Play Away Digital Audio Book Grant Proposal

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Children often struggle to read books for their grade level, which can be a frustrating and disheartening experience. Not only textbooks and articles for school, but fiction and non-fiction that children want to read for pure enjoyment prove difficult. Studies have shown that phonemic awareness (letter and sound recognition) increases children’s reading, reading comprehension, and ability to spell, so the Upper Moreland Middle School Library proposes a small purchase of Play Away Digital Audio Books. Listening to the audio-book while reading along with the text can help children develop their phonemic awareness, increase their fluency in the English language, and boost their self-confidence and desire to read. The library is seeking $750 from the Corning Foundation to purchase about ten Play Away Digital Audio Books for use by the student body in conjunction with the physical copies the library owns.

SETTING

The Upper Moreland Middle School Community

Nestled in Hatboro, Pennsylvania, the Upper Moreland Middle School is part of the Upper Moreland School District composed of the Elementary, Intermediate, Middle and High Schools spread across the adjoining towns of Hatboro and Willow Grove. The Upper Moreland School District has a long, proud history of excellence in education, developed over three centuries across two historic towns with 24,000 neighbors dedicated to community evolvement and recreation. The district has a mixed population that is becoming more diverse with every passing year, and over the past ten years the school district has grown and undergone extensive
upgrades to their facilities to better serve their community. The Intermediate School was built to house the 3rd-5th graders, separated from the K-2nd grades to allow more room for the growing community. The High School had an entirely new science wing built, with labs and computers, and the music wing was remodeled for better acoustical resonance.

*The Upper Moreland Middle School Library*

Built in 1972, the Middle School serves students and their families with an 85 person staff and faculty. They strive to give the highest quality education while ensuring the safety of their students and creating a sense of family and community among the students, their families, and the staff. The Middle School Library offers over 21,000 printed educational resources, non-fiction and fiction books, as well as several databases and other online resources. Their mission is, “to empower our students to become lifelong learners and readers through literacy development, information seeking, and critical thinking skills and to communicate successfully in their community and beyond.” With this goal in mind, the staff is constantly working to find new, more effective methods of teaching and more interactive resources that spark children’s inner desire to learn. To better serve its patrons, the library is open a half hour before school starts and a few hours after school has ended. The library hosts multiple classes a week needing computers or audio-visual equipment, and the library staff teaches short sessions on research techniques several times a year.

*The Upper Moreland Middle School Library Patrons*

The patrons of the library consist of its seven hundred 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students and the 85 staff members attending the school. The students are the most prolific users, using the computer and print and electronic resources for research and projects. The library offers
workspace, school supplies (paper, tape, staples, etc.), research help, and a moderate collection of fiction and non-fiction books for their classes and leisure reading. The staff and faculty also utilize the library, using its interactive True Flix E-Books as lesson openers and directing their students to articles and books for their curriculum in the library.

_The Staff of the Upper Moreland Middle School_

The library is staffed by two people, Ms. Nancy Antonuccio and a part-time library clerk. Ms. Antonuccio, the Librarian of the Upper Moreland Middle School Library for over six years, works tirelessly to assist students in their educational needs, to expand her collection to the advantage of her students and staff, and to create an inviting and comfortable place to learn. Using her limited budget, she creates displays and sections based on student interests so that the students can find them more easily, such as the Graphic Novels and Natural Disasters sections. Ms. Antonuccio strives to update the collection with more recent fiction and non-fiction as well as interactive and electronic resources.

_STATEMENT OF NEED_

At the Upper Moreland Middle School, Ms. Antonuccio has found that many children cannot read at the level of their classmates. Getting past that frustration and inability to read with fluency can make or break a student’s desire to read and learn and affect the rest of their scholastic experience. Ms. Antonuccio has seen the effects of a lack of phonemic awareness, the ability to understand what the words on the page sound like, and the resulting low reading ability and comprehension. She has tried multiple avenues, such as downloading the Lexile Number of books so that she can help direct students to books that they can read and ordering Hi-Lo Books that look like the 6th-8th grade books but read like the lower level books. Ms. Antonuccio has
found that audio-assistance has helped not only struggling readers, but ESL (English as a second language) and blind students learn to be more fluent in English and reading. With more audio options, she believes that her students will learn to read better and enjoy reading more.

PROPOSED INITIATIVE

Ms. Antonuccio would like to purchase 10 Play Away Digital Audio Books—a mixture of mystery, fiction and realistic non-fiction—to help her struggling students. These audio books would help kids get through whole books while simultaneously reading them, using audio-visual learning on their own without pressure. The readers of audio books are trained professionals with perfect enunciation and rhythm, and in the case of different voices, sound effects and music in the background, they can bring a new level of excitement and enjoyment for students. With audio assistance side by side with the actual text, students develop and improve their phonemic understanding of letter-sound relationships by listening and reading along to professionally-narrated readings, increasing their fluency in language and vocabulary. Her goal is to see them frequently circulated with their textual counterparts, and she will ask for feedback from her students that she knows struggle, as well as their language and speech teachers. If the ten audio-books work well for students, she will devote a small portion of her budget every year to continuing to develop the Play Away Collection.

PROPOSED BUDGET

Ms. Antonuccio thinks that these portable, fairly inexpensive audio-books coupled with the regular book would be the best solution for her students as they are less risky to lend out to students over extensive periods of time. These devices are anywhere between $35-$75 dollars
apiece from her district’s vendor, Title Wave, so $750 should be able to purchase 10 or so Play Aways for her students. If these devices prove effective for struggling readers, she will devote $150 of her budget every year hence forth to adding two more audio-books to the library’s collection.

CONCLUSION

Reading is the cornerstone of education, so the better children are able to read, the more satisfying and productive their scholastic lives will be. Ms. Antonuccio hopes that this Play Away project will see some positive progress, and that with new learning with technology initiatives to assist struggling students in literacy, the Upper Moreland School District will continue to be one of the best school districts in the state of Pennsylvania.

Bibliography