

Clinton school official calls free reading software 'game-changer'

Clinton, Oklahoma, school district officials say the Footsteps2Brilliance program will allow all Clinton residents who are learning to speak English to get free access to reading software and songs and games in English and Spanish.

by Tim Willert *Published: July 26, 2015*

CLINTON — School district leaders in this city of 9,500 say they need to do more to serve a rapidly growing Hispanic population. About 45 percent of students are Hispanic and 35 percent are English Language Learners (ELL).

The adults face similar struggles, according to Nance Elementary School Principal Janalyn Taylor.

“Some of our parents aren’t real comfortable with the English language,” she said Friday. “They’re afraid they’re going to make a mistake if they speak.”

Darci Gonzalez, an ELL assistant at Nance, said she translates for parents who grow frustrated because they want to help their children “but they don’t know the language.”

“They’re not able to help them with their tests because they don’t know how to read,” Gonzalez said.

District officials say that’s about to change with the purchase of Footsteps2Brilliance, a blended learning program that will allow all Clinton residents to get free access to reading software and songs and games in English and Spanish.

Children will be able to access the program in their classrooms and at home with their families.

Beginning Aug. 8, the software will be available through a city-wide license as an app for tablets and smartphones in addition to its regular site for computers.

Clinton, through its agreement with the Washington, D.C.-based company, will be designated a Model Innovation City, the first of its kind in Oklahoma, officials said.

“Our kids are going to use it and their parents are going to be able to learn right along side of them,” said Clinton Public Schools Assistant Superintendent Tyler Bridges. “I think it’s going to be a game-changer for our schools and our community.”

‘App on steroids’

Footsteps2Brilliance founder Ilene Rosenthal said the program, which she described as “an app on steroids,” increases vocabulary, comprehension and critical thinking skills.

“It is a mobile app that takes a kid works them toward third-grade reading proficiency, she said. “Anybody who owns a smartphone or a tablet can download the entire program.”

Jaqueline Vazquez, the parent of a 6-year-old ELL student, said the program will help her learn to English alongside her daughter.

“I think it will be awesome because I can understand and help her more with her homework,” Vazquez said through a translator. “I can have better communication with her teacher and I will be able to participate in her school activities.

Taylor, the Nance Elementary principal, said the blended learning program will also benefit low-income families who don’t have books at home.

“I think this is going to be a good outreach to give parents books in the home and materials that they can read and games they’re going to play that increase their vocabulary and reading skills.”

Superintendent Kevin Hime said the district’s \$125,000 investment is worthwhile because the program will help close the achievement gap in local schools.

“In the U.S., 46 percent of children enter kindergarten at risk of failure because they lack essential literacy skills,” Hime said.

“Footsteps2Brilliance can teach young learners the basic vocabulary and readiness skills research has shown can be critical to school success.”

Hime and a Footsteps2Brilliance representative will be on hand Aug. 7 to present the early learning initiative to leaders in the early childhood field and local elected officials.