

A “Journey” into Reading

The “Journeys” elementary reading program by Harcourt/Houghton Mifflin, currently being piloted in thirty Council Rock classrooms, was the topic at the Council Rock Board of Directors’ Academic Standards Committee Meeting on February 2, 2012. School Directors then approved the purchase of “Journeys” at their February 16 meeting, at a cost of \$881,665.24, to be paid over three years.

“Journeys” is a comprehensive program with differentiated instruction available to all levels of a classroom’s learners. This means that whether students are advanced, on grade level, have learning disabilities, need remediation, or are English language learners, the program can accommodate them. In order to be appropriately placed for their needs, instruction can be organized in whole groups, small groups, or for differentiated instruction. The program’s goal is to create life-long readers at all levels. The curriculum includes a rich blend of literary genres, comprehensive writing instruction, and daily practice, which seamlessly incorporates technology.

As Director of Elementary Education/Curriculum Services, Joy McClendon, stated in her June 16, 2011 memo to the School Board: “Today’s reading programs go well beyond the basal book of yesterday in which all students read as a large group from a grade level text. While there continues to be grade level materials, “Journeys” offers an abundance of below and above grade level materials for each classroom, thereby facilitating the delivery of differentiated instruction. Additionally, the online component of the program allows students and their parents to access the reading materials and support resources from home.”

The “Journeys” program includes a focus on phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Literature selections address the needs of a 21st century education by using selections from the most current publications and an emphasis on non-fiction texts.

The writing components have effective vocabulary and spelling strands that are integrated with the literature. Students practice the process of pre-writing, drafting, and revising every day with engaging writing prompts tied to the literature. Foundational spelling, grammar usage, comprehensive writing, and the familiar “daily edit” are all incorporated into instruction.

“Journeys” also engages students to use problem solving and critical thinking skills. With the “Your Turn,” “Turn and Talk,” and “Stop and Think” features throughout the program, students practice communication and collaboration skills. Included in the curriculum materials is a student book that organizes reading selections with comprehensive questions, exercises, writing, and grammar activities directly related to the literature selection.

“Journeys” also comes with dynamic assessment tools for teachers. They are diagnostic, informative, and have summative assessment opportunities and reports that inform instruction for every student. Teachers can then monitor student progress and provide corrective feedback.

Citizens For Education is as excited about “Journeys” as the pilot program teachers and students. The data that is generated by the program will be reported in a future CFE newsletter. The monetary cost of “Journeys” is \$157 per student for next year alone, but when considering that CR keeps a curriculum in place for 10 years, it translates to less than \$16 per student per year. “Journeys” is not just a great educational value; its worth to Council Rock students over their lifetime is priceless.

For more information about the curriculum renewal process that led to the selection of “Journeys,” see page xx.