programming in BHM Schools

In 2007, the district adopted Houghton-Mifflin's Literacy by Design (LbD) program as the core instructional resource to teach the English Language Arts standards and other literacy skills. The Minnesota Academic Standards for English Language Arts had been created in 2003 and the Literacy by Design resource provided a good alignment with these standards at the time.

The adoption of the Literacy by Design program aided the district's shift in literacy instruction from a basal approach to a balanced literacy approach. The basal approach is intended for teaching groups of readers, so it does not allow for ease of differentiation or personalization. The engagement level of students can tend to be lower because the text does not match student interest. The goal of a balanced literacy program is to include the following elements: modeled reading, guided reading, shared reading, independent reading opportunities, interactive writing, shared writing, independent writing opportunities and word study. When Literacy by Design was first adopted, teachers focused on including the elements of best practice literacy instruction. A comprehensive English Language Arts (ELA) program should consist of the following "Big 5" components: comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, phonics and phonemic awareness.

The framework for a 120-minute literacy instruction block within a balanced literacy approach includes whole group and differentiated small group lessons that include instruction in the "Big 5 for reading," along with spelling instruction, handwriting practice and writing lessons. Intervention groups may also take place for students who have not shown mastery in the specific skills being taught.

When the Minnesota Academic Standards in English Language Arts were revised in 2010 and required implementation in districts by 2012-2013, the K-5 Literacy by Design materials no longer aligned well to the expectations of the revised standards. Since that time, the program has been supplemented with various resources at each grade level. The current supplements have been partially successful in plugging the gaps. Houghton-Mifflin no longer supports Literacy by Design with updated or new materials. The materials are beginning to show wear and tear after ten years of classroom use. Therefore, new resources are needed to support the district's elementary teachers and students.

Standards

There was a dramatic shift in the Minnesota Academic Standards in English Language Arts that took place in the 2010 standards revision. These were required to be implemented in Minnesota classrooms in the 2012-2013 school year. National Common Core Standards in English Language Arts were adopted by Minnesota at that time, and an additional 15% was added to include specific standards that were in state statute, such as, American Indian standards and media literacy standards. The Common Core standards are more complex and are expanded to be used in other content areas. The adopted standards define what **all** students are expected to know and be able to do, but not how to teach them.

Some examples are:

- Literature: Key ideas and college and career readiness (CCR) Anchor Standard:
 - Kindergarten: With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about the key details in a text.
 - 4th grade: Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what a text says explicitly and when drawing inferences through the text.
- Informational Text: Craft and Structure (CCR) Anchor Standard:
 - Kindergarten: Identify the front cover, back cover and title page of a book.
 - 4th grade: Describe the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in a text or part of a text.

The Wonders materials recommended in this proposal are aligned to the current Minnesota standards. The materials and lessons are rigorous to meet the high expectations of the standards. The Minnesota English Language Art standards are scheduled for revision again in 2019-2020, with required implementation by districts in 2022-2023.

Summary of Process for Review of Instructional Resources

The district's Continuous Improvement Process (CIP) requires a comprehensive review of needs, educational research, and potential materials prior to making a recommendation in the Curriculum Adoption Proposal. During the CIP phases of RESEARCH and PILOT over the past two years, the K-5 Literacy CIP Team engaged in the following activities:

- determined Literacy was an area that needed to be updated based on surveys and staff input
- upon completing a standards alignment, discovered gaps at every grade level with the current Literacy by Design program and overall weak alignment
- read and reviewed a variety of educational literacy research
- adapted a literacy curriculum rubric to review potential programs
- reviewed four different programs by various publishers
- chose two potential programs for further consideration in a pilot experience
- piloted the curriculum resources in 24 classrooms at all six elementary sites
- investigated technology tools associated with pilot materials
- discussed preferred resources and development of resource scenarios
- reached a consensus on which program to recommend to the school board

- visited school districts that have already implemented Wonders to learn how teachers there are using the program

Selection of Materials

Literacy was determined to be an area that needed to be reviewed based on surveys and staff input. Literacy by Design was purchased before the release of the current standards and alignment was weak. Gaps existed at every grade level.

To begin the CIP process, the literacy team read and reviewed a variety of research on best practice in teaching reading. Based on this research, the team then developed a rubric to evaluate potential programs. The committee reviewed and evaluated four programs: ReadyGen by Pearson, Journeys by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Wonders by McGraw Hill, and Benchmark Advance by Benchmark Education. The team had concerns about the organization and quality of the ReadyGen program and they felt that Journeys lacked a quality scope and sequence. A decision was made to pilot the two remaining programs, Benchmark Advance and Wonders.

A team of 25 pilot teachers from all six elementary sites was assembled. In August 2017, the pilot team of 4-5 teachers per elementary site completed training for their first program. Teachers taught their first program for approximately 8 weeks. Training for the second program took place at the end of October 2017. The second program was taught for 8 weeks as well. On January 9th, the 25 pilot teachers were brought together to review both programs. At that time, each pilot teacher was given a chance to reflect and share which program they thought best met the needs of our district. Areas discussed were alignment of standards, curriculum resources, ease of teacher use of the materials and student engagement. It was through this process that Wonders was chosen by the K-5 Literacy CIP team to be recommended for adoption to meet the needs of the elementary students and teachers.

