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March 28, 2022

EED 5320

School Improvement Memo

After reviewing the Clinton Valley Elementary School Improvement Plan, it was noted that there is a problem with the reading resource that is currently in place throughout the district. The data shows that Clinton Valley’s reading scores have decreased these past five years since the resource was implemented. The current resource used for teaching reading is a program by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt called Journeys. According to Education Week, “Seidenberg, who has reviewed the Journeys materials but not Into Reading, said that the amount of materials, lessons, and instructional choices in the program was overwhelming” (Schwartz, August 2021). Due to the overwhelming amount of resources that is included in Journeys, teachers are struggling with teaching the most important aspects of the reading curriculum. There needs to be a change in the way teachers are teaching reading. The curriculum audit that was completed suggest that a better program, like Top Ten Tools, could take the place of Journeys when it comes to teaching phonics for reading. This tool could show a better improvement in reading scores.

For many teachers, the science of reading is a complicated program to understand and many schools fail to teach teachers about it. With little knowledge on the science of reading, it can be difficult for teachers to truly teach students how to read in the best way possible. According to Sarah Schwartz, “The shifts curriculum providers are making mainly have to do with how teachers instruct students in word-level reading—that is, decoding the words on the page into spoken language” (Schwartz, October 2021). Several reading programs are editing and changing the way they teach reading. Many of these programs are breaking away from some of the old styles of teaching reading and are moving towards a new way. This is just one reason why our school needs to take a look at the resource that we are currently implementing to teach reading. With all the new research about the science of reading, it is becoming clear that current programs are becoming ineffective. In the article, *Popular Literacy Materials Get “Science of Reading” Overhaul. But Will Teaching Change?* Schwartz states, “Much of teacher training and many classroom materials adhere to the theory that children should use multiple sources of information, or cues—the letters in a word, but also the pictures on the page or the flow of the sentence—to make a prediction about what the word is. But evidence from cognitive psychology and neuroscience research has long shown that good readers attend to the letters in the words to identify what words say. Research has demonstrated that instructing students on how to crack the code of written language is one of the most effective ways to get them reading words” (Schwartz, October 2021). This shift in the science of reading needs to be the focus of Clinton Valley’s curriculum and school improvement plan. The data shows a trend in the reading scores. The trend is that over the last five years, our reading scores have gone down. Not only is this trend happening in our school, but it is happening district wide.

After reviewing the curriculum and completing an audit, the recommendation was to use a new program called Top Ten Tools to assist teachers in teaching reading. According to the article *The Reading First Controversy,* “The emphasis on early intervention to prevent failure in the nation’s youngest and most at-risk students marks a major break from the unsuccessful remediation models of the past three decades, which focused on helping older students after they had already fallen behind” (Barbash, 2020). The shift of focus on teaching the science of reading and focusing on the younger students is the shift that the school needs to take when it comes to reading. The research is showing that there is a great change in reading when students are understanding the way letters form sounds in words. This shift in teaching reading would benefit our schools reading scores. Top Ten Tools is a program that focuses on the science of reading. This program could benefit all struggling reads. It will also build strong readers when implemented in lower elementary grades.

The school improvement plan needs to focus on our school’s reading program. There is a big decline over the years that is concerning. Teachers needs to be properly trained in the science of reading, so they are able to teach reading to the needs of the students. Reading is the key to most students’ successes when it comes to academics. If we focus on improving the abilities of our students at a young age, we could see some great growth in reading throughout the school and even throughout our district.

**References**

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