Blended Reading Platform Supports Diversity, Equity, and Choice

San Jose Charter Academy Enhances Literacy Instruction Using Scholastic Literacy Pro®

For the San Jose Charter Academy (SJCA) in Southern California, an effort to enrich literacy instruction through culturally diverse books, combined with the need to pivot and adapt during the pandemic, led administrators to implement a new blended reading platform that is making a difference for students. The school serves just over 1,250 TK–8 students and includes 59 teachers; it's unique in design and organizational structure, being divided into three smaller academies of primary (grades TK–2), elementary (3–5), and junior (6–8).

Technology, equity, and diversity

Erin Shiroma has been principal since 2016. Shiroma highlights certain important initiatives that the school had undertaken that enabled SJCA to quickly adapt to the pandemic in March 2020. "Equitable access to technology has always been one of our top priorities, as part of our mission to create 21st-century learners who are ready for college and career," she says. "As part of that mission, we had gone one-to-one with iPads and laptops for all our students, which enabled us to quickly pivot to a remote teaching and learning environment during the pandemic."

At the same time, the academy had been promoting equity and diversity in its literacy tools and materials. "Prior to the pandemic, we had been investing in culturally rich and diverse books that reflected the diversity of our community to use in literacy instruction. We also wanted to emphasize choice and provide enough books that we could empower students to choose books they identify with or are interested in," Shiroma says. "The remote environment of the pandemic presented a challenge, because students couldn't access any of these books in person. So, the next step was exploring digital resources that could also provide a diversity of books to students from their devices. That led us to Literacy Pro from Scholastic."

> **"I've had teachers thank us for implementing Literacy Pro because it is making a difference in how their students are growing as readers."**

Creating continuity between school, home, and grade levels

Literacy Pro is a reading management solution that provides access to a library of over 2,700 ebooks for students in grades K–8, comprehension checks for thousands of books, assessments, and many additional resources for teachers and families. The platform curates a personalized bookshelf for each student, using a reading recommendation engine that works in partnership with teachers to drive students toward books that are aligned with their interests, grade, and independent reading level. As a browser-based program, Literacy Pro is accessible on multiple operating systems and devices, and is available to access in school or at home.

Michelle Ruiz is literacy and data coordinator for the academy. "Literacy Pro caught my attention because it offered the opportunity to provide a lot more books to our students and to help develop their independent reading skills," she says. "And it was the right choice at the right time, because we could use it in a remote learning environment, but also continue to use it when we came back to in-person learning," she continues, noting that the program met their needs far beyond dealing with the circumstances of the pandemic. "Our students commonly access Literacy Pro to

read at home, in addition to their time in school during reading blocks. That is so important for equity, because not everyone has access to a library or can afford many books."

In addition, Shiroma says the program offered continuity. "A significant selling point for us was that our students could use the same reading platform from kindergarten through grade 8, and not have to get familiar with something different every year," she says.

Tracking data for both print and digital reading

Ruiz also highlights the importance of data and reporting in the program. "The program provides a variety of usage data that helps us understand and assess reading proficiency," she says. "We can see which students are using Literacy Pro, what they are reading, how many minutes they are reading, and how they are responding. It's very informative. That also resonated with us because we're very data driven as a school."

As a blended reading platform, Literacy Pro's dual reading log automatically captures the time students spend reading digital texts, while encouraging them to enter in the time they spend reading print texts. Matty Cuevas, a fifth-grade teacher and the elementary social studies coordinator for SJCA, says this feature has been very beneficial. "Prior to Literacy Pro, students didn't log their minutes," she says. "So we did not know how much they were reading. It is amazing for us and the students to see how their minutes add up." As of June 2022, the 137 fifth graders at SJCA tracked over 130,000 independent reading minutes, two thirds of which were devoted to digital and one third to print, for the current school year.

Variety of genres and reading levels

Mary Spickler, assistant principal of curriculum and instruction, says the usefulness of Literacy Pro extends beyond literacy instruction. "Students are making connections to other subjects while they're reading, because they may recognize a person or topic they are studying in science or history class, for example. It's like a portal into more information about what they're studying. Teachers in many different subjects will note in a project or assignment where students can find more information about that topic in Literacy Pro, so it is useful in other classes, not just for reading and literacy."

Spickler also notes that the variety of reading levels is an important aspect of the program. "We have appreciated how Literacy Pro includes books with so many levels of reading difficulty. That makes it helpful for struggling readers, but also offers books for our high-achieving readers, and everyone in between," she says. "Students can access books at whichever level they need and use them throughout the day. That is very powerful."

Helping to develop ownership

"We want to develop curiosity in our students and enable them to pursue their interests and take more ownership of their learning," Shiroma says. "Literacy Pro helps us give our students choices and flexibility, as well as access to some of their own data about how many minutes they've been reading and what our goals for them are, which helps students develop more of that ownership that we want them to have."

Looking to the future, Ruiz says the academy plans to expand its use of the program. "I want to help our teachers in all subjects understand how to incorporate and recommend more books from Literacy Pro into their classes," she says. "I also want to learn more about how to use all the data it provides to better inform our decisions."

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To learn more about Scholastic Literacy Pro, go to **scholastic.com/literacypro.**