



Brockton considers reading apps for young learners

The license for the software would cost \$540,000, or \$90,000 per year for six years, but would be free for families in Brockton to download and use.

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BROCKTON – City and school district officials say they're hoping the city can raise \$540,000 to buy reading apps designed to teach young learners basic reading and vocabulary skills.

The program "Footsteps2Brilliance," which would be free to Brockton families, is an early learning platform that combines mobile gaming technology with cognitive research. It has been heralded by education officials as an effective tool for early academic success, district officials said.

The program – which can be used on a computer, tablet or smart phone – offers 18 illustrated and animated e-books in English and Spanish, along with more than 200 educational games and a nonfiction series featuring 26 alphabet books and related games.

Statistics show that the greatest disparity of knowledge among children is the vocabulary gap, the number of words a child knows from birth through third grade, said Superintendent Kathleen Smith in a statement about the program.

On average, children from low-income families hear 30 million fewer words before the age of 4 than their more affluent peers, she said.

The technology, Smith said, will also offer learning opportunities beyond school hours.

"This initiative will truly be a collaborative program between government, community partners and parents, who will be actively engaged in helping their children learn new words and concepts," she said.

"We believe that any tool that prepares students for school is a worthy endeavor, and we hope that the whole city embraces this exciting program."

A two-hour event to gauge the interest from parents, community partners, possible financial supporters and early childhood providers is scheduled Tuesday at the Main Library, Multi-Purpose room, 304 Main St., at 4:30 p.m.

To obtain the license would cost the city \$540,000, or \$90,000 per year for six years, said School Committee member Ray Henningson, of Ward 7.

After that time, the city would own the license in perpetuity, and would receive automatic updates, added district spokeswoman Jocelyn Meek.

"It's worth the money," Henningson said. "It allows kids to increase their literacy skills in reading, which is such a critical factor in all of their skills.

"It can also help build the language skills of English language learners."

If adopted, the apps would be available to every family living within Brockton, Meek said.

The technology, licensed by zip code, will be configured so that it is available for free download to all children who live within the city limits – whether they are in public school, private, parochial or home schooled, she said.

Those who wish to use the software would be able to do so at the library or anyplace where devices can access the Internet.

Assessments will show how much a child is learning and administrators will be able to track how often the apps are being used by each child or class and how quickly users are comprehending words, Meek said.