

K-5 “Leveled Libraries” Program Benefits Schools, Thanks to \$60,000 from the Pelham Education Foundation



Mrs. Morrissey and Hutchinson School students using nonfiction materials from the leveled libraries program

Pelham's elementary schools each has been benefiting from a K-5 "Leveled Library" of books and related programs since the school year began last September. The Pelham Education Foundation provided \$60,000 for the new program, acting on a proposal developed by the four elementary school principals. The program was purchased last spring at a generous discount from Benchmark Education of Pelham. Along with the books came teacher training, lesson demonstrations, and Bookroom CDs that provide multiple options for teachers to search for books by title, theme, reading level, etc.

The purpose of the program is to encourage the student reader to read at his or her level: a level not so hard that it will frustrate and not so easy that it will not challenge. The guided reading program uses "leveled books" that are matched to the student's instructional level. As part of the program, instruction can be developed for small groups based on ongoing teacher assessments of the individual students. Guided reading enables students to see themselves as successful readers, which helps them to accelerate learning and then advance into more challenging reading levels.

Individual teachers and schools have easily fit the program into their own unique buildings and teaching styles. Colonial School Principal Dr. Janet Rothstein, a long-time advocate of guided reading, was particularly pleased with the Library's non-fiction selection. Dr. Rothstein was also impressed by the teacher's guides, which are excellent tools that get teachers to focus on the components of reading and the skills needed to improve reading. Hutchinson School first grade teacher Jennifer DeVico agreed that the non-fiction books are well aligned with the math, social studies and science units, and added, "The suggested activities provided for the books are developmentally appropriate and build the necessary skills for good readers. The collection is a wonderful addition to our guided reading program."

Prospect Hill Principal Richard Limato described the books as "high interest, comprehensive, and engaging for both the teachers and the students. The training on guided reading strategies and the use of the materials was first rate." Prospect Hill second grade teacher Gail Geller said the reading program is one of the best uses of the Pelham Education Foundation's funds. She said the program has enabled her "to focus in on the specific reading levels of the children," and provided her with "the resources to teach them how to be active readers." Second grade teacher Diane Foglia commented, "The leveled libraries have greatly enhanced our language arts

curriculum. We like the variety of fiction and non-fiction titles across many subject areas. The paired fiction/nonfiction selections are also extremely useful."

The leveled libraries program is linked to instructional strategies as well as assessments of student progress. The goal is for every child to be assessed on reading at least once during 2006/07 and three times a year, starting in 2007/08. The assessment programs are DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills), for kindergarten and first grade and eventually also grades 2 and 3, and DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment), for first through fifth grades.

These reading assessments give a new dimension to the cycle of assessment and instruction," said Susan Gilbert, Principal of Siwanoy School. "If assessments don't help us to shape instruction, then they are just a piece of paper. An important plus of these assessment programs is that teachers can determine if and when intervention strategies are needed."

The Leveled Libraries project was particularly appealing to the Pelham Education Foundation because it was district-wide, core curriculum based, teacher initiated, and supportive of the Foundation's mission and the school district's strategic plan in differentiated instruction, curriculum mapping and assessment.

The mission of the Pelham Education Foundation is to enhance the quality of public education in Pelham with the help of educators, citizens, parents, students, alumni, businesses and foundations with the help of educators, citizens, parents, students, alumni, businesses and foundations. The Foundation funds educational programs that are outside the annual school budget and award grants for projects that: strengthen and enrich the curriculum by helping to develop and promote innovative programs; support additional faculty training and resources; and provide funding for special school facilities and equipment.