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East Aurora spending about \$7.3 million on new science, English language curriculum

By **Sarah Freishtat** APRIL 19, 2016, 6:37 PM

To cheers and claps from the audience, East Aurora School District 131 board members on Monday approved additions to the district's science curriculum and materials.

The approval comes weeks after the board voted in favor of a new elementary English language arts curriculum and as the board considers a new math program for some grades.

Total, the board has approved spending about \$7.3 million over several years on science and English language arts purchases.

"Yes, science is expensive, we get it," Carla Johnson, director of curriculum and instruction, told the school board Monday. "But we're trying to catch our kids up to what other kids have been doing for a long time."

The science program, STEMscopes, is designed to help the existing curriculum meet new state science standards that are set to be fully in effect next school year, district spokesman Matt Hanley said. It will be used for kindergarten through eighth grades. The district also purchased supplies for all grades.

The English language arts program, Pearson's ReadyGen Biliteracy Pathway, comes three years after the district began building its own curriculum in-house. At the time, two audits – one for elementary programs and one for high school – found the district needed to update its curriculum, offer more support to teachers and provide consistent amounts of instruction time across the district.

Hanley has said the district first began using its in-house English language arts curriculum in classrooms about three years ago, but School Board member Kim Hatchett, co-chair of the board's curriculum committee, has said all pieces of the curriculum were not fully in use until fall 2015.

Recently, in a district survey, a majority of teachers supported a purchased program over the district-written one. Many also pointed to curriculum and resources among the sticking points in now-resolved teacher contract negotiations.

The district also uses an elementary- and middle-school math curriculum written in-house, Hanley has

said. In a recent survey, a majority of elementary teachers said they were interested in having the district look into purchasing a new math curriculum.

A school board curriculum committee is set to review math curriculum in May.

Meanwhile, in late March, the school board approved a new kindergarten through fifth-grade English language arts curriculum. Monday, board members approved professional development for teachers for the program, bringing the total cost to almost \$1.8 million.

For science, the board approved a \$5.5 million purchase, most of which will be paid this year and next, though some costs are projected to come in later years. The purchase covers kindergarten through eighth-grade technology, a six-year STEMscopes license, materials and training for teachers. In high school, the purchase includes materials and technology.

The board also approved publicly displaying nearly \$223,000 worth of high school textbooks, which are set to come before the board for a vote after the display period.

During a presentation to the school board, a science curriculum council told the school board the district needs updated equipment, supplies and technology.

Paul Linden, a science teacher at Simmons Middle School, said students asked where the "science stuff" was in science class, when he had art supplies in art class and food supplies in food class.

"We just need the supplies," he said. "And the kids want to do it."

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