Recommendations

McGraw-Hill's Wonders is the program that the K-5 Literacy team is recommending to the school board for adoption. After comparing programs, Wonders meets the needs of our teachers and students.

The following are some of the benefits noted with the Wonders program:

1. The quality of literature in whole class and small group formats is authentic and has a variety of fiction and non-fiction texts.
2. There is increased engagement through a variety of student response strategies and the depth of knowledge questions built into the program.
3. The program provides a variety of resources ranging from print to digital.
4. Wonders meets the Big 5--phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.
5. The materials are user-friendly.
6. The program includes differentiated spelling.
7. Models for writing, handwriting and grammar are included.

8. A wide variety of assessments are provided that can be either administered online or printed.
9. The guided reading resources are of high quality.

Some potential challenges identified by the pilot team of teachers include:

1. The benchmarking system may need to be updated since Wonders does not have one based on Guided Reading Levels.
2. Teachers and principals at each site will need to identify an effective materials management system for the storage of student and teacher materials.
3. The Wonders writing program, as well as the spelling program in grades K-2 will need some adjustments to meet the requirements of the standards.
4. The sight words in the kindergarten program are limited and will need to be supplemented.

Financial Implications

The initial cost proposal received from McGraw-Hill included all costs based on what the vendor saw as possible needs of teachers. The K-5 Literacy Implementation team spent time reviewing the proposed needs and narrowed down the options to the basics needed to successfully implement and teach the program. There are other materials that may be needed on an individual basis. Those will be purchased at the site level if an individual teacher or grade level feels it is necessary.

In the cost proposal, the majority of the cost comes from teacher manuals and online teacher access, students' reading materials including resource books and guided readers and online access for students. Additional costs are due to consumable resources that will reinforce and provide practice opportunities for the students.

We are still in the process of determining final student and teacher numbers for materials, along with deciding which intervention resources are the most critical for student success. The cost for this K-5 Literacy adoption is estimated to be \$622,500.

Evaluation

Evaluation of the curriculum adoption will be monitored in several ways. Some of the anticipated desired outcomes include:

1. Input from teachers will be collected in a variety of ways during implementation to gather their thoughts regarding how to support them with the new language arts program. It is our goal that teachers will share positive feedback with the implementation of Wonders and will see many benefits of the program and its impact on student learning.
2. Through principal walk throughs, information will be gathered on the fidelity of instructional delivery of the program to determine how well a program is being implemented in comparison with the original program design.

3. Information will be gathered on students' progress with the reading standards, which are being addressed with the use of the Wonders program.
4. Students will be meeting district and reading program benchmarks.
5. Students will be engaged in the reading lessons and demonstrate comfort with the rigor of instruction.
6. Continuous improved reading and writing achievement for all students.

Focus areas for continued training for all teachers will be determined through teacher input and student achievement data. Ongoing training will be offered through elementary professional development opportunities.

Next Steps

Once approved by the school board, the Teaching & Learning Department will begin the process for purchase of the resources. This is a massive undertaking for all elementary staff. Teachers will need to clear out unwanted materials of the previous literacy program and make room for all the new resources. Principals and teachers are already having conversations about how to organize all of the materials included with Wonders. Teachers will be encouraged to keep small group readers or resources from the previous program that could be used to support the new one.

There are several planned professional development opportunities for teachers starting right away in May 2018 and over the summer for teachers who would like a "jump-start." Teachers will have the option of an online Wonders Getting Started Overview course. Teachers can turn in the Wonders issued certificate for Continuing Education Hours. For teachers who would like to attend an in-person session for an overview, there are two summer opportunities. There will be a half-day in June and one in August that teachers can choose to attend to have a similar overview of the program that they would have in the online course. At the Back-to-School Workshop, teachers will have another more in-depth training on how to get started with Wonders. They will also have time to plan and collaborate with their colleagues. The professional development day in October will be reserved for additional training in using the technology components of the program.

A Wonders Implementation Team has been created to support teachers at each elementary site. The team is comprised of teachers who were involved in the pilot. They are receiving extra training to be able to support their staff at their sites. They will host informal, monthly meetings for teachers who want to ask questions or learn new ideas.

Wonders has provided us with their alignment guide to the state standards. As teachers are using the new program, the K-5 English Language Arts team will need to complete its own standards alignment to the parts of the program that will be purchased. This will start in the Fall of 2018 and hopefully be in final draft by May 2019.

There are many more next steps to be completed. The ones above are just a snapshot of a few

things to come next year. There will also be a need to provide professional development to support ESPs and substitute teachers. The technology integration will need to be supported this coming year and for future years as teachers are at different levels of interest and comfort.