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## Community partners help fund OPS literacy program

By Bobbie Hayse Messenger-Inquirer  
Jan 2, 2021

Owensboro Public Schools is striving to close gaps in early education with Footsteps2Brilliance, which has been fully funded for the district through community partnerships.

Footsteps2Brilliance is a pre-K through third grade literacy curriculum that is used in all OPS preschool, kindergarten and first-grade classrooms at no cost to families who benefit from it.

The total cost of the program is \$75,000, and the Public Life Foundation of Owensboro, the Marilyn and William Young Foundation, and the Lawrence and Augusta Hager Educational Foundation have each given \$25,000 toward the project, allowing it to be fully funded.

Emily Baur, OPS grant writer, said all educators and staff members within the district are working toward closing the early learning gap for children in the community and this curriculum program helps with that goal.

“Since the initial implementation, Footsteps2Brilliance added a pair of early learning-centered apps called Clever Kids University focusing on the essential foundational skills that 3- to 4-year-olds need to be successful in kindergarten, and for kindergarten children to strengthen early reading skills.”

She said the \$75,000 expansion will allow the district to add more apps for kindergarten students and provide additional professional development for teachers and administrators to ensure continued fidelity.

Also, the funds have allowed greater access to digital learning tools for the youngest learners, she said.

This program is important for students because it will help them develop verbal, vocabulary, pre-literacy and literacy skills, Baur said.

“Lack of early language and vocabulary development is a huge contributing factor to struggles readers may face, so one of OPS’ focus areas continues to be expanding literacy opportunities for all children from birth to age 5 and beyond,” she said. “Developing early literacy skills helps children learn to read, putting them on the path to school success.”

The mobile technology provided through the Footsteps2Brilliance program allows students to access information at school, from their homes, and whether they are online or offline from a device or a computer.

“Having this program that can reach every student in our community expands literacy efforts and helps build a strong reading foundation for all our children,” Baur said. “The collaborative effort with OPS and our community funding partners of the Public Life Foundation, the Young Foundation, and the Hager Educational Fund shows how important this project is to both OPS and our community.”

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